



# SADiLaR

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# LANGUAGE RESOURCES AUDIT TO SUPPORT MULTILINGUALISM IS UNDERWAY IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES OF SOUTH AFRICA

- Natalie Simon

Language continues to be a barrier to access and success for many students at South African higher education institutions. This was noted by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in their revised Language Policy Framework for Higher Education. This policy framework emphasises the importance of developing multilingual environments at South Africa's public higher education institutions as part of an ongoing effort to remove barriers to access and success in higher education in our multilingual society.

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For this reason, it was decided at the USAf-CoPAL Vice Chancellors Colloquium on the New Language Policy Framework for Higher Education, hosted by the University of Stellenbosch in September 2021, that the South African Centre for Digital Language Resources (SADiLaR) should conduct an audit across the higher education sphere to identify what resources are available to institutions to successfully implement the new policy framework.

In addition, this language resources audit seeks to gauge what is still required to support the implementation of the policy, to identify the milestones that have been achieved, and to find success stories to share with the sector. At the same time, the audit focuses on obtaining more qualitative data questions, concerns and potential ideas that would aid the sector with the implementation of the New Language Policy Framework.

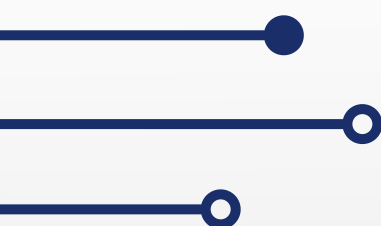
Professor Langa Khumalo, Executive Director of SADiLaR and outgoing CoPAL Chairperson, confirms that "multilingualism in

higher education will mean greater access to learning, student success, social cohesion, transformation and decoloniality". Furthermore, he observes the following:

To be taught in one's mother tongue is a basic human right. However, implementation of this framework will require significant resources. These include language technologies like grammar editors and spell checkers, language terminologies for academic disciplines and special skills and expertise to support multilingualism. Without these resources and a way for institutions to pool resources and share strategies and expertise, this framework will be a non-starter.

## AUDIT MILESTONES

As part of their mandate to the DHET, SADiLaR began rolling out the language resources audit in November 2022. The first official audit roll-out commenced on Friday 4 November at the University of Mpumalanga,



followed by the Vaal University of Technology (VUT) on 22 November and the University of South Africa (UNISA) in Pretoria on 28 November.

Two audit pilot sessions took place in October 2022 for the North-West University and the University of KwaZulu-Natal. These pilot sessions laid the groundwork for the national audit roll-out currently underway.

SADiLaR tabled an interim audit report at the USAf-CoPAL Vice-Chancellors Colloquium on the New Language Policy Framework for Higher Education held in Pretoria (1-2 December 2022). The interim report, which was welcomed by the colloquium, highlighted audit milestones and audit plans for 2023.

### WHAT UNIVERSITIES HAD TO SAY ABOUT THE AUDIT

VUT Vice Chancellor and Principal, Professor Dan Kgwadi said, "Languages should be treated equally. All languages are as important as others. It's imperative to develop languages, not only at university level but at the societal level as well."

Adding to Professor Kgwadi's remarks, Professor Maggie Linington, Deputy Vice Chancellor responsible for Teaching and Learning at VUT, noted that the eight values outlined in the policy framework should be aligned to serve as sources of knowledge.

"The purpose of the audit was clearly articulated and most of the questions were answered. This audit afforded us an opportunity to

contribute to the success of the Language Policy by stating the resources we would need to ensure implementation." This was the view expressed by Head of the School of Social Sciences at the University of Mpumalanga, Professor Calvin Gwandure.

Mr Jacob Thamaga, Language Practitioner (Sepedi) and Acting Manager of VUT's African Languages Development Unit welcomed the audit, noting that it comes at a critical time when VUT is in the process of rolling out its revised language policy.

"We are excited to host the audit event as it will showcase the strides done by the college in infusing the African epistemologies in teaching and learning, research and engaged scholarship," said Professor Zethu Nkosi, Acting Executive Dean; College of Human Sciences at UNISA.

### WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE?

Management, staff, and students are all welcome to participate and have their opinions heard. Universities are also encouraged to confirm their audit dates with SADiLaR!

### AUDIT ROLL-OUT PLANS 2023

Lebogang Boemo, Project Manager at SADiLaR, explains: "We will continue engaging with management, staff, and students at different universities to get a view of the progress that universities have made towards the implementation of the DHET's New Language Policy Framework for Public higher Education Institutions.

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We are currently engaging with the rest of the universities to confirm audit dates and audit plans for year 2023."

### AUDIT ENQUIRIES CAN BE FORWARDED TO:

Ms Lebogang Boemo (Project Manager: SADiLaR)  
North-West University  
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Tel: 018 285 2788



Contact us:





# PROFESSOR TOBIE VAN DYK COMES ON BOARD AT SADILAR

- Natalie Simon

SADiLaR is pleased to announce the secondment of Professor Tobie van Dyk, a highly respected applied linguist from the School of Languages at North-West University (NWU) in South Africa. Prior to this secondment, Prof van Dyk was Head of the Centre for Academic and Professional Language Practice and Director of the School of Languages, both at NWU.

"Professor van Dyk's expertise in the field of applied linguistics and his well-established national and international networks are essential for SADiLaR to fulfill its mandate," says Mr Juan Steyn, SADiLaR's Director of Operations.



**Professor Tobie van Dyk**

in the national linguistic landscape, as it was commissioned by Universities South Africa (USAf) to support the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) with a language resources audit at all 26 public universities in South Africa.

Prof van Dyk says "I'm extremely excited about the secondment to SADiLaR as the design and development of language resources for use in different contexts and for different purposes, and the advancement of multilingualism lie very close to my heart. Also, it affords me the opportunity to strengthen existing relationships and networks, and to establish new ones."

## Language resources audit

The secondment runs from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023, and his expertise will be applied to several of SADiLaR's mandates. This includes primary support with the National Language Resources Audit. This project is evidence of SADiLaR's growing involvement and visibility

## Sustainability of research infrastructure

In addition to other more general support around engagement, networking and raising awareness of SADiLaR's resources and services, as well as

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mentorship in DH, Van Dyk's secondment will also provide valuable insight in a broader process of secondment to SADiLaR's research infrastructure.. "From this we will establish a new baseline for ways in which the Centre can draw on research expertise in a way that is more hands-on and with higher impact than the previous visiting scholar model," says Steyn.

Prof Langa Khumalo, Executive Director of SADiLaR, affirms this: "Sustainability of research

infrastructures like SADiLaR is an ongoing concern in South Africa. As part of the South African research infrastructure roadmap, we need to ensure broad national impact of our work over the next five years, and this means bringing on all the skills and expertise available to us. We look forward to Prof van Dyk's contributions in this regard."

## WRITE IT: A FREE MULTILINGUAL PROGRAMME TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH ACADEMIC WRITING

- **Natalie Simon**



The South African Centre for Digital Language Resources (SADiLaR) forges ahead with an initiative to help students with basic academic writing.

SADiLaR's language development and testing node, the [Inter-institutional Centre for Language Development and Assessment \(ICELDA\)](#), has developed a series of videos called Write It, to fill the gap by guiding students through writing.

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Academic writing is key to academic success, but getting it right is not easy, particularly for students who are learning in a second or third language. Some institutions offer modules in academic literacy and academic writing support, but not all students across South Africa have access to these kinds of support.

Videos with handouts for simple reference and optional online tasks have been made accessible in sign language and all 11 of South Africa's official languages. Students can watch the [Write It videos on SADIaR's YouTube channel](#).

Mr Detlef Cloete, lecturer at Akademia and former project manager at ICELDA says the choice of topics and how the content is presented is driven by insight into and knowledge of academic writing development, as well as global and local research.

The programme comprises 15 topics, which include the following:

- task analysis: how to understand what a set task is requiring from you;
- introduction and conclusions: how to write them;
- discourse markers / logical connectors: how to logically guide your reader through the text;
- voice, stance and engagement: how to display authority over your text and involve your reader;
- referencing support: how to reference correctly; and
- plagiarism avoidance: how to integrate and reference sources in such a way that you do not plagiarise.

Although videos are available in South Africa's official languages, the ICELDA team has decided to maintain the handouts and activities in English.

Prof Tobie van Dyk from NWU's School of Languages, and ICELDA-SADIaR Node Manager, explains that students indicated that they would like to write and study in English with the support of their home languages.

"Handouts and videos should be used as a package, moreover, in a situation where a student knows the English term used, but not the term in their mother tongue, or vice versa," says Prof van Dyk.

Although the course is divided into 15 modules, students are free to choose the way in which they want to interact with the course. Therefore, students can use the materials from start to finish or just concentrate on the parts that are difficult for them.

"We are incredibly passionate about this programme as a way of supporting South African students with academic writing in their own mother tongue," says Dr Kristien Andrianatos, senior lecturer at NWU's School of Languages, and content developer at ICELDA.

"Using academic English and completing written tasks in higher education is complex, especially for beginners, and we trust that 'Write It' will assist students with their academic acculturation on their journey in becoming part of the academic community," says Dr Andrianatos.

### Testing and quality control

Mr Cloete explained that as part of the design and development phase, the ICELDA team worked with Prof Kris van de Poel and Dr Marilize Pretorius from the University of Antwerp, Belgium, in providing universal course content.

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ICELDA also worked with a Belgian company called InterCulturate who provided useful support for elements like the design and layout of the handouts and the online packaging. "We also tested the materials on local students in our Writing Centre environment and in postgraduate academic writing workshops, and the feedback is really positive," says Prof van Dyk.

### Access to all

Students and lecturers can watch the videos on SADiLaR's YouTube channel. Those who wish to access the full course content or require further Learner Management System support may contact SADiLaR via [info@sadilar.org](mailto:info@sadilar.org).

## REVITALISING SIPHUTHI: LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

- Natalie Simon

Language and culture are closely intertwined; a person's language influences their perceptions of the world and shapes their cultural identity. This is why, when a language is lost, we lose so much. Dr Sheena Shah and Dr Matthias Brenzinger are working on a SADiLaR-supported project in collaboration with the ebaPhuthi (Phuthi people), a minority group in Lesotho and South Africa, to restore and revitalise the siPhuthi language. This is taking place through several initiatives, including working with the community to develop and produce a multimodal corpus of siPhuthi. Key to this project is the active involvement of the community.

"The siPhuthi project is a collaborative project between linguists and community members," says Dr Shah. "The community sees the project as a way in which their voices can be heard, and their stories disseminated. They also see the project as playing an important role in their language revitalisation activities."

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## The Phuthi people: past and present

The ebaPhuthi were among the first Bantu-speaking people to arrive in present-day Lesotho, where they came in contact and intermarried with, among others, the hunter-gatherer communities of southern Africa, commonly referred to as San. The Phuthi nation was formed in the early 19th century and consolidated under the leadership of their king, Murena Moorosi. Moorosi was however killed in battle in 1879, after which the ebaPhuthi were, with the support of the British military, colonised by the Basotho people, who are still the ruling majority in Lesotho.

SiPhuthi continues to be widely ignored by the government of Lesotho, and the Phuthi people are marginalised, with low education outcomes and poor employment prospects. SiPhuthi is a highly endangered language spoken only by a few thousand people and the majority of those speakers live in Lesotho. Despite this, siPhuthi does not appear in the Constitution of Lesotho nor in any other official document. SiPhuthi speakers are neglected in the national context and the exclusive use of Sesotho and English by governmental institutions hampers access to critical social services such as education, employment, healthcare, justice, and welfare.

## Revitalising siPhuthi

There is however a movement underway within the ebaPhuthi to restore their language and culture and have it recognised by the Lesotho government.

The establishment of siPhuthi as a key marker of a distinct Phuthi identity has been gaining momentum during the last decade thanks to Libadla le Baphuthi, a cultural association that is the driving force behind many siPhuthi-related initiatives and activities.

It is within this broader context that Brenzinger and Shah began work in 2016 to document the siPhuthi language, a project that has had the support of Libadla le Baphuthi. The two linguists have subsequently become a part of the Phuthi family. This project has contributed to a renaissance of siPhuthi and its associated culture. "There is a growing interest in the language, with many new speakers emerging, who are community members regaining language competence, often as adults, as they consider language to be a key marker of their Phuthi identity," says Dr Shah.

## Project outcomes

The compilation of a multimodal corpus of siPhuthi recordings containing narratives, conversations, interviews, folktales, oral histories and poems is a central feature of the project. The audio and video recordings are transcribed, translated, and annotated. The corpus covers a wide range of topics and includes recordings from a large number of speakers from different generations and geographic locations. This corpus is due to be completed in 2024 and will be made available in the SADiLaR repository.

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The siPhuthi corpus is being developed to serve as a resource for community members as well as academics from various disciplines. The corpus provides insights not only for linguists, but also for historians, geographers, and cultural anthropologists. Most importantly, it also serves as a cultural and historical memory for community members.

The team is also working on a quadrilingual siPhuthi-Sesotho-isiXhosa-English dictionary. The dictionary will be crucial in the development of siPhuthi educational and health materials, as explained by Dr Brenzinger: "After November 19th, 1879, with the death of Murena Moorosi, ebaPhuthi and their language were first actively suppressed and later neglected in the national context of the Kingdom of Lesotho. More recently, however, it seems that siPhuthi might soon become one of the official languages of the country, with the opportunity to use siPhuthi as medium of instruction in primary schools. For the development of teaching and learning materials in siPhuthi, a dictionary of the language is of utmost importance."

#### Working in community partnership

In the past, speakers of the language played a secondary role in linguistic research, as language informants or consultants. While this is to some extent changing as a practice, Shah and Brenzinger believe that the researchers should not be dominant in the project, nor should they be the main beneficiaries of the project through publication and personal career advancement. Rather, their guiding philosophy is that "social justice

"social justice and human flourishing" should be project outcomes when working with marginalised communities.

For this reason, the training and empowerment of the siPhuthi speakers forms the core of the work.

The team conducts workshops in which community members are trained in methods and techniques of language documentation. In addition, the linguists collaborate with the community as active members of Libadla le Baphuthi. Dr Shah makes the following observations:

"For outcomes to be meaningful to both linguists and community members, projects must be truly collaborative. Joint approaches to language documentation enhance scientific outputs and at the same time make outputs accessible to and useful for communities. By supporting small language communities such as the speakers of siPhuthi, we can give these marginalised people a voice in regaining self-esteem and recognition in national contexts. With that, our activities aim at fostering language diversity which we consider to be a human treasure globally."

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***Sheena with other siPhuthi activists at a cultural event***



***Recording an interview with a siPhuthi speaker from South Africa at the annual Murena Moorosi commemoration event***

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***Matthias discusses siPhuthi terms with students in the Daliwe river valley***





# DH-IGNITE: IGNITING THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES IN KWAZULU-NATAL

- **Natalie Simon**

"At the heart of digital humanities is coding, once you can code in R or Python, a world of possibilities opens up to you," said Professor Kevin Durrheim of the University of Johannesburg, speaking at SADiLaR's first DH-IGNITE event which took place in Umhlanga, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) in October last year.

The goal of the DH-IGNITE events is to build a community of practice of digital humanities (DH) among researchers in South Africa to learn to code and apply computational and digital technologies to their own research and teaching. This effort is key to the SADiLaR mandate, to focus on research and capacity-building for DH.

"In order for SADiLaR's digital humanities programme to succeed we need to have broad engagements across the academy and all critical stakeholders in the country," said Professor Langa Khumalo, SADiLaR's executive director. "Through these regional events we are trying to bring scholars together to foster networks and grow regional communities of practice in the area of digital humanities and computational social sciences."

DH-IGNITE is a new initiative of SADiLaR's ESCALATOR programme, an initiative to build an inclusive and active community of practice in DH and computational social sciences in South Africa. The event in KZN was the first of a series of regional events planned across South Africa, strategically located for easy attendance by staff and researchers of all 26 public universities in the country.

Speaking at the KZN event, Anelda van der Walt, ESCALATOR's programme manager, spoke of the challenges ESCALATOR faced in building a community during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns. "ESCALATOR started in December 2020 and we have not been able to get our communities to start building relationships, because building relationships from scratch through online platforms is not the same as engaging in person," she said. Once restrictions were dropped, the ESCALATOR team began planning DH-IGNITE events to allow those engaging in the DH space, or those interested in engaging in the space, to meet and interact in person.

DH-IGNITE opened with several presentations highlighting how important it is for researchers from humanities and social sciences to incorporate digital

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technologies into their work. Noma Maphanga, project manager and data science mentor at ESCALATOR, presented on the need to keep moving with new technologies. She pointed out how none of the delegates walked to the event, but most likely had used cars or buses, and almost certainly no delegates had hand-written their papers and publications, choosing instead to use software to make the work faster and better.

"Learning new tools and methods for research may be time-consuming in the beginning," she said, "but they will serve you in the long run, improving the quality and efficacy of your research."

Other presentations included an understanding of data management principles such as FAIR (findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable) and CARE (collective benefit, authority to control, responsibility, ethics) principles. There were also presentations showcasing national infrastructure and tools available for digital and computational research. Durrheim presented a new initiative at the University of Johannesburg called UJMethLab to support humanities and social sciences researchers in exploring new methodologies and innovation in research.

Delegates were treated to lightning talks on various DH projects, including a showcase on poetry and the DH and the Voices of Mzansi project to give a space for communities to engage with the development of technologies in their own languages.

While there were some hands-on practical presentations, the goal of DH-IGNITE was not to teach coding skills, but rather to introduce delegates to the range of options for learning such skills, and the potential these computational skills have to enhance their research and careers in general.

DH-IGNITE is an invitation to join the ESCALATOR community of practice in computational social sciences and humanities and begin the process of upskilling for the fourth industrial revolution. "We are in it for the long run," said van der Walt. "ESCALATOR and the building of our digital humanities community of practice is a five-to-ten-year project, and we look forward to walking this journey with you."

Visit the website to find out which [DH-IGNITE](#) event is nearest to you.

## Contact us:





# SADILAR RESEARCHERS IMPART KNOWLEDGE AT DIGITAL HUMANITIES SUMMER SCHOOL

- Lihle Sosibo

Three researchers from SADiLaR (Ms Mmasibidi Setaka, Mr Benito Trollip, and Prof Menno van Zaanen) recently taught courses at a summer school which was organised by the Digital Humanities Association of Southern Africa (DHASA). This three-day event, which ran from 31 October to 3 November 2022, provided a range of courses covering topics related to DH. The summer school specifically targeted students and researchers with an interest in the field of DH.

Prof Menno van Zaanen and Franziska Pannach, both executive committee members of DHASA, were instrumental in organising the summer school, which was held in conjunction with a DH conference organised by North-West University. These in-person events took place at the Riverside Sun Hotel in Vanderbijlpark, South Africa.

DH is an academic research field that deals with the application of computational tools and digital methods within the traditional fields of Humanities, such as linguistics, literature, music, history, and philosophy. By organising events such as the summer school, SADiLaR and DHASA aim to boost the field of DH in South Africa, which is currently still very novel. In addition to training events, SADiLaR builds a community of practice that allows researchers to share information and discuss problems, solutions, and possibilities.

Advances in technology as well as the availability of Humanities data have led to the development of the field of DH, which concentrates on generating and answering new questions relevant to the field of Humanities. Research in this field blends Humanities and digital techniques and as such is driven by novel and fast-evolving digital technologies.

DH crosses the boundaries between Humanities and Computing. This leads to inter- and cross-disciplinary collaboration between scientists, bringing together plurality of methodologies, critical and reflexive approaches, and the disruption of traditional practices of doing scientific research. "The DHASA summer school was a great initiative to introduce different scholars to the field of Digital Humanities which is a new field of study in South Africa. Participants were interested in the possibilities that Digital Humanities has to offer, and I believe this should be an ongoing discussion," recommended Humanities researcher at SADiLaR, Ms Mmasibidi Setaka.



**Attendees and presenters at the  
Digital Humanities Summer School**

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## SADILAR RESEARCHERS AT THE 2022 ALASA CONFERENCE

- Natalie Simon

Four SADiLaR researchers attended the 23rd Biennial International Conference of the African Languages Association of Southern Africa, organised by the African Language Association of Southern Africa (ALASA) in collaboration with the Pan South African Language Board, the Department of African Language Studies and the Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). The conference, themed "African languages in practice in the 21st century", took place in Stellenbosch from 21 to 24 September 2022.

For any feedback on the content of the newsletter, please feel free to contact

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[info@sadilar.org](mailto:info@sadilar.org)

For any feedback on the translations, please feel free to address your message to the translator when sending an email to

SADiLaR:  
[info@sadilar.org](mailto:info@sadilar.org)



*Four SADiLaR researchers attending the ALASA 2022 conference. From left to right: Andiswa Bukula, Rooweither Mabuya, Benito Trollip, Muzi Matfunjwa*

### Raising awareness of SADiLaR's contribution to the field

Rooweither Mabuya, Andiswa Bukula, Muzi Matfunjwa and Benito Trollip from SADiLaR all attended and presented papers. However, say the four researchers, the value of SADiLaR staff attending conferences goes far beyond presenting research.

"These conferences give us a great

opportunity to speak to researchers in the field about what SADiLaR, as a national research infrastructure, does, and what we can do for them," says Bukula, digital humanities (DH) researcher in isiXhosa.

"Researchers are very interested in finding out about our open call for funding, how they can access our repository and what possibilities and support is



available for researchers interested in enhancing their research using computational tools.”

Matfunjwa presented on assessing the efficacy of the Siswati part-of-speech tagger, problems observed from incorrectly tagged words and possible solutions to improve the accuracy of the tagger. He noted the interest from other researchers in how he used digital tools in his analysis of Siswati, which is the language he specialises in as a DH researcher.

“Meeting in person at a conference, and hearing researchers present is a great opportunity to show our relevance to researchers in the field,” says Trollip, who specialises in Afrikaans. “The ALASA conference, for instance, had strong presentations in forensic linguistics, and I met a research fellow from UWC who wants to build a corpus of specific court judgements. I found this out by listening to her presentation, and we connected thereafter as SADiLaR has the expertise to assist her with this.”

### **Celebrating South Africa’s indigenous languages**

For all four researchers who attended the conference, the highlight was the presentations given by researchers about their languages, in their languages, with no interpretation services. “For me, this was mind-blowing,” says Mabuya, whose research speciality is isiZulu.

Through this the ALASA conference made a very clear and powerful statement advocating for the upliftment and development of our indigenous languages.”

Trollip, who attended several presentations in South African languages he does not speak, agrees: “It is just wonderful watching people express themselves in their own languages. As an Afrikaans researcher and mother-tongue speaker, I purposely target Afrikaans conferences for the joy of being able to present in my own tongue. It is wonderful to see this practice taking off with our indigenous languages.”

Bukula says she also really appreciated the diversity of both the speakers and the presentations, and the high quality of presentations in general. “Presentations ranged from those on literature and poetry to forensic linguistics, to the more technical and computational work. It was great listening to presentations in our different languages and the social events were excellent,” she says.

**“Congratulations to the organisers for an excellent and well-organised conference.”**

### **Contact us:**





# DR MARAIS ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE OF NODES ON SADILAR'S STEERING COMMITTEE

- **Natalie Simon**

SADiLaR's Governance Steering Committee is pleased to announce the nomination of Dr Laurette Marais as representative of the nodes of SADiLaR on the committee.

Marais is a senior researcher at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and has served as the Speech Node manager since 2022. She has been involved in human language technology research since 2009 and currently leads a SADiLaR-funded project for the development of a wide-coverage computational grammar for isiZulu. Her research also focuses on the application of speech and text processing technology in literacy support and language learning for the South African languages.



**Dr Laurette Marais, representative of the nodes of SADiLaR on the committee.**

The steering committee comprises a number of stakeholders, including academics and funders who provide oversight of all SADiLaR activities, including setting strategic direction, and approving policies and planning that give effect to the strategy. The committee oversees and monitors implementation and execution of the strategy by management while also ensuring accountability for organisational performance through reporting and disclosure.

Members of the committee serve a term of three years in accordance with continued contractual arrangements between the Department of Science and Innovation and NWU.

Delivering on SADiLaR's multifaceted mandate, namely supporting research and development in the domains of language technologies and language-related studies in the humanities and social sciences, requires a wide variety of skills, techniques, and research foci, which are cultivated at the various nodes. At the same time, the nodes are committed to seeking efficient and effective methods for collaboration to achieve more together. It would be an honour to represent hard working colleagues on the steering committee.

## Dr Marais comments:

The SADiLaR nodes are committed to making a measurable impact in multilingual South Africa.

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