



## LANGUAGE USAGE IN PARLIAMENT

The national government, through its executive and legislature develops many important reports, draft legislation, notices and acts. This information, together with the debates and statements, must be made available to the public at large. Simultaneously, and parallel to this, material which emanates from provincial and municipal level, must be made to citizens. It is desirable that a holistic view of all spheres of government should be taken to ensure that all languages benefit from the duties imposed as well as the aspirations of Clause 6 of the Constitution.

### WHICH LANGUAGES SHOULD BE USED IN PARLIAMENT?

Clause 6 (3) of the Constitution reads that the national government and provincial government may use any particular official language for the purpose of government taking into account usage, practicality, expense, regional circumstances and the balance of needs and preferences of the population as a whole or in the province concerned. The national government and each provincial government must use at least two official languages.

Therefore to decide which two or more languages should be used, account must be taken of

- Usage;
- Practicability
- Expense; and
- Balancing the needs and preferences of the population as a whole.

This establishes a criterion of 4 tests (norms) which must be applied to decide which language should be used.

### FIRST TEST: WHAT IS THE PRESENT "USAGE"?

At present in parliament the official languages or languages used for the purpose of record or more accurately for the purpose of government are Afrikaans and English. Therefore, if proper weight to the usage test is given then the status quo should not easily be disturbed. Since Afrikaans and English have been the languages which have been used as the official parliamentary languages for the past 90 years, extremely good reasons must be shown why this practice should not continue. To diminish the status of Afrikaans will be seen by many as an act of aggression.

### SECOND TEST: WHAT IS PRACTICAL?

In parliament, the two languages most often used at present in speeches are Afrikaans and English. It does follow that the use of Afrikaans and English as the official languages and the languages for the purpose of government is sensible and practical. Moreover, the expertise and infrastructure is presently in place and the present system works well.

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It is practical to use for the purpose of government Afrikaans and English since these two languages are:

- Most often used in Parliament
- Understood by most of the members of Parliament; and
- Understood by the greatest number of citizens.

### **THIRD TEST: WHAT ABOUT EXPENSE?**

To maintain Afrikaans and English will not cost more. To remove one of these languages necessitates bringing another language in. This change over will probably not be cost effective, since the present set up will have to be changed.

### **FOURTH TEST: WHAT ARE THE NEEDS AND PREFERENCES OF THE POPULATION AS A WHOLE?**

Afrikaans and English are widely used as home languages over the whole country. Zulu is mainly used in Kwazulu-Natal and Gauteng as a home language. Zulu and Afrikaans are the largest mother tongue languages. Approximately 59% of the population can speak Afrikaans compared to 57,1% of the population that can speak English.

## **NP PROPOSALS**

- Parliament must consult widely before the present parliamentary language usage is disturbed;
- Parliament must interact with the Pan South African Language Board before decisions are made; and
- After consultation with the bodies referred to above, political parties and other interested parties should be asked to make proposals with regard to parliament's language use with the view to give proper effect to the provisions of clause 6 of the Constitution and especially the provision stating that "the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these (indigenous) language."