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PRESS RELEASE

Good news for South African languages/ Goeie nuus vir Suid-Afrikaanse tale

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(Afrikaanse teks volg op Engels)

Good news for South African languages

Worldwide, people are increasingly gaining access to electronic devices in a growing variety of languages. South Africans can already use ATMs and spelling checkers in their mother tongues. For developments like these, language technology data and resources (such as electronic texts and word lists) are needed. The more data there is, the smarter the tool or machine will be, facilitating human-machine interaction through a particular language.

For this reason, the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) has established the National Centre for HLT (Human Language Technology) to develop reusable text and speech resources, and the Resource Management Agency (RMA) to manage and distribute these from one central point. The Centre for Text Technology (CTexT®) at the North-West University has been appointed to set up the RMA over the next three years.

Researchers and developers will soon be able to obtain (and provide) data more easily, saving a great deal of valuable time. As many of the South African languages are deemed resource scarce*,* the RMA aspires to make data resources for these languages more readily available. Mother-tongue speakers of South African languages will benefit greatly, as they could soon see new breakthroughs in health-care communication, educational software or business tools – all because language technology data, which is the backbone of these developments, will be easier to obtain.

"The establishment of the RMA is the realisation of a vision to develop and administer language resources for all South African languages on a global scale. The RMA will facilitate the development and promotion of the official languages of South Africa and the enhancement of the linguistic diversity of the country. This puts us one step closer to achieving the ideal of more smartphone applications, literacy tools, translation software and other developments in as many South African languages as possible," remarked Martin Puttkammer, Head of CTexT®.

"The NWU through CTexT has since 2007 been one of our dependable language technology implementation agencies and as such we are confident that in this endeavour too it will assist us in the execution of our strategy, to the benefit of all role-players in this domain and ultimately the general public. For us, the goal is for South Africans to increasingly gain access to information and services in their languages of choice and language technology plays a vital role in this regard," said Ulrike Janke, HLT Director at the DAC.

The RMA will be based at CTexT at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University. The Dutch TST-Centrale will be collaborating on the project.

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Goeie nuus vir Suid-Afrikaanse tale

Regoor die wêreld raak elektroniese toestelle al hoe meer toeganklik in ŉ toenemende aantal tale. Suid-Afrikaners gebruik reeds OTM'e en speltoetsers in hul moedertale. Vir verwikkelings soos hierdie word taaltegnologiedata en -hulpbronne (soos elektroniese tekste en woordelyste) benodig. Hoe meer data beskikbaar is, hoe slimmer sal die stelsel word wat mens-masjien-interaksie deur ŉ bepaalde taal fasiliteer.

Om dié rede het die Departement van Kuns en Kultuur (DKK) die Nasionale Sentrum vir Taaltegnologie op die been gebring om onder andere herbruikbare teks- en spraakhulpbronne te ontwikkel, asook die Hulpbronbestuursagentskap (HBA) om dit vanuit één sentrale punt te bestuur en te versprei. Die Sentrum vir Tekstegnologie (CTexT®) by die Noordwes-Universiteit is aangewys om die HBA oor verloop van die volgende drie jaar tot stand te bring.

Dit sal binnekort makliker word vir navorsers en ontwikkelaars om data te bekom (en te voorsien), wat heelwat kosbare tyd sal spaar. Aangesien baie van die Suid-Afrikaanse tale as hulpbronarm beskou word, streef die HBA daarna om datahulpbronne vir hierdie tale meer geredelik beskikbaar te maak. Moedertaalsprekers van Suid-Afrikaanse tale sal grootliks hierby baat vind, en kan aanstons nuwe deurbrake te wagte wees in gesondheidsorg-kommunikasie, opvoedkundige sagteware of besigheidshulpmiddels – alles te danke aan die makliker bekombaarheid van taaltegnologiedata, die essensie van hierdie verwikkelings.

"Die totstandbrenging van die HBA is die verwesenliking van ŉ visie om taalhulpbronne vir alle Suid-Afrikaanse tale te ontwikkel en te administreer. Die HBA sal die ontwikkeling en bevordering van Suid-Afrika se amptelike tale fasiliteer; so ook die uitbou van die land se linguistiese verskeidenheid. Dit bring ons al ŉ treetjie nader aan die bereiking van die ideaal van meer slimfoontoepassings, geletterdheidshulpmiddels, vertaalsagteware en ander verwikkelings in soveel as moontlik van die Suid-Afrikaanse tale," was die woorde van Martin Puttkammer, Hoof van CTexT®.

"Die NWU, deur CTexT, is al sedert 2007 een van ons betroubare implementeringsagentskappe vir taaltegnologie, en as sodanig glo ons dat hulle ons weereens sal help met die implementering van ons strategie, tot voordeel van alle rolspelers in hierdie domein en uiteindelik die algemene publiek. Ons doelwit is dat Suid-Afrikaners toenemend toegang moet verkry tot inligting en dienste in die tale van hul keuse, en taaltegnologie speel ŉ baie belangrike rol in hierdie verband," het Ulrike Janke, Taaltegnologie-direkteur van die DKK gesê.

Die HBA sal by CTexT op die Potchefstroomkampus van die Noordwes-Universiteit gesetel wees. Die Nederlandse TST-Centrale sal saamwerk aan die projek.

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