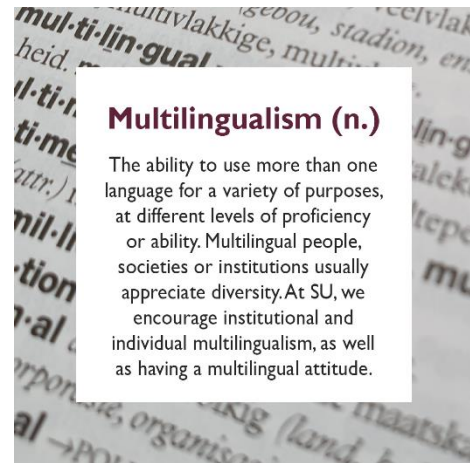


Language Day 2021 report

Constructive and inspiring conversations

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Executive summary

On 30 September 2021, also International Translation Day, the Division for Learning and Teaching Enhancement hosted a very successful and energetic online Language Day 2021. The event was about sharing ideas and best practices on how to implement multilingualism, and not about the Language Policy itself. Academics, students and professional academic support service (PASS) staff had positive and inspired conversations about language and multilingualism at the University. The theme for the day was **Language, learning, life! Implementing multilingualism @SU in academic and social spaces**, and was explored by means of two panel discussions with three sub-themes each:

Multilingualism in (augmented remote) learning, teaching and assessment

- Assessment – Prof Christa van der Walt and Jarryd Luyt
- Online Engagement (peer learning, tutorials) – Prof Mbulungeni Madiba and Alyssa Kekana
- Equitable access and student success – Christine Joubert and Ilze Aäron

Multilingualism in administrative, social and living spaces

- Promoting an inclusive campus culture through multilingualism, and encouraging engaged citizenship – Prof Thuli Madonsela and Xola Njengele
- Implementing innovative language practices on campus and in residences and PSOs – Sanet de Jager and Mbalenhle Shandu
- Multilingualism and operational internal communication – Nicolette van den Eijkel and Kristin Arends

Click [here](#) for a video playlist capturing the essence of the day, from the multilingual mindset video, the opening session by the Rector, the panel presentations to concluding remarks by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching). The contributions were short and punchy, keeping the online attendees engaged, and the 11 breakaway sessions after each panel discussion provided opportunity for attendees to conduct lively, positive discussions and to share their perspectives. Just over 120 staff members and students from all faculties and the PASS environment registered for the event, and right up to the end at least a hundred attendees were present in the meeting. The organisers aimed to model how language played out on a day-to-day basis on campus. Afrikaans and isiXhosa interpreting were available

in separate channels for the plenary sessions, and in breakaways participants could make use of translanguaging or other options. South African Sign Language was available in the plenary sessions.

Participants agreed that a new kind of intentionality was required to make multilingualism part of the fabric of all the various spaces at SU, from teaching and learning to living spaces. It was clear that all of the aspects of multilingualism need to be recognised – individual, institutional and societal multilingualism. All involved were willing to work together to realise this, to invoke multilingualism as an attitude, and there was strong support for the recommendation that multilingualism be made more visible as part of graduate attributes in the new SU Teaching and Learning Strategy.

1. Introduction

Language Day is held every second year. Language Day 2021, hosted by the Division for Learning and Teaching Enhancement, aimed to move on from policy-making to address the implementation of multilingualism at SU in an open, supportive and intellectually stimulating atmosphere. The [video invitation](#) to the event underscored this intention and set the tone. On the day, academics, students and professional academic support service (PASS) staff indeed engaged in positive and inspired conversations about language and multilingualism at the University, according to the theme of **Language, learning, life! Implementing multilingualism @SU in academic and social spaces**.

SU Rector and Vice-Chancellor, Prof Wim de Villiers, [opened](#) the online event by calling on participants to share innovative ways of embracing multilingualism with each other. Multilingualism, he said, is part of our DNA: “At Stellenbosch University, we [...] strive towards a multilingual attitude. We believe that multilingualism is about more than simply being able to use various languages. It is about recognising the value of what is said, whether the idea is expressed in Afrikaans, English, isiXhosa, or South African Sign Language. It speaks to our diversity as a nation, and makes it possible to connect in ways we could not otherwise. Multilingualism is also a mindset.”

Dr Antoinette van der Merwe, Senior Director of the Division for Learning and Teaching Enhancement, facilitated the discussions on the day. The theme was explored by means of two panel discussions with three sub-themes each, which are presented in the next section with links to the recordings of each contribution. The contributions were short and punchy to keep the online attendees engaged, and the breakaway sessions after each panel discussion provided an opportunity for attendees to have lively, positive discussions and to share their perspectives. Lunch was delivered to participants located in the greater Stellenbosch or Cape Town regions, with participants further away receiving Uber Eats vouchers. Prof Deresh Ramjugernath, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching), [closed](#) the proceedings by discussing the way forward.

Just over 120 staff members and students from all faculties and the PASS environment registered for the event, and right up to the end at least a hundred attendees were present in the meeting. Afrikaans and isiXhosa interpreting was available in separate channels for the plenary sessions, and in breakaways participants could make use of translanguaging or other options. From the participation on the day, it was clear that those attending agreed that a new kind of intentionality was required to move forward in a multilingual way, and that they were willing to work together to realise that.

This report contains some proposals, recommendations and good practice examples which will be shared wider to reap even more benefits from embracing multilingualism at SU and beyond.

2. Panel discussions

The aim was to create space for a range of viewpoints. Each panel consisted of three sub-themes, with two panellists per sub-theme (one SU staff member and one student). Panellists were asked to formulate questions for discussion during the breakaway sessions after the panel discussions. Language Day participants met online in 11 separate groups and engaged in some lively, honest and inspiring discussions. Group members were willing to share their own experiences, expectations and solutions. Feedback can be summarised under each panel sub-theme below.

2.1 Panel 1: Multilingualism in (augmented remote) learning, teaching and assessment

The objective of Panel 1 was to enable staff to learn from each other in re-imagining conversations around language at SU, as well as integrating a multilingual mindset into teaching, learning and assessment. The move to emergency remote teaching, learning and assessment (ERTLA) in 2020 at SU (and then to augmented remote teaching, learning and assessment (ARTLA) in 2021) as a result of Covid-19 highlighted many concerns, not least the effects of pivoting online on **assessment**, on **student engagement and participation** and the challenges of implementing multilingualism online, while at the same time encouraging **equitable access for student success**.

Assessment was the first sub-theme addressed by Prof Christa van der Walt (Professor, Department of Curriculum Studies, Faculty of Education) and Jarryd Luyt (industrial engineering student). In asking participants to consider why it is so difficult to reconcile multilingualism and academic language, they pointed out that there is general recognition for the fact that academic literacy is no-one's home language, and yet the restriction on language use is nowhere more apparent than in assessments, be they tests, assignments, a thesis or an oral defence. If language is not incorporated into teaching and learning, it is difficult to include it during assessment. They also questioned the notion of 'mirror competencies' (the notion that students would need to acquire the same competencies in two languages), and explained that this is not how multilingualism works.

Prompted by the panellists' questions, participants in the breakaway sessions considered how one could think differently, and more flexibly, about the academic language used in assessment, and on how ingrained our ideas are around 'academic writing' and 'keeping languages apart' at SU. They also considered how to promote multilingualism and diverse language use within the context of the academic proficiency required by all those involved in the assessment process.

Online Engagement (peer learning, tutorials) was the second sub-theme for Panel 1. Prof Mbulungeni Madiba (Dean, Faculty of Education) and Alyssa Kekana (education student) shared their insights on the intricacies of multilingual teaching and learning in an online environment or platform, and how to promote student engagement and participation online. Prof Madiba emphasised the importance of utilising a translanguaging approach in the classroom to assist students to achieve concept literacy, no

matter which language or dialect is used to achieve this understanding. Some examples provided included multilingual glossaries such as the OERTB (Open Education Resource Term Bank) and Mobilex.

They asked participants to consider in the breakaway sessions how students exhibit agency by employing language in creative, multilingual ways when learning online or in class. They also asked what types of multilingual practices students use for peer learning and tutorials. Participants agreed that what is needed is not only a mind shift but a culture shift. Being more open-minded about the languages around us would enhance students' learning experience. Lecturers need to teach the way multilingual students learn, by drawing on their full linguistic repertoires. Participants also provided some excellent practical examples of applications that could be used in the online space.



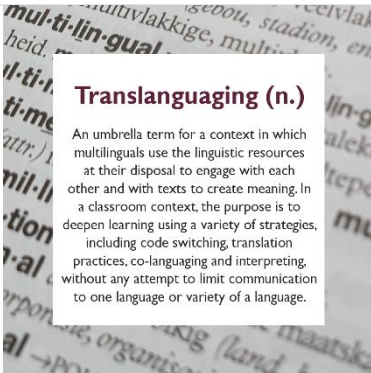
The role played by interpreting in providing [equitable access and student success](#) was discussed by Christine Joubert (educational interpreter at the Language Centre) in conversation with Ilze Aäron, a Deaf student from the Faculty of Education. Marsanne Neethling and Thelma Kotze provided interpreting into South African Sign Language (SASL). ARTLA has strengthened the partnership between lecturers, students and interpreters. The Language Centre's Interpreting Service currently provides real-time online interpreting via Teams for six faculties as well as audio translations of podcasts of lecture material in Afrikaans, English, isiXhosa and SASL. Multilingualism as facilitated by educational interpreting is not only about equitable access to learning in teaching, but also about creating a safe space for students to participate in the language in which they are most comfortable. *Introduction to the Humanities 178*, part of the extended degree programme for the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, is one of the modules where isiXhosa is offered as an interpreting option in addition to Afrikaans. Topics and themes are often contentious, and often lead to robust discussion thanks to trilingual interpreting. However, the benefit of multilingual teaching within the classroom setup lies in the fact that students are exposed to diverse cultures and languages while sharing the same space. This helps to create tolerance and appreciation for each other's culture and worldviews.

Ilze Aäron shared her experience of ARTLA during Covid-19 and highlighted the vital role sign language interpreting had played in preventing linguistic exclusion for her as a Deaf student at SU. Attending lectures and learning had been far easier before the pandemic, since she could be in the same physical space as lecturers and other students. Access to data bundles provided by SU made it easier to participate remotely, but adapting to the online space as a Deaf student had definitely been a challenge.

In the breakaway sessions, participants were asked to indicate what multilingual practices can be used to further facilitate student access, how equitable access plays into the concept of transformative learning and meaning making, and what lessons have been learned about collaboration within the virtual classroom. It was emphasised that one should teach the way multilingual students learn, using multiple channels, and allowing the language of input to differ from the language of output. The discussion can happen in different languages, but final output would be in English. Another strong recommendation was that a common space with information about sources of language support be created for students and staff. Apart from formal solutions, it was proposed that examples of informal solutions should be provided, such as how to create groups for support, tandem learning, etc., and make this information part of student orientation week.

Panel 1 recommendations

Several quoted recommendations from participants that stood out from Panel 1 (sub-themes A-C) have been grouped under the rubrics of individual multilingualism, institutional multilingualism, translanguaging and interpreting below:

 <p>Individual multilingualism (n.)</p> <p>Also called plurilingualism. The ability to use all the languages one knows (your linguistic repertoire) in different settings, for example, using Afrikaans for basic conversation in service encounters, English for academic studies and isiXhosa for communication in the family.</p>	<p>“Language is not just about being perfect – more flexibility can provide students with a way in.”</p> <p>“Introduce a crash course in languages not in repertoire for staff members as part of their induction? Encourage all our staff members and students to be socially proficient in other languages besides their home language.”</p>	<p>“We need to teach the way multilingual students learn, i.e. drawing from their full linguistic repertoires.”</p> <p>“Multilingualism isn’t only for those who speak multiple languages; everyone has a stake in multilingualism.”</p> <p>“It takes a lot of work, but use students as a resource.”</p>
 <p>Institutional multilingualism (n.)</p> <p>A type of societal multilingualism, where communities of speakers of different languages co-exist, but which does not necessarily imply individual multilingualism. It is reflected in the activities and policies of an organisation – in the languages the institution chooses to communicate in, for example.</p>	<p>“It is important to instil graduate attributes from the beginning. We need to focus on subject-related values and ensure that students are prepared for the workplace.”</p> <p>“Integrate multilingualism, when designing courses and assessment and don’t add it as an afterthought.”</p>	<p>“Support in acquiring academic literacies should happen throughout the student’s career.”</p> <p>“We also need to go further in sensitising students about language for professional work.”</p> <p>“Encourage sessions in leadership training for students on how to take multilingualism to different spaces.”</p>
 <p>Translanguaging (n.)</p> <p>An umbrella term for a context in which multilinguals use the linguistic resources at their disposal to engage with each other and with texts to create meaning. In a classroom context, the purpose is to deepen learning using a variety of strategies, including code switching, translation practices, co-langaging and interpreting, without any attempt to limit communication to one language or variety of a language.</p>	<p>“We should be more accepting of language variants: there is a subtle shaming, some variants not thought to be good enough. There needs to be a balance between maintaining language standards on the one hand, and connecting on the other.”</p>	<p>“Access to translation has become easier in smaller groups, someone in the chat can translate.”</p> <p>“Use tech in the right context and for the right purposes. Use Google Translate, but understand limitations.”</p> <p>“Learning a language is a social event. Ask someone to translate and in future know the terms.”</p>



“Interpreting enables access to information in the class; the whole class is contributing to meaning making.”

“Cooperation is so important for the success of interpreting. When lecturers cooperate, good quality of interpreting, this results in a great experience for all involved, even online.”

Faculty of Military Science: “Not only dealing with students from the university system, so educational levels are low. Consider multilingualism for extra support to make concepts clearer.”

2.2 Panel 2: Multilingualism in administrative, social and living spaces

Covid-19 and the necessity to pivot online not only had an impact on learning and teaching, but also magnified questions of social justice, as students from diverse backgrounds grappled with the largely unfamiliar demands of online learning. Panel 2 dealt with life outside the classroom and how language played out in administrative, social and living spaces:

Ways of **[promoting an inclusive campus culture through multilingualism, and encouraging engaged citizenship](#)** were explored by Prof Thuli Madonsela (Chair in Social Justice, Faculty of Law) and Xola Njengele (law student). Xola made three important points after consulting fellow students: Firstly, in a space where there is a dominant language, those who assimilate that language might struggle to engage in their own home language (for instance, a Xitsonga speaker might struggle to speak her own language). Secondly, it is vital to create safe enough spaces to enhance multilingualism, and to engage in the language of the majority. Thirdly, many students tend to misunderstand the value of multilingualism, not understanding what there is to gain by learning isiXhosa, for instance. As he himself had to discover, the incentive is to be an engaged citizen. Xola also highlighted the importance of pronouncing names correctly in order not to dismiss others’ identities.

Prof Madonsela then spoke about leveraging multilingualism as a bridge to social justice and cohesion in administrative and social settings, rather than as a wall or a barrier. In her view, language is steeped in pain, division and socio-economic exclusion anchored in the illusion of multilingualism. The language debate in South Africa is not just a dispute between English and Afrikaans speakers; it is broader than that, and includes questions of engaged citizenship and social cohesion. She shared her language journey to illustrate that she herself had questioned her minimal linguistic competence in both Afrikaans and Tshivenda; she had also been punished for using her home language at school. Her linguistic experiences had made her apprehensive when joining SU because she knew language could divide people, but she was surprised to learn that Afrikaans people at SU had taken the leap to speak English. She acknowledged that there is no sweeter sound than the sound of one’s own language. It makes sense that people would like to cling to the language they know, and feel a sense of belonging in social settings as a result, but one should bear in mind when encountering others that many people do not speak English as their first language, or even their second or third language.

Participants in the breakaway sessions were asked to indicate whether policy or intentional practices within the campus community were better in promoting an inclusive campus culture through multilingualism. Several participants felt that policy was necessary and important to ensure that people are all aligned, but that intentional practices were the best way to promote multilingualism, and to create a cultural shift where people actually want to embrace it. There were several calls for practical examples and tools that could be shared more widely in order to navigate multilingualism.

In considering to what extent the wider community (surrounding a campus) could contribute to the promotion of an inclusive campus through multilingualism, participants agreed that the wider community surrounding SU should also play its part in promoting an inclusive campus. In response to the final question, several ways of using language proficiency education and digital technologies as a bridge to social cohesion and social justice were proposed. It was felt that creating social cohesion was vital in an environment such as a university where everyone feels intimidated.

How to [implement innovative language practices on campus and in residences and PSOs](#) was explored by Sanet de Jager (educational interpreter, Language Centre) and Mbalenhle Shandu (computer science student and house committee member, Erica residence). They reminded participants that “language is a part of us, and we need to make space for language so that we can make space for people”. In their view, multilingualism needs to be made practical in residential spaces. These were their recommendations:

- Ask each other. (Don't feel awkward about language; avoid questions that insinuate proficiency; link multilingualism to values within residences.)
- Ask an expert. (Reinforce the importance of multilingualism; get help navigating the multilingual space; use own agency in the living space.)
- Remember your goal. (Continually assess individual language behaviour; reassess chosen solutions for navigating the multilingual space.)

They emphasised that **intentionality boosts innovation**, and reported on some initiatives which worked in Erica residence (indigenous games; name-meaning session; daily greeting in a different South African language; translation during joined sessions and critical engagements). They also pointed out that **a living space speaks without using any words**, and recommended re-imagining names of events, names of places within the community, music selections and channels of communication. Finally, they made the point that services are only as useful as their availability and the accessibility of the information about them, so recommended **reaching out to extend outreach**.

Participants in the breakaway sessions felt that the session had been very useful and practical, and recommended that similar practical strategies be employed in residences and living spaces in future. Participants confirmed that exclusionary language used in social media posts or to name events or venues did have an impact on people's willingness to engage. It would take a lot of effort to make people feel comfortable and welcome in a meeting, get-together or the living space in different languages, but it would be worth it in the end.

[Multilingualism and operational internal communication](#) was the sub-theme discussed by Nicolette van den Eijkel (Chief Director, Facilities Management) and Kristin Arends (medical student).

They discussed ways of promoting inclusive multilingualism in the workplace and in student-facing administrative spaces, and making it clear that all our languages, official or non-official, are valued in our daily communication and social interaction. They highlighted the importance of team leaders helping employees to thrive and be their best selves through language.

In the breakaway sessions, several participants were of the view that SU was not using multilingualism sufficiently as a drawcard to attract potential students to SU. It was felt that more students would wish to enrol once the perception that SU is not an Afrikaans-only institution was corrected. Other untapped opportunities included telling positive, and nuanced stories around multilingualism in the media, revamping the SU website and making the call centre truly multilingual. Several suggestions were made to better promote multilingualism during students' welcoming phase, and to ensure that SU is a welcoming environment for all students and new staff. Participants believed that it was possible to do more to celebrate multilingualism at SU, from being more intentional in the use of different languages, using the arts in creative and multilingual ways, to using multilingual captioning and signage.

Panel 2 recommendations

Several quoted recommendations from participants that stood out from Panel 2 (sub-themes A-C) have been grouped under the rubrics of plurilingual competence, institutional multilingualism, translanguaging and translation below:



“Everyone feels intimidated at university. We need to reach out, ask for help and that will promote a better sense of belonging.”

“Survival language courses on campus promote social cohesion. They should be free and campus-wide.”

“Pronouncing names correctly is key. Making the effort really goes a long way.”

“Understanding language is important for health care professionals. We need to understand, and be able to translate ‘layman language’ to medical language. Appreciation when even speaking just a few words, indicates you are open.”

“Involving the wider community is vital when it comes to social impact projects and research done in communities. But it is also about me as an individual and how I navigate the world.”

Institutional multilingualism (n.)
 A type of societal multilingualism, where communities of speakers of different languages co-exist, but which does not necessarily imply individual multilingualism. It is reflected in the activities and policies of an organisation – in the languages the institution chooses to communicate in, for example.

“We need both policy and intentional practices – policy creates space but attitude towards multilingualism is the most important.”

“Include ubuntu in the way we approach the world. Don't treat language like an elephant in the room. Be intentional about addressing it.”

“How do we come to language? Play. ART as beauty (without the polarization).

Employing art-based media (storytelling, music etc.) to preserve and archive and share (as a bridge to social cohesion).

Extend the model to foster an inclusive culture around language. Go back to these kinds of basics, e.g. playing indigenous games.”

Translanguaging (n.)
 An umbrella term for a context in which multilinguals use the linguistic resources at their disposal to engage with each other and with texts to create meaning. In a classroom context, the purpose is to deepen learning using a variety of strategies, including code switching, translation practices, co-langaging and interpreting, without any attempt to limit communication to one language or variety of a language.

“Put a human face on technology, in this time of ARTLA. SUNLearn can be changed to bring in other languages. Adding voice notes/informal feedback to assessment.”

“Be intentionally multilingual. It's not a sin to use a language other than English in a meeting.”

“Use multilingual buzz words in headlines, captions, social media.”

“There is quite a culture of shame in academia. This is part of what needs to be addressed. We need to offload the need to be perfect. It impedes learning.”

“Be intentional in terms of language in meetings. Move away from the idea that English is good and Afrikaans is bad. Give more space.”

Translation (n.)
 An activity that aims to transfer written meaning from one language to another within a specific situational or institutional context.

“Names of buildings, events, etc. murals and displays can alienate, which was very much the case in the past. Touches on the culture of the University.”

“Create linguistic landscapes for the entire campus so that people informally learn phrases, rather than forcing people into language learning classes formally.”

“Social media posts do matter and can exclude.”

“Good quality translation will engage people more, by using language creatively in names and titles. Not just cyber-functional translating (e.g. Google Translate). Yes, it has a place, but we need to take more effort to find good creative translations.”

3. How language worked on the day

Afrikaans and isiXhosa interpreting was available in separate channels for the plenary sessions, and in breakaways participants could make use of translanguaging or other options, such as typing a translated summary in the chat box. The organisers aimed to model how language played out on a day-to-day basis on campus. South African Sign Language interpreting was also available during the plenary sessions and in one of the breakaway groups in order to facilitate communication for a Deaf student panellist and participant.

4. University-wide #multilingualmindset campaign

The PR and communication around Language Day created some very positive momentum with a #multilingualmindset campaign that set the stage for productive discussions around language in various university spaces. The Language Centre collaborated with the Corporate Communications and Marketing Division (CCMD) to create awareness of multilingualism before, during and after Language Day, in order to widen the impact of the event. This resulted in a number of **tangible outputs**:

- A **webpage** about multilingualism was created with versions in English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa, which also served as a landing page for the campaign and will live on as a multilingual resource. It may be used, amongst other things, in residences and academic spaces in the future, accessed by a QR code.
- A podcast series of three interviews about multilingualism with **Dr Kim Wallmach** (Director of the Language Centre), **Sanet de Jager** (Language Centre interpreter) and **Prof Mbulungeni Madiba** (Dean of the Faculty of Education).
- A series of **four articles** published in Afrikaans and English on the SU website and SU social media channels exploring positive narratives about language and multilingualism.
- An **opinion piece** published by News24, by Dr Kim Wallmach and Susan Lotz (Language Centre language practitioner).

5. Overarching recommendation and conclusion: "Make space for language to make space for people"

Participants agreed that a new kind of intentionality was required to “make space for language to make space for people”, i.e. to make multilingualism part of the fabric of all the various spaces at SU, from teaching and learning to administrative, social and living spaces. All of the aspects of multilingualism need to be recognised and respected in our daily interactions on our campuses – individual, institutional and societal multilingualism. All involved were willing to work together to realise this, to invoke multilingualism as an attitude. There was strong support for the recommendation that multilingualism be made more visible as part of graduate attributes in the new SU Teaching and Learning strategy, thereby moulding students into engaged citizens with the skills and attitudes to co-create cohesive and tolerant communities in our diverse society. There was also general agreement that SU should be explicit about what we would like to achieve in terms of multilingualism and then measure it, not merely pay lip service at ceremonies. We need to talk about SU as a multilingual university, to promote the idea that SU is evolving, and that we are celebrating language and culture in our own circles. And we need to make the point that we are trying, even if we don’t always get it right.

Language Day 2021 was a resounding success, providing a platform for participants to celebrate and share good practices and creative ideas for the implementation of multilingualism in our current context. These practices will be taken forward and shared more widely within faculties and via SU news and social media platforms to encourage further implementation.