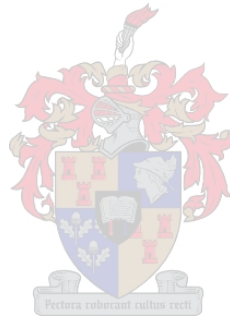# South African Sign Language used in Parliament:
Is there a need for standardisation?

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Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Philosophy at Stellenbosch University

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March 2010

Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained herein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof and that I have not previously, in its entirety or in part, submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Date: 31 August 2009

Abstract

During interpreting in the National Parliament of South Africa, the South African Sign Language (SASL) signs used for terms frequently occurring in political debates appear to differ from one interpreter to the next. The question arises as to whether this could be a possible source of miscommunication, and, if so, whether there is a need for SASL to be standardised in order to promote successful communication and/or avoid misunderstandings while interpreting the proceedings of Parliament for a Deaf Member of Parliament as well as for Deaf members of the public.

The present research set out to answer these questions. In order to do so, video-recordings were made of two parliamentary SASL interpreters each independently signing 10 English terms often used during Parliamentary sittings. These recordings were shown to three Deaf adults, from more or less the same linguistic background, who were tasked with writing down the meaning of each sign of each interpreter. Responses given by the informants were allocated marks and a total score was calculated to reveal the level of intelligibility of the signs of each interpreter. It was found that not one of the deaf adults could understand all 10 signs of any one interpreter, and that the signs used by the two interpreters for eight of the 10 English terms differed vastly. The answers indicate the possibility of miscommunication, which could be avoided if standardised terms were available for use in the Parliamentary environment.

Opsomming

Tydens tolking in die Nasionale Parlement van Suid Afrika blyk tekens in Suid Afrikaanse Gebaretaal vir terme wat gereeld in politiese debatte voorkom, te verskil van tolk tot tolk. Die vraag is of dit 'n bron van moontlike wankommunikasie kan wees en, indien wel, of daar dan 'n behoefte daaraan is om Suid-Afrikaanse Gebaretaal te standardiseer met die doel om suksesvolle kommunikasie te bevorder en/of om misverstande te vermy terwyl die verrigtinge van die Parlement getolk word vir die dowe Lid van die Parlement asook die dowe lede van die publiek.

Die huidige navorsing is gedoen om 'n antwoord op hierdie vrae te verkry. Vir hierdie doeleindes is video-opnames van twee parlementêre gebaretaaltolke gemaak. Elke tolk het onafhanklik van die ander een 10 Engelse terme getolk wat gereeld voorkom gedurende parlementêre sittings. Hierdie opnames is dan aan drie volwasse Dowes gewys, wat afkomstig was van ongeveer dieselfde taalagtergrond, wat die betekenis van elke tolk se gebare neergeskryf het. Tellings is aan die response van elke informant toegeken en die totale telling is uitgewerk om die vlak van verstaanbaarheid van die gebare van elke tolk uit te werk. Daar is bevind dat nie een van die Dowe volwassenes al 10 terme korrek kon verstaan nie en dat ag van die 10 Engelse terme grotendeels verskillend getolk is deur die tolke. Die antwoorde dui daarop dat daar 'n moontlikheid van wankommunikasie bestaan, wat vermy kan word as gebaretaalterme gestandardiseer kan word in die parlementêre omgewing.

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Chapter 1:
Introduction

I was born as a hearing child to Deaf parents. South African Sign Language (SASL) is my first language and while growing up I engaged in various forms of informal interpreting between my parents and the "hearing world". I grew up in a Deaf cultural community, based in Cape Town and influenced by the Dutch Reformed Church, while speaking Afrikaans at school. After completing my higher education, I entered the profession of interpretation. At present, I am working at the National Parliament of South Africa. It is in the course of my work as a SASL interpreter for National Parliament that it became apparent to me that certain signs I use are different from those used by my fellow SASL interpreting colleagues for the same English word. This raised the question as to how the different signs were understood by our Deaf clients – whether the different signs were understood to have the intended meanings and, if not, whether this could lead to a breakdown in communication.

This study focuses on the use of SASL signs used during interpreting in National Parliament for terms frequently occurring in political debates. The question to be answered by this study is whether there is a need for SASL to be standardised to promote communication and/or avoid misunderstandings while interpreting the proceedings of the National Parliament of South Africa.

In order to answer this question, video recordings were made of two of the parliamentary interpreters while they signed SASL equivalents for 10 English terms often used during parliamentary sessions. Data were collected from three Deaf persons, from more or less the same linguistic background, who were then tasked with identifying the signs. Each response given by an informant was allocated a mark based on the extent to which the meaning of the signs was correctly defined.

This study is intercultural in more than one respect. Gudykunst (2003:164) does not view intercultural communication as merely "one 'type' of intergroup communication (i.e., communication between members of different social groups)." Other types of intergroup and thus intercultural communication would include communication between able-bodied persons and the disabled, intergenerational communication, communication between members of different social classes, and interracial or interethnic communication Gudykunst (2003:164). As this study focuses on communication between abled-bodied (i.e., hearing) and disabled (i.e., Deaf) people, the study is intercultural by nature. One could also argue that the communication studied here is intercultural because it takes place between groups with different levels of familiarity with Parliamentary "culture": those who has limited or no exposure to the political environment of Parliament and those who are highly familiar with political debates, as they attend them for work purposes on a daily basis. This could create the possibility of miscommunication.

The structure of this thesis is as follows: Chapter 2 discusses the characteristics of signed languages, how such languages developed and how they are used. The differences between SASL, British Sign Language (BSL) and American Sign Language (ASL) are also illustrated through figures extracted from relevant sign language dictionaries. Chapter 3 considers the topic of standardisation of SASL by comparing it to other (spoken) African languages as well as to signed languages from other countries. Chapter 4 covers the methodology of the research conducted, and gives background information on each respondent as well as on the interpreters. Chapter 5 sets out and discusses the results, and Chapter 6 provides a general conclusion while also pointing out the limitations of the study and making recommendations for further research on the topic under investigation here.

To conclude this chapter, I provide a definition of key terms occurring in this thesis:

South African Sign language: "South African Sign Language (SASL) can be defined as a visual-gestural language that has been created and is used by Deaf South Africans to communicate with one another." (Lotriet *no date*, p. 1, http://www.criticallink.org/files/CL2_Lotriet.pdf)

Sign: A sign includes gestures and stationary hand shapes amongst others.

Language standardisation: "Language standardisation has two main goals which, taken together, serve the overall objective of enhancing communication: maximal elaboration of function (a standard language should be usable for every purpose) and minimal variation in form (a standard language is codified to ensure uniformity in grammar, spelling, pronunciation, etc.)" (Cameron 1995:38)

Standard variety: That variety of a language which is seen to have the most social prestige and is taught to foreign learners of that language.

Chapter 2:
South African Sign Language

2.1.   Introduction

This chapter focuses on signed languages in general and SASL in particular. The general characteristics of sign languages will be discussed, followed by a discussion on the history of SASL and the varieties of sign language used in South Africa. The chapter concludes with a general discussion on the Deaf community.

2.2.   General characteristics of signed languages

According to Morgan and Aarons (1999:371), "signed languages are essentially based on a complex system of classifier hand shapes of movement and location. These form the skeletal structure for most predicates involving movement or location." When translating the sentence *A car goes very fast up a steep hill with hairpin bends*, each of these separate pieces of information is embedded as a morpheme into one sign, which uses its hand shape, movement and location to convey all of this information. This indicates that there is no simple word-sign equivalent and that, in general, the morphology of signed languages is agglutinating, as well as simultaneous.

Looking at a specific signed language, Bellugi and Klima (1991:115) studied ASL and state that there is an emerging awareness of ASL as well as of other signed languages as full-fledged languages, which are as complex and expressive as any spoken language.[1] These authors (1991:116) found that the basic properties of signed and spoken languages are very similar. Signed and spoken languages, while differing in many respects, have the same kinds of organisational principles, the same kinds of rule systems, and the same grammatical complexity and expressive power.

The research done by Bellugi and Klima (1991:118) focuses on the effects of the change in modality (from ear to eye, from vocal tract to hands) on the form that signed languages take and the effects of modality on language organisation. For this purpose, two independent signed languages were compared by these authors, namely Chinese Sign Language (CSL) and ASL.

It was found that signs in both CSL and ASL are composed of simultaneously-articulated layered elements consisting of a small set of hand shapes, locations, and movements, and with morphological patterning layered simultaneously with the root. The two languages are also similar in the ways in which they utilise space and spatial contrasts in the service of syntax. But at the

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[1] Note that it had previously been thought that sign language is **based on** spoken languages, therefore implying that sign language will have a similar grammatical structure to that of a spoken language, whereas it has been found that sign language is a language on its own with a unique grammatical structure.

same time, as completely autonomous signed languages developing without any points of contact, each has its own lexicon and its own distinctive phonology, grammatical morphology, and rules of syntax. Moreover, as one might expect, the two signed languages are mutually unintelligible.

It was found by Bellugi and Klima (1991:120) that there is a profound difference between CSL and spoken Chinese. CSL turns out to be a richly inflected language: CSL exhibits a large number of inflections for grammatical arguments, number, derivational distinctions, and grammatical aspect expressed in the form of movement contours which are layered with the sign root, all articulated simultaneously rather than sequentially. The syntax in CSL, like that of ASL, is expressed spatially. Figure 1 (from Bellugi and Klima 1991:121) shows aspects of the spatially organised syntax of CSL.
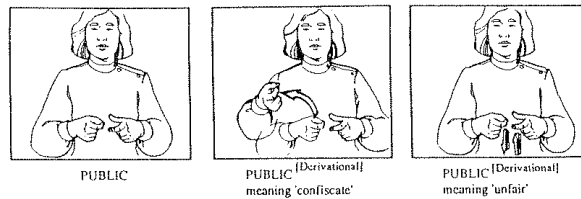
2 A. CSL Derivationally Related Signs
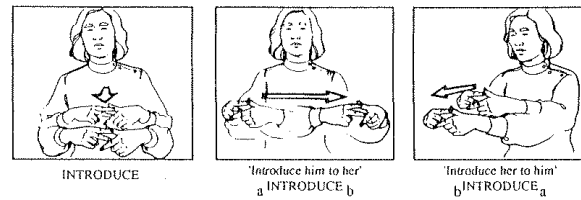
2 B. CSL Verb Inflections Marked by Spatial End-points
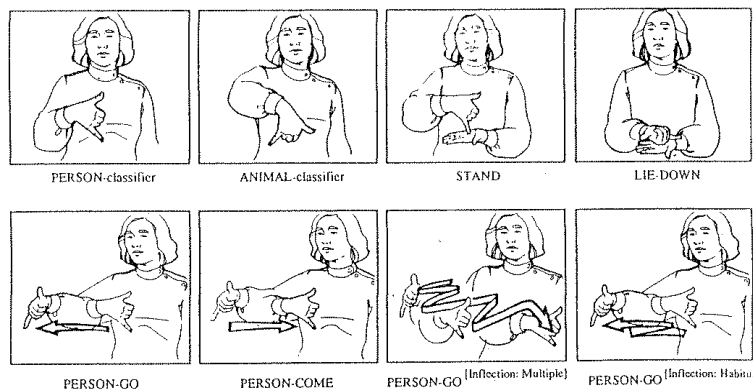
2 C. CSL Classifiers and Related Forms

Figure 1. Aspects of spatially organised syntax of CSL (from Bellugi and Klima 1991)

Investigations by Bellugi and Klima (1991:136) into sign language have so far focused on manual signs. However, there is another layer of structure of sign language, namely non-manual (facial) signals. In the case of signers of ASL, facial signals can function in two distinct ways: one linguistically, the other to convey affect. Examples of ASL non-manual signals (form Bellugi and Klima 1991:137) are given in Figure 2.

surprise	happy	sad

fear	disgust

Affective Facial Expressions

"pursed"	"Wh"	"TH"

"MM"	"puff"

Linguistic Facial Expressions
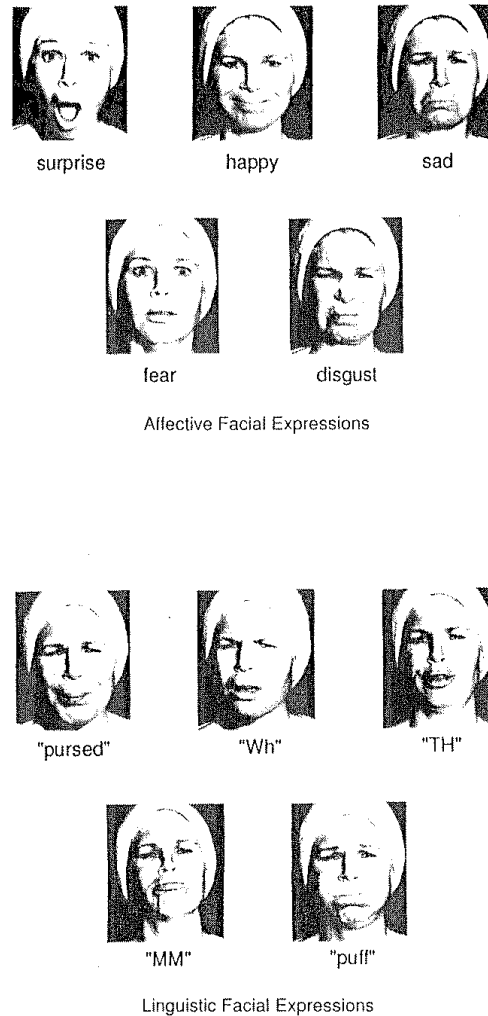
Figure 2. Some non-manual signs in ASL (from Bellugi and Klima 1991)

Like spoken languages, there are unique sign languages around the world. For the purpose of this paper, comparisons are made between SASL, BSL and ASL. In order to show the variation between SASL, BSL and ASL on a lexical level, the signs for the words *bridge* and *bright* in each of these three languages are given in Figures 3 and 4.

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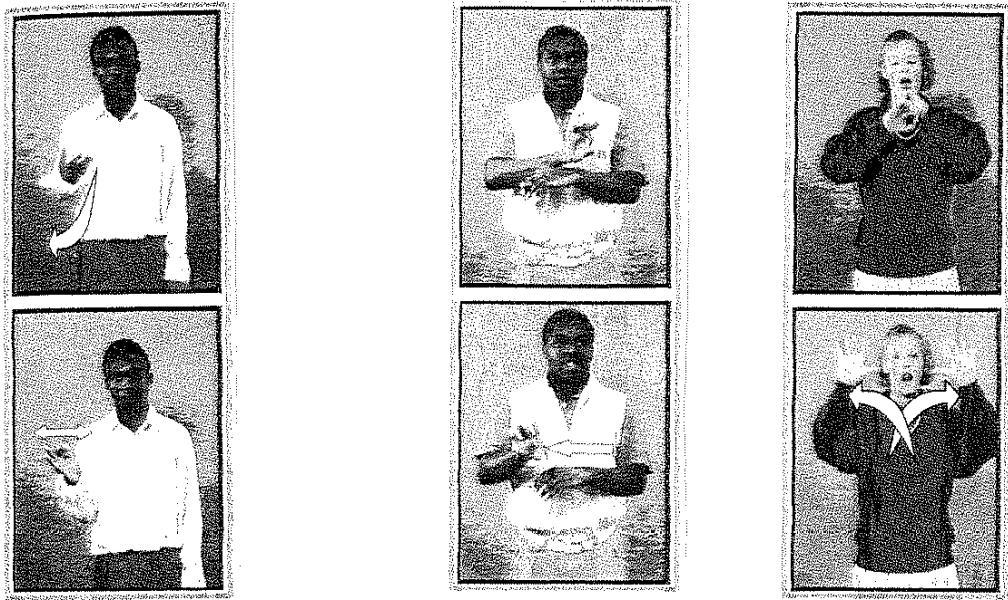
Figure 3.1 Variants of Bright *in SASL (*South African Sign Language Dictionary, p. 105)[2]

BRIGHT 2 *adj.* (Reflected glistening of light ra
The left hand, held supinely before the chest, p
down, represents the object from which the rays ε
ten. The right hand, in the "5" position, touches
back of the left lightly and moves up toward the ri
pivoting slightly at the wrist, with fingers wiggl
Also GLISTEN, SHINE, SHINING.

BRIGHT 3, *adj.* (The mind is bright.) The middle ε
ger is placed at the forehead, and then the hand, w
an outward flick, turns around so that the palm fa
outward. This indicates a brightness flowing from
mind. Also BRILLIANT 1, CLEVER 1, INTELLIGE
SMART.

BRIGHT 1 (brīt), *adj.* (Rays of light clearing the v
Both hands are held at chest height, palms out, all
gertips together. They open into the "5" positio
unison, the right hand moving toward the right anc
left toward the left. The palms of both hands rer
facing out. Also BRILLIANCE 1, BRILLIANT 2, CL
EXPLICIT 2, OBVIOUS, PLAIN 1.

Figure 3.2 Variants of Bright *in ASL (American Sign Language Dictionary, p. 104)*

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[2] The quality of the photographs in this dictionary is not good, for which it is criticised by the Deaf. The reason for the poor quality is that the photographs are still shots of video recordings. Because I include scanned copies of poor quality shots here, the quality of the photographs in the thesis is even worse than that in the dictionary.
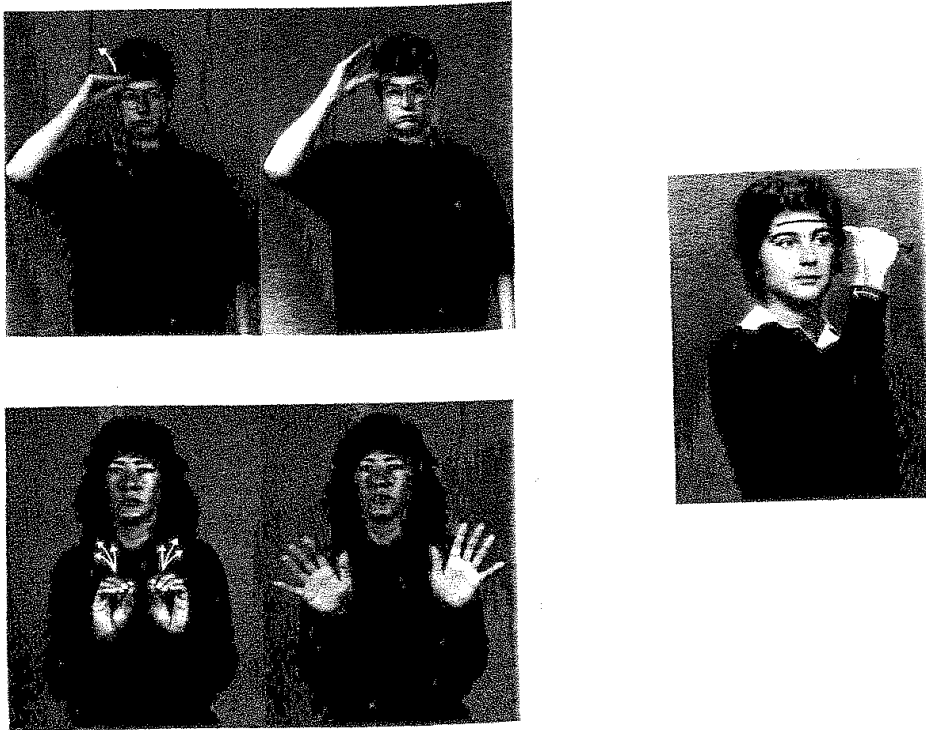
Figure 3.3 Variants of Bright *in BSL (Dictionary of British Sign Language/English, ref. 1728, 166 and 1500)*
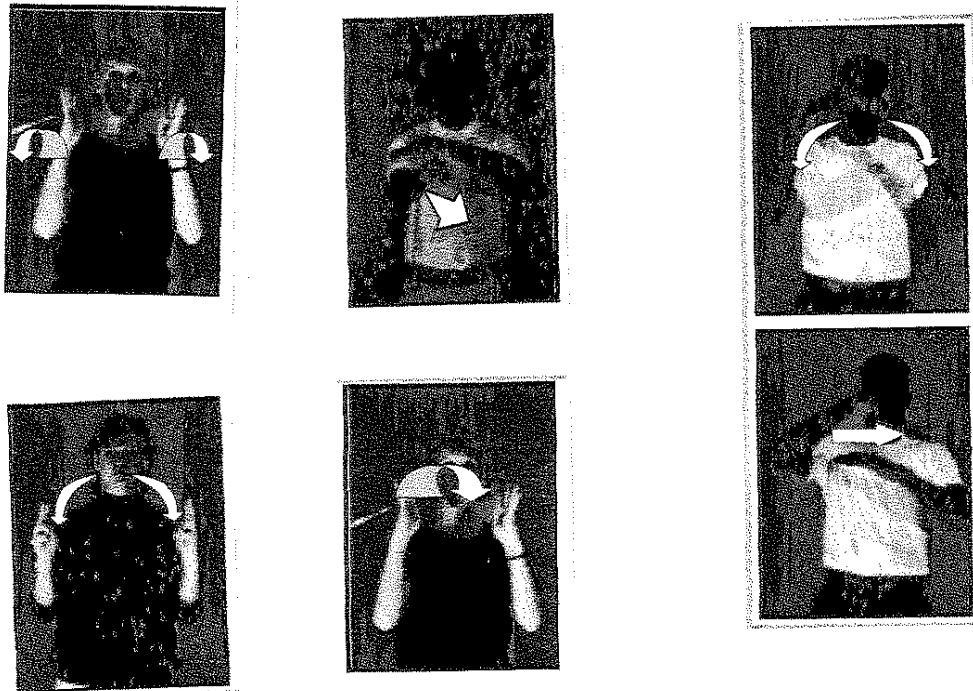
Figure 3.4 Variants of Bridge *in SASL (South African Sign Language Dictionary, p. 104)*

move back and up against the midpoint of the fore-
arm, close to the elbow.
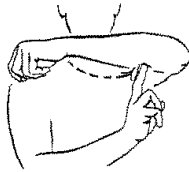
BRIDGE 2, *n.* (The natural sign.) The thumbtips are
thrust up against the edges of the upper teeth. Also
BRACE.

Figure 3.5 Variants of Bridge *in ASL (American Sign Language Dictionary, p.104)*

Figure 3.6 Variants of Bridge *in BSL (Dictionary of British Sign Language/English, ref. 700 and 1663)*

According to Sutton-Spence and Woll (2005:170), there are also other influences causing variants in signs. These include social class, men's and women's dialect, signs linked to sexual orientation, signs linked to ethnic groups, religious groups as well as age-related dialect.

2.3.   History of SASL

Little is known about the history of the Deaf in South Africa prior to colonisation (Heap, cited in Aarons and Akach 2002). After colonisation, and at the onset of government-funded education, the state authorities took little or no responsibility for establishing schools for the Deaf, and this was left almost entirely to the various churches.

However, a major influence on signed languages was experienced when a worldwide Deaf education conference was held in Milan in 1880. During the debate around oralism (non-use of signed languages), all Deaf delegates were excluded from the voting process and the result was

that the World Congress of Educators of the Deaf voted for a policy of strict oralism in schools for the Deaf. This led to signed language going "underground". However, Deaf people did not stop signing to one another.

Another result of the decision to follow the oralism approach was that Signed languages became stigmatised, and Deaf people, particularly those who wanted to consider themselves educated, did not sign in public (Aarons and Akach 2002:131). Today however, most Deaf people take pride in their signed language – a complete turnaround from the stigma attached to its use in the past.

The history of the signed language used in South Africa is closely linked to the development of schools for the Deaf in this country (Aarons and Akach 2002:130). As is the case world-wide, signed language developed in South Africa in places where there were communities of Deaf people who used (exclusively) their hands and faces in order to communicate.

Deaf people tend to seek out communities of other Deaf people, and the signing that has evolved around school centres has tended to spread into Deaf communities at large, even if only some of the members of such communities have actually attended school. Not only did residential schools for the Deaf provide the physical conditions for signed language to evolve; they were, and still are, the centres for the evolution of Deaf culture. (Aarons and Akach 2002:130)

South Africa has a long-established Deaf education system. Statistics indicate that there are more than 40 schools for the Deaf in South Africa of which only 12 schools offer Grade 12 to Deaf learners (http://deafness.about.com/od/internationaldeaf/a/southafrica.htm). Such schools include the following:
- De la Bat School for the Deaf (in Worcester, run by the Institute for the Deaf)
- Fulton School for the Deaf (in Gillitts, outside Durban)
- Kutlwanong School for the Deaf (in Rustenburg)
- KwaThintwa School for Hearing Impaired (in KwaZulu Natal)
- St. Vincent's School for the Deaf (in Johannesburg)
- Vuleka School for the Blind and Deaf (in Ulundi).

Some South African schools for blind children also educate deaf-blind children. The use of signed languages was not always permitted in schools and in some schools today, that is still the case.

As stated by Aarons and Akach (2002:129), an estimated 500,000 South Africans use a signed language in their daily lives (www.about.com: deafness, as informed by www.deafnet.co.za, places this number at between 500,000 and 600,000). The vast majority of these speakers are deaf. The small number of hearing people using a signed language mostly comprises children of deaf adults or professionals working closely with members of the Deaf community (such as teachers), who use sign language regularly. Whereas SASL is not an official language in South Africa, it is protected

by the South African Constitution, as indicated by the following excerpt from this Constitution (http://www.doj.gov.za/legislation/constitution/20081210_cn_1.pdf):

6. Languages

1. The official languages of the Republic are Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu.

2. Recognising the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages of our people, the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages.

3.
   a. The national government and provincial governments may use any particular official languages for the purposes of government, taking into account usage, practicality, expense, regional circumstances and the balance of the needs and preferences of the population as a whole or in the province concerned; but the national government and each provincial government must use at least two official languages.
   b. Municipalities must take into account the language usage and preferences of their residents.

4. The national government and provincial governments, by legislative and other measures, must regulate and monitor their use of official languages. Without detracting from the provisions of subsection (2), all official languages must enjoy parity of esteem and must be treated equitably.

5. A Pan South African Language Board established by national legislation must
   a. promote**, and create conditions for, the development and use of**
      i. all official languages;
      ii. the Khoi, Nama and San languages; and
      iii. **sign language ; and**
   b. promote and ensure respect for
      i. all languages commonly used by communities in South Africa, including German, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Portuguese, Tamil, Telegu and Urdu; and Arabic, Hebrew, Sanskrit and other languages used for religious purposes in South Africa.

Morgan and Aarons (1999:365) state that preliminary results have shown that, linguistically, signed languages in South Africa look like different varieties of the same language. The impact this would have on interpreting is what could lead to miscommunication.

As with BSL (Sutton-Spence and Woll 2005:172), SASL was also influenced by ethnic minority dialects. These influences have enormous practical implications for sign language interpreters and other service providers. Varieties of SASL will be discussed in the next section.

2.4.   Varieties of SASL

There seems to be no answer to the question of how many different signed languages exist in South Africa (see Morgan and Aarons 1999), and only once this is known can a standard variety be established. The question as to how many different signed languages there are in South Africa is mostly asked not by Deaf persons, but by educators of the Deaf, would-be interpreters, bureaucrats and financial managers – for it is costly in terms of time, effort and money to take responsibility for the promotion and development of yet another language group in South Africa.

Aarons and Akach (2002:137) discuss the issue of whether there is a single signed language in South Africa. Firstly, Aarons and Akach (2002:137) claim that the reason some people say that there are different signed languages in South Africa is due to a fundamental misunderstanding of the signed language itself: They assume that signed language is a manual version of spoken language and therefore it is assumed that there is a signed language for every spoken language.

Secondly, Aarons and Akach claim that the *Dictionary of Southern African Signs* is based on the false hypothesis that apartheid education and apartheid social policies led to the rise of different signed language in South Africa. This reference work also seems to presuppose a close relationship between words and signs, and fails to recognise variation within different contexts of use. Although there are certainly different varieties of the signed language used in South Africa, most Deaf people in the country control many of these varieties, as is the case for speakers of any other language, who may speak more than one dialect of one particular language.

Thirdly, Aarons and Akach claims that Deaf people themselves frequently confuse language identity with other kinds of identity and thus sometimes reject the signing of other Deaf people as "other". This reflects the tendency of people born into a certain community or culture, whose primary loyalty and identification is to the language used in that particular community.

2.5.   The Deaf community

In order to define what the Deaf community is, one first needs to define "community". In this regard, Kyle (1991:176) quotes two definitions. The first is that of Padden (1980:4): "A community … is a general society or system in which a group of people live together, share common goals and carry out certain responsibilities to each other." The second definition, that of Luckmann (1970:317), needs to be interpreted against Luckmann's claim that "the idea of traditional communities is not appropriate for the industrialised world we live in." According to Luckmann (1970:317), "instead of being a full-time member of one 'total and whole' society, modern man is a part-time citizen in a variety of part-time societies. Instead of living within one meaningful world system to which he owes complete loyalty, he now lives in many differently structured 'worlds' to each of which he

owes only partial allegiance. Most of modern man's existential universes are single-purpose communities."

For many people, community life has in recent years become restricted to a once-a-year gathering and often people living in the same neighbourhood do not share mutual loyalty due to very different "everyday life worlds". This could be one of the reasons why hearing people struggle to understand the nature of a Deaf society "where commitment and participation are stronger and where there is clearly more than a 'single purpose community" (Kyle 1991:176)

Kyle (1991:175) states that "culture is a rather more profound sharing of experience and expression of that experience in a public form which can be further transmitted in sign language. Community awareness has also brought with it an understanding of tradition which has so often been obscured by the apparently oppressive nature of relations with the hearing majority." He furthermore refers to two different claims made regarding the Deaf community, namely that they are "a handicapped group or else they are an unrecognised minority group". According to Kyle, the simplest and one of the most effective definitions of a Deaf community is that of Baker and Padden (1978:4):

"The deaf community comprises those deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals who share common experiences and values and a common way of interacting with each other and with hearing people. The most basic factor determining who is a member of the deaf community seems to be what is called 'attitudinal deafness'. This occurs when a person identifies him/herself as a member of the deaf community and other members accept that person as part of the community."

According to Kyle (1991:178), Deaf people are unique due to their hearing loss, early life experiences, language and community commitment. They function like a minority group. Kyle (1991:178) states that "the history of pressures to 'abolish deafness' and to 'normalise' through oral language[3] has meant that the emergence of deaf ethnicity has been painful and characterised by

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[3] In this regard, consider the account given below, recorded by Bahan (1989:45-47):

She looked a bit irritated, and said: "Why don't you speak?" while pointing to her lips.

I thought "she must be one of those wackos," and proceeded to squirm my slimy tongue around its oral cavity and uttered, "uh hs .. hagmerbersugar uth kees."

She suddenly looked bewildered, and turned to look at the menu. She took my order and left. Fifteen minutes later she came back with my cheeseburger and a note. I read the note and it said: "I have a deaf brother who went to a wonderful school up north. Now he speeks wel, you know you should lern to speek. Its nevar to lat. Aftar al you lif in a hearing wurld."

I read her note and wondered where she learned to write. But as I read on I thought, "what right does she have to claim, without asking me, that I did not receive speech training. After all, I went to a school that incorporates this method in its School Philosophy…

I pondered on that issue. What right do hearing people have to impose on us the dominance of their world? What is even worse, there are deaf people who strongly uphold hearing world values on us deaf people. They go around saying you have to learn to speak because it is a hearing world. It's strange because while they use that phrase, they are denying their own existence as a deaf person. If the world is not theirs, then who are they?

I am proposing for us all to go out and say, "Hell, it's our world, too! Of course, I cannot deny the fact that there are more, many more, hearing people than there are deaf. But I can and will deny them the right to claim the world.

both overt and covert oppression. Not surprisingly cultural life [of the Deaf community – MZ] has been hidden from prying eyes."

According to Kyle (1991:179), everyday experiences form the basis of Deaf culture. He examines the British situation by considering four different aspects pertaining to Deaf users of BSL, namely Rules of Behaviour, Customs, Tradition and Culture. For the purposes of this thesis, only the Rules of Behaviour will be discussed, as examples of how everyday experiences form part of Deaf culture:

- **Attention-Getting and Touch** – Deaf people touch each other more than do hearing people (at least in British culture) and which part of the body is being touched indicates different intentions. For example, touch on the upper arm, forearm or shoulder is permissible and indicates that attention is needed in order to communicate. Any other part of the body, i.e. the front (intimate) or back (aggressive) would invoke an unwanted response.

- **Turn-taking is complex in BSL.** The signer, during a conversation may look away from the viewer indicating a wish to continue to hold the floor. The viewer may attempt to contribute to the conversation by waving with a wrist action or by beginning to frame a comment but it is more likely that facial expression will inform the signer that the viewer wishes to contribute.

- **Breaking into an ongoing conversation** is also rule-bound. If two people are signing and a third person appears on the scene and wishes to interrupt to ask the first person about some urgent matter, then the format is to touch the first person on the upper arm or shoulder while engaging the second person in eye-contact.

- **Turning Away in BSL** is generally an insult and when attention is called away, the signer has to adopt a convention to ensure that the viewer is not upset. This is often done by signing "HOLD-ON" or holding the viewer's arm while turning away.

- **Taking another's hands** while he or she is signing is a very aggressive act and similar to covering someone's mouth while talking. Educators have in the past frequently broken this rule in their treatment of Deaf children. An equivalent would be forcing the child to sit on their hands during class in an attempt to keep them "quiet", which at times occurs in South African schools.

- **Use of the light to gain attention** is also governed by Deaf conventions. If a Deaf person wishes to gain the attention of a group of Deaf people in a meeting it is likely that the light switch will be flicked on and off very briefly once or twice.

- **Privacy and confidentiality** are more difficult to achieve in the Deaf Community because of the general visibility of conversations.

The above examples serve to illustrate that Deaf people do not necessarily share the culture of the hearing people in their immediate surroundings. As an insider of the South African Deaf community, I know that similar rules apply. Another rule that might be added in the South African context is that of a general consideration of the person you are communicating with during a meal. A Deaf person would have to lip-read more often than not and if the speaker has food in their mouth, it becomes uncomfortable for the Deaf person. Furthermore, when you are signing, your hands should be free: One should not speak with food in your mouth, and in this case, one should not "speak" with something in your hands. Rules have also been adapted for common games played by children or adults, such as rugby or netball, where a whistle is replaced by a flag to draw the attention of the players.

The South African Deaf community is relatively small, and they tend to keep to their own and act very guarded about their culture and their language. Upon speaking to some Deaf adults, and asking them what Deaf culture means to them, I have received mixed responses. Some indicated that being late was one characteristic of members of the Deaf community, as was eating as much as you can when the food is free. Such responses indicate that Deaf culture is something that very few in South Africa understand. Furthermore, there is very little documented about South African Deaf culture.

Kyle (1991:184) mentions that a critical dimension of Deaf community life in general is its closeness or distance from the hearing norms: "Deaf culture has grown in adversity, sometimes with appalling experiences being imposed on very young deaf children, by unknowing parents and by well-intentioned teachers and other professionals. Not surprisingly deaf people view their distance from hearing behaviour and hearing custom as a key indicator of their deaf ethnicity."

The strong sense of identity in nearly every situation in which Deaf people come into contact with each other has been documented as far back as 1858 when De Ladebat wrote: *As soon as Clerc beheld this sight (the children at dinner) his face became animated; he was agitated as a traveller of sensibility would be on meeting all of a sudden in distant regions, a colony of his countrymen … Clerc approached them. He made signs and they answered him by signs. This unexpected communication caused a most delicious sensation in them and for us was a scene of expression and sensibility that gave us the most heartfelt satisfaction.* It is this experience of relationship which is the central feature of Deaf community and culture.

2.6.   Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, it was shown that there is no one, universally used signed language and that even within one country, more than one variety of a particular signed language may occur. Furthermore, the culture of the Deaf and hearing people in one country or area may (and often does) differ. Yet,

despite cultural differences between various Deaf communities, there seems to be a general Deaf culture in the sense that Deaf people of various communities often exhibit the same strong sense of identity with other Deaf people.

This study investigates the use of South African Sign Language by hearing people while interpreting parliamentary hearings to Deaf people. Because variation in SASL and, to an extent the mutual intelligibility of the different signs used by interpreters from different South African Deaf cultural groupings, are at issue here, the next chapter will focus on language standardisation in general and in the South African context in particular.

Chapter 3:
Language standardisation

3.1.   Introduction

In 2005, the Pan South African Language Board conducted a workshop on the standardisation of the African languages of South Africa. In the proceedings of this workshop (PanSALB workshop report 2005:4), it is explained that "Standard Languages have a very important role in public life, in at least the following ways:

- They facilitate effective communication between communities across dialect differences as well as between government and the citizenry, and are used in all official documents.
- They are the languages of education, forming, also, the objects of study in language subjects.
- They are used in high-functioning formal contexts, such as parliament, legislation, the courts, public statements, conferences, the business world, and
- They have an important symbolic function, generally representing the linguistic identity of the members of particular language communities."

From the above, it is clear that language standardisation is an important matter (and it is not only a linguistic issue), and that it should be dealt with by more than only linguists or members of language bodies.

The aim of standardisation of a language is to enable everyone to use and understand the language in such a manner as to minimise the misunderstandings and maximise effectiveness (Milroy and Milroy 1985:23). Milroy also states that absolute standardisation of a spoken language is never achieved when one keeps in mind the variabilities one encounters between the spoken and the written form of a language. Standardisation could be seen more as an ideology and a standard language could be seen as an idea in the mind rather than a reality – a set of abstract norms to which actual usage may conform to a greater or lesser extent (Milroy and Milroy 1985:22).

Standardisation of a language is easier to achieve when the language is written and standardisation is established specifically in the spelling (Milroy and Milroy 1985:22). It is more difficult to standardise spoken language, as some of the rules that apply to the written standard form are abandoned in the spoken form (Milroy and Milroy 1985:23). Based on what scholars have found, standardisation, strictly speaking, does not tolerate variability. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to say that one should look at "standardisation as a historical process which – to a greater or lesser degree – is always in progress in those languages that undergo it" (Milroy and Milroy 1985:23).

In this chapter, I will focus on language standardisation. Firstly, I will briefly discuss standardisation as it pertains to some of South Africa's spoken languages. Next, I will give an overview of the standardisation issues pertaining to three signed languages, namely SASL, BSL and ASL. This chapter will end with a brief section on the possible miscommunication that can occur due to a lack of standardisation of specifically SASL.

3.2.   Standardisation of South Africa's spoken languages

South Africa has 11 official languages, of which two (namely English and Afrikaans) could be regarded as standardised for use in all spheres of public life. The same cannot yet be said of the other nine languages that are all African languages, namely isiXhosa, isiNdebele, isiZulu, Siswati, Setswana, Sesotho, Tshivenda, Xitsonga and Sepedi. For instance, not all of these languages have standardised terminology for use in teaching at tertiary level or for use in political debate at national level. During the workshop "The Standardisation of African Languages in South Africa" held by PanSALB in 2005, Ana Deumert and Vic Webb stated that "the development of fully-fledged standard languages is an imperative in linguistic communities which are internally diverse (house multiple varieties/dialects), particularly from the perspective of the production of educational material (to be used in different dialect communities) and effective communication between governmental institutions and the general public". These authors furthermore stated that they therefore regard language standardisation to be an essential, part of promoting and developing the African languages spoken in South Africa. Deumert and Webb also refer to the current political context which plays a defining role in the standard language issue – particularly in light of the (overt) prestige of English and the low esteem of the African languages relative to the social meaning they could expect to have, given their statistical dominance[4] and their official status in the country.

According to Deumert (2005:18), the chief characteristic of a standard language is the communicative range such a language fulfils in society, rather than its uniformity of structure. Deumert (2005:18) furthermore states that conscious codification is seen as a necessary property of standard languages. The attention then falls on standardisation as an intentional, deliberate act.

Another important issue in the history of language standardisation is the role played by purism and the attitudes towards borrowing that differ across linguistic cultures and across time (Deumert 2005:21). To quote Deumert (2005:27), "Attitudes towards English are strongly positive and already in 1996 LANGTAG [Language Plan Task Group – MZ] noted 'despite the constitutional commitment to multilingualism … there seems to be a drift towards unilingualism [in English] in

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[4] Statistics SA (2003) indicated the following total speakers per language according to the 2001 census (which is the most recent census in which questions on language were included): Afrikaans (5,983,426), English (3,673,203), isiNdebele (711,821), isiXhosa (7,907,153), isiZulu (10,677,305), Sepedi (4,208,980), Sesotho (3,555,186), Setswana (3,677,016), siSwati (1,194,430), Tshivenda (1,021,757), Xitsonga (1,992,207) and other (217,293).

public services'". This attitude towards languages other than English has negatively influenced the progress in standardising African languages[5].

Webb (2005:35) states that for the majority of black South Africans, "the road to educational, economic, political and social development obviously does not lie through English ... It should, logically and linguistically speaking, lie through their primary languages, which black South Africans already know well enough for these languages to be used effectively in all domains of life. However, on this road, as we know, there are also problems". Some of the problems referred to by Webb (2005:36) are the following:

- That African languages generally have negative social meanings for their speakers. The learners involved in the Le3o project (Project: Language, educational effectiveness and economic outcomes), for example, did not regard African languages as instruments for communication in high-functioning formal contexts (such as legislation, teaching, government communication and parliamentary debates): 58% agreed or strongly agreed that African languages cannot be used for studying technical subjects; only 41% often or very often watched television in African languages (compared to the almost 90% who watched English programmes on television) and only 39.8% listened to the radio in these languages (compared to the 80% who listened to English); and more than 40% of the respondents reported to have no desire to read books, newspapers or magazines in their first languages. African languages are clearly low-function languages for these respondents (52% agreed or strongly agreed that such languages are appropriate only for use with friends).

- That standard languages do not yet seem to be generally accepted in primary language communities. Besides the low proficiency levels … "there seems to be language-internal tension (even conflict) in the L1 communities. In the case of standard Northern Sotho, with its 27 and more varieties, tension is reported to exist between rural and urban varieties. Rural dialects have a negative social meaning in urban areas, with speakers of these dialects regarded as inferior, of low class and uneducated, and city dwellers are said to prefer Pretoria Sotho and Tsotsitaal. Non-urban speakers of Northern Sotho, again, are said to regard Pretoria Sotho and Tsotsitaal as corrupt forms of the Sotho languages. Furthermore, there are dialect communities grouped within Northern Sotho who reject their inclusion into Northern Sotho. Speakers of Lobedu, for example, insist that they do not speak Northern Sotho, but a different language[6]." (Webb 2005:36)

In Webb's (2005:37) opinion, if all South Africans are to have full access to their rights in all domains of public life (with access to quality education, economic opportunity, the political

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[5] From my experience as an interpreter working in the Houses of Parliament, this is the case in parliamentary debates: Most mother tongue speakers of African languages deliver their speeches in English rather than in their mother tongue. This leads to the increased use of English and negatively influences the standardisation of terminology in African languages.
[6] In fact, as stated by Webb (2005:37), in the late 1990s, a delegation of this community requested the Pan South African Language Board to work towards having Lobedu recognised as a separate official national language.

decision-making process and the rights pertaining to social and cultural life), and if educational equity is to be established in South Africa (eradicating inequality, discrimination and disadvantage in a meaningful, effective way), African languages need to be developed into fully-fledged standard languages. In my opinion, the same can be said for SASL.

3.3. Official recognition of South African Sign Language

In recent years, The National Parliament of South Africa recognised the importance of SASL as one of the languages to be interpreted during proceedings. This falls within the National Language Policy Framework, actively implemented in 2003, which refers to equality of all official languages, as well as SASL, and states that multilingualism should be promoted.

In the Language Policy, it is stated that Members of Parliament have the right to use any of the 11 official languages, as well as SASL, in the National Assembly, the National Council of Provinces and in Committee meetings. The inclusion of SASL in this way was a first for South Africa, by which is meant that before 2003, there was no official recognition and support for this minority language.

The failure to recognise SASL in the past has resulted in both Deaf and hearing people receiving limited exposure to SASL, which in turn resulted in limited use of this language by hard of hearing or Deaf people. Another consequence of the lack of recognition of SASL in the past is that no significant development of terminology occurred in this language. There is not only a lack of terminology in certain fields (such as politics) in SASL; there is often more than one way to sign the existing terminology – in other words, SASL lacks terminology but also lacks standardisation, However, according to Morgan and Aarons (1999:357) "based on feedback from the Deaf people we met, and our own observations of the signed language they used, as well as our knowledge of the linguistic features of signed language, we suspect that the signed language used by different Deaf communities in South Africa was essentially the same, and that there was a degree of variation in the use of some lexical items." Morgan and Aarons also suspects that if they did an analysis of the sublexical and syntactic structure of signed language, they would find some interesting similarities.

3.4. Standardisation issues in South African Sign Language

As indicated in Chapter 2, it is claimed that more than one signed language exist in South Africa and according to Aarons and Reynolds (2003:203), there are different reasons that underlie these claims. One such reason is that the various Deaf communities have not mixed much over the years (Aarons and Reynolds 2003:203); consequently, the signed languages used show a degree of lexical variation, "a variation perpetuated by apartheid divisions" (Aarons and Reynolds 2003:203). According to these authors, this effect of apartheid is one of the reasons why many people (both

Deaf and hearing) refer to an Afrikaans sign language or an English sign language or a Xhosa sign language: Past practices have kept the communities in question separate for so long. "The other reason, of course, is that many people still believe there is a direct relationship between the spoken and signed languages of a particular ethnic community" (Aarons and Reynolds 2003:203).

Regarding the standardisation of SASL, the Human Sciences Research Council advertised for a researcher in the mid-1980s to work on the standardisation of this language, and the *Dictionary of Southern African Signs* (Penn 1992b, 1993 – 1994) was the outcome thereof.[7] This dictionary was developed over a 7-year period and focused on lexical differences, attempting to correlate different lexical items with the spoken language communities from which the Deaf users came. Signs were documented from 11 different ethnic and geographical communities in South Africa, and English words and phrases were used to elicit the signs from representatives of each community.

Not all scholars in the field received the *Dictionary of Southern African Signs* with praise. Aarons and Reynolds (2003:20) stated that "the question of signed language syntax is not addressed in the dictionary itself, and the pedagogical purpose seems to be to teach some vocabulary in the context of an English sentence. We believe that the pedagogical approach set forward in the dictionary is fraught with many dangers." They continue, stating that a close examination of some of the signs listed in the dictionary as translations into different varieties for the same English word reveals that "some of these signs differ only in one or another inflectional aspect or perhaps a hand-shape alternation and should not be considered as different signs but as different inflections of the same sign." An example of such an entry is that for the English word *look*, given in Figure 3.1 below. Specifically, Variations 3 to 5 would illustrate the last point made by Aarons and Reynolds (2003).

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[7] Examples from this dictionary were used as illustrations in Chapter 2.

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LOOK
Grammatical category: verb.
Level: preschool.
Theme: Sight-act.
Translations: *Kyk* (Afrikaans), *Buka* (Zulu), *Sheba, tadima* (Sotho).
Synonyms: See/watch.
Example of usage: Look at the beautiful bird with the red beak.
*Kyk vir daardie pragtige voel* (Afrikaans).
Variation 1: One-handed sign in which G-hand, palm left, hand up, moves
outwards and downwards from eye level. Used by Northern Transvaal Ts-
wana and Zulu Natal.
Variation 2: One-handed sign in which B-hand, palm left, hand up, moves
diagonally outwards and downwards from eye. Used by Transvaal Indian.
Variation 3: One-handed sign in which V-hand, palm left, hand up, moves
outwards and downwards from eye. Used by Natal English and taught in the
Department of Education and Training Schools (i.e., the black schools).
Variation 4: One-handed sign in which V-hand, palm down, hand away,
moves outwards and downwards from bridge of nose. Used by Cape English.
Variation 5: One-handed sign in which V-hand, palm towards, hand up,
moves outward and downward from eyes. Used by Soweto Sotho, Zulu
Natal, Cape Afrikaans, Transvaal Afrikaans.
GENERAL: Transparent sign. All versions involve movement from eye level.
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Figure 4. Entry for look *in Dictionary of Southern African Signs (from Penn 1992b:356, italics added by Aarons and Reynolds 2003:20)*

Aarons and Reynolds (2003) are also of the opinion that the dictionary "ignores how SASL, just like other languages, has different registers for formal and less formal occasions with polite and less-polite signs, slang, fast signing, in-group signing, and all the other variations that other languages boast, depending on the context of their use." When examining the dictionary, it is found that the elicitation and presentation of items for the dictionary does not take these factors into account.

Aarons and Reynolds (2003) furthermore observe that, when South African Deaf people gather from different communities, they all seem to communicate rather well with one another, which raises the question as to how different various forms of SASL are on a lexical level.

Aarons and Reynolds admit that insufficient research has as yet been conducted on the sign language used in South Africa to make the claim one way or another that there is one sign language. It is my opinion that, as stated in Chapter 2, the Deaf people in South Africa make use of different varieties of SASL. However, if there is one SASL with a number of varieties, this leads us to the ongoing debate on what variety of signed language should be the standard.

As discussed in Chapter 2, a main difference between signed languages and spoken languages is that spoken languages are mostly accessed and received through auditory means whereas sign language is mostly accessed through visual means. During the course of academic research into

sign language, various forms of transcribing sign language, i.e. converting sign language into written form, were developed. However, there is no standardised and broadly used way of transcribing Sign language. To hearing persons, spoken and written language are two forms of the same language. By contrast, Deaf people do not write the same as they would speak. Given Milroy and Milroy's (1985:22) statement that it is easier to standardise a written form than a spoken form of a language, sign language should be more difficult to standardise than spoken languages, given that the written and oral forms of sign language differ extensively.

The standardising of sign language and the impact that sign language traditions, as they manifest in the various cultures in South Africa, have on terminology development, are phenomena that have not been subjected to significant academic investigation. In the present study, the focus will be on determining whether there is a need for standardisation of terminology in SASL to satisfy the language demands of the National Parliament of South Africa. As mentioned above, as is the case for most other South African languages, SASL faces the challenge of standardising political terminology.

In order to contextualise the study further, a brief overview is now given of standardisation issues pertaining to BSL and ASL.

3.5. The standardisation of British Sign Language

To answer the question as to whether or not BSL is standardised, Deafsign.com answers as follows: "BSL, like spoken language, has evolved through the needs of its users in spontaneous and natural ways. There are wide regional differences in some signs - numbers and colours are notoriously variable, however most signs are the same. Many of the variations stem from the schools Deaf people attended; new signs are being coined, and more established signs changing with time and use. Hearing learners may find this a problem in the early stages, but it does not present a problem to native signers. Variations are largely in the vocabulary of signs - the 'words' of the language; the grammatical structures that hold it together and give meaning, vary very little. Language has a life of its own, and most attempts to interfere or control it tend to fail."

A number of factors account for why BSL is changing and growing at a rapid pace. According to Deuchar (1984:130), there is variation in BSL, in the same way in which variation is found in spoken English, and this variation is found at the same levels of the language and is linked to "the same kind of social factors" (Deuchar 1984:130). Sutton-Spence and Woll (2000:23) concur: "Just as there are variations according to region, social group membership and the social situation, so there are regional, social and situational differences in BSL".

Several societal structures are responsible for the variations in BSL, some of them directly related to education of the Deaf. According to Deuchar (1984:130), the Deaf in Britain are unlike the Deaf

in some other cultural minorities. In many other countries, the Deaf tend to live together in isolation, but in Britain, the Deaf are widespread throughout the country. British Deaf persons from various geographical areas meet in educational institutions for Deaf individuals, bringing with them their regional varieties of BSL signs. Related to this, another factor, accounting for much of the variation in BSL, is geographical distance between various members of the Deaf community.

According to Sutton-Spence and Woll (2005:179), reasons for changes in sign language include language planning. With great and noble intentions, language enthusiasts "created new signs and morphological markers to create a system of signing which matched the structure of the spoken language of a country". These signs were generally ignored by the Deaf community itself.

Another reason for changes in sign language is standardisation, even though it is unclear whether a standard form of BSL exists. Whereas a standard variety of English was taught to children, learners of BSL learned dialects of BSL. Even then, the teachers were not necessarily native signers themselves. (Sutton-Spence and Woll 2005:180)

Sutton-Spence and Woll (2005:179) state that "despite the degree of variation, there is no doubt that British Deaf people recognise BSL as one language".

During early research on sign languages, it was emphasised that structural similarities existed between spoken and signed languages. However, more recent research has revealed that there are systematic typological differences between signed languages and spoken languages (Sutton-Spence and Woll 2005:167). Furthermore, research has recognised greater typological variation among spoken languages than among sign languages. Unfortunately, more research is still required to look into the number of possible explanations for the grammatical similarities among sign languages. Sutton-Spence and Woll (2005:168) state that "sign languages are relatively young languages, and indeed, the recent studies of Nicaraguan sign language (Kegl, Senghas and Coppola 1999) suggest that sign languages can arise and develop spontaneously in Deaf communities over three generations".

3.6.   The standardisation of American Sign Language

Interestingly, because of the early influence of the sign language of France upon the school system for the Deaf in America, the vocabularies of ASL and modern French Sign Language are approximately 60% shared, whereas ASL and BSL, for example, are almost completely dissimilar (Paroline 2003). According to the Rochester Institute of Technology (http://fltc.rit.edu/flws/asl.php.), ASL is unique to the United States of America. The establishment of the first school for the Deaf in the United States of America in 1817 led to the standardisation of ASL.

From the above, it thus appears that both BSL and ASL have variations but that these variations are mutually intelligible, which could be taken to point to some form of standardisation. The same cannot necessarily yet be said of SASL. Various terminological differences exist between the several varieties of SASL. Where more than one sign is used for one English equivalent, the possibility of miscommunication exists.

3.7. The present study: Potential for miscommunication in Parliament

It is acknowledged that the legislature context is the most difficult interpreting context in terms of text complexity and time constraints (Wallmach 2000). At present, National Parliament employs four sign language interpreters. These interpreters are all from different sign language traditions (see Section 4.3) and the Deaf Member of Parliament[8] as well as the Deaf members of the public differ from these interpreters in terms of geographical area of origin, ethnic background and SASL variety. For this reason, it is possible that non-standardised signs (by which is meant "different signs by different interpreters") are used during parliamentary sessions, which could lead to a breakdown in communication.

This study aimed to establish whether the non-standardised SASL signs used by the SASL interpreters for key terms in National Parliament are understood by Deaf adults. This study is limited to the context of political debate in Parliament, an area where very little SASL interpreting has occurred in the past. Throughout the research on SASL and the standardising of terms, it has been clear that it would be a difficult exercise to attempt standardisation. The lexical variants used by Deaf adults and those used by the SASL interpreters in Parliament could lead to miscommunication. However, would standardisation be the answer to overcome this miscommunication? The methodology used to answer the research question is described in the next chapter.

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[8] Note that the Deaf member of Parliament at this stage still makes use of her own interpreters, i.e., not of my services or those of the other two parliamentary SASL interpreters,

Chapter 4:
Methodology

4.1.   Research question

As stated in Chapter 2, the question to be answered by this study is whether there is a need for SASL to be standardised to promote communication and/or avoid misunderstandings while interpreting the proceedings of The National Parliament of South Africa. In this chapter, I give an exposition of the manner in which data were gathered and analysed to answer this question.

4.2.   General experimental protocol

Video-recordings were made of two sign language interpreters (see Section 4.3) each signing the same terms. The terms comprised 10 terms often used in debate in National Parliament (see Section 4.5). The recordings were then shown to three SASL-speaking adults (see Section 4.4), who were asked to write down the meaning of each term (see Section 4.6). The responses of the SASL-speaking informants were then analysed, comparing the informants as a group in terms of their responses to each of the two sign language interpreters (see Section 4.7). In short, I established (i) which of the signs were understood correctly, and which incorrectly, (ii) whether all three informants understood all the signs, and (iii) whether both signers used the same signs for each term.

4.3.   The sign language interpreters

Both SASL interpreters (henceforth "interpreters") are currently employed at the National Parliament of South Africa. Annie[9] originates from Gauteng, but has been living in Cape Town for 3 years. She was born to Deaf parents. She grew up speaking Sesotho, Setswana and isiZulu, residing in a Sesotho-speaking community with strong Sotho cultural roots. As Annie has Deaf parents, she is identified as a native signer. She attended the Job Rathebe Primary School and then the Lofentse Girls High School (Gauteng) as well as the Tsebo High School (Free State), all schools for hearing learners. She passed matric and studied further to obtain a National Diploma in Translating and Interpreting. Annie has been working as an interpreter for 10 years.

Victoria is originally from KwaZulu Natal and comes from the Xhosa culture. She has been living in Cape Town for 3 years and has been working as an interpreter for 11 years. She used to be a teacher of Deaf children at Indaleni School for the Deaf where she taught for 9 years, but she has no Deaf family members. She attended the Pholela High School in KwaZulu Natal and obtained her matric, after which she continued her studies in the form of a Diploma in Primary Education and

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[9] Pseudonyms are used throughout for both the interpreters as well as for the SASL-speaking informants.

a Higher Diploma in Deaf Education. She also completed a certificate in Communities and Local Government Level 1 and 2 in SASL. Because Victoria's initial age of exposure to SASL was much later than that of people like Annie, she is identified as a non-native signer.

Due to their places of origin (Gauteng and KwaZulu Natal, respectively), Annie and Victoria have been exposed to different varieties of SASL.

4.4.   The SASL-speaking informants

Three male Deaf adults acted as informants. Their details are set out below. All three were informed that I was doing research on the use of SASL in Parliament (they thus did not know what the research question was) and that participation would entail identifying the meaning of signs which will be shown to them on a television screen.

The first two informants are from the same sign language tradition and the third one is from another. All three informants were previously known to me. The first two are acquaintances of mine; I know them professionally as well as personally, through work and family friends. The third informant is one of my family members. All three informants willingly gave their time to the study and appeared to perform the task with dedication.

Erhard is 69 years old. He was born as a hearing child in Heidelberg (Western Cape) and became deaf at the age of 15 years due to incorrect medication to treat meningitis. He attended a school for hearing learners until he was transferred to De la Bat School (in Worcester) at the age of 16 years. He is fluent in Afrikaans, English and SASL. He completed his matric and started working in carpentry. Only at a later stage in his life did he attend tertiary institutions to further his studies, obtaining a Bachelor's degree through UNISA and then a Master's degree (in SASL Linguistics) through Stellenbosch University. For many years, he was involved with various Deaf institutions, amongst others DEAFSA and the Institute for the Deaf. He married a Deaf woman and together they had two sons (who are both hearing). He and his wife are now retired. Erhard has been exposed to limited parliamentary SASL terminology on an informal basis through discussions with his son Arno (who is discussed below) and other Deaf people interested in political matters.

Arno is the 39-year-old hearing son of Erhard. He is a well respected SASL interpreter and performs interpreting duties for Etv (during the news bulletin) as well as other freelance interpreting assignments. Because he has been exposed to SASL in the home from birth, he is regarded as a native signer. He is also fluent in Afrikaans and English, and due to his interpreting of news reports on parliamentary sittings, he is highly familiar with parliamentary SASL terminology.

Hanko is a 60-year-old male who was born hearing, but became deaf at the age of a few months due to an accident. His parents were hearing and raised him in Delportshoop. He started attending

the De la Bat School for the Deaf in Worcester (De la Bat School) at the age of 3 years and uses SASL as his first language. Hanko reached Grade 10 (then Standard 8) at school and thereafter received training in carpentry. He currently still works as a carpenter. He married a Deaf woman (whom he met at school) and together they are raising three children (all hearing). Hanko has not been exposed to parliamentary terminology because he has not been afforded the opportunity to attend debates. However, he does follow reports on parliamentary sittings broadcasted during television news bulletins which make use of SASL interpreters.

4.5. The signs used in this study

In order to select the terms to be used in this study, a parliamentary sitting was audio-recorded. From this recording, 10 commonly used technical terms were identified. A video-recording was then made of each interpreter signing each of these terms independently, using the signs they would normally use during interpreting in Parliament. The 10 terms are as follows:

(i)   Absolute Majority

(ii)   Bill of Rights

(iii)   Basic Right

(iv)   Black Economic Empowerment

(v)   Civil society

(vi)   Disadvantaged Community

(vii)   Embargo

(viii)   Human Rights Commission

(ix)   Language Diversity

(x)   Nepotism

4.6. Data collection procedure

The order in which the terms were signed was randomised for each of the interpreters separately. During video-recording, I read the terms one by one to each interpreter separately, in random order, upon which they signed each term corresponding to the English word which I read. In order to avoid prior consultation between the interpreters, the SASL interpreters only saw the list of terms when they entered the room for the video recording.

The recordings were then shown to the three SASL-speaking informants. They were asked to watch the interpreter sign a term and then to write down in English or Afrikaans what they understood the sign to mean. Each informant completed this procedure independently; I visited each one separately in his home to collect the data.

4.7.   Data analysis procedure

Because the focus of this study was not on the cultural background of the informants themselves but rather on the extent to which the informants correctly understood the two interpreters' signs, the responses of one informant were compared to those of the other informants, but not in detail.

The analyses of inter-informant comparisons were superficial whereas inter-interpreter comparisons were detailed. Out of the 10 terms signed by the SASL interpreters, only one term was signed lexically the same, although with slight variation on some of the inflections.

The responses of the informants were tabulated according to sign, and then also according to the interpreter using that sign, as indicated in Table 4.1 below.

Table 1. Sample tabulation of response to one item

Sign	Interpreter	Informant	Response	Score	Total
Nepotism	Annie	Erhard	Abuse	0	**0**
		Arno	Smooth talk	0	
		Hanko	Not give attention what I say	0	
	Victoria	Erhard	Family appointment	1	**1**
		Arno	Family support	0	
		Hanko	Committee together, appoint one person	0	

Each response was then scored: Where the response correlated completely with the intended meaning, a score of 2 was assigned to that response. For instance, Erhard wrote that the meaning of Annie's sign for *Disadvantaged Community* was "Disadvantaged Community"; this response was awarded 2 marks. Where the response differed from the indented meaning but was still highly related to it, a score of 1 was assigned to that response. An example would be Erhard's response "Family appointment" to Annie's sign for *Nepotism*. Where the response differed totally from the intended meaning, a score of 0 was assigned to that response. For instance, the following response of Hanko's to Victoria's sign for *Embargo* received 0: "Each one ask question".

The total score for each sign of each interpreter was then calculated out of a maximum of 6. Scores of 0-2 were taken to indicate that the intended meaning of the sign was not understood poorly; scores of 3-4 to indicate that the meaning was understood somewhat, and scores of 5-6 that scores were understood well.

A composite score for each interpreter was calculated out of a maximum of 60. These scores and their interpretation are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5:
Results and discussion

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the results of the task performed by the informants are presented. In Section 5.2, I set out how each English term was signed by each of the interpreters. In Section 5.3, I give the informant responses per SASL interpreter (indicating how each sign of each interpreter was interpreted by the three informants), and in Section 5.4, I give the responses per informant. In Section 5.5, the responses to each individual sign are considered. Section 5.6 concludes the chapter with a general discussion of the obtained results.

5.2. The signs used by each interpreter

Of the 10 terms, Annie and Victoria only signed one, namely "Language Diversity", in the same manner. Interestingly, this was also the only term which all informants understood completely. One needs to bear in mind that this term is probably the least technical of the 10, as the sign used for the term "Language Diversity" is known to the informants because it is used extensively outside of Parliament when the Deaf community discusses SASL on both informal and formal levels. Thus the informants would have been exposed to this sign during everyday life. This could be the reason why all of the informants gave the expected meaning for "Language Diversity".

A rudimentary breakdown of the manner in which each term was signed follows below:

(i)   Absolute Majority
Annie: "full, many". The facial expression showed puffy cheeks to indicate "many".
Victoria: "many, people". The facial expression showed puffy cheeks to indicate "many".

(ii)   Bill of Rights
Annie: "bill, right, page". Her lip movements included a partial pronunciation of the English word "right".
Victoria: "page, right".

(iii)   Basic Right
Annie: "basic, right" In this instance, she uses the same sign for "right" as she when signing the term "Bill of Rights" but she changed the direction and inflection of the sign. Lexically, it was still the same sign, but with subtle variation.
Victoria: "basic, right". Here, she used a different sign than Annie for "basic", which could be interpreted as "sit". She also purses her lips when signing "right".

(iv)   Black Economic Empowerment

Annie: "Black, money, power from biceps to others". She only mouthed the word "black" and kept her lips closed for the duration of the rest of the sequence.

Victoria: "Black, money, power". She used lip movements (pursing her lips, pouting, etc.) but did not simulate English words by mouthing it.

(v)   Civil society

Annie: "community, group". Mouthing of words did not take place in this instance.

Victoria: "community, groups".

(vi)   Disadvantaged Community

Annie: "pushed away, community". Here she deviates from SASL structure which would have indicated "community" first and then "pushed away".

Victoria: "poor, community". Her understanding of the meaning of the term also influenced her decision to make use of the sign for "poor" to indicate "disadvantaged".

(vii)   Embargo

Annie: "page, block, speech, President's". I suspect that she only had a partial understanding of this term and therefore narrowed it down to one type.

Victoria: "discuss". She hesitated before signing this term and I suspect that she had only had a partial understanding of this term.

(viii)   Human Rights Commission

Annie: "human right commission" She partly mouthed the word "right" and this time reverted to the exact same sign used for "right" during the signing of the term "Bill of Rights".

Victoria: "human, right, committee, group".

(ix)   Language Diversity

Annie: "language, different". She partly mouthed the word "language" and puffed her cheeks when indicating "different".

Victoria: "language, different". She signs "language" a little differently to Annie by using the same hand shape, but in a different location and using a different inflection to indicate "language".

(x)   Nepotism

Annie: "person, sweet talk". It was difficult to find a specific English term for the nepotism part of the sign as this sign can also be used for different meanings. She also indicated puffy cheeks and a piece of her tongue protruded from the side of her mouth. Her facial expression is that of disapproval which is indicated by a frown.

Victoria: "family, move".

It was noted that Annie tended to simulate English words by partially or completely mouthing the word while signing the equivalent and showing a lot of facial expressions whereas Victoria did not mouth any words, not even partially. Victoria also used limited facial expression beyond the lip movement of pursing or pouting and occasionally blowing out her cheeks as part of the signing process.

The analyses of these terms above were done subjectively by myself and even here my own interpretation of their signs are based on my knowledge of SASL and unavoidably influenced by my own signing traditions, geographical origin, etc.

5.3.   Responses per interpreter

Table 5.1 overleaf contains the response given by each of the three informants to each of the 10 terms signed by the two parliamentary SASL interpreters, as well as the scores assigned to each of these responses. Annie's signs scored a total 25 out of 60, whereas Victoria scored a total of 29 out of 60, a higher score indicating the signs were more intelligible to the informants. From these total scores, it appears that Victoria's signs were marginally more intelligible than those of Annie, but it is noteworthy that not one of the two interpreters could obtain a score of 50%, which means that, signed in isolation, the signs were correctly understood less than half of the time.

The other nine signs differed from each other in terms of the manner in which the two interpreters signed them and also in terms of the responses and level of understanding of the informants. Of these nine signs, the ones used for "Human Rights Commission" were most similar between the two SASL interpreters. "Human Rights Commission" was signed in a similar fashion, but with slight differences between the two interpreters in terms of inflections of the hand and sequence of signs. Despite the similarities between the two versions of "Human Rights Commission", not all informants could interpret the sign. It appears then that it is not necessarily the similarity between interpreters (and thus the fact that the SASL informants would repeatedly have seen the same signs used for the same intended meaning) but rather the familiarity of the concept represented by the sign which leads to correct responses amongst the SASL-speaking informants.

Table 2. Responses of SASL informants to signed used by two SASL interpreters

No.	Term	Interpreter	Infor-mant	Response	Score	Total score for sign, per interpreter
1	Absolute Majority	Annie	Erhard	Grow to cover everything	0	0
			Arno	*Couldn't identify*	0	
			Hanko	More clothes	0	
		Victoria	Erhard	Many people	1	2
			Arno	More people	1	
			Hanko	More meet	0	
2	Bill of Rights	Annie	Erhard	Bill agreement document	1	1
			Arno	*Couldn't identify*	0	
			Hanko	Yes, through in	0	
		Victoria	Erhard	Rights	1	2
			Arno	… Rights	1	
			Hanko	3 persons through	0	
3	Basic Right	Annie	Erhard	Basic Right	2	4
			Arno	Basic Right	2	
			Hanko	Put away	0	
		Victoria	Erhard	Basic Right	2	4
			Arno	Basic Right	2	
			Hanko	Best through	0	
4	Black Economic Empower-ment	Annie	Erhard	Black Power	1	2
			Arno	*Couldn't identify*	0	
			Hanko	Decision, give power people	1	
		Victoria	Erhard	Black Economic Empowerment	2	4
			Arno	Black Economic Empowerment	2	
			Hanko	Decision strong	0	
5	Civil Society	Annie	Erhard	Community Area	1	2
			Arno	Community	1	
			Hanko	Change circumstances	0	
		Victoria	Erhard	Community Group	1	3
			Arno	Community organisations	1	
			Hanko	People together, group, group	1	
6	Disadvan-taged Commu-nity	Annie	Erhard	Disadvantaged Community	2	5
			Arno	Disadvantaged Community	2	
			Hanko	Neglect, change	1	
		Victoria	Erhard	Poor Community	1	2
			Arno	Poor Community	1	
			Hanko	Behave good people	0	
7	Embargo	Annie	Erhard	Document stop	1	1
			Arno	*Couldn't identify*	0	
			Hanko	Each one ask question	0	
		Victoria	Erhard	Discuss	0	0
			Arno	Discuss	0	
			Hanko	People not learn lesson	0	
8	Human Rights Commis-sion	Annie	Erhard	Human Rights Commission	2	4
			Arno	Human Rights Commission	2	
			Hanko	Through tired committee	0	

No.	Term	Interpreter	Infor-mant	Response	Score	Total score for sign, per interpreter
		Victoria	Erhard	Human Rights Commission	2	4
			Arno	Human Rights Commission	2	
			Hanko	Group strong together	0	
9	Language Diversity	Annie	Erhard	Language different	2	6
			Arno	Language difference	2	
			Hanko	Language different	2	
		Victoria	Erhard	Language diversity	2	6
			Arno	Language variation	2	
			Hanko	Language different	2	
10	Nepotism	Annie	Erhard	Abuse	0	0
			Arno	Smooth talk	0	
			Hanko	Not give attention what I say	0	
		Victoria	Erhard	Family appointment	1	2
			Arno	Family support	1	
			Hanko	Committee together, appoint one person	0	

From the scores which the signs received (0, 1 or 2 out of a possible 6), it appears that the following signs were not understood: Those used by both interpreters (although they used different signs) for "Absolute Majority", "Bill of Rights", "Embargo" and "Nepotism"; Annie's signs for "Black Economic Empowerment" and "Civil Society"; as well as Victoria's signs for "Disadvantaged Community". The following signs appeared to be understood, receiving scores of 5 or 6 out of 6: Annie's sign for "Disadvantaged Community" (whereas that of Victoria was not understood) and that used by the two interpreters for "Language Diversity", which was discussed above. On this analysis, Annie has marginally more non-understood signs than does Victoria (6 versus 5), but Annie also has marginally more understood signs than does Victoria (2 versus 1).

5.4.   Responses per informant

The specific responses of the three informants to each item were given in Table 5.1. In Table 5.2 (overleaf), the scores per informant (as opposed to per interpreter) are given. From the information in Table 5.2, it can be seen that one informant (Arno) interpreted Victoria's signs correctly to a greater extent than Annie's signs. For the other two informants, there was almost no difference between the two interpreters in terms of the overall interpretability of the signs.

Table 3. Total scores of SASL informants, per SASL interpreter

Signer	Candidate	Response
Erhard	Annie	12 / 20
	Victoria	13 / 20
Arno	Annie	9 / 20
	Victoria	13 / 20
Hanko	Annie	4 / 20
	Victoria	3 / 20

5.5. Responses per sign

The specific responses per sign were given in Table 5.1 above. The following signs were not understood at all by the SASL-speaking informants, with the response of all three informants being assigned a score of 0 out of 2: Annie's signs for "Absolute Majority" and "Nepotism", and Victoria's signs for "Embargo". The only sign that was completely understood by all SASL informants, with all informants obtaining a score of 2 out of 2, was that for "Language Diversity", as discussed in Section 5.2 above. Table 5.3 indicates which signs (per interpreter) were equally understood by the informants, based on the overall score obtained by them as a group.

Table 4. Comparative clarity of signs, based on group score of SASL informants

Clarity	Overall score	Interpreter	Signs
Maximal	6/6	Annie	Language Diversity
		Victoria	Language Diversity
	5/6	Annie	Disadvantaged Community
		Victoria	--
	4/6	Annie	Basic Right, Human Rights Commission
		Victoria	Basic Right, Black Economic Empowerment, Human Rights Commission
	3/6	Annie	--
		Victoria	Civil Society
	2/6	Annie	Black Economic Empowerment, Civil Society
		Victoria	Absolute Majority, Bill of Rights, Disadvantaged Community, Nepotism
	1/6	Annie	Bill of Rights, Embargo
		Victoria	--
Minimal	0/6	Annie	Absolute Majority, Nepotism
		Victoria	Embargo

5.6. General overview of the results

The sign used by Annie and that used by Victoria was the same for "Language Diversity" and almost the same for "Human Rights Commission". For the remainder of the terms, the physical signs, and often the meaning ascribed to them by the SASL informants, differed extensively.

Of the two terms interpreted similarly by the two interpreters, only one was seen by all informants as having the same meaning, namely "Language Diversity". Even though Annie's and Victoria's signs for "Human Rights Commission" were highly comparable, Hanko did not interpret them as such. According to him, Annie was signing "through tired committee" and Victoria was signing "group strong together".

Regarding those eight terms for which the two interpreters used different signs: Despite the difference between the signs, Erhard and Arno judged both Annie's and Victoria's signs for "Basic Rights" to mean just that. These two SASL informants also judged the different signs of the two interpreters for "Disadvantaged Community" to mean almost the same, with Annie's sign being interpreted to mean "disadvantaged community" and Victoria's "poor community", the former being a superordinate of the latter. The other six terms which were signed in different manners by the two interpreters were also understood by the informants to have different meanings. In some instances, at least two of the informants agreed on the meaning ascribed to the sign and at other times not. An example of the former is "Embargo", which both Erhard and Arno thought meant "discuss". An example of the latter is "Nepotism", where Annie's sign was seen to mean "abuse", "smooth talk" or "not give attention (to) what I say" whereas Victoria's (different) sign was seen to mean "family appointment", "family support" or "community together, appoint one person".

From the above, it is clear that different SASL signs are being used by the two parliamentary interpreters for equivalents of English terminology. Where the signs are similar (although not necessarily exactly the same), there is a possibility that more persons would be able to follow the signs, as was the case for "Language Diversity" above. However, as stated above, the similar signs used by the two interpreters for "Language Diversity" and for "Human Rights Commission" did not yield the same results: "Language Diversity" was signed the same and was understood by all the informants whereas "Human Rights Commission" was also signed (almost) the same, but was not understood by all the informants. It seems therefore that frequent previous exposure to a term, as is this case for "Language Diversity", influenced the informants' ability to understand and respond correctly in this study.

Chapter 6:
Conclusion

6.1   Summary of the results

This study was conducted in an effort to answer the question of whether there is a need for SASL to be standardised to promote successful communication and/or avoid misunderstandings while interpreting the proceedings of The National Parliament of South Africa. It was found that the two parliamentary SASL interpreters did not make use of the same sign for the same term in most cases. Only one of the 10 signs investigated in this study was signed the same by the two interpreters, while one other was signed very similarly. Sometimes there were slight differences between the signs used by the two, but at other times they used vastly different signs as equivalents to a particular English term.

The manner in which Deaf users of SASL interpret the SASL signs used by the parliamentary interpreters revealed that the standardisation of SASL alone will not necessarily make core terms interpreted during parliamentary sessions accessible to the end-user of SASL. In the first place, the interpreters are influenced by their own cultural background, geographical origins and sign language tradition when signing during an interpreting session in Parliament. Add to this the possibility that the Deaf person reading the signs is from a different cultural background, geographical origin and sign language tradition than the interpreter, and the possibility is great that miscommunication will occur or that the Deaf person would indicate that they do not understand what was interpreted. This would mean that Deaf people have limited access to the content of parliamentary sessions, not because SASL interpretation is not provided, but because the meaning of some of the technical terms used during such interpretation is not understood by all Deaf people.

6.2   Value and limitations of the study

This study has some limitations. The first is that it was a small-scale study, which limits the generalisability of the results. Furthermore, all three SASL informants reside in the Western Cape, originate from the same Deaf Community and have the same religious background. Whereas this is a limitation, it is also interesting to note that even within an apparently homogenous population of SASL users, the interpretation given to one and the same sign often differs.

A further limitation was that the responses of the SASL informants were scored in a subjective manner. There were no existing guidelines to follow when deciding how closely related the meaning given by the informant was to the meaning which the interpreter intended to convey.

Another limitation is that the two SASL interpreters both originate from provinces other than the Western Cape and only moved to Cape Town in 2006. The possibility exists that if the informants originated from the same area as the SASL interpreters, the results could have been completely different. However, interpreting in Parliament exposes the interpreter to Deaf persons from across the whole country, therefore implying that making use of interpreters raised in the Western Cape only is not justifiable for the purpose of this specific study.

A final limitation was that all terms were signed in isolation. It could be that placing them in context will illuminate their meaning, at least to an extent, and this could be investigated in future studies on this topic.

However, the results have been very informative, and lay the groundwork for more in-depth research. The topic of standardisation in SASL is a difficult issue and is influenced by many factors. Where a spoken language can have a standardised written form and several nonstandard spoken varieties, SASL does not have a written form, which complicates standardisation.

6.3   Implications of the study for theory and practice

Standardising SASL might not be attainable in the near future, but the opportunity is there to develop new terminology. Over time and through the regular use of the new, standardised terms, Deaf people will be more likely to understand the terminology during parliamentary proceedings accurately. (Whether every individual Deaf person will understand the interpreter through various dialects, is another issue and whether this will ever be attainable seems too far into the future to fathom.) That said, the question arises as to whether Deaf people will make use of a standardised form of SASL or whether only a small group of Deaf people (the so-called "elite") will use the standard signs, since they work in the interpreting industry and therefore are more exposed to the signs used.

6.4   An indication of directions for further research on this topic

Due to the various dialects of SASL, the different backgrounds of its users and various other factors, there is still a great possibility that miscommunication across (deaf) cultures will occur during SASL interpreting of parliamentary proceedings, not only from the Deaf person's side, but also from the interpreters' side. In many instances, the interpreters might not fully understand what they are interpreting, and may then make use of the incorrect sign. This causes even more miscommunication between the Deaf person and the Member of Parliament (via the interpreter). Because such miscommunication reduces the access Deaf people have to political debates, and as such limits their participation in political matters, further research regarding the use of SASL in Parliament is warranted. In future studies, the limitations of the current one should be addressed, in the sense that a larger number SASL-speakers, more representative of the heterogeneous Deaf

population of South Africa, should be consulted, and that signs should be used in context as well as in isolation.

Studies conducted on the standardisation of other languages, specifically African languages, highlight the fact that it is not only SASL that has been experiencing problems with standardisation. It is recommended that future research on the standardisation of SASL considers the process which is underway to standardise certain African languages spoken in South Africa, and that such research ascertains whether the process for such African languages (most of which are official languages of the country) can inform the process needed to standardise SASL, a non-official, minority language with no written tradition.

6.5   Concluding remark

As stated in Chapter 1, I am a hearing child of Deaf adults. As such, I grew up bicultural and trilingual (in SASL, Afrikaans and English). In the course of my work as a SASL interpreter for Parliament and for a news programme on national television, it became clear to me that I do not use the same signs as do my colleagues, neither those in Parliament nor those at the television station. My concern was that this would cause those Deaf people for whom we interpret to misunderstand what we are intending to convey. This study has shown that there are grounds for such a concern: It appears that SASL users (co-members of my Deaf cultural group) indeed do not always follow when interpreters use certain signs for frequently used terminology, leading to (possibly unnoticed on the side of the interpreter and even the Deaf person) intercultural miscommunication. This study is a first step in making the political process more accessible to Deaf people; as such, it has made a limited yet meaningful contribution to sign language Studies in South Africa.

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