

Empowerment and disempowerment: A descriptive analysis of parliamentary interpreters

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This study aims to investigate the role of the interpreter in the Parliament of South Africa, but more specifically, to examine the reasons why parliamentary interpreters feel more empowered when they are physically available as opposed to when they interpret remotely. Interpreters working in parliament are required to perform in different settings, employ different working modes and address different audiences. Therefore, interpreters require some adjustments in their role between the above-mentioned settings. Interpreters working in the Parliament of South Africa claim that they gain less respect and recognition when they work remotely during parliamentary sittings as opposed to when they are onsite. They further state that they feel that no one listens to them when interpreting in the House and Members of Parliament do not see the need to provide copies of their speeches beforehand. However, interpreters add that when Parliament goes to the people, Members of Parliament see the significance of making their speeches available beforehand (Sogiba 2018). The main research question aims to address reasons pertaining to why parliamentary interpreters feel empowered or disempowered in certain interpreting contexts. To address the above-mentioned problem statement and research question, a qualitative research design will be employed, and in-depth interviews with interpreters will be conducted. The study will then compare the role of parliamentary interpreters when they perform simultaneous interpreting remotely during parliamentary sittings and in “less formal” parliamentary sessions such as public hearing sessions (Ntuli 2012:1). Interpreters in parliament often feel unappreciated and insignificant to their users. Therefore, research and awareness in the interpreting profession is needed to educate people whom interpreting is rendered, as it is every practitioner’s desire to be recognized regardless of the setting.

Key terms: conference interpreting; parliamentary interpreting; simultaneous interpreting; remote interpreting; interpreting context; role of interpreters