

AFRIKAANS

LANGUAGE & CULTURE

Afrikaans is primarily spoken in South Africa and Namibia. Smaller numbers speak it in such countries as Lesotho, Swaziland, Zimbabwe and Zambia. Outside South Africa, Afrikaans, or local derivatives, are spoken in some mining and farming communities. Afrikaans is now spoken by about 9 million people. It is also the most widely spread language in South Africa, and is sometimes used as a lingua franca between speakers of other languages. Due to the emigration of many South Africans, there are an additional estimated 300,000 Afrikaans-speakers in the UK, with other substantial communities in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the USA, and elsewhere.

Afrikaans has about six-and-a-half million mother tongue speakers, about half of whom are the so-called "Coloureds". Large numbers of indigenous South Africans, Indians, and English-speaking whites also speak it as a second language. Geographically, it is the majority language of the western one-third of South Africa. It is also the largest first language in the adjacent southern one-third of Namibia. Much has been done in recent years to promote usage of the language.

During Apartheid, Afrikaans was seen by many as the language of the oppression. The 1976 school boycotts and riots in Soweto was partly a reaction against a language policy that legitimized Afrikaans while downgrading other languages.

STUDYING AFRIKAANS IN THE U.S.

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University of California - Los Angeles
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Please contact the National African Language Resource Center, or check the NALRC web site at <http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu>.



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SOUTH AFRICAN RUGBY FANS

NATIONAL AFRICAN LANGUAGE
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WHY STUDY AFRIKAANS?

Afrikaans is one of the eleven official languages of South Africa. Though an Indo-European language, Dutch and Afrikaans are mutually intelligible. During the 1800's Afrikaans was a spoken language while Dutch and English were the written languages. In 1926 Afrikaans replaced Dutch as the second official language of South Africa.

Knowledge of Afrikaans is essential for scholars of Afrikaans literature and culture, or those interested in southern Africa with a focus on anthropology, agriculture, sociology, economics, political science, linguistics (including the creole spoken on the mines called Fanakalo, and South African urban slang called Tsotsitaal or Isicamtho).

Afrikaans is of particular importance to those interested in the history and consequences of Apartheid given the prominence it received during this period. Historians and language planners will also benefit from studying Afrikaans in the context of language politics in pre and post independence South Africa.

South Africa has the largest and best developed economy on the continent, and professionals conducting trade or business in the country may find learning Afrikaans valuable. Those wanting to work with NGOs in South Africa and Namibia would also greatly benefit by knowing Afrikaans.

Research in the linguistics of Afrikaans is also an interesting field. Afrikaans has only evolved during the past four centuries, making it a relatively young language. Linguists interested in language genesis should consider learning the language because of the unique research opportunities it offers. Afrikaans has been influential in the development of South African English. Many Afrikaans loanwords have found their way into South African English, such as “veld”, “braai”, “boomslang”, and “lekker”. A few words in Standard English are derived from Afrikaans, such as “trek” and “spoor”.

WHO SPEAKS AFRIKAANS?

Afrikaans, a West Germanic language, has its roots in seventeenth century Dutch but it has been influenced by many languages including: English, Malay, German, Portuguese, French and some African languages. Until the 19th century Afrikaans acted only as a spoken language and Dutch was used as the formal and written language. When the “Boers” or Afrikaner farmers, acquired self-government after the second war of independence against the English (1899-1902), Dutch became a second official language alongside English. The language was promoted alongside Afrikaner nationalism after 1948 and played an important role in minority white rule in Apartheid South Africa. With the new constitution of South Africa (1996) it repositioned itself as one of the eleven official languages of South Africa.

Afrikaners are especially fond of braaivleis (barbecue), often just called “braai.” Biltong (dried strips of salted meat), melktert (milk tart), koeksisters (sweet pastries) are all popular. Afrikaner cuisine includes a wide variety of meats and vegetables, which are often flavored and sweetened.

Afrikaners have many interesting cultural features. Boeremusiek is a popular style of music in rural areas. The concertina is the key instrument, accompanied by guitar, banjo, piano, accordion and drums. It combines a lively dance rhythm with a lilting, sometimes plaintive and very distinctive sound. Afrikaners love outdoor life, and many popular pastimes involve being outside. Without a doubt, rugby is the favorite sport of Afrikaners, followed closely by cricket.



Schoolchildren in South Africa



Enjoying a braai in South Africa



Farmer in Namibia