

SATI

South African Translators' Institute

newsletter

YOUR
LANGUAGE
CONNECTION

05 2025



Lost in translation: Humorous missteps and what they teach us

SWIP Project enhances indigenous language presence on Wikipedia

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Advancements in neural morphological tagging for Nguni languages

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Welcome to SATI



LOST IN TRANSLATION: HUMOROUS MISSTEPS AND WHAT THEY TEACH US



SWiP Project enhances indigenous language presence on Wikipedia

The SWiP Project – a collaboration between SADiLaR, Wikipedia, and PanSALB – has significantly increased the digital presence of South Africa’s indigenous languages.

The number of Ndebele articles on Wikipedia grew from 11 to over 180 as of May 2025.

The initiative includes training over 300 participants from various universities in digital content creation, translation, and Wikipedia editing, aiming to promote language equality and cultural preservation.

As language practitioners, we’ve all encountered those hilarious moments when a literal translation misses the mark entirely. Take Coca-Cola’s early attempt to market in China, where their brand name was once phonetically rendered as “Ke-kou-ke-la”, which unfortunately translated to “bite the wax tadpole” or “female horse stuffed with wax”, depending on the dialect. This comedic yet instructive misstep underscores the power – and the pitfalls – of language. Similarly, KFC’s “Finger-lickin’ good” was once mistranslated in Chinese as “Eat your fingers off”, and a Paris hotel sign politely advised guests to “Please leave your values at the front desk”.

While these examples make us laugh, they’re also valuable reminders of why our work as translators and interpreters matters. Literal translations can create confusion, embarrassment or even humour, but they also highlight the need for cultural and contextual sensitivity in our profession. It’s not enough to be technically accurate – we must be culturally attuned and nuanced too.

We should also stay humble and keep our sense of humour intact. After all, language is a bridge, but it can sometimes be a wobbly one! As translators, we’re not just word-swappers; we’re cultural mediators ensuring that meaning, not just words, crosses the divide.

Tickets now available for the ALCA Annual Conference 2025



Advancements in neural morphological tagging for Nguni languages

A group of researchers from the University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch University has recently made big improvements in understanding the structure of some South African languages: Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele, and Swati. These languages fall under the Nguni languages.

The researchers created new computer models called “neural morphological taggers”. Basically, these models can look at words in these languages and figure out important information about them, like their meaning and how they’re built. This is helpful because Nguni languages have lots of small parts (like prefixes and suffixes) that change depending on the sentence.

These new models work better than older systems, which relied on rules written by people. By using these smart computer models, it’s easier to build better tools for translation and language analysis in South Africa’s local languages.

The Association of Language Companies in Africa (ALCA) has announced that registration is now open for the ALCA Annual Conference 2025, taking place from August 28–29, 2025, at the prestigious Cullinan Hotel in Cape Town, South Africa.

Under the theme “Navigating the Global Market: Africa’s Role in the Language Services Industry,” this year’s conference will spotlight Africa’s evolving position in the global localization economy. With experts, innovators, buyers, and language professionals from across the continent and beyond, the conference is set to be a hub of learning, networking, and strategic collaboration.

Visit the [conference website](#).

Special Workshop on August 30, 2025

A workshop with industry thought leader Renato Beninatto, offering insight into the topic – Reframing and Thinking Differently: Growing Against All Odds.

Accommodation

Discounted accommodation rates at partner hotels close to the conference venue are available.

UCT launches multilingual language policy



Digitising a historic German-Sotho dictionary: News from the South African Centre for Digital Language Resources

SADiLaR's UNISA node recently hosted Dr Gertrud Faaß, lecturer and computational linguist at the University of Hildesheim, Germany. Dr Faaß has a special interest in developing digital language resources and natural language processing tools for the South African languages.

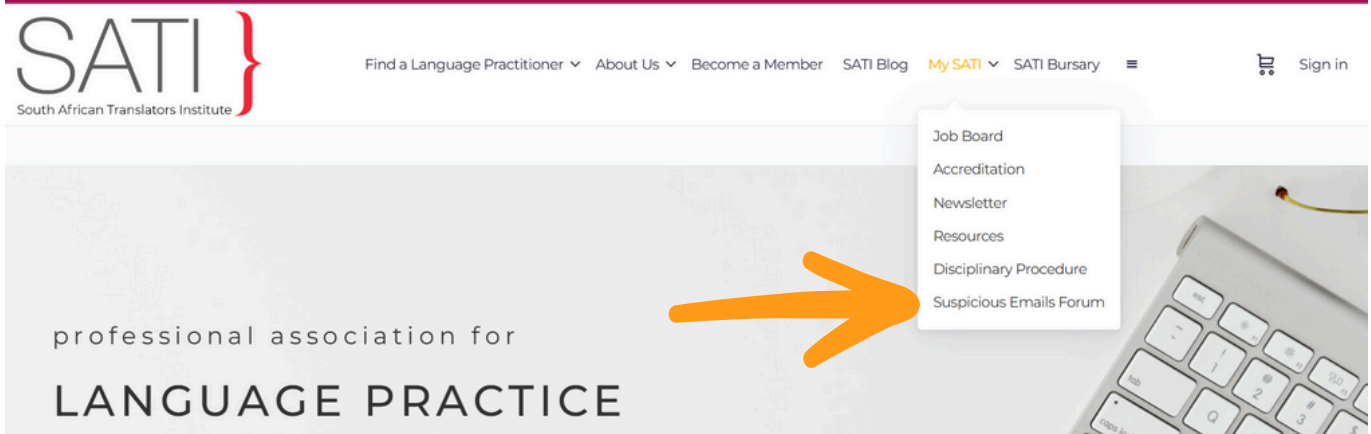
She presented a workshop on digitising a historic German-Sotho dictionary, the Endemann's Wörterbuch der Sothosprache. You can learn more about the project [here](#).



In March 2025, the University of Cape Town (UCT) officially launched its revised language policy to promote multilingualism. English, Xhosa, and Afrikaans are designated as official languages of the university. The policy also identifies Afrikaaps (Kaaps), South African Sign Language (SASL), Khoekhoegowab, and N|uu as languages for development. Undergraduate students are encouraged to take a course in Xhosa communication if they lack proficiency in an indigenous South African language.

This initiative embraces the diversity within the UCT community and values language as a resource for learning, research and communication.

SUSPICIOUS EMAIL FORUM ON WEBSITE



Remember to check out the 'Suspicious email forum' on the SATI website for the some of the latest scams going around.

You can find this by logging into the SATI website (on the top right) and navigating to the Members' Area (My SATI).

Please post in this area if you receive any suspicious emails so that we keep each other informed.

CHECK IT OUT

The Linguist, Spring 2025:
The journal of the
Chartered Institute of
Linguists

Die Afrikaanse Taalraad: teken die datum aan

Datum: 5 en 6 September 2025

Die Afrikaanse Taalraad bied vir die eerste keer 'n taalpodium oor die Stand van Afrikaans aan. Formele uitnodiging volg.

Navrae e-pos:
Marle@afrikaansetaalraad.co.za

The ATR (Afrikaans Language Council): Save the date

Date: 5 and 6 September 2025

The ATR will be hosting an event on the Afrikaans language on 5 and 6 September 2025. A formal invite will follow.

Enquiries:
Marle@afrikaansetaalraad.co.za





WELCOME TO SATI

New members

Ammie Roets
SACAM System Integration CC
Annmari Meyer
Babalwa Sipeliti
Constance Mabitsela
Elizabeth Meihuizen
Enye van Tonder
Eric Beya Kazadi
Eugene van Rooyen
Gahou Jean Jacques Dago
Ivan Rawambia Mouenkoula
Jomari Steinhobel
Justice Mandla Mbatsane
Melanie Maartens
Mosibudi Raphesu
Mpho Johannes Goodwill Mashego
Rodah Sechele-Nthapelelang
Diana Harrison

Rejoined members

Valerie Cilliers
Thailys Freites
Melissa Cawthra
Mike Mahase
Mosolodi Mohapi
Mpho Ntsie
Mampaka Mojapelo
One Visa World

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

**APTIS25 Online conference at the
University College London Centre for
Translation Studies**

Date: 3 and 4 November 2025

“Better together: how can industry and
academia collaborate to empower future
language professionals?”

More info ➤

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Your language is our language

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More about SATI at
www.translators.org.za