

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for future research

6.1 INTRODUCTION

As repeatedly pointed out in this study, the editorial role is difficult to define. Many misperceptions regarding the role of the editor exist, and as a result, editors themselves are, at times, unsure of what their work entails. In addition, South African editors work in an industry that is not professionalised or regulated. One of the consequences of this is that editing is frequently not viewed as a skilled profession. This study has postulated that these issues may be addressed by the development of standards for editing practice. The aims of this study have therefore been to investigate the need for standardisation in the South African editing industry and the impact that the development of standards may have on the nature and status of the South African editing industry, and ultimately to develop a list of core standards that reflects the tasks and skills that are essential for all editors, regardless of the sector in which they work.

To fulfil these aims, a literature review and an empirical investigation were conducted. Both these components were vital in fulfilling the primary objective of developing a list of core standards for editing in South Africa. This chapter summarises and discusses the main findings and conclusions of the study. Section 6.2 provides an overview of the study and summarises the findings of the literature review and the empirical investigation used to arrive at the list of core standards. More specifically, Section 6.2.1 focuses on the status of the South African editing industry, the need to standardise the South African editing industry, and the various sectors of the South African editing industry (the results of the literature review), while Section 6.2.2 outlines the methodological procedure and empirical investigation employed in the study. Section 6.3 makes recommendations for the dissemination of this list of standards and offers suggestions for how the standards may be used, specifically by associations for editors in South Africa. Finally, Section 6.4 outlines some possibilities for future research.

6.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this study has been to identify the tasks and skills that are shared among all South African editors. The purpose of the identification of these tasks and skills has been to develop a list of core standards that could apply to all South African editors (irrespective

of the sectors in which editors work). To attain the primary objective, the following sub-objectives were formulated (see Section 1.4):

1. Analyse the status of the South African editing industry with a view to determining the benefits of standardisation.
2. Determine which tasks and skills are associated with the various sectors of the editing industry through a literature review,
3. Investigate the acceptability of these tasks and skills for South African editors through an empirical study.
4. Identify which tasks and skills are common to editors from all sectors of the editing industry and develop a core set of editing standards for the South African editing industry based on these.

Each chapter contributed to the attainment of the objectives. Chapter 2 focused on the first sub-objective. It discussed the status of the South African editing industry and outlined the impact that standards could have on the professionalisation of the South African editing industry. The standardisation and professionalisation of the editing industry in three other countries, as well as standardisation processes in other professional language domains were also discussed. Chapter 3 focused on the types or levels of editing (as defined by standard industry textbooks) and editing skills, the different sectors of the South African editing industry and the tasks and skills associated with editing for the various sectors. This chapter therefore contributed to the attainment of the second sub-objective. Chapter 4 outlined the methodological procedure employed in the empirical investigation of the study, while Chapter 5 presented and discussed the findings from the empirical investigation. These two chapters therefore focused on the third and fourth sub-objectives, and culminated in the identification of core tasks and skills that are relevant for all South African editors, and the formulation and testing of a list of core standards based on the tasks and skills identified.

The following two sections summarise the main findings of the literature review and empirical investigation, respectively.

6.2.1 Professionalisation, regulation and standards

In order for any industry to be considered a profession, the industry must undergo certain processes and demonstrate certain characteristics. Chapter 2 postulated that one of the key characteristics of a profession is that it is regulated by certain expectations and standards that guide practice. In addition, Chapter 2 outlined a model for the professionalisation process. This model was used to determine whether the South African editing industry is in the process of

being professionalised. Séguinot's (2008:3) model outlines a number of important stages for the professionalisation process, summarised in the list below:

- training becomes longer and moves to universities,
- standards for practice are developed or become higher,
- professional associations are created,
- attempts are made to separate competent practitioners from incompetent,
- codes of ethics are developed, and
- legal recognition for limiting the right to practise is sought.

The analysis of the South African editing industry utilising Séguinot's model demonstrated that the South African editing industry is in the process of being professionalised, but the analysis also found that one important step in this process has been overlooked: the development of standards for practice. The analysis in Chapter 2 found that the lack of standards for practice impacts on all the other stages of professionalisation.

A number of South African tertiary institutions offer degree courses involving editorial training, although the editing component of this training often forms part of a broader degree in language practice, or language and linguistics. This means that editors are trained in different ways, and often develop different sets of skills during this training, entering the industry with varying perceptions of what their work entails. Some research has been conducted on pedagogical approaches to editor training and on the development of curricula for such training at tertiary institutions (see, for example, Kruger, 2008). The training of editors at tertiary institutions is an important step in the professionalisation process; however, the absence of clear guidelines or standards for practice means that the training of editors is not standardised. Consequently, students who have completed such training at different institutions acquire vastly different kinds of knowledge, skills and perceptions relating to editing.

With regard to professional associations for editors, only two associations for editors in South Africa exist: the South African Translators' Institute (SATI) and the Professional Editors' Group (PEG). Although both of these institutions are widely recognised in the South African editing industry, neither has any legal standing, and therefore both serve largely as informal support structures for editors. In 2003, the South African Language Practitioners' Council Bill was drafted. The aim of the bill is to establish a council that will represent the interest of language practitioners in South Africa at legislative level. This means that the passing and subsequent implementation of the bill could give rise to some form of legal recognition for language practitioners (and also editors). However, at the time of writing no information regarding the progress of the bill is available.

Despite the fact that neither SATI nor PEG has any legal standing in the industry, both have recognised the importance of separating competent editors from incompetent editors. SATI offers an accreditation examination for editors and is widely recognised in the industry. However, there appear to be a number of difficulties with SATI's accreditation for editors:

- the examination is not based on a clear set of standards, suggesting that parameters for competence are not clear cut,
- the examination is marked along the same lines as the American Translators' Association's (ATA's) marking grid for translators, which implies that the examination for editors is marked using assessment criteria not specifically based on the South African context,
- the examination may only be done on hard copy and as such does not test the skills associated with editing online (the method of editing that most editors now use most frequently), and
- the examination is currently only available in English and Afrikaans.¹

PEG is currently investigating the possibility of establishing a regulation process and has established a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) committee. The committee is charged with the responsibility of establishing the continued professional development programme that aims to rank or rate editors' competence according a number of criteria (such as attending seminars, undergoing training, participation in testing, etc.). Although both forms of regulation/accreditation are useful, neither is based on a set of clear guidelines for practice, suggesting that editors subject themselves to these forms of accreditation with varying perceptions of what amounts to competence. In addition, the absence of clear guidelines means that these forms of regulation may not reflect all the tasks and skills associated with editing in South Africa (see Chapter 2). The development of standards for editors in South Africa may solve this problem, and could be used to set accreditation examinations or forms of assessment that indicate clearly what is being tested and what is indicative of proficiency.

In addition to the accreditation examination for editors offered by SATI and the CPD-programme that will be offered by PEG, both institutions have established codes of ethics to which their members must subscribe. Although neither institution has any legal standing, internal disciplinary procedures have been established in order to ensure that the members of each institution adhere to its code of ethics. This suggests that both institutions recognise that there should be consequences for practitioners who do not adhere to the principles of ethical practice.

¹ However, as pointed out in Section 2.2.3, this may be the consequence of limited demand for the language editing accreditation examination in the nine other official South African languages. Also, SATI is planning on extending the accreditation for editors to the other South African languages.

With regard to obtaining legal recognition to limit the right to practise, neither SATI nor PEG has been able to obtain such legal recognition. This means that neither institution has the legal power to prohibit incompetent practitioners from practising. The South African Language Practitioners' Bill may solve this problem, and once it is passed it is envisioned that the industry will be managed and regulated at a legislative level. This will have far-reaching implications for training, regulation, accreditation and professionalisation.

The discussion above (and also in Chapter 2) suggests that the industry is in the process of being professionalised. However, the absence of standards for practice is notable, and clearly impacts any progress towards professionalisation. The development and acceptance of standards for South African editors will provide the industry with a point from which to benchmark competence, allowing the training, regulation and accreditation of editors to be standardised. This may strengthen the argument for professionalisation, and also possibly encourage progress in the passing of the South African Language Practitioners' Bill.

Clearly the development of standards for the South African editing industry is an important step that could contribute to the eventual professionalisation of the industry. The impact of standards on regulation and accreditation processes can be significant. In addition to discussing the status of the South African editing industry, Chapter 2 also investigated the effect of the development of standards on the editing industry of three countries: Canada, Britain and Australia. The editing industry in each of these three countries has developed its own set of standards for editors. The course that the development of these standards has taken varies from country to country, demonstrating that standards development is a process that should take into consideration the nuances and uniqueness of the context in which the industry operates. In each country, the standards for editing are used to develop accreditation examinations and assessment procedures. In addition, editorial organisations in each country have established unique ways to test competence among practitioners. The analyses presented in Chapter 2 of these different paths towards standardisation and accreditation suggest that the development of editing standards for South African editors should spring from the realities of editorial practice in the South African context, while taking cognisance of standardisation processes and their outcomes elsewhere in the world. The variables that may have specific impact on South African editors' work include not only the various sectors and environments in which editors work, but also the fact that South African editors work in a multilingual context.

With regard to editing in specific contexts or sectors, it was noted in Chapter 3 that editors perform different functions in different contexts – suggesting that editors require different sets of skills depending on the environment in which they work. While the sector in which an editor works determines the importance of certain tasks and skills, it was postulated that all editors,

regardless of sector, share certain core tasks and skills (i.e. tasks that all editors perform and skills that all editors require). Given this, Chapter 3 asserted that the development of standards for South African editors needed to be founded on a list of tasks and skills that apply to editorial work in all sectors of the industry, based on which core standards could be formulated. More specific tasks and skills, linked to particular sectors, may then be identified and added. For the purposes of this study, four main sectors were identified: editing for book publishing, editing for the mass media, technical editing and academic editing.

The various sectors in which South African editors work were then analysed and key tasks and skills linked to each sector were identified (see Tables 3.2 to 3.5). Prior to the analysis of the editing sectors, parameters for the classification of tasks and skills were identified and based on an analysis of standard industry textbooks (see Table 3.1). Two main categories of tasks and skills were identified, and were then further sub-categorised into nine groups of tasks or skills. These categories of tasks and skills are:

Textual tasks for editors

- Copyediting
- Stylistic editing
- Structural editing
- Content editing
- Proofreading

Extra-textual skills for editors

- Technical skills
- Personal and interpersonal skills
- Procedural skills
- Specialised knowledge

The analysis of editorial work in different sectors of the industry demonstrated that while certain tasks and skills are shared by all editors, many tasks and skills are specific to the editorial work of a particular sector. Chapter 3 therefore concluded that editorial work varies from sector to sector. Comprehensive lists of tasks and skills for each sector were drawn up (see Tables 3.2 to 3.5). However, since most of the literature consulted in the literature review is based on editorial work in other countries (such as Canada, the United States of America, Britain, and Australia), it was deemed necessary to determine which tasks and skills represented the core tasks and skills of editors working in the South African editing industry. The tasks and skills identified in Tables 3.2 to 3.5 were then collated to form a master list of tasks and skills that could apply to

all editors in South Africa (see Table 3.6). The master list of tasks and skills was used to draft a questionnaire that formed the basis of the empirical investigation.

6.2.2 The identification of shared tasks and skills for South African editors: an empirical study

The aim of the empirical portion of the study was to determine (by means of various statistical analyses) which tasks and skills identified in the literature review are shared tasks and skills among South African editors. To this end, a survey in the form of a questionnaire was designed. The questionnaire comprised three main sections: Section A solicited various demographic details from the respondents, Section B asked the respondents how often they perform various editing tasks, and Section C asked respondents to indicate how important certain skills are for their editorial work. Likert scales were provided for each questionnaire item and the respondents were asked to select the most appropriate answer from the options provided.

The target population defined for the study was all editors working in the various sectors of the South African editing industry. The sample of respondents for the survey was selected from various sampling frames representing editors working in all sectors of the South African editing industry (see Section 4.4.2). The sample was selected from five sampling frames. The sample of editors from the book-publishing and mass-media sectors were selected utilising the simple-random sampling procedure, while the sample of editors from the academic- and technical-editing sectors were selected utilising the self-selection sampling procedure. Prior to sending the questionnaire to the sample, the questionnaire was pre-tested in three stages in order to establish its face and content validity (see Section 4.3.5).

Once the validity of the questionnaire had been established through pre-testing, the questionnaire was distributed via email to the sample. In total, 92 questionnaires were returned, with the distribution across sectors as follows: 25 responses from the book-publishing sector, 20 responses from the mass-media sector, 18 responses from the technical-editing sector, 23 responses from the academic-editing sector, and six responses where the respondents did not indicate the sector in which they work. Prior to the analysis of the data, the survey (research instrument) was tested for its measure of reliability. The procedure employed to test the reliability of the questionnaire was the Cronbach alpha method. Based on the test for reliability it was concluded that the research instrument demonstrated a sufficient level of reliability (see Section 5.3).

The data collected in the survey were then analysed. The analysis of the responses to Section A indicated that the respondents represented editors from all four sectors of the industry. The

respondents indicated that their working experience ranged from only a few years to many years. In addition, the respondents surveyed work predominantly in English, with Afrikaans, Xhosa, South Sotho and Tsonga collectively representing only 9.8 percent of the respondents' main working languages. Furthermore, the responses represented the two main working contexts, with slightly more respondents indicating that they worked on a freelance basis. Finally, most of the respondents indicated that they were not accredited editors, with only 14 percent of the respondents specifying that they were accredited. Overall, the responses to Section A of the questionnaire demonstrated that the respondents to the survey adequately represent the population of interest in the study.

Two criteria were set for the inclusion of questionnaire items in the final list of core tasks and skills: firstly, the item must score an acceptable mean in all four sectors (acceptable means are defined as means below 2.50 in all four sectors, or means below 2.50 in three sectors and one mean between 2.50 and 2.59); and secondly, the item must be statistically significant and $p < 0.05$. The responses to Sections B and C were analysed using various statistical methods. Firstly, the responses were analysed for their measure of central tendency (mean) and measure of dispersion (standard deviation). These analyses indicated the average response to each item in the questionnaire and the level of agreement among the respondents regarding the relevance of each item for their editorial work. The means and standard deviations for the responses from each sector were analysed, discussed and compared. Apart from interpreting the results of the questionnaire, the ultimate aim of this was to determine which items all sectors agreed are relevant for their work, and which items are relevant to particular sectors only. Only items that scored acceptable means (as defined above) were considered for inclusion in the list of core tasks and skills. Of the initial 115 items in the questionnaire, 77 items scored acceptable means across all four sectors (see Section 5.4.2.6). Therefore all four sectors agreed that 77 of the items listed in the questionnaire were important for their work and 77 items thus met the first criterion for inclusion in the list of core tasks and skills.

While the analysis of means and standard deviations was useful for determining the acceptability of certain items, additional statistical tests had to be conducted in order to determine whether the data from the sample are representative of the entire population (i.e. the degree of confidence with which it may be assumed that the same results would be obtained if the study were repeated at a later stage or with a different sample). In order to determine whether the results from this study may be generalised to the broader population, significance tests were conducted, with particular focus on the 77 items that scored acceptable means across all four sectors. The results of the significance test indicated that a total of 76 of the 77 items that scored acceptable means across all four sectors returned p-values lower than 0.05. Therefore, 76 items fulfilled both criteria for inclusion in the list of core tasks and skills, and

based on the results of the statistical analysis it was concluded, at a 95 percent confidence level, that the 76 items represent the core tasks and skills of all South African editors.

The 76 items that were identified as core tasks and skills as a result of the statistical analyses were then reformulated as a list of standards for South African editors. This list of standards comprises an introduction that explains how the standards were developed and that they represent the tasks and skills relevant to all editors, followed by a section listing core standards relating to textual editorial tasks and a section listing the core standards relating to extra-textual editorial skills. Once the standards document had been drafted it was sent to four experts who participated in a semi-Delphi study. As discussed in Section 4.6.4 and Section 5.6, the aim of the semi-Delphi was to allow experts involved in the training of editors and the regulation of the editing industry to comment on the formulation and presentation of the standards, and the layout of the document. This stage was included in the study in order to validate the acceptability and quality of the standards in terms of their formulation, clarity and accessibility. The semi-Delphi consisted of two rounds, after which the experts reached consensus on the formulation, clarity and accessibility of the standards. The final list of core standards is presented in Appendix I.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DISSEMINATION OF THE CORE STANDARDS FOR SOUTH AFRICAN EDITORS

The development of standards for the South African editing industry is a step that could contribute to the professionalisation of the industry. However, this contribution is conditional, depending on the dissemination and acceptance of the standards in the industry. Dissemination and acceptance are strongly linked, and it is only through the successful dissemination of these standards that associations for editors and editors themselves may come to accept and endorse the use of these standards as a tool for developing and gauging competence, particularly in training and accreditation processes.

As discussed in Chapter 2, standards that guide an industry's practice may serve a number of purposes and contribute to the professionalisation of the industry in a variety of ways. With regard to the list of standards developed in this study, it should be noted that its contribution is limited by the fact that the standards represent the core tasks and skills relevant to all editors. This list of standards is therefore intended to serve editors more broadly than a specialised list of standards geared towards particular sectors of the industry. Nevertheless, the development of standards (whether shared or sector-specific) is a step towards the standardisation of practice as well as expectations.

Given the current status of the South African editing industry, the standards developed in this study would be best disseminated by the two prominent associations for editors: SATI and PEG. The introduction of the standards document in these two associations means that a large portion of South African editors would have access to a document that outlines the basic tasks and skills required to work in the editing industry. Not only practising editors would have access to these standards, but also academics, who form part of the membership of each of these two associations. This may also contribute to the standardisation of training practice in various institutions.

The dissemination of these standards within SATI and PEG could also serve to “test the waters”, specifically with regard to editors’ willingness to accept prescriptive guidelines for practice (even if these guidelines have been developed by descriptive means). The dissemination of these standards could contribute to the professionalisation of the industry by determining how editors feel about the actual implementation of standards in the industry – opening up further possibilities both for research and for putting processes in place to accommodate the professionalisation, standardisation and accreditation requirements and needs of the South African editing industry. If these standards are accepted by editors they may be useful in establishing more appropriate and representative forms of accreditation and assessment of an individual’s editing competence. In addition, these standards could impact the training of editors, as academics become more aware of the need to standardise the training of editors at tertiary institutions and elsewhere (such as in editing short-courses or workshops).

Another important potential contribution of these standards is to provide editors and the users of editorial services with a document that outlines clearly what editorial work involves, and what a client may expect of an editor. This could help to dispel the many misperceptions surrounding the work of the editor, and provide editors and their clients with a more clearly defined basis for their professional relationship.

The standards developed in this study could contribute towards the professionalisation of the South African editing industry. However, the development of these core standards (and other, sector-specific standards that may result from further work utilising the data gathered in the study; see Section 6.4) alone will not ensure this. The development of generally accepted standards for editorial practice is but one part of the process, and this study foregrounds the fact that much more research about editing in South Africa needs to be conducted in order to create awareness of the important role that editors (and language practitioners generally) play, especially in a context where the promotion of multilingualism and the right to have access to information that is correct and understandable are of vital importance.

6.4 FUTURE RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES

This study opens up a number of avenues for further research with regard to the development of standards. One of the most important issues for further research is the additional testing of the standards developed in this study. This is important for two reasons: firstly, these standards have been developed as part of research for an MA degree, and therefore the study is limited by the time and budgetary constraints of completing a degree; secondly, the identification of standards in this study is based (to a large degree) on what editors say they do – which may differ from what they actually do. A study by Bisailon (2007) found that editors' perceptions of what their work entails often affect how they go about editing, and that editors frequently perform tasks that are not required – or that they are not mandated to perform. This suggests that there is a discrepancy between editors' perception of what their editorial work entails, and what they actually do. It is therefore important to test the standards against practice because they are based on what editors perceive their work to entail.

Another important avenue of further research that is particularly crucial for the professionalisation of the South African editing industry is the identification of additional sector-specific standards that outline the editorial tasks, skills and responsibilities of editors in the various sectors. In this way, the core standards developed in this study could be supplemented and refined by sector-specific standards reflecting the tasks and skills of editors working in the various sectors.

Further research possibilities are to be found in investigating the usefulness of the core standards formulated in this study for accreditation and training – two aspects of professionalisation that depend heavily on standardisation. The standards developed in this study could form the basis of an investigation into acceptable and representative forms of accreditation for South African editors. Another direction in which this research could be directed, is to investigate the use of the standards formulated in this study (and also sector-specific standards that could be developed later on) in the development of standardised curricula for the training of editors at tertiary institutions and elsewhere.

6.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The role that editors play in the communication process is important. Despite this, the role of the editor is difficult to define, because editors fulfil different functions in different contexts. Broadly speaking, however, editors aim to ensure that texts adhere to pre-determined rules; that texts are clear, concise and accessible; and that the information and message contained in a text are well presented, logical, factually correct and appropriate.

The aim of this study has been to identify a list of core standards that reflects the basic tasks and skills associated with working in all sectors of the South African editing industry. The standards document that is the outcome of this study has met this aim, and outlines the basic tasks that editors perform and the skills associated with fulfilling these tasks.

While the primary objective of this study has been to identify shared tasks and formulate core standards, this study has also made some observations about the status of the South African editing industry as well as the impact that standards could have on this status. The fact is that South African editors work in a highly unregulated industry, and as a result often struggle to obtain recognition for their work. In addition, the industry is not always perceived (by clients and editors) as a professional industry, which impacts the perception of the value of this industry.

The development of core standards for editors could go some way to contributing towards a changed professional landscape for South African editors. Specifically, these core standards could be used to educate clients about the editorial role, to train editors, and to develop reliable, comprehensive forms of accreditation or regulation. At the very least, the standards identified in this study could be used by editors to guide them through the editing process. In addition, these standards could form the basis for the development of more comprehensive and specialised standards that reflect the editorial work associated with working in various professional contexts. However, these standards will need to be maintained and revised regularly, particularly given the increasing pace at which the industry and the role of the editor are changing. In addition, further research has to be conducted into the field of editing in order (also) to raise awareness of the important role that editors fulfil. Bisailon (2007:93) reiterates this: "It is vital to dedicate further research to professional editing so as to end the general ignorance surrounding this craft and to garner for it the recognition that it deserves."