

National language and terminology policies – a South African perspective

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Outline of talk:

- Introduction
- Language policy and implications
- National Language Body participation in terminology development
- National terminology office
- Private initiatives
- Conclusion

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Introduction

- The language policy of a country influences terminology development.
- The language policy of a country determines the number of languages to be developed:
 - Eastern Africa: One official language (Kiswahili), various national languages
 - Namibia: One official language (English), 16 national languages
 - South Africa: 11 official languages (with special emphasis also on development of South African Sign Language and Khoé and San languages)

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Language Policy and Planning

- Section 6 of Chapter 1 of the **Constitution of the Republic of South Africa**, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996) declared **Sesotho sa Leboa, Setswana, Sesotho, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, Siswati, IsiNdebele, IsiXhosa and IsiZulu** as official languages.
- "... *the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages*".

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- The language policy promotes the **equitable use** of the official languages.
- It accommodates **linguistic diversity**.
- It provides a **regulatory framework** to facilitate the effective implementation of the constitutional obligations concerning multilingualism.
- National Treasury concluded that it is possible to implement a multilingual language policy. The **expenditure** is relatively small compared to overall departmental budgets.

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- Government documents "**shall be made available in all 11 official languages**".
- In cases where this is not feasible, national government departments "**shall publish documents simultaneously in at least 6 official languages**":
 - Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English
 - One from the Nguni group; one from Sotho group.
- Result to aim for: **enhanced communication** between government and citizens.

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Terminology as a discipline is

- **governed** by the language policy of the country;
- **at the service of** the language policy of the reigning government, e.g. monolingual, bilingual or multilingual.
- South African situation:
 - **previous dispensation**: **bilingual** technical dictionaries
 - **present dispensation**: **multilingual** term lists

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Establishment of the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB)

- PanSALB was established to give effect to the letter and spirit of Section 6 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.
- PanSALB is a constitutional body established in terms of the PanSALB Act (Act No 59 of 1995 as amended in 1999).
- The Board was established to **promote multilingualism** and **develop** the official South African languages, including South African Sign Language (SASL) and the Khoe and San languages.

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PanSALB created advisory structures to assist it in achieving its mandate:

Mandate:

- to promote multilingualism
- to develop languages, and
- to protect language rights

Structures:

- Provincial Language Committees (PLCs) = 9
- National Language Bodies (NLBs) = 13
- National Lexicography Units (NLUs) = 11

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9 Provincial Language Committees (PLCs)

- ☒ Assist Provinces with *language policy formulation, and implementation*

13 National Language Bodies (NLBs)

- ☒ *Standardisation* (e.g. spelling and orthography rules)
- ☒ *Terminology development*
- ☒ *Dictionary needs* (general and special purpose)
- ☒ *Literature and Media*
- ☒ *Research*
- ☒ *Education*

11 National Lexicography Units (NLUs)

- ☒ *Compilation of comprehensive monolingual, and other types of dictionaries (i.e. translation dictionaries; etymological dictionaries; technical dictionaries; etc.)*

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- The PLCs are provincial structures, each taking care of the **languages of a specific Province**
- The NLBs and NLUs are national structures
- The language specific NLB and the NLU take care of
 - **the particular language or language group**
 - **the official language of the majority of the speakers of the language residing in the geolinguistic area;**
 - **developmental issues** regarding the language;
 - **promotion and preservation of the language**

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PLCs keep in contact with NLBs and NLUs in order to:

- make them aware of all the **language needs** that impact negatively or positively in terms of
 - language **policy**
 - language **practice**
 - language **implementation**, and
 - the **promotion of multilingualism** in a Province

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Terminology Management (cont.)

- A national terminology office should
 - render a terminology service by way of conceptualisation, creation, documentation and standardisation of terminologies;
 - develop structures and facilities to meet the requirements of the indigenous language communities;
 - facilitate and coordinate terminology development;
 - develop, manage and maintain a computerized information-oriented terminological database (terminology management system (TMS));
 - disseminate terminological information.

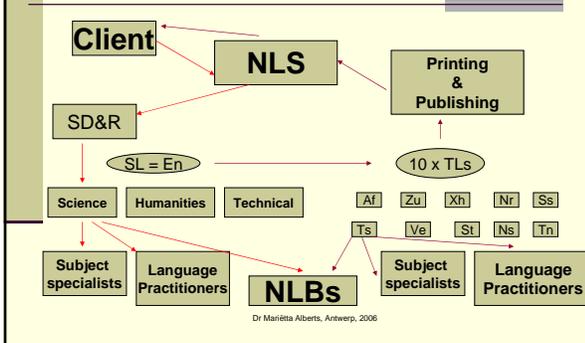
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Terminology Management (cont.)

- A national terminology office has the infrastructure and resources to execute its task.
- Language practitioners are appointed to serve the official or natural (indigenous) languages.
- Terminologists and terminographers perform a specialized service when recording terms and compiling dictionaries.
- Terminology is managed by means of computer-based programs
- A terminology service is provided to subject and language communities

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Terminology flow:



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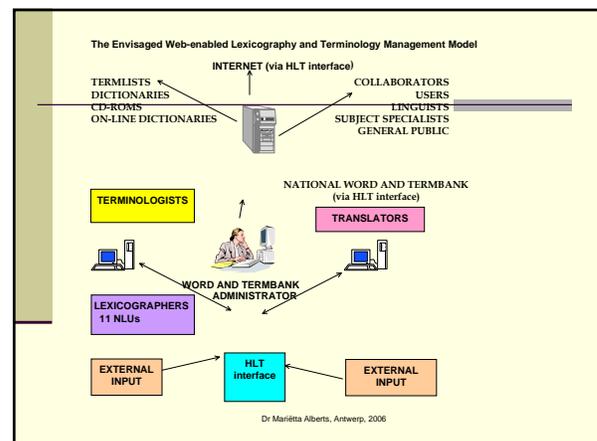
- The compilation of a terminology list is a time-consuming task
- A task that needs commitment and devotion from
 - subject specialists
 - trained terminologists
 - language practitioners, linguists
 - Members of NLBs, PLCs, NLUs
- End-result:
 - enhancement of subject area
 - better or exact communication
 - development of languages into functional languages

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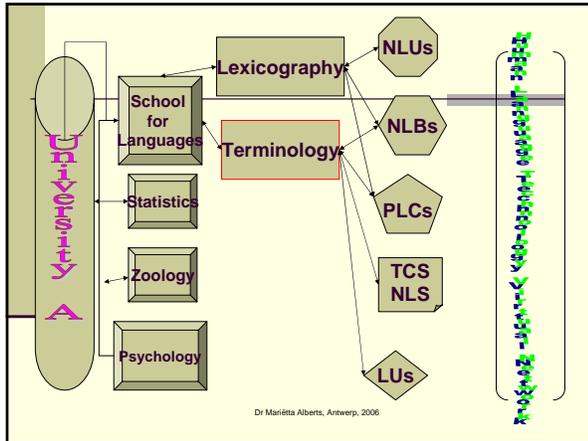
Terminology dissemination:

- Direct queries to national term bank (e.g. Intranet, TCS homepage (flat files))
- Indirect queries to national term bank via e-mail, telephone or fax
- Online dictionaries (NLU's); Internet; CD ROM; HLT
- Publications (term lists, technical dictionaries)
- Documents containing terms: text books, dissertations, manuals, journals, brochures, etc.
- Mass communication media (radio, press, TV...)

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Conclusion

- The language policy of a country influences terminology development since it determines **which languages** to be developed.
- Specialised communication has a **central axle** or **hub** in terminology.
- Terminology is a **strategic resource** and has an important role in a country – especially in a multilingual country.
- Availability of multilingual polythematic terminology is an **indicator of development**.

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- Effective economic, scientific and technical **communication skills** of the citizens of a country are developed through the use of correct terminology.
- Standardised terminology contributes to **quality** of translations, interpreting and subject related communication.
- Streamlined translation and interpreting services provide **competitive advantages**.
- Although terminological and terminographical activities are **not** always **cost-effective**, they are of **invaluable** political, cultural, social, historical, functional, academic and scientific **importance**.

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- A national terminology office **serves** the whole country.
- It should adhere to **language policies** and to sound terminological and terminographical **principles** and **procedures**.
- Terminology work is **team work** and there should be collaboration with subject specialists, academics, linguists, language practitioners, media, national and international terminology organizations, standardizing bodies.
- The terminology practice of any country will **enhance communication** in various domains and will **develop** official (and national) languages into **functional languages**.

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THANK YOU!

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