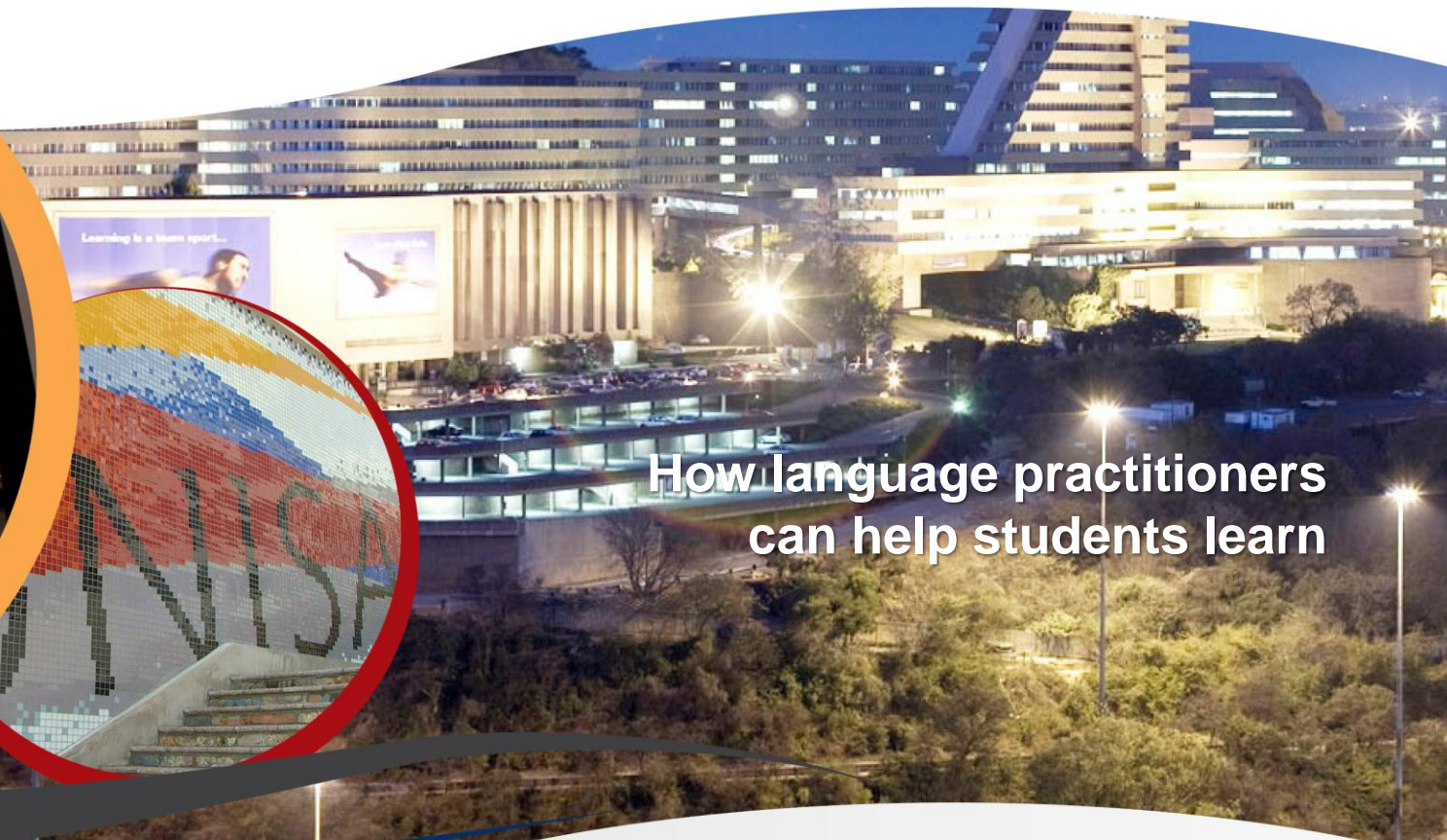# The role of a language services department in facilitating learning in a multilingual student environment: the case of the University of South Africa (Unisa)

How language practitioners can help students learn

Define tomorrow.

UNISA | university of south africa

1. Background

The University of South Africa (Unisa) is Africa's leading Open Distance Learning institution with a large student enrolment of more than 300 000 students from diverse language groups from within and outside South Africa's borders.

2. Language usage

South Africa's 11 official languages

Afrikaans, English (Germanic)

IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, IsiNdebele, SiSwati (Nguni group)

Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana (Sotho group)

Tshivenda

Xitsonga   and more …

3. Study material delivery

- Written word
- Visual aids
- E-tutors and face-to-face tutors (video conferencing)

Directorate Language Services

4. Team approach

- Different roleplayers
- academic staff
- instructional designers
- graphic artists
- multimedia staff
- Department of Study Material Production and Delivery

5. Intervention

"Good editors may be likened to those *crystal-clear prisms* which form a vital part of a pair of binoculars. They are not there to alter the view or change the scene, but to make it *clearer* and *closer*." (Mackenzie)

"The skilled editor pays ruthless attention to detail … which can mean the difference between your writing being understood or misunderstood, being accepted or rejected … between a reader finishing an article or becoming bored." (Kaplan)

Quoted in Van der Poel, K., Carstens, WAM & Linnegar, J. 2012. *Text editing: a handbook for students and practitioners*. Antwerp: UPA.

6. Ensuring quality

- Knowledge of grammar
- General knowledge
- Editing skills
- Ongoing training

7. The role of the text editor

- Correct grammar, spelling and syntax, idiomatic usage

- Consistency (style guidelines)

- Content and structure coherent

- Correctness of facts and subject terminology

- Relevant and clarifying examples, case studies

The role of the text editor (cont)

- Accuracy, readability and consistency
- Functional visuals
- Appropriate register and style
- Clear meaning; no ambiguities
- No plagiarism
- Technical elements

8. Needs of multilingual environment

- Good English source text
- Translation as aid
- Development and standardisation
- Modules at risk

9. The role of the language practitioner as translator

- Translate edited English text with target student group in mind

- Retain meaning

- Correct subject-specific terminology

- Avoid misunderstanding by adding English terms from the prescribed material in brackets

- Compile/update terminology lists and translation memories

10. Conclusion

Language practitioners provide an indispensable link between the authors of documents and the target audience by ensuring that the intended meaning is conveyed and received in the best way possible, and that this is supported by translations in a multilingual environment.