South African Sign Language (SASL) Interpreter Portrayal on SABC 1 News Bulletin: What Do Viewers Think?

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Abstract

Television Sign Language (SL) Interpreters play a vital role in providing the Deaf community with access to information and knowledge in their primary language, Sign Language*. This helps the Deaf community stay informed regarding events in their local and global environment, contributing to their development. However, a lack of research exists on SL interpreters on television. With on-screen placement of SL interpreters during news broadcasts being the primary focus in previous studies, this paper attempts to offer a unique contribution from an audience perception examination of South African Sign Language (SASL) interpreter portrayal in newscasts and its impact. The research, conducted on the SABC 1 news bulletin, employed a qualitative method and purposive sampling. Twelve participants, divided into four categories – Deaf, Hard of hearing, hearing, and SASL interpreters participated in the study through virtual interviews as data collection method. The study findings indicate the portrayal of SASL interpreters on television reflects the discrimination, inequality, and disrespect faced by the Deaf community.*

Keywords: sign language interpreters; South African sign language; deaf community; on-screen placement

Introduction

In the past, television (TV) stations often neglected the needs of the Deaf community by not incorporating Sign Language into their programmes, particularly the news broadcasts, leaving them uninformed about current events in their society and the world. Although the presence of SL interpreters on TV began in the 1950s (Bosch-Baliarda *et al.* 2020), it was not until the early 2000s this phenomenon was observed in South Africa. Previously, the Deaf community in South Africa were exclusively denied access to information, as the apartheid era prioritised English and Afrikaans over other languages, including SASL (Reagan, 2008). Among numerous sources of information, TV is a popular source and widely preferred method for receiving news, entertainment, and other content. Recently, youths predominantly turn to the internet and social media for news and information; however, TV remains a significant and enduring medium for accessing news, particularly for senior citizens (Farhi and Chettah, 2020). According to Singh and Pandey (2017), TV is the second most widely used medium for information and has become a central part of many people's daily lives. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) has been instrumental in providing SL interpretation to South African Deaf audiences, serving as the voice and vision of South Africans since its relaunch in 1996 (SABC, 2020). The idea behind the relaunch was to better serve the public by broadcasting in the official languages of the country (Mhlambi, 2015). This activity was later followed by commitment from the SABC to treating all languages fairly in its programmes, including Sign Language.

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Minority languages, such as Xitshonga, San languages and SASL, however, continue to experience inequality and invisibility in the media (Ramallo, 2017). For instance, in South African TV, SL interpretation is often limited to news broadcasts, emergency and government announcements (De Wit *et al.*, 2020). Wehrmeyer (2013), Marucha and Ngigi (2018), Bosch-Baliarda *et al*. (2020), and Yi *et al*. (2021) investigated various aspects of SL interpretation on TV. Wehrmeyer (2013) explored factors hindering comprehension of SL interpretation in South African TV news broadcasts. Bosch-Baliarda *et al*. (2020) provided recommendations for the formal display of SL interpreters on TV. This paper, however, analyses audience perception of SL interpretation on the SABC1 newscast and determines the viewer impact of this portrayal. The findings from the perspectives of the viewers could help inform recommendations for broadcasters to provide better access to SL interpretation services. The SABC 1 news bulletin was selected as the case study, as it is the national public broadcaster with the largest audience (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001). This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of SL interpretation on TV by addressing the following objectives:

    i.   To examine audience perceptions of SASL interpreter depictions in the SABC1 newscast.

    ii.   To understand the impact of SASL interpreter portrayal on the audience of the SABC1 newscast.

The article encompasses six sections: literature review, methodology, analysis and discussion, findings summary, limitations, recommendations, and future work.

Literature Review

SL interpreting on TV means Deaf and Hard of hearing people are not excluded in TV programming. The inclusion of SL interpreters ensures accessibility to socially and politically important information through TV broadcasting (Yi *et al*., 2021). Similar to their hearing counterparts, deaf or hard-of-hearing people have rights and deserve to access information regarding events taking place around them for their well-being; it is through SL interpreters that they obtain that important information. SL interpretation visibility on TV programmes remains limited, notwithstanding a long-standing effort to make TV more inclusive for Deaf individuals. In England, SL interpreters became noticeable in news broadcasts since 1981 (Kyle, 2007), while the rest of British TV broadcasters incorporated SL interpretation in the mid-1990s. An appropriate illustration, showcasing the importance of SL interpreters, occurred during natural disasters in New Zealand and Australia around the year 2011, with Mckee (2014) highlighting SL interpreters became more visible on TV during this period in these countries. This visibility aimed to ensure Deaf communities remained well-informed, allowing them to take necessary measures for their protection. In China, SL interpreting on TV is extensive, (Xiao and Li, 2013). Similarly, the United States includes SL interpreters in newscasts, entertainment shows, and movies with the aim of accommodating Deaf audiences. De Wit *et al*. (2020) attribute the improved visibility of SL interpreters on TV to the efforts of organisations for the Deaf and government entities to ensure Deaf audiences have access to information.

African countries such as Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa, to name a few, have made progress in incorporating SL interpreters particularly in newscasts (Marucha, 2016). In South Africa, SL interpreters became common on TV news in the 2000s, as a service to the local signing Deaf community (Wehrmeyer, 2014), an increased visibility of SL interpreters in broadcasted government addresses, and emergency announcements was also observed amid the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. It is, however, worth noting there is no standard layout where positioning or portraying SL interpreters on TV is concerned. De Wit *et al.* (2020) observe different countries and broadcasters employ different methods of broadcasting SL interpretation on TV. The methods used range from the type of on-screen insertion, shot size, and positioning, with the size of the SL interpreter insert varying from small to large and positioned on the right, left, top, centre, or bottom of the screen, and the interpreter may be standing or seated (Redón, 2014). Controversy has, nevertheless, marred the on-screen arrangement, as Deaf viewers have expressed dissatisfaction with the small interpreter screen (Wehrmeyer, 2014).

According to Edward (2018), Sign Language research in Africa is scarce, in comparison to other Sign Languages globally, specifically, the Sign Language in TV. This stems from the colonial era, when colonisers displayed little interest in fostering Deaf education or recognising the importance of Sign Language (Edward, 2021). Furthermore, since Sign Language is predominantly used by linguistic minorities, the neglect of their languages and inadequate educational opportunities have resulted in a scarcity of research attention on Sign Language. Nevertheless, available South African studies on this phenomenon praise the inclusion of SASL interpreters on TV. As Wehrmeyer (2013) noted, SASL interpreters feature on various news broadcasts to serve the local Deaf

community. The presence of SL interpreters is a significant development, which elevates their role as the primary source of information for Deaf viewers, compared to other options, such as subtitles, pictorial content, and lip-reading (Wehrmeyer, 2014). Currently, SL interpreters are increasingly visible on newscasts, government addresses, and public announcements such as the COVID-19 and State of the Nation Address (SONA, 2020), a commendable initiative that has empowered the Deaf community. SL interpreters, however, remain rarely seen on regular South African TV programmes, such as entertainment, sports, reality shows and others. The discontinuation of Deaf TV (DTV), the only magazine-style TV programme produced for Deaf viewers on the SABC 3 channel, is a case in point. Moreover, there is a gap between the quality of SASL interpreting offered on TV and the expectations of the Deaf audience, as poor interpreting skills, incorrect use of SASL features such as facial expression and mouthing, reckless signing, incorrect spelling, and narrow vocabulary, as well as poor syntactic constructions, and inadequate interpreting strategies, have been reported (Wehrmeyer, 2014).

The state of SL interpreting faced criticism and scrutiny following the use of a 'fake' SASL interpreter at the memorial service of Nelson Mandela in 2013. Reagan (2020) affirms the use of Jantjie as an interpreter in the memorial service was a significant breach of security and infuriated many, the Deaf community, while also highlighting the position of SASL in the country. Furthermore, numerous cases of interpreter incompetence have been reported in the media, according to Pienaar and Cornelius (2015). Another such case occurred in KwaZulu-Natal, where a provincial disability meeting was cancelled, due to an 'incompetent' SL interpreter, and the Deaf community in KwaZulu-Natal was outraged (Mkhabela and Ndaliso, 2015). The causes of the intricacies can be traced back to education. As Naude (2008) explained, the educational system used for the Deaf in South Africa is unsatisfactory, with most teachers still using oralism, total communication or a "broken" SL, while it also lacks trained interpreters in classes. Furthermore, access to higher education for SASL users is limited, with only a few public universities offering Sign Language studies (Sawula, 2018).

Although, the field of SL interpreting in media settings is under-researched globally (Pöchhacker, 2018), a small number of scholars around the world have indicated interest in this topic. De Wit *et al.* (2020) studied best practices and difficulties faced by SL interpreters in TV interpretation. Data were collected from SL interpreters prior to and during the first European seminar on signed language interpretation in TV and media in 2019.The findings showed SL interpretation is a complex and challenging task, and the interpreters called for specialised training in the TV and media industries. Wehrmeyer (2015) assessed the comprehension of South African SL interpretations in TV news broadcasts from the perspective of Deaf respondents. The study found poor comprehension due to the use of dialects, the small size of the interpreter inset, the interpreter's inadequate performance in terms of facial expression, mouthing, sign articulation and language proficiency, and insufficient target audience background knowledge, among other factors. Bosch-Baliarda *et al.* (2020) examined the response of Deaf audiences to screen composition, including a larger screen for content and a smaller screen for the SL interpreter. Their findings indicated participants normally look more often and for a longer time at the SL interpreter, closer to the main screen. Yi *et al.* (2021) conducted a user survey and evaluation of SL services on TV for Deaf or Hard of hearing individuals, with recommendations to address the challenges faced during interpretation. The study found visibility of the SL interpreter's facial expressions is important for communication, and recommended the interpreter be presented in a clearly visible size.

The reviewed literature suggests much of the research on SL interpreting on TV focuses on the comprehension, quality, and difficulties of providing SL interpretation on TV. This presents an opportunity to contribute to this under-researched field, by analysing audience perceptions of SL interpreter portrayal on TV and its impact on the audience. These considerations could deepen our understanding of the mechanisms that influence the reception of SL interpretation on TV and, ultimately, lead to a more suitable and valued incorporation of SL interpretation into TV programmes.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study uses an interpretivism paradigm and qualitative design to understand participant perspectives and experiences. Rehman and Alharthi (2016) observe interpretivists seek to understand the interpretations of individuals concerning a social phenomenon they interact with. The qualitative method can be applied to gain comprehension of people's experiences, beliefs, attitudes, behaviour, and connections (Rehman and Alharthi, 2016). The research design chosen therefore, correlates with an interpretive paradigm, which seeks to understand peoples' interpretations. As highlighted by Thanh and Thanh (2015), researchers who adopt an interpretive paradigm and follow a qualitative approach, often search to understand experiences, interpretations and insights

gathered from rich, authentic research data, rather than relying on statistics. The SABC 1 news bulletin was selected as the case study, with this method chosen for its versatility and adaptability to both qualitative and quantitative research methods (Rule and John, 2011). Figure 1 below illustrates the on-screen layout of the SABC1 news broadcast that aired on April 16, 2021, at 17:30, and serves as a representation of SASL interpreter portrayal on the SABC1 news. It is worth noting that individual TV screen sizes and colour resolution may vary based on the TV brand and model, potentially affecting reception and viewer responses.

Figure 1: SABC1 News (Source: researchers)

This study is influenced by Reception Theory (RT), which explores audiences' reception and interpretation of media content, leading to a specific perception. According to Srouji-Shajrawi (2013), RT allows audiences to evaluate the meaning and acceptability of a given text, audio, or video, and highlights the importance of purposeful communication in shaping emotions, ideologies, behaviours, and perceptions. This study employed RT to examine audience perception and interpretation of the portrayal of SL Interpreters (SASL) on the SABC1 newscast. RT is particularly relevant to this study, as it is audience-focused and concentrates on audience understanding of media content.
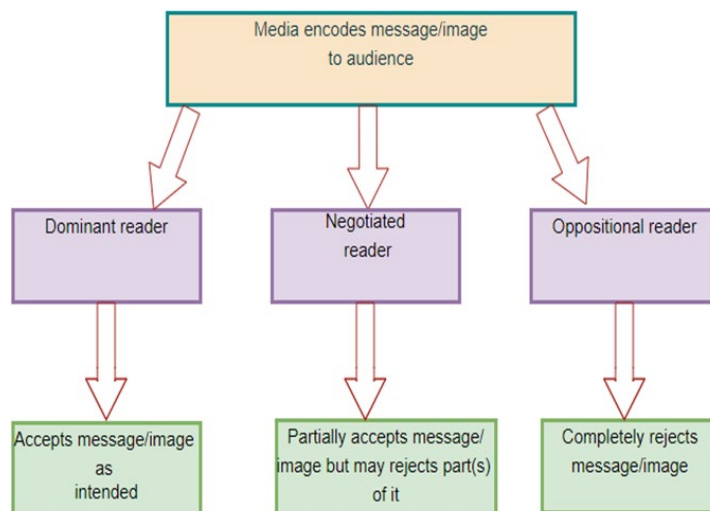

Figure 2: RT - Encoding and decoding process (Harumike, 2017)

Hall (1993) asserted, while media can convey a singular meaning, the audience may, nonetheless, interpret it in one of three ways namely, dominant, negotiated, and oppositional (Teel, 2017). A dominant reading occurs when the audience perceives the media message exactly as intended by the media, a negotiated reading means the audience accepts some of the media's point of view, but also holds their own opinions, while an oppositional reading means the audience completely rejects the conveyed messages. Figure 2 depicts the RT encoding and decoding process, as per Hall (1993), along with the three audience positions when decoding media messages. By applying RT to the study, the research shifted focus from producer to audience perception of media images, since RT is audience-centred and concerns itself with audience perception of media, making it a suitable approach for this research. RT bears significance as an effective and widely utilised framework in the Mass Communication and Media Studies fields. Nepaul (2018) employed Hall's RT to interpret audience meaning of a South African advertisement aimed at reducing road accidents and deaths, under the title "Arrive Alive: You're a killer if you text and drive". The study findings indicated audience members interpreted the advertisement as intended by the

sender; however, some still did not refrain from texting while driving. Lenertz (2022) used RT to explore the filmic perception and reception of a particular group of imprisoned viewership, to understand film's rehabilitative and autonomising benefits for jailed individuals, as well as the need for increased screenings in such institutional environments.

The study further finds prisoners appreciate the mind distraction the media brings, while some still prefer books, an indication of a negotiated position. This concurs with Madianou (2009), who studied audience interpretation of the news in everyday life, using RT; findings suggest news consumption evokes media influence and resistance, indicating a negotiated position among participants. The Durban University of Technology (DUT) granted ethical approval for this research. The study used virtual, face-to-face interviews due to it being conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, when human-to-human contact was deemed hazardous and governed by lockdown laws. Anonymity was maintained and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. Participants provided informed consent and consent for recording during interviews. A purposive sampling strategy where, the researcher purposefully selects participants that possess better comprehension of the phenomenon (Omona, 2013), was used in this study. The inclusion criteria required participants be regular viewers of SABC 1 and between 18 and 40 years of age. The number of participants was determined by a saturation point, as data collected were sufficient to address the research questions. The study included four distinct participant categories, based on their unique characteristics: Deaf, Hard of hearing, SASL interpreter, and hearing participants. The Deaf and Hard of hearing participants were sourced from the eDeaf Institute, a Deaf organisation based in Durban, while SASL interpreters and hearing participants had no specific organisational affiliation. The study used virtual, one-on-one interviews to explore participant perceptions of SASL interpreter portrayal on SABC1 news bulletins. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, interviews were conducted via WhatsApp video calls, with audio and video recordings for data analysis. A SASL interpreter facilitated communication between the interviewer and Deaf and Hard of hearing participants.

Findings and Discussion

Thematic analysis used to describe and interpret qualitative data through code selection and theme development (Kiger and Varpio, 2020) was employed in this study. Thematic analysis categorises interview data based on participant responses, using six steps: data familiarisation, preliminary code assignment, pattern and theme identification, theme review, theme definition and labelling, and report generation. Figure 3 illustrates the mesh topology, representing each theme and bidirectional interactions between nodes.

- T1 - Inequality and discrimination
- T2 - Disrespect to South African SL interpreters
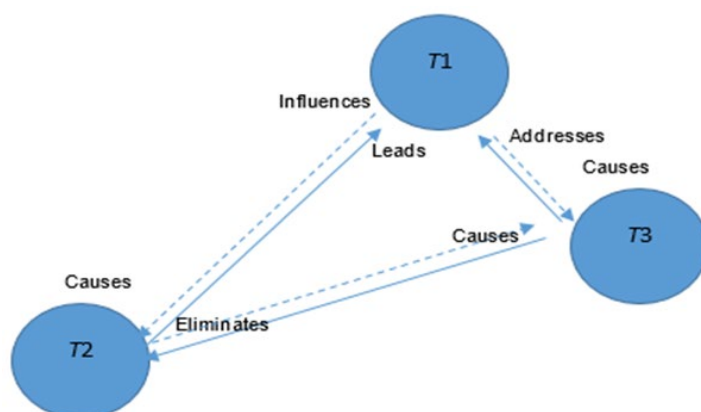- T3 - Need for transformation

Figure 3: Fully meshed network topology of research themes

Each theme is viewed as a node, connected in a point-to-point fashion, creating a network of themes that can be observed as a mesh topology (Mousa *et al*., 2019). In the mesh topology, T2 is influenced by T1, while T1 occurs because of T2. Participants felt the inequality and discrimination faced by the Deaf community, because of how SABC 1 portrays South African SL interpreters, influences the public to disrespect South African SL interpreters

and the Deaf community. Furthermore, T1 and T2 create a need for T3, which is focused on transforming the way SASL interpreters are portrayed, as per participant commendations.

The following conclusions were drawn from participants responses analysed thematically. Participants names are reflected as pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Inequality and discrimination

Yenzelwe, a Hard of hearing participant, explained as follows:

> The SL interpreters should not be placed in that little box on the screen while the news anchor takes up the majority of the screen. Why do we always have to be different and treated differently to other people? We are all supposed to be equal as human beings.

"Undermining disabled people is sensitive to me because I do not believe anyone is inferior to another" (Hard of hearing participant Khanya). In the above responses, the use of words such as 'little', 'majority', 'different', 'undermining' and 'inferior' in responses to news anchors and SASL interpreters implies inequality and discrimination, despite equal human rights in the country's constitution. Mulrennan (2013) notes receptive challenges are presented to the Deaf audience, through the inherent nature of news broadcasts in TV creating a psychological distance from mainstream society for the Deaf audience. According to the participants, the blatant inequality presented on the SABC1 news bulletin insinuates the hearing audience is superior to the Deaf audience.

Some participants stated the way in which SASL interpreters are portrayed on the SABC1 news bulletin resembles the poor state SASL finds itself in SA.

Hearing participant Lihle, stated:

> I think the manner in which they [SABC 1] position them [SASL interpreters], impersonates the Sign Language situation in the country. [SL] is usually an overlooked language. People usually forget about the existence of SL and when it hits them that it exists, they begin to want to acknowledge it, but in doing that, they then misrepresent it.

The words 'overlooked' and 'misrepresent' used in the above expression suggest the held position of inequality and discrimination.

The expression by Lihle, in addition, also reflects the concerns of DeafSA regarding SASL recognition, particularly from a constitutional perspective (Druchen, 2010). Although SASL has finally been recognised as the official language of the country, prior to 2023, DeafSA worked tirelessly in calling for SASL to be recognised as the 12th official language in SA. Brown (2020) highlights the development of SASL has always been hindered by hearing people who do not notice the negative consequences of their actions. In line with this background, most participants perceived the SABC1 news bulletin portrayal of the SASL interpreter disturbing and to be promoting inequality between the Deaf and hearing audience. Some highlighted all minority and majority communities of South Africa have equal rights; therefore, no one should be discriminated against. Moreover, they confessed their dismay when asked regarding their feelings on the present SABC1 news bulletin status. As shown in Figure 4, participant responses were also mined to determine the frequency of negatively connoted terms for T1, thus providing a more complete picture or enhanced presentation of the phenomenon under investigation. Based on RT, the emergence of this theme indicates an oppositional position by the participants. They criticise the on-screen arrangement of the bulletin, wherein a SASL interpreter is presented in a small insert picture, while a news anchor appears in a larger, full-screen picture. This oppositional interpretation is based in the belief such a portrayal promotes inequality and discrimination. Participants claim SASL and South African Deaf community already face general discrimination and marginalisation, with SABC 1 intensifying the situation through SASL interpreter portrayal. This is deemed critical, as the portrayal during the news bulletin influences the perception of the Deaf community, particularly among those not exposed to it.
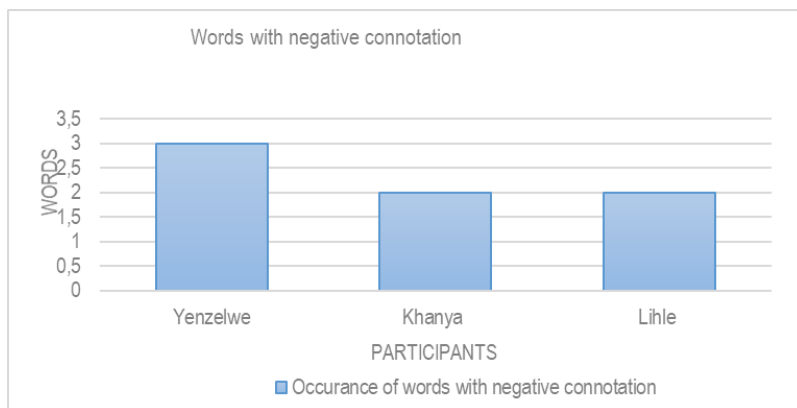
Figure 4: Frequency of words with negative connotations

Disrespect to South African SL interpreters

Participants were asked if they believed SASL interpreters' portrayal affected public perceptions of the Deaf community. Many noted instances of SASL interpreters being ridiculed on social media.

> Let me say this. Hearing people take SASL as a joke sometimes. They don't take it [SASL] as a language for deaf. There was a speech done by the president. So, an interpreter did a sign and they were mocking that sign and saying something else and laughing (SASL interpreter participant Sindi).

> I personally think the portrayal of that small image demonstrates that they are not taken seriously, so as for our community, which is very fortunate, who have got everything, I won't take a deaf person seriously, you see? (Hearing participant Khanya).

> Someone might even say that if you not going to portray them in an equal sense why you then ridicule them and portray them in that small box, it is to some degree an insult to the Deaf community (Hearing participant Nsizwa).

The use of terms such as 'joke', 'mocking', 'laughing', 'ridicule' and 'insult' in participant responses indicate disrespect to both SASL and SASL interpreters. The phrases: 'not taken seriously' and 'they don't take it as a language', further magnify interpretations of mockery and disregard. These responses echo disappointment at how other communities make fun of SASL. Similar responses are also reflected in a report by Williams (2020) on a Cape Town comedian, who was threatened with legal action by DeafSA for spoofing a SASL interpreter during President Ramaphosa's COVID-19-related address. The comedian reportedly photo-shopped herself into the interpreter box during the address and made incomprehensible signs. Pienaar and Cornelius (2015) stated SASL interpretation has been in a mediocre state and underwent serious scrutiny after a 'bogus' SL interpreter, Jantjie, was exposed in 2013. Figure 5 depicts the frequency of terms with strong negative connotations extracted from participant responses for *T*2. Theoretically, participant interpretations took an oppositional position. Most participants expressed disappointment at the SASL interpreter portrayal on the SABC 1 news bulletin. According to the participants, SABC 1 continues to create an erroneous notion that SASL and the Deaf community are inferior compared to the hearing community. This inferiority projected from the on-screen arrangement of the news broadcast has invited disrespect, mockery, and trivialisation of SASL interpreters, as well as the Deaf community.
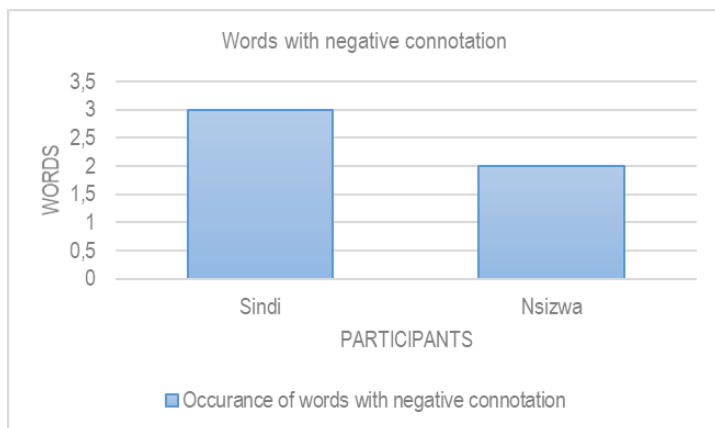
Figure 5: Frequency of words with negative connotations

Need for transformation

Participants suggested that the portrayal of SASL interpreters needs transformation for equality. Many rejected the small box for SASL interpreters and proposed suggestions for improvement. Lihle, a hearing participant, suggested the following change:

> If they [SABC 1] can have slots for Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele and Swati news bulletins then they can create a slot specifically for Sign Language news bulletins because it's a fully-fledged language. I would create a thirty-minute slot, just like they do with other languages, which will be a Sign Language news bulletin slot.

Another participant called for the improvement of the on-screen arrangement, suggesting SASL interpreters should occupy the entire screen, since Deaf people rely on visuals to communicate and access information; compared to hearing people, who are able to use both audio and visuals. This was expressed by SASL interpreter participant Mlonde as: "A bigger audience needs an ear to listen. I would just put a big screen there and put interpreter there and then Deaf people get good access, and they can be accommodated as much as possible." The use of words such as 'create', 'access' and 'accommodate' indicate reform must take place on the SABC1 news bulletin, based on participant expressions. Other strong transformation measures proposed by participants suggested an equal distribution of on-screen arrangement of news anchor and SASL interpreter. Yenzelwe and Nsizwa were quoted explaining the following:

> The screen should be parted in half, and they should have equal segments, because I don't understand why they are portrayed differently and unequally. That demonstrates inequality, so we want them to be portrayed the same so we can be able to access information" (Hard of hearing participant Yenzelwe).

> "The screen should be demarcated in half. One half dedicated to Deaf audience and the other to hearing audience and then have subtitles to complement interpreting so that they can rely secondary on that" (Hearing participant Nsizwa).

The need for transformation in TV news bulletins was also observed by ICASA, the South African broadcasting regulatory body. ICASA (2008) mentioned room for improvement remains; in respect of reasonable provision for SL interpreting during news bulletins transmitted in prime-time and during other programmes. In addition, Kurz and Mikulasek (2004) posited, for the Deaf to overcome their isolation, broadcasters should increase the number of signed programmes and provide more programmes with SL interpretation.
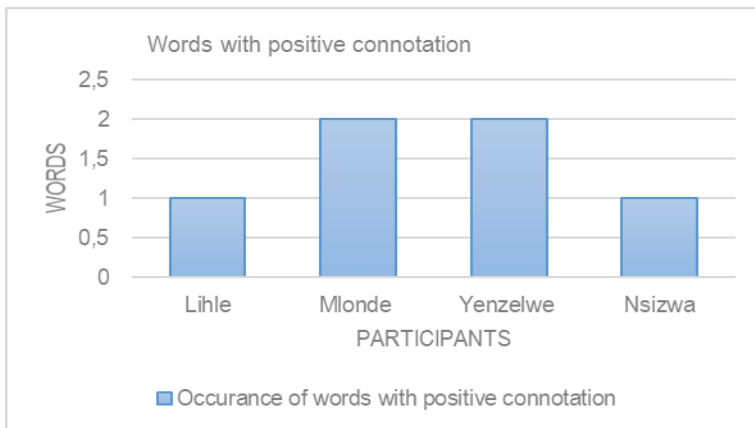
Figure 6: Frequency of words with positive connotation

Figure 6 depicts the frequency of positively connotated words extracted from participant responses for T3. Based on RT, this suggests participants took the negotiated position. Here, most participants commended the inclusion of SASL interpreters on the SABC 1 news bulletin and suggested it promoted exposure and awareness of SASL and the Deaf community. However, they also lambasted the on-screen arrangement of the bulletin, claiming it needed to transform to meet the needs of the Deaf audience. Participants additionally suggested ways to achieve transformation.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to assess audience perception of SASL interpreter portrayal in the SABC1 newscast and its impact. Based on RT, some participants took a negotiated position, while others adopted an oppositional stance. The majority participants criticised the on-screen newscast layout, which displays the SASL interpreter in a small, inserted image and the news anchor in a larger, full-screen image, leading to inequality and discrimination. Participants stated SABC1 portrayal of SASL interpreters exacerbates the marginalisation and discrimination faced by the SASL and the Deaf community. This is critical, because viewers who are unfamiliar with the Deaf community, often perceive it through SASL interpreter representation on TV. Participants perceived SABC1 perpetuated the misconception that SASL and the Deaf community were inferior and unimportant, compared to the hearing community. SABC1 programmes were seen as biased toward a hearing audience, with Deaf and Hard of hearing audiences offended by the unfair portrayal of SASL interpreters on the SABC1 newscast. Participants noted the SABC1 portrayal of SASL interpreters negatively impacted the confidence and pride of Deaf audience members. They demanded the SABC1 should modify the way SASL interpreters are portrayed on news broadcasts, immediately.

This study has highlighted the difficulties experienced by members of the Deaf community in accessing understandable information on TV broadcasts, particularly the news. Despite significant progress in TV representation for the Deaf, additional concerns have been raised. Offering an on-screen interpreter as a small box insert for only 30 minutes a day, five days a week, at a time when viewers are commuting, is extremely offensive to the minority group in question, their hearing family, and friends, and SASL interpreters. The case study highlights the injustices faced by the deaf minority of South Africa in accessing mainstream news, highlighting the need for immediate attention to eradicate discriminatory practices and examine viewer attitudes to better understand the underlying issues. Future research should expand the sample size and investigate SABC1 news viewer attitudes to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

The following recommendations were developed, based on the current research findings:

i. Positioning of SL interpreters: SABC1 needs to transform its portrayal of SASL interpreters in news bulletins to avoid inequality and discrimination. Consultation with Sign Language experts and equal representation of all South African languages is needed.

ii. Inclusion of SASL in newscasts: The SABC should increase SASL interpreter inclusion for all news bulletins and programs, including interviews and live shows, to provide equal access to Deaf events. Furthermore, since 17:30 is not prime time, therefore, the selected slot should be differently accommodated.

iii.   Presence of SASL interpreters in regular TV programmes: The recommendation is to include SASL interpreters in regular TV programmes, especially on SABC channels, to ensure equal access to educational, entertainment, commercial, and sports programs for the Deaf community.

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