# The linguist's role in the process of name changes: The South African case

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Place name changes are nothing new in the history of humankind. In Poland, there were many name changes in the years following the Second World War into the mid-fifties, and after the collapse of Communism waves of changes up till now. In South Africa, the biggest name changes came after the end of Apartheid. After 300 years of white rule the government was taken over by the predominantly black party – the African National Congress – headed by Nelson Mandela. There were no major changes immediately, but in the course of the past few years the changes intensified and seemingly became a politically tool.

In an analysis of "black" and "white" media coverage of the past year the following issues were predominant: Name changes are important to commemorate unsung heroes of the past, for standardisation, to remove the remaining traces of Apartheid, to confirm democracy and to portray a true African society. The arguments against name changes include that they lead to confusion, are not as important as other issues such as poverty relief and development, are a waste of money, are aimed at the Afrikaner, thus dividing communities, are only about the ANC, and Afrikaner names are also African.

With the YLMP's slogan in mind, the presenters of this paper wish to address the following question: What is the role of the linguist in a socio-political sensitive case such as name changes? In order to answer the question, the presenters will give a short overview of the South African history, show the importance of names in the African culture and discuss the results of the media analysis. In the second part, the ways in which name changes were dealt with in Poland and South Africa respectively will be compared. Based on the findings in the first two parts, the paper will be closed with a task description of the linguist in the process of name changing.

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