# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Background

South Africa (SA) is a multilingual country with 12 official languages[[1]](#footnote-1). As such, many South Africans can read, write and speak one or more languages. This language diversity has created a need for multilingual written communication and information as well as skilled language practitioners who can copywrite, edit, interpret and/or translate in one or more of these languages (Law, 2011). Because many citizens and language practitioners are bi- or multilingual to a proficient level, there has been a tendency to think that most, if not all, language practitioners’ skills are interchangeable, similar in nature, and that no formal training is required for these. In the workplace, language practice is often seen as one large grouping with various subsets of skills (e.g., an English-speaking copywriter, editor, interpreter and translator, not a copywriter and/or editor, etc. who works in the English language).

In addition, the SA public often has access to various language practitioners that work in a multitude of languages offering various services and skills at various pricing structures with varying standards, levels of training and/or ethics. Focusing on the SA text-editing industry, one realises that it is fractured, not formally professionalised, nor regulated (Kotze & Verhoef, 2001, p.78). Currently, SA text-editors are not (yet) required to register with a regulating body[[2]](#footnote-2), nor do they need to belong to a professional body[[3]](#footnote-3) before offering their services to the public or to practice legally (Linnegar, 2015, p.82). Thus, there is no unified expectation of SA text-editors’ training, skills, standards and/or ethics (Kotze & Verhoef, 2001, p.78; Linnegar, 2015, p.82).

## Rationale

I find this problematic as a freelance academic editor running my own business, Strikethrough Professional Academic Editing Services. In addition, many authors (i.e., researchers and government departments alike) have called for the industry to be either professionalised, regulated or both. This study’s contribution is important as little empirical evidence exists regarding the professionalisation of text-editing (particularly pertaining to the roles of regulatory and professional bodies). Research completed regarding the professionalisation and/or regulation of the SA text-editing industry has been piecemeal, completed in unrelated fields (e.g., public relations)[[4]](#footnote-4) and not looked at the industry as a whole. Furthermore, the areas of interest have not been placed within the spheres of professional/regulatory bodies. This study’s strategic aim is to inform the practices of the SA text-editing professional and regulatory bodies through interrogating current practices and contrasting them to the activities that could be/are in practice in other places.

## Problem statement(s)

As mentioned, many studies have discussed the professionalisation of the SA text-editing industry. However, these studies have focused on ‘stand-alone’ issues such as standards, ethics, mentoring, factors influencing work, roles and responsibilities, etc. In addition, mention is often made of the South African Language Practitioners’ Council[[5]](#footnote-5) Act (SALPC Act/SALPCA) (No. 8 of 2014) but no research has been completed on the SALPC (a regulatory body) within the existing social setting of the SA text-editing industry. Thus, this proposed study joins the ongoing academic discussion (Bak, 2013, pp. 3, 17; Blaauw & Boets, 2000; Law, 2011; Law & Kruger, 2008) regarding the professionalisation and/or regulation of the SA text-editing industry. The proposal notes that research relating to implementing the SALPCA regulations is needed, since professionalisation is not achieved solely through regulation.

Furthermore, though promulgated in 2014, the SALPC only announced the appointed board members on 18 August 2023 (Gazette, 2023). During the (almost) decade of the SALPCA being active, various professional bodies have continued operating without the SALPC’s active oversight. Of these, the four most important ones for this study are:

* + the Publishers Association of South Africa (PASA),
	+ the Professional Editors’ Guild (PEG),
	+ the Southern African Freelancers’ Association (SAFREA), and
	+ the South African Translators’ Institute (SATI).

None of these bodies fully consider the issue of professionalisation of the SA text-editing industry because the differing purposes and tasks of professional and regulating bodies are not clear. Note that regulatory bodies are not professional bodies nor vice versa. Attention should be given to defining the differences between professional and regulatory bodies and how they can and must collaborate to professionalise an industry. Professional bodies serve and protect the interests of professionals/practitioners; regulatory bodies serve and protect the public (Benton, Thomas, Damgaard, Masek, & Brekken, 2017, p. 4; Visconti, 2022, p. [n.p.]). These bodies are able to regulate an industry’s actions and professionalise the profession through formalised regulation, standardisation and accreditation. Various authors (Blaauw & Boets, 2000; Law, 2011; Law & Kruger, 2008; Meintjes & Niemann-Struweg, 2009) have noted the importance of this and the processes through which this could happen.

A further problem in the SA text-editing industry is the amount of overlap and duplication of information taking place among the three dominant professional bodies dealing with editing in some form or another in SA (i.e., PEG, SAFREA and SATI). For example, currently both SATI and PEG have a text-editing accreditation test available to their members, but the PEG test is based on the SATI test. PEG recognises SATI’s test, but SATI does not formally recognise PEG’s test. Furthermore, PEG’s continued professional development programme will be shared in future with SATI. Also, SATI does not currently have an active ethics committee, while PEG does and regularly implements this (Carstens, Blaauw, & du Preez, 2020; South African Translators Institute [SATI], 2023). Both organisations are aware of SAFREA and though PEG has many freelancers, almost no mention is made of engaging with SAFREA when it comes to forwarding the causes and needs of this group.

1. The 12 official South African languages are Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, Sepedi, Sesotho, siSwati, Xitsonga, Setswana, Tshivenda, isiXhosa, isiZulu and South African Sign Language (from 20 July 2023) (SAnews.gov.za, 2023). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Though promulgated in 2014 and mentioning “a register kept in accordance with the provisions of this Act”, the South African Language Practitioners Council Act (SALPC Act/SALPCA) (No. 8 of 2014) does not currently expect text-editors to register with them. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Note that in the USA, regulatory bodies are separate from professional bodies (also known as associations) and trade unions, this is similarly so in SA. Furthermore, according to Benton, Thomas, Damgaard, Masek and Brekken (2017, p. 4):

this separation is not the case in all countries. In some jurisdictions, the functions of regulatory bodies, professional associations, and trade unions coexist ... in some Canadian provinces, Spain, and Portugal, the roles of the regulator and the professional association are held by the same organization. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Meintjes and Niemann-Struweg (2009) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This will be the industry regulatory body for all South African language practitioners. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)