Harold Lesch

A descriptive overview of the interpreting service in Parliament

Language and language policy played a seminal role in the transformation of South Africa. The legislative framework laid down a multilingual language policy with the recognition of eleven official languages. Besides questions regarding its economic viability, there is a perception that the language policy is merely an attempt at political correctness. Nevertheless, societal issues and linguistic realities in the public arena necessitate that language service delivery in a multilingual country be granted a prominent role. This article portrays the reality of an interpreting service within the context of the public domain with specific reference to the highest state organs – nationally and provincially – as transformed entities, but also critically investigates the tasks to be fulfilled by language practitioners.

'n Beskrywende oorsig van die Parlementêre tolkdiens

Taal en taalbeleid het 'n belangrike rol in die transformering van Suid-Afrika gespeel. Die grondwetlike raamwerk het 'n veeltalige taalbeleid daar gestel deur die erkenning van elf amptelike tale. Benewens die vrae oor die ekonomiese lewensvatbaarheid is daar 'n persepsie dat die taalbeleid bloot 'n poging was vir politieke korrektheid. Kwessies in die samelewing en taalwerklikhede in die openbare arena, noodsaak egter dat taaldiens in 'n veeltalige land 'n prominente rol te speel hê. Hierdie artikel skets die realiteit van die tolkdiens binne die konteks van die openbare sektor met spesifieke verwysing na die hoogste staatsinstellings – nasionaal en provinsiaal – as getransformeerde entiteite, maar bied ook 'n kritiese ondersoek van die rolle wat deur taalpraktisyns vervul word.

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SUN M☉DIA
BLOEMFONTEIN

I n a multilingual society, effective communication is essential for the functioning of public servants on all levels, including politicians. Citizens from different cultural and language groups have started to play a key role within the public debate. Consequently, within the context of communication across language barriers – national and provincial – it is necessary to communicate easily and precisely. The dawn of a new political dispensation in South Africa was characterised by tolerance on various levels of society and transformation on various fronts, including the public domain. In the language arena, these changes culminated in the bandwagon of multilingualism onto which many a language professional and language practitioner jumped. The advantages of a multilingual language policy are obvious in a culturally and linguistically diverse society, but the efficiency of its implementation is often hampered by the practicalities involved. After 15 years of democracy it is possible to revisit some of the programmes that were initiated. This article presents a critical overview of the implementation of the multilingual language policy with specific reference to the interpreting service in the highest state organ, namely the South African Parliament.

In order to promote multilingualism, people not only need to speak their own language with pride, but also need to cultivate respect and tolerance for the languages of others. It is not an easy task to change attitudes and perceptions regarding language diversity, and it requires the cooperation and support of the broader community. This support is best ensured through the training and development of language practitioners, including translators, interpreters and lexicographers. The greatest challenge, however, is to foster a new generation of public administrators as well as a society at large that embrace the practical, often time-consuming difficulties associated with attempts at empowering language users. One particular difficulty is the use of language intermediaries, as members from diverse linguistic and cultural groupings are elected as Members of Parliament and appointed to the state organs. Official speeches are henceforth more tailored to the needs of a multilingual audience, including secondary target listeners, such as visitors to Parliament or members of the public. It has become necessary for individuals to

adapt their approach to and technique of communication to comply with the changing circumstances. In order to communicate effectively within a linguistically diverse conference-like context such as the National Parliament, an interpreting service could be employed in order to convey the message in all official languages to enhance comprehension. Extended communication facilitated by interpreters should play a pivotal role in the highest state organs to enhance effective oral communication.

It should be noted that the role of an interpreter in an emerging multilingual state organ entails more than the provision of an efficient simultaneous (or consecutive) interpreting service. In addition to the obvious prerequisite that the interpreter should be proficient in at least two languages, his/her job description includes a number of non-interpreting activities. The parliamentary interpreter is expected to interpret, translate, edit and proofread as well as to provide assistance regarding terminology development. These language-related activities are essential in language practice, but should be complemented by certain functional choices that need to be made.

This article draws on aspects of the requirements for the professional conference interpreter as dictated by the South African market and the (under)utilisation of the service. It starts from the viewpoint that the interpreter in Parliament should be more than merely a conference interpreter – s/he should be a language professional in his/her own right who facilitates communication between speakers of different languages. The following questions arise: Why are interpreters – powerful individuals who have occupied centre stage since the origins of cross-cultural communication and who represent more than the sum of their linguistic competencies – regarded as mere language conduits or even invisible parties in communicative events? Why is their ability to perform complex linguistic and informational tasks always underplayed (Angelelli 2004: 44)?

The aim of this article is to review the reality of the interpreting service within the context of Parliament as well as the underutilisation thereof, and to critically characterise the role to be fulfilled by interpreters within this context.

1.   Theoretical background

According to Chernov (2004: 6), conference interpreting is a complex communicative activity, performed concurrently with the audiological perception of an oral discourse offered once only, under conditions imposing strict limits on available processing time and the amount of information that can be processed. This implies that the simultaneous interpreter is denied his/her proximity to the source-language speaker as is the case in consecutive interpreting. In the case of simultaneous interpreting the interpreter operates from a booth, from where s/he only listens through headphones and views the speaker either on the monitor screen or live in the conference room. There is consequently no opportunity to ask the source-language speaker to clarify or repeat what has already been said. This may be the reason why simultaneous interpreting is the most difficult and stressful mode of interpreting.

Accordingly, performance problems do not only occur in fast, information-dense or technical speeches, but also in clear, slow speech segments in which no particular obstacle can be detected (Gile 1995: 159). Performance problems are exacerbated in the case of densely informative speeches or highly technical speeches (cf Gile's Gravitational Model, 1995), and are compounded by the possibility of an insufficient understanding of the source language.

Gile's (1995) effort models were developed to describe the interplay between different sets of cognitive operations involved in simultaneous interpreting and consecutive interpreting. These sets of operations were grouped into "efforts", which compete for a limited amount of processing capacity. The listening and analysing effort (L) includes all reception and comprehension operations; the memory effort (M) designates the storing of information in the interpreter's short-term memory for the interval between the moment the speech is heard and the completion of its formulation, and the production effort (P) represents all operations extending from the mental representation of the message to its actual formulation in the target language. These three efforts make demands on the interpreter's processing capacity, together with a coordination effort (C), which

represents the additional cognitive load required for managing the three efforts simultaneously. When the sum of the total requirement exceeds the capacity, the necessary cognitive balance between the efforts is disrupted, resulting in failure sequences with different errors and omissions. It becomes essential for the interpreter to balance these requirements, as only limited mental energy is available for coordinating this array of mental efforts.

The successful coordination of these efforts is undoubtedly one of the variants that determine the quality of the interpreting product. Quality assurance has become an issue of the profession's reputation as well as a basis for assuring good working conditions and adequate remuneration (Kalina 2005: 769). Both professional interpreters and clients should therefore take an interest in quality assurance policies and guidelines (Pöchhacker 1994).

According to Kramer aus Bochum (2006: 4-5), the European Organisation for Quality Control defines quality as the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy a given need (cf Wenger 1981: 24). With respect to the concept of quality in interpreting, there are various references to its elusiveness – it is hard to grasp and difficult to define (Shlesinger *et al* 1997: 122). Ackermann *et al* (1997: 262) compare the notion of interpreting quality with the Loch Ness monster, because of its "elusiveness and the fact that once seen both are immediately recognizable". The only point on which there is general agreement is that quality may mean very different things to different people (Kalina 2005: 771). Or, even if there is a certain consensus on quality recognising its importance, this consensus lacks substance (Kahane 2000). In addition, there appears to be a "gap between ideal (academic) quality and situated (real-world) quality" (Straniero 2003: 135).

Real-world quality should thus begin with the client's needs and end with the client's perception – also in the case of Parliament. This quality is influenced by numerous variables as Partridge (2008: 71-9) indicates. Even though she refers to interpreting in an educational context, the aspects that determine the quality of the interpreting service in this context are also relevant for conference interpreting and include, among others, a noisy environment; the audibility of

the speech delivery; accent, intonation and rhythm; speed of speech delivery; complexity of informational content; differences between the syntax of the source language and that of the target language as well as incorrect language usage. All these problem triggers have the potential to influence the interpreter's performance in a parliamentary setup.

These ideas are also echoed by Pienaar (2006) and Cenkova (1998: 164-5), who state that certain factors can influence the quality of the interpreting service, especially aspects that relate to the original speaker: the delivery speed of the original speech; whether the original speaker is a mother-tongue speaker of a specific language; the fluency and clarity of the speech, and the use of a so-called world language (English) versus the mother tongue where a heavy accent might cause the interpreter to find certain words unrecognisable. For the interpreter to deliver a faithful rendition of the speech, these aspects should be taken into account. Nevertheless, the quality is influenced not only by the original speaker, but also by aspects relating to the apparatus, the availability of relevant documentation beforehand, the visibility of the interpreter and a realistic perception of what one can expect of an interpreting service (Pienaar 2006).

It is thus no surprise that for Verhoef (2008: 119):

> [t]he notion of *interpreting competence* is a broad term that attempts to strike a balance between the necessary knowledge, skills attitude and aptitude needed for the comprehension and processing of a source text, on the one hand, and the demonstrable ability to produce an accurate and fluent target text, on the other hand.

Similarly Pöchhacker (2002) acknowledges quality as an essentially relative and multidimensional concept that should be approached with different evaluation methods from a variety of perspectives. This article supports this view of quality, namely not as a self-contained notion but as a complex, overarching theme in which all aspects of the interpreter's product and performance – textuality, source and target text equivalence, communicative effect and role performance – play an integral part.

2. Context

According to authors in Bayley (2004), the activities of a parliament are of a linguistic nature. A parliament produces talk and subsequently texts. Broadly speaking, the objectives of parliamentary discourse reveal global similarities: to legislate or contest legislation, to represent diverse interests, to scrutinise the government's activities, to influence opinion and to recruit and promote political actors. Nevertheless, parliamentary discourse is subject to variation on all linguistic levels on the basis of history, cultural specificity and political culture in particular.

It should be added that, although parliaments fulfil broadly similar functions on a cross-cultural level, they are sensitive to the context of culture and history. This would involve a number of linguistic and non-linguistic variables such as the general rules of politeness, tolerance of aggressive linguistic behaviour, preference towards abstract or concrete political language, as well as concepts of irony and humour, in a given culture (Bayley 2004: 14). In addition, parliamentary discourse is ritualised and rule-bound; it is governed by tradition, rules and regulations which new members are required to respect (Bayley 2004: 14).

The vision of the National Parliament of South Africa is to build an effective people's parliament that is responsive to the needs of the people and is driven by the ideal of procuring a better quality of life for all citizens. From a linguistic perspective this implies that Members of Parliament should be able to communicate across language borders with the citizens of the country, while using the language of their choice – even if the citizens constitute the secondary target audience of the political debate in the parliamentary context.

Parliament gives expression to the country's democracy and entrenches representability in accordance with the linguistic compilation and language policy of the country. The Language Policy Implementation Project (LPIP) (2003) of Parliament refines and inculcates these constructs by integrating multilingual communication into the daily activities and outreaches of the institution.

The political mandate of the LPIP emanates from the linguistic rights entrenched in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996). The importance of this project is underlined by data published by Statistics SA that more than 38.7 million citizens – more than 90% of the population – do not use English as their mother tongue (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2007: 28). This project aligns functional multilingualism as a constitutional requirement with the institutional value of people-centeredness and provides the impetus to change the institutional culture to become a more inclusive and representative reflection of the country's diversity:

> One of the aims of LPIP is to develop sufficient capacity, both at a functional system and human resource level, increasing and balancing the linguistic output and input. This implies the building of sufficient internal capacity of the project's primary customer, […] and ensuring quality multilingual service delivery in all 11 official languages and SA Sign Language to the customers of the institution, internally and externally by using a phasing-in approach over a proposed period of six years (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2007: 28).

As part of this initiative, conference interpreters were appointed to address the immediate demands of the interpreting service in both Houses of Parliament. In order to render a simultaneous interpreting service, various infrastructural, technical and functional systems that meet industry standards have been introduced. As a direct result of the project, the simultaneous interpreting service outputs in the Houses increased by 550%, providing a continuous service in all official languages during parliamentary proceedings (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2007: 28-9).

The Language Policy of Parliament (2003) has as its main objective to set out rules with regard to the use of the official languages in Parliament:

> Members of Parliament have the right to use any of the 11 official languages, as well as South African Sign Language, in the National Assembly, the National Council of Provinces and in Committee meetings. The speeches will be simultaneously interpreted into all 11 official languages.
>
> Interpreting services will be made available in the galleries for visitors, Members of other Houses visiting and the media

Since its adoption in 2003, the language policy of Parliament has guided and determined the language usage and interpreting service in the National Assembly (NA) and the National Council of Provinces (NCOP). The policy was envisaged to be implemented in two phases. Against the background of the abovementioned multilingual language policy, the interpreting service delivery has recently undergone dramatic changes. Until 2002 and the earlier part of 2003, Parliament made use of *ad hoc* interpreters. Members of the National Parliament have to indicate beforehand whether they will need an interpreter and for which language combination, simply because the interpreters cannot be available in the interpreting booths for the duration of the entire debate. The speakers list (see further in text) and the in-house close circuit television of the House serve to indicate when an interpreter for a specific language combination should be available. This also means that practical issues regarding the availability of the interpreter become obvious, for instance where a specific language interpreter should be available at the NCOP and the NA at the same time. One can only imagine the chaos should the message of the first interpreter also be relayed into another language (for instance isiXhosa to English to Afrikaans) and the first interpreter is not available.

Prior to 1994, only an interpreting service between English and Afrikaans was available in the National Parliament due to the language policy at the time. With the dawn of a new political dispensation and a multilingual language policy, but also in accordance with the language policy of Parliament, interpreters for all official languages as well as Sign Language had to be appointed. With the implementation of the language policy in the National Parliament in 2004, 44 full-time positions for interpreters – four for each language – were advertised. Another 60 positions for sessional language practitioners were advertised in 2005. It is envisaged that by 2010 up to 220 language practitioners (including interpreters) will be appointed to Parliament. They will provide in the needs of all official languages as well as Sign Language in both Houses and in committees.

3. Exploring the reality of the language service in parliament

To contextualise the interpreting practice and the scope of these positions, one may examine the following advertisement:

Parliament of the Republic of South Africa

Applications are invited from suitably qualified individuals for the following posts:

Senior Language Practitioner - Reporting
(11 posts, one for each of the official languages)

Senior Language Practitioner - Translation
(11 posts, one for each of the official languages)

Senior Language Practitioner - Interpreting
(11 posts, one for each of the official languages)

Basic salary: R158 625 per annum

Total package: R224 805 per annum

The main purpose of this job is to ensure the quality of Language Practitioners' work in English and their respective mother tongues. Although successful candidates will be placed in one of the three units, they may from time to time be required to perform any of the three core functions. Key performance areas include: ● Transcribing members' speeches and other parliamentary debates ● Translating members' speeches, parliamentary papers and other assigned documents ● Interpreting parliamentary proceedings inside and outside the parliamentary precinct; interpreting committee proceedings ● Editing Hansard speeches ● Editing translations ● Monitoring and ensuring a qualitative interpreting service at all times ● Staff coaching and mentoring ● Proofreading Hansard publications ● Overseeing terminology development in the incumbent's mother tongue ● Assisting with the performance management of allotted staff, which includes identifying training needs, as well as developing and implementing personal development plans ● Preparing staff performance reports at the required intervals.

Applicants must be in possession of a degree or diploma in Languages, supported by 5 years' relevant experience, three of which must be directly related to two or more of the key functional areas of this job, namely Hansard reporting, translation and/or interpreting. The following is essential: ● Proficiency in English and one other national language ● Excellent verbal and written communication skills ● Good interpersonal skills ● Ability to work under pressure ● Supervisory and leadership skills ● Computer literacy ● Typing and word processing skills ● Willingness to work long and irregular hours.

General: ● As part of the selection process, short-listed candidates will be expected to take a written and/or interpreting test, to test their ability to execute the core functions of these positions ● People who wish to be considered for more than one post should apply for each post separately.

Language Practitioners

Basic salary: R123 915 per annum

Total package: R176 773 per annum

● English with simultaneous interpreting as an added recommendation (3 posts) ● Afrikaans with simultaneous interpreting as an added recommendation (2 posts) ● isiZulu with simultaneous interpreting as an added recommendation (2 posts) ● Sepedi with simultaneous interpreting as an added recommendation (1 post) ● Sign Language Interpreter (1 post) ● Siswati with simultaneous interpreting as an added recommendation (1 post) ● Xitsonga with simultaneous interpreting as an added recommendation (1 post)

Requirements: ● Preferably a tertiary qualification with a major in one of the above-mentioned languages, or an equivalent NQF qualification ● Proficiency in two official languages, one of which must be English ● Typing or word processing skills will be an advantage.

Key performance areas: ● Interpret Parliamentary debates ● Report (transcribe and edit) Parliamentary debates ● Translate Parliamentary debates and official Parliamentary documents ● Index Hansard ● Develop terminology.

Parliament reserves the right not to make an appointment.

Please submit detailed applications, including full personal and career details relevant to the position, with three contactable referees to: The Manager: Human Resources Administration, Parliament of RSA, PO Box 2164, Cape Town 8000, for attention: Ighaan Cookson.

Closing date: 11 August 2006.

The Parliamentary Service promotes & applies the principles of affirmative action and equal opportunity.

It may be inferred from the above that language practitioners in Parliament need to translate, interpret, transcribe, edit and assist with terminology development. The language practitioners that are appointed are sourced among others from the teaching profession (language teachers) and from the courts – even though different interpreting modes exist in these different environments. The main criterion is that they should be attuned to language and the assumption is that they will receive further training. Training in itself is problematic simply because the training facilities are limited. However, as from 2007 this state of affairs has been rectified, as Stellenbosch University has equipped itself to provide the necessary training for interpreters – also via short courses. This is indeed an avenue that should be pursued because this institution owns the necessary simultaneous interpreting equipment, but just as important, has access to colleagues who are mother-tongue speakers of African languages and language experts in their own right who are able to cover a wide variety of the South African language combinations. In addition, the expertise at Stellenbosch University extends beyond linguistics to areas such as law and drama – all relevant to interpreter training.

With reference to the National Parliament of South Africa, the rules involve strict time allocations to speakers, exemplified by the following draft of the debate on the budget vote in Parliament on 10 June 2008:

PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

PO Box 15 Cape Town 8000 Republic of South Africa
Tel: 27 (21) 403 2911
www.parliament.gov.za

FIRST DRAFT (11:00)

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

DEBATE ON BUDGET VOTE No 2: PARLIAMENT

10 June 2008

NO	PARTY	TIME	NAME	LANGUAGE
1.	SPEAKER	40	Hon The Speaker	E
2.	ANC	15	Hon Chief Whip of the Majority Party	E/Z
3.	DA	8	Hon Chief Whip of the Democratic Alliance	E
4.	IFP	4	Hon J H van der Merwe	E
5.	ANC	10	Hon J L Fubbs	E
6.	UDM	3	Hon G T Madikiza	E
7.	ID	3	Hon	E
8.	ANC	10	Hon B M Komphela	E/Sesotho
9.	HOUSE CHAIRPERSON	10	Hon House Chairperson K O Bapela	E
10.	ACDP	3	Hon	E
11.	ANC	10	Hon W S Newhoudt-Druchen	E
12.	MF	3	Hon S Rajbally	E
13.	HOUSE CHAIRPERSON	10	Hon House Chairperson M B Skosana	E
14.	ANC	10	Hon M V Meruti	E/A
15.	APC	3	Hon N T Godi	E
16.	PAC	3	Hon	E
17.	ANC	10	Hon B Mthembu	E
18.	NA	3	Hon S Simmons	E
19.	HOUSE CHAIRPERSON	10	Hon House Chairperson G Q M Doidge	E
20.	IFP	3	Hon S A Seaton	E
21.	DA	6	Hon M J Ellis	E
22.	ANC	10	Hon M M Madumise	E/Sesotho

SPEAKER	1 x 40
HOUSE CHAIRS	3 x 10
ANC	1 x 15; 6 x 10
DA	1 x 8; 1 x 6
IFP	1 x 4; 1 x 3
UDM	1 x 3
ID	1 x 3
ACDP	1 x 3
MF	1 x 3
APC	1 x 3
PAC	1 x 3
NA	1 x 3

TOTAL = 178

Prepared by the NA Table Division (A Mbenga x3218)

The above speakers list clearly indicates the different time slots allocated to speakers; the language that the original speaker will use, and alert the specific language combination interpreter – also in terms of code-switching. The reconciliation of these two variables (strict time allocations and tolerance with regard to language usage) could be problematic. The comprehensive use of interpreters is a fairly recent practice that is in accordance with the language policy.

The delivery speed of the speaker (time allocation of speakers in the National Parliament is mathematically calculated) is a concern (especially when the speaker wants to fit a 10-minute speech into a five-minute slot), and even more so when the Speaker adheres strictly to the time allocation. In other instances, when a Member of Parliament is a non-mother-tongue speaker of English, the fluency, clarity and audibility of the oral text can become problematic for the interpreter (cf, for instance, Madikiza, Komphela Madumise in speakers list). Pienaar (2006) and Cenkova (1998) address these issues.

In its simplest view, language is merely a communication tool to be used for understandable, simple and clear expression. The purpose of communication is to portray the concept one perceives in one's own mind by using the spoken and/or written word in such a way that the people to whom one wishes to convey the concept will be able to perceive this picture exactly as one perceives it in one's own mind (Gildenhuys 2004: 65). People feel more at ease in their native language and can express themselves and comprehend a message best in their mother tongue. The recent South African history has proved that language is an extremely sensitive cultural and political issue – in fact, one that cannot be ignored by politicians and public administrators. It was no simple task to decide on the official language policy of the country. Due to the diverse cultural and linguistic groupings in South Africa, a multilingual language policy was adopted.

The interpreting service in the Western Cape Legislature (the provincial parliament) differs considerably from that of the National Parliament. The official languages of the province are Afrikaans, isiXhosa and English. These languages may be used in any debates and other proceedings of the Western Cape Provincial Parliament and its committees. The Western Cape Provincial Parliament needs to

provide for interpreting services for members from and into the three official languages during sittings of the Provincial Parliament and any of its committees. The Legislature provides outsourced interpreters for isiXhosa/English and Afrikaans/English for all sittings. Interpreters are also provided for committee meetings and public hearings if requested by the Chairperson of the Committee. A typical speakers list of the Western Cape Legislature is provided below:

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF WHIP — WESTERN CAPE PROVINCIAL PARLIAMENT

KANTOOR VAN DIE HOOFSWEEP —WES-KAAPSE PROVINSIALE PARLEMENT

IOFISI YOMBHEXESHI OYINTLOKO - IPALAMENTE YEPHONDO LENTSHONA KOLONI

24 June 2008

SUBJECT FOR DISCUSSION: Empowering the youth for poverty eradication

NO/ INANI	PARTY / IQELA	NAME/ NAAM/ IGAMA	TIME/ TYD / IXESHA	DESIGNATION/ AMP/ ISIKHUNDLA
1.	ANC	S. Byneveldt		Speaker
2.	ANC	C. Dugmore	9	MEC for Education
3.	DA	A. Marais	8	MPL
4.	ANC	K. Mqulwana	9	MEC for Social Development
5.	DA	L. Max	8	MPL
6	ID	S. Paulse	2	MPL
7.	ANC	J. Witbooi	9	Chair
8.	UIF	Z. Manjiya	2	MPL
9.	ACDP	A. Arnolds	3	MPL
10.	ANC	M. Jacobs	9	MEC for Cultural Affairs and Sport

The names and the times may be changed during the course of the debate. A party may, however not give some of it's time to another party.

Die name en tye mag in die loop van die debat verander word. 'n Party mag egter nie van sy tyd aan 'n ander party afstaan nie.

Amagama namaxesha angatshintshwa ngexesha lengxoxo. Iqela alinakho ukuba linikise ngexesha lalo kwelinye iqela.

Max Ozinsky
Chief Whip
487-1727

7/30/2008
12:07 A7/P7

Even though the speakers lists of the Western Cape Legislature do not indicate the language of the speaker as in the case of the National Parliament, the language of communication in the Legislature is predominantly English. In 2003 it was estimated that isiXhosa is used approximately 20% of the time in the sittings of the Legislature and possibly 5% in sittings of the Committee. At that time the first language profile of members of the legislature was isiXhosa 16%, Afrikaans 44% and English 40%. The fact that outsourced interpreters are used indicates that the Western Cape Legislature trails behind the National Parliament.

4.   In search of a quality service

It is essential that the users of the interpreting services should also become skilled in the utilisation of the service. The fact that the primary (members of Parliament) and secondary (media and visitors in the galleries) users are not properly informed about the interpreting service places the interpreter in a very difficult position and confirms the negative perception about simultaneous interpreting. Members should be aware of aspects such as making documentation/speeches available to the interpreters prior to delivering their speeches; the speed at which they deliver their speeches, and the role of code-switching in simultaneous interpreting practice.

In addition, listeners and speakers should be made aware that they should have realistic expectations of the simultaneous interpreter (Pienaar 2006). Users of the services should bear in mind that even though conference interpreting is referred to as taking place in simultaneous mode, there is usually a small time difference between the original and the interpreted speech, meaning that 100% simultaneity is not achieved (Paneth 2002: 32-4). In the case of relay interpreting (for instance, Ndebele to English to Afrikaans), an increase in the time difference might be observed, but a high level of accuracy can still be expected.

Apart from the interpreter's individual capacity and language skills, other variables should be taken into consideration to deliver a quality service. First, problems regarding code-switching are to

be considered. Switching between different codes should not be a problem for the interpreter, but at times parliamentary speakers switch between some of the African languages to such an extent that the product becomes an amalgamated language. This results in the problem that interpreters are in doubt regarding the source language (for example, isiZulu or isiXhosa) and are unsure whether they should interpret. In one instance both the isiZulu and the isiXhosa interpreters were interpreting such an amalgamated excerpt into English. It should be interesting to compare the two target texts in such an instance. In the case of relayed interpreting these forms of code-switching also give rise to their own problems.

Secondly, it was discovered that in most cases the English or Afrikaans speakers make a symbolic gesture by greeting the African language speakers in their mother tongue. The English SL interpreters have taken it onto themselves to learn these more general phrases and to interpret these single phrases instead of relying on relay interpreting. This should be interpreted as an effort to enhance their output as interpreters.

Thirdly, a copy of the speech that is delivered is as a general rule not available. When it is made available, it is usually just as the speech is about to be delivered or ten minutes into the speech.

Finally, there is the notion of taking-Parliament-to-the-people or the so-called People's Assembly, where the National Parliament meets with the communities in a hall or marquee tent. In these cases the professionalism of the parliamentary interpreters are at risk: booths are bad, noise levels are high and the quality of the interpreting is compromised. In exceptional cases consecutive interpreting is done when the necessary equipment is not available. Apart from the inherent mental difficulty of interpreting, these aspects will definitely influence the quality of the interpreting service.

Often parliamentary interpreters only have experience as consecutive interpreters – for instance as legal interpreters or within a church setting. There is general consensus that sufficient training is not provided. Some of the language practitioners were of the opin-

ion that they were appointed as translators and transcribers and not necessarily as interpreters.[1]

5. Why does English play such a dominant role as medium of communication in this setting?

Despite all the mechanisms put in place for ensuring a multilingual parliament, there is still a strong tendency among the speakers to use English as the *lingua franca*. The reasons for this include:

5.1 Communication

It is generally assumed that a message expressed in English will reach a wider audience. This is in line with Beard (2000: 37) who states that the real audiences are the millions who will hear or see the politician on radio and television. It should be emphasised that the latter is a general assumption among politicians in a multilingual country with a population of 45 million people. It should also be borne in mind that a high percentage of South African parliamentarians received their education in English and feel comfortable in English.

5.2 The 'neutrality' of English

The use of one indigenous language (including Afrikaans) rather than another can be perceived as divisive. English is regarded as the "neutral" *lingua franca* (this would apply in particular, though not exclusively, to members of the executive management, who have provincial/regional responsibilities and do not want their pronouncements to be associated with a regional language). The first president of a democratic South Africa rarely spoke anything except English in Parliament, but did very deliberately use other languages – Afrikaans and isiZulu, for instance – when focusing on specific target audiences. This is in line with Beard (2000: 4) who qualifies Nelson Mandela as a statesman whose reputation is to a large extent untainted with the usual connotations of deviousness, but is rather associated with wisdom, vision and dignity.

1   This, of course, is not true – as proven by the advertisement.

5.3 Logistical and technical issues

Addressing Parliament in languages other than English can cause technical complications. Because interpreters for languages that are rarely used cannot be kept on permanent standby (especially in the case of freelance interpreters), members have to give prior notice of their language intentions. This inhibits spontaneous language choices. With the prevailing language policy and the implementation thereof, including the appointment of full-time interpreters for all official languages, this is no longer a valid reason.

5.4 Quality issues

The quality of interpreting varies and has resulted in the fact that members are not always convinced should they choose not to speak English, that their message will be fully and accurately conveyed into English, and even more so in the case of relay interpreting. On average, the quality of the African language interpreters has room for improvement because they have to interpret into their second or even third language and not only into their mother tongue. Even though it is advised in the literature that interpreters interpret into their mother tongue (Paneth 2002: 31, Jones 2002: 8-9), it is a reality within our context that interpreters have to interpret into as well as out of their first language.

5.5 Audio-feed broadcast

In Parliament the audio-feed broadcast on television (for example, SABC's *Parliament Live* and MultiChoice's *Parliamentary Channel*) usually carries the floor (original) language channel, thus viewers do not have the benefit of the English interpretation. This fact might be in members' minds when they know a debate is being broadcast. As Beard (2000: 37) confirms: "[t]he real audiences are the millions who will either read about the speeches in newspapers or hear/see them on radio and television."

5.6 Connotations of status

According to some African-language speakers, in some non-English-speaking communities, people demonstrating an ability to make a speech in English are considered socially superior or better educated. From a sociolinguistic point of view this is highly debatable, but the perception at least persists.

5.7 Texts and subject matter

Much of the material debated in Parliament – legislation, in particular – is technical to a greater or lesser degree, and the documentation, briefings and committee discussions are in English. The preparation of speeches on such subjects, in any language other than English, often poses problems regarding terminology.

5.8 Speeches

Speeches are quite frequently based on or, frankly, plagiarized wholesale from source texts (for example, briefing documents or explanatory memoranda) that are only available in English. It is often apparent that a speech has been prepared, in whole or in part, by someone other than the member speaking – for example, a party researcher or an employee of the department or Ministry in question (cf Beard 2000: 37). The only common language between the drafter and the member might be English.

However, when a member stumbles uncomprehendingly (and virtually incomprehensibly) through a ponderously drafted, jargon-drenched English text, one wishes that the member had rather chosen his/her first language and relied on a competent interpreter for the English version. With a competent interpreter, the message is conveyed far more effectively, and all those involved have a much happier experience.

6.   Concluding remarks

A multilingual legislative framework does not necessarily guarantee the linguistic success of a multilingual parliament. Internationally

acclaimed language planners and other scholars of applied language studies concur with this notion. In the words of Ayo Bamgbose (2000: 2):

> Apart from lack of political will by those in authority, perhaps the most important factor impeding the increased use of African languages is lack of interest by the elite. They are the ones who are quick to point out that African languages are not yet well developed to be used in certain domains […]

The irony, however, is that English is usually not one of the many languages in which most of them are proficient.

For many years interpreting services have been non-existent or have been viewed as a marginal activity. In order to rectify this viewpoint, simultaneous interpreting services are made more widely available, but too often become a symbolic gesture in the South African context. The fact that interpreters play a pivotal role in the dynamics of communication is slowly but surely recognised. As parliamentary language practitioners are expected to translate, transcribe and interpret, one necessarily does not doubt the language abilities of the individual, but his/her functional abilities (to interpret, for instance) need to be nurtured and enhanced. What becomes clear is that the interpreter should be more than a mere interpreter, but should be a language professional in his/her own right who strives to deliver a quality service. As Schäffner & Adab (2000: xiv) have confirmed, performance in any professional environment is judged according to clearly defined objectives and needs, which demand a specific type of competence. The interpreting environment should be no exception. I wish to concur that highly competent interpreters are needed to meet the ever-changing requirements of the professional environment. This also applies to the South African Parliament. But, in accordance with Ulrych (2005: 23), who is referring to translators, one needs to caution that there is still room for improvement before interpreters will receive the desired professional recognition and a quality service can be assured.

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