

Afrikaans speakers prefer to read 'in die taal'

By  Daya Coetzee

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Most South African newspaper readers can read their news in English, but that does not mean that it is their preference.



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Research shows that 83% of Afrikaans speakers prefer to read in their own language. Just for them, "83% *van Afrikaanssprekendes verkies om te lees in hul eie taal*". The establishment and the longevity of *Die Burger* is testament to this and the newspaper has grown along with Afrikaans as a language.

Bun Booyens, editor of *Die Burger* was asked in Ads24's trade newspaper 'The Beat' Afrikaans Reader Community Edition what impact *Die Burger* had on Afrikaans as a language. "Immense. Afrikaans can celebrate its 90th year as an official language in 2015 because *Die Burger* started lobbying for it a hundred years ago. *Die Burger* was perhaps the most important catalyst in establishing Afrikaans as a reading language and a business language."

Die Burger has introduced a number of words to the Afrikaans language. Booyens mentions some of his favourites: "There are many. In sport, 'skrumskakel' and 'losskakel'. At the time, the word was 'halfagter', as in half-back. While watching a game with Paul Roos, Herman Steytler from our sports desk came up with the new words. 'Toebroodjie' (for sandwich) is also a lovely word that was established by *Die Burger*."

Die Burger is celebrating its centenary and things have changed since it was established 100 years ago. Booyens says, "There was no printing capacity (the Remington Company caved in under political pressure and cancelled the printing contract), there was no paper (due to the German U-boats sinking commercial ships), there were no journalists (journalism wasn't an established profession in the Afrikaans community), there wasn't any advertising (no Afrikaans word existed for most fashion items or new technology like motor vehicles). Above all, there were hardly any readers (only about 15% of the white Afrikaans population went beyond primary school in 1915) and there was no language (Afrikaans enjoyed no official status). So, it wasn't a time to start a new newspaper - it was at time to close newspapers. *Die Burger* was established as an act of faith."

The media landscape has transformed dramatically over the last 100 years, yet Afrikaans newspapers often still break news. Booyens explains why he thinks Afrikaans news remains important: "It's not about the news itself, it's about the audience - *Die Burger's* relationship with its audience. *Die Burger* is the newspaper that helped them through two World Wars, the Great Depression, the droughts and all the ups and the downs of the last hundred years. Today, *Die Burger* still

validates the world out there for its readers. In a way, something has only really happened once it's confirmed by *Die*



Source: AMPS 2014AB, Effective measure May 2015, Futurefact 2014, Forum24

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Burger. The story is told of a dominee who prayed at a prayer day for rain: "And Lord, as you would have seen in *Die Burger* this morning, it is very dry in the Overberg. That just about sums it up." The newspaper's slogan sums up the sentiment that many of its readers feel, 'Lees *Die Burger* en gesels saam!'

In a research paper on the African edition of the *Global Media Journal*, titled, '[Culture, language and niche publications in South Africa](#)', the author Pedro Diederichs says, "I have studied the rise (and fortunately not yet the fall) of the Afrikaans newspapers. It was fascinating to see how the cultural and political will of the Afrikaner audience supported the growth and wealth of companies that concentrated on 'roots' - elements that Afrikaners identified with." He goes on to say that Afrikaans newspaper editors agree that, "It is out of loyalty to the language only that lots of readers support the Afrikaans newspapers."

He goes on to speak about the value of news in the vernacular, "But like Afrikaans almost 100 years ago, other indigenous languages are seemingly coming into their own through the printed word... Looked at against the successful background of the

Afrikaans media with its niche publications, other indigenous language groups, will, like Afrikaans, indeed follow the same historical development... More (people) may prefer news and information, like entertainment, in their own languages as well."

Sources: Source: AMPS 2014AB, Effective Measure May 2015, Futurefact 2014, Forum24

ABOUT DAYA COETZEE

Stone Soup is a public relations consultancy specialising in business to business communication and is a part of the Iconic Group which includes Wag the Dog Publishers (The Media, The MediaOnline, The MOST Awards and EASYDIY), Ideology and Snippet Video.

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