

Afrikaans¹ in Higher Education in S.A.²

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Abstract

The main issue dealt with in the article is the case for the retention of Afrikaans as a language of higher education. Given its association with apartheid, the attempts to impose it on black learners in the 1970s, its continuing stigmatisation in many communities and the total loss of political of its white speakers, the question to be asked is whether it should be retained as medium of instruction in higher education in post-1994 democratic South Africa, and, if there are valid reasons in support of its retention in this capacity, what its role should be and how its revitalisation

¹ Given that the focus of this edition of *Alternation* is on ‘South African indigenous languages’, which is usually taken to refer to what is internationally called ‘Bantu languages’, it could possibly be argued that Afrikaans ought to be excluded from consideration. However, besides the fact that the overall theme of the edition does not exclude any language from consideration, a reasonably strong claim can be made for Afrikaans to be regarded as ‘an indigenous (African) language’ (but not, of course, a Bantu language): Afrikaans came about in (south) Africa; it is significantly spoken only in Africa; many of its lexical items are African in origin—also in the sense that their meanings reflect the African environment; and some of its structural features are also of African origin (and are not merely the products of the structural simplification/over-generalisation of 17th century Dutch features).

² I wish to express my gratitude to the reviewers for their comments, which enabled me to improve this contribution.

should be handled. Six arguments are presented in support of the maintenance of Afrikaans as an academic language

Keywords: Afrikaans, higher education, language and culture, educational development, educational access and success, equity and parity of esteem, pluralism, community support, language policies for higher education and public debate

1. Introduction

Given Afrikaner nationalism and the appropriation of Afrikaans by the white community as an instrument to obtain and exercise control over its own interests; given the association of Afrikaans with apartheid; and given the attempts by the former Nationalist Party government to impose Afrikaans on black learners in the mid-1970's, Afrikaans is often described as the language of the oppressor and of white discrimination, domination and exclusion. Today, despite the fact that Afrikaner nationalism is no longer a major force in the country, that Apartheid has been abolished, and that white Afrikaans-speaking South Africans (sometimes called 'Afrikaners') have lost their political power, Afrikaans still retains its generally negative social meaning in the broader South African society. Additionally, Afrikaans has lost its privileged position as one of two official languages in the country and now has to compete with ten other languages for a role in public life. A consequence of these negative scenarios is the political demise of the Afrikaans language.

Given, now, the demise of Afrikaans in public life, the question is whether Afrikaans can be expected to retain / regain any meaningful role in the public domain. Should it, for example, be maintained as a medium of instruction in higher education in post-1994 South Africa?

This article argues that Afrikaans should, indeed, be retained in a significant way in higher education. In order to present this argument, the demise of the language is first discussed, followed by an overview of the arguments in favour of retaining it as a university language; the role it should have in this context; and what should happen for it to retain and then maintain this role.

2. The Demise of Afrikaans as Public Language

Although the demise of Afrikaans since 1994 has not yet been systematically researched, there are clear indicators of the decline of its role in public life. Generally speaking, Afrikaans is no longer used to any significant extent in parliament, courts of law, state administration at all three levels of government, the public media or the business sector in general. The same trend is evident in formal education. Giliomee and Schlemmer (2006: 242-243, quoting du Plessis, 2001), for example, list the reduction in single-medium Afrikaans schools from 1993 to 2003 in selected provinces as follows:

Table 1: Reduction in the number of Single-medium Afrikaans Schools in Selected Provinces

Province	1993	2003	% Reduction
Gauteng	274	155	43.0
Free State	153	97	36.6
Limpopo	38	12	68.0
Mpumalanga	90	3	96.6

Source: Giliomee and Schlemmer (2006)

The reduction of single-medium Afrikaans schools means, of course, that the schools concerned have all become dual- or parallel-medium schools, with English being used alongside Afrikaans as medium of instruction (MoI), and possibly even becoming the main MoI.

In higher education, the same trend is apparent: Whereas there were formerly five universities using Afrikaans as sole or main MoI, and three formally and functionally bilingual universities (Afrikaans and English), there are currently only two universities in which Afrikaans is used to a significant degree as medium of instruction: the University of Stellenbosch and North-West University, on its Potchefstroom campus³. The University of

³ The University of the Free State is a parallel medium institution and the Universities of Johannesburg and Pretoria are currently practically English universities. (The University of Pretoria is, however, in the process of revising its (existing, ineffective) policy of bilingualism.) See du Plessis 2003, 2005 and 2006 for fuller discussions of language political changes in higher education.

Pretoria, on the other hand, serves as an example of the gradual shift towards English: in the period between 1995 and 2007, students' MoI preference changed quite radically, as indicated in Table 2:

Table 2: Change in the ratio of students electing for instruction in Afrikaans as opposed to English, 1995 to 2007, as percentages

	'95	'96	'97	'98	'99	'01	'04	'05	'06	'07
Afrikaans	70.8	65.5	62	59.1	57.3	53	42.8	43.3	36.8	34.8
English	29.2	34.5	38	40.9	42.7	47	57.2	56.7	63.2	65.2

Source: Bureau for institutional research and planning (Birap), University of Pretoria

According to Webb (2008) 72.2% of the training programmes of the University were probably taught in English in that year⁴.

The same situation applies regarding Afrikaans as a subject of study: both student and staff numbers in departments of Afrikaans have decreased quite radically, and formerly autonomous departments of Afrikaans have either been scaled down (e.g. at the Pietermaritzburg campus of the UKZN) or have been merged with other language departments (e.g. at the University of Cape Town)⁵. Similarly, Afrikaans has almost vanished altogether as a language of research publications. Mouton (2005) reports that only 5% of the

⁴ According to the official University brochure, 10.4% of the 152 undergraduate programmes were to be taught only in English and 61.8% in both Afrikaans and English in dual medium format. However, given that a number of students in dual-medium courses (often even a minority) are unlikely to be proficient in Afrikaans, that practically all Afrikaans-speaking students are reasonably proficient in English, and that lecturers are understandably loathe to duplicate courses, the language used in such (dual medium) classes was probably predominantly or only English. Added together, a percentage of 72.2% is obtained.

⁵ There are autonomous Departments of Afrikaans at 8 SA universities (where it is taught as a separate discipline); at 3 it is taught within a larger department, and at 7 SA universities it is not taught at all. (Internet search on 23 April, 2009.)

research articles which were published in 2002 were written in Afrikaans (as opposed to 14% in 1990). As a language of university management at the historically Afrikaans universities [HAUs] (e.g. as a language of meetings at senior levels), Afrikaans also seems to have declined quite markedly, as at the University of Pretoria (personal observation).

Finally, the demise of Afrikaans as a public language is, arguably, also clear from the diminished status of its standard variety, as reflected by the increasing incidence of code-switching and code-mixing in the direction of English (in newspaper letters and radio interviews)—see Webb (in press).

Given these language political developments one must obviously ask what the reasons for the demise of Afrikaans in public domains (and specifically in higher education) could be.

There are obviously several factors involved. *Primary factors*, of course, are globalisation and the domination of a market-driven economy, both of which function largely through English, thus strengthening the economic, social and political dominance of English and impacting negatively on the use of minority languages in public contexts⁶.

Secondly, there are also the large-scale political changes in 1994, as a result of which, firstly, the Afrikaans-speaking community lost all political (and even much of their economic) power. This loss of power led to what Louw calls the loss of ‘political patronage’ or ‘state patronage’ for the Afrikaner and her/his language, which meant that it became a marginalised, minority group, without the ‘spaces’ and the ‘resources’ it had before 1994 (Louw 2004: 51)⁷. The political transformation of South Africa meant that

⁶ The threat posed by dominant (hegemonic) languages is, of course, very real, as illustrated in the case of the KhoiSan languages in South Africa, Irish, Welsh and Scots in the UK, and Catalan in Spain. At the moment Spanish in the USA is also under threat, despite the fact that Spanish is a powerful international language and that there were 41 million Hispanics in the USA in 2004 (Fernández 2005).

⁷ The SA constitution does, of course, make provision for safeguarding group rights, and has even created institutions for this purpose (including PanSALB). In practice these institutions have made no meaningful impact on the issue of cultural and linguistic rights. Stronger protests by communities in this regard are obviously necessary.

black South Africans obtained the political power, for whom the interests of the white Afrikaans-speaking community, including the use of their language as medium of instruction, were obviously not priorities.

Thirdly, the emphasis on access and equity (in higher education) led to striking changes in the demographic character of staff and student populations of, especially, the former HAUs. Significant numbers of black students registered at these universities for study (for example 25160 in 2006 as opposed to 10729 in 2002 at the University of Pretoria—University of Pretoria, 2009) and, given their preference for English as medium of instruction, contributed towards the demand for English and the decline in the use of Afrikaans⁸.

Finally, in the case of universities, there was also the strong drive towards internationalisation and becoming globally competitive, which led to the recruitment of academic staff and students from outside South Africa, who obviously do not know Afrikaans⁹.

These factors, together with the negative social connotations of Afrikaans mentioned above and the continued lack of internal unity in the broader Afrikaans-speaking community¹⁰, have all contributed to the recent rather sudden decline in the role of Afrikaans in tertiary education.

⁸ Pro-Afrikaans activists perceive state action regarding Afrikaans as medium of instruction in (secondary) schools and universities as a directed strategy of the government to establish racial equality and to enforce racial integration.

⁹ One can probably also list other factors, such as the increasing commodification of university training (as a response to market demands) and financial constraints, in the demise of Afrikaans as tertiary language.

¹⁰ A comment by a former vice-chancellor of the University of the Western Cape in this regard is revealing and instructive: ‘The challenge to Afrikaans is to tackle its destructive internal discord and to overcome the racial and ethnic exclusivity in its own ranks whilst simultaneously respecting and honouring its own rich diversity. And to position (itself) dynamically as part of the rich diversity in South Africa’ (transl. VNW). See also Webb (2008).

One can argue, of course, that the increasing Anglicisation¹¹ of HAUs is a ‘natural’ development, unavoidable, and should therefore be accepted. It is also possible, however, to argue that it is important to retain Afrikaans as a tertiary language. The question would then be: for what reason(s)?

3. Arguments in Favour of Retaining Afrikaans as Language of HE

Before presenting what I regard as the major arguments for the retention of Afrikaans as language of tertiary education, I wish to present a critical assessment of an argument often put forward by intellectual leaders in the Afrikaans community in this regard (see Giliomee 2001, 2003a and b; Giliomee & Schlemmer, 2001 and 2006)¹²: that Afrikaans should be retained in order to preserve the cultural integrity of the Afrikaner¹³. Giliomee and Schlemmer (2006) provide a clear exposition of this view. Their argument can be summarised as follows¹⁴:

¹¹ Brink (2006) prefers the term ‘englishification’ on the basis of the argument that an institution which uses English as language of learning and teaching has not necessarily adopted the values, beliefs, views, norms, attitudes, etc. usually associated with ‘the English’. Whether his assumption is correct must obviously be investigated.

¹² For other discussions of the role of Afrikaans (and the African languages) in tertiary education, see Brink (2006), Gerwel (2002), and the report by the rectors of HAUs (2005).

¹³ Support for the advocacy on behalf of Afrikaans also comes from academic and cultural bodies, such as the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns (the SA academy for science and art); the Stigting vir bemagtiging deur Afrikaans (foundation for empowerment through Afrikaans), the Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurliggame (the federation of Afrikaans cultural bodies), the Afrikaanse Taal- en Kultuurverenigings (the Afrikaans language and cultural societies) and AfriForum.

¹⁴ All quotations from Giliomee & Schlemmer are presented in translated form—by the author.

- a) There is a close relationship between language and culture: a language is the vehicle and expression of a community's patterns of thought, values and intellectual traditions (p. 176);
- b) The non-use of Afrikaans in universities and in the courts, business, finance, technology and so forth, its subsequent public regression and the shift away from it, will, eventually lead to the attenuation of the (associated) language-linked values and cultures (p. 26);
- c) The linguistic and cultural dominance of English may lead to cultural minorities (including black 'minorities'¹⁵) losing their self-confidence and solidarity (p. 28) as well as their ethnic and cultural identities (p. 26), thus undergoing cultural decay (p. 198); and
- d) A university must provide an intellectual and spiritual home for a language group and the HAUs have a social, historical and cultural responsibility towards Afrikaans (p. 169); in fact, a university belongs to a cultural group (p. 207).

A culture-based argument is, in my view, problematic if it is presented as the only (or even as the main) argument in support of retaining minority languages as academic languages, for reasons discussed below.

Such an argument assumes, in the *first* place, that language and culture are co-determinant, which is not quite the case. There is, obviously, a link between language and the cultural character of a language community: norms, values, patterns of behaviour, and so forth are acquired and constructed through linguistic interaction, whilst a language and its use (linguistic behaviour) is in many ways a reflection of the history of a community and its social norms (as implied in footnote 1). But this does not mean that language and culture are mutually deterministic, with changes in the one necessarily reflected in a direct way by the other. To claim, therefore, that the loss of a language will lead to the loss of a particular cultural 'identity' is too strong.

¹⁵ The major African language communities are not, of course, minorities in a numerical sense, but have become minoritised in terms of the power dimension.

Secondly, to talk about the/an ‘Afrikaner culture’ is also problematic. Such a view seems to assume that a cultural character is a clearly defined, distinct, fixed and internally homogenous entity. This is arguably not the case. For example, in what way does ‘Afrikaner culture’ differ from, say, ‘English culture’? How do these two language communities differ with respect to values, norms, attitudes and patterns of behaviour? Are the differences between them concerning their origin (e.g. Britain as opposed to the Netherlands, France and Germany), their history (different perceptions of the Anglo-Boer war of 1899-1902) or the food or sport they typically prefer, sufficient to regard them as being culturally distinctive groups? Furthermore, a community’s values, norms, patterns of behaviour and attitudes are not inherited or somehow fixed and unchanging, but are continually being reconstructed by each generation with reference to new environments and new needs and priorities. Besides, all speakers of Afrikaans do not hold the same beliefs, attitudes, values, and so forth. The ‘culture of Afrikaans-speaking communities’ is quite a diverse phenomenon, with young, Afrikaans-speaking urbanites differing quite markedly from other social groups in the broader language community. So, if universities are to remain ‘Afrikaans’ on the basis of the notion ‘cultural character’, one could ask: what cultural features? And whose?

A *third* reason is that a culture-based approach, like a rights approach, can be perceived as confrontational, especially in South Africa, where language has been (and still is) an ethno-political issue, having been used as a divisionary and mobilising instrument. Language and culture are sites of struggle and are conflict-generating instruments. In this context, the pro-Afrikaans lobby can easily be suspected of thinking and operating within an ideology of separatism and of wanting to continue Afrikaner nationalism¹⁶.

¹⁶ This is essentially Brink’s criticism of the cultural approach to the preservation of Afrikaans as a university language (2006). An argument on the basis of the cultural concerns of the Afrikaner, he says, is a return to apartheid thinking, is separatist, and will necessarily prevent transformation (p. 17); it is an argument for ensuring an Afrikaner enclave; it is part of a neo-Afrikaner agenda, an instrument for polarisation, for linguistic apartheid, and it will lead to isolation and parochialism (p. 145).

Finally, I would agree with Brink's view (2006: 207) that it is not primarily the business of a university to safeguard a particular ethnicity, culture or language, but that its main task is to disseminate and construct knowledge and pursue truth (p. 207). Furthermore, as he points out, a university certainly does not 'belong to any particular cultural community'.

Thus, while I agree that the non-use of Afrikaans in higher education will have negative consequences, also culturally, I do not think that the issue should be addressed *solely* (or even mainly) on the basis of the need to protect 'the Afrikaans culture'¹⁷. Other factors possibly constitute more important arguments for the retention of Afrikaans as a university language.

The *first*, and clearly most important, reason is that its use as MoI will contribute to more effective educational development. A large proportion of Afrikaans-speaking students, especially from disadvantaged communities (by far still the majority in South Africa) do not have the English language proficiency required for academic development (more specifically CALP in English, as argued by Cummins 1984) and are therefore excluded from effective access to information, participation in class discussions and the opportunity of demonstrating their knowledge, understanding and subject skills effectively in assessment situations. The importance of mother tongue education (or, at least, education in a well-known language as well as the home language) in cognitive, affective and social development and, by implication, the economic advantages which such education brings – higher success rates and, thus, lower failure rates and lower repetition rates, better employment prospects later on, etc.) – has been demonstrated empirically in research work across the continent of Africa¹⁸. Similar findings however abound in other parts of the world. See for example

¹⁷ This stance must obviously not be interpreted as implying that the cultural dimension must be removed from the debate about Afrikaans as MoI in higher education (and in schools). On the contrary, as argued below, in the context of an ideology of multilingualism and multiculturalism, universities should make explicit provision for communities on their campuses to exercise their cultural rights.

¹⁸ For Nigeria, Malawi and Tanzania, see for example Bamgbose (1991); Webb (2005; 2006); Webb, Lepota & Ramagoshi (2003); and the contributors to Brock-Utne and Skattum (2009).

studies from Helsinki, Toronto, and Cambridge¹⁹.

Secondly, and directly linked to the previous argument is the question of access to higher education. Of the 370 489 full-time contact students in South Africa (DoE 2008), only 12% were black Africans and 12% were coloured (as against 43% who were Indian/Asian, and 54% who were white) (HESA, 2010: slide 8). Of concern here, from the perspective of the role of Afrikaans in (higher) education, is the coloured community, particularly in the Western Cape, where it is the largest population group (Webb, 2002). Giliomee (2010: 12) puts the participation rate of people in this community at 4.5 per 1000 Afrikaans-speaking students (as opposed to 10/1000 for black students in general and just under 50/1000 for Afrikaans-speaking white students). Without wanting to suggest that language is the only or even the main factor in affecting access to tertiary education, it certainly plays a role and can function in an exclusionary manner.

A *third* reason in support of the retention of Afrikaans as MoI in higher education is the contribution it will make towards the promotion of the African languages. With the increasing dominance (many observers prefer the term ‘hegemony’) of English, South Africa is becoming more and more monolingual in its language use in public life, which is a direct denial of a variety of constitutional stipulations. Given that Afrikaans has the same linguistic capacity as English (albeit not the same social capacity), it can, to some extent, stand up to English, and can challenge its total dominance and maybe even limit its hegemony. It is unlikely that support for Afrikaans alone will have any really significant effect in this regard, especially given the asymmetric power relationship between the two languages²⁰, but the

¹⁹ Note the views expressed by Dr. Thomas Wilhelmsson, vice-rector of the University of Helsinki, Dr. Stacy Churchill, University of Toronto and Dr. Suzanne Romaine, University of Oxford on the centrality of people’s first languages to their social and psychological development, at the Helsinki conference on bi- and multilingual universities, in 2005.

²⁰ Asymmetric power relations in a particular country is not the only factor involved in language maintenance, as is illustrated in the case of French in Canada, Dutch in Belgium and Swedish in Finland, where these languages (though nationally minority languages) can depend on their stature internationally.

retention and maintenance of Afrikaans as a language of higher education could, conceivably, contribute to some degree to the development and promotion of the African languages through the support it gives to multilingualism; the example it sets for language maintenance and promotion and, hopefully, through some future decision by language activists on both sides to co-operate in language promotion. If this happens, and the associated century-old minoritisation of these languages (including that of their speakers) can be reversed, it can be of fundamental importance to the people of South Africa²¹. Not only will it contribute to an increase in self-esteem and a sense of socio-psychological security among the members of these communities, but, given the expected increase in the use of the African languages in high level critical discourse and abstract reasoning, it will also contribute to the increasing intellectualisation of African communities. In this regard Afrikaans can play an important role as a language political example: whereas it was a communicatively restricted and socially stigmatised language at the beginning of the 20th century, it became, by the middle of that century, a language used for performing high functions, such as being used as MoI in higher education, with fully developed academic registers and the associated technical terminology. Its development in this regard is a striking success story and can, conceivably, function as a good example for the promotion of the African languages.

Linked to the preceding argument is the issue of the constitutional stipulation that the national official languages should be characterised by equity and parity of esteem. Were this to happen, with all these languages becoming instruments of access, even if only at local levels, to educational, social, political and economic opportunities, an important step will have been taken in the advancement of national social integration, the effectuation of

²¹ This is especially important, given the limited proficiency of many black learners (and students) in English (the preferred MoI in secondary schools and universities), which contributes to the restricted academic development of many of them, as was mentioned above (and see also Webb 2005). (A comment by one of the reviewers is also relevant in this regard: given the negative status and prestige of the African languages their teaching and study as home languages is also problematic, which probably means that learners' skills in these languages are also not effectively developed.)

the constitution and its founding principles, and in the struggle against discrimination and exclusion. At the moment, with the dominance of English, it is only the interests of the ruling elite which are served, not that of the majority of citizens. Equally negatively: social classification, which seems to have become based on proficiency in English (the closer one's English is to the UK norm, the higher one's status and prestige), can be corrected. If this skewed social reality can be changed, South Africa will become more democratic. The argument here is thus that the retention (or re-instatement) of Afrikaans as a significant language of higher education (and thus also of public use) will, through contributing to the development of the African languages and thus the establishment of multilingualism, facilitate access to public opportunities (education, political participation and access to the economic life of the country) across language divisions and contribute towards combating inequities, discrimination, marginalisation and exploitation. Linguistic equity and parity of esteem will have been established.

A fifth consideration, also directly linked to the former point, is that by giving Afrikaans (and, by implication, the African languages) a meaningful role in higher education and by promoting public multilingualism, a mind-set, an ideology (in a positive sense) of pluralism will be established, with all the benefits that come hand-in-hand with such a development. A regime of pluralism²², of course, consists by definition in the recognition of diversity—religious, cultural and linguistic, the development of respect for difference and the promotion of the particular interests of the members of the different communities. It is generally accepted that linguistic diversity (and multilingualism) is, as such, a common good, a valuable national resource. From a socio-psychological perspective it facilitates inter-group communication, mutual understanding, tolerance and co-operation, contributing to (national) integration, and, as Giliomee and Schlemmer (2006: 27f) argue,

²² The SA constitution in essence rejects the alternative philosophies for dealing with diversity / minority groups: viz. assimilation (absorption by the dominant group), integration (the development of a new cultural character based on the cultural characteristics of the major constituent groups) and separatism (as in the time of apartheid). (See South African Constitution, 1996.)

the development of a community's sense of solidarity and self-confidence. Additionally, as is pointed out in the literature on bilingualism, there is a positive correlation between bi-/multilingualism and creativity, lateral thinking, innovativeness, cognitive flexibility, and adaptability (see also Brink, 2006: 126/7)²³. In more practical terms, the value of proficiency in different languages is also that it provides work seekers with a wider scope of opportunities and enables business persons to obtain contracts across linguistic boundaries. As regards government, multilingualism is important in effective service delivery by the state, as the former SA Department of Provincial and Local Government have realised²⁴. In Europe, multilingualism is regarded as a core value and as a feature which gives Europe its uniqueness.

In a complexly multilingual society such as South Africa, a pluralist approach to the management of public affairs is clearly more beneficial to the citizenry than an assimilationist approach, as is currently being followed in South Africa. As Giliomee and Schlemmer point out (2006: 172, and 21, quoting the Indian sociolinguist Pattanayak), a regime of assimilation generally benefits mainly the elite, not the majority: access to material benefits in South Africa is currently being (co-) determined by proficiency levels in English. South Africans who are not adequately proficient in English remain poor, and are excluded from access to opportunities across the spectrum.

²³ The value of diversity is nicely formulated by a character in a recent novel by the Brazilian author, Paulo Coelho (*The witch of Portobello*): Deidre O'Neill (a British medical doctor working in Transylvania, Romania, in the Gipsy community) says: '(My protector—a gipsy) threw my world off balance—even though he was only a gipsy blacksmith. I used to go at least once a year to his village and we would talk about how, when we dare to see things differently, life opens up to our eyes (allowing us to discover a wisdom that is beyond each of us, and to go forward)' (2008: 267).

²⁴ In 2008, the former Department of Provincial and Local Government launched an extensive development programme aimed at promoting multilingualism in local government in order to speed up service delivery through facilitating community participation and empowerment. Several workshops were held and a national conference took place in Cape Town in June, 2008. All 283 municipalities in South Africa participated in the conference (dplg, n.d.).

The argument for multilingualism at South African universities links up directly with views expressed in HESA's response to the Ministerial Report on transformation (HESA, slides 9 and 34²⁵); namely that universities should:

- Strengthen curriculum reform initiatives to *include other forms and hierarchies of knowledge and worldviews* (italicisation VNW) to advance disciplinary knowledge and scholarship and challenge existing stereotypes about racial groups (and) the African continent;
- (Promote) ... new values (to be) shared and assimilated so as to provide inspiration and guidance for the change process;
- (Contribute to) changing the culture of a university as a perceived ivory tower serving the elite towards engagement with all our communities and being responsive to their needs;
- (N)urture and value social, epistemological and intellectual diversity. Diversity is central to the achievement of (universities') goals. The creation of an affirming environment promotes effective teaching and learning (slide 34).

A final (and sixth) argument in support of the retention of Afrikaans as a language of universities (incorporating, as argued above, the gradual promotion of the African languages in this capacity), relates specifically to the issue of community service and community involvement.

As Giliomee and Schlemmer (201: 109) note, the scientific enterprise is part of a community's culture. Universities cannot restrict the distribution of knowledge and research findings to their colleagues in the global research community. They need to distribute their knowledge and research findings in their own communities as well. This 'indigenisation' of science ideally takes place in the languages of the communities. In this way universities participate in the intellectualisation of their societies, developing a body of informed citizens who have the ability to reflect critically on issues of importance, thus promoting a knowledge culture. Similarly, it is also important for universities to have access to local knowledge, points of view

²⁵ This source is available only in a power point presentation, and the quoted material is contained on slides 9 and 34.

and perceptions. This is only effectively possible if universities and their researchers can communicate with the members of local communities in languages well-known in the communities.

As regards the development and promotion of the plural state, universities also have a responsibility. In addition to giving the languages of the communities the necessary recognition in their policies and practices, they also need to recognise the presence of different communities on their campuses, respect the cultural integrity of these groups and provide the necessary space for their members to engage in their own cultural practices.

To illustrate the importance of universities' social responsibility in more practical terms, one can take note, once again, of some of the realities in the coloured community of the Western Cape, a community plagued by alcohol, drugs and gangsterism in the lower socio-economic levels:

- of the learners who started in Grade 1 in 1995, only 5.4% passed Grade 12;
- the percentage of coloured students at the 4 Western Cape universities in 2006 comprised only 26% of their populations (whereas they formed 54% of the total provincial population)²⁶; and, finally
- of all people in the coloured community in the age group 5-24, only 36% were enrolled in an educational facility.

Universities in this province clearly have an enormous community task to perform, in particular the University of Stellenbosch, the only university which still teaches in Afrikaans.

4. The Role of Afrikaans in Higher Education in South Africa

Assuming, now, that Afrikaans can be restored or maintained as a university language, several questions need to be dealt with: At which universities

²⁶ Of these students only just over 13% were enrolled at the University of Stellenbosch, the only tertiary institution in the Western Cape which provides courses in Afrikaans.

should it be used as institutional language? What roles should it perform at the different universities? At what levels should it function? In cases where it is used as language of learning and teaching, what MoI model should be followed (i.e. single medium, dual medium or parallel-medium²⁷)?

Obviously, the response to all these questions will depend upon the institution concerned, with decisions based upon the vision and the mission of the university, the sociolinguistic character of its (primary) community/ies, the needs and preferences of the students and staff and the human and financial resources it has available.

As regards the first consideration above (vision of the university), the question would be: Does the university wish to be a comprehensive bi- or multilingual institution and produce bi- or multilingual graduates?²⁸ In such a case the university would need to ensure that students receive their training in two (or more) languages, some courses being taken in language A and the remaining in language B (and C). Alternatively, of course, a university can ensure that (all) courses are available in two or more languages, with students free to study in the language of their choice (thus not necessarily producing graduates who are bi-/multilingual).

As regards the role of the sociolinguistic realities in the university, the case of the MoI policy at the University of Pretoria can be considered. As indicated above (and see Webb 2008), the university formerly served an almost wholly Afrikaans-speaking community and thus presented training only in Afrikaans. However, as also mentioned earlier, political and social

²⁷ From the point of view of the protection of a language against a strongly dominant language, all three of these models are in some or other way problematic: single medium for the reasons mentioned at the beginning of this contribution; dual medium because of the likelihood of the marginalization of the minor languages in the context of the more powerful language; and parallel medium because of the cost factor. A dual medium approach could be positive in an institution in which learners/students and teachers/academic staff are fully bilingual and in which the language policy is effectively implemented (or strictly enforced).

²⁸ This is the policy of the University of Freiburg in Switzerland: it requires its students to undertake and complete their studies in two languages—French as well as German (see Langner 2005).

changes over the past twenty years have led to an increasingly non-Afrikaans student population and this has meant that English has become the dominant MoI. The University, however, accepted its commitment to retaining Afrikaans as academic language but, given the real constraints of human, financial and physical resources, it has accepted that it cannot meaningfully retain Afrikaans within a dual- or a fully parallel-medium MoI model. Instead it is now considering committing itself to presenting a set of core training programmes in Afrikaans (as well as, of course, in English), thus reflecting its commitment to the establishment and promotion of multilingualism (personal communication, the registrar, UP).

The University of Stellenbosch, again, provides a good illustration of the possible negative role of the linguistic demands of the community in which a university is situated. This university, situated in a predominantly Afrikaans environment, but aiming to be internationally competitive, has to cater for an increasing number of students who want to be trained in English. The university has thus developed a complicated set of LoL/T models, providing for courses taught only in Afrikaans, only in English, in both Afrikaans and English in separate classes (the parallel-medium option) and in both languages in the same classes (the dual-medium option). This language policy, however, has led to serious differences between the university and leaders in the community it serves: Several community leaders have developed serious doubts about the sustainability of the use of Afrikaans (the dominant language in the community) at the university, especially with reference to the so-called ‘T option’—‘tweetalige opsie’/dual-medium option), arguing (probably rightly so, see Webb 2010b), that dual-medium instruction in the context of the asymmetric power relations between Afrikaans and English will inevitably lead to the decreasing use of Afrikaans as LoL/T. These differences have generated considerable conflict in the university community, which could have negative effects on the university.

The North-West University provides an interesting illustration of the use of institutional resources: human, financial and physical. Given the potential conflict between the use of Afrikaans as LoL/T and the principle of free access to students, the university’s commitment to the retention of Afrikaans as an academic language, and the costs (human, financial and physical) of the parallel-medium option, the university has developed a system of simultaneous interpreting in classes, with lecturers teaching in

either Afrikaans or English, and with interpreters providing translation to students in the other language. According to Verhoef (director, Institutional Language Directorate, NWU), the costs involved in their interpreting service is not prohibitive (unpublished seminar presentation 2010).

Finally, an important condition in the context of SA's pluralist political philosophy and political character (specifically the unequal division of linguistic power and the inequality in South Africans' proficiency in the official languages of the country as languages of academic work) is that university language policies need to be designed to achieve set aims in a progressive way. Some SA universities (such as the University of Pretoria, see University of Pretoria, 2009) have designated an African language as an official language of the university, but, in light of the current developmental status of the African languages, restrict it to being a 'language of university communication', meaning that it will be used on university letterheads, the names of campus buildings, the university website and public notices. Whilst such a policy decision is a positive development it is in itself clearly not an adequate policy decision. It is essential that provision also be made to develop the elected African language(s) as a language of academic use through, for example, requiring staff to contribute to technical term development and, even, to use it for academic development purposes in small working groups. The same arrangement could apply in the case of Afrikaans at universities where Afrikaans is not a major consideration.

5. How should the Revitalisation of Afrikaans in the Tertiary Sector be Managed?²⁹

Given the demise of Afrikaans and the need to re-instate it as a university language, it is necessary to devise strategies to achieve this re-instatement. To do so, it may first be helpful to take note of some of the challenges facing a programme directed at reviving Afrikaans as tertiary language. These

²⁹ As one reviewer pointed out: it is necessary to take note of the 'apparent inability of the South African government to honour constitutional rights, particularly where language rights are concerned'. This is indeed a serious (but complicated) matter.

challenges include the overwhelming strength of English supported by the market-driven economy of the country and globalisation; the large demand for English following the radical demographic transformation of South African universities; the negative social meaning of Afrikaans nationally; the loss of coherence in the white Afrikaans community (see Giliomee & Schlemmer 2006: 33) and the absence of an *inclusive* Afrikaans-speaking community (Webb 2010a); the low status of African languages and the lack of meaningful support for their promotion among their own speakers; the lack of interest in the public promotion of multilingualism and a lack of understanding among academic staff of the fundamental role of language in education. Each of these challenges needs to be addressed in any strategy directed at restoring Afrikaans in higher education (and, ultimately, developing the African languages as university languages).

In devising strategies for the revitalisation of Afrikaans in the tertiary sector it is essential that the fact be accepted that the Afrikaans-speaking community is a minority, with very little economic, social or political power; that their interests are not a priority in the country and that they cannot, in reality, expect any meaningful support from government. Despite the state's responsibility to protect the rights and interests of its citizens, including those of the Afrikaans community, *in practice* they cannot rely on existing official stipulations, regulations, or even official structures for meaningful support. An example of the ineffectiveness of official stipulations with reference to language promotion in the tertiary sector is the issue of language rights. Although the constitution explicitly recognises the rights of linguistic communities (in addition to religious and cultural communities), that is, group rights, the constitution gives priority to individual rights. Whilst individuals can exercise their linguistic rights through complaints to PanSALB, linguistic rights cannot play any significant role in promoting Afrikaans as a university language.

With this point of departure in mind, it is clear that the *first* strategy for university management teams is to formulate appropriate language policies (as required by government prescription), describing in clear terms what the role of Afrikaans (and the African languages) will be in the university. Language policies alone, however, are of no value at all, without being accompanied by an implementation plan and a clear prescription of procedures and mechanisms for managing and monitoring the language plan

of implementation³⁰. In addition, universities also need to have the necessary infra-structural capacity available, such as a language planning manager, a language centre, a language ombudsman and language practitioners such as translators, interpreters and editors. University language policies can vary of course, from rather vague statements of intent to quite specific prescriptions about language choice and language use. The Universities of Helsinki and Ottawa, for example, prescribe the MoI to be used in the university by statute (or policy regulations), whilst in Belgium the use of Dutch, French and German in the designated territories is prescribed by (a 1963) law.

A *second* strategy is that universities must be in constant (and preferably public) debate with the government. In a situation where public universities are largely dependent on government funding it is quite clearly the responsibility of the government to provide the financial resources for developing multilingual universities. Given South Africa's constitutional commitment to pluralism and thus multilingualism, the government has no option but to provide the required support, albeit initially on a small scale³¹.

A *third* strategy, specifically directed at the re-instatement of Afrikaans, is that Afrikaans activists (such as persons involved in the newly established Afrikaanse Taalraad—Afrikaans Language Council, and the numerous associated institutions) need to consider establishing collaborative links with activists in other language communities. To do this, of course, it will be necessary to convince potential collaborators that a pro-Afrikaans movement is not directed at serving the exclusive interests of a minority group and that it is, in effect, also directed at contributing to the promotion of

³⁰ A former language policy of the University of Pretoria directed specifically at safeguarding the role of Afrikaans (in a policy of bilingualism, alongside English), failed because the University underestimated the power of market forces (see Webb 2008).

³¹ One of the reviewers of this article quite rightly made the following comment: 'The dilemma that all universities have to face is that the state and the various political parties do not actively participate in providing adequate legislation or leadership in protecting the different South African languages in higher education. Universities are expected to take sole responsibility for devising fair language policies and the politicians remain silent' (about the rights of communities to receive higher education in their home languages).

the African languages; that it is furthermore committed to multilingualism, and is therefore geared towards contributing to the realisation of the country's national ideals, development and social transformation.

A *fourth* strategy is to give explicit support to and acceptance of the importance of English in public life, that is, to avoid conveying the impression that a pro-Afrikaans (and pro-African language) programme is in any way an anti-English action. This implies that the role of Afrikaans (and the African languages) in tertiary education will be determined within the context of bilingual education (generally English and a language other than English).

Fifthly, the top-down approach to policy implementation usually followed in language planning must necessarily be complemented by a bottom-up approach³². This means essentially that the support of students and staff must be obtained³³. This implies, on one hand, that members of the teaching staff need to understand the fundamental role of language in educational development³⁴, and, on the other, that the use of Afrikaans (and/or an African language) as MoI should not detract from academics' right to do research. Important, also, is that staff and students be helped to

³² It is true, as one reviewer commented: 'It was only once the UK government passed the Welsh language act that universities in Wales (e.g. Cardiff, Bangor and Aberystwyth) started to make significant progress in introducing Welsh as a medium of instruction.' On the other hand, the Welsh Language Act was probably only passed by the UK government due to considerable pressure from Welsh activists (with community support).

³³ In the case of African languages it will be a major challenge to obtain the support of students, as Pare showed with reference to Northern Sotho, Southern Sotho, Tswana, Venda and Zulu (the home languages of the students) in a first-year Physics test: no student found the use of his/her home language alone in a (monolingual) test in Physics useful, whereas less than half of the students found the use of their languages in a bilingual test paper useful (Pare, 2008: 106).

³⁴ And that the approach called 'Content and Language Integrated Learning' (CLIL)—where all lecturers explicitly give attention to the development of students' discipline-related language skills along with their acquisition of course content, be adopted as university policy.

understand that the language debate is not primarily concerned with language as such, but deals with the interests and well-being of people and communities, institutionally, locally, regionally and nationally.

6. Conclusion

The demise of Afrikaans as a university language is the consequence of deep, underlying social, economic and political forces, and can therefore not be turned around through a series of policy decisions and strategies (at whatever level). To re-instate Afrikaans (as well as promoting the African languages) at tertiary level will be a long-term process, requiring, firstly, establishing an ideology of multilingualism and increasing people's respect for difference, and secondly, requiring an increase in the social, economic and political value of Afrikaans and the African languages, which would then lead to the necessary changed language attitudes.

It is certain, also, that such a revitalisation programme will be a costly affair. However, if one considers,

- the unambiguous constitutional imperatives (and the stipulations in the government's language policy for higher education);
- the (invisible) costs of *not* implementing multilingual policies, that is, the costs of providing training only in a second or even a 'foreign' language (which has demonstrably led to poor educational development—limited knowledge and underdeveloped cognitive skills in the workplace); and
- the (economic) benefits of a multilingual dispensation (more effective training, higher productivity and increased self-esteem and self-confidence),

universities have little choice in the matter.

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