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# “We Give Way:” 6 Narratives of the Academic Negotiation Between English and Afrikaans at The University of Stellenbosch

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**“WE GIVE WAY:”  
6 NARRATIVES OF THE ACADEMIC NEGOTIATION BETWEEN ENGLISH AND  
AFRIKAANS  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH**

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for South Africa: Multiculturalism and Human Rights

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### **Acknowledgments:**

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**Abstract:**

The negotiations between the African National Congress (ANC) and the National Party in 1992 led to the creation of South Africa's eleven national languages including English and Afrikaans. This paper discusses the intricate relationship between these two languages at the University of Stellenbosch. This project attempts to understand how undergraduate and postgraduate students have negotiated the rise of English as a universal academic language and the maintenance of Afrikaans as Stellenbosch's core language of instruction. The project works to determine how students view the changes to the policy and how those changes affect them, looking particularly at the effect of dual-medium instruction between English and Afrikaans.

To give context to the current language debate occurring at the University of Stellenbosch, I give a brief summary of South African language policy at the tertiary level and at the University of Stellenbosch. Then after analyzing data gathered in interviews with undergraduate and postgraduate students, this paper examines the effect of bilingual instruction on the students and how they view the growing pressure on the University of Stellenbosch to Anglicize its courses.

The findings of this project have determined that language policy at the University of Stellenbosch is much different from the language practices at the institution. In fact, the language practices of some undergraduate and postgraduate students actually contradict the current policies put in place by the University and the South African government. This study has shown that language practice at the University is fueled by the international demand for English speakers while competing with the deep-rooted Afrikaans tradition.

## **Introduction:**

### **ISP Rationale:**

Having grown up in Southern California where Spanish is just as common as English, from a very young age it was apparent to me that language was a divider of people. All the native English speakers were a part of the same social group, while the Spanish speakers tended to stick together, and those that were bilingual were able to float amongst groups like bees during pollinating season. I became interested in how languages interact within the confines of competition for status and resources after I started to learn Spanish.

Arriving in South Africa, only to find that this country has eleven national languages boggled my mind. I wanted to understand how all the languages coexist in one space. Not having the ability or time to examine how all eleven languages interact, I chose to look at the isolated case of English and Afrikaans on the university campus at Stellenbosch. To understand how the languages interact, I needed to understand how the students view the language policy and how they use language in their daily lives, in their homes and in their classes. There was a lot of literature on language and bilingualism, but not a lot of work on how the policies actually affect students and how they adapt language to suit their lives. I set out to at least begin to fill that gap.

### **The History of the Relationship between Afrikaans and English:**

When speaking about the language debate occurring in South Africa currently, one cannot be ignorant of the complex and controversial relationship between English and Afrikaans. Afrikaans is at its core a creole language; it is derived from the interactions between the Dutch language brought by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) settlers, the indigenous languages spoken by the Khoi and San peoples, and the Malay Portuguese brought by the slaves from the Indian coast. The British brought the English language when they finally defeated the Dutch and occupied the Cape Colony

from 1806 to South Africa's independence in 1960. From the creation of the South African Union in 1910, English and Afrikaans shared the role as the country's two national languages.

The end of apartheid saw the creation of a new language policy where English and Afrikaans maintained their places as the elite languages of the country (Hill, 2010). The other nine indigenous languages, although promised equitability in the Constitution, have been relegated to lower domain languages. In many areas around South Africa, English is seen as the language of success while native languages are taught to preserve culture and heritage rather than to promote the development of African languages into higher domains.

The last twenty years has seen the rise of English as a universal academic language. In South Africa, English has become the language of commerce, government, and education. This is due to globalization and the need to communicate across country borders. In most places the growing dominance of English has not been an issue; however, there exists a conflict between English and Afrikaans in areas where Afrikaans is the dominant mother language. Although some scholars would argue that English has always been dominant over Afrikaans, many see the decline of Afrikaans in the face of English as a decline in the status of the language and the people who speak it (Hill, 2010; Mesthrie, 2006) The University of Stellenbosch is at the forefront of this controversial debate.

### **The Context of Language Policy at the University of Stellenbosch:**

South African language policy is complex not only because there are eleven national languages but also because there exists a disconnect between legislation and the enforcement of the legislation. This 'policy gap' is most easily seen within the government setting. Although all languages are supposed to be utilized and monitored in Parliament, "95% of all Parliament speeches were conducted in English" (Kamwangamalu, 2003: 223). The complexity of the current language policy is also demonstrated in contradiction in the state's intentions regarding language. The Language in Education Policy (2002) argues for the development of the African languages (Afrikaans

is included in this specification) into higher domain languages suitable for academic purposes. Yet the government also urges tertiary institutions like Stellenbosch to teach more courses in English to open up opportunity for black students in South Africa. Under the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) universities have the right to develop their own language policy as long as it does not violate the Constitution. The University of Stellenbosch has chosen Afrikaans as its core language at the undergraduate level. Therefore, the government's dictate presents a challenge to Stellenbosch's tradition of teaching in Afrikaans.

65% of the students at Stellenbosch are white and for those who do not speak English as a home language, English is usually taught as a second language (University of Stellenbosch website). The University of Stellenbosch has recently adopted a plan to make Stellenbosch a 50% black university by 2018. This means the opening up of more courses taught in English at the undergraduate level. For the native Afrikaans speakers, this creates a new set of challenges; these students will have to adapt their education to the growing Anglicization occurring on campus.

### **The Focus of this Study:**

This research project focuses on the relationship between English and Afrikaans as it plays out on the university level. Although there is a lot of literature written on the dynamic between the two languages, there are no surveys on how the actual students think of the controversy between the pushing of English as a universal language and the maintenance of Afrikaans as a traditional African language. Therefore, this project is, at least partially, filling in the gap that exists in the current literature. By interviewing Afrikaans-speaking students at Stellenbosch, a cross-section of opinion can be created for this particular social group regarding language policy and application at the University.

The objective of this project is to understand how undergraduate students have dealt with the growing Anglicization on campus while continuing Stellenbosch's proud Afrikaans tradition. Some



scholars argue that Afrikaans is losing status as an academic language, so this project will also work to gauge the reactions of the Stellenbosch students to these claims. This research will also attempt to understand the challenges of being a bilingual institution in South Africa. Overall, this project will focus on the relationship between English and Afrikaans as well as the relationships the students maintain with the languages that they engage with on a daily basis.

The information in this Independent Study Project will be presented in four distinct sections: introduction, literature review, methodology, and findings. This introduction provides a brief background to help the reader understand history and context surrounding language policy in South Africa. The literature review serves to provide the reader with the current writings on the subject of language policy and language planning to demonstrate the gap in the research that this project attempts to fill. The methodology section will extrapolate on the project's limitations as well as the self-reflexivity practiced by the researcher. And finally, the findings section will explain the data that has been collected and analyzed within the context of the literature.

The structure of this paper supports the argument that language practice of students at the University of Stellenbosch is at odds with the University's language policy. While most students support the maintenance of Afrikaans as a home language, some students believe that it no longer has a place in the academic arena. In fact, many students believe that English is a unifying language on campus rather the destructive force many accuse the language of being. In a country like South Africa, diversity is a wide and complex issue and with eleven national languages, there must be a communicating language common amongst students, faculty, alums, and administrators; that language appears to be English.

However despite the apparent approval of English by the students interviewed for this study, many claim that Afrikaans is important to maintain due to its history and its strong heritage as the language of the Afrikaners. The teaching of Afrikaans is a means to preserve the complicated history

of one of South Africa's minority populations. Stellenbosch town and the University of Stellenbosch play important roles as one of the last densely Afrikaans-populated areas. The University itself can be viewed as the last academic outpost for the Afrikaans language. It is due to this role as an Afrikaans outpost that the issue of Afrikaans as an academic language becomes prominent. The power of a language to be used for academic instruction and discourse is tied to that language's status. Given South Africa's history, the status of a language holds a lot of power and influence.

The status of a language is also a determinant of the status of a language speaker. An example of this is seen in the workings of the South African Parliament. In Parliament, English is the most commonly used language to communicate in; therefore, English is associated with power. It cannot be denied that being able to speak English in South Africa is a skill to be valued. The language of Afrikaans demands a lot of influence in some sectors of commerce; however, the language is also tainted by the legacy of apartheid. The aura of oppression that is sometimes associated with the language can give it a negative perception in the eyes of some. The University of Stellenbosch was the birthplace of the horrific social experiment that was apartheid. And that can be a difficult past to run from.

These aspects of language all play a large part in the overall language practice at the University. Language practice is fueled by the international demand for English-speakers, the tension between English and Afrikaans, and the deep-rooted Afrikaans tradition of the University of Stellenbosch.

### **Limitations of Study:**

Due to the short nature of ISP, some limitations developed as the period progressed. There were two main limitations that affected this project: the short time period compacted by exams at the University of Stellenbosch and the recognition that this project was conducted in a very white, non-diverse space.

In the first two weeks of the Independent Study Project in which I was conducting interviews, the University of Stellenbosch students were in the middle of intensive exams. In spite of this, I was able to conduct six interviews with twelve students over a three-day period. A minor limitation was the tardiness and unreliability of the Cape Town railway system; however, I was able to make four separate trips to the University of Stellenbosch for interviews as well as for paper research purposes. Four of my interviews were very enlightening in that the interviewees were very open about their experiences and were willing to give me honest answers. And then the last two interviews were supplementary in that they basically repeated the information I had already gotten from other sources. These supplementary interviews worked to solidify the claims made in my findings.

The main limitation during this study was the recognition that the entire project operated within a very white space. In this instance, white space refers to the fact that this project was conducted in a location with very little racial diversity. Although people of color were interviewed, the study focused on the maintenance of a predominantly white language from the perspective of a speaker of another white language: English. Working within such a non-diverse space made me cognizant of how I was only getting one perspective of the Afrikaans/English debate and that was the University of Stellenbosch perspective. In the period of ISP, this study was able to focus on Stellenbosch with very little time to look into the relationship between the two languages at other universities such as the University of Cape Town or the University of the Western Cape. These two

universities have much more diversity on their campuses; therefore, the debate would have unfolded in a much different context with potentially very different perspectives.

This acknowledgment is not only a limitation on this project but it is also a comment on my own personal growth while here in South Africa. The fact that I gravitated towards a project such as this one where I found myself mostly surrounded by other white people demonstrates where my comfort zone lies. South Africa is a country where 80% of the population is black, yet I did my research in a very white community. I recognize that this comfortability is a result of my own upbringing and habituation but I feel it is necessary to address this comfortability with regards to how it affected my research. Given the location of my research, I found myself interviewing mostly white people and I was easily able to approach strangers and ask about their lives and how they utilize language. However, if I had done this same project but instead had to approach groups of black students my own self-consciousness as an out-group intruder would have made it very difficult to interact with the interviewees on the same level I had with the white students.

Overall, the limitations experienced during the Independent Study Period were helpful in that they forced me to truly think about my positionality within the project and the attitude and influence I wanted to convey during interviews. They also made me cognizant of my own personal limitations within the South African context.

## Literature Review:

### South African Language Policy in Higher Education

The national language policy that emerged from the newly minted South African Constitution was one of equality and progression. Eleven national languages were created: English, Afrikaans, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Xitsonga, siSwati, Tshivenda, Sesotho, isiNdebele, Sepedi and Setswana. However, it was English that became the dominant language “at the expense of the other languages” (Mesthrie, 2006). English is seen as the language of finance, science, and business, so many people are learning English in order to keep up with the globalized world; therefore, there is less emphasis on the use Afrikaans in the higher domains it once dominated.

The Language in Education Policy (LiEP) was passed in November of 2002. This piece of legislation defined language policy not only at the primary and secondary level but also at the tertiary level. It stated that “all institutions are to formulate and publicise an appropriate language policy” that was within constitutional guidelines (Mesthrie, 2006). The University of Stellenbosch has been viewed as a traditionally Afrikaans university despite its history as a once English institution. Therefore, the University has developed a language policy that is “committed to the use and sustained development of Afrikaans as an academic language in a multilingual context” (University of Stellenbosch website). At Stellenbosch, every undergraduate student needs to have a working knowledge of Afrikaans. While at the postgraduate level, most courses are taught in English to cater to an international student population. However, the University recently unveiled a new diversity policy stating “by 2018 the institution should have a diversity profile where coloured, black and Indian students will make up 50% of the number of enrolled students” (Die Matie, 15 May 2015). This shift in student population guarantees that Afrikaans will no longer be able to be the language of instruction at Stellenbosch; with the growth in the number of black, Indian, and coloured students, the

university will struggle to enforce their language policy. This will lead to a greater opening of courses taught in English at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Mda (1997) in his article *Issues in the making of South Africa's language in education policy* argues that LiEP must be evaluated in terms of the tensions it creates amongst the eleven national languages focusing on English and Afrikaans. With eleven national languages, undeniably there is going to be a struggle for resources from the government. This fight for resources plays out mostly on the primary and secondary level where every student has the right to be instructed in his/her mother tongue. The question of resource allocation also presents the question of language status. It is nearly impossible to separate the status of a language from the social status of the speakers of that language (Hill, 2010). This is demonstrated by Mda (2006) when he states that Afrikaners take offense at “the superior position that seems to have been given to English by South Africans of British descent and Africans alike.” Due to the oppression of the Bantu Education Act in 1953, English became the adopted language of South Africa's elite blacks (Mitchell & Balfour, 2004). Before the end of apartheid, Afrikaans was an elite and academic language. However, in the new South Africa, the Afrikaners have lost not just political influence but slowly the status of their language as well. Hill (2010) states that it is “generally accepted that the status of English has grown significantly during the last sixteen years. Moreover, this new status has come largely at the expense of the public status of Afrikaans” (43).

Although language status is usually discussed in terms of the indigenous African languages such as Ndebele or Sotho, it is an equally vital term when applied to Afrikaans.

There has been a noted decline in the status of Afrikaans as an elite, academic language; however, within a bilingual university setting, the “more passive capacities of white English speakers have played a significant role in sustaining the academic status of Afrikaans” (Hill 2008:18).

Stellenbosch's language requirement of Afrikaans proficiency allowed for the continuance of the

language's status as English-speaking students adapted to the policy. English may have become dominant in the last few years, but Afrikaans is still fighting for its place as an elite language, ironically, due to the help of English speaking students.

The acknowledgment of the decreasing status of Afrikaans highlights the current struggle taking place within Afrikaans communities to maintain their heritage. Korf and Malan (2002) argue "it is important to individuals that their identities show continuity over time." This is especially apt when discussing a minority social group like Afrikaners who went from controlling South Africa to giving up political power to the group of people they had spent forty-six years oppressing. When a group goes through such a dynamic social change there is a need "to confront themselves anew; such reexamination may, in turn, lead to new in-group norms"(Korf & Malan, 2003:2). For the Afrikaans-speaking population, the development of new in-group norms saw the creation of a hypersensitive awareness of culture and the need to preserve that culture. During apartheid, the fear of losing the Afrikaner culture was not present due to the dominance of Afrikaners as the political and economic leaders in South Africa. However post-1994, brought a shift in society that required an active maintenance of heritage rather than a passive one. Therefore, more emphasis was put on the teaching of Afrikaans to the younger generation especially at the University of Stellenbosch.

However, the University also recognizes the importance of English, so Stellenbosch operates within a dual-medium instruction system with courses taught equally in Afrikaans and English. The concept of the bilingual university is not new; there is very little research into how such a university operates as well as how dual or parallel instruction affects its students. Dual-medium instruction refers to a system where both English and Afrikaans are taught in conjunction with each other, while parallel instruction" involves the use of two distinct but equivalent teaching streams" (Hill 2008:5). Although, it is at the professor's discretion to teach in whichever language they want. This can mean speaking in English with Afrikaans slides or switching mid-sentence from English to Afrikaans.

Most students at the University of Stellenbosch recognize the importance of English in terms of career building and being a valuable employee. In fact, “English is seen as a powerful social and economic tool” (Kamwangamalu, 2033: 228). Despite this, many Afrikaans speaking students acknowledge that Afrikaans will always be an aspect of life at Stellenbosch. While some students believe that the language only belongs in the homes of the Afrikaners, some students still want Afrikaans to be used as an academic language. Neville Alexander (2013) argued adamantly for the development for African languages. He stated that students did not understand English well enough to apply it in academics and that some professors were even unable to use the language adequately. This theory runs counter to how many students feel about the maintenance of Afrikaans as an academic language. It is an interesting disconnect that will be investigated further on in this paper. Mesthrie (2006) also argues for the development of African languages due to the supposedly destructive growth of English in South Africa.

This disconnect represents one of the main functions of this literature review: to present theory that contradicts the findings of this study. This paper will argue that English is, in fact, unifying rather than destructive and that students at the University of Stellenbosch do not actually call for the maintenance of Afrikaans as an academic language while supporting it as a home language.

When speaking about the decline of Afrikaans, it is important to note that there is an exhibited difference in the use of the language in higher domains, such as education, and the language’s use in the home and community. While it is true that the support for Afrikaans as an academic language is waning, contrary to what a lot of this literature argues, the language is not dying in the home. In fact, support for the continuance of social Afrikaans is highly evident based on the interviews conducted for this study.



### **Methodology:**

Since this project focuses on language policy and practice from the perspective of University of Stellenbosch students, the main methodological practice utilized in this study was the use of narrative interviews as well as some minor observation to catalogue the languages most commonly heard in the public areas of the University of Stellenbosch. Before beginning this project, I hypothesized that English was going to be seen as dominant and destructive. I thought that native-Afrikaans speakers were going to be incredibly defensive of their language and deny that English was overtaking Afrikaans. However, through the methods described above, I recognized that my hypothesis was right in that English is taking Afrikaans' place as an academic discourse, but my thoughts on the students' reactions to this intrusion were very wrong. Due to my findings, my hypothesis went from being very one-dimensional to much more complex and fascinating.

This study focuses on how the students perceive the language policy and they practice language in their daily lives; therefore, it was vital to interview students to gain their perspectives. The strength of this method is in the direct interaction with field subjects; it allows for the creation of a relationship between interviewer and interviewee, whereas observation only allows for one-sided perspective. The negative of this is the possibility of unintentionally influencing an interview subject either through a leading question or by the bias of the interviewer. This will be discussed in the "Ethical Reflexivity" section of this project.

The literature presented demonstrates the gap in research on language policy and practices regarding how these policies affect students. The literature also demonstrates the gap between the theory and the actual attitudes on the ground. It is important to recognize that much of the literature argues that English is destroying the Afrikaans language and that the language must be maintained academically. However, the students interviewed from this study stated they did not feel that the language needed to be used academically in order to survive. The literature serves a dual purpose. It

predominantly works to show the opposing perspectives presented by the interview subjects. These opposing perspectives demonstrate the shift in thought from 1994 to 2013. The social atmosphere has greatly changed and these changes are reflected in how young, educated people think about language.

Secondly, the literature works to support the argument that although English is becoming more common than Afrikaans at the academic level, Afrikaans is not necessarily a dying language. There is still great support for the promotion and maintenance of the language as an important aspect of South Africa's history. The literature provides the theory to back up the voices of the interview subjects represented in this project.

This study of language practice at the University of Stellenbosch focuses on the narratives of twelve Stellenbosch students. These twelve students were interviewed in six separate interviews. Most of these interviews took place on the main quad at the University; however, one took place at the Once in Cape Town backpackers. All interviews took place between November 12 and November 18, 2013. The narratives themselves are told by 3 postgraduate students, 1 recent Stellenbosch graduate, 5 second- year students, 2 first-year students, and 1 student who did not graduate due to personal reasons. The ethnic background of the participants included a Nigerian, an Indian, a Zulu, a coloured student, a German, 3 Afrikaners and 4 English-speaking South Africans.

These interviews were largely informal, taking place in public areas on weekdays at the University of Stellenbosch. They generally lasted 15-45 minutes depending on the group being interviewed. Two of the interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants while the rest were recorded through detailed note taking. The biggest difficulty of relying on narrative interviewing for much of the data is the possibility of interviewees not giving complete answers or answers that do not answer the question. The greatest asset though in interviewing is the ability to

create, although brief, a relationship with the interviewee. This allows the interviewer the opportunity to gauge the reactions of the interviewees through their body language and facial expressions.

### **Descriptions of Study Participants:**

#### **Narrative One: Jergun**

Jergun is a Stellenbosch student graduating this year with a degree in Bioscience that includes such subjects as genetics, biochemistry and physiology. He is applying to pursue a postgraduate degree in Physiology from Stellenbosch. He is a native Afrikaner from about two hours north of Stellenbosch.

#### **Narrative Two: Pumi, Samantha and Maria**

Pumi, Samantha and Maria are all first year Honors students at the University Stellenbosch. Pumi and Samantha are studying Agriscience while Maria is studying Marketing. Pumi is a Zulu. Samantha is from Namibia. Maria is Indian. Samantha did not do her undergraduate work at Stellenbosch but Pumi and Maria did. For all three, Afrikaans is a second or third language.

#### **Narrative Three: Chris, Claire, and Hayden**

Chris and Hayden are first years. Claire is a second year. Both Chris and Claire are from Durban. Hayden is from Johannesburg. All three are native English-speaking South Africans.

#### **Narrative Four: Jacqueline and Natalie**

Jacqueline and Natalie are both from Pretoria; however, Jacqueline is Afrikaans while Natalie is English. Jacqueline studies in the Science faculty; Natalie is a student of the Humanities. Both are second year students.

#### **Narrative Five: Chad and Eva**

Chad and Eva are second-year students within the Humanities faculty studying international relations. Chad is from Johannesburg; He would be identified as “coloured.” Eva is an international student from Germany.

### **Narrative Six: Jaco**

Jaco spent four years studying at the University of Stellenbosch although he did not graduate. He is originally from the countryside and comes from a traditional Afrikaner family. Afrikaans was his first language but he learned English from his mother at a very young age.

The people interviewed for this project were mostly chosen at random on Stellenbosch's main quad, but they were chosen for their diversity. As an objective study, it was important to gain as many perspectives as possible especially on such a controversial issue as language policy and practice. By gaining the opinion of white Afrikaners, black students, coloured students, international students, undergraduate and postgraduate students, this project was made more legitimate in its findings.

### **Sample Interview Questions:**

The University of Stellenbosch operates under a dual-medium instruction system between English and Afrikaans. So...

- Which language do you prefer to speak in English or Afrikaans?
- Which do you prefer to write in?

In primary and secondary school, what was your language of instruction?

- If English is your second language, do you feel competent in your language ability?

Now at Stellenbosch University, what language are most of your classes conducted in?

- When taking exams, what language do you write in?
- Do professors encourage the use of Afrikaans rather than English?

Do you know and understand Stellenbosch's language policy?

- What do you think about it?
- Do you agree or disagree with it?
- Do you think that the African languages should be promoted at the tertiary level?

**How do undergraduate and postgraduate students at the University of Stellenbosch negotiate between the rise of English as the universal academic language and the deep-rooted Afrikaans tradition at Stellenbosch?**

It is this question that this project hopes to answer as fully as possible through interviews with diverse groups of students. It is the hypothesis of this study that language policy is most influenced by the competition between English and Afrikaans for status and resources.

This project has found that language practice is multi-faceted in that common themes run through every interview. These common themes support the argument that language practice at Stellenbosch is a balancing act between making sure students are prepared for international careers while also attempting to support the maintenance of Afrikaans. It is a balancing act between moving forward with the times and continuing the heritage and culture that makes the University of Stellenbosch so unique. The most important finding of this project is that students at the university view English as a positive force rather than as destructive. This main concept lays the foundation for the minor themes of: Afrikaans' role as an academic language, and race as a determinant of language perception. The last finding is the assertion that Afrikaans is not declining in the minds of some students at the University. Although the language has lost prominence as one of South Africa's academic languages, Afrikaans is still very much alive in the homes and the communities to which the language originally belonged. For Afrikaners, their language is the conduit of their heritage and culture.

**English as a unifying language:**

Many scholars blame English for the decline of Afrikaans both as a social and academic language. However, this study has not found this claim in any of the six interviews conducted.

Instead, this project has found that some University of Stellenbosch students see English as a common, unifying language. Stellenbosch is a diverse university where so many different languages are spoken that one common language is necessary for communication amongst peers. Based on narrative proof, this language seems to be English.

Although English has become the dominant language in commerce, education and in the government, it cannot be denied that English provides a common ground language that can be used across ethnic barriers. Mitchell and Balfour (2004) state that English has become the language of the elite, the language of the educated black South Africans. English became a unifying factor as a shared language after the riots in Soweto in 1976. The ANC used English as its communicating language because they refused to use Afrikaans and of course could not use their home languages due to their diversity. For the ANC, English was the common denominator. This is also the case at the University of Stellenbosch.

Students at the University of Stellenbosch come from incredibly diverse backgrounds. Due to this diversity, Stellenbosch also deals with a great amount of racial tension. In fact, Chad stated, “the residences are full of racial tension”(Personal communication, 18 November 2013). While Eva joined in to say that Afrikaans was an intimidating language for those who did not speak it; “English is needed for diversity” (Personal communication, 18 November 2013). Claire also made it clear that at Stellenbosch the students are divided socially based on what language they speak, English or Afrikaans (Personal communication, 14 November 2013). These statements provide evidence demonstrates the need for a common language amongst all students; that language is English.

However, Mda (1997) states that Afrikaners take offense at “ the superior position that seems to have been given to English by South Africans of British descent and Africans alike.” Theoretically, this resentment would result in the decrease of the use of English as a communicating language; however, this is not the pattern that has emerged.

Although this resentment may exist for some Afrikaners, the Afrikaans-speaking students interviewed at Stellenbosch seemed to recognize that English was becoming the more important language with regards to academia. Eva commented that Afrikaans is “unfriendly” to international students because it is so exclusive (Personal communication, 14 November 2013). Chad commented that, at Stellenbosch, English is a “unifying force”(Personal communication, 14 November 2013). And although Jergun is a proud Afrikaner he said during his interview that students need “one common language-that’s English” (Personal communication, 12 November 2013).

When I began this project, I had assumed that English would be seen as a force that was destroying the proud Afrikaner language, but instead I have found that many students view English as a positive means of communication amongst a diverse student population. At first, I was reluctant to accept this as my main finding due to my own bias as an English-speaking American; however, after reviewing all the interviews and the literature, I realized that this was a true theme rather than the articulation of my bias. Recognizing that English is a unifying power on the University of Stellenbosch’s campus, forces one to contemplate the part Afrikaans plays on campus as a competing academic language.

#### **Afrikaans’ role as an academic language:**

The controversy between English and Afrikaans finds its main arena in academia where English has slowly become the more applicable language for scholastic discourse. The growth of English raises the question of whether such a small, isolated language like Afrikaans still belongs at the tertiary level.

The Language Policy for Higher Education was instituted in November of 2002 and stated that “all institutions are to formulate and publicise an appropriate language policy” that was within constitutional guidelines (Mesthrie, 2006). This policy created a lot of discussion regarding the traditionally Afrikaans universities such as the University of Stellenbosch. Mesthrie (2006) argues

that the ability of a university to restrict its medium of instruction to one language runs counter to South Africa's goal to transform the higher education system. The University of Stellenbosch language policy is "committed to the use and sustained development of Afrikaans as an academic language in a multilingual context" (University of Stellenbosch website). Therefore, Afrikaans is the main language used on campus. However, the university recently released a new policy stating that by 2018 they want 50% of the campus to be black, coloured, or Indian (Die Matie). This means that more English courses are going to be necessary to instruct the new population of students that don't necessarily speak Afrikaans. Although this policy is rooted in good intentions to raise the diversity of the university, it also pushes Afrikaans further out of the arena of academia. With a policy as radical as this, the Anglicization of the university cannot be just an unintentional consequence. In spite of the growing use of English, some scholars still call for the development of African languages for academic use.

Neville Alexander (2013) was one of South Africa's leading scholars in language policy and language development. He advocated for the development of the African languages into languages that can be used in the higher domains of government, commerce and education. He states two major reasons for the development of African languages rather than simply move to a completely English system. He argues that some students "are not making it, partly because of a lack of proficiency and intuitive grasp of the idioms of the languages" (80). Secondly, he argued that even the professors struggle with English and cannot teach adequately in a second language. It is because of these factors that Alexander wrote extensively on the development of African languages and Afrikaans is included in this category. Afrikaans is still considered an academic language however it is, undoubtedly, losing ground to the more universal English.

The two points made by Alexander cannot be refuted. Throughout my interviews, the students commented on how the professors struggle with the dual-medium instruction between



English and Afrikaans. Jergun described the anger of some of his classmates over poorly translated slides between Afrikaans and English (personal communication, 12 November 2013). Pumi notes that some professors “[explain] better in Afrikaans” because they just don’t have the English skills (Personal communication, 14 November 2013). There is evidence of what Alexander claims in this project; however, there is also a large disconnect between what Alexander calls for as a scholar, as a politician, and what the actually students who are affected by the policies want. Most of the students interviewed for this project were clear in their belief that Afrikaans was no longer necessary in academia. Chad and Eva, two second-year students, were adamant that the language policy of Stellenbosch was “holding the university back.” They argued that some students just don’t apply to Stellenbosch because Afrikaans is one of the main languages of instructions; they stated that the main goal of any university should be to educate people, but they saw Afrikaans as a “barrier” to “mass education”(personal communication, 14 November 2013). Jergun argues that English is good for the University, and that he only wants Afrikaans to be maintained to “spread knowledge. “ Jergun states that as soon as the use of Afrikaans becomes political, “[the purpose of the institution has been defied]”(Personal communication, 12 November 2013). Out of the six interviews conducted, only one interviewee spoke up for the academic use of Afrikaans. Jaco stated, “if the language is not spoken academically, the language will die” (personal communication, 16 November 2013). This statement forces the researcher to remember the very real consequences of language policy and practice as it pertains to the continuance of this unique language.

There could be many reasons for this disconnect. This researcher thinks that at the time, Alexander was writing to defend the language policy of equality that he helped formulate in 1994. Due to the equitability guaranteed by the Constitution, Alexander would have been obligated to call for the lifting up of the African languages to put them on a level playing field with English and even Afrikaans. The disconnect may also be the result of the 20 years that have lapsed since the

construction of South Africa's language policy; the "Free Borns" may not view language the same as the older politicians that lived through the times of Soweto 1976. The value of being allowed to speak your home language in a classroom setting may be lost on the younger generation. Or specifically looking at students at the University of Stellenbosch, they may already recognize that Afrikaans has "made it," so to speak. Afrikaans is already recognized as a higher domain language and therefore doesn't need to be further developed or maintained. For them, Afrikaans has already reached the highest status a language can.

In a country where so many languages vie for influence and resources, the status of language says a lot about that language and about the people who speak that language. In fact, Hill (2010) argues that the status of language cannot be differentiated from the status of the speakers of that language. This explains why English-speakers maintain a higher place in the social hierarchy than non-English speakers. The social capital connected to English cannot be denied especially in country like South Africa where the economy is so westernized. This is not only observable in South Africa, but also in the United States where English-speakers are valued more than Spanish-speakers.

During apartheid, Afrikaans was the most valued language in South Africa. It was the language of government, commerce and education. However post-1994, Afrikaans has lost most of that status. English has risen at the expense of the African languages (Mesthrie, 2006). This, of course, includes Afrikaans. Hill (2010) would argue that English has risen almost completely at the expense of Afrikaans. It is because of this expense that Mda (2006) argues that policies such the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) must be evaluated through the tension it creates amongst the languages. There will always be a fight for resources when a country is as diverse as South Africa. And the allocation of those resources is tied to status of a people and of their language. Mitchell and Balfour (2004) argue that the larger the population of speakers of a certain language, the more priority that language and people will be given. However, this does not apply to English. It could be

argued that English is the most powerful language in South Africa yet the number of English speakers is nothing compared to the Zulu speakers, the Xhosa speakers, or even the Afrikaans speakers.

Language policy at any level only created tension and controversy. This is seen at the University of Stellenbosch in the allocation of resources between English and Afrikaans. Eva stated that if the resources do not exist to maintain both languages at Stellenbosch, then Afrikaans should be dropped. She went on to say that “developing Afrikaans as an academic language should not be a priority. No money”(personal communication, 14 November 2013). There is obviously conflict between the two languages at the administrative level when it comes to dividing funds between English and Afrikaans. The allocation of resources at the University of Stellenbosch is divided not just amongst English and Afrikaans but also amongst the other language programs offered at the University. The institution offers English, Afrikaans, French, German, and Chinese as second language courses (University of Stellenbosch website).

One cannot look at language practice at one university in the Western Cape without putting that university in a greater context. Comparing the University of Stellenbosch with the University of Cape Town and the University of Western Cape demonstrates that Stellenbosch is behind in the international languages taught at the institution. The University of Cape Town offers Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho, Afrikaans, English, Dutch, Arabic, Mandarin, Classical Greek, French, Hebrew, Italian, Latin, Portuguese and Spanish (University of Cape Town website). The University of Western Cape teaches Xhosa, Dutch, English, Afrikaans, Arabic, French, German, and Latin (University of Western Cape website). Neither of these two universities uses Afrikaans as a medium of instruction; both use English as their main language. It is because of this that Jergun commented that “UCT is better” than Stellenbosch because their complete use of English (Personal communication, 12 November 2013). Pumi made a similar comment (Personal communication, 14 November 2013). UCT is viewed as a

better institution because there is a greater focus on English as an international language. Jergun even said that there is a joke on campus that if you don't like speaking Afrikaans, "why don't you go to UCT"(Personal communication, 12 November 2013)? There is a perception that full-English instruction provides a better education.

The University of Stellenbosch is one of the few universities that offer Mandarin as a second language. This demonstrates that Stellenbosch is an incredibly business-oriented and forward-thinking university. Mandarin is swiftly becoming a powerful language in the global economy. By offering Mandarin, the University of Stellenbosch is preparing its students for the global market. They are willing teach Mandarin yet they seem to be struggling to accept English as the international language that it is. This reluctance to give English a higher place at the University could be due to the Afrikaans speakers who fund the University as well as the apparent competition between the social and academic statuses of English and Afrikaans. Not only do the languages compete for status and resources there is also a racial expression of the language debate at the University of Stellenbosch. This racial expression places even more pressure on the institution to standardize their language policies.

### **Race as a determinant of language perception**

Afrikaans was the language of apartheid, the language of the National Party. It was the language that forced upon students in schools across and it was the language that was rebelled against in Soweto in 1976. At a place like the University of Stellenbosch, where the system was formulated, this legacy is even more prominent and present. Some black students may feel that the use of Afrikaans is a form of institutionalized racism.

Berger (2004) argues, "in contemporary South Africa, certain racial differences are sometimes reformulated to focus on culture rather than skin color"(9). The racism experienced by some students at the University of Stellenbosch is not due to their skin color but rather from the exclusionary nature

of Afrikaans. Racism at Stellenbosch has become less about pigmentation and more about whether or not one fits into the massive Afrikaner culture present on campus. Black students who do not speak Afrikaans create the out-group at Stellenbosch. It should be acknowledged that the use of Afrikaans at Stellenbosch is not racist due to its connection to apartheid. Rather some black students see it as racist because they do not belong to the in-group, which includes every student that speaks Afrikaans.

Jergun commented on exactly this: some black students feel that the use of Afrikaans by professors is racist and unfair towards the students who don't speak Afrikaans (Personal communication, 12 November 2013). However, Pumi explicitly stated that the use of Afrikaans wasn't racist but that some professors simply "explain better in Afrikaans" (Personal communication, 14 November 2013). Based on the interviews, it seems as if Afrikaans is only viewed as racist if you are black and do not understand Afrikaans. Natalie commented, "coloureds also speak Afrikaans" (Personal communication, 14 November 2013). And although the issue of not understanding Afrikaans is a concern, most students came to Stellenbosch knowing that it was an Afrikaans university; therefore, there is no space for complaint. In fact, every interviewee expressed the fact that "Stellenbosch is Afrikaans." In all 6 interviews, the use of Afrikaans by professors as racist was only expressed by one interviewee; however, given the incredibly racialized nature of language, especially Afrikaans, the issue needed to be addressed. Based on interviews and observations on the University of Stellenbosch campus, I hypothesize that in some cases the racism connected to the use of Afrikaans is not based on actual race but in the resentment of some students who do not speak Afrikaans and yet attend an unarguably Afrikaans university.

### **Language as a conduit for heritage**

Most of the literature argues the Afrikaans is declining as a language. This is true when placing Afrikaans in an academic context; however as a social language Afrikaans is still strong. The

language can be seen throughout the country in books, movies, and music. And for the people who speak the language, nothing is more important than maintaining the rich and unique heritage that comes with being an Afrikaans-speaker.

Kamwangamalu (2003) uses Zulu to describe the linguistic situation in which English is used to get ahead in the world while Zulu is spoken to maintain heritage. He states that “the purpose of learning Zulu is to keep the language and the culture it embodies alive, so that ‘the children did not forget their roots’” (12). This is also demonstrated in the Afrikaans community. While there is less support for the language as a scholastic language, there is a dearth of support for the maintenance of the language as a means to preserve the Afrikaner culture and tradition.

During apartheid, it was guaranteed that the Afrikaans language would be maintained: it was the language of the government. However since 1994, there has been more and more competition for resources and status. And with the rise of English, the status of Afrikaans has been brought into question. Korf and Malan (2002) argue that the great social realignment that occurred post-1994 forced Afrikaners “to confront themselves anew; such reexamination may, in turn, lead to new in-group norms”(2). The shifting of social dynamics where Afrikaners lost political and social power, the identity of Afrikaners was threatened. And this threat allowed for the creation of new in-group norms, which, I argue, created a much greater push for the maintenance of the Afrikaans language within the Afrikaner community; the new social hierarchy required an active maintenance of culture.

There is an obvious connection between a population’s language and the traditions that they have. For Afrikaners, their language makes them Afrikaners. The rest of their culture is derived from the exclusivity that their language gave them. Based on the views expressed by the interview subjects in this study, their language is the most important aspect of their culture; it is the conduit of their culture.

Jergun and Jaco, the two interviewees that come from hard-core Afrikaners backgrounds stated explicitly the value they felt for their language and the continuance of that language (personal communications, 12-14 November 2013). Jergun spoke of his great-grandmother who put in a concentration camp by the British and of how his language was such a part of him. He said, “I will always speak Afrikaans. It’s my heritage”(personal communication, 12 November 2013). Jaco was even more adamant when he stated “I will teach Afrikaans to my children. Killing the language means killing the culture”(personal communication, 14 November 2013). And although the other interviewees did not come from strong Afrikaans backgrounds, they also stated that Afrikaans “will always be around”(personal communications). Although Afrikaans may not be used as an academic language in large spheres anymore, the language is not dying. However, there a few universities that still use Afrikaans as a language of instruction.

The University of Stellenbosch remains one of the last universities to teach in Afrikaans. The few Afrikaans universities that remain such, as University of Bloemfontein and Potchefstroom are not very well known and nowhere near the caliber of the University of Stellenbosch. It is this difference that makes Stellenbosch the last academic outpost for Afrikaans. Afrikaans as an academic language is sustained at the university. For all the interviewees that took part in this study, it was acknowledged that Stellenbosch is Afrikaans and will always be so.

The students who did not enjoy having Afrikaans as an instructing language even admitted that Afrikaans was the tradition at Stellenbosch. Maria, an Indian student, stated, “Afrikaans will always be here”(personal communication, 14 November 2013). Jaco stated that students at Stellenbosch were “proud to be Maties.” He also stated “Stellenbosch is the heart, the soul of Afrikaans. It’s keeping it [Afrikaans] alive” (personal communication, 14 November 2013).

### **Ethical Reflexivity:**

The fact that I am an English-speaking American provided the greatest ethical dilemma. I recognized very early on that my bias was obviously towards English being the universal academic language at the University of Stellenbosch. Of course, as a scholar studying in the United States, I would benefit from the universal standardization of English as an academic language. English is my native language; therefore, I understand the nuances and idioms of the language and can write in it much more capably than I can in my second or third language. If every scholarly document produced in every university across the world was written in English, I would never have to worry about having documents translated. However, this is an unrealistic desire. Once I recognized where my biases lied, I worked to mitigate them in my interviews and in my research.

I worked to be very forthcoming about my research and my background. I was very clear about who I was and what I was interested in learning. I answered all the questions that were put to me, although most of the students did not seem very concerned that I was a stranger asking them questions about their lives.

However after my first interview, I recognized that my position as an American was a lot more effective than I thought it would be. It became obvious that the United States is generally the country my interviewees spoke of when discussing the international demand for English-speakers. They commented that the “big companies are American.” Because of this I did not want to influence my interviewees into giving the answers they thought I wanted; these answers would have been geared towards accepting English over Afrikaans. I also noticed that many native Afrikaans speakers are uncomfortable with their English ability, and seemed nervous talking to me in English. I immediately worked to give them enough space to think and express their ideas as they normally would without my presence influencing their speech. I did this by asking very broad questions and then allowing the conversation to guide itself as my interviewees discussed amongst themselves the



language issues on campus. I just took notes and asked follow-up questions when necessary. This allowed the students to use their own language to describe their experiences. Every person I interviewed seemed to give their very personal and honest opinion about Stellenbosch's language policy and what they thought about changes to that policy. They did not seem to hesitate because I was an outsider. I think this was incredibly valuable in gaining legitimate testimony and narratives about language practice at the University of Stellenbosch. Although the atmosphere was one of comfortability, the power dynamic that was at play created a unique situation.

The power dynamic that existed during interviews was interesting in that both the interviewer and the interviewees were college students and generally around the same age. This influenced the power dynamic by creating a seemingly level playing field. There was a certain amount of familiarity that made for easy conversation. Obviously, I, as the interviewer, maintained more power in that I controlled the direction of the interview but by all parties being of similar social levels as educated, college students, the exchange of information was even. The interviewee had the power to end the interview at any time and could refuse to answer a question; this gave them an advantage over the interviewer. Overall, the power dynamic allowed for the fluid of exchange of information.

### **Conclusion:**

This project set out to find how students negotiate between English and Afrikaans at the University of Stellenbosch and to understand how language practice operates on campus. The University of Stellenbosch is known for its proud Afrikaans tradition. And even if students arrive on campus not speaking a word of Afrikaans, they are immediately embraced by the Maties culture, the Sport and the late nights at Bohemia, the local pub. This study has shown the students are not only connected by their Stellenbosch experience but also by their use of English. The University of Stellenbosch draws its student population from all over the world; therefore, a common language is necessary. Due to its universal use, English has become this language. Language has the remarkable power to alienate but it also has the power to bring people together. This study has found that Afrikaans-speakers are willing to set aside their language in order to communicate with others in a greater space. They “give way” to English on campus in an academic and social setting.

Within an academic setting, Afrikaans-speakers have expressed their opinions that Afrikaans does not need to be maintained as an academic language of discourse. They understand that English is the language that is most necessary to utilize within the classroom. This on-the-ground perspective is at odds with the opinions of numerous scholars that argue that the African languages need to be developed as higher domain languages. These divergent perspectives are the result of the 20 year gap between the end of apartheid and now and the different way young South Africans view language. For some students at Stellenbosch, language is not the polarizing topic that it used to be. Although language will always be a racialized subject, young South Africans or “Free Borns” do not associate it with oppression. The relationship between apartheid and Afrikaans is recognized; however, in most cases Afrikaans is not associated with racism. Black, Coloured and Indian students apply and attend Stellenbosch knowing that it is an Afrikaans university.

If anything has come from this study, it is the knowledge, for many, the maintenance of the Afrikaans heritage and tradition means the continuance of the language. The language is not dying because it is still being taught to children and continues to carry the deep heritage of the Afrikaner people.

The analysis of the data gathered through a series of interviews demonstrates that there are two pillars that govern language practice at the University: the international demand for English and the need to maintain Afrikaans. Together these two things dictate how students use language everyday whether they are bilingual or not. A student who does not speak Afrikaans is just as affected by these pillars as students who speak both languages, if not even more affected. The growing Anglicization of the University creates conflict in that it draws resources away from Afrikaans, but the University of Stellenbosch has proven itself to be a modern university in its teaching of Mandarin. The University recognizes the advantage of English while catering to its strong Afrikaans tradition.

It is from my personal experience at the University of Stellenbosch and throughout my travels in South Africa that these two pillars are not only applicable in the isolated case of the Stellenbosch campus. In fact, I think that most people in South Africa experience the conflict of English and their home language. In South Africa, most bilingual people recognize the value of English but also the need to maintain their language as a means to maintain their culture. For them, it is a battle between the language of their home, their community, their family and the language of their career, their future. Afrikaans may be one of the youngest languages in the world, but it is not one that is likely to be forgotten. With over 6 million speakers, Afrikaans is the third largest language in South Africa and represents one of the richest and most unique histories and cultures. The language is not dying; it is simply “[giving] way.”

### **Recommendations for Further Study:**

Language policy and practice across South Africa is incredibly complex. Therefore, there is plenty of opportunity for further study. This study only focuses on the University of Stellenbosch and Afrikaans. It would be very interesting to look into language policy and practice at the University of Cape Town or the University of Western Cape. It would also be very interesting to look into language practice at what used to be called “ethnic universities,” or universities that were created specifically for black students during apartheid. Most of these universities were instructed in either Xhosa or Zulu, but now instruct in English. Looking at other universities would also provide a great opportunity to look into how African languages function as higher domain languages at other institutions.

Another place for further study would be to compare young Afrikaans speakers with the older generation. The older generation is generally more reluctant to let go of Afrikaans and speak English especially because their English is not as good. It would be interesting to note the changes that the Afrikaner culture has experienced with the birth of the “Free Born” generation. And lastly, the non-official languages in South Africa are not particularly noted or studied. To study these languages would be to fill a very obvious gap in South Africa’s linguistic studies.

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