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UCT steps up efforts to foster multilingualism

In an evolving world, the ability to speak more than one language has become second nature. As part of the University of Cape Town's (UCT) New Language Policy, the institution offers an isiXhosa short course at no cost to staff and students after the government identified the need to promote different languages at South Africa's institutions of higher learning.

Professor Mbulungeni Madiba, coordinator of + the UCT Multilingualism Education Project (MEP) said isiXhosa was selected as its language of choice and committed to providing students and staff with additional learning opportunities in the language since 2006. An Afrikaans short course was introduced to the campus community for the first time this year.

According to Professor Madiba, research indicates that many of the world's languages are in danger of extinction. At least one language dies every week, he said. And when a language dies, cultures, traditions and philosophies go with it. It's for this reason that the need to preserve all languages has increased dramatically.

"Many things go with a dying language, including morals. But language is a resource, not a problem," he added.

He described monolingualism – the ability to speak only one language – as an "exception", and jokingly referred to it as a disease "that needs to be cured" – and with a short course no less.

Said Professor Madiba: "Africa is the richest in terms of language. In the world right now, there are over 6 000 languages spoken, and a third of those languages are spoken on this continent. Our language policy at UCT is clear, we want students to be well-rounded in order to fit into the societies they will be part of after university."

ENDS

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