

Abstract 08

Dearth of Translators Impedes the Implementation of Official Languages Policy

Anusha Subramaniam

Language Promotion and Investigating Officer, Official Languages Commission
anuanush89@gmail.com

The dearth of qualified translators and interpreters is a major hurdle to the implementation of the official languages policy, with a pressing need for them in courts, provincial councils and local authorities. The cadre strength of the translator service was around 600 in the past but there are only 131 in the service at present. This study is concerned about the dearth of translators, which impedes the implementation of official languages policies. The data consist of language audit reports on government institutions. According to the language audits conducted by the official languages commission, many government departments and institutions do not have the facilities to either reply to letters received in the second official language (Tamil) or to provide a reliable translations. In several government institutions, translation is a serious problem, especially in places including courts, divisional secretariats, police stations and hospitals. The purpose of this study is to identify the reasons for this dearth of translators. The non-availability of qualified translators should be addressed at school level with the education system being geared to produce persons who are bilingual or trilingual (Sinhala, Tamil and English) while the universities should also organize their language departments to produce graduates who are competent in at least two languages. This research concluded that general education should include training in the second national language; the national language which is not the mother tongue of an individual, meaning either Sinhala or Tamil and that the second language be made a compulsory subject in schools. It is also recommended that facilities be provided to students who wish to study the second national language as a subject at the GCE Ordinary and Advanced level examinations. In the university system, it is vital to design the language courses, which include both national languages. The Official Languages Commission also recommends that a translation centre be set up, modelled on the translation bureau of Canada to provide the service of translation of documents and of interpretation and related matters.

Key words: Languages, National Language, Sinhala, Tamil, Translation