

## **LOTE as languages of science in multilingual South Africa. A case study at the University of Pretoria**

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### **The Problem**

Since the democratisation of South Africa in 1994, English has become the major language of public communication in South Africa, and is gradually also becoming the only language of science, i.e. of teaching and research at tertiary level. Languages other than English (LOTE) have, in practice, almost no role in this particular context.

The consequences of this development are quite clear: the strengthening of English is leading to the further marginalisation and inferiorisation of LOTE, which, in turn, means that these languages will be used still less as media of instruction, contributing to continued poor educational development, and thus, poor economic performance. Ultimately it means that the current situation of (selective) disadvantaging, marginalisation, inequality and poverty will be maintained.

The obvious question is what can be done to contribute towards rectifying the asymmetric power relations between the major languages of the country, so that the communities in which these languages are first languages can have fair and equal access to their rights and privileges. In the context of this paper, the question is what universities can do in this connection, more specifically: what universities can do to develop LOTE as languages of science.

The aim of the proposed paper is to deal with this issue with specific reference to the language political situation at the University of Pretoria.

The University of Pretoria (student population in November 2004: 38 505; 42% Afrikaans-speaking, 0.8% Afrikaans and English, 23.4% English first-language speakers, and 33.9% English second-language users) formerly used only Afrikaans as language of science, but switched to a bilingual university in the early 1990s, and is currently, like all South African universities, required by government policies to promote the Bantu languages as languages of science.

### **Dealing with the problem**

The paper will deal with the issue within the following *frame of reference*:

- a) the stipulations of the constitution, the language-in-education policy of the Department of Education of 1997, the language policy for higher education and the language policy of the University of Pretoria
- b) the language political realities at the University of Pretoria (language distribution, language proficiency, pass-rates, repetition rates, etc.),

and will conclude with some suggestions about the ways in which the University can contribute towards maintaining Afrikaans as a language of science and promoting the Bantu languages as languages of science.