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## **Policy for the Treatment of Insulting and Sensitive Lexical Items in the *Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal***

### **Abstract**

The policy for the treatment of insulting and sensitive lexical items in the *Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal* states that all such lexical items be included, labelled and explained in the printed form of the *WAT*, but that no collocations and editorial usage examples be given with them. In the case of racist terms, but not with other kinds of insulting and sensitive lexical items, no hurtful synonyms, no semantic oppositions, references and citations or other usage examples will be included. This excluded information, with the exception of collocations and editorial usage examples, as well as all citations which reflect a negative attitude towards any population group, is included in an electronic version. The electronic manuscript can be made available to bona fide users on request and in accordance with the Bureau's current policy.

### **1. Introduction**

Language usage can be insulting to such an extent that the social structure of the language users is seriously affected. Such language usage may consequently lead not only to an alienation from the products of the language, but also from the language itself.

The climate in South Africa is particularly sensitive to the use of racist lexical items. At an international congress on the treatment of insulting and sensitive lexical items in the *Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal* (Stellenbosch, 8–10 Feb. 1994) the belief was expressed that this climate was of a temporary nature. At that stage it was nevertheless felt – although not by all – that the inclusion of racist lexical items in the *WAT* would be undesirable during this period of reconciliation. Such a move would not only hinder reconciliation, but it would at the same time result in greater alienation.

The Bureau then formulated a provisional policy for the treatment of insulting and sensitive lexical items in the *WAT* and sent it not only to all the participants in the above mentioned congress, but also to language

users, language practitioners, linguists and other important international lexicographers and metalexigraphers for their comments.

It was suggested that no racist lexical items be defined in the *WAT* and that, with a single exception, no racist compounds be included. Simplexes of this nature are included, but purely with a reference to the complete treatment in electronic form which is available on request. Details regarding both these simplexes as well as their compounds can then be found here.

The Bureau received diverging reactions to this policy. It ranged from approval to conditional approval to serious criticism.

The Bureau is of the opinion that macrostructural comprehensiveness with regard to offensive and sensitive lexical items is of the utmost importance. This ensures the possibility of labelling each such lemma properly. Microstructural comprehensiveness with regard to racist terms and other insulting and sensitive lexical items need however not be strictly maintained, as long as the explanation of meaning takes place and the user is warned against the hurtful nature of the items.

In the light of the latter opinion and of the criticisms received of the first version of its policy, and also as a result of the positive change in social relations in South Africa, an alternative policy as set out below was formulated.

## 2. Racist terms

Examples: *aia* (black woman servant, maid), *Asiaat* (Asiatic), *Boesman* (Bushman, San), *Hottentot* (Hottentot, Khoikhoi), *kaffer*, *Kleurling* ("Coloured person"), *koelie* (coolie, Indian person), *bitterbek* ("bitter mouth", brown or black person), *hotnot* ("Hottentot", brown person), *Kaaskop* ("cheese head", Dutchman), *Rooinek* ("red neck", Englishman), *witvel* ("white skin", white), *zool* (black), *hotnotsblymaak* ("Hottentot's happiness", drizzle which falls with brief interruptions), *Kafferafrikaans* (faulty Afrikaans as used by some blacks), *koeligriep* ("coolie influenza", Oriental influenza), *meidewerk* ("(black or brown) maid's work", inferior work), *witmanstaal* ("white man's language", European language), *hotnotskooigoed* ("Khoikhoi bedding", soft, grey, woolly herbaceous plant), *kafferblom* ("kaffer flower", poinsettia), *kakiebos* ("English soldier's bush", any of a range of weeds), *boesmanry's* ("Bushman's rice", termite larvae), *hottentotsgot* ("Hottentot's god", different kinds of carnivorous insects of the *Mantidae* family), *kafferkraai* ("kaffir crow", trumpeter hornbill), *Boesmanland* ("Bushman country", geographical name, which could be offensive in the meta-

language), *Hotnotsbaai* (“Hottentot’s bay”, geographical name, which could be offensive in the metalanguage), *Kafferberg* (“kaffir mountain”, geographical name, which could be offensive in the metalanguage), *Meidekop* (“(black or brown) maid’s hill”, geographical name), *Boere* (“(white) farmers”, Afrikaners; the police; prison warders), *Franse siekte* (“French illness”, syphilis), *Jood* (“Jew”, miserly, avaricious person; shrewd businessman; usurer), *Spanjools* (derogatory term for Spaniard), *’n Boesmantjie doodslaan* (“to kill a little Bushman”, to sleep badly; to enjoy a drink; to be restless, hurried), *los hotnot* (“loose Hottentot”, somebody without work or other commitments, who is free to come and go as he or she pleases, a (grass) widow or (grass) widower), *koelietaal vir iemand wees* (“to be coolie language for someone”, to be incomprehensible to somebody).

## 2.1 Treatment in the WAT

The concept “racist term” must be clearly defined in the User’s Guide for each volume of the WAT. Racist lexical items will be considered for inclusion only if they conform to the general usage criterion of the Bureau.

A distinction is drawn between wholly racist lexical items and partially racist lexical items. *Wholly racist lexical items* are simplexes such as *hotnot* and *kaffer* and compounds such as *hotnotstaal* (the language of the “hotnot”, a derogatory reference to Afrikaans), *kafferbrak* and *uitkaffer* (“kaffir out”, to insult someone) of which all the distinctions are racist. *Partially racist lexical items* are polysemic terms such as *boer* (white Afrikaner person, farmer) and *meidjie* (young, black or brown maid, endearing term for a woman) of which there are neutral semantic distinctions. The term *boer*, for example, can in the first place also mean “someone who farms”, while the term *meidjie* is used as a term of endearment for addressing female persons. This also applies to polysemic compounds of which the components themselves are not racist, but the whole is indeed so, for example *gifasem* (“poison breath”, black person) and *houtkop* (“wooden head”, black person).

### 2.1.1 Wholly racist lexical items

- All simplexes, compounds and expressions are included as lemmata and treated subject to the additional conditions below.

- Lemmata are labelled as follows: *rassisties; die gebruik hiervan is uiters neerhalend en aanstootlik* (racist; the usage is extremely derogative and offensive). This label is clearly explained in the User's Guide.
- The metalanguage is as neutral and sensitive as possible.
- A racist lexical item is referred to the only or most commonly used synonym for the definition in the case where one or more neutral synonyms exist, regardless of the common usage of the racist lexical item referred. No racist synonyms are, however, given at neutral or racist lexical items.
- No semantic oppositions, such as antonyms, are given.
- No illustrative material, i.e. collocations, editorial usage examples or citations, are given. The Bureau does not want to provide any encoding information regarding racist lexical items in the printed *WAT*.
- Expressions containing these lexical items are included and explained, but no racist or neutral synonyms, antonyms or references to other lexical items in the *WAT* and no illustrative material are given with such expressions. The expression *'n los hotnot* will for example be included in the article of the lemma *los* and the expression *koelietaal vir iemand wees* will be included in the article of the lemma *koelietaal*, but will be treated in the restricted manner referred to.
- The same manner of treatment applies to racist expressions under a neutral lemma, i.e. expressions of which none of the components are racist, but the whole is in fact so (e.g. *kort voor die stroois omgedraai hê*, "turned back just before reaching the hut", to be of mixed blood).
- For a complete treatment of the lemma concerned – including expressions containing the lemma – or of a racist expression under a neutral lemma, the user is referred in the User's Guide to the electronic manuscript of the Bureau, which is available in electronic form on request.

### 2.1.2 Partially racist lexical items

- All simplexes, compounds and expressions are included as lemmata and treated subject to the additional conditions below.
- Neutral semantic distinctions are treated in full.
- Racist semantic distinctions and expressions are labelled and are further treated exactly as wholly racist lexical items under 2.1.1 above.

The Bureau of the WAT reserves the right to review the policy regarding the treatment of racist terms after deliberation and as the climate concerning the experience of racist terms changes.

## 2.2 Treatment in the electronic manuscript

- All racist lexical items which have been included in the printed version of the WAT in a scaled-down form are treated more comprehensively in the electronic version and are stored in electronic form for availability. This is done subject to the additional conditions below.
- The labelling of these lexical items takes place in a careful and sensitive manner. Allowances are made to indicate differences in the degree of racism attached to the lexical item or semantic distinction. The labels used to indicate such differences in degree are explained in the User's Guide.
- The metalanguage is as neutral and sensitive as possible, and lexical items which are not likely to have a neutral value for language users in the future, for example *inboorling*, are avoided in the metalanguage.
- References to or the noting of synonyms or semantic oppositions are given with neutral as well as non-neutral lexical items.
- Collocations and editorial usage examples are not included.
- Usage examples in the form of citations are given, but are chosen carefully. No citations are included in which racist terms are used to express a negative attitude towards any population group. An utterance such as *'n Mens kan nie 'n kaffer met die bouwerk vertrou nie* (You can not trust a black person with the building process) is not acceptable as illustrative material. Furthermore, no citations are included in which the phenomenon, the practice or the consequences of racism are approved of.
- The contents of the electronic manuscript will be available on request and in terms of the prevailing policy of the Bureau.
- Articles of racist lexical items in both the printed WAT as well as the electronic manuscript are checked for correctness and sensitive treatment by advisors to the Bureau.

## 3. Sexist terms and sensitive lexical items which indicate stigmatized sexual phenomena, practices and preferences among people

Examples: *vrouelis* (woman's guile), *verwyf* ("effeminate"), *ouvroustories* (old wives' tales), *oujongnooi* ("old young girl", spinster),

*swakker vat* (weaker sex), *mannemoed* (manly courage), *oumansklier* ("old man's gland", prostate gland), *oujongkêrel* ("old young boy", bachelor), *gigolo* (man maintained by a woman), *hoer* (whore), *snol* (tart, harlot), *agtermekaarkêrel* ("behind one another chap", a pun on the neutral sense "fine chap", male homosexual), *haas* ("queer"), *kween* ("infertile cow", slut, childless or infertile woman), *manvrou* ("butch" woman), *moffie* ("queer"), *poefter* ("queer"), *sodomieter* (sodomiter), *trassie* ("transvestite", hermaphrodite).

This category is considered rather broadly, since not all sensitive lexical items contained in it are considered hurtful towards a certain sex or offend the sexuality of somebody.

The Bureau does not intend to perpetuate or entrench any sexually discriminating hierarchy, but aims instead to play a role in the equalization of the sexes. It also aims to be neutral towards different sexual phenomena, orientations, practices and preferences. In the light of this, the following treatment policy is followed:

- Sexist lexical items will only be considered for inclusion if they meet the general usage criterion of the Bureau.
- All sexist lexical items which meet this condition, are included and treated in full, with due observance of the additional conditions below.
- Sensitivity is practised in the metalanguage regarding terms which are experienced as sexist.
- Common or neutral pronouns and other references are used in the metalanguage. A repetition of he/she or him/her is generally experienced as disturbing by the reader. Therefore the following formulations are recommended: "Iem. wat ..." ("Someone who ..."), "Persoon wat ..." ("Person who ..."), "T.o.v. volwassenes" ("Regarding adults" instead of "Regarding a man or woman"), "T.o.v. kinders" ("Regarding children" instead of "Regarding boys or girls"), or "T.o.v. mense" ("Regarding people"), etc.
- Sexually offensive lemmata are clearly labelled as *seksisties* and the label is explained in the User's Guide to each volume of the *WAT*.
- Where possible and regardless of the conventionality of the non-neutral lexical item, the definition is given at the most commonly used neutral synonym. A descriptive definition would thus be given at *vrygesel* (bachelor), while *oujongkêrel* would be referred to *vrygesel*. Similarly, a descriptive definition would be given at *homoseksueel* (homosexual), while *moffie* would be defined as *man-like homoseksueel* (male homosexual), which contains an indirect reference to a synonym.

- Reference from the hurtful to the neutral synonym, and vice versa, takes place completely. *Oujongkêrel* will thus be referred to *vrygesel*, and vice versa. All sexually offensive synonyms at a neutral lemma are labelled clearly as sexist at the relevant lemma. Antonyms and other references are also given.
- Collocations and editorial usage examples are not included.
- Usage examples of use in the form of citations are given, but carefully chosen. No citations are included in which a sexist term is used to express a negative attitude towards a particular sex. An utterance such as *Geen man sal na 'n tipesie oujongnooi kyk nie* (No man would look at a typical spinster) is not acceptable. Neither are citations included in which the phenomenon, practice or consequences of sexism are approved of. In the choice of illustrative material a balance between citations referring to male role players and citations in which female role players feature, is aimed at. These conditions also apply to citations in articles of neutral lemmata.
- Expressions containing a sexist lexical item, for example *soos 'n viswyf skel* (to rave like a fish vending hag, fishwife), are included and treated in the normal manner, except that here too no collocations or editorial usage examples are given.
- In order to ensure that no discrimination through omission takes place against any sex or against any sexual preference, for example by ignoring certain lexical items on sexist grounds or because offence will be taken by other groups, all forms of literature will be excerpted on an even more representative manner for such material. In this way the Bureau hopes to present a correct and balanced picture of such material.
- Articles of lexical items in this category are checked for correctness and sensitive treatment by advisors to the Bureau.

#### **4. Sensitive lexical items which indicate stigmatized physical or mental conditions and phenomena among people**

Examples: *gebreklik* (decrepit), *gestrem* (retarded), *tartie* (derived from “retarded”), *kinderverlamming* (infantile paralysis), *haaslip* (“hare’s lip”, cleft palate), *boggel* (hunchback), *horrelvoet* (club foot), *skeel* (cross-eyed), *blind* (blind), *doof* (deaf), *doofstom* (deaf and dumb), *hardhorend* (hard of hearing), *swaksiende* (“weak-sighted”, with impaired vision), *stokblind* (“as blind as a stick”, totally blind), *stokdoof* (“as deaf as a stick”, totally deaf), *doof soos 'n kwartel* (“as deaf as a quail”, totally

deaf), *kruppel* (crippled), *lam* (lame), *melaats* (leperous), *mongool* (mongoloid), *idiot* (idiot), *eenvoudig van gees* (simpleminded), *geestelik versteurd* (mentally deranged), *sielsiek* ("soul-sick", mentally deranged), *vertraag* (retarded), *mal* (mad), *kranksinnig* (insane), *psigo-paat* (psychopath), *waterhoof* ("water head", hydrocephalus).

The sensitive lexical items in this category are not experienced as hurtful as racist terms because they are used to a lesser extent to deliberately insult those involved. Reference plays a larger role here than typification and insult. With this distinction in mind, the following methods of treatment are followed:

- Sensitive lexical items in this category will only be considered for inclusion if they meet the general usage criterion of the Bureau.
- All lexical items which meet this condition are included and treated in full with due observance of the additional conditions set out below.
- Full treatment includes the indication of synonyms, antonyms and other references. Reference from the hurtful to the neutral synonym and vice versa thus occurs. Each hurtful synonym under a neutral lemma is labelled accordingly at the relevant lemma.
- Sensitive lexical items are used with great circumspection in the metalanguage.
- Non-neutral lexical items are labelled. These labels are clearly explained in the User's Guide of each volume of the *WAT*.
- Where possible and regardless of the conventionality of the non-neutral lexical item, the definition is given at the neutral synonym most used. *Haaslip* will for example be referred to *gesplete lip* and *mongolisme* to *Downsindroom*. If no neutral synonym exists, the non-neutral lexical item is treated in full.
- In the case of sensitive lexical items such as *haaslip*, *horrelvoet*, *doof* and *blind*, there are differences in the degree of sensitivity attached to the lexical items. Somebody who is really blind, will experience the designation *blind* as reasonably neutral. Someone whose eyesight has been affected to a lesser degree, will experience *blind* not only as a misnomer, but also as injurious. The same applies to *doof* x *hardhorend*. The possibility of including a semantic distinction which distorts the facts must be guarded against. A label at the lemma *blind* will indicate that it is sometimes experienced as injurious by those called such.
- Differences in degree occur not only between semantic distinctions within the same article (for example *blind*), but also between different lexical items. Therefore *haaslip* should have a more



markedly censuring label than for example *horrelvoet*. *Haaslip* is particularly injurious because a human characteristic is related to that of an animal. The same applies to lexical items where use is made of intensification. Thus *stokblind* is more injurious than *blind* and *so doof soos 'n kwartel* is more injurious than *doof*. In the latter case there is even increased injuriousness: not only does intensification through comparison take place, but the comparison is moreover with an animal characteristic. All these differences play a role in the distinction of degrees by means of labels.

- Collocations and editorial usage examples are not included.
- Usage examples in the form of citations are given, but are carefully chosen. No citations are included in which a hurtful designation of this kind is used to express a negative attitude towards persons who show stigmatized physical or mental conditions or phenomena. An utterance such as *Weens hulle onselfstandigheid is die blindes 'n las op die samelewing* (Due to their dependence, the blind are a burden to society) is not quotable. Neither are citations included in which discrimination in this sphere is regarded with approval.
- Expressions in which lexical items occur which point to stigmatized physical or mental conditions and phenomena among people are given strongly condemnatory labels. The relevant expressions (cf. *blind soos 'n mol* ("as blind as a mole", very blind) and *melaats wees* ("to be leperous", to be avoided) are treated in full.
- Articles of lexical items in this category are checked for correctness and sensitive treatment by advisors to the Bureau.

### **5. Sensitive lexical items within a social, political and religious structure**

Examples: *armlastige* ("poor nuisance", pauper), *agtergeblewene* ("person left behind", disadvantaged person, social drop-out), *minderbevoorregte* (less privileged), *onderontwikkelde* (underdeveloped), *plakker* (squatter), *lokasie* ("location", ghetto), *bloubaadjie* ("blue jacket", traffic policeman), *hond* ("dog", policeman), *platpote* ("flat foot", policeman), *kapitalis* (capitalist), *kommunis* (communist), *civics*, *comrade*, *demand*, *toi-toi* (dance of rallying demonstrators), *regime*, *struggle*, *terroris* (terrorist), *vryheidsvegter* (freedom fighter), *Dopper* ("villager", derived from Dutch "dorper"; member of the Reformed Church of South Africa), *Gatjeeper* ("wearer of the anal coat", derived from "gatjapon", tailcoat; member of the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa), *heppiekleppie* ("happy clappy", member of a

church where hands are clapped), *Katools* ("Catholic", foolish, lecherous woman), *soos 'n Katolieke bid* (to pray like a Catholic, with eyes half open in order to peep), *dogterkerk* ("daughter church", church denomination lesser than another), *sektekerk* (sectarian church), *Gam* (Ham, Biblical figure; brown or black person), *Mohammedaan* (offensive term for an Islamic person), *Moslem* (instead of *Moesliem*, Muslim), *Slams* (offensive term for Islamic), *soos in 'n Jodekerk wees* ("to be as in a Jewish synagogue", noisy).

All lexical items in this category could be used or experienced as insulting, hurtful or alienating. Compare in this regard *agtergeblewene*, *armlastige*, *plakker*, *regime*, *platpote*, *terroris*. The degree of humiliation is not the same with each lexical item and is also not always predictable. The policy for the treatment of such lexical items follows below:

- Sensitive lexical items in this category will only be considered for inclusion if they meet the general usage criterion of the Bureau.
- All lexical items which meet this condition are included and treated in full with due consideration to the additional conditions set out below.
- Treatment in full includes the indication of synonyms, antonyms and other references. References from the hurtful to the neutral synonym, and vice versa, for example, are given in full. Each hurtful synonym under a neutral lemma is labelled appropriately at the relevant lemma.
- These lexical items are as far as possible not used in the meta-language.
- Appropriate labels indicate the sensitive nature of dissimilar cases, for example *regime*, *platpoot* and *bloubaadjie* (neerhalend, "derogatory") versus *struggle*, *demand* and *comrade* (in bepaalde politieke kringe as distansierend ervaar). These labels are explained in the User's Guide of each volume of the WAT.
- Collocations and editorial usage examples are not included.
- Usage examples in the form of citations are given but carefully chosen. No citations are used in which social or political groups, religions or religious bodies are offended. An utterance like *Die plakkers het vanweë ontoereikende behuising baie koud gekry toe die Kaapse winter toegeslaan het* (Due to the inadequate housing, the squatters were very cold when the Cape winter set in) is acceptable, while *Die plakkers leef soos diere in krotte* (The squatters live like animals in hovels) is not. Furthermore, no citations are included in which the abuses of a certain social or political structure are approved of.

- In order not to discriminate in particular against different political and religious groups through omission, for instance by ignoring their linguistic expressions on the ground of ideological or theological apathy or because certain lexical items could offend other groups, all kinds of literature will be excerpted in an even more representative manner also for such material. In this way the Bureau hopes to give a correct and balanced image of such material. This applies particularly to words such as *comrade*, *toi-toi*, *struggle* and *vryheidsvegter*.
- Articles of lexical items in this category are checked by the Bureau's external advisors for correctness and sensitive treatment. For this purpose articles of sensitive lexical items in the field of politics and religion are submitted to knowledgeable and recognised representatives of political groups and religious bodies.

## 6. Obscene and vulgar lexical items, abusive language and swear-words

Examples: *bedonderd* ("to be with, like thunder", hard-headed, difficult, angry), *fok* (fuck; also as swear-word), *fokken* (fucking), *kakpraat* (talk crap), *opdonder* ("thunder up", beat up), *opneuk* ("fuck up", beat up), *opmoer* ("mother up", beat up), *naai* ("sew", fuck), *pis* (piss), *skyt* (shit), *stront* (shit; also as abusive language and swear-word), *esel* (mule; as abusive language), *hond* (dog; as abusive language), *vark* (pig; as abusive language), *moerskont* ("mother cunt"), *verdomp* (damn), *vuilgoed* (rubbish, as abusive language), *allemagtig* (Almighty; as swear-word), *bliksem* ("lightning"; as swear-word), *hel* (hell; as swear-word), *Here* (God; as swear-word).

All the lexical items in this category can offend or can be used to insult and injure or can be experienced as such. The degree of hurtfulness is not the same with each lexical item and also not always predictable. Obscene and vulgar language is not for example regarded in every company or social atmosphere as being in equally bad taste. In the case of abusive language and swear-words, it is the social attitude of the user which is of primary importance. However, the meaning and connotation is also significant here. People are for example usually more offended if in abusive language they are compared to a pig rather than to an ass or a buffalo. In swear-words where the Deity is mentioned by name, the religious attitude and affiliation of the hearer is in turn of great importance to the experience thereof. The following treatment policy is therefore followed by the Bureau:

- Sensitive lexical items in this category will only be considered for inclusion if they meet the general usage criterion of the Bureau.
- All lexical items which meet this condition, are included and treated in full with due consideration to the further conditions set out below.
- Treatment in full includes the indication of synonyms, antonyms and other references. Reference from the hurtful to the neutral synonym, and vice versa, thus occurs. Each hurtful synonym under a neutral lemma is labelled appropriately at the relevant lemma.
- Sensitive lexical items are labelled. These labels are clearly explained in the User's Guide of each volume of the *WAT*.
- Where possible and regardless of the conventionality of the non-neutral lexical item, the definition is given at the neutral synonym most used. Thus *pis* (in its different parts of speech functions) will for instance be referred to *urine* and *urineer*. If no neutral synonym exists, the non-neutral lexical item is treated in full.
- These lexical items are, as far as possible, not used in the meta-language, except in their neutral values, as with *esel*, *hond*, *vark*, *vuilgoed*, *bliksem*, *hel*, *Here*.
- Collocations and editorial usage examples are not included.
- Usage examples in the form of citations are given, but are carefully chosen. No citations are used in which religious, social or political groups may be offended. This also applies to citations in articles of neutral lemmas.
- Articles of such lexical items which apply to religions with which the editors are not fully familiar, are checked by recognised advisors from these religious bodies as regards correctness and sensitive treatment.

## 7. Conclusion

To summarize, the Bureau's standpoint underlying its policy can be stated as follows:

- The Bureau is constantly aiming at comprehensiveness in the recording of Afrikaans lexicon.
- The Bureau is constantly aiming to make the macrostructure as well as the microstructure of the *WAT* as comprehensive or rather as representative as possible.
- The comprehensiveness of the microstructure does not have to be reflected exclusively by the printed version of the *WAT*. The elec-

tronic medium can consequently be employed to supplement the printed *WAT* in the field of sensitive lexical items in order to present a representative picture of Afrikaans.

The Bureau believes that with this policy for the treatment of insulting and sensitive lexical items in the *WAT* it shows not only an understanding of a problem which caused great pain, indignation and interpersonal alienation in South Africa, but that it is also doing something to help rectify the problem without becoming disloyal to its assignment and typological nature.