

The foundation of AFRILEX

Mariëtta Alberts



Mariëtta Alberts started her career as a terminologist in 1971 at the Department of National Education in South Africa, where she later became secretary of the Coordinating Terminology Board. Her research interests include terminology, lexicography and computational linguistics, and she has been actively engaged in creating training programs for several South African entities. Among her many roles, she has served as Head of departments in the National Language Service, part-time lecturer in Lexicography and Terminology at the University of Pretoria, and Manager at the Pan South African Language Board, a position that she currently holds. Dr. Alberts holds membership in the ISO TC/37, served as Executive of the South African Translators' Institute and was elected Vice-Chairperson of the International Information Centre for Terminology. She is a founding member of the Centre for Legal Terminology in African Languages, where she serves as secretary on the Executive Board, and of the African Association for Lexicography, where she was re-elected as President in July 2005. marietta@pansalb.org.za

1. Background

In 1992, the Board of Control of the Bureau of the *Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal* (BCBWAT) conducted a feasibility study to determine if there were a need to establish the Southern African Institute for Lexicography. The purpose of such an institute was to unite the various local private and governmental bodies involved in dictionary practice that existed due to historical, cultural and other reasons. The research was entrusted to Prof. William Branford and myself, and was funded by the Gencor Development Trust. While initiating the idea, the BCBWAT members realized that such an institute could not be established without the consent, support and collaboration of all the players in the Southern African lexicography scene.

At the time, only the official dictionary offices of Afrikaans and English (the Bureau of the WAT and the Dictionary for South African English (DSAE), respectively) received funding from the government of South Africa. This was due to the bilingual policy of the country held until then. The local African languages received no official funding; the few dictionaries compiled were either university-based or private initiatives. Proper funding was needed to produce more dictionaries and to train lexicographers and terminologists for all Southern African languages. It was thought that a national institute could disseminate available expertise and provide in-house training.

Three areas were researched: the need for a Southern African Institute for Lexicography, its structure, and the collaboration between the various interested parties. The target respondents included all known individuals, institutions and bodies involved in lexicography and related professions. They received a cover letter, a document including information about the purpose of the research, and a questionnaire.

2. Feasibility study

The study showed that the main concern of the respondents was the lack of coordination in lexicographic efforts. Respondents wanted collaboration, training and sharing of knowledge in the field, but they did not agree that a formal structure, such as an institute, was the way to go about it. There was

much reservation about introducing a new administrative controlling system, underlain by the fear that an institute might hamper private initiatives and activities.

Some respondents suggested that a coordinating body, a clearinghouse or an association, could be established as an interim structure before deciding to have an institute. An association for lexicography could reunite interested parties without undermining individual projects, while offering expertise, training, information, news, etc.

The feasibility study indicated that the time was not ripe for the establishment of an Institute for Southern African Lexicography, but that a professional association for Southern African lexicography should be immediately established, to address the communication and coordination needs of the respondents. The association could initially function under the auspices of the Linguistic Association of Southern Africa (LSSA).

Aims of the professional association

The study recommended that the professional association should, to ensure autonomy, have its own constitution and formulate its own aims and projects. It was suggested that the association should provide the following services:

- establish a liaison office or clearing house to coordinate projects;
- set an email network;
- issue a quarterly newsletter;
- publish an accredited magazine (e.g. *Lexikos* of the AFRILEX series);
- organize an annual conference to share professional information;
- formulate a national policy regarding lexicography.

Funding

An association would require less funding than an institute, yet membership fees alone could not sustain it. Those involved in planning should look into funding possibilities. An important aspect to take into consideration was addressing the existing imbalance between public spending on Afrikaans and English compared to that of African languages.

Publishers

Lexicography depends to a great extent on publishing houses. Some have an

excellent record of dictionary publication. Others try to make a profit without taking into consideration the overhead and research cost involved in the lexicographic process. Publishers should be encouraged to effectively finance dictionary research and compilation, and to support the association financially.

How to proceed

It was suggested that:

- all respondents should be informed of the envisaged professional association;
- respondents who indicated interest in the association should be contacted to take part in the process of its planning;
- all the respondents and other interested parties should be invited to join the association and become members;
- a meeting should be called as soon as possible to gather all interested parties for the establishment of such a professional association;
- feedback regarding the outcomes of the feasibility study should be given to all respondents;
- the report on the feasibility study should be made available to all interested parties and decision-makers in the field of lexicography.

Concluding remarks

The results of the feasibility study indicated a keen interest in a unifying body among lexicographers and members of related professions. It was clear that there was not, as yet, a need for an official institute. It was strongly felt that whatever body is formed, it should not be bureaucratically structured and should not restrict individual freedom, *inter alia* with regard to management and control.

Therefore, the research team suggested that a professional association for lexicography be established to meet the needs of lexicographers and other related interest groups.

The report on the feasibility study was presented to the BCBWAT in 1992, and Afrikaans and English versions were published in 1993. Board members were obviously not in full agreement with the conclusions of the study since they had hoped that the respondents would have agreed on the establishment of an Institute for Southern African Lexicography.

3. The establishment of AFRILEX

In 1995, Daan Prinsloo and I drafted a questionnaire to test the viability of an association for lexicography. Over 800 copies were sent to members of ALASA, LSSA, publishers, government

departments, and even political parties. The idea was greeted with overwhelming enthusiasm that left no option but to establish an association.

On 14 July 1995, several lexicographers, academics and others met at the Eighth International Conference of the African Languages Association for South Africa (ALASA) to establish a professional lexicography association, the African Association for Lexicography.

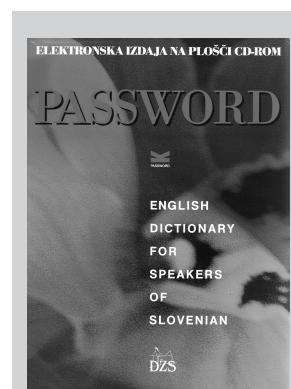
Dr. Reinhard R.K. Hartmann chaired the inaugural meeting and facilitated the entire process, including the election of office bearers. Prof. Rufus Gouws was elected Chairperson, Ms. Irene Dippenaar and Prof. Sizwe Satyo were elected as Vice-Chairpersons, Dr. Mariëtte Alberts as Secretary-Treasurer, and Prof. Daan Prinsloo as Organiser. Mr. Pieter Hartevelt, as Editor of *Lexikos*, was co-opted to the Board.

The Bureau of the WAT granted permission to the association to adopt the name AFRILEX and its publication, *Lexikos*, became the official mouthpiece of the African Association for Lexicography.

A related issue concerns the establishment of the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) with eleven National Lexicography Units (NLUs). The NLUs function under the auspices and financial backing of PanSALB. Each NLU is managed by an Editor-in-Chief. The Bureau of the WAT and the DSAE have become the NLUs for Afrikaans and English, respectively, and remain in their locations of Stellenbosch and Grahamstown, respectively. Nine African language NLUs have been established and they are hosted at tertiary institutions in the geo-linguistic area where their majority native language speakers live. Employees of the NLUs are members of AFRILEX and participate regularly in its activities.

4. Present situation

AFRILEX promotes and coordinates the research, study and teaching of lexicography in Southern Africa, in the broadest sense. It acts to train lexicographers, terminologists and other language practitioners in lexicographic principles and practice, organizes regular international conferences and local seminars on topics that are of current relevance, and publishes a journal as well as with other relevant literature. Membership is open to all individuals and institutions with an interest in lexicography. This creates a mutually stimulating environment conducive to



**PASSWORD English
Dictionary for Speakers of
Slovenian**

**Elektronska izdaja na
plošči CD-ROM**

DZS

Ljubljana, Slovenia

December 2005

ISBN 86-341-3839-9

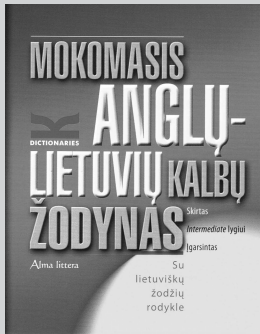
<http://www.dzs.si>

[http://kdictionaries.com/
products/medium/pwesi.
html](http://kdictionaries.com/products/medium/pwesi.html)

From the series

KERNERMAN SEMI-

BILINGUAL DICTIONARIES



PASSWORD Electronic Dictionary
Mokomasis Anglu-Lietuvių Kalbų žodynas
English-Lithuanian Learners Dictionary
 ALMA LITTERA
 Vilnius, Lithuania
 December 2005
 ISBN 9955-08-695-5
<http://www.almali.lt>
<http://kdictionaries.com/products/medium/pwelt.html>

From the series
 KERNERMAN SEMI-BILINGUAL DICTIONARIES

the exchange of ideas for researchers and practitioners in this field.

AFRILEX is managed by a Board that is elected biannually by postal ballots and holds annual general meetings during its international conferences. The first Board drafted a constitution that was adopted at the first meeting. Over the years, some amendments have been made to the constitution for keeping it updated and relevant. Each Board member has an allocated task to fulfill:

- **President:** oversees the activities of the association and its liaison with other associations;
- **Vice-President:** performs the responsibilities of the President when the President cannot do so;
- **Secretary:** writes minutes and letters, and liaises with board members and general members;
- **Registrar:** updates address lists, manages and maintains the database;
- **Treasurer:** responsible for the change of signatories, processing membership fees and preparation of auditor's reports;
- **Organizer:** organizes seminars, tutorials and the annual conference, and liaises with other associations;
- **Webmaster:** maintains the website.

The Board coordinates conference dates with those of other local linguistic associations such as ALASA and LSSA. It cooperates with international lexicography associations such as EURALEX, ASIALEX, AUSTRALEX, the Dictionary Society of North America (DSNA), etc, and its members attend conferences of these associations whenever possible.

AFRILEX holds its international conferences by invitation at tertiary or lexicographic institutions. The Tenth anniversary of the association was celebrated at the 2005 conference hosted by the Sesiu Sesotho Dictionary Unit at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein. The Eleventh International Conference is to be held in July 2006 at the University of Venda for Science and

Technology in Thohoyandou, with the central theme of "The user perspective in lexicography".

Certificates of merit in recognition of contribution to AFRILEX have been presented to three members so far: Dr. Johan du Plessis, Editor of *Lexikos*, and two previous chairpersons, Prof. Rufus Gouws and Prof. Daan Prinsloo. There is also one honorary member, Prof. A.C. Nkabinde.

AFRILEX is fortunate to have an accredited magazine such as *Lexikos*, which is published by the Bureau of the WAT and serves to promote lexicography in its broadest sense. The editor, Dr. Johan du Plessis, has retired from his position as the final editor at the Bureau, but keeps his post as editor of *Lexikos*. AFRILEX shares responsibility for the future existence of *Lexikos* with the Bureau of the WAT.

The *Lexikos* encouragement prize for scholarly writing was initiated in 2005. This prize aims to encourage students in lexicography and young lexicographers to conduct significant research in their field of study, and to raise the standard of scholarly writing in the field of lexicography. Contenders to the prize submit articles dealing with lexicographical or metalexicographical aspects of languages used in Africa, and the winning article is published in *Lexikos*.

5. Conclusion

The membership of AFRILEX is comprised of dictionary compilers, members of the lexicography teams of the eleven NLU's, compilers of terminology lists or technical dictionaries for Language for Special Purposes, directors and members of various language boards and advisory bodies, lecturers and students of metalexicography and terminology, and other language practitioners such as translators, editors, interpreters, teachers and journalists.

The members of AFRILEX have a responsibility towards the various speech communities they serve, helping to preserve African languages and develop them into functional languages in all spheres of life, while encouraging all of the various language communities to stretch their communication skills to the fullest.

Alberts, M. 1993. *Feasibility Study: Institute for Southern African Lexicography/Lewensvatbaarheidstudie: Instituut vir Suider-Afrikaanse Leksikografie.* Bureau of the WAT, Stellenbosch.

<http://afrilex.africanlanguages.com>



M. Alberts, R. Hartmann, R. Gouws and D. Prinsloo with the AFRILEX emblem (2005)