



QUALITY INTERPRETING SERVICE: THE PARLIAMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA AS A CASE STUDY

By

Thomas Phaswana Ntuli

Supervisor: Dr Harold Lesch

BACKGROUND

- ❑ **The Constitution of the Republic of SA (Section 6 (1) Act 108 of 1996)** –outlines 11 official languages as Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu, plus South African Sign Language.
- ❑ **Bill of Rights (Section 30 Act 108 of 1996)** – Provides use of languages of choice during Parliamentary debates.
- ❑ **The need of interpretation service in Parliament** – bridging the gap.
- ❑ **Establishment of the Interpretation unit** – consists of 44 language practitioners positions to interpret parliamentary proceedings.
- ❑ **The Parliamentary Language Services Section (LSS) is comprised of three units:**
 - a) Interpreting Unit.
 - b) Reporting Unit.
 - c) Translation Unit,

Introduction

□ **What is interpretation?**

□ **Two modes of interpreting in The Parliament of South Africa:**

- a) **Simultaneous interpreting:** highly complex discourse performance during which language perception, comprehension, analyzing, reformulation and production operations are carried out virtually in parallel and within tight time constraints (Tommola and Hyona (1990:180).
- b) **Consecutive interpreting:** The interpreter has the liberty to being the same physical space as the source language speaker, has time to listen and take notes and only conveys the intended message after the speaker is finished.

Introduction cont..

- ❑ **South African Translators Institute (SATI)** - sole accreditation body currently for which I am an accredited professional member. Most of the interpreters in Parliament do not belong to this body because they cannot afford its annual subscription fees.
- ❑ **Quality in interpreting** - basic concern underlying the process of professionalisation. Australia remains unique in the sense that it has a National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI). This body gives accreditation to training courses and administers tests for the recognition of different levels of vocational linguistic qualifications in more than forty languages (Franz Pöchhacker (2004: 30)).
- ❑ The South African Language Council Act provides for the establishment of an accreditation body, this body is not yet established in South Africa to accredit interpreters.

•

Main problem: Quality

- What is quality?
- The notion of quality in respect of simultaneous interpreting has varying interpretations.
- Quality from the interpreter`s perspective.
- Quality from the user`s perspective.
- Quality from the speaker`s perspective.

This paper is premised on the following assumption: Whether complaints continually received from MPs that **the quality of simultaneous interpreting in POSA is not up to standard**, are justified or not.

While premised on the abovementioned assumption, this paper is further driven by the concern that, if MPs complaints are not attended to, the resulting situation could likely lead to MPs to no longer have interest of using their home languages during House(s) debates, but resorting to using English only, a situation that will have negative impact on the promotion and development of multilingualism as well as previously disadvantaged languages.

Research Question and Hypothesis

- Aspects such as recruitment, level of training or qualifications, working conditions of interpreters etc. are accorded differing values. Consequently, a number of research questions worth investigating in the context of simultaneous interpreting offered in the Parliament of South Africa (POSA), were raised. They are as follows:
- Does the simultaneous interpreting practical test undertaken by interviewees determine quality in simultaneous interpreting?
- Does Interpreting Unit provide formal training in simultaneous interpreting to interpreters before they assume their duties?
- Are the recruitment advertisements relevant to attract most suitable candidates for interpreting positions?
- Do interviews panels constitute language and technical specialists who are able to select the best suitable candidates?
- Are the working conditions of interpreters conducive to the delivery of quality interpreting services?

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this study was to investigate:

- a) The quality of interpreting service rendered in the Parliament of South Africa
- b) Aspects surrounding recruitment and appointment of interpreters which is vital for the actual service.

In order to obtain the above stated goals interpreting literature has been reviewed. During literature review the following have been reviewed among others:

- Quality from the interpreter`s perspective.
- Quality from the user`s perspective.
- Quality from the speaker`s perspective.

The study has among others investigated:

- The advertisements used to recruit language practitioners.
- The interview process for short-listed candidates.
- Interpreting assessment tests conducted during interview process.
- The provision of interpreting training.

Methodology

- ❑ **Theoretical component** focusses on literature review.
- ❑ **Empirical component** focusses on the actual data that will be gathered and the interpretation thereof.
- ❑ After obtaining necessary permission from the Secretary of Parliament to conduct empirical research in Parliament:
 - Relevant interpreting literature was reviewed.
 - Attending interpreters` interviews as an observer.
 - Conducting unstructured interviews with some supervisors` of interpreters
 - Recording interpreters while interpreting in the House(s).
 - Reviewing current advertisements for interpreters in Parliament.
 - Reviewing the testing method used by Language services section during the interviews of interpreters.
 - Developed and distributed questionnaires to relevant stakeholders for their inputs regarding the interpreting service in the Parliament of South Africa.

Findings of the study

❑ **Interpreting service is not up to standard**

- The study reveals that 59% of the sample of MPs have a problem with inaccuracy of interpreting service.

❑ **No formal training for interpreters**

- The study reveals that 32% of the sample of MPs recommends that interpreters should first received intensive training before assuming their interpreting duties.

- The study also reveals that 65% of the sample of interpreters joined Parliament without interpreting skills and they have not received training.

❑ **The provision of Members` speeches**

- The study reveals that 18% of the sample of MPs is of the view that provision of speeches to interpreters could attribute to improvement to quality of interpreting.

Findings of the study cont.

❑ Working conditions not conducive

- The study reveals that 77% of the sample of interpreters says working conditions in Parliament are not conducive to deliver quality interpreting service.

❑ Recruitment of interpreters

- No interpreting related questions asked to interpreting candidates.
- during practical test only English is tested, candidates first language not tested.

Recommendations

- Training of interpreters
- Payment of affiliation fees for language practitioners
- Provision of members speeches
- Improving working conditions (time in the booth)
- Increasing man power
- Recruitment of interpreters
- Presentation during members training

THANK YOU

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the following people:

- The Almighty God for making it possible for me to compile and present this paper.
- My Supervisor, Dr Harold Lesch.
- The Parliament of South Africa for paying my study fees and giving me permission to conduct research.
- Members of Parliament who willingly and actively participated in my study.
- All my colleagues in the Parliamentary Language Services Section who fully participated in my study.
- The Language Services Section Manager Mr Steven Letsatsi for offering me an opportunity to present this paper on behalf of the section.
- To access my full thesis google Quality interpreting: Thomas Phaswana Ntuli

