# Creating linguistic resources for use in digital humanities: notes from one proudly South African adventure

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### In this presentation...

- Quick introduction to the AfWN and the MLTB respectively
- Our approach and experiments
- What we learnt from it
- Suggestions and conclusion

### Wordnets in a nutshell

Princeton WordNet for English

(https://wordnet.princeton.edu/)

Open Multilingual
 Wordnet

(http://compling.hss.ntu.edu.sg/omw/)

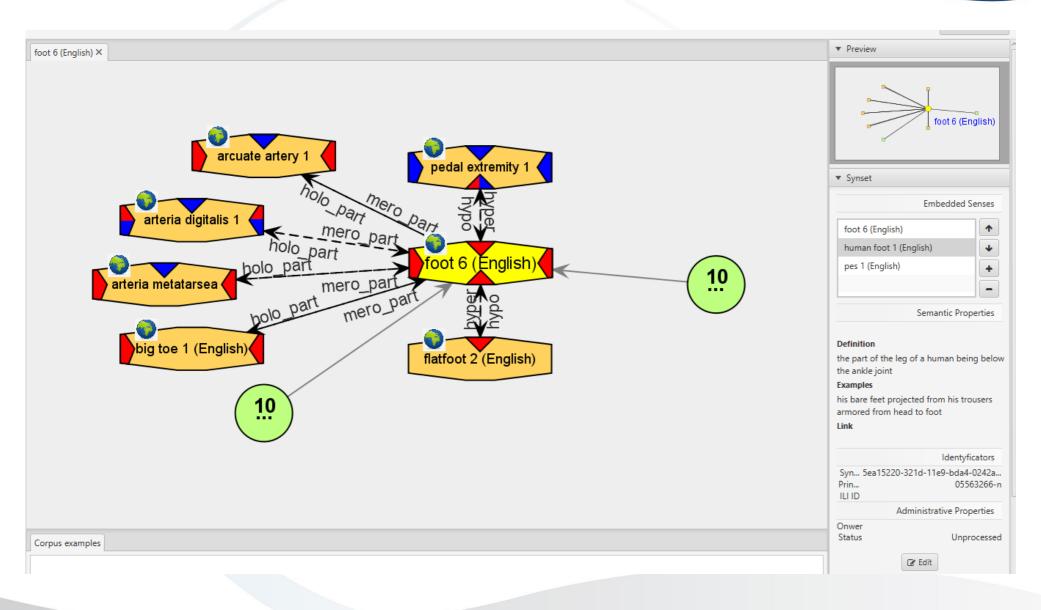
#### WordNet Search - 3.1 - WordNet home page - Glossary - Help Word to search for: noun Search WordNet Display Options: (Select option to change) Change Key: "S:" = Show Synset (semantic) relations, "W:" = Show Word (lexical) relations Display options for sense: (gloss) "an example sentence" Noun • S: (n) noun (a content word that can be used to refer to a person, place, thing, quality, or action) direct hyponym | full hyponym • S: (n) collective noun (a noun that is singular in form but refers to a group of people or things) • S: (n) mass noun (a noun that does not form plurals) • S: (n) count noun (a noun that forms plurals) • S: (n) generic noun (a noun that does not specify either masculine or feminine gender) S; (n) proper noun, proper name (a noun that denotes a particular thing; usually capitalized)

o direct hypernym I inherited hypernym I sister term

object of a preposition, or in apposition)

• S: (n) common noun (a noun that denotes any or all members of a class)

S: (n) noun (the word class that can serve as the subject or object of a verb, the



### AfWN development: Background (1)

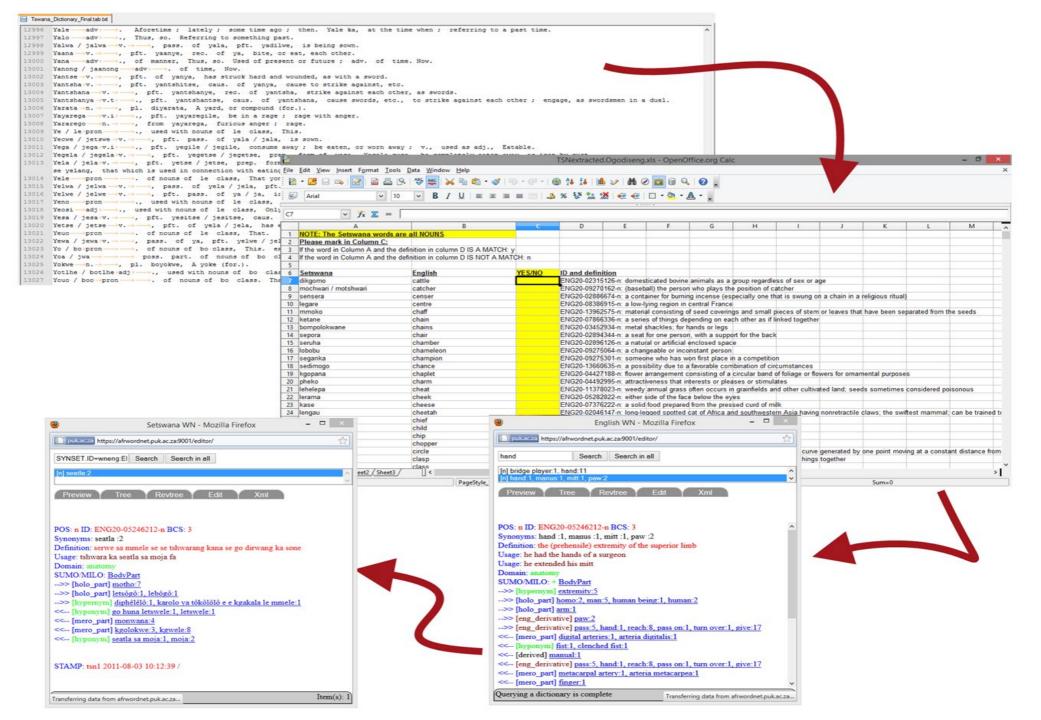
- The African Wordnet has steadily added more synsets, definitions and usage examples to wordnets for 9 South African languages
  - 2007: Initial workshop with all South African languages represented
  - 2010: Development starts for isiZulu, isiXhosa, Setswana and Sesotho sa Leboa
  - 2013: Addition of Tshivenda
  - 2018: Addition of Sesotho & Siswati
  - 2019: Addition of Xitsonga & isiNdebele
  - 2020-2022: Expansion of these languages and new release
- South African Digital Language Resource Centre (SADiLaR) became the long-term host for the AfWN in 2018

## AfWN development: Background (2)

- The expand approach is suggested for less-resourced languages
  - Uses the tried and tested ontological structure and content of an existing wordnet (often the English Princeton WordNet (PWN)) as a template
  - Translation of synsets from (American) English to the target language
  - Advantages: no advanced language resources needed & a less complicated approach for inexperienced teams
  - Disadvantages: labour intensive task; requires advanced linguistic knowledge from the team & time spent on unlexicalised concepts
- AfWN followed this advice and is still using the PWN as guide, although the need for more intricate localization has become obvious
- The AfWN currently includes roughly 70 000 synsets across the 9 languages

## First experiment: Linking wordlists to the PWN (1)

- The AfWN team acquired the following resources:
  - English-Venda Bilingual Dictionary (Murphy; 1997)
  - The Comprehensive Northern Sotho Dictionary (Ziervogel and Mokgokong; 1975)
    - trilingual monodirectional dictionary for Northern Sotho, Afrikaans and English;
  - Setswana-English Dictionary (Brown; 1925);
  - For isiXhosa and isiZulu, a selection of private bilingual wordlists were made available to the project team
- Since language resources are a scarce commodity, we have to make the most of what we have



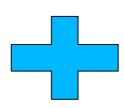
## Current strategy: SILCAWL list and translations (1)

- An African alternative to Eurocentric seed lists can be found in the SIL Comparative African Wordlist (SILCAWL), compiled by Keith Snider and James Roberts (2006)
  - It is a list of lexical data (1700 words with both English and French glosses) resulting from linguistic research in Africa
  - The items are organized semantically under twelve main headings from man's physical being to animals and grammatical items
- The hypothesis: Creating a more localised (South African)
   English source text and then translating this into all 9 South
   African languages not only fast-tracks development of new
   synsets, but also forms a multilingual parallel sub-corpus of
   commonly used concepts



# Current strategy: SILCAWL list and translations (2)





Open Educational Resource Term Bank

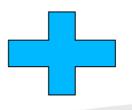


WordNet

A Lexical Database for English





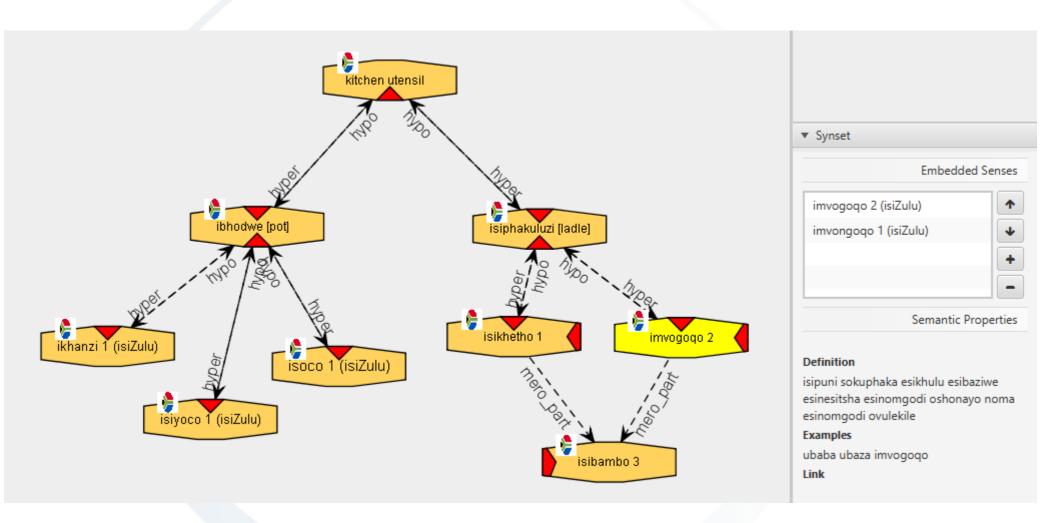




AT WORK

# Current strategy: SILCAWL list and translations (3)

1
<u>(e</u>
epedišitše mebele ya bona
nmino
ago le tšhaba letšatši
niša hlogo ya gagwe
fasana
ašošo phatleng ya ka
e nka be ke bone
sa gagwe ge a ekwa ditaba
e n



### Lessons learnt: technical errors

- The existing AfWN data contains errors that can be identified and corrected (semi-) automatically
- Although the translators did an excellent job, many errors still occurred
- Language independent SQL scripts were developed to identify and correct these errors
  - Capital letters and punctuation;
  - Empty mandatory fields;
  - Invalid/incorrect information in fields with set values (POS and semantic relations for instance); etc.

## Lessons learnt: language specific decisions (1)

- The South African English source text certainly made a difference but we soon realised that each language would also present unique challenges
  - Translation for wordnets was definitely a specialised activity due to the hierarchical nature and technical constraints
- African languages often use euphemisms to refer to taboo terms and are the preferred form in some languages
  - Xitsonga: the concept of "breaking wind/farting"
    - Biological translation = tamba
    - Preferred euphemism = humesa moya literally translated as "to kill an insect"
- AfWN team decided to include both as synonyms with a tag to indicate the taboo term

## Lessons learnt: language specific decisions (2)

#### WordNet Search - 3.1

- WordNet home page - Glossary - Help

Word to search for: plate Search WordNet

#### Noun

- S: (n) home plate, home base, home, slab where the batter stands; it must b

  Lexical gap: no distinction between plates for use by children or adults in (American) English
- S: (n) plate (a sheet of metal or wood or yeass or plastic)
- S: (n) plate (a full page illustration (usually on slick paper))
- S: (n) plate (dish on which food is served or from which food is eaten)
  - <u>direct hyponym</u> / <u>full hyponym</u>
    - S: (n) dessert plate (a small plate on which dessert can be served)
    - S: (n) dinner plate (a plate from which a diner eats during the main course of a meal)
    - S: (n) paper plate (a disposable plate made of cardboard)
    - S: (n) <u>salad plate</u>, <u>salad bowl</u> (a plate or bowl for individual servings of salad)
    - S: (n) soup plate (a deep plate with a wide rim)
    - S: (n) steel plate (a plate of steel)
  - <u>direct hypernym</u> / <u>inherited hypernym</u> / <u>sister term</u>
- S: (n) plate, platoful (the quantity contained in a plate)
- S: (n) plate, <u>crustal plate</u> (a rigid layer of the Earth's crust that is believed to drift slowly)

## Lessons learnt: language specific decisions (3)

#### WordNet Search - 3.1

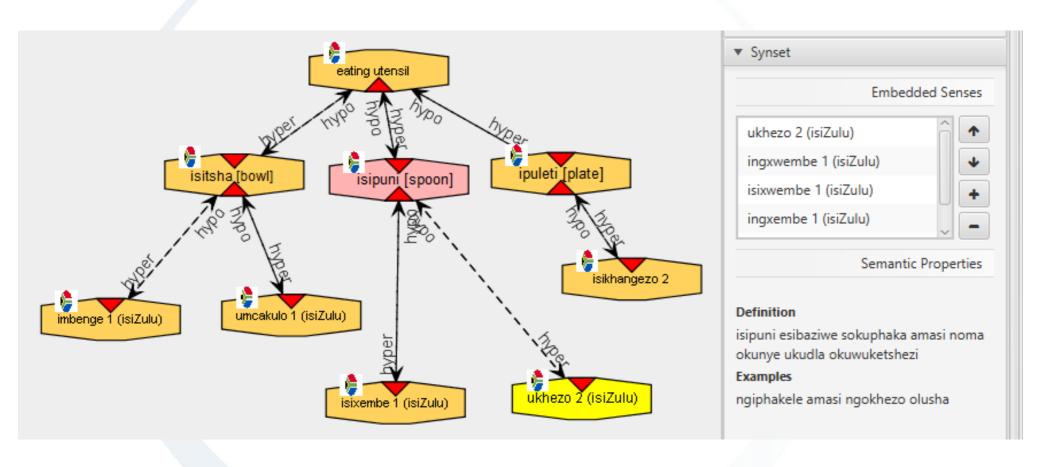
- WordNet home page - Glossary - Help

Word to search for: gourd

Lexical gap: no distinction Sea between gourd and calabash in (American) English

#### Noun

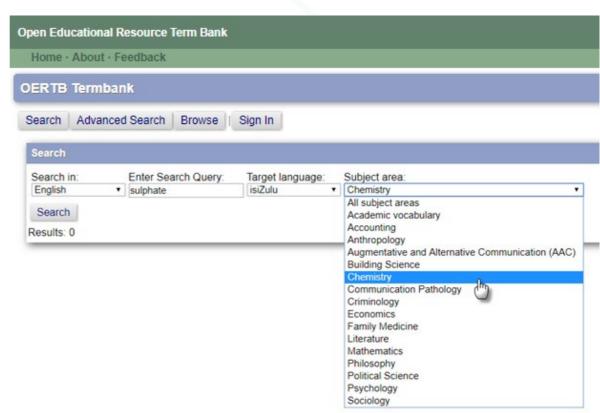
- S: (n) gourd, calabash (bottle made from the dried shell of a bottle gourd)
  - <u>direct hypernym</u> / <u>inherited hypernym</u> / <u>sister term</u>
    - <u>5:</u> (n) <u>pottie</u> (a glass or plastic vessel used for storing drinks or other liquids; typically cylindrical without handles and with a narrow neck that can be plugged or capped)
- <u>S:</u> (n) **gourd** (any of numerous inedible fruits with hard rinds)
- S: (n) gourd, gourd vine (any vine of the family Cucurbitaceae that bears fruits with hard rinds)



### Term banks in a nutshell

Open Educational Resource Term Bank - UP

(http://oertb.tlterm.com/)









Created by University of Pretoria • University of Cape Town • DHET

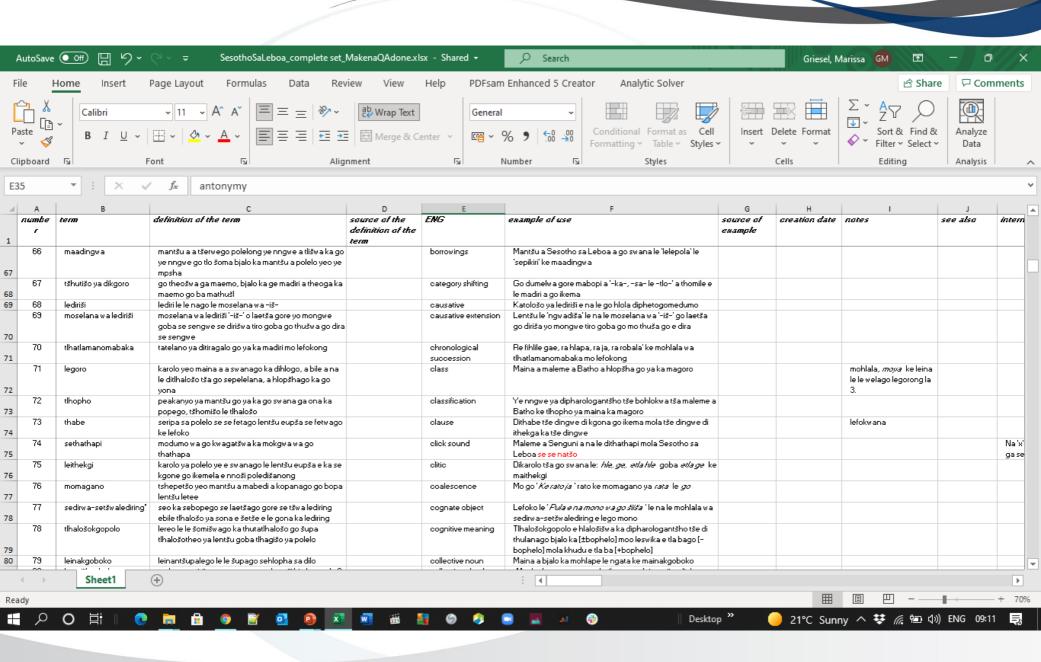
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## Background

- Need for standardisation of terms in African languages
- Different source language for students meant confusion
- Freely available, editable and standardised term bank with linguistic terminology needed
  - To be used in classrooms from a very early age

### **Process**

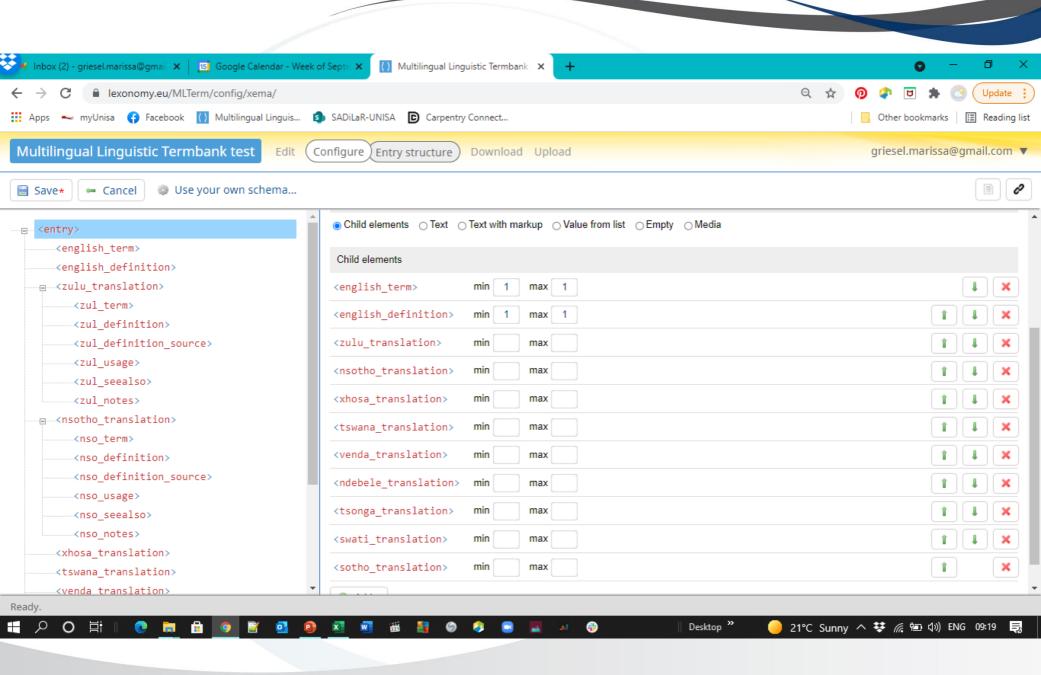
- Initially the plan was to perform (semi-) automatic term extraction after digitisation of old study guides
  - Strange fonts and other technical problems meant this was impossible
- Setting up a manual term list by team of experts was the only way
- Loosely based on terms used in guides
- Multilingual is NB
- Difference not focussed on English base meaning

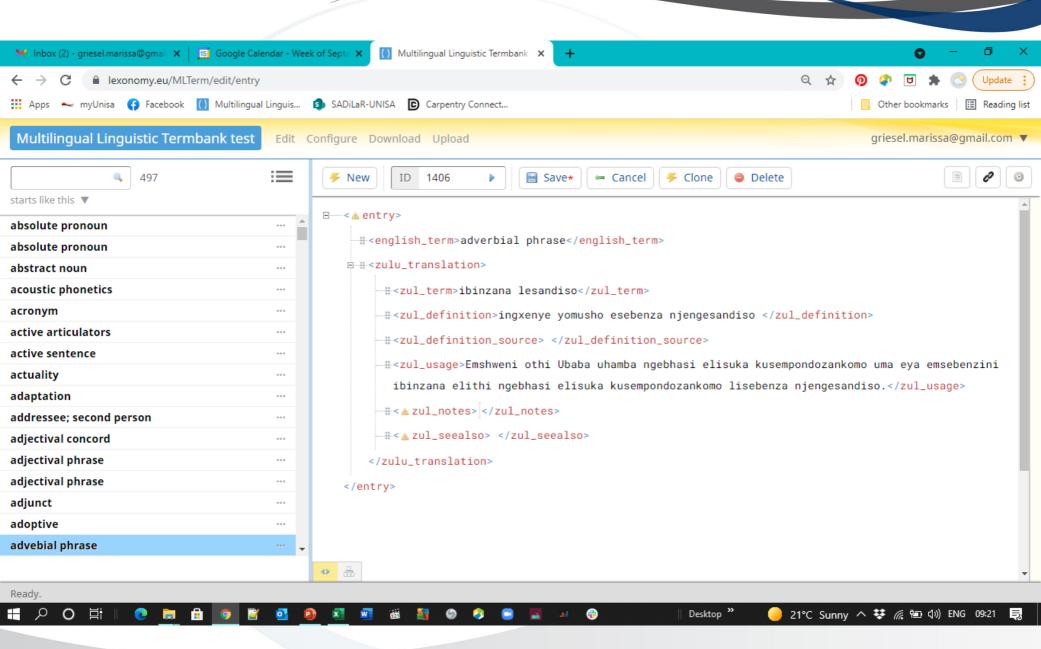


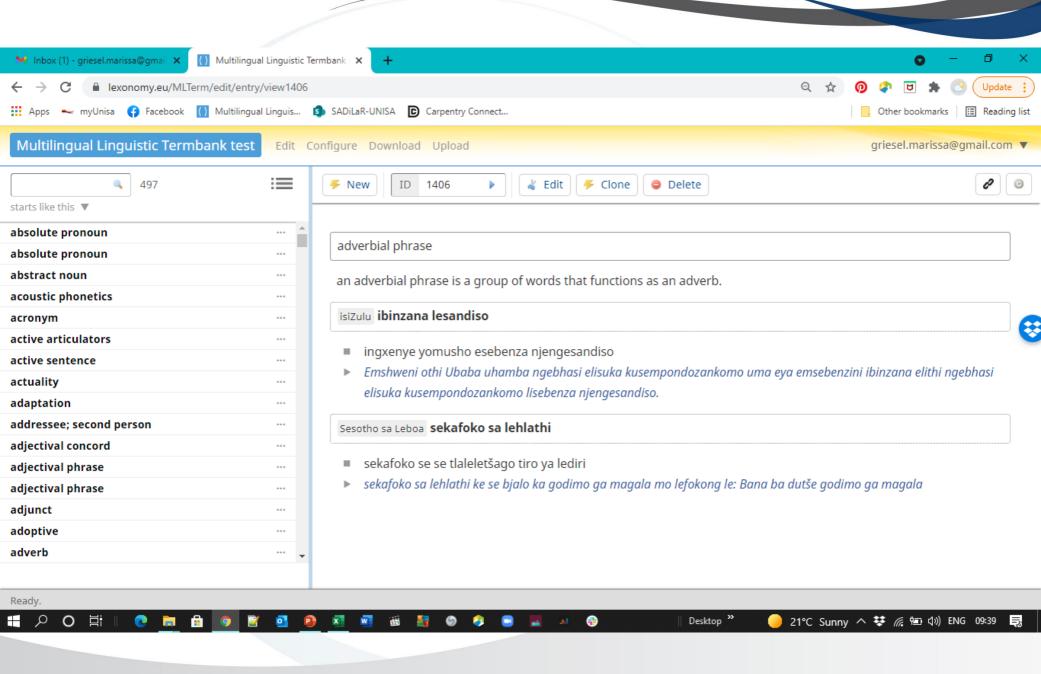
## Lexonomy

## https://www.lexonomy.eu/

griesel.marissa@gmail.com LEXONOMY Welcome to **Lexonomy**, a cloud-based, open-source platform for writing griesel.marissa@gmail.com and publishing dictionaries. Log out | Your profile Gentle introduction to Lexonomy Your dictionaries A short and sweet guided tour of Lexonomy for beginners. Multilingual Linguistic Termbank test Introducing Lexonomy: an open-source dictionary writing and publishing system PDF Venda-English-Afrikaans TEST A conference paper offering a detailed review of Lexonomy's features. Create a dictionary Reference Měchura, M. B. (2017) 'Introducing Lexonomy: an open-source dictionary writing and publishing system' in Electronic Lexicography in the 21st Century: Lexicography from Scratch. Proceedings of the eLex 2017 conference, 19-21 September 2017, Leiden, The Netherlands. If you are referring to Lexonomy from an academic publication, it is recommended that you cite this paper.







## Suggestions (1)

- Some improvements could be implemented immediately:
  - Better understanding of the use of the translations by both the English lexicographer and the African language translators is essential;
  - The style guide was updated to include more detailed instructions with examples in various languages;
  - Where possible, closely related languages such as isiZulu and isiXhosa could benefit from shared translations.

## Suggestions (2)

- Other measures will take some more work to implement:
  - AfWN: Adding morphological analysis or as a minimum lemmatisation to the quality assurance pipeline to check that the lemma is used in the usage example, for instance, will reduce the amount of confusing sentences;
  - Both projects: Including quality assurance measures such as spell checking, checking for mandatory fields left open or invalid values for some fields directly into the development interface is a long-term goal.

### Conclusion

- All data developed in the project will be made available under a Creative Commons license via the SADiLaR language resource repository
  - Hope to increase NLP development particularly for the African languages;
  - All users have to be aware of certain linguistic and technical decisions made during development so that they can also make provision for certain aspects in their systems;
- Nothing beats a good old round table discussion to sort out some of the standardisation problems or find more creative solutions.



## Thank you

This presentation is based on previously published work. For a full list of research outputs in the project, please see <a href="https://africanwordnet.wordpress.com/research/">https://africanwordnet.wordpress.com/research/</a>

The African Wordnet (AfWN) and Multilingual Linguistic Terminology project was made possible with support from the South African Centre for Digital Language Resources (SADiLaR). SADiLaR (www.sadilar.org) is a research infrastructure established by the Department of Science and Technology of the South African government as part of the South African Research Infrastructure Roadmap (SARIR).

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