



Filling the Gap between Formal and Informal Language in the Classroom: The Case of Lesotho's *Sesotho sa Seterateng*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explored *Sesotho sa seterateng* (an informal Sesotho language in Lesotho) to establish the traditional function of Sesotho in the 21st century at schools. The observation made was that, as much as *Sesotho sa seterateng* is considered informal, learners continue to make use of it even in formal settings such as classrooms. Therefore, this article argued that in terms of language development, this form of language variety adds value to language change. Despite the growing body of literature examining language changes in Sesotho, no research has been conducted on *Sesotho sa seterateng*. Therefore, this research aimed to analyse the impact of *Sesotho sa seterateng* when used in formal settings such as schools. The authors interrogated how the use of *Sesotho sa seterateng* fills the gap between formal and informal Sesotho in the classroom. The article further attempted to address the gap between *Sesotho sa seterateng* and the formal language used for education purposes. The study was framed within sociolinguistics to expand understanding of *Sesotho sa seterateng*. This was exploratory research which made use of a case study research design. Data was generated from daily reflections recorded in the journal of one Sesotho teacher and content analysis was used to analyse it. The article recommends that teachers should allow learners to use *Sesotho sa seterateng* in their classrooms so that they can acquire scientific knowledge and express themselves in the language that they use daily and understand better. It further recommends that *Sesotho sa seterateng* could be used by stakeholders in the language development unit to contribute towards the development of standardized Sesotho to enhance its vocabulary. The study adds to the scientific knowledge of the debates around the use of non-standard language varieties in classrooms. The article may change the attitudes of curriculum developers, education officials and teachers about non-standard varieties and influence them to acknowledge its positive role in education.

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INTRODUCTION

Sesotho is an indigenous and official language for Basotho in Lesotho and South Africa respectively. It is a standard language used in formal settings such as schools and workplaces. According to Semethe, in South Africa, “the term Sesotho is also used interchangeably with ‘Southern Sotho’, which

differentiates it from Sepedi, also referred to as ‘Northern Sotho.’¹ Lesotho is a mountainous kingdom completely surrounded by South Africa and its population consists of one dominantly homogenous ethnic group. Like other languages, Sesotho has transformed gradually. The transformation can be traced as far back as the 1800th century. The early conduct of Basotho with the missionaries (Dutch and Britain) influenced the borrowing of lexical items recorded in Sebopeho-puosa Sesotho ‘The Structure of Sesotho Language.’² It is logical that non-standard varieties in Lesotho would use Sesotho as a base language. It has been observed that *Sesotho sa seterateng* is an informal Sesotho language spoken by most young and educated Basotho in Lesotho in the 21st century. It is categorized as informal because it is regarded as a transitional language. As Gumede et al. observe, informal languages change their vocabulary very quickly as compared to standard languages.³ It is important to highlight that *Sesotho sa seterateng* was developed recently by people who are born between the mid-1990s and early 2000s.

These young and educated Basotho learners bring certain changes to Sesotho due to their contact with English.⁴ Sesotho's contact with the English language and different South African languages has led to its change and development of new language varieties. Contact with these languages and modernization especially in urban areas in Lesotho, are two outstanding domains that lead to the development of mixed language in facilitating communication across these different boundaries. This indicates that non-standard languages impact on the use of standard language especially in the classroom setting. Khotso is of the view that other different factors can be attributed to these changes.⁵ In the same vein, Possa explains that language is not static. Therefore, the Sesotho language cannot be exceptional to this rule.⁶ For the youth, *Sesotho sa seterateng* ‘represents urbanism, slickness, progressiveness, streetwiseness, and modernity.’⁷ It is believed that the use of *Sesotho sa seterateng* in formal settings such as classrooms helps to bridge language barriers for students as it becomes one of the linguistic repertoires at their disposal. This, therefore, means that its use is no longer limited to informal domains.⁸ Against this background, the study thus poses the following research questions:

- a. What motivates learners to use *Sesotho sa seterateng* in the classroom?
- b. What influence does *Sesotho sa seterateng* have on standard Sesotho?
- c. What is the role played by *Sesotho sa seterateng* as a non-standard variety in formal settings like the classroom?
- d. How does the use of *Sesotho sa seterateng* fill the gap between formal and informal Sesotho language in the classroom?

Using a case study research design (the daily reflections recorded in the journal of one Sesotho teacher) this article seeks to determine the impact of *Sesotho sa seterateng* when used in formal settings such as schools. The paper further attempts to address the gap between *Sesotho sa seterateng* and Sesotho as a formal language used for educational purposes. It also investigates the impact of *Sesotho sa seterateng* when used in formal settings such as schools. From the name *Sesotho sa seterateng*, the word *seterateng* means in the streets. This means that *Sesotho sa seterateng* is an informal language variety based on the daily lives of ordinary people in cities, especially learners at urban schools in the

¹Mpho Maboitumelo Semethe, “Code-Switching, Structural Change and Convergence: A Study of Sesotho in Contact with English in Lesotho” (Faculty of Humanities, 2019), 9.

²Semethe, “Code-Switching, Structural Change and Convergence...,” 9.

³Zempilo Silindokuhle Gumede, Linda van Huyssteen, and Thabo Ditsele, “A Morphological and Lexical Analysis of Mandeni Urban Vernacular,” *South African Journal of African Languages* 41, no. 1 (2021): 105–12.

⁴Semethe, “Code-Switching, Structural Change and Convergence...,” 9.

⁵Palesa Khotso, “The Semantic Shift in Political Talk among the Basotho,” *American Research Journal of Humanities Social Science* 3, no. 7 (2020).

⁶Rethabile Marriet Possa, “The Place of Oral Literature in the 21st Century: A Perspective on Basotho Proverbs” (2013).

⁷Thabo Ditsele and Ellen Hurst, “Travelling Terms and Local Innovations...,” *Literator* 37, no. 1 (2016), 2. <https://doi.org/10.4102/lit.v37i2.1274>.

⁸Thabo Ditsele, “Why Not Use Sepitori to Enrich the Vocabularies of Setswana and Sepedi?,” *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 32, no. 2 (2014): 215–28, <https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2014.992652>.

context of this study. It does not mean *Sesotho sa seterateng* is a language used by street gangs. However, within the context of this study, the term is used particularly to refer to township spaces where speaking informal language shows one's education and modernization.⁹ It is important to highlight that in Sesotho when something is associated with the street, it has negative connotations. However, in this study, *Sesotho sa seterateng* is viewed from a positive perspective as it is associated with urban youth language variety in Lesotho. Therefore, like the South African Tsotsitaal and Nouchi from Côte d'Ivoire/Ivory Coast, the authors believe that *Sesotho sa seterateng* also is a language used by youth in the 21st century.¹⁰

Language Varieties

Linguists commonly use language variety as a cover term for any of the overlapping subcategories of language. Language variety is a specific set of linguistic terms or human speech pattern particularly sounds, words, grammatical features, and many more which are connected to geographical areas or social groups.¹¹ Those who belong to a particular group such as the youth tend to adopt a non-standard variety which they are the only members who know and understand it. Ditsele argues that new terminologies created by societies through non-standard varieties are advantageous.¹² The conviction is that these language varieties enrich the vocabularies of standard varieties that they are closely connected with and easily understand. This study, therefore, believes that Sesotho vocabulary can be enriched through non-standard varieties such as *Sesotho sa seterateng* 'which is mutually intelligible with.'¹³

Urban youth varieties have not been studied in the Lesotho context. Therefore, the current study aligns itself with youth studies conducted in a neighboring country, South Africa. Language varieties used by blacks in urban communities in South Africa include: Tsotsitaal, Sepitori, Is'camtho and Tsotsitaal also known as Flaaitaa. It is important to highlight that these language varieties originated due to 'language contact within a multilingual setting in the nineteenth century South Africa' and they are usually associated with townships such as Soweto.¹⁴ Afrikaans is generally regarded as the base language of these varieties. However, regional varieties of Tsotsitaal can be distinguished based on South Africa's 11 official languages and the base language of this variety differs depending on the area. Ditsele and Mann note that Sepitori is the language of Pretoria which is a city in South Africa. Sepitori is a mixed language of Setswana, Sepedi, Afrikaans, and English vocabulary.¹⁵ Is'camtho is believed to be used 'where people socialize, and perform both a unifying and separatist function, making its speakers urban, hip, and sophisticated.'¹⁶ Its base languages are strongly isiZulu and Sesotho. Although Is'camtho was associated with criminal behaviour, it is no longer the case because people who are not part of any gang such as Kwaito singers currently use it. It serves as a social mediator by building oneness and breaking down ethnic barriers.

Previous Studies on Language Varieties

⁹Anthea Bristowe, Marcellyn Oostendorp, and Christine Anthonissen, "Language and Youth Identity in a Multilingual Setting: A Multimodal Repertoire Approach," *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 32, no. 2 (2014): 229–45.

¹⁰Ditsele and Hurst, "Travelling Terms and Local Innovations..."

¹¹Ditsele, "Why Not Use Sepitori to Enrich the Vocabularies of Setswana and Sepedi?"

¹²Ditsele, "Why Not Use Sepitori to Enrich the Vocabularies of Setswana and Sepedi?"

¹³Gumede, van Huyssteen, and Ditsele, "A Morphological and Lexical Analysis of Mandeni Urban Vernacular." 106.

¹⁴Magdeline Princess Bembe and Anne-Marie Beukes, "The Use of Slang by Black Youth in Gauteng," *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 25, no. 4 (2007): 465.

¹⁵Thabo Ditsele and Charles C Mann, "Language Contact in African Urban Settings: The Case of Sepitori in Tshwane," *South African Journal of African Languages* 34, no. 2 (2014): 159–65.

¹⁶Bembe and Beukes, "The Use of Slang by Black Youth in Gauteng," 465.

Empirical research on non-standard varieties conducted in South Africa is discussed in this section and identified gaps based on what the present study aims to fill are also analysed. The studies to be discussed among others include Gumede et al., Wagner et al., Ditsele and Ditsele.¹⁷

Gumede et al.'s study investigated morphological and lexical features of an urban vernacular spoken in Mandeni, KwaZulu-Natal.¹⁸ The study compared Mandeni Urban Vernacular's (MUV) morphological features with standard IsiZulu as its base language.¹⁹ Like the current paper, the study was qualitative in nature. Its method of data collection comprised recorded MUV conversations between the researcher and seven participants, consisting of five males and two females, and used the corpus sampling method. Similar to urban youth varieties studies and the current paper, a journal was kept from the interactions of the teacher and learners (young people). The findings revealed that most morphological structures of MUV are in alignment with those of IsiZulu. For instance, in MUV concordial agreement, in this case, verbal concordial agreement, the verb gets into agreement with the subject noun which is similar to IsiZulu. However, there were exceptions in the concordial agreement, which included 'indefiniteness, class shift and the use of foreign-bound morphemes and reversed derivational patterns when MUV was compared to isiZulu.'²⁰ It was also found that many MUV lexical items are used as Tsotsitaal lexical items nationally. It must be stated that Gumede et al.'s study did not say anything about Sesotho varieties; therefore, the current study aims to fill this gap.

Wagner et al. also conducted a study on the influence of Sepitori on standard Setswana learners in three Tshwane townships.²¹ The study sought to investigate whether Sepitori influences learners' written output of standard Setswana significantly or insignificantly. Like the current study, Wagner et al.'s study gathered data from learners' use of language. However, it differs from the current study in that, the setting for data collection of the current study was a high school in Lesotho while Wagner et al.'s study was conducted in Pretoria. The researchers collected data through a mixed qualitative approach. Quantitative data consisted of terms collected from learners' written work, while qualitative data was generated from teachers' responses to open-ended interview questions. Learners were selected from three high schools in different areas which offered Setswana as a home language and 90 students from grades 9-11 were purposely selected. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 6 teachers who teach Setswana's home language in the three schools. The study revealed that most of the students' essays comprised Sepitori, while a few did not reflect any. Another feature of the students' writing was that they used Sepitori and formal Setswana terms interchangeably. This linguistic repertoire demonstrates that they have access to Sepitori and Setswana terms which are synonymous but presume that they are both acceptable in the formal writing of Setswana.²² The implication is that most African languages are not fully developed, and learners cannot differentiate between standard variations (such as Setswana) and urban vernaculars (such as Sepitori). Wagner et al.'s study did not address the role played by *Sesotho sa seterateng* as a non-standard variety in formal settings like the classroom, which the current study aims to address.

Ditsele conducted a study to establish whether Sepitori submitted on a tweet #LearnPitori could be regarded as Sepitori.²³ The study collected data from Twitter from a tweet #LearnPitori which was trending in June 2017. Although Ditsele's study focused on language variety which is similar to the current study, the difference is that the two studies do not use the same data instruments.

¹⁷Gumede, van Huyssteen, and Ditsele, "A Morphological and Lexical Analysis of Mandeni Urban Vernacular"; Valencia K. Wagner et al., "Influence of Sepitori on Standard Setswana of Its Home Language Learners at Three Tshwane Townships," *Literator* 41, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.4102/lit.v41i1.1653>; Thabo Ditsele, "Assessing Social Media Submissions Presented as Sepitori On# LearnPitori1" (Arusha Working Papers in African Linguistics, 2019); Ditsele, "Why Not Use Sepitori to Enrich the Vocabularies of Setswana and Sepedi?"

¹⁸Gumede, van Huyssteen, and Ditsele, "A Morphological and Lexical Analysis of Mandeni Urban Vernacular."

¹⁹Gumede, van Huyssteen, and Ditsele, "A Morphological and Lexical Analysis of Mandeni Urban Vernacular."

²⁰Gumede, van Huyssteen, and Ditsele, "A Morphological and Lexical Analysis of Mandeni Urban Vernacular," 110.

²¹Wagner, Ditsele, and Makgato, "Influence of Sepitori on Standard Setswana..."

²²Wagner, Ditsele, and Makgato, "Influence of Sepitori on Standard Setswana..." 4.

²³Ditsele, "Assessing Social Media Submissions Presented as Sepitori On# LearnPitori1."

In the present study, data was generated from one researcher's reflective journal from her classroom interactions with learners, while Ditsele's was from a tweet.²⁴ The findings Ditsele's study showed that participants did not associate themselves with Sepitori. Instead, they regard Sepitori as a language of someone else and also participants were not aware that Sepitori is a Matrix Language, and has Tsotsitaal embedded in it.

A related study was conducted by Ditsele to demonstrate how Sepitori could be used to enrich the vocabularies of Setswana and Sepedi.²⁵ Similarly, the present study also aims to understand how the use of *Sesotho sa seterateng* can help to fill the gap between formal and informal language. However, unlike Ditsele's article, the present study focused on *Sesotho sa seterateng*, not Sepitori. Ditsele's study used August 2012 recorded unsolicited everyday conversations with L1 speakers of Sepitori in Pretoria. To confirm the authenticity of the unsolicited sentences, the researcher selected seven respondents (4 males and 3 females); four Sepitori L1 speakers, two Sepedi L1 speakers and one Setswana L1 speaker to give the equivalents of Sepitori sentences. The study revealed that it should be acceptable to adopt Sepitori-coined terminology into standard Setswana and Sepedi to address the challenges of unnecessary long phrases and take advantage of available single words people mostly use in their day-to-day lives.²⁶ Ditsele's study is regarded as relevant to the current study in that it proposed that non-standard varieties should be considered valuable and be used to enrich the vocabularies of standard ones, which is the focus of this study. The preceding section discusses the theoretical framework guiding the study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is framed theoretically by Sociolinguistics which is the study of language and society. Sociolinguistics studies language in relation to society. In the current paper, sociolinguistics is used to analyze the use of *Sesotho sa seterateng* by youth at one high school in Lesotho. This framework is used to understand how the use of *Sesotho sa seterateng* can help to fill the gap between formal and informal language. The focus is on 'the relationship between language and the context in which it is used.' The paper adopts the view that Sociolinguistics focuses on the society by studying 'the context of the language used to know more about the language.' In the context of the current study, the interest is an informal Sesotho language variety spoken by most young and educated Basotho in Lesotho in the 21st century. Therefore, the authors have named this language variety *Sesotho sa seterateng*. Their focus is on the language choice of this age group, as well as what motivates their language choice.²⁷ This framework is deemed fit for the study as it strives to understand the social and linguistic factors associated with language varieties, which is what the article wishes to unpack. This theoretical background helps in providing the analytical tool for discussing the patterns that have been identified in the use of *Sesotho sa seterateng*.

METHODOLOGY

The research questions in this study dictate exploratory qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research was deemed relevant for the study to deliberately choose the phenomena under investigation since it is information-rich and would comprehensively answer the research questions.²⁸ The study adopted a qualitative approach to explore *Sesotho sa seterateng* within its real-life context.²⁹ This methodology was found to fit the objectives of the study as it guides in gaining a detailed

²⁴Ditsele, "Assessing Social Media Submissions Presented as Sepitori On# LearnPitori1."

²⁵Ditsele, "Why Not Use Sepitori to Enrich the Vocabularies of Setswana and Sepedi?"

²⁶Ditsele, "Why Not Use Sepitori to Enrich the Vocabularies of Setswana and Sepedi?"

²⁷Kenny Smith and Elizabeth Wonnacott, "Eliminating Unpredictable Variation through Iterated Learning," *Cognition* 116, no. 3 (2010): 444–49.

²⁸Ntsoaki Teresa Mokala et al., "Filling Information Gap on Covid-19 Pandemic Using Proverbs and Figurative Language: Lilaphalapha Facebook Page Lesotho," *Journal of Languages and Language Teaching* 11, no. 2 (2023): 311.

²⁹Pamela Baxter and Susan Jack, "Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers," *The Qualitative Report* 13, no. 4 (2008): 544–59.

understanding of *Sesotho sa seterateng*.³⁰The aim was to explore the impact of *Sesotho sa seterateng* when used in formal settings such as schools. A further attempt to address the gap between *Sesotho sa seterateng* and the formal language was used for educational purposes. The study subsequently aligned itself with a qualitative case study which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest.

To collect data, a reflective journal was kept by one of the authors, who is a teacher from one high school in Lesotho. Adopting Hussein's view, the reflective journal allowed the researchers to look back at experiences, decisions, actions, and recognize values and beliefs underlying these actions and decisions and explore possible alternatives.³¹The researchers looked back at Sesotho lessons and the use of *Sesotho sa seterateng* in learners' classroom written activities and verbal utterances to identify and explore the usage of informal Sesotho. Qualitative data collected in this study were analysed using content analysis. Khotso articulates that content analysis takes into consideration music, diaries, letters, newspapers folk songs and many more by examining the details and implications of the content.³² The researchers looked at data from different angles to identify keys that would help them interpret it. As Mokala et al. explain, 'using content analysis enables researchers a chance to make meaning from their own interpretations and summaries.'³³

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FIELD DATA

Participants' statements of *Sesotho sa seterateng* are presented below in tables as informal Sesotho, followed by English translations and formal Sesotho. The presentation of the data is based on the following themes: the Influence of the English language, Translation from English, the Influence of modern life and the use of slang, and the influence of South African languages.

Influence of the English Language

Instead of using a standard language, learners draw terms from the English language once they find it suitable in their context. The global status of English, its preference as a language of education, as well as its importance in enabling interaction in multiracial settings, influences youth language.³⁴ It is evident that learners' contact with English at school produces new varieties such as mixed language. This non-standard variety which they turn to speak in informal settings extends to formal settings such as schools as well. It must be stated that in the current study, learners are Basotho who speak Sesotho as a home language and in their daily interactions often converse in Sesotho. Therefore, this interchange of languages cannot be qualified as codeswitching. In code-switching, speakers use at least two languages because of their limited vocabulary in the two languages.³⁵ As a result, in their conversations, they switch between languages to supplement this shortage. They turn to use more than one language in smaller units of speech called code-mixing.³⁶

Table 1: Words that have influence from the English language

| Informal Sesotho | English word | Meaning | Formal Sesotho |
|--------------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------------|
| <i>O hot</i> | hot | He/ she excels | <i>Oa ipabola</i> |
| <i>Ba nyoka seterata</i> | street | They are leaving | <i>Baa tsamaea</i> |

³⁰J.W. Creswell, *The Mixed Methods Reader* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd, 2013).

³¹Hinda Hussein, "Examining the Effects of Reflective Journals on Students' Growth Mindset: A Case Study of Tertiary Level EFL Students in the United Arab Emirates.," *IAFOR Journal of Education* 6, no. 2 (2018): 33–50.

³²Khotso, "The Semantic Shift in Political Talk among the Basotho."

³³Teresa Ntsoaki Mokala et al. "Reimagining Sesotho Songs in the 21st Century: A Case of Tshepe Music," *Indilinga African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems* 20, no. 2 (2021): 247.

³⁴Elirea Bornman, Pedro Álvarez-Mosquera, and Vuyo Seti, "Language, Urbanisation and Identity: Young Black Residents from Pretoria in South Africa," *Language Matters* 49, no. 1 (2018): 25–44.

³⁵Kgomotso Jennifer Tshotetsi, Thabo Ditsele, and Linda van Huyssteen, "The State of Setswana in Itsoseng, a Black Township in the North West Province, South Africa," *Arusha Working Papers in African Linguistics*, n.d., 3.

³⁶Tshotetsi, Ditsele, and van Huyssteen, "The State of Setswana in Itsoseng, a Black Township in the North West Province, South Africa."

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|--------------------|------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>O jesa team</i> | team | He/she puts them in danger | <i>A ba Kenya mathateng</i> |
|--------------------|------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|

From the above examples, three terms appear to be drawn from English. Familiar English words (hot, street and team) are added to make it easy to comprehend the meaning. The term hot means high temperature. In the above context, the youth speak about a person who excels from different angles; either in sports, learning performance, dress code, or other spheres. *Seterata* refers to a public road in a city, town, or village with houses and buildings on both sides. The meaning has been extended to a movement away from home, especially without a special intention. A team means a group of people. In this context, '*o jesa team*' implies that one's wrongdoing affects the whole group. Inserted English words above do not carry the meaning they are associated with in English use. It is unlikely that speakers realise words have an English source unless there are some obvious similarities in such words.³⁷ Borrowed words from English function as ideal for identity to show that Basotho learners are bilingual and urbanized. This, therefore, proves that the contact of youth with a second language changes their mother tongue drastically since they are a new generation in a new environment.³⁸ The findings of the current study resonate with what Khetoa found when he indicated that students borrow words from other languages and use them in their own language.³⁹ Code mixing in a Sesotho classroom is not a deficiency in learning but it can be considered as a strategy in classroom interaction which aims to make the meaning clear.⁴⁰

Translated from the English Language

Learners transfer meaning from English words to Sesotho and this loses the original meaning of the word or phrases. They just translate considering their local meaning or knowledge not considering its first connotation in English. The essence of translation is, therefore, associated with an innovative lexicon.⁴¹ Below are the learners' pure translations from English to Sesotho which cannot be classified as standard Sesotho.

Table 2: Words translated from English

| Informal Sesotho | English | Formal Sesotho |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>A etsa feela</i> | Doing as she pleases/ does not care | <i>A sa tsotelle motho</i> |
| <i>Ke tla ipona</i> | I will see myself out | <i>Se khathatsehe ka 'na</i> |
| <i>Ba e nkile hanyane</i> | They are taking it for granted or very lightly | <i>Ha ba e nkela hloohong</i> |

Learners turn to translate English phrases to Sesotho to show their understanding of the meaning of words in both languages. The reason for translation in this youth language lies in the nature of the situation. As Noppers puts it, when the youth translate, they maintain the common ground between both languages by erasing the aspect of code-switching.⁴² The youth seems to literally translate in their conversations. This suggests that the recent generation may be making more use of English at their social level.⁴³ The translated phrases above seem to include elements of youth language in order to give reference to actions of their age group and put to listeners that the speakers are knowledgeable since they are able to comprehend the English language. Translation strategy in this case erases

³⁷Heather Brookes, "Youth Language in South Africa: The Role of English in South African Tsotsitaals," *English in Multilingual South Africa: The Linguistics of Contact and Change*, 2020, 176–95.

³⁸Ditsele and Mann, "Language Contact in African Urban Settings: The Case of Sepitori in Tshwane."

³⁹SoyisoGodsaveKhetoa, "Factors constraining Grade 12 learners' achievement in Sesotho Home Language." PhD diss., University of the Free State, 2016.

⁴⁰Wagner, Ditsele, and Makgato, "Influence of Sepitori on Standard Setswana of Its Home Language Learners at Three Tshwane Townships."

⁴¹Bristowe, Oostendorp, and Anthonissen, "Language and Youth Identity in a Multilingual Setting: A Multimodal Repertoire Approach."

⁴²Annebet Noppers, "The Translation of Youth Language: A Comparison of Dutch Translations of The Catcher in the Rye and Less Than Zero" (2010).

⁴³Brookes, "Youth Language in South Africa: The Role of English in South African Tsotsitaals."

standard Sesotho's common ground which includes the employment of common knowledge and understanding of words or phrases. Therefore, translation usage in youth language maintains that readers or listeners are required to have sufficient knowledge of non-standard language terminology used. For instance, *a etsa feela, ke tla ipona, ba e nkile hanyane* may be misunderstood by old Basotho who do not fall in the same age category as the youth. Ditsele and Mann explain that learners' acquisition of language is influenced by the use of informal language in their environment.⁴⁴

The Influence of Modern Life

Youth like to live a life that is modern as reflected in their language use. Learners' vocabulary gradually becomes more and more attached to the modern lifestyle. This implies that youth in their spaces are active creators and contributors toward linguistic change.⁴⁵

Table 3: Words Influenced by Modern Life

| Informal Sesotho | Meaning | Formal Sesotho |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <i>Ke cheese</i> | He/ she is rich | <i>Ke morui/ o na le chelete</i> |
| <i>Ho hloella kalana</i> | To go to bed | <i>Ho robala</i> |
| <i>U ikente</i> | You should accept a situation | <i>U ikamohele</i> |

Learners' reference to a person as (cheese) is associated with the idea that people who come from rich families live a luxurious, soft life. Therefore, such a person is well off and can afford everything. Normally, Basotho uses the words *hloella kalana* to express the act of a chicken going to sleep. They sleep on the highest position referred to as *kalana* which may be a heap of wood and in this case a bed. *U ikente* means injecting oneself and is derived from the English word injection. The implication is that one has to be fully prepared for anything and accept a situation as it is. This creativity serves to show that words or phrases may be applicable in other situations, and they are not only confined to a certain meaning. It also shows that learners align themselves with the changing world as they are observant of their changing environment. Therefore, they use such words and phrases to suit their status.⁴⁶

The Use of Slang

Slang is a non-standard language which from the linguistic point of view, seems to occupy an extreme position within the language's formal structure.⁴⁷ Although it occupies a large structure within language's formal structure, slang originates in speech and is more spoken than literary language.⁴⁸

Table 4: Words that use Slang

| Informal Sesotho | Meaning in English | Formal Sesotho |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>Ho se ba hemise</i> | Not give them a chance to breathe/ relax | <i>Ho se ba fets'oea</i> |
| <i>Ba mpha hlooho</i> | They make me happy | <i>Ba ntlhabolla/ nthabisa</i> |
| <i>O tseba ntho tse bohlale</i> | He/ she knows beautiful/ good things | <i>O hlalefile</i> |

The two phrases *ho se ba hemise, ba mpha hlooho, o tseba ntho tse bohlale* do not exist in formal Sesotho in the way they are used. However, learners use them since they find them meaningful in the context used. They substitute words and place them with those they find meaningful. This implies

⁴⁴Ditsele and Mann, "Language Contact in African Urban Settings: The Case of Sepitori in Tshwane."

⁴⁵Fridah Kanana Erastus and Ellen Hurst-Harosh, "Global and Local Hybridity in African Youth Language Practices," *Africa Development/Afrique et Développement* 45, no. 3 (2020): 13–32.

⁴⁶Bembe and Beukes, "The Use of Slang by Black Youth in Gauteng."

⁴⁷Daniel Neate, "'Yebo Gogo, It's Time to Braai Mzansi!' Code-Switching, Borrowing, Prestige, Slang, and Persuasion in the Digital Marketing Industry of South Africa," 2022.

⁴⁸Magdeline Princess Bembe, *The Use of Slang among Black Youth in Gauteng* (University of Johannesburg (South Africa), 2008).

that the usage of slang terminologies within standard Sesotho builds the development of its vocabulary. Learners do not totally divert from their language, but they add new meaning to terms that already exist in their formal language. Neate concurs, that the informality of the use of slang proves one's use of local words.⁴⁹ Bembe and Beukes argue that the youth's style of deviating from standard language shows their linguistic talent and creativity. They further add that the slang users' intention is to be 'innovative and come up with new words all the time.'⁵⁰ In addition, in Mojela's view, the usage of slang disguises and conceals information that the youth do not want others to know about.⁵¹ As such, slang terminology changes frequently, and in other cases, there are many terms. In this case, learners' use of slang makes their learning understandable, and bearable and shows that they are creative, young, and understand their own language variety as youth. Even though most terms derived from the slang are not standard Sesotho, it seems they are used more than standard Sesotho. The researchers also observed that these terms are growing at an alarming pace, and it is not possible for teachers to remove them from learners' language use.⁵²

The Influence of South African Languages

Sesotho sa seterateng is perhaps influenced by cross-border languages spoken in South Africa. Media such as television, radio, and different social media platforms influence the manner in which learners use language. Learners seem to emulate what they hear on the radio and see on television and social media. As Tshotetsi et al. state, learners may tend to communicate in a way regarded as modernized so that they can be accepted in a social group.⁵³

Table 5: Words Influenced by South African Languages

| Informal Sesotho | Original word | Meaning in English | Formal Sesotho |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| <i>Ha ke mo foke</i> | <i>Fokol-</i> Afrikaan | I do not care | <i>Ha ke mo tsoetelle</i> |
| <i>Ba chaile</i> | <i>Tshayile/ shayile</i> (Isixhosa/ IsiZulu) | They stopped working, particularly at the end of the day/knock-off time | <i>Ba ile hae/ Nako ea ts'ebetso e felile</i> |

Learners draw terms from South African languages. The word *fokol* is derived from Afrikaans meaning nothing. In this context, it means not caring, thus someone does not care. *Chaile* originally is IsiXhosa *tshayile*, IsiZulu *shayile*, Setswana *chaile* meaning finish or completed to refer to 'knock-off' time. If one has *chaile* in formal Sesotho it means one has a huge harvest. Learners' adaptation of these words reflects their knowledge and understanding of South African languages. This finding perhaps adds a voice to Wanger et al's study, which posits that people have to recognize and accept the idea that mixed languages will always influence standard varieties in classroom situations.⁵⁴

SUMMARY

This study sought to understand the impact of *Sesotho sa seterateng* on standard Sesotho. The analysis of data showed that English lexical items seem to be used a lot by learners as opposed to Sesotho. Most of their non-standard lexical items in *Sesotho sa seterateng* are also direct translations from English. These translations are mainly drawn from modern lifestyle, slang and other South African indigenous languages. These provide an answer to the first research question. Regarding the second research question, the analysis revealed that although *Sesotho sa seterateng* seems to decrease learners' vocabulary in Sesotho, it has the potential to improve their vocabulary. The researchers have also

⁴⁹Neate, "'Yebo Gogo, It's Time to Braai Mzansi!' Code-Switching, Borrowing..."

⁵⁰Bembe and Beukes, "The Use of Slang by Black Youth in Gauteng." 466.

⁵¹Victor Maropeng Mojela, "The Cause of Urban Slang and Its Effect on the Development of the Northern Sotho Lexicon," *Lexikos* 12 (2002).

⁵²Mojela, "The Cause of Urban Slang and Its Effect on the Development of the Northern Sotho Lexicon."

⁵³Tshotetsi, Ditsele, and van Huyssteen, "The State of Setswana in Itsoseng, a Black Township in the North West Province, South Africa."

⁵⁴Wagner, Ditsele, and Makgato, "Influence of Sepitori on Standard Setswana..."

identified that the negative attitude towards it needs to be changed and its positive impact should be acknowledged by society, especially by educational officials. It is believed that many learners including teachers at township schools speak the non-standard variety.⁵⁵In relation to research question three, the findings point to *Sesotho sa seterateng*'s role in the classroom setting and its impact in making learners' learning understandable, improving their creativity, and showing learners' understanding of other languages. Therefore, it can make learners master standard Sesotho if it can be allowed to be used in classroom settings. Tshotetsi et al. note that people are unable to draw a line between different roles of language since they are unaware that language as a transmitter of knowledge differs from being a communication tool.⁵⁶ The analysis of data in the current study showed that *Sesotho sa seterateng* fills the gap between formal Sesotho and knowledge formation. The authors conclude that the fact that *Sesotho sa seterateng* is not recognised as a language from language purism's point of view does not disqualify it as a language from a linguistic point of view.⁵⁷

RECOMMENDATIONS

The article recommends that teachers should allow learners to use *Sesotho sa seterateng* in their classrooms so that they can acquire scientific knowledge and express themselves in the language that they use daily and understand better. It further recommends that *Sesotho sa seterateng* could be used by stakeholders in the language development of standardised Sesotho to enhance its vocabulary. The study adds to the existing body of knowledge and debates on the use of learners' linguistic repertoires in education.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored *Sesotho sa seterateng* to establish the traditional function of Sesotho in the 21st century at schools. The paper concludes that the new curricula have to take language varieties and make provisions for them in the future. *Sesotho sa seterateng* has an impact on the standard Sesotho language in various ways in classrooms. Apart from facilitating communication, it has the dynamic nature of language. Formal Sesotho language should not be regarded as the only correct and proper language to be used in the classroom. Rather, new curricula must take recognition of different varieties and make provisions for them in the future as they are learners' ways of communicating daily and must be incorporated in school as well. Future research in *Sesotho sa seterateng* must focus on translanguaging and how it can be used as a resource for education since it is one of the linguistic repertoires of learners.

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⁵⁵Wagner, Ditsele, and Makgato, "Influence of Sepitori on Standard Setswana..."

⁵⁶Tshotetsi, Ditsele, and van Huyssteen, "The State of Setswana in Itsoseng, a Black Township in the North West Province, South Africa."

⁵⁷Ditsele, "Assessing Social Media Submissions Presented as Sepitori On# LearnPitori1," 17.

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