

CONVENTIONS PARALLEL BILINGUALISM

ORGANISATIONAL LANGUAGE AT UT

February 2024

INTRODUCTION

The University of Twente aims to be a welcoming place for everyone with a campus that is a safe, diverse and an open space to work and live. In order to allow everyone to participate as actively as possible within the UT community, the Executive Board has explored different scenarios where a situation in which the formal working languages on campus will be Dutch and English in the form of *parallel bilingualism*¹ was deemed most favorable.

This is in line with the university's internationalisation building blocks². Because the organisational language is only part of the integral UT language policy, this proposal includes guiding principles, followed by a set of conventions. These should provide guidance for the implementation of parallel bilingualism, pending a revision of the integral language policy when there is more clarity about developments in educational language. These conventions apply to the entire UT.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES ORGANISATIONAL LANGUAGE

- Inclusion: we strive to create a learning and working environment where everyone can feel at home. Inclusion is part of our core business and one of our three main pillars as a university: open, inclusive and entrepreneurial.
- Equity: we foster the ability for everyone to use the language they prefer, as it contributes to giving everybody fair access to opportunities and fair treatment of each other. This contributes to the sense of belonging we want the whole UT community to experience.
- Employability: in our decisions, we are attentive to the impact on work pressure, wellbeing, and work-life balance.
- International orientation, local roots: science is a global endeavour and UT has a clear view on internationalisation. Also, we are embedded in Dutch society and the (EU) region. Therefore, both languages have their specific purpose.
- Participation: we want equal opportunities for all staff and students to be able to fully participate.

¹ *Parallel bilingualism*: both English and Dutch are considered official languages: English as lingua franca in science and as shared language in our international community, Dutch as language of the region and the society in which UT is embedded. There is not only encouragement, but an expectation and active support for staff and students to be able to communicate in both languages, but there is no explicit right for all communication to be offered bilingually. Choice of language is fluid and organic. Rough guidelines may exist, but ultimately it will depend on topic, audience and what conversation partners agree upon.

² <https://www.utwente.nl/nieuws/2023/7/1039681/aanstaande-maatregelen-rond-internationalisering?code=dea51ea7>

'Language is important: we will need English and Dutch to remain inclusive. We will stimulate and facilitate the learning and use of Dutch and English by all students and staff members.'

CONVENTIONS

1. In accordance with the General Administrative Law Act, the formal written language at board level is (at least) Dutch. Written formal decision-making of governing bodies is in Dutch. The leading principle is that the whole UT community should have access to crucial decisions and be able to participate in discussions, therefore (summarised) translations in English are made available.
2. Institutional communication is bilingual: Dutch and English. The guiding principle here is that we make sure everyone has access to important information.
3. The language of communication is chosen situationally and depending on the context, taking into account the equality and language skills of the (participants or) conversation partners. This means that for effective communication, the use of one of the working languages may suffice, possibly with the addition of a (summarised) translation into the other working language. A mix of languages is also possible.
4. Contents of documentation and meeting documents should be accessible to all participants and stakeholders. While all Board level documentation should be (at least) in Dutch as per convention 1; for all other meeting and reporting documentation the choice of language may be fluid depending on participants and stakeholders.
5. Multilingualism is embraced, partly through the use of receptive multilingualism (*lingua receptiva*³).
6. Communication with third parties⁴ is in Dutch unless otherwise agreed.
7. UT expects students and staff to make an effort in becoming (more) proficient in both official languages.
8. UT actively encourages, supports and facilitates language learning and translation tools and services, in order to avoid exclusion, career barriers, (work or study) pressure and promote participation.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

- The equal position of both languages is a condition for the success of parallel bilingualism. An approach that encourages language learning *for all* is preferable to setting specific requirements only for non-native speakers of Dutch. An additional task for incoming staff and students to learn Dutch could create an uneven playing field if there are insufficient opportunities to do so alongside work or study commitments.
- Given the equal status of the two official languages, it makes sense to require staff and students to have some competence in both. However, all staff and students already have a certain level of English proficiency, while there is a large group of staff and students with little or no prior knowledge of Dutch. It takes time to acquire a basic knowledge of Dutch.
- New students and employees must be taken into account at all times. They will need time to develop their language skills alongside a full course or workload; and at oftentimes whilst trying to adapt to a new culture. This needs to be recognised as an ongoing process. We need to be aware that exchange students and temporary staff are also part of our

³Lingua receptiva: loosely translated as “listening language” makes multilingual communication possible. It is based on the principle that active use of a language (speaking, writing) requires a higher level than passive use (listening, reading). Participants speak in the language of their choice or the language they are most proficient in. The condition is that the other participants can at least understand that language when they listen to it. They are able to speak the other language, which others use as a listening language.

⁴Third parties include: suppliers, external parties collaborating with the UT (caterer, cleaning company), the municipality, (safety) region, government agencies.

community. They will have less options to learn the Dutch language and while they are encouraged to explore this possibility, they are not expected to do so.

- Not everyone has the same aptitude for learning a language. A tailored approach is preferable to a one-size-fits-all scenario.
- The internationalisation process is a precarious one. Some places within the UT are largely international, others hardly at all. There are 'bubbles'. It is important to guard against polarisation and the emergence of parallel worlds. Bursting the bubbles must be an active element in the implementation of parallel bilingualism on campus.

PREREQUISITES

STAFF

- Being a good employer means being transparent and looking after the wellbeing of your staff. This includes clarifying expectations, promoting a sense of belonging and monitoring workload. Facilitating the learning of Dutch goes well with promoting integration into a new living environment and making employees feel at home.
- It is crucial to find a balance between what's achievable for the individual and what's reasonable for the university as an employer. It may be unreasonable to have the same productivity expectations (KPI) for staff who need or aspire to devote part of their time to learning Dutch. The impact of additional responsibilities on individuals should not be ignored but should be made transparent and, where possible, distributed in an equitable and inclusive manner.

COMMUNICATION

- When people communicate in a language other than their native language and they do not master that other language at a comparable level, this can affect the quality of communication.
- Every change to corporate language, such as making websites available bilingually, adjusting signage and information boards or further development of branding/house style, is a major undertaking and costs a lot of time and money. It is advisable to allow time for transitioning websites, documents and information available so this can be done in a natural and gradual manner, taking into account the end-of-life cycle (for example with information boards and signage).

CAMPUS & COMMUNITY

- Flexibility in language choice requires everyone to make an effort to accommodate others, to take each other and each other's language skills into account, to give each other space, to learn and to ask questions.
- Insufficient language skills in (one of the) spoken language (s) can create a barrier to participation and thus exclude people. Inclusive practices need to be an ongoing concern in order to keep campus (social) life accessible to all.

GOVERNANCE & PARTICIPATION

- Policy documents require a high command of the language they are written in, including specific idioms. This can form an impediment to non-native speakers making the provision of translation options imperative. Individuals actively involved in decision-making or advisory bodies may need a higher level of proficiency (in Dutch/English) than their regular activities require in order to participate fully in the discussion. Additional support may be required and should be offered.

LANGUAGE SUPPORT

- UT supports the community with tools such as glossaries and style guides, editing services and a sufficient and needs-oriented curriculum in the field of language and communication through the UT Language Centre and the platforms *GoodHabit* and *FutureLearn*. UT bears the costs of these services.
- UT will make Dutch and English language support and translation services available to persons elected to a participatory body, such as the University Council.
- UT facilitates support in the field of translations through contracted translation partners. Access to proficient translation and GDPR compliant writing software (such as paid versions of Grammarly, DeepL, ChatGPT, etc.) can alleviate the work pressure of having two languages.

WAY FORWARD

- Have clear and transparent information about language levels and expectations. The CEFR framework should be available to all, with concrete examples and estimated time requirements with regard to language learning. The information should help to make a (self) assessment and identify steps for improvement.
- Develop a communication strategy about language policy. It is important to be clear in vacancy texts and at student recruitment events. Current staff and students may have chosen UT with the specific expectation that either English or Dutch would be sufficient for pursuing their careers and study programs; and being able to fully participate in university life. Clarity and flexibility are to be considered when setting up information for current students and staff.
- Make a proposal for a total package for new employees. Adapt recruitment information to include parallel bilingualism and expectations of incoming staff and communicate this throughout the recruitment process. Make an inventory of the language learning needs part of the onboarding process. It is considered preferable for new employees to start improving their language skills as soon as they take up their position at UT as it is assumed that assigning time is easier at this stage. However, accept that this will take away attention from their core role and it should be clear how the employee will be supported during this time. Offering a comprehensive package of language support will help to make UT an attractive employer.
- Clarify expectations with current employees as soon as possible and where possible, take into account and be sympathetic to individual employees' situations. Management needs to be given the tools to facilitate these conversations and set a specific action plan with language learning being a topic of the midterm review.

- Equip management and teams to support language learning. Bring back initiatives that were successful in the implementation of the current language policy. Make a toolkit of practical tips to enhance language learning during work hours.
- Make sure that Dutch and English language support and translation services are available to persons elected to a participatory body, such as the University Council.
- Develop support material for receptive multilingualism (*lingua receptiva*) in meetings (e.g. tips for participants and guidelines for the role of the chair).
- Make an inventory of the support needed for current employees and students. Assess provision of English and Dutch language teaching for new and existing students. Review the current package of language support (GAP analysis).
- Review technology available to ease translations and its effectiveness in the translation needs of the UT. Review the use of AI tools and their availability, resulting in accessible tips and tricks for users, implementable idiom lists and a proposal to better support (individuals in key positions in) the organization in delivering “good enough” translations. The UT facilitates the safe and free use of these professional AI tools to support daily activities and communication purposes. Ensure ongoing review and assessment of the effectiveness of these tools against non-AI translations in delivering accurate and effective copy.
- Deliver a timeline and cost calculation for implementation.