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SOUTH AFRICAN SIGN LANGUAGE (SASL) DISSEMINATION EVENT

*Driving South African Sign Language (SASL)
forward in digital spaces*



29 May 2026 | 10:00 – 15:00

CSIR ICC, Pretoria



science technology
& innovation
Department:
Science, Technology and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Stellenbosch
UNIVERSITY
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Programme

Programme Director: Candice Morgan

- 09:00** **Arrival, coffee and tea**
- 10:00** **Opening, welcome and project overview**
Prof Heather Brookes, CLD Node, Stellenbosch University
- 10:20** **The planned sign bank for South African Sign Language**
Ms Candice Morgan, Stellenbosch University
- 11:15** **SASL resources: Power presentations**
Various resource developers
- 11:45** **SASL resources: Inventory**
Ms Ayesha Rumjugernath, Stellenbosch University /
Mr Juan Steyn, SADiLaR
- 12:15** **Lunch**
- 13:25** **African Wordnet**
Ms Marissa Griesel, SADiLaR
- 14:00** **A Learner Management System for SASL texts**
Ms Ayesha Rumjugernath, Stellenbosch University /
Mr Juan Steyn, SADiLaR
- 14:20** **Closing discussion**
Prof Langa Khumalo, SADiLaR
- 15:00** **End of programme**

Speakers

Ms Candice Morgan

Producer: Deaf Television

Advocate for the Deaf community



Candice Morgan is a Deaf television producer, presenter, director, actress, scholar, and advocate for the Deaf community. She is known for her work with DTV South Africa, where she served as executive producer, presenter, director, and mentor to emerging Deaf media professionals. She holds a diploma in Information Technology from City & Guild, a BA in Political Science, and a postgraduate diploma in Second Language Studies. For her Master's study, she is using Sentence Repetition Tasks to assess the South African Sign Language proficiency of Deaf school children with various levels of exposure to the language. The data is video recorded and analysed by the sign parameter to investigate the correlation between lexical development and length of language exposure.

Prof Heather Brookes

Director: Child Language Development Node (SADiLaR)

Professor: Department of General Linguistics (Stellenbosch University)



Prof Heather Brookes is Professor in the Department of General Linguistics at Stellenbosch University and Director of the Child Language Development Node at SADiLaR. She holds a PhD from Stanford University. Her research spans gesture, child language development in South Africa's official languages, South African youth languages, and multilingualism. She is an NRF B2-rated scholar and serves as the MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventories Advisory Board consultant for African languages. She has also served as the Vice-President of the International Society for Gesture Studies.

Her current work focuses on developing, validating, and norming early language development measures for South African languages. She has published on gesture, youth language practices and early child language development, and leads major research projects on South African child language development, gesture, language input and assessment. A major focus is on developing human language technologies for early language assessment, including the development of digital tools, datasets and computational resources to support research on child language development in South African languages.

Ayesha Ramjugernath

Deaf South African Sign Language (SASL) specialist (Handlab, Stellenbosch University)

Founder: SociGo



Ayesha Ramjugernath is a Deaf South African Sign Language (SASL) specialist, interpreter, trainer, and Deaf education advocate with extensive experience in curriculum development, accessibility, and Deaf-led educational initiatives. She works with the Handlab Project at Stellenbosch University in quality control and curriculum material development, supporting the creation of SASL educational resources and digital learning platforms for Deaf learners across South Africa. She is also the founder of SociGO, an initiative focused on Deaf empowerment, media, and community development.

Her work focuses on advancing equitable access to education through SASL curriculum development, interpreter training, digital accessibility, and inclusive learning innovation. Ayesha has worked nationally and internationally in, amongst others, higher education support, SASL training, media production, and Deaf community empowerment, with a strong commitment to strengthening Deaf education and accessibility in South Africa.

Mr Juan Steyn

Director: Operations



Juan Steyn is the Director of Operations at SADiLaR. He has been involved in multiple Digital Humanities and educational technology-related projects. He also has a special interest in training and capacity building through his involvement within the Software and Data carpentry community as well as the Digital Humanities Association of Southern Africa.

Prof Langa Khumalo

Chief Director (SADiLaR)



Langa Khumalo is a Full Professor and Chief Director of the South African Center for Digital Language Resources. He holds a PhD in Linguistics from the University of Oslo, an MPhil in Linguistics from Cambridge University, and a Certificate in Corpus Linguistics from The Tuscan Word Centre, Italy. He completed a Strategic Leadership Programme at the Saïd Business School, Oxford University. He is a Fellow of the Cambridge Commonwealth Society, a member of the Scientific Board of the Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society.

He is a board member of the African Literary Metadata Project based at Uppsala University, Sweden. He is currently a Member of the DHET Advisory Panel for Language Policy Implementation. He is an award-winning author in Intelligent Text Processing and Computational Linguistics. He received a Recognition Award from the University of the Free State for his Contribution to Multilingualism globally.

Marissa Griesel

Project manager: African Wordnet and Multilingual Terminology projects (SADiLaR)



Marissa Griesel is the project manager for the African Wordnet and Multilingual Terminology projects at SADiLaR. She has obtained a BA degree in Computational Linguistics and a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics and is currently enrolled as a PhD student in the Department of African Languages at UNISA. Her research focuses on enhancing South African Digital Humanities through the development of specialised text resources, such as applying the African Wordnet to create semantically annotated corpora.

She is passionate about interdisciplinary collaboration and enjoys working on projects where researchers and developers from linguistics, computer science, and related fields come together to find innovative solutions for under-resourced languages. Marissa is furthermore involved in SADiLaR's ESCALATOR project as facilitator, where crucial human capital development and empowerment in using digital tools to enhance traditional Humanities research is central.