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Coverage of language-related topics, and in particular, language rights and language policy issues in the South African printed media

The printed media is an important instrument in bringing about community mobilisation, and can make a contribution in the debate on language matters by influencing the political (ideological) orientation of policy-makers which at this stage can be characterised as internationalisation. Internationalisation leads to language hierarchisation or linguicism. Linguicism entails that the resources of minority groups, which include language, are seen as handicaps. The empirical investigation reported on in this article established *inter alia* the percentage of topics reported on, the distribution of reporting per language medium of newspapers, the types of records on language complaints, and the sources of language rights incidents. In order to determine the validity of the conclusions the results are compared to official complaints lodged with PanSALB. It was established that the printed media is a reliable barometer of the feelings and attitudes of its readers, and a government can benefit by ensuring that citizens' constitutional rights are upheld, and avoid conflicts by seeking to solve problems before they escalate.

Dekking van taalverwante onderwerpe, in besonder taalregte en taalpolitieke kwessies in die Suid-Afrikaanse gedrukte media

Die gedrukte media is 'n belangrike instrument in die mobilisering van die gemeenskap en kan in die taaldebat 'n bydrae lewer deur die beleidsmakers se politieke (ideologiese) oriëntasie te beïnvloed. Die huidige oriëntasie kan as internasionalisasie bestempel word. Die onderskrywing hiervan mag lei tot taalhiërargisering of linguïsme. Linguïsme behels dat die hulpbronne van minderheidsgroepe as struikelblokke beskou word. Die empiriese ondersoek waaroor verslag gedoen word in hierdie artikel, was gerig op die dekking van taalsake deur die gedrukte media. Die persentasies van onderwerpe waaroor berig is, is onder meer bepaal, asook die verspreiding van beriggewing per taalmedium van die koerante, die tipes beriggewing oor taalregteklagtes, en die bronne van taalregte-insidente. Ten einde die geldigheid van die gevolgtrekkings vas te stel, word vergelykings met die amptelike taalregteklagtes wat aan Pansat gerig is, getref. Daar is vasgestel dat die gedrukte media 'n betroubare barometer is van die gevoelens en gesindhede van sy lesers. Dit kan dus die regering loon om toe te sien dat elke burger se grondwetlike regte gehandhaaf word, en om konflikte te vermy deur aandag te skenk aan probleme voor hulle eskaleer.

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In an analysis of the structure of the official language clause (section 6 of Act No 108 of 1996), Du Plessis & Pretorius (2000: 505-6) state that, judging from its practical application, the official language clause must be one of the provisions of the Constitution that invites the greatest number of divergent interpretations. They further note that “[g]enerally speaking, it is probably correct to state that the evolving pattern of official language policy in South Africa reveals a trend towards English, thus in effect towards official monolingualism” (Du Plessis & Pretorius 2000: 506). A Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) was established (Act No 59 of 1995) to monitor the judicial implementation of the official language policy. PanSALB’s Board approved certain projects, including one on language rights. The Board’s task under this focus area

is to facilitate the investigation of alleged violations of language rights, policy and practice. PANSALB encourages practice and policy that will assist in freeing South Africans from all forms of linguistic discrimination (PanSALB 2001: 26).

In addition, “PANSALB wishes all linguistic groups to be made aware of their language rights” (PanSALB 2001: 27).

In order to obtain sufficient information on language rights and language matters in South Africa, PanSALB commissioned the Unit for Language Facilitation and Empowerment (ULFE) at the University of the Free State (UFS) to assist with the establishment of the South African Language Rights Monitor (SALRM), focusing on reports on language rights issues following the example of the annual publication of the Canadian Commissioner of Official Languages (cf Annual Report 2002). The goal of the SALRM is the establishment of an annual comprehensive report on language rights issues in South Africa. Specific objectives of SALRM are, among others, to provide a critical survey of media coverage on language issues, and provide information on and a critical analysis of, language rights complaints and findings in South Africa.

In the next section an account of an empirical study on coverage in the printed media on language-related subjects, and in particular on the official usage of language relating to language rights in South Africa, is given for 2002, the first year of the project.¹ In the third main

1 For a comprehensive account of the study, cf Lubbe *et al* 2004.

section a comparison will be drawn between the complaints covered by the printed media and those registered with PanSALB.

1. Account of the empirical investigation

This section presents an account of media coverage on language issues in general and on language rights in particular for the period 1 January 2002 to 31 December 2002. The first subsection gives a theoretical motivation for the investigation, and the second subsection outlines the methodology of the investigation. Subsequent subsections discuss language-related data, language rights complaints, and language rights complainants. In the third section the findings of the investigation will be compared with language rights complaints lodged with the official language body, PanSALB.

1.1 Theoretical motivation for the investigation

Tollefson (1991: 211) concludes his investigation concerning language policy in the community by alleging that “a commitment to democracy requires a commitment to struggle for language rights”. Martel (1999), too, in a study on “Heroes, rebels, communities and states in language rights activism and litigation”, deems language rights activism to be essential, even inevitable, in a process aimed at democratising a multilingual society. She describes language rights activism as a rights-orientated process through which pressure is exerted to effect change in socio-political practices and structures (Martel 1999: 47-8).

It is important that a distinction should be drawn between language activism and language rights activism. Steyn (1980: 74), as well as Du Plessis (1987) indicated that language activism is seldom concerned merely with language *per se*, but rather with a type of political pressure group. In contrast, in the case of language rights activism, role-players attempt to bring about a change in social practices, ideologies and structures that influence the maintenance and development of linguistic communities.

Language rights activism can therefore be described as a form of activism in which role-players, by means of (or against the background of) language rights, play an active role to effect change in social practices, ideologies and structures influencing the preservation and deve-

lopment of language communities. Language rights activism can be seen as a

manifestation of a rising consciousness, and rejection, of conditions of submission/oppression/control/domination/authority/centralization/monopoly. It can be a challenge to sociopolitical structures that reproduce non-equitable power relations (Martel 1999: 49).

Martel (1999: 47) distinguishes six instruments of language rights activism, namely litigation, the formation of pressure groups (lobbying), research, community mobilisation, media coverage, and the most extreme form, namely violence, as manifested in Northern Ireland (Jenkins 1991). Du Plessis (2004: 170) distinguishes a seventh instrument of language rights activism, namely the lodging of complaints, which entails the formal submission of a complaint to an official institution which has been specially designated for the purpose, for example, PanSALB in South Africa.

Although not as effective as, for example, litigation, which, in any case, “remain[s] a final strategy” (Martel 1999: 65), use of the printed media, together with the other instruments distinguished by Martel and Du Plessis, can be an instrument in bringing about community mobilisation. Because the status of the respective official languages in South Africa has become a controversial point of discussion, particularly after 1994, the issue received relatively wide publicity in the printed media.

Political parties and interest groups who wish to influence policy-making employ the mass media in general, and the printed media in particular. As a result of the overwhelming electoral majority of the African National Congress (ANC) and its alliance partners, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) and the South African Communist Party (SACP), the influence of the printed media in the formulation of official policy is minimal and is limited to affecting the details of policy administration and implementation (Booyesen & Erasmus 1998: 240).

A further meaningful contribution which the printed media can make in the debate on language matters is to influence the ideological orientation of policy-makers, which can be characterised as internationalisation, and which contrasts with vernacularisation (Kamwagamalu 2003: 175). The adherence to internationalisation leads to language hierarchisation or linguisticism, with the result that the resources of

minority groups are seen as handicaps (Strydom & Pretorius 2000: 113). In the case of South Africa that means that the colonial language, English, becomes hegemonic and the other ten languages mentioned as official in the Constitution are marginalised.

To prevent the official encroachment of English on the domains of the other ten languages the printed media is the best equipped to raise the ethical stakes so high that those with vested interests in the status quo cannot find any political high ground on which to oppose. An analogous example of the influence of the media which caused an awareness with the general public was the constant reporting of environmentalists' activities concerning the threat being posed to the environment and some animal and plant species.

Already some investigation of printed media coverage concerning language issues has been done. One of the most comprehensive studies is Steyn (1995) which investigated "gesindhede teenoor Afrikaans soos deur die koerant gereflekteer, 2 Februarie 1990-27 April 1994".² Issues like the official language debate, the language of teaching and science, and language matters in public broadcast are discussed.

Especially within the framework of Critical Linguistics (CL) several studies were carried out showing how the media convey their ideology in subtle ways through the use of language. Thetela (2001), for instance, carried out an analysis of press reports on the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) military intervention in 1998 in Lesotho.³ Lubbe & Du Plessis (2001) did a content analysis of the debate in the printed media on the interpretation of the official linguistic principles of the Interim Constitution, while Truter (2002) performed a quantitative analysis, on the basis of media reports, of the reaction of Afrikaans speakers regarding changes to the language policy and supposed lack of recognition of Afrikaans in the Free State for the period 1994 to 1998. Truter (2003) investigated the responses, as reported in the printed media, of mother-tongue speakers of Afrikaans to the

2 Attitudes concerning Afrikaans as reflected in the papers, 2 February 1990-27 April 1994.

3 Other studies within the CL framework include Anthonissen 1996, Bond 1996, Carstens 1996, Stibbe & Ross 1997, Geslin 2001 and Thompson & De Klerk 2002.

language policy changes instituted by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) from 1994 to 1996.

In the next subsection the methodology used in the empirical investigation of printed media coverage concerning language matters for the period 1 January 2002 to 31 December 2002 is outlined.

1.2 Methodology

Data for the investigation was captured from media cuttings from SA Media at the UFS. The media-excerpting services of the University of Stellenbosch (US), the then Rand Afrikaans University (RAU) and the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) are linked to those of the UFS and do not function independently. SA Media provides access to records from 67 mainstream newspapers, journals and magazines. Of the 67 publications, 70,1% (47) are English, 25,4% (17) Afrikaans, and 4,5% (3) bilingual (Afrikaans and English).

No claim is made to comprehensiveness. Thus, for example, the particulars of the Zulu newspaper in KwaZulu-Natal (*ilanga lase Natal* or “Sun of Natal”, as well as the Seswati newspaper available in Limpopo and Mpumalanga (*Unokbethwako* or “Your choice”, are missing. Likewise, the list does not include the local and regional newspapers. Both *Mayibuye* or “If he comes again” and *Vuka SA* or “Wake up SA”, which, at first glance, may possibly seem to constitute African-language publications, are published in English. Language rights complaints from the legal journal, *De Rebus* (DR), which is not excerpted by SA Media, were also taken into account.

To extract the relevant press records, the greatest possible number of keywords were used, namely *resensies* (reviews), including *nominasies* (nominations); *naamsveranderinge/plekname* (name changes/placenames); *spotprente* (cartoons); *taalprobleme* (language problems), with the key words *struikelblokke* (obstacles), *kwelvrae* (problematic questions) and *taalkruie* (interesting aspects of language); *anekdotes* (anecdotes); and *taalnormering* (language standardisation). These yielded 1 717 relevant records, comprised as follows: reviews (1 210), place names (445), language problems (36), language corpus-related problems (23), cartoons (3), anecdotes and language standardisation both 0.

In addition to these, the following keywords pertaining to language rights were used: *taal en reg* (language and the law); *taal en klag* (language and complaint); *taal en howe* (language and courts); *taal en miskennig* (language and disregard); *taal* (language). The abovementioned key terms yielded a total of 369 records. In addition, the following keywords were used in order to ensure that the widest number of possibilities were covered: *language and English*; *language and Afrikaans*; *Africa and language*; *Africa and languages*; *activist*; *language and activist*; and *Pan SA Language Board*. These yielded a further 180 media records, all of which were duplicates, thus representing an overlap of 48,8% already in the database. A further 22 media records were excerpted from the law journal, *De Rebus*. This gives a grand total of 571 records. Because of the 180 duplicates, 391 records are relevant for the analysis. Of these, 251 pertain to specific alleged language rights violations and/or complaints, while 80 records refer to language rights in general, five to the Commission for the Promotion of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CPRCRLC), 47 to PanSALB, five to the Telephone Interpreting Service of South Africa (TISSA) and three to the Human Rights Commission (HRC). Thus, a total of 2 108 (1 717 + 391) relevant records are being dealt with here.

1.3 Discussion of language-related data

The language-related topics and the distribution of reporting between Afrikaans, English and bilingual media for the language-related topics which make up the 2 108 records, are shown in Table 1.

Probably because place names offer more opportunity for pressure grouping, they receive wide prominence in reporting, accounting for 21.1% (445) of the records. Although issues relating to place names can be regarded as being related to language rights, they are discussed here as a language-related subject. Particularly in the case of reports on name changes, one contribution often contains several references, for instance to names of towns, provinces and airports. As a result of this, an additional 177 references were distinguished, bringing the total number of references concerning name changes to 622 recorded media references. Of these name changes, the names of provinces accounted for 25.9% (161) of the media references, followed by cities and towns with 21.0% (136), totalling 46.9% (297).

Table 1: Reporting per language medium of newspaper

	Afrikaans	English	Other	Total	%
Reviews	664	546	0	1 210	57.3
Name changes	202	243	0	445	21.1
Language rights (general)	65	15	0	80	3.8
Language rights (incidents, complaints)	167	59	25	251	12.0
Cartoons	1	2	0	3	0.1
Language corpus-related problems	14	9	0	23	1.1
Language problems	36	0	0	36	1.7
CPRCRLC	5	0	0	5	0.2
TISSA	3	2	0	5	0.2
Human Rights Commission	3	0	0	3	0.1
PanSALB	40	7	0	47	2.2
Total	1 200	883	25	2 108	100

A noteworthy aspect regarding place names and name changes in general is that there are no significant differences between the Afrikaans and English printed media in respect of the reporting. Out of the total of 445 reports, 54.7% (243) refer to reports in English newspapers, and 45.3% (202) to reports in Afrikaans newspapers. Conservatism regarding name changes is clearly not limited to the Afrikaans-speaking group.

Because of the importance of language rights and the successful resolution of issues relating to language rights, reporting on language rights complaints and language rights complainants is of particular interest, comprising the topic of the next two subsections.

1.4 Discussion of language rights complaints

A distinction is made between language rights complaints and language rights complainants. The former refer to expressions of dissatisfaction or displeasure by a person, the media, the business sector or an institution (which may include among others a political party, a trade union, a professional organisation, a cultural body, a statutory body, a tertiary or educational organisation) in respect of an alleged unacceptable and/or unsatisfactory level of language treatment. In short, language rights complaints

refer to complaints by members of language groups or sectors of the community who are experiencing a disregard for their language rights.

An individual, an institution, a body or governmental organisation, or a department bringing an alleged language rights violation to the attention of the offender, the institution or the government, all comprise language rights complainants.

At first sight it seems as if language rights incidents only account for a small component of the overall reporting on language-related topics, *viz* 12% (251) out of 2 108 reports. Reviews, however, account for 57.3% (1 210). A review is an objective, critical appraisal of a book or a theatre production, and has no bearing on language rights issues. If reviews are not taken into consideration, the remaining reports amount to 898. Of these, the 445 reports relating to name changes comprise 49.6%, and the 251 relating to language rights incidents comprise 28%.

These 251 records are analysed in terms of types of records, *viz* reports, editorials, letters, columns (commentary and discussion by affiliated colleagues) and articles (an essay on a particular topic by an academic). Table 2 illustrates the language spread between these records.

Table 2: Types of records on language complaints

Type	Afrikaans newspapers		English newspapers		Afrikaans/English newspapers		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Report	89	81.7	18	16.5	2	1.8	109	43.4
Editorial	28	77.8	7	19.4	1	2.8	36	14.3
Letter	35	47.3	20	27.0	19	25.7	74	29.5
Column	12	41.4	14	48.3	3	10.3	29	11.6
Article	3	100	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	1.2
Total	167	66.5	59	23.5	25	10.0	251	100

It is noteworthy that Afrikaans records are dominant in the case of four of the five types. The exception is that of columns, where the proportions of Afrikaans and English records do not differ significantly. However, a significant difference can be noted in language spread when it comes to letters. Significantly, the English press (20 records, or 27.0%) and the bilingual press (19, or 25.7%) — jointly accounting for 39 records, or 52.7% — published more letters on language complaints

in relation to the other types of records, while the Afrikaans press published proportionally fewer letters of this type, or 47.3% (35). This proportional difference between letters and other types of records (reports, editorials, columns and articles) in the Afrikaans and English/bilingual press respectively suggests, on the one hand, that Afrikaans newspapers play a larger activist role regarding coverage on language complaints than the English and bilingual press. On the other hand, the difference suggests a relatively smaller activist role among readers of Afrikaans newspapers than among readers of English and bilingual newspapers. This observation is surprising since the impression exists that Afrikaans speakers are generally more aware of their language rights than other speakers. However, because of the historical activist role of Afrikaans newspapers, readers might still be consoled by the fact that these newspapers are prepared to champion the language cause, as they have done in the past.

Table 3 contains particulars on the sources of language rights incidents. An incident is an act that gives rise to the lodging of a complaint by a complainant. As such, a language rights incident is related to a perceived discriminatory action taken by an institution against a certain official language — usually an action that the complainant perceives to be violating his rights regarding the use of that language.

Table 3: Sources of language rights incidents

Source	Afrikaans newspapers		English newspapers		Afrikaans/English newspapers		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
State	63	65.6	29	30.2	4	4.2	96	76.2
Semi-state	5	38.5	8	61.5	0	0.0	13	10.3
Private	10	58.8	2	11.8	5	29.4	17	13.5
Total	78	61.9	39	31.0	9	7.1	126	100

From the 251 records, a total of 126 incidents were identified on the basis of a content-analysis. Altogether, of the 126 incidents, 76.2% (96) allegedly originated within state institutions. Semi-state institutions were the source of 10.3% (13) of the language rights incidents, while private institutions were the source of 13.5% (17) of the incidents. Since state institutions traditionally played a vital role in the implementa-

tion of the pre-1994 50/50 bilingual language policy, and since the legacy of this policy still dominates these institutions, it is not surprising to note that they feature prominently as sources of language rights incidents.

It turned out that 65.6% (63) of the 96 references to the state as a source of language rights incidents, were excerpted from Afrikaans newspapers and 30.2% (29) from English newspapers. However, almost the opposite is true of references to semi-state institutions as a source of language rights incidents. Here, 61.5% (8) of the 13 references were excerpted from English newspapers and 38.5% (5) from Afrikaans newspapers. Although the N-count is not high, this difference might suggest a greater interest in semi-state institutions among readers of English newspapers because of the privatisation debate. Also, these are the institutions that were traditionally considered to be bastions of Afrikanerdom.

When the 96 cases where the state is the source of language rights incidents are analysed in more detail, it transpires that the first level of government and the tertiary education sector were responsible for most incidents, namely 34.4% (33) each, followed by the second level of government with 19.8% (19). Table 4 contains details on the coverage of language rights incidents related to state sources per newspaper group.

Table 4: State sources of language rights incidents per newspaper group

Source	Afrikaans newspapers		English newspapers		Afrikaans/English newspapers		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1st-level government	21	63.6	8	24.2	4	12.1	33	34.4
2nd-level government	9	47.4	10	52.6	0	0.0	19	19.8
3rd-level government	9	90.0	1	10.0	0	0.0	10	10.4
Tertiary education	23	69.7	10	30.3	0	0.0	33	34.4
Statutory bodies	1	100	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.0
Total	63	65.6	29	30.2	4	4.2	96	100

In comparing Afrikaans newspapers with English/bilingual newspapers, it can be seen that the former gave more prominence to lan-

guage rights incidents related to state sources, namely 65.6% (63) as against 34.4% (33). A notable exception is the second-level government: 47.4% (9) of the relevant records, all of which refer to school language issues, were in Afrikaans newspapers, while 52.6% (10) were in English newspapers. This is surprising, since one would have expected more prominence to have been given by Afrikaans newspapers to this source of language rights incidents, especially in view of the debate on the position of Afrikaans in state schools.

1.5 Discussion of language rights complainants

An analysis of the language rights complainants is also informative. A content analysis of the 251 records on language rights complaints yielded 292 references that have a bearing on language rights complainants. Table 5 contains details regarding the respective language groups of the newspapers that cover the reporting on complainants. From the table, it becomes clear that complainants have used the Afrikaans newspapers far more than the English and bilingual newspapers to voice their concerns regarding alleged language rights violations.

Table 5: References to complainants per language medium of newspaper

	Afrikaans		English		Afrikaans/English		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Complainants								
1st, 2nd and 3rd level government	7	58.3	3	25.0	2	16.7	12	4.1
Education	7	70.0	3	30.0	0	0.0	10	3.4
Statutory body	16	76.2	5	23.8	0	0.0	21	7.2
Political organisations	19	70.4	7	25.9	1	3.7	27	9.2
Cultural organisations	42	89.4	5	10.6	0	0.0	47	16.1
Professional organisations	1	33.3	2	66.7	0	0.0	3	1.0
Business organisations	3	50.0	3	50.0	0	0.0	6	2.1
The media as complainants	57	76.0	17	22.7	1	1.3	75	25.7
Private persons as complainants	51	56.0	17	18.7	23	25.3	91	31.2
Total	203	69.5	62	21.2	27	9.2	292	100

Noteworthy for the purposes of this discussion is that the printed media (after private persons, who were complainants in 31,2% (91) of the cases), through editorials, columns and articles, accounted for the biggest source of complainants, namely 25.7% (75), far exceeding both cultural organisations (47, or 16.1%) and political organisations (27, or 9.2%). Here again there is an indication that the Afrikaans printed media continue, as they have done in the past, to play an activist role when it comes to language rights issues. The state is seen to be favouring English, in particular regarding internal and external communication, and Afrikaans is perceived to be the language that is most discriminated against.

A content analysis of incidents in which the favouring of English prompted complainants to complain against alleged rights violations, shows that the two most important issues are the internal and/or external communication of state departments which use only English, and the English hegemony in tertiary education. Incidents perceived to be discriminatory against Afrikaans, prompting complainants to act, likewise involve the refusal of state departments to communicate in Afrikaans as well as English. In addition, the downscaling of Afrikaans in journals and magazines, and the lack of a language plan, or the failure to institute a language plan that might safeguard the use of Afrikaans, prompted dissatisfaction.

2. Comparison with complaints lodged with PanSALB

PanSALB fulfils a key role in ensuring the legal implementation of language policy in South Africa. Its objectives and competencies are determined by the Pan South African Language Board Act (Act No 59 of 1995). Essentially PanSALB promotes multilingualism, is responsible for language development, undertakes research on language policy matters, gives advice to government on language policy, language legislation and language planning issues and mediates complaints about language rights violations (cf Marivate 2000: 132). Section 8 of the act defines the competencies and activities of the Pan South African Language Board with regard to language rights. Section 8(1)(i) determines that PanSALB:

[M]ay investigate on its own initiative or on receipt of a written complaint, and alleged violation of a language right, language policy or language practice in terms of section 11.

Section 11 deals with the procedure followed by the Board in respect of arbitration, reconciliation and/or negotiation, and stipulates, *inter alia*, (Section 11(1)) that:

Any person acting on his behalf or any person, body of persons or institution acting on behalf of its members of a language group or any organ of state may lodge with the Board a complaint concerning any alleged violation or threatened violation of a language right, language policy or language practice.

In order to determine the validity of the conclusions reached on the ground of the empirical study of reports in the printed media the results will be compared with complaints lodged with PanSALB.

From 1997, there was a sustained increase in the number of complaints of alleged violations of language rights that were submitted, and by the end of March 2002, a total of 234 complaints were lodged (PanSALB, 2002: 176). During the period under investigation 83 language complaints were lodged with PanSALB. Since one of these complaints was pending and had not been registered at the time of investigation the PanSALB offices were visited on 1 July 2002) only 82 records were taken into consideration for the analysis.

On the basis of a content analysis 53 incidents were identified from the 82 records, and are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Sources of language rights incidents lodged with PanSALB

Source	n	%
State	36	67.9
Semi-state	15	28.3
Private	2	3.8
Total	53	100

If the information in Table 6 is compared with that in Table 3 in which sources of language rights incidents as reported in the media are given, two noteworthy differences materialise, namely the increase of incidents prompted by semi-state institutions (10.3% to 28.3%), and the decrease of incidents prompted by private institutions (13.5% to 3.8%).

When only letters of complaint which appear in the media are taken into account for the comparison a more equitable comparison can be made. The data is presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Comparison between sources of language complaints in letters of complaint published in the printed media and complaints lodged with PanSALB

Source	Media		PanSALB		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
State	15	29.4	36	70.6	51	40.2
Semi-state	8	34.8	15	65.2	23	18.1
Private	51	96.2	2	3.8	53	41.7
Total	74	58.3	53	41.7	127	100

The comparison reveals a stark difference between the sources mentioned. While 70.6% (36) of the complaints registered with PanSALB pertain to the state, only 29.4% (15) of these complaints were directed as letters to the media. A similar situation can be observed regarding the mention of semi-state sources, where 65.2% (15) of these complaints were lodged with PanSALB, while 34.8% (8) were registered as letters of complaint to the media. The difference is even more defined when it comes to private sources, where quite the opposite is true: 96.2% (51) of the total complaints about private sources were registered with the media, while only 3.8% (2) were registered with PanSALB.

This sharp opposition confirms that complainants have a relatively clear understanding of PanSALB's role as language rights "watchdog" as far as the official language rights domain is concerned. They are also well aware of the fact that the state has little jurisdiction over language rights in the private domain and that the media are seen as a far better forum for alleged violations in this domain. Since most of the relevant complaints are related to business organisations, complainants are probably relying on the power of negative publicity in the media to advance their cause.

As in the case of the content analysis of incidents prompting complaints in the media, a content analysis of complaints lodged with PanSALB reveals the same issue, namely dissatisfaction with the preference/insistence on the sole use of English in the internal and/or external communication of state departments, especially with regard to the availability of forms in English only.

Of the complaints lodged with PanSALB concerning administrative action that allegedly discriminates against languages other than

English 77% refer to alleged discrimination against the use of Afrikaans, and 23% to alleged discrimination against the use of other languages, specifically the African languages.

The comparison with complaints lodged with PanSALB confirms the findings reached with the analysis of the coverage of language policy issues in the printed media.

3. Conclusion

The most important conclusion to be drawn from the investigation is that in a democratic society the printed media has, in matters concerning language rights, an important watchdog function to play. The printed media is a barometer of the feelings and attitudes of its readers, and a government would benefit by ensuring that every citizen's constitutional language rights are upheld, and avoiding conflicts by seeking to solve problems before they escalate. Especially by promoting the ideological orientation of vernacularisation, in contrast to internationalisation, the printed media can play an important role in preventing, on the one hand the marginalisation of the indigenous languages, and on the other the hegemony of English.

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