

Towards Linguistic Inclusivity: An Exploration of the Wayfinding System at Stellenbosch University, South Africa

Gera de Villiers*

Postdoctoral Fellow
The Visual Redress Project,
Stellenbosch University

gera@sun.ac.za

*corresponding author

Elmarie Costandius

Associate Professor in Art Education,
Coordinator, MA in Visual Arts,
PhD Supervisor
Stellenbosch University

elmarie@sun.ac.za

Kelly Brazier

Designer, Art Director
and Illustrator,
Stellenbosch University

kbrazier@live.com

Karolien Perold-Bull

Coordinator and Senior Lecturer
Visual Comm. Design Division,
Visual Arts Department,
Stellenbosch University

karolien@sun.ac.za

INTRODUCTION

Wayfinding is intended to facilitate a person's movement through space by "the process of using spatial and environmental information to navigate to a destination" (Lidwell, Holden and Butler, 2010, p. 260). However, the reading of wayfinding is not only influenced by the tangible but also the intangible, which together create a multidimensional experience operating at the complex intersections of socio-political, cultural, economic, and linguistic issues. Therefore, the aim of an inclusive wayfinding system should be both equitable and accessible to accommodate users with diverse preferences, backgrounds, and abilities (Arthur and Passini, 1992).

This paper investigates the wayfinding system on the main campus of Stellenbosch University in Stellenbosch, South Africa. In 2016, this historically white, Afrikaans university adopted a new language policy that elevated the use of English and isiXhosa alongside Afrikaans within the university's academic and social sphere (Stellenbosch University, 2016). The research aimed to gain insight into how users experienced and negotiated the campus using the directional and informational wayfinding systems available. In addition to an analysis of these wayfinding systems on campus, data were collected through interviews with, and questionnaires completed by participants on Stellenbosch University's campus.

This article begins by providing the context of South Africa's divided history, the Afrikaans language, and Stellenbosch University's relationship with language on campus. This is followed by an explanation of this study's methodology, unpacking of the theoretical perspectives including wayfinding, linguistic landscaping, and spatial justice, and concludes with a presentation and discussion of findings. The intent is to

Abstract /

Effective wayfinding design should efficiently and accessibly provide navigational tools to its user. These tools are multidimensional and engage a complex network of socio-political, cultural, economic, and linguistic issues. This paper interrogates the wayfinding system on Stellenbosch University's campus – a space where issues regarding linguistic injustice have been prevalent due to the university's long history with Afrikaans language and culture. The research considers the theoretical perspectives of wayfinding, linguistic landscaping, and spatial justice. These theories were utilised alongside qualitative data collected through interviews with and questionnaires completed by relevant participants on campus. The results revealed that the user experience of the wayfinding system was lacking in effective and efficient accessibility. It was suggested that an amended wayfinding design – one that took into account the balancing of power relations in the campus space – could contribute towards spatial justice and a more welcoming environment for all.

Keywords /

spatial justice; wayfinding; semiotic landscapes; linguistic landscaping

contribute to an understanding of the role of way-finding systems in providing equitable, and inclusive public spaces.

CONTEXT

South Africa's long history with oppression and exclusion spans back to 1652, when the Dutch East India Company created the Cape Colony. The settlers stole ancestral land from the Khoikhoi and San peoples and imported slaves from the East Indies and other parts of Africa. Although slaves were "freed" in 1834, a racist, segregated system was still in place. This became formalized in 1948, when the National Party came to power on the platform of apartheid in accordance with Afrikaner nationalism. Apartheid separated people into four racial categories – black, colored, Indian, and white – and passed laws that denied rights to people of color to privilege the white minority.

Stellenbosch, founded in 1679, lies approximately 50 kilometers inland from Cape Town and is known for its wine production and university. Due to segregationist policies, black and colored communities were established on the outskirts of the town, leaving the center for white people. This was enforced during apartheid when, in 1964, a colored community was violently removed from the center of town (an area called Die Vlakte) and relocated further away. Stellenbosch University received some of this land for its campus. This is an event that has repercussions today, as the university works to address the fractured relationship between it and the previous residents of Die Vlakte.¹

In 1994, apartheid was officially dismantled and a democratic South Africa was ushered in with Nelson Mandela at its helm; a former lawyer and anti-apartheid activist who had recently become a free man after being imprisoned for 27 years for his activism. This event also allowed for nine African languages to be recognized as equal official languages of South Africa (along with English and Afrikaans).² While there has been great progress since the end of apartheid, the country is still struggling to rectify the wrongs of its past and there is also great disappointment and unease in the slow process.

Some of this disappointment and unease came to a head in 2015 and 2016, when students across the country were galvanized in protests against the injustices of the past and the systemic racism still prevalent in universities. These protests began with the #Rhodesmustfall movement at the University of Cape Town in 2015 with calls to remove the statue of Cecil John Rhodes, the British imperialist who bequeathed "his" land to South Africa, a portion of which the university is built upon.³ However, the movement brought about much larger issues inherent within higher education across the country such as the necessity for the decolonization of university space and curriculum (for Stellenbosch University this specifically included a look at language use), addressing of university fees with the outcome of affordable and accessible education, and more student housing.

Afrikaans

Afrikaans developed in South Africa from three main language sources: Dutch colonizers, indigenous peoples, and slaves (Roberge, 2002, p. 79). The late 19th Century gave rise to Afrikaner nationalism to uphold Afrikaans language and culture – as spurred on by the Anglo Boer/South African Wars (Kriel, 2010). During apartheid, Afrikaans was the language of the ruling party – and, thus, was seen as the language of the oppressor. In 1953, the government passed the Bantu Education act, which amongst many things, enforced racially separated schools. In 1974, the *Afrikaans Medium Decree* was enacted, which forced the teaching of subjects in Afrikaans within black schools. One fallout of this decree was the 16 June 1976 Soweto Uprising; a protest by black school children in Soweto, a township outside of Johannesburg, against being taught in Afrikaans. The protestors were met with violence from police that left many dead or wounded. The use of Afrikaans by the ruling party during apartheid has superseded its history within other cultural groups – it is also the linguistic and cultural identity of many people of color. As Hein Willemse (2015, p. 1) states "While our recent sociopolitical history often casts Afrikaans as the language of racists, oppressors and unreconstructed nationalists, the language also bears the imprint of a fierce tradition of anti-imperialism,

anti-colonialism, of an all-embracing humanism and anti-apartheid activism.” The history of Afrikaans is richly multifaceted.

Stellenbosch University and Language

Stellenbosch University was formally established in 1918 as an Afrikaans university – in both language and culture. This foundation tied it (and the town that it sits in the heart of) to the rise of Afrikaner Nationalism and apartheid. As an institution that was historically white, Afrikaans, and exclusionary, the university has officially acknowledged and apologized for its “role in the injustices of our country’s past” (De Villiers, 2018) and has taken many strides towards institutional transformation since 1994 (Stellenbosch University, 2022b). However, it is still a space that is grappling with issues of inclusivity.

In recent years the demographics have changed to welcome people from more diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and this necessitated a renegotiation of the linguistic landscape of the university. In 2022, 32,535 students were enrolled at the university with the following home language (first language) statistics: 48% English, 32.8% Afrikaans, 5.46% Xhosa, 8.82% other official South African languages, and 4.84% other (international) languages (Stellenbosch University, 2022a).⁴ The university further reports that in 2021, 80.8% of undergraduate students preferred English as their language of learning and teaching. This includes 49.5% with Afrikaans as their home language along with almost 100% of students with other home languages. In terms of race, almost 100% of black African and Indian/Asian, 80.7% of colored, and 73.8% of white undergraduates preferred English as their language of teaching and learning (Stellenbosch University, 2021c). The university’s physical landscape encompasses five campuses and 10 faculties. The main campus – the one central to this article – holds eight of these faculties and sits in the center of the town of Stellenbosch.⁵

It is important to note that there has been a long, emotional, and tumultuous debate regarding language at Stellenbosch University. A very superficial explanation of the complexities of the debate is that one side (mostly

outside Afrikaans interest groups) are adamant that the language of instruction at the university should be Afrikaans and the other side (namely, many staff, students, and the leadership of the university) believe that it needs to be multilingual. While this debate began long before the 2015 student protests, these protests catalyzed a critical look at the university’s then language policy, which the student organization Open Stellenbosch suggested “safeguards Afrikaner culture and excludes black students” (Phakathi, 2016).

A new language policy was established in 2016 – and updated in 2022 – that

aims to increase equitable access to SU for all students and staff, promote multilingualism and the appreciation thereof, and facilitate pedagogically sound teaching and learning. Without losing sight of the fact that SU also serves continental and global communities, we commit ourselves to multilingualism by using the three official languages of the Western Cape, namely Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa (Stellenbosch University, 2021b, p. 3).

The policy supports the use of multilingualism institutionally and in social settings. Prior to this, the language policy of the university made provisions for Afrikaans and English as academic languages (Stellenbosch University, 2014).

In 2015, the Department of Visual Arts at the university initiated a preliminary survey in which students indicated the need for multilingual signage on campus. Various respondents discussed their inability to navigate around campus because much of the signage was in Afrikaans, which they could not read, and this led to them feeling confused and unwelcome (Costandius & de Villiers 2015, p.1). The department then motivated the Facilities Management to include three languages (Afrikaans, English, and isiXhosa) on signage boards, and this was approved in late 2015. Unfortunately, however, the wayfinding system on campus was slow to be updated according to this new procedure.⁶

As mentioned, modifications to the language policy have not been welcomed or supported by everyone. Specifically, the 2016 language policy was challenged by

Afrikaans rights activists but was upheld by the Western Cape High Court in 2017 (see *Gelyke Kanse and Others v Chairperson of the Senate of the University of Stellenbosch and Others* [2017] 17501/2016) and the Constitutional Court in 2019 (see *Gelyke Kanse and Others v Chairperson of the Senate of the University of Stellenbosch and Others* [2019] ZACC 38). There is an ongoing investigation (started in 2021) by the South African Human Rights Commission into an alleged “ban on Afrikaans in residences during the welcoming period at the beginning of the academic year at Stellenbosch University” (Stellenbosch University, 2021a, n.p.). These are just a few of the legal issues involved with language at the university. A simple Google search will reveal even more threats of legal action and public debates regarding the merits or implementation of the language policy. It is clearly a contentious and emotional topic for many.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this research was an explanatory qualitative case study within an interpretative paradigm, which aimed “to discover the social dynamics operating within [a] population” (Babbie, 2007, p. 96). For the purpose of this study, “social dynamics” refers to the linguistic landscape at Stellenbosch University and how it affects wayfinding. An interpretative paradigm suggests that an individual’s reality is created “through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, documents, tools, and other artifacts” (Klein & Myers, 1999, p. 69). It also understands that these social constructs can be conflicting and biased (Klein & Myers, 1999).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three individuals involved in the reform of the wayfinding system at the university on an institutional level, as well as through questionnaires completed by a small, random sample of linguistically diverse university students and staff – three Afrikaans-speaking, four English-speaking, three Xhosa-speaking individuals (this reflects the first language of the individuals). This collected data were supplemented by analysis of the directional and informational signage on campus (both the old signage in Afrikaans or Afrikaans and English and

the new signage in all three languages) and document analysis of official university documents concerning the language policy and signage/building name changes. This also incorporated university statistics and the preliminary survey on the proposed signage changes conducted by the Department of Visual Arts in 2015.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

This research considers the theoretical perspectives of wayfinding, linguistic landscape, and spatial justice. These three perspectives work together to provide an understanding for the necessity of a linguistically inclusive signage system on Stellenbosch University’s campus that abides by the institution’s new language policy. This type of signage system could assist in creating an equitable and just navigational tool for staff, students, and visitors to campus.

Romedi Passini (1981, p. 17) describes wayfinding as “[people’s] ability to reach spatial destinations in novel as well as in familiar settings.” Kevin Lynch (1960, p. 4), who coined the term “wayfinding,” defines it as being “a product both of immediate sensation and of the memory of past experience, and it is used to interpret information and to guide action.” Wayfinding, then, relies on a user’s reading of the duality of the physical/visual and experiential environment to successfully navigate through a space.

A wayfinding system can contribute to manipulating the network of relationships already present in a space, and, in the process, it “can enable or disable people” (Clarkson and Coleman, 2015, p. 236). An inclusive/enabling approach aims to negotiate uneven power relations in a space by providing equitable, effective, and accessible wayfinding information, thereby allowing the majority of users to actively participate in the space. Such an approach should produce a system that is able to communicate effectively to a diversity of people with different intellectual, linguistic, physical, and sensory abilities, as well as varying social stratifications and cultural backgrounds (Arthur and Passini, 1992, p. 85). This could facilitate an environment that enables navigational independence to the greatest

extent possible (Salmi, 2005, p. 6). For Stellenbosch University, an enabling approach to wayfinding is to include all three languages on the university's signage boards.

The understanding of communication within the environment is also considered in the theory of linguistic landscape. This semiotically based theory was first defined by Landry and Bourhis (1997, p. 25) as encompassing "[t]he language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration." Updated definitions have been offered such as "any sign or announcement located outside or inside a public institution or a private business in a given geographical location" (Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Amara, and Trumper-Hecht, 2006, p. 14) or "any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame" (Backhaus, 2007, p. 66).

Linguistic landscaping considers the process and intent behind a sign. It asks the questions: "who puts up what sign(s) where, in what language(s) and last but not least why (or why not)?" (Marten, Van Mensel, and Gorter, 2012, p. 5) – and also, for whom? It is about the sign and how people interact with the sign. It investigates the complexities of language use on signs – especially in multilingual contexts – as an "outcome of different power struggles over space, of ownership and legitimacy, of policy and ideology..." (van Mensel, Blackwood, and Vandenbroucke, 2016, p. 8). Particularly, for Stellenbosch University, it assists in understanding the "aspects of linguistic diversity that typify the multilayered, superdiverse multilingual contexts" (van Mensel et al, 2016, p. 3) of the university sphere and of the power dynamics within this linguistic diversity.

Linguistic landscaping encompasses many themes; one aspect it considers is the impact of official language policies on the landscape.⁷ This is of particular interest to this paper as it considers the multilingual language policy of Stellenbosch University and how it has been implemented in directional and informational signage across the main campus. As mentioned, South Africa has 11 official languages, and is thus ripe for

research regarding language policies in linguistic landscapes. A number of scholars have provided research on this topic throughout the country; Theodorus du Plessis (2012) looks at language policies in the linguistic landscape of three towns within a rural area in the Free State Province; Philadelphia Mokwena (2017) analyses the linguistic landscape of two rural municipalities in the Northern Cape Province; Temitope Adekunle, Gift Mheta, and Maeshoane Rapeane-Mathonsi (2019) investigate the linguistic landscapes of the University of Cape Town and the University of the Western Cape; and Michael Kretzer and Russell Kaschula (2021) consider language policy in regards to linguistic landscapes at 300 schools in three provinces in South Africa. Additionally, Sibongile Philibane (2014) provides us with an overview of the linguistic landscapes at three Western Cape Province Universities – including Stellenbosch University – with the discovery of an unequal promotion of multilingual signage (between Afrikaans, English, and isiXhosa) at these institutions; also finding that Stellenbosch University's signage favored Afrikaans.

Linguistic landscaping goes hand in hand with the semiotic landscape. Such a landscape is understood through human intervention of meaning making in a space and, specifically in the sense of language use, contributes to "power relations and identity formation through the lens of place-naming, multilingualism, linguistic vitality, and language policy" (Jaworski and Thurlow, 2009, p. 9). These landscapes are a "reflection of socio-cultural symbols and meanings that define what it means to be a human being in a particular culture" (Greider and Garkovich, 1994, p. 3). They are a combination of the physical and linguistic signs that contribute to the identity of a place – and, reflexively, to the identity of a person or group of people.

In order to effectively negotiate an inclusive approach to wayfinding, one needs to gain insight into the context within which it functions; most often, public social spaces. Social space, according to Henri Lefebvre (1991, p. 77), "contains a great diversity of objects, both natural and social, including the networks and pathways, which facilitate the exchange of material things and information." As spaces are "an active force shaping

human life" (Soja 2009, p. 2), linguistic landscaping, then, must be created with the understanding of the "situated social dynamics of multivocality in local spaces, manifest in the contesting lives of multiple publics" (Stroud and Jegels, 2014, p. 2). Therefore, the wayfinding of a space must cater to the language of the public that it serves – it should not enable or disable one group over another but, rather, work to empower all.

For this to occur, wayfinding needs to incorporate spatial justice practices to confront a range of unequal power relations within a space; as Edward Soja (2010, p. 28) rightly asserts, "[s]pace – like justice – is socially produced, experienced, and contested on constantly shifting social, political, economic, and geographical terrains, which means that justice must be engaged on spatial as well as social terms." For Soja (2009, p. 1), spatial justice considers how inequality and injustice is created by, manifested in, and maintained through public social space and how justice in these spaces is an "active negotiation of multiple publics, in search of productive ways to build solidarity across difference" (Soja, 2010, p. 28). David Harvey (1988) argues that to amplify the prospects for social engagement for all, one should attempt to create social spaces in a way that would make it accessible to the majority of those who move through these spaces. Nancy Fraser (1990, p. 57), a seminal theorist in the field of social justice, suggests that the public social space acts as an "arena of public discourse" within which social justice functions. She views the concept of social justice through the lens of what she terms "participatory parity" (Fraser, 2008, p. 278), which she describes as involving social policies and arrangements that make it possible for all inhabitants of a space to participate in that space in an equal capacity (Fraser, 2008, p. 280) – spatial justice.

Doreen Massey (2013, p. 3) speaks to this when she explains that everyone relates differently to spaces and has distinct relations to the social interconnections in these spaces: "you're not traveling across a dead flat surface that is space, you're cutting across a myriad of stories." It is the spatial relations between these stories that are integral to an understanding of politics and power (Massey, 2013, p. 2). The wayfinding system is just one of the avenues in which these linguistic power rela-

tions are established; they create the social justices and injustices that manifest in the space and are both informed by and create the semiotic landscape in which they exist. Massey (2013, pp. 3-4) furthers this idea by explaining that "...what we have is a geography, which is in a sense the geography of power. The distribution of these relations, mirrors the power relations within the society we have."

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This research was an investigation into the linguistic landscaping present in the wayfinding system on Stellenbosch University's campus – through signage – and the experiences of staff and students regarding the system. Interviews were conducted with three people who were involved in the updating of the wayfinding system at the university on an institutional level. Additionally, questionnaires were completed by three Afrikaans first language, four English first language, and three isiXhosa first language university students and staff. For anonymity, a coding system has been used to refer to each respondent. Those who were interviewed are referred to as Respondent 1 through 3 and for questionnaires they are referred to as Participants 1 through 10. Analysis of the data revealed that there were two main aspects of incorporating Afrikaans, English, and isiXhosa equally into the wayfinding on campus: the first is the use of language for accessibility and the second is the use of language as symbolic.

As mentioned, the university's language policy prior to 2016 made concessions for Afrikaans and English. Therefore, much of the directional and informational signage on campus was either in Afrikaans or Afrikaans and English. At the end of 2015, the proposal to incorporate three languages on signage was accepted and rolled out. The name of the university appears on both old and new signs in Afrikaans, English, and isiXhosa. Locational or informational signs outside of specific buildings include the name of the building in all three languages, as seen in Figure 1. Figure 2 demonstrates existing directional signs in Afrikaans and English and



Figure 1 /

Visual Arts Building signage in all three languages.



Figure 2 /

Directional signage in English and Afrikaans.



Figure 3 /

Directional signage in all three languages.

Figure 3 shows a new sign with all three languages. It has been standardized so that all new signage on campus is in the following language order: Afrikaans, English, isiXhosa.⁸

Reactions to Stellenbosch University's Wayfinding System

When asked to rate different navigational activities on campus on a scale from easy to difficult, all participants who completed the questionnaire indicated that they found it relatively difficult to find any building on campus. It was mentioned that the “campus is not very clearly marked overall and is confusing to outsiders and first-years” (Participant 5). One participant stated that “the wayfinding system is hidden, uninteresting, and sometimes inaccurate” (Participant 6). It was also mentioned that much of the wayfinding system has been the same for many years and that some of the signs have been broken, damaged, and vandalized (Participant 10). Such signs can be seen in Figures 4 and 5 below. Lidwell, Holden and Butler suggest that “navigational choices are complex and so destinations should be clearly marked by signage” (2010, p. 261) and the above demonstrates the need for clear signage on Stellenbosch University's

campus — not only in regard to language.

Reactions to Stellenbosch University's Wayfinding System: Language for accessibility

Only one participant in the questionnaire answered that they use the wayfinding system, and this participant also indicated that their home language is Afrikaans. One isiXhosa participant explained that they do not use the signage because it is impractical as it is in Afrikaans, which echoed the sentiments of many of the other opinions expressed in the questionnaire. When asked what they would do if they had an opportunity to change something about the system, half of the participants (all of whom were either English- or isiXhosa-speaking) stated that they would modify the languages found on the signage. They mentioned that the signs should be revised to “ensure that the languages represented would be indicative of those who are a part of the university staff and student body” (Participant 3) and “make sure that it would be understood by more than just those who understand Afrikaans” (Participant 5).

When the participants of the questionnaire were asked if they understand written Afrikaans, half replied that they did, but also stated that “Afrikaans



(L) Figure 4 /

Vandalized Parking Signage.

(R) Figure 5 /

Damaged Directional Signage.

signs do not help, they were actually more confusing," that they "do not understand the technical terms in Afrikaans, like the environmental sciences building" and that "some of the Afrikaans names are long and confusing, hard to pronounce and hard to remember." This shows that the signs cannot just be in Afrikaans, it must be linguistically accessible to the majority of those who interact with them – to the "multilayered, superdiverse multilingual contexts" (van Mensel, Blackwood, and Vandembroucke, 2016, p. 3) inherent in Stellenbosch University.

Reactions to Stellenbosch University's Wayfinding System: Language as symbolic

The majority of the participants of the questionnaire stated that they had either noticed that the new signage changes included Afrikaans, English, and isiXhosa, or had heard about them. While most participants supported the new signage, as it widened accessibility to diverse linguistic groups and demonstrated the university's commitment to multilingualism, one participant added that the new signs "had even more writing on them and were too busy" (Participant 9). This reveals that there is a chance that the inclusion of all three languages detracts from their practicality because if signage fails to present information in a simple and uncomplicated

manner, it could contribute to making those who interact with it feel unwelcome in the space in which it operates. Conversely, perhaps a more powerful argument is that, in line with semiotics, language is such an integral part of an individual's identity that the benefit of the inclusion of "your" language greatly outweighs this issue of practicality. As Respondent 3 said, "the fact of the matter is that all three languages are there and it includes everyone. To me, I do not see it being something difficult if all the languages are there, if I can access my language and read it. Whether I read it on a third line or whether I read it on a first line, I do not really mind." Multilingual signage enables equitable access for multiple publics in the space (Stroud and Jegels, 2014; Soja, 2010). It amplifies the prospect of accessibility and spatial justice (Fraser, 2008). Additionally, as mentioned, the order of language has been standardized to facilitate a less confusing presentation of information.

Further, Respondent 1 argued that the "main target group [of the new wayfinding system] is not those that have been here for years and years but is mainly newcomers." This is because they will experience the new wayfinding system on campus without prior knowledge of or previous interaction with the old, existing wayfinding system. It is, however, acknowledged that the new

signage will also affect those who have interacted with the university space for many years as it demonstrates that the university is working towards a more inclusive future. In line with Lefebvre, negotiating the update of the wayfinding system contributes to the production of the social space within which it functions. It engages the workings of its own production as well as encompasses the interrelationships between the “things” or “objects” that form the space (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 73). In order to move towards spatial justice and create a more inclusive environment for all, a balance needs to be “engaged on spatial as well as social terms” (Soja, 2010, p. 28).

On the questionnaire, participants were asked if they felt welcome on campus with regard to language. Interestingly, an Afrikaans-speaking respondent indicated that the campus space was not welcoming. This response was not based on their own experiences, but on the behalf of fellow isiXhosa and English students’ attitudes and perceptions of what Afrikaans means on campus (Participant 9). The use of Afrikaans throughout the university environment “sends a message of exclusion to those who do not understand Afrikaans” (Respondent 3). An inclusive approach to wayfinding, with the understanding of the spatial injustices at play in a space, is important when attempting to address the invisible variables and power relations within the Stellenbosch University landscape.

The university “can’t become too precious and show how things can never be changed” (Respondent 1). It should rather be adaptable to the constantly changing social contexts in which it finds itself because “true inclusivity is about understanding all the invisible variables and also making action institutionally sustainable” (Respondent 1). This shows how vital the move towards an inclusive wayfinding system is and the impact that it could have on social and institutional cohesion. This forms part of a “new spatial consciousness, making us aware that the geographies in which we live support oppressive forms of cultural and political domination and aggravate all forms of discrimination and injustice” (Soja, 2010, p. 19).

The roll out of the new signage has not been without issues, however. When some of the new signs

were installed on campus there were complaints that there were spelling and translation mistakes in all languages. Criticism followed: “From a university where you have an Afrikaans department, the English department, and the African Languages department, which specializes in isiXhosa, [this] is unacceptable” (Respondent 3). The mistranslation of a minority language within the linguistic landscape that promotes equitable use of three languages could lead to frustrations and symbolize a lack of care on the part of the university as “language use on official inscriptions can carry highly symbolic value and provoke controversy” (van Mensel, Blackwood, Vandenbroucke, 2016, pp. 11-12).

In light of the above-mentioned issues that surfaced, it was suggested that the university create a wayfinding, naming, and signage committee comprising of permanent staff who can open dialogue with both students and the various offices and departments – such as the Transformation Office, the Department of Visual Arts, or Facilities Management – that are involved in the creation and implementation of the wayfinding system (Respondent 1; Respondent 3). In 2017, the visual redress committee was formed and this issue fell under their management and it has been formalized in the adoption of the visual redress policy (2021) that was in draft since 2017.⁹ The policy “will proactively guide visual changes on SU campuses [...] This will assist SU in its drive for transformation in and through visual redress” (Stellenbosch University, 2021d, p. 2), which is inclusive of campus signage.¹⁰

For Stellenbosch University, an updated wayfinding system is about both the straightforward aspect of providing information in languages that people understand and about the symbolic aspect of including three languages as a way to provide “participatory parity” (Fraser, 2008, p. 278). It is also “about negotiating social and political issues” (Respondent 2). As Respondent 1 indicated,

It seems like the most simple thing to take a sign down and to put another one in its place but it is governed by so many other variables, invisible

variables [...] If we could have done things with the experience of the end user in mind, then it would be simple [...] This is not just about the end user; it is about underlying power battles [...]

These battles create obstacles to inclusivity because of the web of power relations inherent in the linguistic landscaping of the university. Massey speaks to this when she suggests that everyone relates differently to spaces, with distinct relations to the social interconnections in these spaces (1994, p. 1). These “spatial relations between, for example, people, cities, jobs, is, however, key to an understanding of politics and power” (Massey, 2013, n.p.). Wayfinding as a system is just one of the avenues by which these power relations are established and so the issue of “signage and building names have come up on multiple university and non-university platforms, both being about the climate on campus and about accessibility” (Respondent 1). This is endorsed by Massey’s (2013, n.p.) idea that the “geography of power, the distribution of these relations, mirrors the power relations within the society we have.”

CONCLUSION

Reflecting on Stellenbosch University’s transformation vision – i.e. “a welcoming campus culture, accessibility, and a multi-lingual academic offering” (Stellenbosch University, 2015) – in relation to its wayfinding system, the possibility of change through inclusive wayfinding is evident. Updating the wayfinding system of Stellenbosch University in such a manner necessitates an approach that is open to the dynamic, social nature of the environment (Stroud and Jegels, 2014). This reinforces the notion that the meaning and value of wayfinding do not merely lie in the signage itself, but also in the effects of the signage on the greater social consciousness of those who interact with it. Through continuous open dialogue with those who use the space, potential strategies for overcoming spatial injustices (Soja, 2009 and 2010; Fraser, 1990 and 2008) with inclusive wayfinding – i.e. new signage systems – could be negotiated and

developed and, in the process, the semiotic landscape of the space can become more inclusive.

Stellenbosch University is still associated with Afrikaans. However, as the demographic statistics show, English is the predominant language and the preferred language of instruction. The adoption of the new language policy in 2016 – and update in 2022 – signified the university’s commitment to linguistic inclusivity, which, ideally, can foster other types of inclusivity on campus – racial, social, cultural. To appease a diverse campus population, the wayfinding system has to function in a multifaceted and multilingual environment that understands the challenges of navigation, accessibility, language, and power inherent in a complex country such as South Africa.

These national complexities, which are echoed in the linguistic power relations found on campus, create the framework for the production of space at Stellenbosch University; they influence the semiotic landscape. Wayfinding as a system has the power to simultaneously include and/or exclude and can, therefore, be an obstacle to inclusivity as well as a powerful tool for curbing injustices. To overcome the challenges of functioning in such an intricate environment, the wayfinding system should act as a mediator between the various linguistic power relations. The research suggests that wayfinding could contribute to spatial justice by utilizing linguistic landscaping to create a space that is more accommodating, functional, and accessible to all users regardless of their linguistic ability. This goal could be achieved by providing signs that are clearly understood by a diverse, multi-cultural, and multi-linguistic population. The accessibility and equitability of wayfinding in shared public spaces – such as on Stellenbosch University’s campus – could enable and empower users to feel welcome, confident, and knowledgeable.

Notes/

- [1] Amongst numerous initiatives: In 2006, the University collaborated with the community and published a book on the people of Die Vlakte called *In ons bloed* ("In our blood"); A large map of Die Vlakte has been installed at the entrance of the Arts and Social Sciences building, which is built on land previously inhabited by the community. A scholarship fund has been established for descendants of Die Vlakte to study at Stellenbosch University.
- [2] isiZulu, isiXhosa, Ndebele, Swazi, Northern Sotho, Sotho, Tswana, Venda, and Tsonga.
- [3] The statue was removed a month after protests began. This issue of controversial statues is being grappled with worldwide.
- [4] The university's statistical profile of enrolled students in June 2022 was 51.6% white, 23.3% black African, 17.3% coloured, 3.4% Indian, and 0.37% Asian (Stellenbosch University, 2022a). Additionally, The university's statistical profile of permanent personelle in 2018 was 51.9% white, 36.6% coloured, 9.3% black African, 1.7% Indian, and 0.5% "unknown" (Stellenbosch University, 2018).
- [5] The other campuses are all in the Western Cape Province, but not in Stellenbosch. They are in Bellville, Tygerberg, Saldanha, and Worcester.
- [6] See Philibane, 2014, pp. 61 and 64 for a breakdown of language use on signage at Stellenbosch University prior to the updated signage policy (and University of the Western Cape and University of Cape Town).
- [7] See these early studies on language policy: Rosenbaum, Nadel, Cooper, and Fishman, 1977; Tulp, 1978; Wenzel, 1998; and Monnier, 1989. Later studies include: Ben-Rafael et al., 2006; Backhaus, 2009; Barni and Vedovelli, 2012; and Shohamy, 2015.
- [8] The order at the time represented the order that the university adopted each language: it was first an Afrikaans university, then English was included, then isiXhosa.
- [9] See point 5.3 of the policy (Stellenbosch University, 2021d).
- [10] The policy defines visual redress as: "An attempt to right the wrongs of former and current powers by removing hurtful symbols (e.g. of apartheid), social injustice and misrecognition and by remedying the harm that has been caused by these visual symbols through compensation with new visual symbols that allow for the inclusion of a variety of expressions, stories, identities and histories aligned with the restorative processes of healing at SU" (Stellenbosch University, 2021d, p. 7)

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