

## Facebook Goes 'Vleisboek'

Written by Rudi Prinsloo

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South Africans who logged onto Facebook last week may have struggled if they did not understand Afrikaans.

Some South African users of Facebook were automatically switched to Afrikaans during the social networking site's much publicised upgrade last Wednesday.

Blogs and chatrooms quickly filled with posts from puzzled users, with one renaming the site "Vleisboek".

Said one post on [www.mydigitallife.co.za](http://www.mydigitallife.co.za): "Guess the shock I had this morning when I log on to my Facebook page to find that everything is in Afrikaans.

"And there's a little banner that asks me to be part of their new initiative to translate Facebook into Afrikaans whilst these guys have already imposed the Afrikaans version on me without asking me.

"... why not ask first before imposing it on me? Never mind the fact Afrikaans was the only language chosen in the sea of 11 official languages."

Facebook, however, denied it had unilaterally imposed Afrikaans on South Africans.

"When we make new languages available on Facebook, we do not automatically switch our users to the new language unless their browser settings are already set to that language," said spokeswoman Elizabeth Linder in an email interview.

"In the case of Afrikaans, for example, users whose browser settings were in Afrikaans would have been automatically switched over... If users' browser settings are not in Afrikaans, they can choose to switch the language option.

"On rare occasions, when we cannot detect browser settings, we do our best to use other information to ascertain whether or not the user is likely to use the new language. Users can change the language they prefer at any time," she said.

When asked why Facebook chose Afrikaans over South Africa's other official languages, Linder did not provide an answer, writing instead: "By using our translation application, which enables users to help translate Facebook, we are able to translate and subsequently launch new languages as quickly as possible."

She said there was no set number of languages for the site. More than 40 languages had been put on the site and 50 more were currently under translation.

She added: "Our hope is that the number of languages on Facebook will enable... users to connect with their friends, family, and coworkers in the language they feel most comfortable using."

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