

**PRESTIGE TERMINOLOGY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
NORTHERN SOTHO VOCABULARY**

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**PRESTIGE TERMINOLOGY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
NORTHERN SOTHO VOCABULARY**

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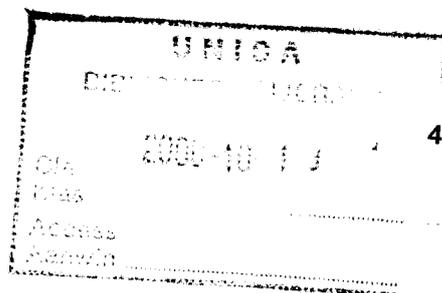
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## SUMMARY

The thesis investigates the factors which lead to the development of 'prestige' terminology in the Northern Sotho vocabulary. It investigates the factors which lead to the development of 'prestige' language varieties and 'prestige' dialects, which are sources of 'prestige' terminology. These factors include, inter alia, **urbanization, industrialization, the missionary activities** and **standardisation**. The thesis tries to explain the reason why most of the Northern Sotho people do not feel free to speak their language when they are among other communities. It explains the reason why the speakers of the so-called 'inferior' dialects of Northern Sotho have an inferiority complex while the speakers of the 'prestige' dialects have confidence when speaking their dialects.

The people who are residents of the urban and industrialized areas have a high standard of living due to the availability of employment opportunities, while the rural communities are usually unemployed and, as such, their standard of living is low. This elevates the urban community to a high status which is shared by the type of language they speak. The rural communities start associating themselves with the urban communities by imitating the urban varieties in order to elevate themselves. This is one of the reasons which lead to the widespread use of urban slang and other language varieties which are associated with the urban areas of South Africa, i.e. the

PWV (Pretoria, Witwatersrand and Vereeniging). Standardisation of Northern Sotho and the missionary activities within the Northern Sotho communities led to the creation of 'superior' and 'inferior' dialects. The missionary societies established missionary stations among certain Northern Sotho communities while other communities did not have these stations, and became the vanguards of Western civilization among the indigenous people of Southern Africa. ¶The dialects among which the missionary stations were established came to enjoy a high status since these varieties were the first to be converted to written forms. In this case, the first varieties to be considered during standardisation were those which had a written orthography, and this is exactly what happened in the standardisation of Northern Sotho.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The main objective of this research is to assess the role played by 'prestige' terminology in the development of the vocabulary of Northern Sotho. In the context of this research, 'prestige' terminology refers to:

- (1) The terminology adopted by Northern Sotho from the two 'prestige' languages which used to be the only official languages before 1994, i.e. English and Afrikaans.
- (2) The slang terminology which is commonly used by most of the Northern Sotho people.
- (3) A mixture of Southern Sotho and Tswana terminology which is frequently used with Northern Sotho by the Northern Sotho people.
- (4) The terminology derived from the 'prestige' dialects of Northern Sotho (such as Pedi and Kopa) by the 'inferior' dialects such as Lobedu, Phalaborwa, Pulana, Tlokwa, Khutšwe (i.e. the Lowveld dialects).

This research explains some of the factors which lead to the use of 'prestige' terminology in Northern Sotho, such as **urbanization, missionary activities, standardisation and industrialization**. It explains the reasons why most of the Northern Sotho communities do not have confidence in their language, especially the speakers of the 'inferior' dialects in the Lowveld.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter discusses the role played by standardisation of Northern Sotho in the creation of 'superior' and 'inferior' dialects of Northern Sotho. The second chapter discusses the role played by the former official languages, i.e. English and Afrikaans, in the creation of 'prestige' terminology in Northern Sotho. Chapter three analyses the contributions of slang terminology in the development of 'prestige' terminology in Northern Sotho. The fourth chapter discusses the contributions by the Southern African indigenous languages in the development of 'prestige' terminology in Northern Sotho. The last chapter aims to capture the most important findings arrived at during the research project.

### **The research methods**

Most of the data was collected through listening to individuals and groups during conversations and interviews. The research is mainly aimed at establishing the following:

1. The use of the language (Northern Sotho) by individuals and groups in free and practical situations where formal barriers, such as the grammar of the language, are not observed by speakers. This type of language is the one dominating most of our conversations today, which results from multilingualism. The formal and grammatically correct terminology is only reserved for use in formal situations such as formal gatherings and written communications.
2. How this informal usage of Northern Sotho results in a shift from the use of dialectal vocabulary to a language which is mostly dominated by code-mixing, under the influence of various factors which are discussed in the next chapters.

With a view to achieving these objectives, interviews were held with a sample of teachers and pupils in some selected high schools in the Northern Province, especially in the areas where the so-called 'inferior' dialects of Northern Sotho are spoken. The following high schools were visited: Maphokwane, Lebeko and Lepato (the rural high schools in Phalaborwa), Sebalamakgolo, Meridian College and Vuxeni (urban high schools in Phalaborwa), Seboye, Kgapane and Pusela (urban high schools in Tzaneen), Bokgaga, Mokomene and Sir Val Duncan Technical school (boarding schools). Interviews were also conducted with the Northern Sotho students at the University of the North. Data was collected by:

- (a) Listening to conversations and arguments by students; comparing the type of language they used with the dialect spoken in the area where the school is situated.
- (b) Compiling lists of words from other languages, such as English, Afrikaans and standard Northern Sotho for teachers and students to supply slang synonyms which are frequently used by them in their daily conversations. Most of the slang terms in the glossary at the end of the last chapter of this thesis were accumulated in this way.

### **Theoretical Framework**

For the purpose of this study the explanation and application of key concepts are based on definitions of authoritative work in the fields of general linguistics, sociolinguistics, history

(especially South African history), dialectology, anthropology and ethnology. These key concepts include inter alia, terms such as: prestige terminology, standardisation, dialect, dialectology, borrowing, loan words, semantic shifts, ambiguity, vocabulary, euphemism, slang, *tsotsi-taal*, code-mixing, multilingualism, synonymy, polysemy. The collected data is analysed on the basis of the definitions of these linguistic concepts.

Since this study is multi-faceted, having to take cognisance of many factors from diverse sources which may have an influence on the development of linguistic terms in Northern Sotho, it was decided to adhere to an open and eclectic approach, rather than a particular theoretical framework.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **THE ROLE OF STANDARDISATION OF NORTHERN SOTHO**

#### **1.1 Prestige terminology**

In the context of this research, prestige terms refer to all the words which are regarded as superior in status when compared to those terms which are regarded to be 'inferior' in status by some Sotho speakers. Prestige terms are always derived from the languages, or dialects, which are regarded as 'superior' in status when compared with other languages or dialects in the community. The speakers prefer to use 'prestige terminology' or prestige languages so as to be associated with the status of the language.

#### **1.2 Factors leading to prestige terminology**

Prestige terminology is derived from prestige languages, or prestige dialects. Several factors facilitate the rise of a dialect, or a language, to a status of 'prestige' language, among which are the following: **standardisation, missionary activities, the role of the Language Boards, political factors, socio-economic factors, etc.**

##### **1.2.1 Standardisation**

Crystal (1985:286) defines standardisation as a natural development of a standard language in a speech community or an attempt by a community to impose one dialect as standard. This definition is in line with Hudson's (1980:32) view, whereby standardisation is regarded as a direct and deliberate intervention by society to create a standard language where before there were just 'dialects' (i.e. non-standard varieties). According to Ansre (1971:369), standardisation is:

“...the process by which a specific variety of a language emerges as the preferred variety of a speech community.”

This means that one variety is elevated among the various dialects to become a standard language, used especially in education and some selected official and socio-cultural communications. Standardisation is also effected by creating a composite of all the major dialects to arrive at an accepted standard form, as suggested by Whitely (1957:224):

“Standardisation may be effected in either of two ways: by elevating one of a number of dialects to be the standard form, or by attempting to create a composite of all the main dialects.”

The elevated variety will automatically gain prestige among the other dialects, and will subsequently be regarded as a ‘language’ while other varieties will be ‘dialects’. This not only elevates the status of the dialect, but also that of its speakers, its terminology, its orthography, etc. Kamwangamalu (1997a:91) says the following regarding standard languages:

“Standard languages are usually associated with prestige and cut across regional differences, providing a unified means of communication, and thus an institutionalized norm which can be used in the mass-media, in teaching the language to foreigners, and so on.”

He (1997a:91) goes on to emphasize the significance of the selected variety as follows:

“The selected variety may be an existing variety, such as the one used in an important political or commercial centre, as is the case for Bemba in Zambia, but it could be an amalgam of various varieties. The selection has political significance since the selected variety gains prestige and so the people who already speak it share in this prestige.”

In the case of the Developing and Third World countries, such as in Africa and Asia, where most countries have just emancipated themselves from colonialism, standardisation is either initiated or influenced by the politicians, usually the colonial rulers and the missionary societies. In these countries, besides standardising the Bantu languages, there will always be at least one language

imposed by the Colonial Power as an official language, and which will even carry more prestige than the resulting African standard languages. In Africa, for instance, besides the influence exerted by the prestige of European languages such as English, German, French, etc., the European rulers and missionaries played a major role in the standardisation of languages such as Swahili, Shona, Northern Sotho, etc. The events which led to the standardisation of Swahili and Shona are worth mentioning here, since they exemplify the two options of standardisation, i.e. the **elevation of one variety** to be a standard language and the **amalgamation of the various major dialects** to form a standard language. With regard to the elevation of Swahili as official language in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda (the East African Federation), both the missionaries (Catholic Missions and the German Evangelical-Lutherans) and the politicians participated in the debates which ultimately led to the elevation of the Zanzibari dialect of Swahili as standard language. Ansre (1971:383) says:

“The pressure for more education with Swahili as the language of instruction met with consistent co-operation from the Anglo-Catholic UMCA and Roman Catholic Missions, and with resistance from the German Evangelical-Lutherans.”

Ultimately, the politicians, through their authority over the establishment of the relevant standardisation and language Committees, gained the upper hand. With regards to the standardisation of Swahili, Ansre (1971:384) summarises as follows:

“Officially, the process of standardisation began when a Committee for the Standardisation of the Swahili Language met at Dar es Salaam in 1925. Two rival dialects were considered for the official choice. At a meeting in Mombasa the Committee’s recommendation that the Zanzibari dialect be elevated as standard, especially for Kenya and Uganda, was adopted. The Mombasa delegation staged a walk-out in protest.”

Unlike the standardisation of Swahili, where one variety, i.e. the dialect of Zanzibar, was chosen to be a standard language, the Shona standard language originated through the amalgamation of the major varieties spoken in the then Southern Rhodesia. The Government of Southern Rhodesia

appointed Clement Doke in 1929 ‘to investigate and report to the Legislative Assembly on the possibility of unifying the dialects of the territory into a literary form for official and educational purposes and the standardisation of the orthography’ (Ansre, 1971:378). This led to the amalgamation of six major dialects to form a standard Shona language, i.e. the **ZeZuru, Korekore, Karanga, Manyika, Kalanga** and **Ndau**. In his recommendation, Doke (1931:78) says:

“The Committee has come to the conclusion that the only name possible for the language which may be expected ultimately to result from the proposal made is the name ‘Shona’, and accordingly we propose to produce a Shona Grammar and a Shona Vocabulary.”

Standardisation in itself, even though it has a unifying advantage, usually leads to the creation of prestige varieties. The elevation of one variety to a standard language is automatically the elevation of that variety to a prestige language. For instance, the elevation of the Zanzibari dialect of Swahili to a standard language for the East African Federation did not only reduce other native languages of that area to a statusless position, but also reduced the status of the Swahili varieties in the Mainland. In this way, the speakers of the other varieties find it a prestigious matter to use the Swahili terminology of the island of Zanzibar while at the same time feeling inferior to use their own dialects (language) in public. This is the same case with the Shona language. Even though the Shona standard language originated through the amalgamation of the major varieties, the other languages, such as the **Budya, Tavara, Karombe, Danda**, etc. did not have a share in this amalgamation, and their marginalisation obviously resulted in the emotional inferiority among the speakers of these languages. In his recommendations, Doke (1931:76) strove to discourage the use of these dialects as much as possible by proposing

“That a dictionary of Shona be prepared, to be as inclusive as possible of words from ZeZuru, Karanga, Manyika and Ndau. That for the present Korekore words be admitted sparingly and that the use of colloquial words from the dialects of Budya, Tavara, Karombe, Danda, Teve, Langwe etc. be discouraged.”

As a result of standardisation, more attention is paid to the development of the elevated variety (i.e. the prestige variety) with regards to linguistic and literary development, while other dialects are deliberately neglected, to discourage the people from using these varieties. Ansre (1971:371) explains this development as follows:

“When a specific variety has thus been selected or when the newly created variety is arrived at, it can only be called basic standard. Following the selection or creation of this basic standard, a process of development follows. By the development of the basic standard, we mean the increasing and augmenting of the linguistic repertoire of the basic standard at various levels to widen its scope as a medium of communication. Two factors which are most significant in this development are what Ferguson terms ‘graphisation’ and ‘modernisation’. Graphisation involves the devising of graphic symbols to represent the spoken form, the settling of orthographical problems and the production of textbooks, newspapers and other kinds of literature. Modernisation mainly involves the creating or borrowing of new lexical items and their incorporation into the basic standard.”

As such, more attention was paid to the development of the Shona language in Southern Rhodesia and the Swahili dialect of Zanzibar, in the East African Federation, at the expense of the mentioned Rhodesian dialects and other Swahili dialects, especially those which were influenced by the Bantu languages in the Mainland. Ansre (1971:385) says:

“Be it as it may, the Interterritorial Language (Swahili) Committee was founded in 1930 ‘to promote the standardisation and development of the Swahili language’ which standard it defined as the Zanzibar dialect represented by the works of Steere and Madan. In doing its work, this Committee wisely decided that Bantu words would be employed wherever possible, but due regard should be paid to Arabic words and those of other foreign languages which are established and have become part of the Swahili language.”

This is done to promote the elevated variety to be ‘used in all the functions associated with central government and with writing, for example in parliament, the courts, education, administration, commerce, mass-media, and in various forms of literature’ (Hudson, 1980; Wardhaugh, 1986). The terminology of the established standard language will gain the status of ‘prestige terminology’, and most speakers, especially from the marginalised dialects, will find it prestigious to associate themselves with the prestige language so as to elevate their own status. This is the same case with Northern Sotho, where ‘graphisation’ and ‘modernisation’, as they are defined by Ferguson (Ansre, 1971:371), only apply to a few dialects, such as **Pedi**, **Kopa**, and the dialects spoken around Pietersburg and Potgietersrus, most of which had their own orthographies, inherited from the missionaries prior to standardisation. According to Ansre (1971:369):

“Discussions on standard language are usually confined to languages that have a written form. It is true that ‘graphisation’, as Charles Ferguson calls it (1968:4), is an important aid to standardisation; it enhances the chances of the written form becoming the acknowledged standard.”

Dialects such as **Pulana**, **Lobedu**, **Phalaborwa**, etc. did not have any orthography, and until today very few people can write these dialects, even after consulting phonetic transcriptions to check the pronunciations. This is due to the fact that policy-makers (who were usually products of the missionaries) paid more attention to the development of the **Pedi-Kopa** dialects in establishing the standardised medium of communication at the expense of the development of a written form for the mentioned dialects (**Pulana**, **Lobedu**, **Phalaborwa**, etc.). Louwrens (1994:183) defines ‘standard Northern Sotho’ as:

“A term used to refer to that form of Northern Sotho which is based on the **Pedi** dialect, and which has been standardised mainly in accordance with resolutions of the Northern Sotho Language Board regarding spelling rules, word division, etc. (See *Northern Sotho Terminology and Orthography No. 4 of 1988.*) *Standard Northern Sotho* is often referred to as the *official language* or *official Northern Sotho*, i.e. the language which is officially recognised by the Language Board and which is taught in schools and at universities, and which is used in radio and

television broadcasts, official government documents, etc.”

In accordance with this definition, communications in almost all the major activities are made through the standard Northern Sotho language, which is basically the Pedi dialect which has been elevated to a superior status. This has further created the notion that those languages which have no written forms are inferior, (i.e. they are dialects) which obviously led to an inferiority complex among the speakers of the marginalised dialects of Northern Sotho. Robins (1989:56) comments as follows in this regard:

“In one usage, springing from the misguided attitude referred to in the preceding section, forms of speech without a writing system, or those held to be characteristic of uneducated persons, are regarded as ‘dialects’ and contrasted with the ‘true language’ of the literate and educated.”

The fact that these dialects (mentioned above) do not have any written forms, causes them to be looked upon as ‘languages’ of the illiterate and uneducated people. It is therefore not surprising that the speakers of these dialects seem to have little or no pride in their dialects, and they strive to learn the dialects which are closer to the standard language, such as the Pedi-Kopa dialects. For instance, most Lobedu people feel inferior to use most of the terminology of their dialect when giving public addresses or other types of communication when they are among people of other Sotho dialects, especially the educated group. They prefer to use the terminology of the written standard language, to avoid being associated with the ‘low-class’, unwritten dialects. They usually tend to replace the following Lobedu phonemes and morphemes with the standard Northern Sotho phonemes and morphemes as in the following examples:

(a) **Phoneme examples:**

The use of the standard ejective lateral **tl** ([tʰ]) for the Lobedu voiced interdental **ɖ** ([d̪]) as in the following examples: e.g.:

**Botlokwa**                      for                      **Boɖokwa**                      ‘Botlokwa’ (name of place)

<b>-tlotša</b>	for	<b>-ḡotša</b>	‘smear’
<b>ntlo</b>	for	<b>ndḡo</b>	‘house’
<b>tlala</b>	for	<b>ḡala</b>	‘hunger’
<b>-tfile</b>	for	<b>-ḡdile</b>	‘arrived’
<b>maatla</b>	for	<b>maaḡa</b>	‘power’
<b>letlalo</b>	for	<b>leḡalo</b>	‘skin’
<b>letlapa</b>	for	<b>leḡapa</b>	‘stone’

The use of the standard voiceless lateral fricative **hl** ([**h̥**]) for the aspirated interdental plosive **th** ([**th̥**]) as in the following lexical items:

<b>-hlatswa</b>	for	<b>-ṡhatswa</b>	‘wash’
<b>mafahla</b>	for	<b>mafaṡha</b>	‘twins’
<b>-hlaka</b>	for	<b>-ṡhaka</b>	‘suffer’
<b>mahloko</b>	for	<b>maṡhoko</b>	‘misery’
<b>mahlatse</b>	for	<b>maṡhatse</b>	‘luck’, ‘fortune’
<b>-hlaba</b>	for	<b>-ṡhaba</b>	‘stab’
<b>-fihlile</b>	for	<b>-fiṡhile</b>	‘arrived’
<b>mohlolo</b>	for	<b>moṡholo</b>	‘miracle’

**(b) Morpheme examples:**

The class prefix **se-** of class 7 is **khe-** in Lobedu, e.g.:

<b>selepe</b>	for	<b>kheebe</b>	‘axe’
<b>sefepi</b>	for	<b>khefepi</b>	‘whip’
<b>selemo</b>	for	<b>khelemo</b>	‘summer’
<b>seema</b>	for	<b>kheema</b>	‘proverb’
<b>seeta</b>	for	<b>kheeta</b>	‘shoe’
<b>sehlare</b>	for	<b>kheṡhare</b>	‘tree’
<b>sephiri</b>	for	<b>khephiri</b>	‘secret’

**sereto**                      for            **khereto**                      ‘poem’

The use of the locative ending **-ng** for the Lobedu **-ni** e.g:

<b>sekolong</b>	for	<b>khekoloni</b>	‘at school’
<b>kgorong</b>	for	<b>khoroni</b>	‘at the court’
<b>mpeng</b>	for	<b>mpeni</b>	‘in the belly’
<b>maleng</b>	for	<b>maleni</b>	‘in the belly’ or ‘in the stomach’
<b>komeng</b>	for	<b>komeni</b>	‘at the circumcision school’
<b>nokeng</b>	for	<b>nokeni</b>	‘at the river’
<b>kopanong</b>	for	<b>kopanoni</b>	‘at the gathering’
<b>thabeng</b>	for	<b>thabeni</b>	‘at the mountain’

The Lobedu people, and most speakers of the ‘low-class’ dialects, do not feel free to speak their language in public due to their inferiority complex, and this is usually aggravated by the attitudes of some speakers of the ‘prestige’ dialects who despise other dialects, especially the marginalised dialects, which do not even have a written form. This attitude is explained by Allen and Linn (1986:218) as follows, with reference to the writings of the early explorers and the missionaries about the Amerindian languages in Latin America and the Carribean dialects:

“The first sense underlies the idea that a language for which there exists no written form, a language which has not yet been alphabetized, is for that reason intrinsically inferior, not a real language, but a mere dialect. It is an attitude which we find quite commonly in incidental references to Amerindian Languages in the writings of early explorers and missionaries.”

### 1.2.2 The missionary activities

The missionaries were among the first (together with the travellers and explorers) to learn to speak and to write the Bantu languages, especially during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.

Canonici (1994:6) says:

“Knowledge of African languages was mostly limited to the work done by missionaries, who learned the native languages in order to communicate with the people, worked out grammars and dictionaries, and were soon able to translate parts of the Bible and the catechism, which became the first reading books in most African languages. Explorers and serious travellers also collected lexical items and common expressions on their travels.”

The missionary societies, mostly from Europe, established several mission stations in South Africa. These missionary societies included, *inter alia*, the London Missionary Society in the Cape Colony and the Free State, the Moravian Missionary Society at the Cape, the French Missionary Societies in Basutoland and surrounding areas, the Roman Catholic Missionary Society, which established stations throughout South Africa. The most important missionary society which played an important role in the literary and linguistic development of Northern Sotho was the Berlin Evangelical Missionary Society from Germany. The Berlin Lutheran missionaries established mission stations throughout Sekhukhuneland under the Pedi people and at Maleuskop under the Kopa people of Kgoši Boleu. The importance of the missionaries in the historical development of the African people, lies in the fact that they were the first to establish schools for them before any Colonial rule ever thought of doing so. In the mission stations, schools were established to educate the converts so that they would be able to read and write religious documents and the Bible. The missionaries also learned the African languages to be able to communicate with the indigenous people. The establishment of schools in the mission stations meant that the people who lived near the stations would be the first to gain spiritually and educationally. With regard to the African languages, the variety which was spoken in the area where the mission station was established, was the first to be known by the missionaries and, as such, was the first to be written. The missionaries had, *inter alia*, the following influence in the development of prestige varieties among the African languages:

(i) They were the first to write on the African languages, and as such, the varieties which were spoken next to the established mission stations were the first to be written. These dialects gained

prestige among all other varieties because the first books used in education were written in these dialects. All the speakers of other varieties who went to schools in these mission stations were compelled to use these varieties in order to be educated. The fact that the first written orthographies were based on these dialects meant that the varieties would influence the ultimate future standardisation of the languages. The important role played by the missionaries in the development of standard languages is stressed by Ansre (1971:384) as follows, with regard to the rise of Swahili in East Africa:

“It had become not only the prestige language of the Muslim community, but was also becoming the medium of Christianisation and secular education. Economic and political power were also more easily obtained in the Colonial Era by its knowledge on the part of both Africans and Europeans. In schools, teaching materials were available in Swahili. These included textbooks on geography (in 1886) and history (in 1893). By 1901 a new set of books called **Doorway to knowledge** had been produced on astronomy, geology and European philosophy. All these had been through the efforts of Missionary bodies. They were all done in the Roman scripts. But seen from a wider perspective they went a long way to augment the already popular Swahili writings that were available to Muslim scholars in the Arabic scripts. In 1906, the German Colonial administration also began to produce its own books which were mainly school books. A Swahili newspaper, **Kongozi**, is reported to have been started in 1905.”

The development of Northern Sotho orthography started as early as 1859 (Esterhuyse, 1974:1) after the arrival of the Berlin Lutheran missionaries, Merensky and Grutzner, in the district of Lydenburg. By 1870 the missionary Schweltnus had already started publishing the first Northern Sotho publication, the Padišo series, which was based on the Pedi and Kopa dialects. This implies that the orthography of Northern Sotho is based on the work of the missionaries, while those dialects which were spoken in the areas too remote from Sekhukhuneland were sidelined. Kgagara (1993:7) says:

“In comparing our present symbols of alphabet with that of Dr. P.G. Schwellnus and A.Merensky, one would not be wrong to assert that the present Northern Sotho notation is based on that of missionaries.”

(ii) Christianity and education in the mission stations brought an advantage to the people living in close proximity to these stations. They were the first to receive an education and ultimately, were the first communities to be “civilised” and, as such, they were admired by other communities. The status enjoyed by these communities was also associated with the language varieties which the community used. The terminology used in these varieties automatically became ‘prestige terminologies’ which speakers of other dialects would be proud to use in public, instead of the terminology of their own dialects. The first elite group among the Northern Sotho people mushroomed in those areas where missionaries first established the mission stations. People like Rev. Serote and many other early Northern Sotho writers were products of missionaries. As such, the Pedi and Kopa dialects enjoyed the status of being the ‘languages’ of education since by then they were the only dialects which were used in these missionary schools. ✓

(iii) Education and Western civilization which developed in the mission stations led to the rise of the elite group, especially those people who were educated at these stations. The elite group not only became influential as far as religion and education were concerned, but also influenced the political developments in their areas. With regard to the linguistic development of their languages, the elite group had tremendous influence in the development of the written orthographies of their languages as well as the standardisation of the languages. This can be proved by the fact that most of the standard languages in Africa were derived from the dialects which were spoken in the areas where the missionary activities were dominant.

### 1.2.3 Political factors

Political factors play a major role in the rise of prestige languages. The importance of the political, religious and educational authorities in the determination of standard languages in the Sub-Saharan Africa is emphasized by Ansre (1971:388) as follows:

“Thirdly, hardly any real linguistic considerations play any part in the choice of the standard. Not very many linguists have been influential in the process. The final decisions have been taken by governmental, religious and educational authorities.”

According to Ansre (1971:388):

“the agents of language standardisation in Africa South of the Sahara have in almost all cases been foreign Western Europeans.”

The following are some of the ways in which politics usually facilitates the development of prestige languages in the societies:

(i) In most cases, the dialects of the politically influential groups are imposed on other communities as medium of instruction. For instance, in most parts of India, Hindi became a standard language due to the influence of politics. Burling (1970:107) explains how Hindi was imposed on the Indian people as follows:

“For most people, standard Hindi remains a second or third spoken style to be used in school, in college, in the office, or on formal occasions or when speaking with people of a different regional background. Even those who speak or understand little of the standard can expect to hear it used at political rallies, at meetings concerned with economic development, and at some religious ceremonies and more and more in the cinema and on the radio. Even when the people attending these functions understand little of what is said, they still may acknowledge the prestige of the language. Since it has prestige, its forms seep slowly but progressively into regional and village dialects.”

Most European languages such as English, French, German, etc. are ‘prestige’ languages in Africa. During the Colonial Era, these languages were imposed on the natives as medium of instruction in schools, in the Courts of Justice, in the Commercial sectors, in the government offices, etc. People who could communicate effectively in these languages enjoyed the respect of

the community. In South Africa, for instance, the two major status languages are English and Afrikaans because the English and Afrikaners used to dominate the politics of the country for many years. Their political preponderance did not only place them in a better economic situation to enjoy a higher standard of living when compared to other groups, but also gave them a prestige which other races did not have. In most cases, when a person has pride or is claiming to be of high class, one would hear the Sothos saying: **o itira Lekgowa**, “he is making himself a White”, meaning: “he thinks he is important”. This expression reveals how the Whites are highly regarded in our community, and anyone who is associated with them or their languages is regarded as superior in status.

(ii) Usually the politicians take initiatives in standardising the languages in their countries by way of appointing language experts or commissions to do the work on their behalf. These experts are entirely of the politicians’ choice, and usually, they tend to satisfy the interests of the politicians, who had appointed them, more than the interests of the populace. For instance, it was the Government of the East African Federation which formed a committee (The Committee for the Standardisation of the Swahili Language) to see to the standardisation of the Swahili language for Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. It was the Government of Southern Rhodesia which took the initiative to appoint Clement Doke in 1929 ‘to investigate and report to the Legislative Assembly on the possibility of unifying the dialects of the territory into a literary form for official and educational purposes and the standardisation of the orthography’ (Ansre, 1971:378). In South Africa, it was the Government which took the initiative to appoint the Language Committees to standardise the Bantu languages. Kgagara (1993:10) says the following in this regard:

“Formal education and its maintenance was for long in the hands of the Missionaries among the Blacks. The South African Government passed the Bantu Education Act in October 1953 ( Act No. 47 of 1953) by which the South African Government took over the control of formal education from the Missionaries. Since the takeover, the Sotho (Northern Sotho) orthography was monitored and finalised by the Department of Bantu Education. The Language Boards, then called Language Committees, were responsible to the Department of Bantu Education for innovations in Sotho (Northern Sotho) orthography.”

(iii) The other factor which leads to the rise of 'prestige' languages emanating from politics, is the creation of an economically powerful group of people, usually at the expense of other groups. The people who are politically influential are usually given the first priority by the politicians when coming to the economy of a state, and as such, their standard of living will be high when compared to the standards of those who are not politically dominant. In South Africa, for instance, the politically dominant Whites used to pass several laws and regulations, such as 'the Job Reservation Act', which reserved special managerial posts and other high income positions for the Whites, as well as 'the Group Areas Act' which placed the Whites next to the economic 'arteries' of the country to ensure them a better employment all the time. A better economic status obviously gave the South African Whites a higher standard of living and a high social status. Irrespective of the fact that their languages were imposed as official by the rulers, the prestige derived from the economic status of the White community in South Africa was enough to place the English and Afrikaans languages at the prestigious level they enjoy today.

#### **1.2.4 The role of the Language Boards**

The Language Boards originated after the initiative was taken by the politicians to unify the various dialects of the Bantu languages, especially in South Africa. (This factor was mentioned in paragraph 1.2.3 dealing with the political factors leading to the rise of the prestige languages, due to their interrelationship with politics). In South Africa, the Government made use of the then Transvaal Education Department, the Department of Bantu Education, and later, the Departments of Education in the Homelands, to create the committees which were to carry out the assignment of unifying the Bantu languages by way of forming standardised, unitary languages to be used in education and other social activities. With regard to the development of Northern Sotho orthography, the initial decision on the unification of all the Sotho languages was taken by the Transvaal Sotho District Committee which was appointed by the Transvaal Education Department (TED) in 1929 (Terminology and Orthography No.4, 1988:5). This unification meant that there was to be created one standard Sotho language which would be elevated to be a prestige language over all other varieties which would be referred to as Sotho dialects. According to the Northern Sotho Terminology and Orthography No.4 (1988:5), a single orthography for the Sotho languages was adopted and published in 1930. Unfortunately, this Committee and the

corresponding one for Tswana failed to reach an agreement and the Tswana Committee adopted an independent orthography in 1937. From 1947, the TED made several efforts at unifying the Sotho orthographies, and several meetings and conferences were held, such as the Somerset House Conference of February 1947, at which a number of changes were agreed upon. The final orthography of the Sotho languages was adopted by the Orthography Sub-Committee of the Sotho Language Board on the 20th October 1950, and it became compulsory in the Transvaal from January 1953. From the beginning it was obvious that the unified Sotho orthography would not last due to the fact that the relevant Sub-Committees of the Sotho Language Boards (the Northern Sotho Language Committee, the Tswana Language Committee and the Southern Sotho Language Committee) wanted to make changes to enable their individual dialects to dominate the orthography. The situation was aggravated by the Government's new policy of Separate Development, whereby it was decided to encourage the ethnic groups to develop separately, and this led to the establishment of the Homeland Government System or Bantustan Government System (as they were notoriously known). This resulted in the creation of Bophuthatswana, Lebowa and Basotho Qwa-Qwa, with the respective Sub-Committees becoming independent Language Boards for each Homeland.

The disadvantage associated with these Language Boards was that they did not represent the various dialects of the languages under their jurisdiction. The Government, or the Homeland Governments (after 1963), nominated some officials, through the Departments of Education into the Boards. These officials were usually taken from the elite group, especially the high-ranking officials from the Education Departments, such as Inspectors of Education, Education Planners, Directors, Teachers, etc. The result was that the legacies of the missionaries still prevailed due to the fact that most of these elite groups were products of the missionary schools. The Government took over control of schools from the missionaries in 1953, and by that time the educated middle class were all those who came from the missionary stations, and who were mostly from the few dialectal areas which were situated in the proximity of the missionary stations. This simply means that all the dialects which were not represented, due to the fact that the people concerned did not have qualified (educated) people to be members of the Board, were sidelined. With regard to Northern Sotho, the areas which suffered as a result of a shortage of qualified people were areas in which **Phalaborwa, Pulana, Lobedu** and **Tlokwa** were spoken.

They did not have missionaries during the early part of the 20th century. It was only after the second decade of the 20th century that missionaries from Switzerland established a station at Shiluvane, under **Bakgaga ba GaMaake**. At this station a school and a hospital were built which came to serve the whole area, including **Mapulaneng, Phalaborwa, Makhutšwe, Bolobedu, Botlokwa**, as well as a large section of the area under the **Tsonga-Shangaan** group which later came to form part of the Gazankulu Homeland. As a result of a lack of missionary activities in these areas during the 19th century, by the turn of the century almost all the people (in these areas) were illiterate, and by 1950 only about two percent could read or write, while in other areas, such as in Sekhukhuneland, the missionaries had already produced teachers, priests, inspectors of schools, etc. This is one of the major reasons why the dialects, which are spoken in these areas, were totally sidelined during the standardisation of Northern Sotho since there was no one from these areas who was qualified enough to be appointed to the relevant Committees. By the time education started to reach these areas, the Northern Sotho standard language had already been established on the legacy of the missionaries, and books such as the Padišo series were already in use in schools. As such, the people in these areas had no option but to take what education gave them, i.e. to accept what had been decided on for them (to accept the standard Northern Sotho language). These people had to accept that their own dialects were ‘inferior’ to the **Pedi** and all other dialects spoken around Pietersburg, Groblersdal and Potgietersrus. The dialects which were considered for the standardisation of Northern Sotho are viewed as languages of the educated by speakers of other dialects, since most speakers who are educated use a standard language in their communication, which is more or less the same as the ‘prestige’ dialects mentioned above, instead of using their ‘inferior’ dialects. For instance, the educated group from Bolobedu will say:

<b>Ke ja bogobe</b>	‘I eat porridge’	instead of	<b>ke ʎa booswa</b>
<b>Ke nwa mageu</b>	‘I drink mageu’	instead of	<b>ke nwa mapoto</b>
<b>O rea dihlapu</b>	‘he/she is fishing’	instead of	<b>o ʎoba dikhobe</b>
<b>Ke leribiši</b>	‘it is an owl’	instead of	<b>ke mmankhodo</b>
<b>Ke kgoši</b>	‘he is a chief’	instead of	<b>ke khosi</b>
<b>Ke diša dikgomo</b>	‘I look after cattle’	instead of	<b>ke lesa dikhomu</b>
<b>Ke nwa moro</b>	‘I drink soup’	instead of	<b>ke nwa mothotho</b>

**Ke hlapa sefahlego** 'I wash my face' instead of **ke thapa khofeni**  
 ^

The phrases on the left hand side here represent the standard Northern Sotho terminology as well as the terminology of the 'prestige' dialects mentioned above. These examples show a vast difference between the Lobedu terminology and the standard terminology. The first Northern Sotho Language Board was established in 1978 after the Department of Bantu Education had abolished the 'co-ordinating Central Bantu Language Board as well as its constituent Language Committees' (Kgagara, 1993:56 ) in 1977 with the decision of giving the Homeland Governments full control over their own affairs. Even though the members of the first Northern Sotho Language Board, under Lebowa Legislative Government, included a member from Mapulaneng, Mr L S Kganane, who was Chief Inspector of Education, and who acted as Chairman of the newly formed Language Board, and a member from Bolobedu, i.e. S P N Makwala, who was Circuit Inspector at Thabina Circuit (who acted as Vice-Chairperson of the Board), the membership still represented the high ranking educated officials of the Department of Education and the products of the missionary schools, who had already adopted the Northern Sotho orthography as decided upon by their predecessors. Other members of the Board of 1978 were the following (Kgagara, 1993:60):

- J D Ngoepe - Chief in the Language Service Division (Department of Education) -  
Lebowakgomo
- S M Molepo - Cultural Organiser - Seshego
- J S Mabitje - Bible Society of South Africa - University of the North
- W S Lekalakala - Inspector of Education - Warmbaths
- G P Mojapelo - Principal - Mokopane Teachers Training College
- C M Dolamo - SABC - Johannesburg
- H M Nkadimeng - Bureau of National and International Communication
- W J Pretorius - Department of Education and Training - Pretoria
- P H D Mashabela - University of the North - Turfloop
- M S Serudu - University of South Africa - Pretoria
- P C Mokgokong - University of the North - Turfloop
- P S Groenewald - University of Pretoria - Pretoria

- J Murray Louw - Bible Society of South Africa - University of the North  
 C J Pretorius - SABC - Johannesburg  
 S M Komote - Ribane-Laka Secondary School - Mamelodi-East  
 S M Mamoepa - Mohlakaneng High School - Seshego

The ordinary people, who were not educated, and who regarded their dialect as a 'language' and not as a dialect of any other language, were not consulted. The abovementioned list of members of the Board of 1978 shows clearly that the Board represented the educated senior officials of the Department of Education and the University Academics. This setup still exists even today. The major stake-holders, such as the tribal leaders like the Chiefs and Indunas, the community leaders like the Civic Leaders, etc., who are closer to the people, were either consulted indirectly by these educated Academics, or not consulted at all in the decision-making regarding a standard language. The present structure could bear fruit if there was equal representation to represent all the so-called Northern Sotho dialects in the Language Boards which are given the authority of deciding on the future of their language. Lack of equal representation has not only led to the elevation of some few Sotho varieties to be prestige dialects and other varieties to be inferior dialects, but also created a situation where the difference between some of the 'inferior' dialects and the Standard Northern Sotho is very wide. For instance, the Tswana language, which is an independent language, is closer to the Northern Sotho Standard language than are Lobedu and Pulana, which are said to be dialects of Northern Sotho, e.g:

- English : 'In the evening he was not there'  
 N.Sotho : **Mantšibua o be a se gona**  
 Tswana : **Ka ntšibuwa o ne a se teng**  
 Pulana : **Ka malobane o be a šiiyo**  
 Lobedu : **Ka mantšeboya ke mo a kheeyo**

- English : 'he was hungry'  
 N.Sotho : **o be a kwa tlala**  
 Tswana : **o ne a kwa tlala**  
 Pulana : **o be a lapile**

Lobedu : **ke mo a khe o<sub>Λ</sub>dwa d<sub>Λ</sub>ala**

English : ‘he arrived yesterday’

N.Sotho : **o fihlile/gorogile maabane**

Tswana : **o gorogile maobane**

Pulana : **o fihlile malobana**

Lobedu : **o fi<sub>Λ</sub>tile maabane**

English : ‘he eats porridge’

N.Sotho : **o ja bogobe**

Tswana : **o ja bogobe**

Pulana : **o ja bušwa**

Lobedu : **o ja booswa**

### 1.2.5 Socio-economic factors

The economic standard of a community has an impact on the social status of the people together with all the activities associated with that community, including the language. Appel and Muysken (1987:33) comment as follows (with reference to the status of the Spanish language in Latin America):

“Social status is very closely aligned to economic status, and it is probably equally important with respect to language maintenance. A group’s social status, which here refers to the group’s self-esteem, depends largely upon its economic status. Speakers of Quechua in Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia will generally consider themselves to have low social status, and tend to shift towards Spanish, which has the connotations of higher social status.”

A better economic status usually results in a high standard of living for the community, and as such, a high social status. The language (or dialect) spoken by this community will be associated

with the status of the community. The speakers of other languages (or dialects) with inferior economic status will find it prestigious to speak the language (or dialect) of the economically superior community, or even, just to apply some of the terminology of the said community in their own language (dialect). Appel and Muysken (1987:33) go on to say:

“The economic status is a prominent factor in nearly all studies on language maintenance and shift. Where groups of minority language speakers have a relatively low economic status, there is a strong tendency to shift towards the majority language. For example, most speakers of Spanish in the U.S.A. find themselves in the low-income groups. They associate speaking English with academic achievement and economic progress. Spanish gets the stigma of the language of poor people, and parents who themselves sometimes have a poor command of English try to urge their children to speak English, because they have internalized the societal attitudes towards Spanish.”

As such, English will be looked upon as ‘the language of the rich’, ‘the language of the educated’, ‘the language of the upper class’, etc. This belief is corrected by Haas (1982:10) in the following comment:

“It is true, however, that when a form is selected as ‘standard’ and others are rejected as ‘sub-standard’ there are frequently neither linguistic nor any more general social reasons to justify the preference. ‘It aint no good’ is intrinsically no worse than ‘It isn’t any good’ or ‘It is no good’. The only reason for accepting the latter is the social prestige of those who use them. It may happen, too, that a form which is rejected as sub-standard is, from a linguistic point of view, preferable to the standard.”

### **Industrialisation and the proximity to urban metropolitan areas**

The nearer the community resides to the industrialised and metropolitan cities the less the people are affected by unemployment. Low unemployment rate will result in a high economic standard

of living for the community and, obviously, a high social status. Everything associated with this community will be admired by those who reside far away from the cities, including their language. The status accorded to the dialects of the cities is described by Robins (1989:55) as follows:

“A dialect, or some closely similar group of dialects enjoying prestige as the speech of educated people of the Capital City or of some other socially respected group, is often designated ‘the Standard Language’, ‘Standard English’, ‘Standard French’, and so forth; and the pronunciation characteristic of this type of English has been called ‘Received Pronunciation’ or RP.”

He (1989:55) goes on to define the Capital City as follows:

“The term ‘Capital City’ may be more in the nature of a cultural focus or centre than just the political capital of a country.”

In this way, the city dwellers are not only associated with the languages (dialects) of the educated and those who are economically better-off, but also with the standard languages. The community which resides far away from the industrialised metropolitan cities will obviously experience a high unemployment rate resulting in a low standard of living. The people in this community will feel inferior to those in the cities. Everything associated with the city community will be admired (including their language). It will be a prestige for other communities to speak like the people in the urban areas. Among the Sotho people, the Tswana people are usually regarded as more ‘elevated’, being the group which resides next to the metropolitan areas of the Witwatersrand. This has given the Tswana people a superior status in the minds of most Northern Sotho people who are a bit further away from the urban areas. This perception also exists especially among people whose dialects were marginalised in the standardisation of Northern Sotho, such as Balobedu, Baphalaborwa, Bakgaga, Mapulana, Batlokwa, etc. The status of Tswana is reflected in the behaviour of most High School pupils and students in most Boarding Schools in the previous rural Northern Transvaal. Before 1953 (the year in which the Government took over control of the Education for the Bantu from the missionaries) and several years later, the South

African Government did not build proper schools for the Blacks in the urban areas, especially High Schools, due to the fact that the Group Areas Act regarded the Blacks who resided in the so-called urban townships as temporary residents who belonged to their respective Homelands and, as such, who had come to the cities to work, only to return to their Homelands at every interval, i.e. they were supposed to be 'migrant labourers'. The only proper schools (at which most Sotho people were also catered for) with boarding facilities and effective discipline, were those in the rural areas, of which some were still under the control of the missionaries, especially schools such as **Pax, Motsemaria, Maripi, Lemana, Bokgaga, Bethesda, Botšhabelo, Setotlwane, Kgaiso, Emmerentia Geldenhuys**, etc. Most parents in the metropolitan areas sent their children to these schools to get good education, and most of these pupils were of Northern Sotho parents but they spoke Sotho with the terminology which was predominantly Tswana. Even though they were few in numbers, when compared to the pupils from the rural areas in these institutions, their language would spread very quickly so that, in a very short space of time, the majority of the students would be speaking this 'prestige' language. Even those students who had never been in the Witwatersrand, would be heard speaking Northern Sotho with the Tswana terminology, to associate themselves with the urban students. They would start replacing their 'inferior terminology' with the 'prestige terminology', as in the following examples:

O a <b>itsi</b>	(Tswana) 'you know'	for NS. O a <b>tseba</b>
O <b>batlang fa?</b>	(Tswana) 'what do you want here?'	for NS. O <b>nyakang mo?</b>
O <b>pila</b>	(Tswana) 'he/she is beautiful'	for NS. O <b>botse</b>
O ja <b>hampe</b>	(Tswana) 'he/she eats too much'	for NS. O ja <b>kudu</b>
O a <b>tshameka</b>	(Tswana) 'he/she is playing'	for NS. O a <b>bapala</b>

The rural Northern Sotho people associate the Tswana language, which they refer to as **Sekgatla**, with the metropolitan South, i.e. the Witwatersrand area. **Sekgatla** is, therefore, associated with academic achievements as well as economic progress by the rural Sotho people. Most of the Northern Sotho people who go to the 'South' (as it is called), usually come back speaking a Sotho language which is mixed with Tswana terminology. In this way, they try to imitate the 'prestige' language which is spoken by the 'rich' and 'wise' people of the 'South'.

### 1.3 Dialectology and dialects of Northern Sotho

According to Lehmann (1962:118), dialectology or dialect geography entails the study of the varying forms of speech. He (1962:3) defines dialect and dialect geography as follows:

“Subdivisions of a language are referred to as dialect. The study of variations among dialects of a language is termed dialect geography.”

Lehmann (1962:256) goes on to say:

“Dialect is used for a subdivision of a language or of a language family, e.g. English is an Indo - European dialect. The midland dialect is used across a central portion of the United States.”

According to Crystal (1985:102), a dialect is:

“A regional or socially distinctive variety of languages, identified by a particular set of words and grammatical structures. Spoken dialects are usually also associated with a distinctive pronunciation, or accent. Any language with a reasonably large number of speakers will develop dialects, especially if there are geographical barriers separating groups of people from each other, or if there are divisions of social class. One dialect may predominate as the official or standard form of the language, and this is the variety which may come to be written down.”

Doke (1954:21) gives a specific definition of Bantu dialects as follows:

“The local form of speech. In Bantu it is applicable to the language of a tribe, and more particularly of a clan section of a tribe.”

### 1.3.1 Dialects of Northern Sotho

In his publication of 1935, Van Warmelo (1935:108) gives a geographical classification of the Sotho dialects ( which later came to be known as the dialects of Northern Sotho) as follows:

- (i) **Central Sotho**, which includes Pedi, Tau, Kone, Roka, Kopa.
- (ii) **Eastern Sotho**, which includes Kutswe, Pai and Pulana.
- (iii) **North Eastern Sotho**, which includes Phalaborwa, Lobedu, Mamabolo, Letsoalo, Mametša, Mahlo, Kgaga.
- (iv) **Northern Sotho**, which includes Mphahlele, Tšhwene, Mathabatha, Maja, Mothapo, Matlala, Molepo, Tlokwa, Dikgale, Moletši, Hananwa.

It was only later that Doke (1954:24) was to propose a classification of what he termed ‘the Northern Sotho cluster’ as follows:

**Pedi, Kone, Tau (Masemola), Kgaga, Kwena, Gananwa, Tlokwa, Ndebele-Sotho.**

To these dialects he added **Lobedu, Phalaborwa, Pai, Kutswe and Pulana**, which, he said, differ considerably from Northern Sotho. (Mokgokong, 1966:3).

According to Louwrens(1994:54):

“Several *dialects* are distinguished in Northern Sotho, such as Tlokwa, Hananwa, Lobedu, Phalaborwa, Pedi, etc. *Dialects* which are spoken in the same geographical area, and which are characterised by certain common phonological, morphological and lexical features, are often grouped together in what are called *dialect clusters*.”

With regard to the classification of Northern Sotho, Mokgokong (1966:3) says:

“The provisional classification of the Northern Sotho subgroup into dialect clusters by the Department of Bantu Languages, University of South Africa, is as follows: (a) **The Central Sotho Dialect Cluster**, from whose dialects the written Northern Sotho language has developed, e.g. **Pedi**, **Tau** (Masemola), **Kone**, **Mphahlele**, are the most important - i.e. the dialect of Sekhukhuneland and adjacent parts. (b) **The Eastern Sotho Dialect Cluster**: Here the dialects are **Pulana**, **Kutswe** and **Pai**. These dialects bear a strong impression of Tsonga and Swazi, especially **Pai**. (c) **The North-Eastern Sotho Dialect Cluster**: Here the most important dialects are **Lobedu** and **Phalaborwa**, and related languages such as **Kgaga**. They show a strong influence of Venda. (d) **The North-Western Sotho Dialect Cluster**: Here we have the dialects common to the Pietersburg and Potgietersrus districts, i.e. **Hananwa**, **Matlala**, **Tlokwa** and **Mamabolo**. **Birwa**, a nearly extinct language, may also be included.”

### 1.3.2 Attitudes towards dialects

Attitude plays a major role in the classification of the languages and the dialects into inferior and superior dialects (languages). While some people have a (wrong) conception that their languages are better than others, others have a wrong conception that theirs are inferior to other languages. These conceptions emanate from the ‘superiority’, and ‘inferiority’ complexes within the minds of the speakers. Allen and Linn (1986:218) say the following with regard to the superiority attitude of the Greek nation:

“It is an attitude which is ultimately of classical origin - it is to the Greeks, after all, that we owe the tradition that all those who do not speak our language are - necessarily - barbarous.”

This superiority attitude is found in every community, especially the communities whose languages are among the ‘prestige’ varieties. With regard to dialects, the people with this attitude regard theirs as ‘languages’ and other varieties as ‘dialects’. Allen and Linn (1986:220) explain this as follows:

“This represents perfectly the popular idea of dialect and most of the connotations that surround the idea: a dialect is uncouth - an ugly, imperfect, corrupt version of a language which I myself speak perfectly. On one level this sense is merely a survival of the same classical attitude which reduced unwritten languages to the status of ‘mere dialects’. But on another it is closely related to the last definition that is important, the idea that a dialect is something like a patois, in the French sense, a distinctive and honorable but rural and moribund by-form of a language.”

This is the attitude which prevails in the minds of most speakers of the ‘prestige’ dialects towards the marginalised dialects. To these people, a dialect is an incorrect, corrupt version of their language (since they regard their variety to be a language), which is soon to disappear. The dialect is associated with rural and poor civilization, when compared to their language variety, which to them symbolizes civilization, education and superiority. This is the situation in which most speakers of the marginalised dialects find themselves when they are to use their dialects openly. Due to various factors (as explained in the previous paragraphs), some of the dialects of Northern Sotho such as **Pedi**, **Kopa**, etc., seem to be closer to the standard language than other dialects, e.g. **Lobedu**, **Hananwa**, **Pulana**, etc. As such, there is an attitude among most Sotho speakers that the dialects which are nearer to standard Northern Sotho symbolize civilization, education and prestige, while other varieties symbolize illiteracy and the barbaric. The ‘prestige’ terminology will always be associated with the ‘prestige’ dialects.

#### 1.3.2.1 The low-class dialects

These are dialects which are associated with the people of low social status in the community. Burling (1970:122) talks of ‘stigmatised’ dialects in his reference to the American low-class varieties:

“Americans tend to be relatively tolerant of most regional dialects, but Negro speech patterns have been closely associated with their inferior social position and, like the dialectical specialities of lower-class whites, their patterns have become stigmatized. Many people look upon them not simply as divergent but as

inferior.”

Standardisation of Northern Sotho has reduced many of its dialects to ‘low-class varieties’ which has ultimately reduced the self-confidence of its speakers. The speakers of these dialects feel emotionally inferior to give public addresses, or even to engage in open communication in their dialects. The study of Northern Sotho dialects shows that almost half of the dialects were sidelined in its standardisation. The isoglosses show that the dialects which formed the standard Northern Sotho language are those found in the **Central Sotho dialect cluster**, such as **Pedi**, **Masemola**, **Kone**, **Mphahlele**, as well as some dialects in and around the **Pietersburg** and **Mokerong** districts. Indeed, the dialects in these districts are ‘prestige’ dialects of Northern Sotho and the speakers of these dialects **speak** their ‘language’ with confidence. Other dialects such as **Pulana**, which is spoken in **Mapulaneng** ( Bushbuckridge district), **Lobedu**, in **Bolobedu** ( Duiwelskloof district), **Tlokwa**, spoken in **Botlokwa** ( Soekmekaar-Sekgosese district) as well as the dialects spoken in areas such as **Phalaborwa**, **Makhutšwe** ( which the speakers pronounce **Makhutšu** - from **-khutša** ‘rest’) and **Bokgaga** are quite different from the standard Northern Sotho. Speakers of these dialects regard the standard terminology of Northern Sotho as ‘prestige terminology’. They are, in most cases, shy to use the terminology of their own dialects in public for fear of being associated with the ‘inferior’ dialects. The following are some of the phonemic differences between the standard Northern Sotho terminology and that of some of its dialects:

- (a) The use of plosive **kh** ([**kh**]) instead of the standard affricative **kg** ([**kxh**]), as used by **Balobedu**, **Baphalaborwa**, **Bakgaga**, **Batlokwa** and those people in the **Makhutšwe** area, e.g.:

<b>khosi</b>	for	<b>kgoši</b>	‘chief’
<b>khoro</b>	for	<b>kgoro</b>	‘court’
<b>khoho</b>	for	<b>kgogo</b>	‘fowl’
<b>khale</b>	for	<b>kgale</b>	‘old’
<b>-khotsofatša</b>	for	<b>-kgotsofatša</b>	‘satisfy’
<b>-khetha</b>	for	<b>-kgetha</b>	‘choose’
<b>khopa</b>	for	<b>kgopa</b>	‘snail’

*seped compare to other dialects*

**khofa** for **kgofa** 'tick'

(b) The use of alveolar **s** ([s]) instead of the prepalatal **š** ([ʃ]), as in the following examples:

<b>-rwesa</b>	for	<b>-rweša</b>	'load'
<b>-supa</b>	for	<b>-šupa</b>	'point'
<b>-sala</b>	for	<b>-šala</b>	'remain'
<b>-sikinya</b>	for	<b>-šikinya</b>	'shake'
<b>lesilo</b>	for	<b>lešilo</b>	'fool'
<b>-lesa</b>	for	<b>-diša</b>	'look after livestock'
<b>-sila</b>	for	<b>-šila</b>	'grind'
<b>-busa</b>	for	<b>-buša</b>	'govern' or 'bring back'

(c) The use of glottal **h** ([h]) instead of standard velar **g** ([g]) as in the following examples:

<b>-hola</b>	for	<b>-gola</b>	'grow'
<b>-hapa</b>	for	<b>-gapa</b>	'drive'
<b>-hafa</b>	for	<b>-gafa</b>	'mad'
<b>-hana</b>	for	<b>-gana</b>	'refuse'
<b>mohale</b>	for	<b>mogale</b>	'hero (soldier)'
<b>mohala</b>	for	<b>mogala</b>	'string' or 'telephone'
<b>lehapu</b>	for	<b>legapu</b>	'watermelon'
<b>sehafi</b>	for	<b>segaswi</b>	'lunatic'

Prestige motive seemed to have influenced the low-class dialects of Northern Sotho in the application of the prefix **mma-**, which is pronounced as such by the speakers of these dialects while the standard orthography uses only one **m**, i.e. **ma-**. This prefix is used mostly in the Lobedu and Phalaborwa dialects for the names of people, especially the ladies. Although the difference between the pronunciation of this prefix in practical speech and its written form is obvious to the speakers of the low-class dialects, they feel proud to write it as it is written in the original standard orthography (using one **m** instead of two) without even questioning the

omission of the other 'm' which is audibly pronounced when mentioning the name, and which is derived from the word **mma** referring to 'mother'.

These names are usually descriptive, as in the following examples: **Mmadala**, the name given to a person who was born during the time of starvation, which literally means 'mother of hunger'. In standard Northern Sotho it is written **Matlala**, instead of **Mmatlala**. **Mmamolatela**, which is the name given to a lady who is married to her own sister's husband (especially when the older sister has failed to bear children for the family), which literally means 'the one who follows', is written **Mamolatelo** in standard Northern Sotho instead of **Mmamolatelo** or **Mmamolatela**. **Mmakhwara**, which is the name given to a lady who is troublesome and which literally means 'mother of trouble' is written **Makgwara** in standard Northern Sotho instead of **Mmakgwara**. **Mmanare**, a name given to a lady who is pugnacious (sometimes as nickname), is written **Manare** in standard Northern Sotho. **Mmapula**, which is the name for a girl born on a rainy day, or during a season when there was too much rain, which literally means 'mother of rain', is written **Mapula** in standard Northern Sotho. Even though the standard orthography still uses one **m** as shown in the abovementioned examples, the names are pronounced with double **m** as they appear in their original Lobedu form. The Lobedu people also use one **m** when writing these names, obviously because they want to be associated with the 'prestige' varieties, and also because they found it written in this way in the official orthography of Northern Sotho, even though most can see that these spellings do not match the pronunciation of the names. Besides the mismatch between the pronunciation and the spelling of these names resulting from the use of one **m**, these names sometimes cause ambiguity in sentences. For example, the name **Makgwara (Mmakgwara)** can be mistaken for **makgwara** which refers to 'gravel', which is not pronounced with double **m**'s but with one **m**. The name **Matlala (Mmatlala)**, for instance, can be mistaken for **Matlala** which is pronounced as it is written here, and which is a tribal village to the west of Pietersburg. The word is also a well-known Sotho surname.

In this way, the Lobedu people chose to accept the written form for these names without even questioning the validity of the orthography applied in this situation as a result of an inferiority complex. Obviously, the spellings in these names came about as a result of the influence of the missionaries, who, due to lack of sufficient vocabulary of the Sotho dialects, were not used to

names which started with two **m**'s. As such, most European missionaries pronounced these names exactly as they are written here (they pronounced the names with only one '**m**').

### 1.3.2.2 Prestige dialects

These are those varieties of a language which most people regard to be superior in status to other dialects. These varieties are usually associated with people of high social status. Most of the people who enjoy this status have a negative attitude towards other dialects. This attitude is properly explained by Allen and Linn (1986:218) in the following comment:

“The first sense underlies the idea that a language for which there exists no written form, a language which has not yet been alphabetized, is for that reason intrinsically inferior, not a real language, but a mere dialect,”

Attitudes such as this prevailed during the early writings of Northern Sotho (then Sepedi) by the missionaries, especially the Berlin missionaries, who had several mission stations in Bopedi (Sekhukhuneland). During this period, the Pedi and Kopa varieties were regarded as the real languages, while all other varieties which constitute Northern Sotho today were considered to be 'mere' dialects of Pedi. The Berlin missionaries were among the vanguards of the first Northern Sotho 'scholars' who wrote several works in Pedi-Kopa dialects, such as translations of catechisms and other religious manuscripts which were among the first Northern Sotho readers used in schools and churches. Mokgokong (1966:36) comments as follows with regard to the role of the missionaries in Sekhukhuneland and Maleuskop:

“In the case of Northern Sotho, the Pedi dialect, or rather an admixture of Pedi and Kopa dialects, was the first to be used in writing. The early Berlin Lutheran missionaries first established mission stations at Schoonoord and at Maandagshoek and then, under pressure from Sekhukhune I, moved to Botšhabelo. Here Pedi and Kopa converts lived, and were taught, together; and when the Bible had to be translated into Northern Sotho, Abraham Serote, a Kopa, was sent to Lobethal to study the Pedi dialect. The result was that the first Northern Sotho Biblical

translation contained linguistic features characteristic of both Pedi and Kopa dialects. In it we find such sounds as **bj** as in **-bjala** (plant), **fs** as in **lefsifsi** (darkness), **ps** as in **-psila** (nice, well); or lexical items such as **-bua** (speak), **-utlwa** (hear) and **-tsamaya** (go, walk), which are not characteristic of typical Pedi. In this way, apart from Abraham Serote, the early Northern Sotho writers, notably K. Endemann and E.M. Ramaila, adopted the Pedi - Kopa dialect as the standard literary form.”

This gave the Pedi dialect a superior status it still enjoys even today among the dialects of Northern Sotho. This superior status has created self-confidence in the Pedi people and some of them developed the attitude that other dialects are inferior to theirs. This is usually the case with most speakers of the standard dialects who invariably regard other dialects as inferior and uncivilised. This type of attitude is described by Robins (1989:55) as follows:

“It is a popular assumption on the part of those speaking standard dialects that other dialects, especially those spoken by groups lacking any social prestige or recognition, are both ‘incorrect’ and more or less formless, without a true grammar or precise means of discourse. Epithets such as ‘ugly’, ‘slovenly’, and the like are freely employed with reference to the pronunciation of such dialects.”

This attitude among the Northern Sotho people who speak a standard dialect, is usually seen, for instance, where this group will try to imitate the Lobedu (or any other speakers of the so-called ‘inferior’ dialects) in a mocking manner, like: **khelo kheela kha maabane**, which is a Lobedu sentence meaning ‘that thing of yesterday’, with a repetition of the sound **[kh]** which is a Lobedu form for standard **[s]**; **Lekhelo-khelo**, which is one of the many nicknames given to those whose dialects are related to Lobedu, which means ‘the one who says **khelo, khelo**’ instead of standard Northern Sotho **selo** ‘a thing’. In correcting this attitude, Robins (1989:55) summarises as follows:

“The term Standard Language must not mislead. Such forms of speech are descriptively dialects, just like any other dialect, to be described and delimited on

just the same criteria as the less socially and officially favoured 'regional' dialects."

Allen and Linn (1986:219) are amongst those linguists who try to correct this fallacy of 'superiority' and 'inferiority' with regard to dialects and languages. Haas (1982:10), also, criticises this wrong conception when he says:

"when a form is selected as 'standard' and others are rejected as 'sub-standard' there are frequently neither linguistic nor any more general social reasons to justify the preference."

Haas (1982:10)'s idea is that the only reason for accepting certain forms as 'standard' is the social prestige of those who use them. On the basis of this reasoning, it is obvious that the selection of the Pedi - Kopa dialects as standard Northern Sotho did not have any justification on linguistic grounds, but on the prestige of the dialects - the prestige which these dialects acquired from the presence of the missionaries in their areas (as we have seen in the previous paragraphs).

With reference to the inferiority complex among the Negro people in America, Burling (1970:130)'s advice reads as follows:

"Negro children ought to be able to take pride in their own background and should not be burdened with shame for cultural differences that are not of their making, and which are inferior only in the sense that people with power happen to have different patterns. If black children are to compete successfully with their white suburban contemporaries in the practical, unjust world of the present day United States, they may have to learn the standard language. But if in learning it, they are forced to reject their own native dialect and to accept the dominant society's view that their native language habits are simply inferior, the experience may do them more psychic harm than social good."

Allen and Linn (1986:219) try to show that dialects are equal and have the same function

irrespective of whether they are regarded as 'superior' or 'inferior'. They say:

“Consequently everybody has his or her own dialect: I have mine, you have yours, Susanna Moodie had hers, and our Queen has hers. It is a notion that would probably horrify our Queen: it would certainly have horrified Susanna Moodie. Moodie, like most people of her class, then and since, had a quite different attitude to dialect. For her, the English language was what she spoke, every form of English which deviated from this was a mere dialect.”

#### **1.4 The consequences of Northern Sotho standardisation**

##### **1.4.1 The psychological effects - inferiority and superiority complexes**

The obvious effect of standardisation applicable to all languages is the resulting inferiority and superiority complexes on the part of the speakers of the neglected dialects and those whose dialects were considered for standardisation. The emotional consequence of standardisation has been mentioned several times in the previous paragraphs of this chapter. With regard to Northern Sotho, speakers of the dialects which were marginalised during the standardisation feel inferior to use their dialects or the terminology of these dialects because they don't want to be associated with the 'low-class' dialects. These dialects include, inter alia, **Lobedu, Phalaborwa, Hananwa, Makhutšwe, Bakgaga** and **Batlokwa**. On the other hand, speakers of the dialects which formed part and parcel of the standard Northern Sotho language have a feeling of superiority in status and some of them tend to undermine other dialects and the speakers of these dialects. These prestige dialects of Northern Sotho include, among others, **Pedi, Mphahlele, Kopa** and the dialects of **Sekhukhuneland, Pietersburg, Groblersdal** and adjacent areas.

##### **1.4.2 The decline of dialectal vocabulary**

The marginalisation of the so-called 'low-class' dialects did not only have emotional effects on the speakers concerned, but also a negative effect on the development of these dialects. Up to this moment these dialects do not have a written form and even those who speak the dialects cannot

write what they say. For instance, the Lobedu speaker will write: **ke tla o itia** “I will wallop you”, while in practical speech he/she will say: **ke do o tia**, which the majority of the speakers cannot write because there is no orthography for these dialects. The fact that these dialects were not considered in the standardisation of Northern Sotho means that they will continue to be sidelined when Northern Sotho will be developed further, and this will lead to the decline in the vocabulary instead of developing it to enrich the dialects. This is usually aggravated by the fact that most of the educated members of the community who speak these dialects are shy to use them in their communications since these educated groups are the ones who are supposed to help develop the dialects. The loss of dialectal vocabulary does not only affect the dialects concerned but also has negative effects on the development of the vocabulary of the Northern Sotho standard language as a whole, since most of the terminology used in the ‘low-class’ dialects can still be used fruitfully to enrich standard Northern Sotho. For instance, terms such as the following can still form part of the standard vocabulary of Northern Sotho:

<b><u>Dialectal</u></b>	<b><u>Standard</u></b>	
<b>booswa</b>	<b>bogobe</b>	‘porridge’
<b>-apa</b>	<b>-bolela</b>	‘talk’
<b>mokhope</b>	<b>morula</b>	‘marula beer’
<b>-moḁa</b>	<b>-betha</b>	‘thrash’
<b>mothotho</b>	<b>moro</b>	‘soup’
<b>mmankhoḁo</b>	<b>leribiši</b>	‘owl’

### 1.4.3 Vocabulary imbalance among the Northern Sotho people

Standardisation of Northern Sotho led to imbalances in vocabulary between the speakers of the centralised dialects and those of the marginalised dialects. The speakers of the marginalised dialects have an advantage of broadening their vocabulary since they, besides already having a knowledge of the vocabulary of their own dialects (which they are afraid to use), are compelled to acquire the terminology of the standard Northern Sotho language, which in turn will be a knowledge of the terminology and vocabulary of the prestige dialects of Northern Sotho. This

means that most speakers of the 'low-class' dialects of Northern Sotho are familiar with the terminology used in almost all the dialects of Northern Sotho, while at the same time the speakers of the 'prestige dialects' have a narrow vocabulary with regard to the terminology of the dialects of Northern Sotho. These speakers use their dialects with confidence and they regard their dialects as superior in status to all other dialects of Northern Sotho. (They are just like Susanna Moodie, who, like most people of her class, believed that the English language is what she spoke, and every form of English which deviated from hers was just a mere dialect (Allen & Linn, 1986:219)). Their superiority complex discourages these speakers from learning the marginalised dialects since they are of the opinion that a knowledge of these 'low-class' dialects will not help them achieve anything in life. Ultimately, the vocabulary of these people will always be narrower than that of the speakers of the marginalised dialects. This means that the speakers of the marginalised dialects can communicate effectively with the speakers of the other dialects without any problem since they will understand what the other speakers say, while the speaker of the prestige dialect will have a problem in understanding some of the terminology of the marginalised dialects.

## CHAPTER 2

### PRESTIGE TERMINOLOGY IN FOREIGN ACQUISITION

#### 2.1 Introductory definition

In this chapter the role played by the former two official languages of the Republic of South Africa, i.e. Afrikaans and English, in the development of Northern Sotho vocabulary will be investigated. These are two major prestige languages in South Africa and most of the African languages, such as Northern Sotho, Zulu, Tsonga, Venda, etc. acquired **most** of their borrowed vocabulary from these languages, while in turn, these two prestige languages did not acquire vocabulary from the African languages at the same rate as was the case vice versa. Besides the fact that English and Afrikaans were official languages, which counted **much** for their prestige, the policy of 'Segregation' (and later 'Apartheid') contributed much to the prestige of these languages. Despite the fact that these policies were very unpopular among the indigenous people, these policies created a 'privileged class' which everybody wanted to be associated with. The status of this 'privileged class' was elevated by the protective laws, passed to secure the privileges of this 'class', such as the 'Job Reservation Act', the 'Group Areas Act', etc. which ensured that they always got good employment and excellent residential areas, etc. In general, the 'privileged class' enjoyed a very high standard of living in South Africa. The indigenous people, who were excluded because of colour, strove to learn to speak the languages of the 'upper class' in order to be associated with it and this led to extensive borrowing, or foreign acquisition.

Foreign acquisition or borrowing can be described as a process whereby the speakers fill the gaps which exist in the vocabulary of their languages with foreign terminology and foreign culture, thereby facilitating improvement in the lexical development of the borrowing languages. Hockett (1958:402) says:

“Whenever two idiolects come into contact, one or both may be modified. In face-to-face communication, either speaker may imitate some feature of the other's speech; when the contact is indirect, as in reading, the influence can of course pass

only in one direction. The feature which is imitated is called the *model*; the idiolect (or language) in which the model occurs, or the speaker of that idiolect, is called the *donor*; the idiolect (or language) which acquires something new in the process is the *borrowing idiolect* (or language).”

With regard to the reasons for linguistic borrowing, Mackey & Ornstein (1979:284) remark as follows:

“Reasons for word-borrowing vary as circumstances under which people come in contact with foreign cultures vary. Visitors and immigrants to foreign countries tend to use borrowed words in their native languages to show their progress of acculturation. According to this author’s survey (Higa, 1970), in immigrant communities like the Japanese community in Hawaii, borrowed words play an important role in creating a new dialect through which the members of the community can identify each other as belonging to the same community. English words are abundantly borrowed in the Japanese spoken in Hawaii, but they are used mostly among the members of the Japanese community. When these members speak to visitors from Japan, they try to speak as much standard Japanese as possible without using the borrowed English words. Among themselves,-----, they tend to borrow English words even when there are Japanese equivalents and there is no linguistic need to borrow foreign words.”

According to Ullmann (1951:57):

“Four methods are at the speaker’s disposal when a gap in the vocabulary has to be filled. He can either create a word from scratch, or resort to one of the usual processes of word-formation, or borrow a term from some other language, or change the meaning of some existing word.”

The term ‘borrowing’ is somewhat misleading, (as was also discovered by scholars such as Hockett (1958:402), Knappert (1970:78), etc.), because what is borrowed needs to be returned,

and in the case of languages, the loanwords are permanently incorporated in the vocabulary of the borrowing language. Hockett (1958:403) says:

“The process itself is called ‘borrowing’, but this term requires some caution. Thus, that which is ‘borrowed’ does not have to be paid back; the donor makes no sacrifice and does not have to be asked for permission. Indeed, nothing changes hands: the donor goes on speaking as before, and only the borrower’s speech is altered.”

With regard to the term ‘loanword’, Knappert (1970:78) says:

“The term loanword is not a satisfactory one. Obviously a word that people have borrowed cannot be returned after use. The German *Fremdwort* (lit. ‘Alien word’) seems more appropriate since our first task will be to note the foreign quality of certain words in the languages we are studying.”

## 2.2 Types of borrowing (foreign acquisition)

Two types of borrowing are identified, based on the manner in which foreign words are borrowed into the vocabulary of the borrowing languages, i.e. direct and indirect borrowing:

### 2.2.1 Direct borrowing

Words which are directly borrowed from foreign languages are classified into **loanwords** and **foreign words**.

#### 2.2.1.1 Loanwords

Loanwords are words which are borrowed from foreign languages and incorporated into the linguistic system of the borrowing language (Mojela, 1991:13). Mackey & Ornstein (1979:285) explain this as follows:

“When words are borrowed by one language from another, they are subjected to the phonological rules of the language that borrows. In other words, although these borrowed words may introduce new things and concepts, they do not introduce new sounds to the borrowing language. Thus, such sounds as /v/ and /l/ as in *violin* that do not exist in the Japanese phonology are changed to /b/ and /r/....”

In Northern Sotho, for instance, foreign words are subjected to the Bantu syllabic structure which is mostly ‘CV’ (consonant + vowel), e.g.:

<b>sekolo</b>	from English	‘school’ or
	from Afrikaans	<b>skool</b>
<b>teromo</b>	from Afrikaans	<b>drom</b> ‘drum’
<b>koporo</b>	from English	‘copper’ or
	from Afrikaans	<b>koper</b>
<b>sepikara</b>	from English	‘speaker’
<b>puku</b>	from English	‘book’ or
	from Afrikaans	<b>boek</b>
<b>kuku</b>	from Afrikaans	<b>koek</b> ‘cake’
<b>meyara</b>	from English	‘mayor’
<b>rula</b>	from English	‘ruler’

Words which are borrowed from foreign languages are also called adoptives. Louwrens (1994:5) defines the term ‘adoptive’ as follows:

“A word that has been taken over from a foreign language and which has been adapted to fit into the sound system and grammar of the borrowing language, is called an adoptive. Adoptives are traditionally also referred to as *borrowings* or *loan-words*, e.g.:

**seteišene** from English *station*  
**garafo** from Afrikaans *graaf* (shovel)  
**mokoti** from Zulu *umgodi* (mine)”

The loanword is one which has been taken up in the linguistic system of the borrowing language in such a way that it has become part and parcel of the borrowing language. Hockett (1958:408) says the following in this regard:

“The borrower may adopt the donor’s word along with the object or practice: the new form in the borrower’s speech is then a *loanword*.”

In Northern Sotho, the loanwords conform to the linguistic system of Northern Sotho, and this includes all the phonological, morphological, syntactical, lexical, and the tonological adaptations of the loanwords. For instance, there are two types of morphological adaptations, i.e. (1) one in which the first phoneme of the loanword determines in which class it will probably be placed, for example, the word ‘speaker’ is borrowed from English as **sepikara**, with the **se-** automatically placing this loanword in class 7; and (2) the other where a prefix is added in order to accommodate a loanword in a certain noun class, e.g. **lebotlelo**, from English ‘bottle’ or Afrikaans **bottel**, where a prefix **le-** is prefixed in order to accommodate the loanword in class 5. Once incorporated into the vocabulary of Northern Sotho, the loanword becomes part and parcel of this language, as stated by Mackey & Ornstein (1979:291):

“A loanword is only historically and etymologically foreign, but psychologically it is as indigenous as any other word once it is commonly used.”

#### 2.2.1.2 Foreign words

These are lexical items which are used by the borrowing language either totally unadapted or with a partial adaptation. Louwrens (1994:5) says the following in this regard:

“Some *adoptives* are only partially adapted and betray certain features which are

reminiscent of their language of origin, e.g. **mopresidente** ‘president’ which exhibits the consonant cluster **pr** which is foreign to Northern Sotho. There are also *adoptives* which have been taken over without any change, e.g. **video** and **radio**, and these are referred to as *foreign words*.”

This means that there are two types of foreign words in Northern Sotho, i.e. those lexical items which are taken over without any adaptation, e.g.

<b>radio</b>	from English	‘radio’
<b>drowa</b>	from English	‘draw’
<b>chess</b>	from English	‘chess’
<b>video</b>	from English	‘video’

There are also words which are only partially adapted. These words still show foreign elements in their structure after adaptation, such as instances where more than one consonant are juxtaposed, or appear within one syllable, e.g.

<b>moprista</b>	from English	‘priest’
<b>stepise</b>	from English	‘step’
<b>ilektrisithi</b>	from English	‘electricity’
<b>petrolo</b>	from English	‘petrol’

Some of these words may be fully adapted into the morphological structure of the language, while displaying some ‘foreign’ phoneme combinations, e.g. **moprista** is placed in class1 and makes use of all the regular concords of class1. Some nouns may be foreign because they do not fit into the class system, although they may comply fully with the phonological system of the language, e.g. **rula** ‘ruler’, which does not fit into any of the traditional, original noun classes. It does not display a prefix, nor is its first consonant occlusivated which is normally the case for nouns placed in class 9.

Today foreign words are widely used in Northern Sotho, some of which are partially adapted,

while others are completely unadapted. This is mainly due to the fact that most Sotho people want to be associated with the 'prestige' languages, and the closer their pronunciation is to the prestige terminology, the higher their status is elevated towards that of the English and Afrikaans community. Today there is what we may call 'pronunciation evolution' of the borrowed lexical items in most Bantu languages, because the borrowing languages try to imitate the original pronunciation of the borrowed words, and most Northern Sotho speakers prefer to pronounce the foreign words, especially the prestige terminology, in the same way as the mother tongue speakers pronounce the words, e.g.

<b>ilektrisithi</b>	instead of	<b>elektriki</b>	'electricity'
<b>helikhoptha</b>	instead of	<b>helikhoptara</b>	'helicopter'
<b>mishen</b>	instead of	<b>mmissini</b>	'mission'
<b>dram</b>	instead of	<b>teromo</b>	'drum'
<b>khompyutha</b>	instead of	<b>khomphutha</b>	'computer'
<b>erial</b>	instead of	<b>eriale</b>	'aerial'
<b>Septhemba</b>	instead of	<b>Setemere</b>	'September'
<b>silva</b>	instead of	<b>silebere</b>	'silver'

Hockett (1958:414) comments as follows on the prestige attached to the imitation of pronunciation:

“A style of pronunciation can also be imitated, usually for prestige reasons, without specific reference to a particular word. Modern Castilian Spanish /θ/ was formerly a spirant of the general type of [s]; the change to [θ] is said to have arisen because the king had a lisp, which others found it advisable to imitate.”

This means that anything associated with people of high rank (the king) 'is always right' even though in the real sense it may not be correct. This shows the impact of prestige in the development of languages.

### 2.2.2 Indirect borrowing

While direct borrowing is said to refer to the borrowing of words from foreign languages, indirect borrowing is found where a foreign or a new concept is taken over, and not the word itself. In most cases such a concept is associated with an indigenous word. This type of borrowing usually leads to the formation of polysemous words. The word which previously referred to a known concept in Northern Sotho has its meaning extended to refer, also, to the new concept which has closer affinity with the known concept. This type of borrowing is also known as neologism. King (1974:73) comments as follows in this regard:

“Apart from the borrowing of concepts and their symbolizations from other languages and the conscious symbolizations of new concepts, virtually all new concepts are symbolized by appropriating the symbolizations of already existing semantic units. These symbolizations thus acquire new meanings which coexist with the old ones or drive them out.”

Hockett (1958:411) refers to this type of borrowing as *loanshift*, which he defines as follows:

“When confronted with a new object or practice for which words are needed, the borrower may not accept the donor’s words along with the new cultural item. Instead, he may somehow adapt material already in his own language. The precise adaptation, however, may be in one way or another patterned on the donor’s verbal behaviour. In any case, a new idiom arises, and since it arises under the impact of another linguistic system, it is a *loanshift*.”

The following are examples of indirect borrowing in Northern Sotho:

<b>go aloga</b>	for	‘to graduate’
<b>sealoga</b>	for	‘graduate’
<b>sehlare</b>	for	‘medicine’
<b>ngaka</b>	for	‘doctor’

<b>moditi</b>	for	'leader'
<b>Hlogo</b>	for	'Principal'
<b>peolwane</b>	for	'aeroplane'
<b>morodi</b>	for	'bullet'

Neologism usually leads to polysemy and ambiguity in languages, since the borrower uses words already existing in his own language to refer also to the new concept or object, and the word is ultimately affected by meaning extension (as we shall see later in this chapter under the consequences of foreign acquisition). For example, the word **go aloga** existed long before schools, colleges and universities existed among the Northern Sotho people, referring to the act of graduating from the initiation schools. The word today refers to the graduation of students from educational institutions. In the same way, the word **sealoga** used to refer to someone who has completed training in the initiation school and today the word refers, also, to graduates from the educational institutions. Traditional doctors used parts of trees such as roots, leaves, etc. to make medicines, and these traditional medicines were named **dihlare** 'trees' (singular: **sehlare** 'tree'), and today the word **sehlare** refers also to the Western medicine used in hospitals by the medical practitioners. The word **ngaka** used to refer only to a traditional doctor (or a witchdoctor) and not to Western medical practitioners as it is applied today. **Moditi** is a leader in the initiation school, but the word is sometimes used to refer to leaders in all the institutions. As a result of neologism, words refer to more than one meaning and therefore, they tend to be polysemous and ambiguous.

### 2.3 Prestige as motive for foreign acquisition (borrowing)

There are many reasons which lead to borrowing in languages. Some of these reasons include, inter alia, the closing of cultural and communication gaps in the borrowing languages, linguistic innovation, etc. Of all these, the prestige motive seems to be one of the major reasons underlying foreign acquisition in most languages. Mackey & Ornstein (1979:284) comment as follows in this regard:

"There seem to be several reasons for borrowing foreign words. According to

Weinreich (1953), one reason is linguistic innovation. When new things or concepts are learned by one culture from another, there arises a linguistic need to name them in its own language. It may innovate new words to name them, or it may directly borrow ready-made foreign words. Another reason for borrowing is considered to be social prestige. People who want to exhibit their familiarity with foreign culture, especially so-called prestige cultures, tend to use foreign words as proud evidence of such familiarity.”

Foreign acquisition is manifested in a contact situation where, for various reasons, different cultures come into contact with each other and interact. According to Mackey and Ornstein (1979:277), the conditions and results of such interaction are often studied and discussed in terms of culture diffusion, acculturation, culture exchange or culture learning. This statement is confirmed by Giglioli (1975:223):

“Whenever two or more speech communities maintain a prolonged contact within a broad field of communication, there are cross-currents of diffusion.”

This simply means that there is a symbiotic process going on between the contacting cultures whereby both languages have a system of ‘give and take’, even though the process does not always take place at the same rate. Some cultures give too much and take very little, while others borrow too much and give their counterparts very little as a result of the inequality of status between the cultures. In the case of languages, a prestige language will turn out to be a donor language while the languages which are regarded to be low in status turn out to be receivers of foreign terminologies and cultures, or borrowing languages. This is due to the fact that the speakers of inferior languages admire the prestige languages and they try to associate themselves with the speakers of these (prestige) languages. That is why most speakers of the inferior languages strive to learn to speak the prestige languages or just to use some of the terminology of the prestige languages in their own languages. At the same time the speakers of the prestige languages develop a superiority complex, and do not bother to learn the languages of the inferior communities, since most of them believe that these languages will take them nowhere because they are ‘useless’. This notion is based on the faulty perception that the low-status languages,

express cultures which are still primitive and the prestige languages do not want to degrade their standards by associating with inferior languages. The 'prestige' motive for borrowing terminology from the status languages is stressed by Ullmann (1951:63) as follows:

“The motive force behind borrowing is *prestige*. A nation must be looked upon as worthy of imitation in general, or at least in some particular sphere, before its words begin to be taken over. This is best shown when two or more languages of unequal status are found within the same State.”

The status of the language is equated to the status of the community which speaks that language, and there are several factors which elevate and sustain the status of the community and its language, such as **political power, numerical domination and economic advancement**.

### 2.3.1 Political domination

Political domination is always associated with military power (or numerical strength in the case of democratic states) since a group can hardly rule over other groups if it is not superior militarily. The group which is politically dominant is accorded a high social status in the community and, its language also, shares the status of its people, while at the same time the people who are overwhelmed politically, automatically occupy a lower social status and their languages get inferior status. Under these circumstances, the language with a low status will borrow more lexical items from the prestige language and not vice versa. Ullmann (1951:63) gives the situation regarding borrowing between Celtic and English as an example:

“Why, it has been asked, are there so few Celtic words in English whereas the Celtic vernaculars abound in English terms? Jespersen believes that the reason is to be sought in the social position of the two speech-communities. For the conquered Celts it was a sign of distinction to interlard their speech with English tags, whereas it would never have occurred to them to introduce their own homely expressions into their English. The prestige factor is also responsible for all the affectations, mannerisms and snobbery that often govern the use of foreign

words.”

### 2.3.1.1 The influence of Colonialism

Colonialism played a very important role in the development of prestige languages in Africa. Not only did it lead to the establishment of colonies which were politically subordinates of the major European Powers, but it also had far reaching consequences in the lexical development of the African languages. These Colonial Powers were, inter alia, the following: the Germans in Tanganyika, Zanzibar, South West Africa; the French in North, West and Central Africa; the Italians in countries such as Abyssinia and Eritrea; the Portuguese in areas such as Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique), Portuguese West Africa (Angola), and Portuguese Guinea; the Belgians in the Congo; as well as the British, who occupied most of the African territories during the scramble for Africa in the 19th century, especially the Southern and Central parts of Africa as well as territories such as the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone and Nigeria in the West and some Northern territories such as Egypt and Sudan. These Colonial Powers introduced their languages as official languages of administration in the colonies. As conquerors and political powers, their languages became very important to the residents of the colonies, especially the indigenous people, who found it a prestige to know the languages of their ‘masters’. The indigenous people did not only have a desire to know the languages of their rulers but wanted to be identified with them. For instance, in the French colonies such as Senegal, Algeria, Congo Brazzaville, Ivory Coast, etc. the indigenous people became proud of speaking the French language or just to use some of the French terminology in their languages. And in this way, borrowing was facilitated, which ultimately led to the enrichment of the vocabulary of the African languages, while the French people in these colonies did not even bother to learn the African languages since they believed they would have little, or nothing, to gain from the languages of the ‘inferior’ indigenous people who, according to them, needed to be civilised by the introduction of Christianity, and the establishment of schools where they would formally learn to speak the language of the ‘civilised’ people. As a result, the French language gained very little from the vocabulary of the indigenous people. The same process took place in territories which were colonised by the Italians, the Germans, the Belgians, the Portuguese and the British. For instance, in the southern part of Africa, in areas such as Rhodesia (Zimbabwe and Zambia), Nyassaland (Malawi), Bechuanaland

(Botswana), Swaziland and South Africa, English became a prestige language, while Portuguese became important in Mozambique, Portuguese Guinea and Angola. Kamwangamalu (1997:89) remarks as follows on the significance of colonialism in the development of prestige languages in Zaire and Zambia:

“As a result of colonization French is the official language of Zaire; and English is one of the official languages of Zambia. In addition to French in Zaire four local languages, Ciluba, Lingala, Kikongo and Swahili have the status of ‘national languages’; while in Zambia, in addition to English, six local languages namely Bemba, Nyanja, Lunda, Lozi, Lovale, and Kaonde also have the status of official language. In terms of their social status the local languages and French in Zaire or English in Zambia coexist in a diglossic relationship, where French and English are H(igh) and the local languages are L(ow).”

#### 2.3.1.2 English and Afrikaans in South Africa

In South Africa, the African languages borrowed much from both English and Afrikaans. Afrikaans, which originated largely from the previous Colonial Power of the Cape, i.e. the Dutch (during the rule of the Council of Seventeen (the Dutch East India Company)), was also admired by the indigenous people as the language of the rulers for many years before English came to be introduced in Southern Africa. English was established as an official language only after the fall of the Batavian rule in 1806 (during the Napoleonic Wars). The Great Trek and the ultimate establishment of several Boer (Afrikaner) Republics in the then hinterland of South Africa, especially in the Orange Free State, Natal and the Transvaal, where the Afrikaans speaking Afrikaners became rulers, helped to elevate Afrikaans to become a prestige language in these areas. Even though the Boer Republics were later annexed, as a result of the imperialist attitudes of British officials such as Sir Benjamin Disraeli, Cecil John Rhodes, etc. (who applied ‘the Cape of Good Hope Punishment Act’ which prescribed difficult conditions for the Boer Republics before Britain could recognise their sovereignty), South Africa was unified in 1910 with a constitution granting universal suffrage to the South African White community, and both English and Afrikaans became official languages. Consequently, both Afrikaans and English played major

roles in the development of the vocabulary of the African languages in South Africa since these languages were looked upon as prestige languages. Between these two status languages, most of the indigenous people, especially the Northern Sothos, borrowed more from Afrikaans than English. This is due to the fact that the Afrikaners outnumbered the English, and also, the fact that most Afrikaners were farmers and, as such, were always neighbours to the indigenous people who were mostly found in the rural areas, while most English were found in the developing urban centres. Afrikaans and English, as languages of the rulers, acquired very little terminology from the speakers of African languages. Besides the fact that the White communities, i.e. the British and the Afrikaners, were reluctant to learn the African languages, the indigenous people also, especially those who could speak these prestige languages fluently, did not want to introduce or to use the terminology of their own languages in their English or Afrikaans, since this would reduce the little prestige they had acquired by their knowledge of the prestige languages. The tendency of mixing the terminology of one's vernacular when speaking a second language is usually observed among people who are not yet conversant with the second language, and as such, for a Sotho person to speak English or Afrikaans using some of the Sotho terms will be a sign to others that he/she does this because he/she is running short of the vocabulary of the prestige language, and that is why speakers of an African language try to avoid this 'mistake' to sustain their prestige. Contrary to this fact, the indigenous people enjoy employing as much prestige terminology as possible from the languages of their rulers when speaking their own vernacular, especially through code-switching so that other people can realise that they are civilised, and by so doing, the vocabulary of their vernacular is enriched through foreign acquisition while the prestige languages gain very little from the African languages. The following are examples of how Northern Sotho people use English and Afrikaans terminologies in their daily communication, which obviously leads to borrowing:

**mošemane yo o sepela 'thuumatšh'** 'this boy is always moving around' (too much), instead of:  
**mošemane yo o sepela kudu.**

**ga ke je 'phok'** 'I don't eat pork', instead of:  
**ga ke je nama ya kolobe.**

**ke ja di 'pins'**                      'I eat beans'                      instead of:  
**ke ja dinawa.**

**o be a enwa mmeleke**                      'he was drinking milk'                      instead of:  
**o be a enwa maswi.**

**mosetsana yo o 'praet'**                      'this girl is bright (intelligent)' instead of:  
**mosetsana yo o bohlale.**

**ke lekgarebe le le 'slenda'**                      'it is a slender girl'                      instead of:  
**ke lekgarebe le lesese.**

**o senya 'mmoi' ka 'lelek'**                      'he destroys good (Afr: **mooi**) things by bad (Afr: **lelik**)things'  
 instead of: **o senya botse ka bobo.**

**monna yo ke 'dronklap'**                      'this man is a drunkard'                      instead of:  
**monna yo ke letagwa.**

According to Hockett (1958:404):

“People emulate those whom they admire, in speech-pattern as well as in other respects. European immigrants to the United States introduce many expressions into their speech, partly for other reasons, but partly because English is the important language of the country. Upper- and Middle-class Englishmen, in the days after the Norman Conquest, learned French and used French expressions in their English because French was the language of the new rulers of the country.”

The imitator, according to Hockett (1958:404), does not necessarily admire those whom he imitates, but wishes to be identified with them and thus treated as they are.

The political factor does not only relate to the admiration of the ruler's language by the subdued

community, but also to the unilateral decision by the rulers to promote their own languages at the expense of the indigenous languages. Throughout Africa, and the world as a whole, it is a usual policy that those people who hold power make it a point that their languages are given special priority in the society, usually by declaring theirs to be official languages used in law courts, schools, offices of administration in the commercial and business sectors, the churches, etc. The indigenous languages are ignored as if they don't exist. According to Kamwangamalu (1997 :89), colonization has placed the French language in Zaire (the former Belgian Congo which is now the Democratic Republic of Congo) and the English language in Zambia in privileged positions, and even today they are not only official languages in these territories, but also act as lingua franca for the various ethnic groups in their daily communication. Kamwangamalu(1997 :89) says:

“French and English serve as the media for education, administration, diplomacy and international business transactions, and are perceived not only as status symbols, but also as open sesame by means of which one can achieve unlimited upward social mobility. Being able to speak French or English well is something that everyone strives for and it gives the aspiring masses the hope to someday belong to the elite group.”

In South Africa, English and Afrikaans used to be the sole official languages, and were used in all spheres of life. Prior to the establishment of the Bantustan governments, these languages, especially English, were widely used to the extent that the African languages were hardly used, even in the lowest standards in schools. Contrary to the shortcomings which this system had on the development of the African languages (such as Northern Sotho), the speakers of African languages enjoyed the prestige of learning these official languages, and to most of them, if not all, to be educated meant to be able to speak English and Afrikaans fluently. After the establishment of the Verwoerdian policy of Separate Development in the early sixties of this twentieth century, the government encouraged the system of mother tongue education, and this was criticised by most indigenous people, especially the older generations who regarded this as the government's intention to lower the standard of education for their children. Most of the Northern Sotho people, especially those who were educated under the TED (Transvaal Education Department) in the Transvaal criticised the use of mother tongue in schools because, to them, it was a poor

education system. Most of them even today could be heard saying:

“O re o phasitše ‘standard six’ mara ga a kgone le go bolela Seisimane. Ke yona thuto yona yeo? Thuto e fedile le TED. Ka nako ya rena ngwana wa go phasa ‘standard one’ o be a bolela le makgowa a sa kgamakgametše.” ‘He says he has passed standard six but he cannot even speak English. Is that education? Education ceased with the TED. In our time a child who had passed standard one could speak fluently with the Whites.’

The fact that the politicians could manage to indoctrinate the people to believe that there can be no education without a knowledge of a particular language reveals how influential the political factor is on the lives of the people. It is also interesting to note that there are very few people, especially those with little or no education at all, who realise the fact that a prestige language in one country is not always important in another country. In recent interviews with several patients in some government hospitals in the Northern Province, I discovered that many of the patients do not have full confidence in the recently deployed Cuban doctors in these hospitals, especially those who cannot speak English or whose knowledge of English is very poor, and one of the reasons for this is that the people do not believe that a person can become a medical doctor without a knowledge of English. To most speakers of African languages, especially the illiterates, it seems possible for someone to become a witchdoctor without a knowledge of either English or Afrikaans, or both, but not a medical doctor or an academic doctor. The people are not aware of the fact that the South African prestige languages are not regarded as prestigious in the former Portuguese or French colonies. During the Machel era in Mozambique many people could not understand why Samora Machel could be President while they never heard him uttering a word in English. During the Incomati Accord (in a no-man’s land between South Africa and Mozambique) he required an interpreter to interpret what he was saying into English, and vice versa, to have English communications translated into Portuguese for him, which gave the South African people the impression that Machel was not educated, while the people of Mozambique held their President in high esteem for speaking Portuguese fluently (which is a prestige language in their country). When the French President visited our country recently, there was an interpreter to interpret for him when he addressed the South African Parliament, which seemed very strange, especially when considering the fact that the French and the English are ‘next door neighbours’

in Europe but they still needed somebody from Africa to come and help them communicate. This is simply due to the fact that both the French and the English regard their languages as superior in status, and none of them is prepared to submit to the other. In the same way the inability of many visitors from Europe to speak English is marvelled at. They even require other Africans to interpret for them. This seems strange to the South Africans, considering the fact that English is such an important language to them. They can't imagine anyone coming from Europe not being able to speak English.

Borrowing between European languages exists on a very small scale. It is important to realise that most countries and islands in Latin America and the Carribean Sea take Spanish and Portuguese as their status languages since these used to be the languages of their former Colonial Powers, i.e. Spain and Portugal, and these are still languages of education, administration, commerce, etc. in these areas. As such, the Cubans can be educated and acquire any profession without any need for a knowledge of English. The people in Latin America and the West Indies have a respect for English only because of the fact that it is the official language of a 'Super Power' in their neighbourhood (the U.S.A.).

### **2.3.1.3 Directionality of borrowing**

The abovementioned paragraphs lead us to what Mackey and Ornstein (1979:278) refer to as 'directionality of borrowing' between the dominant and the less dominant cultures. Mackey & Ornstein (1979:278) classify borrowing according to the circumstances under which borrowing occurred. According to Mackey and Ornstein (1979:278), we have what they refer to as 'mutual borrowing' or 'non-borrowing'; word-borrowing from the dominant to the subordinate; word-borrowing where a subordinate culture comes in contact with a dominant culture within the same country or within the same political unit, and they cite as example here the languages of the immigrants to America such as the Japanese, Chinese, Italian, German and the Swedish languages which have borrowed words from the American English much more heavily than vice versa; and word-borrowing where there are a main culture and more than two subcultures within the same country, and the subcultures borrow words heavily from the main culture but among the subcultures word-borrowing or non-borrowing is mutual. As examples here they mention Chinese

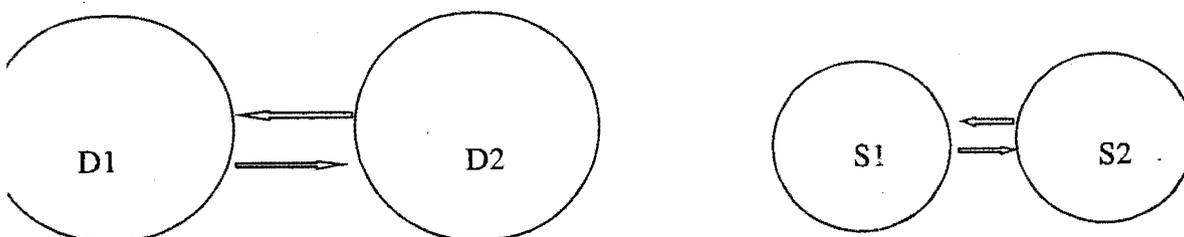
and Japanese spoken in the United States which use a great number of words borrowed from American English but with little word-borrowing between the Chinese and the Japanese languages. They (1979:278) say:

“Mutual borrowing or non-borrowing takes place when two cultures in contact are equally dominant or not dominant, or when their dominance-subordination relationship is not clearly established. This is almost a theoretical case, but the cultural relationship between America and Russia in recent years may be considered as an example in this category. There seems to have been little word-borrowing between these two super-powers of the world since the end of the second world war. If one is more dominant or advanced than the other, the directionality of culture learning and subsequent word-borrowing is not mutual but from the dominant to the subordinate. Here we find many examples including the relationship between American culture and Japanese culture. Japanese has borrowed a great number of words from American English but not vice versa.”

The following diagrams illustrate the directionality of borrowing between the countries with equal cultural dominance and those with unequal cultures:

### Diagram 1

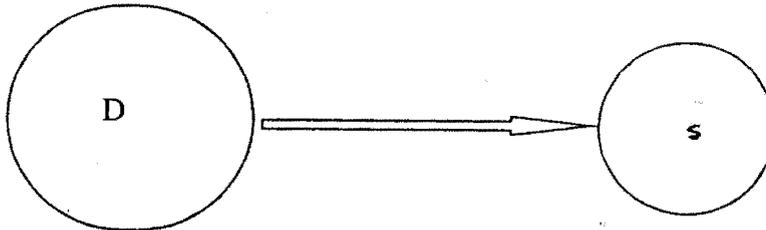
The directionality of borrowing between two equally dominant or subordinate cultures  
(D1 and D2, or S1 and S2)



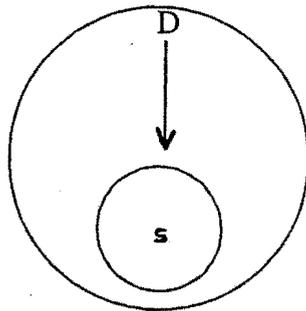
**Diagram 2**

The directionality of borrowing between a dominant culture and a subordinate culture

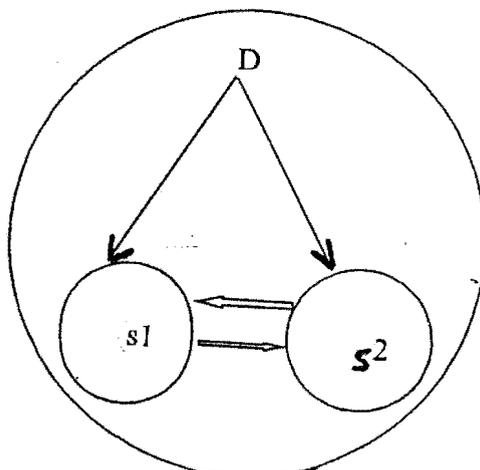
(D) and (s)

**Diagram 3**

The directionality of borrowing between a dominant culture (D) and a subordinate culture (s) within the same country:

**Diagram 4**

The directionality of borrowing among a dominant culture (D) and subordinate cultures (s1, s2 ---sn) within the same country:



Prestige motive for borrowing, motivated by politics, sometimes occurs in the form of what Hockett (1958:405) refers to as 'dialect borrowing', especially where the speakers of a certain dialect of a language have more political power over the speakers of the other dialects, more probably as a result of the group having numerical domination over the other groups or sometimes as a result of their military strength over the speakers of other dialects. Hockett (1958:405) says the following in this regard:

“The prestige motive is constantly operative in dialect borrowing; it becomes important in language borrowing only under special conditions. When speakers of two different languages live intermingled in a single region, usually one of the languages is that spoken by those in power: this is the *upper* or *dominant* language, and the other is the *lower*. Such a state of affairs has most often been brought about by invasion and conquest, more rarely by peaceful migration.”

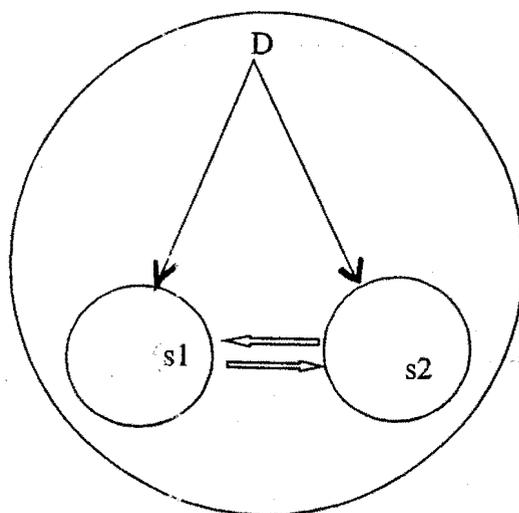
### 2.3.2 Numerical preponderance

Languages sometimes get superior status when spoken by the majority. The people whose languages or dialects are in the minority tend to associate themselves with the majority by speaking the languages of the majority. This is usually the case with immigrants from other countries who, for fear of being discriminated against as foreigners, have a desire to be associated with the majority of the people by incorporating as many lexical items as possible in their languages. In South Africa, for instance, there are many illegal immigrants from most parts of Africa, like refugees from Mozambique, Angola, etc. as well as legal immigrants from other parts of the world. They are usually in the minority, and as such, these immigrants make it one of their priorities to learn to speak the languages of the majority so as to be associated with them. The fact that some of the lexical items of the majority languages usually have synonyms in the borrowing languages, shows that prestige as the main dominating factor cannot be overlooked in this regard.

With regard to conformity to majority, Hockett (1958:404) remarks as follows:

“However, there is one negative variety of prestige which must not be overlooked: that of conformity with the majority. Naturally, this is more operative under some social conditions than others. A child moved at an early school age from one part of the United States to another changes his style of English in the direction of that of his new age-mates in school and playground. This is not necessarily through direct imitation of some single outstanding playmate, but simply because it is discomfoting to be in the minority. Here, as often, different prestige models may disagree. The child’s parents and teachers probably say *John and I are going*, while the predominant usage of the child’s age-mates is *me and John are going*. For a time, at least, the drive for conformity within the age group is apt to take precedence.”

With regard to foreign acquisition, the numerical factor played a minor role in the development of Northern Sotho vocabulary. Speakers of African languages such as Zulu, Sotho, Xhosa, etc. always outnumber the Whites, except perhaps in a few places in the urban areas. Even in the metropolitan areas of the Witwatersrand, where Whites are found in large numbers, Blacks are in the majority. Contrary to expectation, however, the principle of the languages of the majority influencing the languages of the minority does not operate. Although English and Afrikaans are always comparatively in the minority, they function as donor languages of prestige terminology in Northern Sotho. Therefore, even though the African languages dominate numerically, White culture dominated over the African culture and the situation is equivalent to what Mackey and Ornstein (1979:280) refer to as ‘the directionality of borrowing among a dominant culture (D) and subordinate cultures (s1, s2) within the same country’, as illustrated in the following diagram:



### 2.3.3 Economic power

Just like political dominance, economic dominance plays a major role in the elevation of a community and its language to a prestige status. The country with the superior economy will, as a matter of fact, occupy a superior status among its neighbours, and its community will always be looked upon with prestige by other communities. For instance, the people in South and North America have a respect for the U.S.A. because of its viable economy and, as a result, the English language, which is official in the United States, is associated with this economic prosperity and everyone in this part of the globe strives to know this 'prestige' language in order to associate himself with economic prosperity. In Southern Africa, for example, the South African economy is dominating the economy of the whole sub-continent, and the neighbouring countries such as Swaziland, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Angola, Zambia, Mozambique, Botswana and Malawi (the SADC countries) admire the South African economy. The economy of South Africa is estimated to surpass that of the abovementioned countries combined, 'ten - to - one' in strength. Many people from these neighbouring states come to seek work in South Africa, and they don't only regard the South African people as superior in status but also their languages, which most of them strive to know in order to associate themselves with the people of South Africa. For example, in several interviews I had with legal and illegal refugees from Mozambique, who used to be found in camps in the former Gazankulu areas of Phalaborwa, Bushbuckridge and Giyane (areas under the former Gazankulu Bantustan government, which used to be the only place where these refugees were given asylum before the 1994 elections in South Africa), I discovered that most of these refugees try their level best to avoid speaking the Mozambican Tsonga dialect and they try to adjust their Tsonga language to resemble that of the South African Tsonga-Shangaan people in order to associate themselves with the South African Tsonga which, to them, is a prestige dialect, since the economic status of the Tsonga-Shangaan in South Africa was always superior to that of the Tsonga-Shangaan in Mozambique. I also discovered that most of these refugees, especially those I met at Majeje and Matiko-Xikaya villages in Phalaborwa, do not only practise the Tsonga dialect of South Africa in avoiding their dialect which is full of Portuguese accent and vocabulary, but could also speak some of the South African languages such as Northern Sotho and Zulu. Most of the illegal refugees learn the South African languages for

prestige and also as a means of disguise to avoid arrest and repatriation to their country which they no longer want to see again because of fear of hunger, starvation and civil unrest caused by the Renamo guerillas (which they refer to as **Maphyanga**). Most of them went to the extent of changing names and identity to become full citizens of the Republic of South Africa. The respect for the South African people is usually observed when one visits the neighbouring states during holidays or when on business tours. Most of the people from these areas (especially Mozambicans) do not differentiate between South Africa and Johannesburg, since most of the older generation in their communities once worked on the Reef as migrant labourers. In Maputo, for example, the South African tourists could on several occasions hear the indigenous people saying **ivayeni vha ku huma Johane**, literally meaning ‘they are visitors from Johannesburg’ even though the visitors may be coming from Cape Town or any part of the Republic of South Africa. The same thing can be observed with most people in Zimbabwe, Zambia, etc. who don’t distinguish between South Africa and Johannesburg because when they think of Johannesburg they think of money and a high standard of living. As a result of South Africa’s economic domination of this sub-continent, all the languages spoken in this country became status languages to the people in the neighbouring states.

#### **2.4 The gap-filling motive**

This motive for word borrowing is properly defined by McMahon (1994:201) as follows:

“The most common and obvious motive (for borrowing) is sheer necessity: speakers may have to refer to some unfamiliar object or concept for which they have no word in their own language.”

This is more or less similar to what Hockett (1958:405) refers to as the need-filling motive for borrowing. Even though Hockett does not seem to associate this motive with prestige, their relatedness cannot be ruled out in the sense that the languages which ‘fill up vocabulary gaps’ are always languages of inferior communities, while the prestige languages do not borrow much from the ‘inferior’ languages to fill up their gaps, even though the vocabulary ‘gaps’ do exist. Hockett (1958:405) says:

“We can imagine a British sailing-vessel in China waters in the earliest days of the China trade, manned by a mixed crew. A Chinese crewman notices a cloud-formation on the horizon and in terror cries out his word for the kind of storm that impends. After the storm, the English speaking members of the crew are all too willing to admit that it is unlike anything in their previous experience and needs its own name; they adopt the Chinese word *typhoon*.”

Even though it might be accepted that ‘prestige’ languages, like English, German, etc. express highly developed and rich cultures, it should also be considered that the African languages also have unique cultures which the English language cannot express, and as such, there are gaps in the European languages which need to be filled by borrowing terminology from the African languages in Africa. Unfortunately, very few of such gaps are filled due to the fact that the superiority complex of these prestige languages do not allow them to borrow much from the indigenous languages. Some of the few terms borrowed by English from the African languages include words such as **lobola**, from the Nguni and the Tsonga-Shangaan languages, which refers to the act of paying a stipulated amount of money or a number of cattle by the bridegroom to the family of the bride as arrangement for marriage; **marula**, which is a Sotho word referring to the fruits of *the morula* (the name of a tree which bears **marula** fruits) which are used by the indigenous people to make ‘**marula beer**’, etc. The fact that many of these words do not generally appear in English dictionaries means that most of the English users just use them in informal situations, and as such, the words are not yet officially adopted into the English vocabulary, even though the English language does not have original words of its own to refer to these concepts which are unique to the South African situation. In contrast to this, however, there are many English and Afrikaans words which are borrowed into Northern Sotho to fill the gaps which originated as a result of Western culture, or cultures which were initially unknown to the Sotho people. The fact that the acquisition of foreign words took place on a large scale from the English and Afrikaans cultures to the Bantu languages, like Northern Sotho, and less from the Bantu languages into English and Afrikaans does not imply that the ‘gaps’ which exist in the vocabulary of the White languages are too narrow. The fact of the matter is that the high status of these languages does not permit the English and Afrikaners to absorb too much of the inferior culture and its terminology ‘which does not seem to be as important as theirs’. For instance, the

following words are borrowed to fill the communication gaps which existed in the Northern Sotho vocabulary as a result of Western civilization (the concepts referred to here were initially unknown to the Sotho people):

<b>puku</b>	from English	'book'
<b>selula</b>	from English	'cellular phone'
<b>khomphutha</b>	from English	'computer',
<b>pata</b>	from Afrikaans	<b>pad</b> 'road'
<b>khekhe</b>	from English	'cake'
<b>khefi</b>	from English	'café'
<b>Ebangedi</b>	from English	'Evangelism'
<b>thaere</b>	from English	'tyre'

In this way, Northern Sotho absorbs these new terms to fill the communication 'gap' which existed in its vocabulary, thereby expanding its vocabulary faster than the 'prestige' languages do. On the other hand, the few terms acquired by the prestige languages from the inferior and minority languages were absorbed into the vocabulary of the superior languages because of the need-filling motive. Hockett (1958:405) comments as follows regarding the need-filling motive of foreign acquisition:

"The new experiences, new objects and practices, bring new words into a language. It does not matter whether the new objects and practices come to the community, by way of what anthropologists call *diffusion*, or the community goes to the new objects and practices, by way of migration; the result is the same. *Tea, coffee, tobacco, sugar, cocoa, chocolate, tomato* have spread all over the world in recent times, along with the objects to which the words refer. Typhoons and monsoons have not spread, but direct or indirect experience with them has."

In his concluding remarks, Hockett (1958:606) shows how both the prestige and the need-filling motives usually interact:

“Immigrants to the United states in the last seventy-five years have drawn heavily on English for new words, partly on the prestige basis and partly for need-filling purposes: the two motives must often be mingled, and we cannot always say which was more important in a given instance. In exchange, however, American English has acquired only a sparse scattering of need-filling loans from the various languages of the immigrants: *delicatessen, hamburger, wiener, zwieback* from immigrant German, *chile con carne, tortilla* from Mexican Spanish, *spaghetti, ravioli, pizza, grinder (sandwich)* from Italian (the last perhaps from *grande* ‘big one’), *chow mein, chop suey* from Chinese - to stick to the sphere of humble foodstuffs.”

## 2.5 The consequences of foreign acquisition in Northern Sotho

Borrowing leads to far reaching consequences in the development of languages, especially changes in the morphological, phonological, syntactical, and the semantic system of the languages. Besides the phonological changes occurring when words are borrowed and ultimately adopted in the lexicon of the borrowing languages, many lexical items undergo semantic shifts. In some cases, borrowing results in ambiguity. While the obvious consequence of borrowing is the increase in the vocabulary of the languages that borrow, the fact that borrowing is the result of cultural contact means that it also leads to the rise of the pidgin languages. In Northern Sotho, borrowing leads to, inter alia, the following consequences:

### 2.5.1 Morphophonological changes

English and Afrikaans words borrowed into the vocabulary of Northern Sotho are subjected to the phonological and morphological system of Northern Sotho. The following are examples of some of the phonological changes affecting consonants in borrowed lexical items:

The sound [k] changes to [tʰ]; [v] changes to [β]; [b] changes to [pʰ]; [g] changes to [kʰ], etc. as in the following examples:

<b>tlelase</b>	from	'class'	(English),	<b>klas</b>	(Afrikaans)
<b>tlelereke</b>	from	'clerk'	(English)	<b>klerk</b>	(Afrikaans)
<b>bese</b>	from	'verse'	(English)		
<b>bene</b>	from	'van'	(English)		
<b>poroto</b>	from	'board'	(English)		
<b>poraše</b>	from	'brush'	(English)		
<b>keiti</b>	from	'gate'	(English)		
<b>karatšhe</b>	from	'garage'	(English)		

The loanwords comply with the syllabic structure of Northern Sotho:

- (a) CV (consonant + vowel), where C represents any consonantal phoneme, e.g. **karatšhe** or
- (b) V (vowel), e.g. **keiti** or
- (c) C (syllabic consonant), e.g. **setempe**.

The loanwords are also made to conform to the morphological characteristics in order to be fully integrated into the grammatical system of the language. In the case of nouns where the initial phoneme does not suggest a particular class prefix and the word does not have an initial plosive sound (e.g. '**bene**'), such words are treated as belonging to class 9/10. Loanwords mostly end in vowels in order to comply with the general open syllable structure of Northern Sotho, i.e. CV, e.g.

<b>setereke</b>	<b>streek</b>	(Afrikaans)	'district'
<b>setempe</b>	'stamp'	(English)	
<b>laeta</b>	'light'	(English)	
<b>khurukhu</b>	'crook'	(English)	
<b>lefithi</b>	'lift'	(English)	
<b>lesene</b>	'lesson'	(English)	
<b>Aporele</b>	'April'	(English and Afrikaans)	
<b>lepolanka</b>	'plank'	(English and Afrikaans)	

### 2.5.2 The rise of semantic shifts

One very important result of cultural contact and borrowing is a change in the meaning of lexical items. Moyo (1995:187) quotes Bloomfield as follows, with regard to cultural contact and semantic shifts:

“It is a natural phenomenon that when languages come into contact they do change (Bloomfield, 1950; Lyons, 1981).”

According to Ronald Langacker (1967:179):

“Living languages never hold still. Every language is the product of change and will continue to change as long as it is spoken.”

Ullmann’s (1951:65) remark about change of meaning reads as follows:

“A *change of meaning* will arise whenever there is some alteration in that basic relationship. Such alteration can take two forms: a new sense may be added to an old name, or a new name to an old sense.”

Stern (1931:163) defines semantic shift as:

“The habitual modification among a comparatively large number of speakers of the traditional semantic range of the word, which results from the use of the word to denote one or more referents, which it has not previously denoted.”

Ullmann (1951:64) makes the following observation regarding the role of foreign acquisition, especially coinage, in the development of semantic shifts in languages:

“Coinages, word-formation and borrowing succeed between them in filling many of the gaps in our store of words. But it is doubtful whether language could

efficiently cope with the steadily growing demands made on it by modern life if it did not have a more subtle and flexible method at its disposal: the addition of new senses to existing words.”

As a result of foreign acquisition, the meaning of a word may be widened to include referents which it did not mean before; or the word may acquire a restricted or specific meaning, thereby losing some of the referents it had previously referred to. And, lastly, the word may completely lose its basic meaning and refer to a new concept altogether.

Ullmann (1951:70) remarks as follows in this regard:

“Having severed their links with rhetoric and put semantics ‘on the map’ as an autonomous branch of language study, Bréal and other late nineteenth-century scholars subjected changes of meaning to logical analysis. They found that the range of the old sense and the new provided a very handy framework since only three possibilities had to be considered. The old meaning could be either wider than the new, or narrower, or on the same footing. No fourth alternative was conceivable.”

#### 2.5.2.1 Meaning extension and ambiguity

In shift of meaning, the meanings of words, especially existing words, are generalised to refer to those concepts which the words did not previously refer to. Mojela’s (1991:58) definition of meaning extension is as follows:

“Meaning extension can be regarded as the addition of secondary meaning, or meanings, to a word. The word which initially had a particular meaning, comes to express a more general meaning. It is consequently applied in a wider range of syntagmatic relationships.”

Meaning extension is common in neologism and usually leads to ambiguity, since the

generalisation of the meaning of words obviously results in the word having more than one referent, thus becoming polysemous and ambiguous. The following Northern Sotho lexical items have undergone meaning extension to incorporate the meaning of new concepts which originated with foreign culture, i.e.

<b>tšhwana</b>	‘traditional knitting instrument’ (basic meaning) ‘sewing needle’ ‘knitting needle’ ‘hypodermic syringe’
<b>mmila</b>	‘animal path’ (basic meaning) ‘road’ ‘highway’
<b>selepe</b>	‘an axe’ (basic meaning) ‘judicial court sentence’ ‘traditional court sentence’
<b>serumola</b>	‘a burning splinter’ (basic meaning) ‘a torch’
<b>hlogo</b>	‘a head’ (basic meaning) ‘rector’ ‘manager’ ‘principal’

The coined words have a basic meaning as well as one, or more added secondary meanings to refer to the newly acquired concepts. For instance, the word **tšhwana** basically used to refer to a traditional Sotho instrument used for knitting, but today the word refers also to the modern medical practitioner’s hypodermic syringe, an ordinary sewing needle, or a knitting needle. **Mmila** is a Sotho word which basically refers to a path made by animals, but today the word refers also

to a public or private road. **Selepe** basically refers to ‘an axe’, but the word today is sometimes used, figuratively, to refer to a judgement in court. **Serumola** used to refer to a burning splinter, but today the word is also used to mean ‘a torch’. Since these words are polysemous, they tend to be ambiguous when used in sentences, e.g.

<b>Lephodisa le swere hlogo</b>	‘the policeman caught the head’	(literal meaning)
	‘the policeman arrested the principal’	
	‘the policeman arrested the manager’	
	‘the policeman arrested the leader’	
<b>Selepe se remile</b>	‘the axe has cut’	(literal meaning)
	‘the sentence is passed’	
<b>Ba kitima mmileng</b>	‘they are running in the animal path’	(literal meaning)
	‘they are running in the road’	
	‘they are running on the highway’	
<b>O swere serumola</b>	‘he is holding a burning splinter’	(literal meaning)
	‘he is holding a torch’	

Semantic extension also occurs with loanwords, and in this case, the loanwords usually express the basic meaning of the foreign language as well as the secondary meaning given to it by the borrowing language, as in the following examples:

<b>namuneiti</b>	‘lemonade’	(basic meaning)
	‘cold drink’	(secondary meaning)
<b>sekontiri</b>	‘tar’	(from Afrikaans <b>skoonteer</b> ) (basic meaning)
	‘tarred road’	(secondary meaning)
<b>tšhekase</b>	‘Checkers’ (a supermarket)	(basic meaning)



‘woman school teacher’

The Afrikaans words **betaal** ‘pay’ and **kamer** ‘room’ are borrowed into the Northern Sotho vocabulary as **-patela** and **kamora**. **-Patela** ‘pay’ is restricted to payment by money, while **kamora** ‘room’ refers to ‘bedroom’ and not to just any room, as illustrated below:

**-patela** (‘pay’)                    ‘money payment’

**betaal** (Afr.) (‘pay’)        ‘payment by money’  
    ‘payment by money or any other means’

**kamora** (‘room’)                ‘bedroom’

**kamer** (Afr.) (‘room’)    ‘bedroom’  
    ‘bathroom’  
    ‘kitchen’  
    ‘classroom’  
    ‘dining room’

### 2.5.2.3 Complete shift of meaning

Beside meaning restriction and meaning extension, lexical items sometimes undergo radical meaning change. In this case, the meaning change may occur through meaning restriction when the lexical item loses its basic meaning and retains a secondary meaning. With regard to loan words, the word is adopted with a different meaning to that of its counterpart in the ‘donor’ language. In some cases the lexical item is adopted in a different word category from that of the original word in the ‘donor’ language, e.g.

From a verb to a noun:

Afrikaans.        **slag** (‘slaughter’) : verb

N.Sotho.        **leselaga** ('butchery') : noun

From adverb to noun:

Afrikaans.     **vanmelewe** ('long long ago') : adjective

N.Sotho.        **lefamolele** ('person who doesn't return home') : noun

From adjective to noun:

Afrikaans.     **wild** ('wild') : adjective or ('game') : noun

N.Sotho.        **lebelele** ('wild, or untamed animal, or a wild person' (figurative)) : noun

Besides changing their word category, adoptives may shift to a completely different meaning altogether from what the original word refers to, as in the following examples:

<b>-maketa</b>	from English	'market'
<b>koulo</b>	from English	'goal'
<b>semaušu</b>	from Afrikaans	<b>smous</b> 'hawker'

The loanword **mmakete** refers to 'a person who is looking for a job' and **-maketa** refers to 'the act of looking for a job'. These words are derived from the English word 'market', which as a noun refers to 'a place of supply and demand' and as a verb describes 'the act of selling and buying'. These meanings differ completely from that of the Sotho loanword. The same case is found with the word **koulo** which refers to 'a soccer ball' while its English counterpart, 'goal', refers to 'the pair of posts into which the ball has to be sent to score points' (Watson, 1968:452). The Afrikaans word **smous** is synonymous to the English word 'hawker' which refers to 'a person who peddles goods, especially from a cart etc. moving from place to place shouting out his wares' (Watson, 1968:494). The Sotho loanword **semaušu**, which is derived from this Afrikaans word (**smous**), refers to something different from what the Afrikaans word signifies, i.e. a temporary edifice used as a shop. **Dimaušu** (plural for **semaušu**) can be said to be synonymous

to what are today generally referred to as 'spaza shops'.

### 2.5.3 Enrichment of vocabulary and euphemism

The obvious consequence of foreign acquisition is the enrichment of the lexicon of the borrowing language while, at the same time, the donor language has nothing to lose in this borrowing. Today, almost one third of the vocabulary of Northern Sotho is made up of words borrowed from English and Afrikaans. Besides the filling up of the cultural gaps in the vocabulary, Northern Sotho has borrowed many lexical items from English and Afrikaans even though Northern Sotho words with the same meanings existed prior to borrowing. This is usually due to the prestige associated with the two official languages, and the Sotho people prefer to use the borrowed words to associate themselves with the White community. As such, there are many synonyms resulting from the duplication of lexical items, i.e. the use of loanwords, from the prestige languages, to replace existing words for the sake of status. Sometimes the loanwords are preferred to existing native terminology as a result of euphemism. Like most speakers of various languages, the Sotho people prefer to use euphemistic words to replace existing terms which express taboo or indecency. Ullmann (1951:77) says:

“The substitution of a harmless or propitiatory alternative for a taboo word is but one aspect of euphemism (from Greek *eu* ‘well’ + *pheme* ‘speaking’), the great veiling and toning-down device applied by language to anything dangerous, sacred or awe-inspiring, and also to anything unpleasant or indecent. We constantly resort to understatement, gentle hints and circumlocutions when we have to break unwelcome news, especially about illness or death; or when we try or pretend to sweeten the pill of criticism, as in Mr. Churchill’s well known phrase: ‘terminological inexactitudes’.”

With regard to the use of foreign words to create euphemistic expression, Stern (1931:331) says:

“A foreign word is substituted, which, being less definite in meaning, is in the

same degree less offensive.”

Stern (1931:331) is of the opinion that a foreign word is more or less a blank, which obediently conforms to the use we make of it, while the indigenous word has numerous undesirable associations with the offensive thing, and means exactly what it means. In Northern Sotho, for instance, there are many borrowed words which are used as substitutes for offensive and indecent indigenous words, such as the following:

<b>-reipa</b>	‘rape’	instead of	<b>-kata</b>
<b>-prophousa</b>	‘propose’, i.e. ‘love proposal’	instead of	<b>-apisa or -loša</b>
<b>makaka</b>	‘feaces’ from Afrikaans <b>kak</b>	instead of	<b>masepa</b>
<b>-preke</b>	‘pregnant’	instead of	<b>-ima</b>
<b>-menstroweita</b>	‘menstruate’	instead of	<b>-bona kgwedi</b>
<b>-tilibara</b>	‘deliver’ i.e. ‘give birth’	instead of	<b>-belega</b>

These words, apart from being associated with prestige languages, i.e. English and Afrikaans, are used by speakers to avoid their own indigenous words which, to them, do not only seem to be offensive and indecent, but are also taboo and, in Stern’s (1931:331) words, they ‘mean exactly what they mean’, while the foreign words do not seem to have the same impact as one’s taboo terminology. Ullmann (1951:75) remarks as follows regarding taboo terminology:

“Taboo is a polynesian term denoting anything sacred and mystically untouchable: a person, an object, or a word. If a word is struck by a taboo ban, it must be replaced by a harmless alternative, a so-called *noa* term. Such customs are by no means confined to primitive societies; they occur in all kinds of environments and at every level of civilisation.”

The ultimate consequence of a desire for prestige and to avoid taboo and offensive terminology is the creation of new terms through borrowing, and this has an advantage of enriching the vocabulary of Northern Sotho.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE USE OF SLANG IN NORTHERN SOTHO**

#### **3.1 Types of slang common in South Africa**

Slang terminology is given a high status by most indigenous people in South Africa, especially the youth. Most of the slang varieties originated in the urban areas as a result of the presence of multilingual societies in these areas. The status accorded to these slang varieties is usually associated with the status of the environment of their origin. The people in the rural areas usually have an inferiority complex and they regard anything originating from the urban areas as superior in status. As such, slang as a product of the urban environment, is given a special status by the youth, even though some scholars such as De Klerk (1991) regard it as a low-prestige variety (basing their arguments on moral grounds more than on the functions and necessity for a language). De Klerk (1991:69) says:

“Being recognized as a group phenomenon, associated with group identity, particularly in the subcultures of youth, slang is generally a low-prestige variety.”

Despite these criticisms, slang terminology is generally preferred by most speakers and continues to dominate informal as well as formal communications. The speakers who use slang terminology regard it to be prestigious when comparing it with the terminologies from their own indigenous languages. The term ‘slang’ is defined by Watson (1968: 1041) as follows:

“Currently widely used and understood language, consisting of meanings attributed to existing words or of wholly new words, generally accepted as lying outside standard polite usage. Originating from the attempt to introduce fresh expression into a language, slang will either usually pass out of usage in time or be accepted into standard usage. A conventional language that is peculiar to a group, profession or

social class, *thieves' slang*, *schoolboy slang*.”

With regard to slang, Bailey (1985:2) remarks as follows:

“Can slang be defined on a purely linguistic basis? Such an approach is superficial and unrevealing since slang is merely the linguistic response to certain patterns of social behaviour.”

Bailey (1985:2) regards slang to be a ‘register’:

“Slang is best described as a ‘register’ or a ‘variety according to use’. It is therefore neither a language nor a dialect in any strict sense.”

Slang results from contact situations between different languages of various status and is in most cases preferred by the youth, especially those whose indigenous languages are ‘low class’ or ‘inferior’ varieties. Some of the most common slang ‘varieties’ found amidst the South African society are the following: (1) *tsotsi-taal* or *flytaal*, which may be classified into many types in accordance with the environment or areas in which they are spoken and the languages influencing the existence of such varieties (which Mfusi (1992:40) refers to as ‘*street lingo*’, ‘*urban slang*’ or ‘*isijita*’), (2) as well as the various language ‘varieties’ which are spoken with mixed terminology (such as code-mixing and code-switching), more especially the indigenous African (or Bantu) languages which are spoken with mixed terminology and structures from prestige languages such as English and Afrikaans. The latter are usually associated with the languages pertaining to particular groups such as the *troopie language* (Picard, 1989), which is the type of language spoken by soldiers in the South African National Defence Force; the language of high school and university students; the *taxi language* which pertains to the vocabulary used in the taxi industry; the *boop language* which refers to a South African prison argot which is almost a replica of the American criminal or prison slang known as *con lingo*, etc. According to McKnight (as cited by Ndlovu, 1963:7) slang is defined as:

“A form of colloquial speech created in a spirit of defiance and aiming at freshness and novelty. Its figures are consciously far-fetched and are intentionally drawn from the most ignoble of sources.”

Ndlovu (1963:7) goes on to say:

“Slang relates not so much to words as to the use made of words. When that use is informal, irregular or whimsical and begins to be widespread, the word is likely to be classed as slang.”

Slang can be defined as a ‘language’ of a highly colloquial type considered as below the level of standard educated speech and consisting either of new words or current words employed in some special way. As basically colloquial, slang is usually used in informal situations with one’s peer groups, and most critics of slang dislike it because they associate it with disrespect and immorality. The youth may not speak to older or senior people using slang terminology because it will show disrespect, while senior people of the same status can communicate among themselves in slang and enjoy the conversation, with no one feeling belittled or having any sort of disparagement. For example, the youth may ask a question in *tsotsi-taal*: *waar blom hom timer?* (‘where does his father stay?’), to his friend or any youth of his age, but he/she may not use the same ‘language’ when talking to a senior person as a sign of respect. Slang is not regarded as a dialect of any language but a register which is employed as a colloquial variety and is considered by some linguists as being below the level of a standard language. In contrast to slang, a standard language is defined by Dittmar (1976:107) as follows:

“That variety of speech community that is legitimized and institutionalized as a supraregional method of communication as a result of various sociopolitical and power political circumstances in the historical process. The standard variety is to some extent codified by means of a series of norms which lay down the correct written and oral usage. It serves as an intersubjective conveyor of information and is

most frequently used in the context of official and social institutions, as well as in all formal contexts where sanctions can be expected if it is not used correctly.”

In the South African situation, most of the so-called ‘slang’ varieties are interrelated and, with the exception of *fanakalo* which is sometimes regarded by some linguists as a pidgin language (with a low status), it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between them. This is usually due to the fact that most of the vocabularies and structures of slang varieties in South Africa evolve around the lexicon and structures of the two former official languages, i.e. Afrikaans and English. Unlike *tsotsi-taal* and other related types of slang which most indigenous communities associate with a high status of the PWV (Pretoria, Witwatersrand and Vereeniging) and other metropolitan areas of South Africa, *fanakalo* has a connotation of low class variety, which may be ascribed to the status associated with the uneducated and mostly unskilled migrant labourers from the neighbouring states (such as Nyassaland and Mozambique), who usually used this variety to communicate with their bosses in the mines. This is the case even though *fanakalo* is a variety which is also spoken in the metropolitan regions which are regarded as ‘prestige’ areas of South Africa. Besides low status resulting from low education and low professional standards, one of the underlying reasons for the inferior status associated with this variety is the fact that it employs a minimal quantity of Afrikaans and English vocabulary (which are prestige languages), while the Nguni languages predominate in the structure and vocabulary of this pidgin language. Unlike *fanakalo* which is basically an inferior variety, most slang varieties such as *flytaal*, *street lingo*, etc. are associated with prestige status by most of the indigenous people, especially the youth. While *fanakalo* is associated with poor, unskilled and uneducated labourers whom the urban youth regard to be *mogos* (stupid), *tsotsi-taal* is associated with the urban youth who, in turn, have connotations of ‘cleverness’ in their behaviour. The vocabulary of most slang varieties such as *flytaal*, *street lingo*, *the troopie language* and *the boop language* is more or less the same, depending on the environment in which the variety is used.

### 3.1.1 *Tsotsi-taal* or *flytaal*

The term *tsotsi-taal* can be translated as *tsotsi* language in English (Afrikaans: *taal* meaning

'language'), i.e. the language which is used by *tsotsis*. This slang originated from a mixture of linguistic subsystems such as the Nguni and the Sotho dialects in the metropolitan areas, especially in the Kimberley and Witwatersrand areas after the discovery of diamonds and gold. The mixture came about as a result of cultural contact between urban Black communities on the one hand and the Whites (the English and Afrikaners) in these areas on the other, coupled with a desire by the youth from the Black community to communicate in the prestige White languages. Lack of sufficient vocabulary of Afrikaans and English resulted in the youth applying the meagre vocabulary they managed to acquire in the course of time (mixing this with the vocabulary of their own vernacular) to communicate among themselves. Most of the vocabulary is derived from English, Afrikaans and other Bantu languages and is used in a metaphorical sense to refer to related concepts. With regard to the term *tsotsi*, Mfusi (1992:39) says:

“The etymology of the term *tsotsi* is uncertain, but from the few informants interviewed it could be gathered that this term originates from *stof-pipe*, a term which was used to refer to the tight fitting trousers which were worn by gangsters in the 40s. The township equivalent for *stof-pipe* was *tsotsi*.”

Coplan (1985:162) defines *tsotsis* as follows:

“Tsotsis were originally young, city-bred ‘confidence men’, able to speak some English and Afrikaans and to manipulate the white system. Aided by female counterparts called *noasisas* (watchers), the *tsotsis* initially relied more upon their wits than violence. The term *tsotsi* itself was an urban African pronunciation of ‘zoot suit’, a symbol of urban sophistication drawn from American popular culture, with its ready money and flashy clothes.”

The birth place for the *tsotsi* language, which became the contact medium for these *tsotsis* is in the black urban areas of the Witwatersrand. Some scholars like Msimang (1987:82) believe that *tsotsis* originated during World War II in the urban centres of the area which is today known as Gauteng.

According to Mfusi (1992:46), *tsotsis* were part of the ethnically mixed society of the locations and among themselves spoke the Afrikaans dialect (*flytaal* or *mensetaal*), and by the 1940s this hybrid Afrikaans had become known more widely as *tsotsi-taal*. Coplan (1985:162) describes *tsotsi-taal* as follows:

“Borrowing heavily from American slang, Johannesburg *tsotsitaal* was eventually spoken by most urban workers and became the language of African working-class culture. As conditions worsened, *tsotsis* turned to robbery, mugging and other violent crimes. Meanwhile the label broadened to include all urban criminals except for the gangs of migrants such as the *maRashea* (Russians) and *Amalaita*. The *tsotsis* were successors to the infamous Blue Nines.”

Unlike in the rural areas where previously the youth did not have access to most Western sophisticated appliances and entertainments, the youth in the urban areas were exposed to modern things such as cinematograph entertainments where they could see Western gangsters in movies. Initially some of the terminology of *tsotsi-taal* or *flytaal* were derived from American gangster languages, especially the terminology they got from these movies. Coertze (1969:394) says the following in this regard:

“In die *flaaitaal* kom ook ‘n hele reeks woorde voor wat direk uit die taal van rampokker- en Wilde Weste- films herlei kan word, bv. *dou* (dough) = geld; *ghraft* (graft) = steel; *marwanas* (*marijuana*) = dagga; *mazoemas* (*mazuma*) = geld; *mol* (moll) = meisie; *rensj* (ranch) = bende; *tjerrie* (cherry van Frans cherie) = jong-meisie; *totsj* (torch) = om te kyk, om te sien; *triegha* (trigger) = pistool; *tsjoet* (shoot) = praat, vertel.”

(“In the *flaaitaal* quite a number of words also occur which can be traced back directly to the language of troublemakers and Wild West films, e.g. *dou* (dough) = money; *ghraft* (graft) = steal; *marwanas* (marijuana) = dagga; *mazoemas* (*mazuma*)

= money; *mol* (moll) = girl; *rensj* (ranch) = gang; *tjerrie* (cherry from French *cherie*) = young girl; *totsj* (torch) = to look out, to see; *triegha* (trigger) = pistol; *tsjoet* (shoot) = talk, tell".)

Even though the structure of *tsotsi-taal* is generally based on that of Afrikaans, one can classify this type of slang into many categories in accordance with the dominant languages of the people speaking this 'language' as well as the environment in which it is spoken. The *tsotsi-taal* which is spoken in the environment where Zulu is dominant will, besides the use of Afrikaans and/or English vocabulary and structures, be dominated by the vocabulary and structure of Zulu, (like Mfusi's (1992) Soweto Zulu slang), while the type of *tsotsi-taal* spoken in the area where the Sotho languages predominate will be dominated by the Sotho vocabulary and structures. The original *tsotsi-taal*, which was commonly known as *flytaal* (or *flaaitaal* - Coertze, 1969) and which was spoken throughout Johannesburg and the surrounding metropolis was predominantly Afrikaans in structure and vocabulary. This domination shifted gradually to the indigenous languages as many people came to speak this 'register', (including those who were not conversant with the Afrikaans language), especially the young generation who had to learn this slang after the 1976 Soweto students' riots which reduced the importance of Afrikaans as a language of education in most Black schools in the Republic of South Africa. Besides the Soweto uprising by students who launched a country-wide boycott of Afrikaans as an official language of education, a shift in the dominating languages was facilitated by the desire for a knowledge of *tsotsi-taal* by most youth in the remote areas which were far from the metropolitan areas and, who did not have regular contact with the Afrikaans speaking communities. Most of the older generations still use the original *flytaal* which is dominated by what Mfusi (1992:46) calls 'hybrid Afrikaans'. Mfusi (1992:47) regards 'Soweto Zulu slang' as a modern version of the original *flytaal* which, (according to him) was spoken in the areas of Johannesburg and surrounding cities:

"The Soweto Zulu slang is the modern version of *tsotsi-taal* which is still much in use by the older generation. The lack of regular contact between the later generations and the Afrikaans-speaking communities had led to the use of Zulu and Sotho as base

languages.”

*Tsotsi-taal* uses lexical items which are usually derived from English and Afrikaans vocabularies in a metaphorical style to refer to different but related concepts, e.g. *waai*, an Afrikaans word referring to ‘blowing’ (by wind) is used metaphorically to mean ‘moving’, ‘leaving’ or ‘going’; *clewa* or *klewe*, from the English word ‘clever’ is used in *flytaal* to refer to a *tsotsi* or their comrades and not necessarily to someone who is wise, but someone who understands their ‘language’ and *tsotsi* tactics. To most of the youth, it is a prestige to be one of the so-called *clewas*, i.e. to be fluent in *flytaal* and to follow their so-called ‘clever’ way of life. The following extract from Coertze’s (1969:399) study of Atteridgeville youth language gives an example of *tsotsi-taal* (or *flaaitaal*, as he calls it) which was recorded from the ‘language’ of the youth or the so-called *tsotsis* at Atteridgeville and which is more or less a replica of the original *tsotsi-taal* which is based on the Afrikaans structure:

*“Ons slaan ‘n moegoe strouk. Die klewe’s los ons, dis die mannes daai. Die bok se mannes ons los hulle, hulle is ok motsiengs bat is spatsa-motsiengs, is die Hepkets. Spatsa-motsiengs is mannes wat nie die taal mang en reelie-reelie tsjoet nie. Ons dam hom bat net as hy so ghieliek mazoemas het. Ons gan nie an soos topsak nie. ‘n Ngamla ons dam hom by die joek-boks, reeds as hy gesop is, die slag as hy moet onsse molle wil mang. Da’ mak hy ons somme’ so ghieliek som. Die mommiesje van die kaas, dis die kou-kou’s, hulle loop nog skool, hulle gloup moe’ die glouper, gan ons nie soos koek nie. Hulle het ok hulle rensje bat hulle is nie brata’s nie, net pelle.”*

(“We rob a stupid person. We leave the cleverers, they are co-*tsotsis*. The coward *tsotsis* we leave too, they are also *tsotsis*, but half *tsotsis*, they are Hepkets. Half *tsotsis* are *tsotsis* who don’t know nor communicate in the ‘language’ (*tsotsi-taal*). We rob him only when he has much money. We don’t rob an old man. A White man we rob at the jukebox when he is drunk, by the time he wants to make love to our girls. Then he gives us too much money. The stupid boys of the location, they are

young boys who still attend school and learn under the teacher, we don't rob them. They have their gang too, but they are not brothers, just friends.”)

A *tsotsi-taal* which is spoken by the youth from the Nguni background is dominated by Afrikaans, English and Nguni terminology while that which is spoken by the youth from the Sotho background is dominated by the terminology from Afrikaans, English and the Sotho languages (especially the Tswana language). Even though this dominance affects all the (indigenous) languages, *tsotsi-taal* in the Transvaal is mostly dominated by Afrikaans, English, Sotho and the Nguni languages. Mfusi (1992:43) gives the following specimen as example of *tsotsi-taal* spoken by the older generation (with Afrikaans as base), compared to the modern versions with Zulu and Sotho as base languages:

#### Text A

Afrikaans based *tsotsi-taal*:

“Speaker X: *Heit, ou beau! Hoezif?*

Speaker Y: *Is dolly, my bra. Verder?*

Speaker X: *Sweet. Jy's bietjie skaars. Waar chaaf  
jy jouself?*

Speaker Y: *Ek is bu die round, my bra. Is net om te sê ek  
het baie dulate. Jy ken mos hoe's lannies.  
Hulle het ons moet zaak. Sê vir my. Waar kan  
ons gaan blom? Ek wil net twee poplas gaan  
blaas. Gisteraand, ek het 'n hajaa van gin genyanya.  
nou voel ek bietjie dors.*

Speaker X: *Is chandies, my bra. Ek is lus vandag. Laat ons  
die magrison gaan vas. Maar jy ken wat. Ek skuld die  
ou lady nog. Ek sê, ek was buro oorla Bhiza se cabin  
gisteraand. Ek het hom toppie gang chinny geche.”*

Text B

Sotho based *tsotsi-taal*:

- “Speaker X: *Heit, Wakithi! Ho joang?*
- Speaker Y: *Ho sharp, Wakithi. Verder?*
- Speaker X: *Ho grand. Ha ke sa hotseba, my bra. O itjhafile waar?*
- Speaker Y: *Ke teng rounding. Taba ke spani. Mos oa tseba hore dingamla di re tshwere ntswempu, di squila le nyoko. A ko njwetse, re ka bloma kae re shape dwesh ya di poplar? Maobane jumpers ke ile ka blasa majasana wa seputla. Nou ke tshwerwe ke setlamatlama.*
- Speaker X: *Ey! Enne ke lus blind vandag, my bra. Keng o sa re re ilo photha magrison a re kenye ko bukeng once. Weer nna ke sa mokolota. Phela ke ne kele ha oorla Bhiza gister ka di ngiba, ka gaya le timer la hae nyoko ebaie.”*

Text C

Zulu based *tsotsi-taal*:

- “Speaker X: *Heit, Wakithi! Kunjani?*
- Speaker Y: *Kusharp, Wakithi. Verder?*
- Speaker X: *Kugrand. Angisakwazi, bra wami. Usitshafa*

*waar?*

Speaker Y: *Ngiserawundini. Indaba yispani. Mos uyazazi izingamla zisiphethe ntswempu, ziyaskwila nenyuku. Awusho, singayobloma waar sishaye noma yidwesh yamapopla? Izolo jumpers ngiblase umajazana wesputla. Nou ngiphethwe yistlamatlama.*

Speaker X: *Ey! Enne ngilus blind vandag, bra wami. Yini singayophotha umagrison, kuvele kube yincwadi once. Futhi mina ngisamkolota. Phela bengikwa-oorla Bhiza izolo jumpers, ngagaya itimer lakhe inyhuku ebaie.”*

These texts can be recast in English thus:

“Speaker X: Hello, pal! How’s it?

Speaker Y: Fine, pal! What can you tell me?

Speaker X: Nothing except that you are pretty scarce.  
Where have you been hiding?

Speaker Y: I am around. Just a little busy at work. You know how Whites are, very stingy with money. Tell me, where can we relax and have two quarts of beer? Yesterday evening I drank half a bottle of gin. Now I have a hang-over.

Speaker X: Shame! I am penniless today, pal. How will it be if we could go and persuade the old lady to give us liquor on credit. By the way, I still owe her some money. Yesterday afternoon I went to the late Bhiza’s place and gave his father a lot of money.”

Initially, *tsotsi-taal* was a slang spoken only by the people in the metropolitan areas of the Witwatersrand, and this very fact elevated its prestige among the South African youth from all parts of the country as well as the neighbouring states, such as the former high commission territories of Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana. When the migrant labourers most of whom usually worked in the mines in South African cities, went back to their own countries they introduced *tsotsi-taal* to those who did not know the Witwatersrand and, as such, who did not know Johannesburg. Even in our own country here people who come from the metropolitan areas of the PWV (Pretoria, Witwatersrand and Vereeniging) are still highly regarded by the rural community, and a knowledge of *tsotsi-taal* is one of the factors through which the people (the youth) can distinguish the so-called 'clevas' (from 'clever') of the urban areas from their fellow rural counterparts. *Tsotsi-taal* derives its prestige from its association with the mode of life of the urban youth which includes, inter alia, the following:

- (a) Their 'clever' tactics of robbing stupid people (*moegoes* or *mogos*, *mommiesje* or *mometch*, etc.).
- (b) The typical (nice) clothes they wear (which they call *jewish*).
- (c) The clever tactics (*mishen*) they use to defend themselves against their foes.
- (d) The clever tactics (*mishen*) they use to dodge the police, which also include the effective use of *flytaal* for the purpose of disguise.
- (e) The clever tactics (*mishen*) they use to accumulate money (which they call *mazuma*, *dough*, *mulla*, *chin*, *zack*, *smeka*, *ndadiama*, etc.).
- (f) The 'clever' ways of doing things (in 'metropolitan style') such as staff-riding in trains and busses, etc.

These, together with many other related factors such as the prestige of the environment in which all these *tsotsi* activities operate (the urban environment), help to elevate the prestige of this 'register' which many of the so-called 'prescriptivists' (De Klerk, 1991:81) condemn in the strongest terms. The desire of many people (like the youth in the remote rural areas such as Lebowa) to know this 'language' has led to the introduction of *tsotsi* terminology in many South African indigenous

languages. Today the *tsotsi* terms are used so widely that they have come to replace many existing indigenous synonymous words in these languages. For instance, in Northern Sotho, the following slang terms (which may be regarded as loanwords) are so widely used that the synonymous Northern Sotho lexical items are no longer used by many Northern Sotho speaking people and this is obviously due to the fact that many Northern Sotho youth regard *tsotsi* terminology to be more prestigious than their synonymous Northern Sotho terminology:

<i>tšheri</i>	‘cherry’	instead of	<b>moratiwa, motlabo</b>	(girl or girlfriend)
<i>jola</i>	‘jolly’	instead of	<b>go ratana</b>	(love affair)
<i>pholaka</i>	‘pluck’	instead of	<b>go tšea mahlo a tšhipa</b>	(drink a bit of liquor to get courage)
<i>skeifi</i>	‘skuif’	(Afrikaans meaning ‘shift’)		
		instead of	<b>go tsobišwa</b>	(share cigarette, etc.)
<i>kuruba</i>	‘groove’ or ‘groovy’			
		instead of	<b>boipshino</b>	(enjoy a nice time)
<i>shap</i>	‘sharp’	instead of	<b>go lokile, go loka</b>	(good order)
<i>tiribula</i>	‘dribble’	instead of	<b>go gakantšha</b>	(trick)
<i>semoko</i>	‘smog’	instead of	<b>bothata</b>	(problem or trouble)
<i>misheni</i>	‘mission’	instead of	<b>maano</b>	(plan)

Even though *tsotsi-taal* is highly regarded by the majority of the youth from almost all languages spoken in our country, there are still other sections of the population, like the so-called ‘prescriptivists’ (De Klerk, 1991:81) who have negative attitudes towards slang. This group dislikes *tsotsi-taal* because it does not meet the standard requirements for a language they want it to be. They have a notion that *flytaal* is destroying the purity of the indigenous languages. The opinions of most critics of urban slang or ‘prescriptivists’, as De Klerk (1991:81) calls them, are rooted on what Greenbaum (1988:2) refers to as ‘misuse and abuse of language’ in the following remark:

“Constant misuse and abuse of the language are resulting in changes in the language that are permanently damaging it as an instrument for communication.”

Perhaps one of the basic factors leading to this bad attitude towards slang is the fact that in its application there is less respect when addressing people who are senior in age or in status. In his study of the Soweto Zulu slang, (which may also be said to be a Zulu based version of *tsotsi-taal*), Mfusi (1992:61) says:

“There is also another view that Soweto Zulu slang is a corruption of a ‘higher’ language, namely, standard Zulu. This attitude is discernible in Swanepoel’s article entitled ‘Urban slang in compositions’ which appeared in the *Educamus* of December, 1978. It opens with the following sentence, ‘This type of language can only be condemned in the strongest terms’.”

Contrary to the views of scholars such as Swanepoel (1978), the use of urban slang is growing tremendously among the youth in almost all languages, especially amongst the Black communities. Even Swanepoel (1978: 8) himself has realised the popularity of *tsotsi-taal* among the Northern Sotho youth, as is stated in his comment:

“...this type of language is used so commonly today that it has found its way right into the compositions and other written work.”

The critics of urban slang are mostly concerned with the way this ‘language’ is ‘contaminating’ standard languages, more than its function which is communication. The contribution it makes to the development of the vocabularies of these standard languages is disregarded. Perhaps some of the critics of *tsotsi-taal* base their criticisms on the moral aspect of the people speaking the ‘language’ more than the slang itself. For instance, the negative attitudes towards *tsotsi-taal* may be ascribed to its association with immoral actions of the *tsotsis* such as crime, robbery, theft, rape, etc. Mfusi (1992:60) says:

“Negative attitudes towards this variety stem from its association with crime and juvenile delinquency. In fact, attitudes towards a speech form are hardly other than attitudes towards the speakers. What is accepted or stigmatized depends on what is permissible or acceptable in a certain social system.”

It is an undeniable fact that, for as long as a language is preferred and spoken by a section of the community, it will always have both negative and positive influences on the existing languages. The negative influences will be those which are major concerns for the so-called ‘prescriptivists’, i.e. infringement on the vocabulary and structures of the standard languages (the purity of the standard languages), while the positive influences will concern the development of the vocabulary of the existing standard languages. Like most critics of urban slang, Swanepoel is of the opinion that this variety is a corrupt version of the standard languages and is degrading the status of standard languages. In defending the position of urban slang (Soweto Zulu slang) against these critics who commonly believe in the unconditional purity of the standard languages, Mfusi (1992:61) remarks as follows:

“The Soweto Zulu slang is not an incorrect version of standard Zulu but rather a new language. Its terminology was largely derived from older languages during a period of linguistic crisis to fill an urgent need for communication.”

Swanepoel’s (1978) argument against urban slang seems to be centred more on the moral aspect of the behaviour of the youth than on the realisation of a need for communication. Even though, according to him, the use of this *tsotsi* terminology ‘does not indicate any form of language ability’, his argument against urban slang seems to confirm the opposite point he wants to drive home, especially his acknowledgment that this variety exists and communications are possible through its use and that it has already found its way into some of the compositions of the indigenous languages by some authors. Swanepoel (1978:8) argues as follows:

“Many readers of this article will immediately remark: ‘O yes that is the so called

‘tsotsi’ language of some youngsters in our towns’. Who of us will not recognise these common terms?: “notch”, “cherry”, “groove”, “mnca”, “smack”, “dribble”, “bra”, etc. My answer to these people is that this type of language is used so commonly today that it has found its way right into the compositions and other written work. I want to stress another important point: The use of this type of language does not indicate any form of language ability, on the contrary this displays poor taste and exactly the opposite of what the user had in mind.”

### 3.1.2 Slang from other speech communities

Besides *tsotsi-taal*, there are other types of slang pertaining to various speech communities in South Africa, such as the *rhyming slang*, the *prison slang* (the *boop language*), the *taxi language*, etc. Although they might be regarded as inferior in status (especially when comparing them with standard languages), the communities who use these varieties find it a pleasure to communicate in these ‘languages’. These communities find it a prestige to know the terminology used in some of these slang varieties, even though their influences in most standard languages were too minimal when compared to *tsotsi-taal*.

#### 3.1.2.1 The rhyming slang

This type of slang is not common with the African youth since it is of European origin. According to Barnes (1992:1) rhyming slang was first noted by Ducange Anglicus in 1857 as a secret language used by thieves in England. It originated on the Thames embankment in the interplay between Cockney dockers and Irish navies. Barnes (1992:2) says:

“Rhyming slang became, and remained, very much part of Cockney English, but it also moved into the Victorian underworld and then became a part of the criminal argot of the English-speaking world. It spread to Australia, Victorian Britain’s

dumping-ground for unwanted criminals, 'where it took root and produced an indigenous crop with local peculiarities' (Franklyn, 1960:18). From there it appears to have spread to the West Coast of America, where it frequently appears in underworld argot and seems to have taken on its own peculiarly American character."

According to Barnes, this slang also arrived in the South African underworld, although it does not appear to be used as extensively or productively as in the United States or Australia. He listed the examples of this rhyming slang which were found in the language of ex-convicts from Central and Zonderwater Prisons in Pretoria, and the following are amongst those in the list:

<i>Betty Boop</i>	'soup'
<i>Bob Hope</i>	'soap'
<i>Nancy Lee</i>	'tea'
<i>Over the meatball</i>	'over the wall'

This type of slang did not have any influence in the Northern Sotho language, probably due to the fact that it was of foreign origin used by very few White youth, while in South Africa there were very little contacts between the White and the Black youth. And also, the fact that this variety was common with prisoners did not give positive impressions to the youth since a prison is not associated with any prestige by the majority of the population in the global village.

### 3.1.2.2 The prison slang or the *boop* language

Prison slang, criminal argot, or jail jargon received a lot of attention in the English speaking world from scholars such as Cardozo-Freeman (1978 & 1984), Little (1982), Lyons (1984), Maurer (1981), Morgan (1981), etc. This jail jargon is sometimes called *con lingo* in the United States. In South Africa the prison slang is sometimes called the *boop language*. The term *boop* or *boep* (under the influence of Afrikaans) is derived from the British underworld term *boob*, which in South African English referred to prison. Barnes (1992:4) gives the following comment regarding South African

prison slang:

“The etymology of another prison term *the bomb* (die bom) is even more interesting. When prisoners are sent to solitary confinement - a form of punishment for various misdemeanours - they refer to this as *going to the bomb*. Bomb is apparently short for Bombay. The term arose because originally prisoners were given only rice water when in solitary confinement. Today prisoners are given mealie-meal porridge instead of rice water, and the watered-down variety of porridge that is usually given is known as *vispap*. It is interesting to note that a rehabilitation centre is known as a *papplaas*.”

*Papplaas* may be translated to English as ‘porridge farm’, i.e. *pap* (Afrikaans), which refers to porridge and *plaas* (Afrikaans for ‘a farm’). This is due to the fact that porridge (*pap*) is usually served to prisoners in a rehabilitation centre. In most cases the prisoners use ironic names. For example, a maximum security section of Pretoria Central is called *Beverly Hills* because the inmates there live in ‘high society’ and receive ‘five star treatment’ (like better rations than other prisoners) (Barnes, 1992:4). Zonderwater is called *The Farm* (Die Plaas), because it actually is a farm which is worked by the convicts. The following are some of the *boop* names given to prisons:

<i>Sun City</i>	Diepkloof Prison
<i>Crown Town</i>	Kroonstad Prison
<i>Blue Skies/Cinderella</i>	Boksburg Prison
<i>Die Fort</i>	Hillbrow Prison
<i>Die Rooi Hel</i>	Durban Prison
<i>Die Rooi Wal</i>	Port Elizabeth Prison

The following are some of the prison terms common in the South African prisons, especially common with the White prisoners before the abolition of segregation (when White and Black prisoners were still kept apart):

<i>boere</i>	‘warders’
<i>pimp</i>	‘prisoner who works with the warders’
<i>veterinarian</i>	‘a prison doctor’
<i>bra, china, or school tie</i>	‘a good friend’
<i>the FBI</i>	‘prisoners who work with warders’
<i>the Airforce</i>	‘those who help a prisoner to escape’
<i>a rabbit, or a haas</i>	‘a homo-sexual’ (female role)
<i>a hawk</i>	‘a homo-sexual’ (male role)

Like rhyming slang, the prison slang had little impact on the vocabulary of Northern Sotho, apparently because prisoners are very much outnumbered by the population as a whole, and also due to the fact that a prison is viewed by many people (even the ex-convicts) as a place for those people who are social outcasts and there is no one who is proud to be one of them. As such, there is no one who wishes to be associated with prisoners even though most of their terminology resembles that of urban slang.

### 3.1.2.3 The taxi language

The taxi industry is growing at an alarming rate in South Africa today and is gradually replacing all other traditional transport services such as buses and trains among the non-white communities. Today the taxi operators have developed their own terminology which pertains to their sphere of operation, and which sometimes can only be understood by them. Words such as the following are used in the taxi industry:

<i>Flouta</i>	‘when a taxi is moving without passengers’
<i>Thaotha</i>	‘when a taxi is moving around looking for passengers’
<i>Lekhamba</i>	‘a sort of a come-together by taxi drivers’ (or money paid for this purpose)
<i>Ounara</i>	‘a taxi owner’

<i>Tsheking</i>	‘money collected by a driver from the passengers’
<i>Kamina-ka-wena</i>	‘a method of loading at a taxi rank when two taxi associations share a route. After one taxi from one association has loaded, the other one from another association follows’

Like the prison terminology, the terminology pertaining to the taxi industry is not yet popular among the ordinary people in the community, but is only common among the taxi owners and their employees.

### 3.2 Code-switching and code-mixing

Perhaps the most common type of spoken ‘languages’ today is a mixture of terminology and phrases from two or more different languages when communicating in formal or informal situations between people who are either bilingual or multilingual. These types of varieties are found in almost all the population groups in South Africa between people of various ages. Code-switching is defined by many scholars, such as Msimang (1987), Mfusi (1992), Cluver (1986), Ferguson & Heath (1981), etc. In defining what Hudson (1980:57) refers to as conversational code-switching, Cluver (1986:10) says:

“*Code-switching* will refer to the switching from one language to another that occurs when two bilinguals, who belong to the same speech community, are talking to each other.”

According to Ferguson and Heath (1981:527) *code-switching* is said to be the:

“Changing from one language or language variety to another in the course of using a language; usually determined by the particular function, participants, or setting and identity the speaker wishes to project.”

In the process of *code-switching*, according to Cluver (1986:11):

“...the speaker does not ‘translate’ what he has just said into the other language as he goes along. Rather, he makes one point in one language, then switches to the other to bring out a different aspect of the argument.”

Bokamba (as cited in Msimang, 1987:83) draws a distinction between code-mixing and code-switching as follows:

“Code-switching is the embedding or mixing of words, phrases and sentences from two codes within the same speech event and across sentence boundaries.”

While code-mixing, on the other hand, is:

“The embedding or mixing of various linguistic units, that is, morphemes, words, phrases and clauses from two distinct grammatical systems or subsystems within the same speech situation.”

Today it is hardly possible for a speaker, especially those speaking the Bantu languages, to speak continuously without mixing with terms from other languages, especially the prestige White languages. Some of the words are used as loanwords while others are used in their original form. In Northern Sotho, for instance, the use of terms derived from English and Afrikaans words is very common, e.g.:

<b>Ke ngwana wa <i>my suster</i></b>	‘It is my sister’s child’
<b>Ke mo file <i>current</i></b>	‘I gave him <i>current</i> ’ : (literal)
	‘I ignored him/her’ : (figurative)
<b>Ke swere <i>loaf bread</i></b>	‘I am holding a loaf of bread’
<b>My <i>broer o nwa mainstay</i></b>	‘My brother drinks mainstay’

<b>Ga ke rekiše pap en vleis</b>	‘I don’t sell porridge and meat’	
<b>Moisa yo o lelik kudu</b>	‘This chap is too ugly’	
<b>Ke my girlfriend</b>	‘She is my girlfriend’	
<b>Scara o bolela rubbish fela</b>	‘Scara speaks <i>rubbish</i> only’	: (literal)
	‘Scara speaks senseless things only’	: (figurative)
<b>O fihlile even though a latetšwe</b>	‘He has arrived even though it was late’	
<b>Ek verstaan nie gore o nagana eng</b>	‘I don’t understand what is in his mind’	
<b>Ek glo gore o kgauswi</b>	‘I believe he/she is nearby’	
<b>Perhaps o tla ba le understanding</b>	‘Perhaps he/she will understand’	

According to Mfusi (1992:68):

“Code-mixing may give way to situational or metaphorical code-switching at any time, for instance, the use of the former for an activity always discussed in a particular language, or the use of the latter to evoke special feelings.”

### 3.2.1 Factors leading to code-switching and code-mixing

There are many reasons why speakers switch from one language to another when in conversations. Cluver (1986:9) says the following with regard to the purposes for code-switching or code-mixing in languages:

“The term *variety* is used to refer to the same concepts as the terms *language*, *dialect* and *register*. It appears that many speakers switch from one variety to another so as to comply with certain requirements of a particular situation or to achieve certain communicative objectives.”

Cluver (1986:13) lists five reasons why bilinguals use code-switching, i.e.:

1. to express meaning more effectively
2. because the experience or the item referred to is typical of the other language's culture
3. to establish the social identity of the referent or speaker
4. to embellish a point
5. to reflect confidentiality or privateness.

One of the reasons for the use of code-switching and code-mixing which is usually common among the indigenous languages in our country is the 'prestige' motive, which can be associated with objective number 4 (above) in Cluver's reasons (to embellish a point). Most of the Northern Sotho speaking communities prefer to communicate in a Northern Sotho which is mixed with English or/and Afrikaans terms to elevate their standard. The inclusion of terminology from the prestige languages is an indication that one is civilized, is educated, belongs to a status of 'high society', etc. For instance, a person who is not educated, or who is not good in English or Afrikaans will be identified easily through his/her poor pronunciation of English or Afrikaans terms or by a habit of frequent malapropism, like in the following examples (which will reveal that the speaker is just forcing himself/herself into the status where he/she does not belong):

#### I

**Le ge a le sehlogo, we presented him go dira bošoro bjo a bego a ikemišeditše.**

instead of

**Le ge a le sehlogo, we prevented him go dira bošoro bjo a bego a ikemišeditše.**

'Even though he is cruel, we prevented him/her from executing the cruelty he/she had intended'

#### II

**O phasitše ka onderskeiling dihlahlobong tša gagwe tša marematlou.**

instead of

**O phasitše ka onderskeiding dihlahlobong tša gagwe tša marematlou.**

‘He got a distinction pass in his matric examination’

### III

**O sepetše le *his college* go ya ngakeng ya diphoofolo.**

instead of

**O sepetše le *his colleague* go ya ngakeng ya diphoofolo.**

‘He has travelled with his colleague to the veterinary doctor’

### IV

***When charging a case* motho o swanetše go ba careful.**

instead of

***When judging a case* motho o swanetše go ba careful.**

‘When judging a case a person must be careful’

As such, it is a prestige to use the ‘prestige terms’ properly, and the people who pronounce foreign lexical items properly enjoy the respect of their friends and colleagues. Those people who cannot use code-mixing or code-switching properly due to poor pronunciation or poor knowledge of the foreign languages are regarded inferior in status to those who can speak properly. When these foreign words are used with Northern Sotho, they are regarded as prestige terms by the Northern Sotho speaking people.

#### 3.2.2 Code-switching and code-mixing with slang

A type of *code-mixing* and *code-switching* common in Bantu languages, such as Northern Sotho is the use of slang terms in conversations, especially conversations between people of equal rank or of the same age. Even though there are very few people among the indigenous communities in South Africa who can speak slang varieties, such as *tsotsi-taal* (especially the rural communities), the terminology is known by a majority of the South African community. Today it is a common habit for

the youth to speak a vernacular which is mixed with slang terms and, for them it is a prestige to speak this type of 'language'. When it is spoken by the people in the rural areas, it tends to be another way of associating themselves with the urban environment. For instance, it is a prestige to speak a Northern Sotho which is mixed with *tsotsi* terms which the Northern Sotho youth regard to be 'prestige terms'. Those who do not know these *tsotsi* terms are regarded as *mogos* (stupid) since they don't know the 'language' or the *lingo* (as they call it) of the *clevas* ('wise people' - *tsotsis*). The following are examples of Northern Sotho sentences which are mixed with slang terms:

**Sentence** : *My oulady ga se a mphe zak.*  
**Literal meaning:** *My oulady did not give me zak.*  
**Meaning** : My mother did not give me money.

**Sentence:** : *O sepela le timer la gagwe.*  
**Literal meaning:** He/She goes with his/her *timer*.  
**Meaning** : He/She goes with his/her father.

**Sentence** : *O fihlile maabane ka jumpers.*  
**Literal meaning:** He/She arrived yesterday at *jumpers*.  
**Meaning** : He/She arrived yesterday at night.

**Sentence** : *Moisa yo o blind kudu.*  
**Literal meaning:** This chap is too *blind*.  
**Meaning** : This chap is not good.

**Sentence** : *Ke smoko fela kua dlandleni.*  
**Literal meaning:** Is only *smog* at *dlandleni*.  
**Meaning** : There is too much trouble at home.

**Sentence** : *Ke sepetše grand go ya Tshwane.*

**Literal meaning:** I travelled *grand* to Pretoria.

**Meaning** : I travelled well to Pretoria.

**Sentence** : **Dilo ka moka di *sharp, majita*.**

**Literal meaning:** Everything is *sharp, majita*.

**Meaning** : Everything is right (in good order), boys.

**Sentence** : ***Cherry yela e a squila, ga e rate go waaia* (or *go vaya*).**

**Literal meaning:** That *cherry* is *squiling*, she doesn't want to *waaia*.

**Meaning** : That girl refuses (resists), she doesn't want to leave.

Many of the senior members of the community have negative attitudes towards code-mixing, especially the educated groups and some of the language authorities because they believe in strict application of formal standard language orthographies which are free of foreign elements such as mixed terminology. This group is concerned about the growing popularity of *code-mixing* and *code-switching* and they try to discourage the community from using these types of 'language' in order to retain the purity of the standard languages. They are aware of the fact that most of the youth regard it a prestige to speak these types of 'varieties', and the most effective method they can apply to discourage the youth from using these 'languages' is by avoiding their use in all formal situations such as schools and other academic environments (as if they don't exist), as well as avoiding them in their daily use in informal situations. Cluver (1986:14) cites an example of this type of attitude from the Afrikaans speaking speech communities as follows:

“...some societies or some sub-groups of a speech community frown on code-switching. Later Afrikaans speaking generations (i.e. those that are now between 40 and 60 years old), reacted against the influence of English on Afrikaans, and code-switching became stigmatised amongst educated Afrikaans speakers. An even younger generation of urban Afrikaans speakers (i.e. those under 30) seems to use

code-switching more - despite condemnation by schools and universities. This description seems to be valid for many young German-speaking South Africans as well.”

### **3.3 Factors leading to the use of slang in languages**

Slang develops in a contact situation where two or more languages, usually of different status, are spoken. In situations such as these most speakers of inferior languages have a desire to know the prestige languages and start imitating the languages using the little knowledge of the vocabulary and pronunciation they have already acquired, which in most instances amounts to a mixture of vocabulary and structures of the Bantu languages and those of the prestige languages in order to forge understanding. This desire for a knowledge of English and Afrikaans is usually coupled with prestige and other factors such as secrecy and euphemism which Mfusi (1992) refers to as ‘lexical avoidance’. With regard to the motives for the use of slang, Mfusi (1992:57) says:

“The inescapable aspect of language use is that it is more than a communication code. Within this Soweto speech community switching from standard Zulu to the Soweto Zulu slang is motivated by factors such as secrecy, prestige and lexical avoidance. Like *tsotsi-taal* (previously regarded as a secret code) the Soweto Zulu slang has certain features that render it incomprehensible to strangers.”

The following are some of the main factors underlying the development of slang in the South African languages:

#### **3.3.1 Multilingualism**

The term multilingualism refers to a speech community which uses two or more languages. According to Mansour (1980:250), multilingualism covers two distinct social phenomena, i.e. (1) the co-existence and close contact of several languages within a given community where, owing to the

nature of community life, a special pattern of language use needs to be adopted; and (2) the co-existence of several ethnolinguistic entities within the boundaries of a state, with each entity occupying a relatively well-defined territory. Mfusi (1992:53) mentions three factors affecting the developments of languages in a multilingual society, i.e.:

“(1) Which languages co-exist in a contact situation. (2) The demographic weight of each linguistic group. (3) The historical and/or socio-economic origins of the contact situation.”

The urban community in the metropolitan areas of South Africa is a good example of a multilingual society. Besides the existence of the two ‘prestige languages’ which used to be the sole official languages, i.e. Afrikaans and English, the other indigenous languages such as Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Venda, Tsonga, etc. exist in the same proximity, and this resulted in the creation of a ‘mixed society’ which required a ‘mixed variety’ (like slang) to act as *lingua franca* to simplify communication between several peoples of different linguistic backgrounds. Even though the ‘demographic weight’ of the indigenous people favour the Bantu languages, the ‘historical and socio-economic’ factors leading to the origin of the contact situation in the metropolitan areas showed much influence of Afrikaans and English, especially with regard to the structures and the vocabulary of urban slang. The historical and socio-economic factors seem to be one of the main reasons why most rural communities associate the people who are conversant with urban slang with a high status. Mfusi (1992:53) says:

“In a heterogeneous urban community such as Soweto’s, the majority of the population speaks several languages. In almost all cases the knowledge of English and/or Afrikaans is indispensable for the acquisition of any type of employment. Actually, historical conditions in South Africa interrupted a natural extension of the functional range of local languages. With the institutional pattern, imposed by the colonial powers, arose the need to employ European languages not only in the role of languages of wider communication, but also as official languages.”

As a result of multilingualism in the metropolitan areas of the PWV the people from various linguistic backgrounds felt a need to communicate in a sort of a *lingua franca* variety which will be easily understood by most people without prior formal instructions. As a 'register' incorporating vocabularies from different languages, slang seemed to be an appropriate *lingua franca* for the urban Bantu communities, especially the youth. In most cases, slang uses most of the known terminology from different languages in a form of metaphor which makes it easily understood without prior instruction in these 'languages'. To the rural residents of South Africa, such as the Northern Sotho communities who are at home in **Lebowa**, (the North or Northern province), it is a prestige to belong to, or to be associated with the multilingual society of **Borwa** (which is a name given to the urban area of the PWV by the Northern Sotho people - literally meaning 'south'). As such, urban slang like *tsotsi-taal* is accorded a special status due to its association with the 'South', and anyone who uses *flytaal* terminology when speaking to his friends or his peer groups is regarded to be wise (to be a *cleva*; to be a *motsieng*; to be a *mca* or a *bra*, etc.) by his peer groups. As youth 'language', slang is used within the peer groups and among friends and it may not be used when communicating with one's seniors, especially those who deserve respect and who do not form part of the so-called *cleva* comrades. For instance, as a sign of respect, the youth may not use *tsotsi-taal* or slang terminology when speaking to his/her parents and vice versa.

### 3.3.2 Prestige motive

As already mentioned earlier, prestige seems to be one of the most important reasons for the development of slang among the youth. For instance, the development of *tsotsi-taal* among the urban youth may be ascribed to their desire for a communication in the prestige white languages. Lack of sufficient knowledge of these languages resulted in the youth mixing the vocabulary and structures of these languages with their own vernaculars, which ultimately led to the development of a 'language' which is neither Afrikaans nor English, nor Zulu, or Sotho, but a different variety altogether, i.e. urban slang. In theory, slang varieties such as *tsotsi-taal* seem to be of low standard, especially when considering facts such as the following: (1) their lack of written orthographies; (2) the habit of continuous change of terminology; (3) their association with juveniles only as well as (4)

their association with the criminal elements in the society. Nevertheless, in spite of all these factors, the prevailing situation is one in which these varieties are highly regarded by most of the young generations in our country and, for them the ability to speak *tsotsi-taal* does not only signify a sense of belonging to a group of clever people, but also a reality of belonging to a high social status. Bailey (1985:8) comments as follows on the status of those who are fluent in *flytaal*:

“While some slang users have a basic control of the register others pride themselves on their repertoire which they are at pains to develop and display whenever the opportunity arises. Those more proficient are acclaimed by their friends and in the course of this work I was often advised, ‘If you want slang ask so-and-so!’”

When responding to the views of those who regard urban slang to be an inferior version of standard languages, Mfusi (1992:59) emphasizes the status of urban slang (which he calls ‘Soweto Zulu slang’) as follows:

“There is no gainsaying that Soweto Zulu Slang is of a lower status as compared to the standard Zulu on which it is based. The former is not officially recognized but, at least, among a particular age group it has acquired the status of street discourse. This implies that it is used as a register in informal situations by the members of this speech community.”

Mfusi (1992:60) proceeds to say:

“Soweto Zulu Slang holds a special position of prestige which derives from its use in music and political circles. Actually, it has become quite prestigious for the youth to use this code as it identifies them as Sowetan. People from Soweto are regarded with awe by Blacks from other parts of South Africa, and are also considered as trend-setters in fashion and also in the liberation struggle. The people’s newspaper, *Sowetan*, improves the status of Soweto Zulu Slang by occasionally publishing articles

in this communication medium.”

As stated in previous chapters, the languages spoken in the vicinities of the metropolitan cities are accorded prestige status by the communities who live in the remote areas, while those who live in these cities look down on the rural communities. This is the case with urban slang (especially *tsotsi-taal*) in South Africa. The speakers of Northern Sotho in **Lebowa** admire anyone speaking *tsotsi-taal* since this shows that he is from **Borwa**, ‘the South’. Even those people who never stayed in the PWV can be heard speaking *tsotsi-taal* or a Northern Sotho which is mixed with *tsotsi* terminology in order to associate themselves with the ‘clever’ people of the urban areas. The prestige of using urban slang did not only have negative results in the standard Northern Sotho language but also resulted in the enrichment of the Sotho lexicon since there are many terms which are today used by the majority of the Sotho speaking people, which may be traced back to urban slang. Even though most of these lexical items are still not yet accepted officially into the standard Northern Sotho vocabulary, the lexical items have almost replaced existing Northern Sotho words in the daily communications between most Northern Sotho people and sometimes it is even difficult to recall the original Sotho words with the same meaning. Words such as the following are widely used by people of almost all ages in Northern Sotho, even though they are very common with the youth:

NS: <b>sepoto</b> or <b>sepotso</b>	Slang: <i>spot</i>	‘a place where people buy and drink liquor’
NS: <b>shebini</b>	Slang: <i>shebeen</i>	‘a place where people buy and drink liquor’
NS: <b>tšheri</b>	Slang: <i>cherry</i>	‘girlfriend’ or ‘girl’
NS: <b>jola</b>	Slang: <i>jola</i>	‘to have a love affair’
NS: <b>pholaka</b>	Slang: <i>pluck</i>	‘to take a small dose of liquor - for courage’
NS: <b>kuruba</b>	Slang: <i>groove</i>	‘to enjoy nice time’
NS: <b>blaend</b>	Slang: <i>blind</i>	‘not good’
NS: <b>mišeni</b>	Slang: <i>mishen</i> or <i>mission</i>	‘plan’
NS: <b>semoko</b>	Slang: <i>smok</i> or <i>smog</i>	‘trouble’
NS: <b>moho</b>	Slang: <i>mogo</i> or <i>moegoe</i>	‘stupid’
NS: <b>krente</b>	Slang: <i>grand</i>	‘right’

NS: **shapo**Slang: *sharp*

'good' or 'right'

### 3.3.2.1 Euphemism

Sometimes euphemism cannot be dissociated from prestige, especially in cases where the speaker prefers to use one lexical item over another to avoid the embarrassment which might result from its application, and which in turn might affect one's prestige negatively. Sometimes people prefer to use slang terms to avoid using indigenous lexical items which may not only be associated with harsh and unpleasant reality of the meaning of the terms but also, according to Stern (1931:331), 'have numerous undesirable associations with the offensive things, and mean exactly what they mean'. The status of the indigenous terminologies is associated with inferior and humiliating connotations attached to the words. In identifying the 'semantic areas of slang', Bailey (1985:10) says:

"The corpus on which this study is based shows a wealth of terms in a few specific areas. Sexual pursuit (a constant and often brazen preoccupation), drinking (and the embarrassing consequences of overindulgence) and fighting or conflict (more often discussed than engaged in) are rich areas which testify to their importance in the life of the age-group under investigation."

As mentioned in the above quotation sexual pursuit, drinking and fighting or conflict are, as a matter of fact, common areas which can be associated with the youth (and their 'language' - slang). As such, most of the words relating to things such as the embarrassing consequences of overindulgence in drinking, the embarrassing and indecent indigenous terms relating to sexual organs and sexual activities are replaced by decent slang terms. This amelioration of indecent terminology resulted in the creation of many lexical items used by most Northern Sotho people which originated from slang. Even though most of such words are still not yet adopted as loanwords in the Northern Sotho vocabulary, most people prefer to use them instead of their counterparts which are accepted as part of the standard terminology. As such, people prefer to use the word *spotsong* or *shebini* instead of **bjaleng**, which has an additional connotation of 'stupifying drunkenness' in it. The lexical item *tšheri*

is more prestigious (and less offensive) than the standard Northern Sotho words **nyatse**, **motlabo**, or **mokaola** which all mean ‘girlfriend’ and which are not as decent as the former. This is the case with *jola* which is less offensive and more prestigious than **nyatsela**, **tlabola** or **kaola**. The use of the words *blaend* and *pholaka* do not only show amelioration of the meanings of **mobe** ‘bad’ and **tagwa** ‘drunk’ respectively, but are also decent and prestigious. The word *skhebereshe* is a slang term referring to a lady or a girl who makes love with every man or who has a love affair with more than one man at a time. This word seems to be preferred by many Northern Sotho people instead of **nkwahla** or **kwababane** which both seem to be indecent. The following are examples of these slang terms used in sentences to show euphemism:

Slang: <b>Mosadi yo ke <i>skhebereshe</i></b>	NS: <b>Mosadi yo ke <u>kwababane/nkwahla</u></b> ‘This lady is morally weak’
Slang: <b>Monna yo o <i>blaend</i> (<i>blind</i>)</b>	NS: <b>Monna yo ke yo <u>mobe</u></b> ‘This man is bad’
Slang: <b>Papa o <i>tšere pholaka</i></b>	NS: <b>Papa o <u>tagilwe gannyane</u></b> ‘Father is half-drunk’
Slang: <b>Mmakgwara o <i>jola</i> le Tom</b>	NS: <b>Mmakgwara o <u>nyatselane</u> (<i>ratana</i>) le Tom</b> ‘Mmakgwara and Tom are in love’
Slang: <b>Mmakgwara ke <i>tšheri</i> ya Tom</b>	NS: <b>Mmakgwara ke <u>nyatse</u> ya Tom</b> ‘Mmakgwara is Tom’s girlfriend’
Slang: <b>Tate o ile <i>spotsong</i></b>	NS: <b>Tate o ile <u>bjaleng</u></b> ‘Father went to a <i>shebeen</i> ’
Slang: <b>Ditsotsi di tsuba <i>maruana</i></b>	NS: <b>Ditsotsi di tsuba <u>patše</u> (<u>lebake, matekwane</u>)</b> ‘ <i>Tsotsis</i> smoke dagga’

Some of the best examples of euphemism associated with slang are those terms which are used in the *boop* ‘language’. In this jail jargon terminology most of the terms or names which are associated with nice things are ironically named for direct opposite concepts, i.e. those things which are not decent. Barnes (1992:5) gives the following examples of the *boop* terminology:

<i>Sun City</i>	:	'Diepkloof prison'
<i>The FBI</i>	:	'prisoners who work with the warders'
<i>Airport special</i>	:	'alcoholic concoction'
<i>queen</i>	:	'older or overt homosexual' (female role)
<i>hawk</i>	:	'aggressive homosexual' (male role)
<i>The CIA</i>	:	'prisoners who counsel other prisoners'
<i>green</i>	:	'dagga'
<i>juvenile</i>	:	'short-time prisoner'
<i>The Big House</i>	:	'Pretoria Central prison'

The terminology which the youth employ enable them to communicate freely on those topics which most people regard to be taboo since the terms which are usually associated with taboo sense are replaced by slang terms which do not seem to have the same sense as the indigenous words. Mfusi (1992:59) remarks as follows in this regard:

“Another most interesting feature of this phenomenon is its use in expressing freely topics which the society in general considers to be taboo. In other words, it serves to respond more easily to the stimuli of the immediate situation, hence the designation used by Swanepoel (1978) to qualify this code, namely, ‘circumstantial communications medium’. This partly accounts for the high frequency of Soweto Zulu Slang terms in certain specific semantic fields. The domain or topic that scores highest in this respect is the one that involves reference to sexual matters, followed by those vocabularies relating to illegal transactions.”

### 3.3.2.2 Recognition

Recognition is one of the priorities in the lives of many people, especially the youth. Most of the youth in the areas which are far from the cities want to be associated with the so-called *clevas*,

*majitas, bras, motsiengs* or *mcas* (some of the *tsotsi* names for ‘clever’ people, especially the youth) of the cities. For most of them, to speak a refined standard vernacular without the inclusion of slang terms, especially the *tsotsi* terms, is a sign of stupidity. And such a person who doesn’t seem to have a knowledge of ‘their language’ (which they sometimes call *lingo*) is referred to as a *mogo* (or *moegoe*), *barri, spaza* which means he/she is ‘stupid’. Socially, the so-called *tsotsis* may not be regarded as a dignified group of people in the community since they cannot be associated with ‘gentlemen’ or ‘ladies’, more especially because the majority of them are still young, while most of them can be associated with juvenile delinquency. This seems to be one of the reasons why most critics of slang refer to it as a low-prestige variety, while the youth themselves regard it as a prestige variety through which they can be recognised as a group of sophisticated urban youth as against outdated rural youth. For instance, scholars such as De Klerk (1991:69) regard urban slang to be a low-prestige variety, even though they do admit that the variety is very popular among the youth and most of the young people want to be recognized as belonging to the group of *clevas*. De Klerk (1991:68) says:

“Being recognized as a group phenomenon, associated with group identity, particularly in the subcultures of youth, slang is generally a low-prestige variety. Ellen Bouchard Ryan (1979) in investigating the persistence of low-prestige varieties found that the value of a variety for solidarity and identification with a group can often outweigh considerations of prestige, status, or social advancement. In other words, it carries a covert prestige value within subcultures, which makes it highly desirable to the members of that community. It is local, current and topical, and is constantly changing, because of its role as an in-group out-group identifier.”

Even the rural youth do not want to be identified as being different from the urban group, and that is the reason why even in the rural areas most of the youth speak *tsotsi-taal*, or mix their vernacular with urban slang terminology - because they want to be recognised as belonging to the group. De Klerk (1991:81) remarks as follows in this regard:

“No one teaches these words, they must be picked up by careful observation, and used casually and coolly. Asking about what they mean would be tantamount to admitting failure as a teenager. So one must not make the mistake of equating language use with morality - there is a wide and very real discrepancy between proclaimed standards of language behaviour and practice, and between the meanings of the words bandied around in the sweet mouths of the young and their perceptions of (the meanings of) these words.”

The Northern Sotho youth can be divided into two categories in this regard, i.e. those who stay or belong practically in the metropolitan areas, and those who reside in the rural areas in **Lebowa**. Almost all of the Northern Sotho youth who live in the PWV speak a vernacular (Northern Sotho) which, besides the terminology from Afrikaans and English, is rich in urban slang vocabulary. A considerable number of the young generation whose lives are still entirely restricted to the rural areas still use a refined standard Northern Sotho which is free of urban slang terminology, especially the ladies, while the majority of the rural youth, especially the male youth, try to imitate the urban youth in order to be recognised as belonging to a group of a sophisticated young generation. This group gets acquainted with urban slang terminology in their contact with the urban youth in various youth centres such as boarding schools and the institutions of higher learning (such as universities, technikons, etc.), while some of the rural youth get acquainted with urban slang when they visit the urban areas and transmit this to their counterparts and friends in the rural areas who do not get a chance of meeting the urban youth.

### 3.3.3 **Disguise motive**

One of the reasons for the use of slang is to disguise or conceal information which the speakers do not want other people to know. For this reason, the speakers sometimes use a special vocabulary which is solely intelligible to them. Mfusi (1992:49) remarks as follows with regard to Soweto Zulu slang:

“The term ‘cant’ is used to refer to a special vocabulary peculiar to certain social classes. It comprises words that are employed to conceal meaning to the uninitiated and used mainly by hardened criminals, tramps, prostitutes and other underworld communities. When a cant word through common usage becomes universally accepted and freely used as a mode of expression, it ceases to be regarded as a speech peculiarity of a certain social class. Instead, it becomes a slang. Soweto Zulu slang, for instance, has a wealth of such words.”

With regard to the South African urban slang, the need to disguise and conceal information became necessary, especially with *tsotsi-taal* after the *tsotsis* ‘turned to robbery, mugging and other violent crimes’ (Coplan, 1985:162). Today, *tsotsis* are associated with criminal activities such as theft, robbery, rape, drug dealings, etc. which are activities punishable by law and therefore, secrecy is one of the most important objectives when using their ‘language’ to avoid imprisonment. This is one of the reasons why most of the terms used in jail jargons such as the *hoop* language can be said to belong to secret codes to avoid detection and understanding by the jail warders. Barnes (1992:9-10) listed the following secret terms used in the South African prison cells by convicts:

<i>The Airforce</i>	:	‘prisoners who help in an escape’
<i>blade</i>	:	‘a lip-ice lidful of dagga’
<i>boere</i>	:	‘warders’
<i>box</i>	:	‘a matchboxful of dagga’
<i>dabas</i>	:	‘false dagga’
<i>The FBI</i>	:	‘prisoners who work with the warders’
<i>issue</i>	:	‘the tobacco ration’
<i>laaitie (lightie)</i>	:	‘homosexual’ (female role)
<i>The Law</i>	:	‘prisoners who investigate a prison ‘crime’
<i>majat</i>	:	‘low-quality, adulterated dagga’
<i>springbok</i>	:	‘prisoner who escapes’
<i>veterinarian</i>	:	‘prison doctor’

Disguise is usually a primary reason why in most cases slang terminology keeps on changing all the time, or in some cases there are many terms referring to one concept. This is usually due to the fact that a secret term is only secret for some time before it is known by other people, which obviously forces the users of the term to find another secret term for the same concept to keep the secrecy. This is mostly the case with all illegal or unlawful activities which might lead to the speakers being arrested if the concealed information should reach the authorities. For instance, the following terms either refer to dagga or are dagga-related concepts: *maruana* (or *marwana*), *mingus*, *gantja*, *the holy herb*, *dabas*, *giggle sticks*, *greens*, *majat*, *tarries*, *zol*, etc.

### 3.3.4 Short and to the point

The other reason which encourages people to use slang, *code-mixing* and *code-switching* is the need to be short and to the point when communicating. This is usually the case where the indigenous languages have coined many terms through indirect borrowing (or neologism) from English and Afrikaans to refer to the new concepts which were previously unknown to the particular community. In this case the coined words often seem to be too long and ambiguous when compared to the foreign words in their original form. The ambiguity of the lexical items is due to the fact that coined words have both basic and secondary meanings, and sometimes these lexical items are formed through compounding, e.g. the word **senwamaphodi** is a coined word referring to ‘cool drink’, formed by combining **senwa-** ‘that which is sipped’ and **-maphodi** ‘a state of being cool’. This lexical item is very long when compared to its English or Afrikaans counterpart, i.e. ‘cool drink’ or *koeldrank*, which are often preferred by speakers in code-mixing and code-shifting instead of using **senwamaphodi**. It is only on rare occasions that one can hear the Northern Sotho people using this lexical item in sentences. Common sentences in this regard are the following:

**Ke nwa cool drink**

‘I drink cool drink’, instead of:

**Ke nwa senwamaphodi.**

**Ke sepela ka *plane*** 'I travel by airplane' instead of:

**Ke sepela ka sefofane.**

**Ke *choir conductor*** 'I am a choir conductor' instead of:

**Ke mootledi wa sehlopha sa baopedi.**

The youth also have a tendency of shortening the names of people, especially when communicating in *flytaal*. The word *bra*, which is a shortened *tsotsi* term for 'brother' (even though it does not mean brother in *tsotsi-taal*, but 'a friend' or 'a comrade') always precedes the shortened name as sign of respect. The youth prefer not to call people by their surnames, e.g.:

*Bra Tom* for Thomas, Timothy, Tompson, etc.

*Bra Jack* for Jackson, Jacob, etc.

*Bra Sol* for Solomon, Solster, etc.

Respect is also shown by the addition of the prefix *ou*, (especially when referring to someone who is senior in age or status) e.g.:

*Oubra Tom* for Thomas, Timothy, etc.

*Oubra Jack* for Jackson, etc.

*Oubra Sol* for Solomon, etc.

### **3.4 The consequences of slang, code-switching and code-mixing in Northern Sotho**

The use of slang leads to far-reaching consequences (both negative and positive) in the development of the Northern Sotho language. These consequences include the following: the rise of ambiguity in the meaning of lexical items; a shift in the meaning of words; a 'contamination' of the standard

orthography of the Northern Sotho language, as well as the improvement of the vocabulary of Northern Sotho. Bailey (1985:2) comments as follows in this regard:

“The study of variation in language, especially with regard to the distribution of linguistic items has been shown to be a fruitful and essential part of linguistics. It is therefore surprising that slang should have been so neglected since it is a vital, creative and changing part of many languages. Most recent textbooks of sociolinguistics omit discussion of or even reference to slang, e.g. Chambers and Trudgill (1980) and Hudson (1980).”

### 3.4.1 **Semantic shifts and ambiguity**

Ambiguity and a shift in the meaning of words resulting from the use of slang in languages exists through the creation of many synonyms for one concept, the rise of polysemy, i.e. the use of one lexical item to refer to more than one referent, as well as a metaphoric use of words to express secondary meanings. With regard to the role of slang in semantic shifts in languages, Bailey (1985:2) says:

“Slang is a valuable testing ground for any theory of the spread of linguistic change (at least as far as lexis is concerned).”

#### 3.4.1.1 **The creation of synonyms**

This is one of the major factors contributing to the rise of many synonyms in languages. The creation of synonyms is usually due to the fact that most of the *tsotsis* want to disguise or to conceal information about their daily activities. This they do by using terminology which can be understood by them only. When these secret terms are uncovered they find other terms for the same concepts in order to keep the secret concealed. Bailey (1985:12) remarks as follows in this regard:

“It is often noted that slang has a plethora of terms for certain standard words. This phenomenon is usually dismissed as wasteful synonymy. In fact slang simply specialises and augments the lexicon in certain areas to accommodate the needs of its speakers. Denotation is all but redundant and connotation accounts for lexical diversity.”

For example, the following *tsotsi* terms are all synonyms for the words ‘right’ (or ‘good’), ‘stupid’ (or ‘moron’) and ‘money’ respectively as used in *tsotsi-taal* by the youth:

right : *dolly, sharp, sweet, grand, ok, posh, etc.*

stupid : *mometch (mommiesje), mogo (moegoe), barri, spaza, kgashu, etc.*

money: *mazoema or mazuma, zak, chin, ndadiama, smeka, mulla, etc.*

#### 3.4.1.2 Ambiguity through polysemy

Ambiguity in the meaning of slang terms occurs through the metaphoric use of words which, besides reference to basic meaning, have a metaphoric tendency of expressing figurative meaning. This means that the words have a shift of reference, i.e. the meaning of the word either shifts completely to refer to a different referent altogether or the meaning is generalised to include a secondary referent, one word thus having more than one referent (polysemy). Mfusi (1992:75) says the following in this regard:

“...this linguistic process entails the attaching of new semantic aspect as (sic) to already existing words, thus modifying their semantic content. This process is described as rather a shift of reference than sense since both terms continue to co-exist, one in ordinary speech and the other as a term in a special field.”

This metaphoric use of words in *tsotsi-taal*, which Bailey (1985:13) refers to as metaphoric association, facilitates a shift in the meaning of words. According to Bailey (1985:13):

“The words ‘chick, bird, bit of fluff’ are based on a common metaphoric association. It is difficult to be certain whether this association is in any way real for the speakers; or whether it affects their choice of words.”

For instance, the word ‘clever’ (*tsotsi-taal: cleva*) is a verb which basically means to be wise. The word has metaphorically shifted to refer to a *tsotsi* (or clever youth) apparently due to the fact that *tsotsis* usually claim to be clever, or/and sometimes other people associate them with cleverness. The words, *gecook*, *gesop* (*flytaal*) are *tsotsi* terms referring to ‘a state of being drunk’. These words are derived from the words ‘cook’ (English) and **sop** (an Afrikaans word referring to ‘soup’). In this case, a person who is drunk is metaphorically associated with something which has been cooked, while in the case of *gesop*, intoxicating liquor is metaphorically associated with ‘soup’. This is the case with most of the slang terms which are used in metaphoric associations to express secondary meanings, especially *tsotsi* terms, such as the following:

- jola* : ‘to have a love affair’; from ‘jolly’ (associated with happiness)
- smoko*: ‘trouble’; from ‘smog’ (atmospheric pollution - associated with trouble)
- timer*: ‘father’; from ‘timing’ (associated with ‘regulation’ and ‘control’)
- oulady*: ‘mother’; from ‘old lady’ (associated with seniority - in age)
- blind*: ‘bad’; from ‘blind’ (associated with ‘lack of vision’)

#### 3.4.2 ‘Contamination’ of standard languages

Some scholars, such as De Klerk (1991) and Greenbaum (1988) believe that slang is one of the major factors which result in the misuse and abuse of language, which ultimately destroy the purity of the standard languages. Greenbaum (1988:2) says:

“Constant misuse and abuse of the language are resulting in changes in the language that are permanently damaging it as an instrument for communication.”

In Northern Sotho, for instance, some of the youth get used to slang terminology to the extent that they no longer can remember the actual Northern Sotho words and, as a result, they can no longer speak a 'refined' standard Northern Sotho language.

### 3.4.3 Improvement of vocabulary

Besides the abuse and misuse of languages, slang also makes a positive contribution in the development and enlargement of the vocabulary of languages. Bailey (1985:12) says the following in this regard:

“In fact slang simply specialises and augments the lexicon in certain areas to accommodate the needs of its speakers.”

In Northern Sotho there are many loanwords which are either adopted or are just used extensively to the extent that they have become part and parcel of Northern Sotho, especially the lexical items which are either directly or indirectly associated with euphemism. Words such as the following are widely used in Northern Sotho:

- jola* : 'to have a love affair'
- skhebereshe* : 'a girl (a lady) who is morally weak' (who makes love with every man)
- skeif* : 'share smoke'
- kuruba* : 'to have a nice time' (usually by drinking liquor, making love; etc.)
- nkamola* : 'a rich person' (from *flytaal: ngamla* referring to a rich person or a  
White)
- pholaka* : 'take a bit of liquor for courage'

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **CONTRIBUTIONS BY THE INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES OF SOUTHERN AFRICA**

While the largest contribution to the development of prestige terminology in Northern Sotho is from the major prestige languages, i.e. English and Afrikaans, the neighbouring indigenous languages of Southern Africa (especially the South Eastern zone Bantu languages) also play a role in this development. These languages influenced the development of prestige terminology in Northern Sotho in various degrees, viz., in accordance with the amount of prestige the Northern Sotho community accords the particular indigenous language. The status attached to these languages is determined by various factors such as socio-economic factors, proximity to a city or industrialized environment, the literacy rate and civilization standard of the community. This means that the indigenous community with a high socio-economic standard will have a high status, which will be shared by its language. The indigenous community which is next to an industrialized urban centre has a comparatively high standard of living and therefore, is accorded a high status compared to those communities which are far from the urban centres (and its language shares in the high status of its community). The indigenous community with a high literacy rate has a status which is higher than that of the community with a low literacy rate and its language is accorded a 'prestige' status. The indigenous community which is civilized in accordance with the traditional Western standard of civilization is accorded a high status compared to the community with a low civilization standard and its language is accorded a 'prestige' status.

#### **4.1 Factors determining the prestige of the indigenous languages**

##### **4.1.1 Socio-economic factors**

In chapter one (1.2.5) it was mentioned (in general) how the social status of the community can be affected by its economic status, especially with regard to its prestige. This is also the case with various Bantu communities in South Africa. The community with a comparatively high standard of

economy is generally confident, and is regarded to be superior and prestigious by other indigenous communities, and its language is regarded as a prestige language by these communities. Most people strive to acquire a knowledge of this 'prestige' language in order to elevate themselves. For instance, the Southern Sotho and the Tswana communities in South Africa are comparatively better off economically than most indigenous communities, especially when we compare them with the indigenous communities who reside in the Northern Province, like the Northern Sotho people, the Tsonga and the Venda people. This may be ascribed to their (the Tswana and Southern Sotho) proximity to the rich industrial centres of South Africa, which include areas such as Kimberley, the PWV, Rustenburg and the northern part of the Orange Free State. During the Bantustan era, for example, Kgoši Lucas Mangope's quasi-independent state of Bophuthatswana was the wealthiest of the former so-called TBVC states (Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei) as a result of the development of rich platinum mining industries in this area (especially the areas in the district of Rustenburg). The economic status of Bophuthatswana is explained by Hutcheson (1991:953) as follows:

"The majority of Bophuthatswana's inhabitants are dependent on mining and agriculture, although only 6.6% of the land area is arable. Bophuthatswana has reserves of vanadium, asbestos, chromium, nickel, copper, rhodium and platinum; it was the world's largest producer of platinum in 1984, providing about 30% of total world production. In 1989 a platinum and gold refinery was opened near Rustenburg. During that year the Bafokeng tribe, which had granted mineral rights to a South African platinum-mining company, Impala, in 1967, lost a legal action which it had initiated against the company in 1988 to reclaim the mineral rights, following a long-running dispute over royalty payments."

Recently, the Bafokeng tribe under Kgoši Molotlegi (which has shares in the abovementioned platinum mine) was publicized in the media as being among the richest tribes in the Republic of South Africa. These mines guarantee employment security for the Tswana people which helps to elevate their economic standard of living. Besides the development of mining wealth in Bophuthatswana, the

development of tourism and the casino hotel industry throughout the independent state of Bophuthatswana by the hotel magnate, Sol Kerzner, (of Sun International) gave employment to thousands of the Tswana people. The casino hotels such as those in Sun City at Pilanesberg (in the rural area under Kgoši Pilane), Mmabatho Sun, The Carousel, Morula Sun, etc. created jobs from unskilled labour to white collar categories. Even though Kerzner's Sun International casinos were also established in other independent Bantustan territories of the Transkei, Ciskei and Venda, Bophuthatswana's industry outnumbered that of the three states combined. In addition to all these job creating opportunities, Bophuthatswana used to be the most thriving Bantustan homeland with regard to clothing factories and other manufacturing industries. Factories such as those in Babelegi, next to Hammanskraal, and many others throughout this homeland helped to boost the economic status of the Tswana people, and many people from the Northern Province, especially the Northern Sotho people from 'Lebowa', flocked to this area to look for fortune. The economic status of the environment where the Tswana and the Southern Sotho people resided did not only lead to the elevation of their socio-economic status, but also led to the elevation of their prestige which included their languages (which came to be looked upon by the Northern Sotho community as prestige languages).

The majority of the Northern Sotho people who went to the PWV have either abandoned their language or they just speak a Northern Sotho which is mixed with Tswana and Southern Sotho. This is contrary to the fact that the Northern Sotho people, in some of these areas, outnumber both the Tswana and the Southern Sotho communities. According to Finlayson and Slabbert (1997:123):

“The townships of the Gauteng Province, within which Soweto falls, are the most multilingual. According to the last census (1990) the predominant language group resident in Soweto are Zulu (38.5%) and Northern Sotho (15.5%). Xhosa (11.5%) and Southern Sotho (11.5%) constitute the next largest. The third largest grouping includes Tswana (6.6%) and Tsonga (6.6%) of the total population which was estimated to be 1.93 million. Nevertheless, the research has shown that Zulu and Southern Sotho are the most utilized.”

The research by Finlayson and Slabbert (1997:123) discovered that:

“...Northern Sotho, while being a dominant language of the Northern Province, is nevertheless utilized to a far lesser extent in the Gauteng area.”

The reason for this is an inferiority complex on the part of the Northern Sotho people since they regard their own language as inferior to Southern Sotho and Tswana, and as such, when they (the Northern Sotho people) arrive in Gauteng, from ‘**Lebowa**’, they practise to speak Tswana and Southern Sotho which they refer to as the languages of ‘**Makgoweng**’ (the languages of the ‘White area’ - the name which usually alternates with ‘**Borwa**’ which all refer to the metropolitan areas of Gauteng). One may wonder why the language of the Northern Sotho people is utilized by relatively few people in the areas around Johannesburg, even though they constitute the majority (after the Zulu) of the indigenous population in these areas (15.5% according to Finlayson and Slabbert, 1997). The Southern Sotho and Tswana people are outnumbered by the Northern Sotho people but their languages predominate. This is due to the fact that most of the people who speak Southern Sotho and Tswana in the Gauteng Province are Northern Sotho people who want to be associated with the prestige languages of the ‘White areas’, and who do not want to be associated with the language (Northern Sotho) of the ‘poor’ rural community of the north. This inferiority complex is also coupled with the superiority complex of the Tswana and the Southern Sotho, most of whom do not bother to learn Northern Sotho because they believe they have nothing to gain from it, and also, they are convinced they will never go to ‘**Lebowa**’ because it has nothing to offer them. The people of the ‘north’ are rather the ones who always go to ‘**Borwa**’ to look for employment opportunities in order to elevate their economic status. The influence of Tswana and Southern Sotho is so high that, even in places where they are totally outnumbered by Northern Sotho speaking people, the presence of the few of them is always felt since the majority of the Northern Sotho people would start imitating them. In chapter one it was shown how the few Tswana and Southern Sotho students from the PWV (who attend the boarding high schools and tertiary institutions in the rural areas of the Northern Transvaal) turn the whole boarding school into a Tswana and Southern Sotho speaking community due to the fact that most of the rural youth in these institutions want to be associated with these prestige

languages and as such, they start imitating them. It is interesting to realise that even the few Tswana and Southern Sotho speaking students who came from the 'south' (who influence the rural students) are in fact children of the Northern Sotho community who reside in the PWV areas, who are ashamed to speak Northern Sotho for fear of being associated with an inferior language. In the classroom, however, the students study Northern Sotho and not Tswana or Southern Sotho since the institutions in the 'north' do not offer these two languages, but Northern Sotho only.

As already mentioned, the Tswana and the Southern Sotho acquired their prestige from the environment in which they found themselves (the areas which came to be the richest part in Southern Africa). The destruction of Mzilikazi's Ndebele headquarters of Mosega and Kapain by the Voortrekkers, left the Tswana people to the north-west and western parts of the present Gauteng as the sole indigenous community in this area. The Ndebele (under Mzilikazi and his successor, Lubengula,) were forced out of the Transvaal into the then Southern Rhodesia where they established Bulawayo as their headquarters, and this gave the Tswana a chance to expand into the whole area to the north and west of the PWV. The Southern Sotho people flanked the south and the south-eastern part of this area, as well as the Orange Free State, where, besides the Griquas of Adam Kok and Andries Waterboer and the Tswana in Thaba Nchu, they were the only indigenous people in these areas where the mining and industrial centres of Kimberley, Vereeniging, Sasolburg, Secunda, Witwatersrand, etc. later developed. The Tswana tribes bordered with the Northern Sotho people in the North-East (areas around Ellisras and Naboomspruit) and the Ndebele and the Northern Sotho tribes in the East (the area to the east of Pretoria). As such, the rich gold mines of the PWV were developed next to the areas in which the Tswana and the Southern Sotho people used to be the sole indigenous residents, and when indigenous people from other parts of South Africa started moving to this area to look for work, they found the Southern Sotho and the Tswana people already established in these areas. For the Northern Sotho people (especially the youth) it is a prestige to speak Tswana or Southern Sotho, or to use Tswana and Southern Sotho terminology when speaking Northern Sotho. It is also important to realise that among the Northern Sotho community code-switching with Southern Sotho or Tswana terminology is more common than vice versa. For instance, sentences such as the following are quite common among the Northern Sotho people:

**Ga ke *itsi* gore o nyaka eng** instead of **ga ke tsebe gore o nyaka eng**

‘I don’t know what he is looking for’

**Ke *banyana* ba ba botsana** instead of **ke basetsana ba ba botsana**

‘They are beautiful girls’

**Ga a *batle* go sepela** instead of **ga a nyake go sepela**

‘He/She doesn’t want to go’

**O *bua* leleme le šele** instead of **o bolela leleme le šele**

‘He/She speaks a foreign language’

**Ba hwetšwa *ko* Tshwane** instead of **ba hwetšwa kua Tshwane**

‘They are found in Pretoria’

**Ga ba *mmatle*** instead of **ga ba mo nyake**

‘They don’t like him’

*Tsotsi-taal*, which is spoken by the urban youth and which is highly regarded by the youth in general as a language of the ‘wise people’ usually appears in versions which might be classed as Zulu or Sotho versions of *tsotsi-taal*. The Sotho version is always in Southern Sotho or Tswana, and very seldom in Northern Sotho, even though there are many Northern Sotho speaking people who speak this ‘register’.

This is one of the reasons why the Northern Sotho dialects, such as Kopa, which are closer to Southern Sotho and Tswana are regarded as status dialects of Northern Sotho by most of the Northern Sotho people, especially by speakers of the low prestige dialects of Northern Sotho such

as the Lowveld dialects of Bolobedu, Bokgaga, Phalaborwa, Mapulaneng, etc. This is because these dialects (the dialects which are closer to Southern Sotho and Tswana) are associated with prestige languages which are respected by most of the Northern Sotho people. This is also a confirmation that the closer the community is to the industrialized metropolitan areas the higher the status it acquires, and the further the community is situated from the industrialized metropolitan centres the lower is its status. For instance, the Northern Sotho dialects which are taken to be of low status are in most cases all those varieties which are either in the far north or far eastern part of the Northern Province and Mpumalanga, and as such, these dialects are further away from the metropolitan areas of the PWV than the prestige dialects of Northern Sotho such as Pedi and Kopa. This also applies to the other indigenous languages such as Venda and Tsonga which are far from Gauteng and which are generally regarded by most Northern Sotho people as of low status. It is also important to realise that most of the Northern Sotho people whose dialects belong to the prestige varieties regard the low prestige dialects of Northern Sotho in the Lowveld as belonging to the same status as Venda and Tsonga due to the fact that they are in more or less the same area. The historical ties of the Kopa people and the Tswana people is explained in their praise poem:

“Re ba boKgobudi Morolong,  
 Re bina tholo ye e tšwago Maralla,  
 Ye e tšwago Modimolle wa Mmangwato.”(Mokgokong, 1966:17)

(We belong to Kgobudi’s clan, a Morolong,  
 We venerate the kudu which comes from Maralla,  
 Which comes from Modimolle in Botswana)

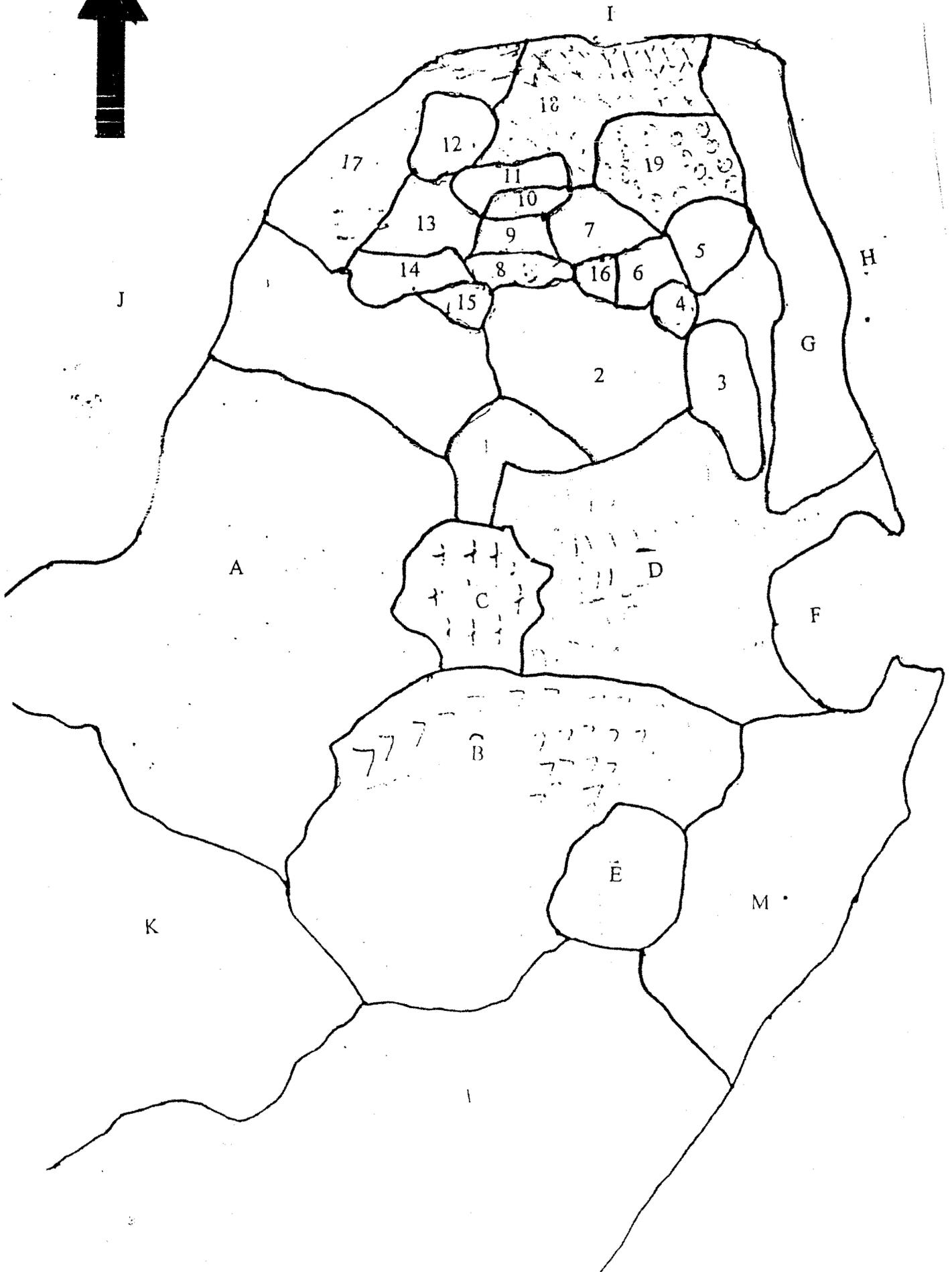
With regard to the origin of the Kopa people, Mokgokong (1966:17) says:

“According to tradition, their original home was Borolong, i.e. the area around the present town of Mafeking. From Borolong they migrated eastwards in the form of regiments and did not return to their homeland. Their first settlement in the Transvaal

was in the area between Marapyane and Groblersdal, whence they moved to a place called Tilo on the Olifants River. Here they met, and lived with, the Kwena of Mašabela and the Kgaga of Maake”.

The following map shows the distribution of Northern Sotho dialects and other indigenous ethnic languages (which are spoken in the neighbourhood of the Northern Sotho communities) in relation to their distance from the PWV (which is composed of a prestigious multilingual society) :

NORTH



Explanation of the map:

- 1 : Kopa (Northern Province: 1 - 19 )**
- 2 : Pedi**
- 3 : Pulana**
- 4 : Dzwabo**
- 5 : Phalaborwa**
- 6 : Khutšwe**
- 7 : Lobedu**
- 8 : Molepo**
- 9 : Mamabolo**
- 10 : Dikgale**
- 11 : Tlokwa**
- 12 : Hananwa**
- 13 : Moletši**
- 14 : Matlala**
- 15 : Ndebele-Sotho**
- 16 : Khaga (Kgaga)**
- 17 : Seleka**
- 18 : Venda**
- 19 : Tsonga - Shangaan**
- 
- A : North West Province (the Tswana)**
- B : Free State Province (The Southern Sotho)**
- C : Gauteng (Multilingual society)**
- D : Mpumalanga (Swazi, Zulu, Ndebele, Northern Sotho, Tsonga)**
- E : Lesotho**
- F : Swaziland**
- G : Kruger National Park**

- H : Mozambique**  
**I : Zimbabwe**  
**J : Botswana**  
**K : Northern Cape**  
**L : Eastern Cape**  
**M : Kwazulu-Natal**

#### 4.1.2 Proximity to urban environment

Proximity to urban centres is also one of the major factors which give prestige to the community and its language. This means that the community which resides far from the metropolitan centres is regarded as inferior in status to those communities which are nearer to these centres. As such, the nearer the community is to the cities the higher is its status. This is usually due to the fact that the urban centres are always associated with economic prosperity, and most of the people who are economically better-off are those who work in the cities. Many people in the South African rural areas flock to the cities to seek their fortune, and those people who stay within the urban environments are regarded as fortunate by the communities who stay in the rural areas because they are believed to be next to employment opportunities, civilisation, schools, etc. As already mentioned (in the previous paragraphs), the Sotho communities who are nearer to the metropolitan areas of the PWV are the Tswana and Southern Sotho people. Compared to these communities, the Northern Sotho people reside very far from the metropolitan environment of the Witwatersrand (i.e. in the Northern Province), especially the communities who reside in the Lowveld areas (to the northern and eastern side of the Drakensberg), such as the **Lobedu, Bakgaga ba Maake, Banareng ba Sekororo, Baphalaborwa**, etc. The dialects which are spoken in these areas are regarded as being among the inferior dialects of Northern Sotho. The communities who reside closer to the metropolitan area of the 'South' equate the status of the Northern Sotho communities in the Lowveld with their neighbours, i.e. the Tsonga and Venda communities. Even though the Tsonga and Venda communities do not abandon their languages to speak Southern Sotho or Tswana, they are however aware of the inferior status associated with their languages, possibly due to the fact that their

languages are not associated with the metropolitan environment of the 'South', but with the Bantustan areas of Gazankulu and Venda. This is usually proved by the fact that a large majority of the Tsonga and the Venda people can speak almost all the indigenous languages which are spoken in the PWV areas, such as Tswana, Southern Sotho, the Nguni languages as well as Northern Sotho (especially the Lobedu dialect, which is spoken in their neighbourhood). In contrast to this, the majority of the Tswana, the Southern Sotho, the Northern Sotho (especially those who use 'superior' dialects of Northern Sotho, i.e. Pedi, Kopa and several dialects which are spoken in the areas around Pietersburg, Potgietersrus, Ellisras, Naboomspruit, Nylstroom, etc.) and the Nguni communities cannot speak Tsonga or Venda. The Tsonga and the Venda people regard it as prestigious to know the indigenous languages which are spoken in the metropolitan South (which the Tsonga people call 'Joni' - for Johannesburg) but the PWV communities for their part do not find it necessary to know Venda or Tsonga, which they despise due to their rural association. This is exactly the same status the 'prestige' Sotho languages (as well as the 'prestige' dialects of Northern Sotho) accord the 'inferior' dialects of Northern Sotho, such as Lobedu, Pulana, Kgaga, Phalaborwa, Khutšwe, Tlokwa, etc. This is apparently due to the vast difference which exists between the standard Northern Sotho and these 'inferior' Lowveld dialects. Monnig (1967:V) says the following with regard to the difference between the Lobedu and the Pedi dialects:

"It is clear that complete cultural homogeneity did not follow upon the establishment of the political or military supremacy of the Pedi. In fact the cultural differences between the Pedi and some of the tribes of the Transvaal Sotho are considerable. The Lobedu, for example, are culturally closer to the Venda than to the Pedi."

The prestige associated with the urban environment is also observed within the rural communities themselves. In the Northern Province (like in all other provinces which are predominantly rural) there are small urban centres such as Pietersburg, Louis Trichardt, Messina, Phalaborwa, Potgietersrus, Nylstroom, Ellisras and Tzaneen, where some indigenous people (usually from the nearby rural villages) reside in the rural townships (today some stay in towns). Some of these small urban centres have mining industries and factories where a considerable number of people get employed, even

though they may not compete with the PWV. Centres such as these include the open cast copper mines in Messina and Phalaborwa, as well as the chrome mines in Tubatse and Burgersfort. In these centres, which are usually found next to the rural villages, a small group of urban citizens is created, which enjoys a superior status compared to their rural neighbours who are still living under the authority of the local chiefs (**Magoši**). The communities who stay in the rural areas around these small urban centres feel inferior to those who stay in the urban centres, while, at the same time, those who regard themselves to be urban citizens, have a superior attitude. This is also reflected in their language where they try to move away from the local dialects to get closer to standard Northern Sotho. This is usually facilitated by the fact that a considerable number of people who stay in these urban centres come from remote areas with different dialects altogether (especially prestige dialects) to influence the majority who originate from the nearby villages. In informal research I conducted in the communities of Phalaborwa, Duiwelskloof and Tzaneen, I discovered that, of the Northern Sotho people who stay in the township of Namakgale, about 53% speak a standard Northern Sotho and 30% still use the Phalaborwa dialect, while 17% of them use other dialects, especially those which are spoken in the Lowveld areas. Statistics in the rural villages under kgoši Makhushane, Mashishimale, Selwane and Maseke (which are villages outside Namakgale in Phalaborwa) show that the Phalaborwa dialect is still used by the majority of the members of these communities, i.e. about 85%, while the remaining 15% is dominated by those who, due to education or an inferiority complex, have adopted the standard Northern Sotho language (or speak dialects which are closer to the standard language), and these are mostly the youth who are influenced by their peers from Namakgale township whom they meet in the local high schools and technical colleges of, for example, Sebalamakgolo, Lepato, Maphokwane high schools, Sir Val Duncan technical school, etc. The situation in other rural towns in the Lowveld, such as Tzaneen and Duiwelskloof is the same, even though the use of standard Northern Sotho and other 'prestige' dialects is less than it is in Phalaborwa. This is due to the fact that, unlike situations in other rural towns like Tzaneen, Duiwelskloof, Giyane, etc. which are mainly agricultural and administrative, Phalaborwa developed as mining and industrial centre (phosphate mine which was developed as government parastatal by Foscor since 1956 and the open cast copper mine which was started in 1964 by Rio Tinto in the name of Palabora Mining Company, as well as other heavy industries such as Fedmis) where many people

came from other parts of the Northern Province to look for employment. As such, besides the arrival of the people who spoke standard Northern Sotho as well as other 'superior' dialects of Northern Sotho, which exerted influence on the Phalaborwa dialect, many people who spoke other South African indigenous languages settled in Phalaborwa in the townships of Namakgale and Lulekani. These included the Tsonga from Mozambique and the former Gazankulu homeland, the Swazi from the former Kangwane homeland and Swaziland, the Zulu and the Venda people. As a result, there is a sort of multilingualism in the townships of Phalaborwa, which is not the case in some of the other townships, such as Lenyenye, Gakgapane, Praktiseer, etc. where the local rural dialects, (which are spoken in the nearby villages under the traditional chiefs) still dominate other dialects. Many residents of Lenyenye (in Tzaneen) and Gakgapane (in Duiwelskloof) speak a Northern Sotho which is closer to the standard language, since they want to dissociate themselves from the inferior dialects which they believe are spoken by those people who are not yet civilised, even though **Sekgaga** and **Selobedu** still dominate in these townships. In the rural townships in the Lowveld (where most of the Northern Sotho dialects are regarded as inferior) the communities strive to come closer to the standard Northern Sotho language by avoiding local dialects, as in the following examples:

**Khesimana khe ke letekere** (Lobedu), as against the township language:

**Mošmane yo ke setlaela** (standard)

Eng. : 'This boy is stupid'

**Ba ʎoba dikhobe kua nokeni** (Lobedu), as against the township language:

**Ba swara dihlapi kua nokeng** (standard)

Eng. : 'They catch fish at the river'

**Ba ʎa booswa** (Lobedu), as against the township language:

**Ba ja bogobe** (standard)

Eng. : 'They eat porridge'

**Khosi ba tshwere kheebe** (Lobedu - the plural subject concord is often used to show respect), as against the township language:

**Kgoši o swere selepe** (standard)

Eng. : 'The chief is holding an axe'

#### 4.1.3 Literacy rate and civilization

The rate of literacy and civilization of a community determines its status. The community which is literate and civilized is always accorded a high social status while the community with a high illiteracy rate and low civilization standard is always accorded a low social status. Literacy, which leads to the civilization of the community, is mainly attained through education (especially of the youth). The literate and civilized community always tends to associate itself with the standard variety since the standard language is always applied as medium of instruction in schools, which gives this variety a status of 'a language of the educated group'. Cluver (1996:28) says the following in this regard:

"This means that pupils whose language or dialect differs somewhat from that of the standard are forced by the education system to adjust their language so that it conforms with the standard form."

These adjustments automatically elevate the status of these pupils who will no longer prefer to be associated with their original dialects (which are regarded to be inferior to the standard language) but with the prestigious standard language. Cluver (1996:28) says the following with regard to the results of civilisation in the social status of the Greeks:

"The high levels of civilisation and learning of the Greeks gave them and their language a very high standing in all the surrounding countries. Local languages did not have the vocabulary for all the Greek concepts and became stigmatised as 'uncivilised languages'. If you wanted to express complex thoughts you had to do it in Greek. In this way the Greek language and culture dominated the surrounding

communities.”

According to Cluver (1996:29):

“Once a community has achieved a high level of civilization its language obviously reflects this and it will have many technical and scientific terms. This creates the image amongst other speech communities that their languages are ‘not good enough’ or are ‘incapable’ of expressing these higher thoughts.”

The literacy rate of a community is also determined by the environment in which the community finds itself. For instance, the rural communities in most cases have a low literacy rate compared to the urban communities, apparently due to the fact that schools in the urban areas are usually readily accessible, while in the rural areas most of the pupils have to walk several kilometers daily to reach the nearest school. In some cases schools may even be totally out of reach. It was mentioned in chapter one that the National Party government did not make provision for the establishment of schools for the indigenous communities in the metropolitan areas and various townships. However, this only applied to tertiary institutions and boarding high schools. Primary and secondary schools (usually made up of two blocks of five classrooms each, with a small administration block consisting of a staff-room, a store-room and the principal’s office) were built in all the South African townships for only the day scholars (the same plan for all township schools). The situation was better than in the rural areas where the government gave all the powers for the collection of funds from the rural communities (for the erection of schools) to the chiefs (**magoši**) of whom the majority did not have any prior financial management skills to handle capital for the establishment of projects such as these. In this way, only the communities which were fortunate to have able, dedicated and honest traditional leaders (usually those chiefs who were educated and civilised) succeeded, while the vast majority, who were mostly illiterate, failed due to mismanagement and corruption. Most of the chiefs who did not acquire Western civilization, did not find it necessary to build schools in their areas, and furthermore, they did not even make provisions for their own children (the future heirs) to acquire Western civilization by attending missionary schools (wherever they happened to be available). The

literate traditional leaders developed their areas by providing for the establishment of infrastructures such as roads, schools, health clinics, tertiary institutions, etc. and also encouraged the establishment of missionary stations in their areas while the vast majority remained underdeveloped. This ultimately led to the creation of civilised societies within these communities which came to be regarded as superior by other communities, especially by those who did not get such opportunities due to the failures of their rulers. In the case of Northern Sotho, these factors played an important role in the creation of prestige varieties among the Northern Sotho communities. Most of the traditional leaders (and their subjects) in the Lowveld were not as advanced as the chiefs (and their subjects) in Sekhukhuneland, Groblersdal, Polokwane, etc., and this is one of the major factors which gave the latter group the monopoly in the creation of a standard Northern Sotho language (as was stated in chapter one). As a result of the civilizing work of, inter alia, the German missionaries among the Pedi community, the Pedi people and their dialect became very influential, and even today their influence is still felt among the Northern Sotho communities. For instance, recently the 'Pedi issue' has just repeated itself when the influential elite groups (apparently the academics and some influential groups in the defunct Northern Sotho language board), decided to change the name 'Northern Sotho' to 'Sepedi' - a decision which caused a furore among the various communities who belong to dialects other than Sepedi and whose arguments are that Pedi is a dialect just like theirs and that Northern Sotho is a unifying name which is acceptable to the majority of the dialects even though its orthography is based on the Pedi dialect). As a result, some of the remote dialects such as Lobedu intend to withdraw to become independent languages. The Lobedu community has already submitted an application to this effect, and the Pan South African Language Board is in the process of investigating this possibility.

Civilization and literacy, which lead to the elevation of the status of societies, cannot be divorced from the economic position of the community. The communities which have sound economic footing, possibly due to the environment in which they live, are able to establish the infrastructures and institutions to help educate and civilise their youth so that they can have the respect of other communities. The majority of the Northern Sotho people are poor, just like the province in which they live, i.e. the Northern Province (which is recorded to be the poorest of all the nine provinces of

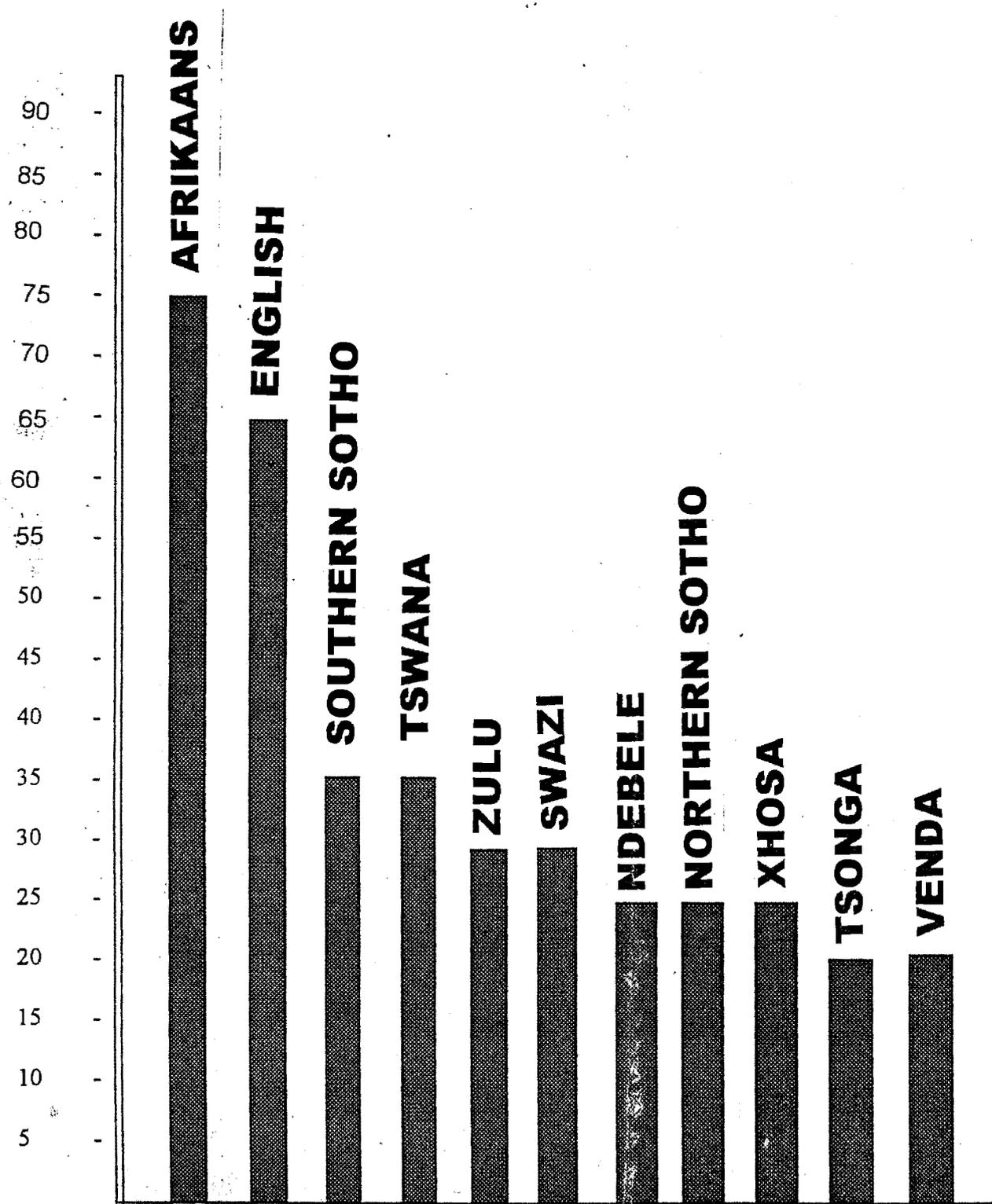
the 'New South Africa') as compared to the other communities such as the Tswana, the Southern Sotho, the Zulu, the Xhosa, etc. who are found in environments which are better off economically. With the exception of the Tsonga and the Venda people, whose status is also associated with the poverty of the Northern Province, most of the ethnic indigenous communities live in the areas which are rich in agricultural and mining products and these create a good atmosphere for education and the development of literate and prestigious societies. The languages spoken by these literate and prestigious societies will also be associated with the status of these societies, while the languages (or the varieties) used by illiterate and uncivilized societies (such as the majority of the people who live in poor areas such as the Northern Province) are always associated with the low status of these societies and are regarded as inferior languages (varieties). According to the 1996 census returns (as reflected in the Northern Times of October 27, 1998), over ninety percent of the population of the Northern Province are still rural, and of the 4,9 million people in this province 2,5 million are Northern Sotho speaking people while all the other ethnic population groups, like the Venda, the Tsonga, the Ndebele, the English and Afrikaans groups, etc. share the remaining 2,4 million. In general, this reflects the extent to which the Northern Sotho people are exposed to poor environments, which hamper the development of a literate society.

#### **4.2 Contributions by the indigenous languages**

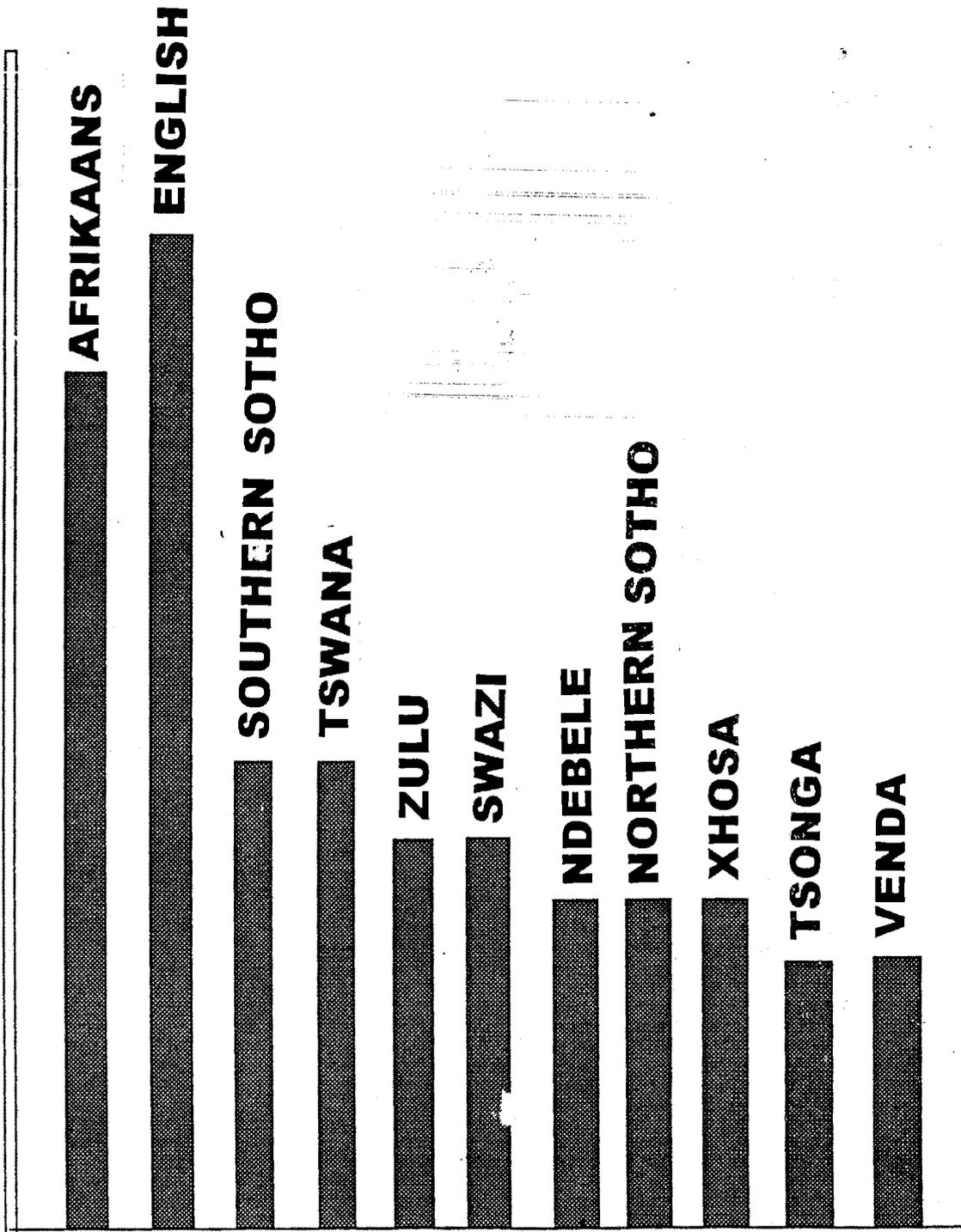
The indigenous languages which contribute to the development of the status of Northern Sotho and the development of prestige terminology in this language are mainly the languages which are spoken in the neighbourhood of the Northern Sotho people and those languages which are dominant in the multilingual societies in the urban areas, especially in Gauteng. These indigenous languages include languages such as Tswana, Southern Sotho, the Nguni languages (Zulu, Swazi, Ndebele and Xhosa), Tsonga and Venda. The role played by these languages in the development of Northern Sotho is determined by their status. The higher the prestige the language has, the higher the influence it has on the development of prestige terminology in Northern Sotho, and the lower the status the language has, the lower its contribution is to the development of prestige terminology in Northern Sotho. The following graphs show how the Northern Sotho people rate Afrikaans and English as well as the

indigenous languages of South Africa, according to their prestige (Afrikaans was rated slightly higher than English before the Soweto riots of 1976, and this position changed radically after 1976):

The (prestige) status of the South African languages before 1976



The (prestige) status of the South African languages after 1976



#### 4.2.1 The Sotho languages

As already mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the other two Sotho languages, i.e. Southern Sotho and Tswana, play a major role in the development of prestige terminology in the Northern Sotho vocabulary. The factors mentioned in 4.1. (such as proximity to urban metropolitan environment, the economic status, literacy and civilization) explain the reasons why the Northern Sotho people regard these two Sotho languages as superior to their language. Many Northern Sotho people are inclined to use Southern Sotho and Tswana terms (in the form of code-switching and code-mixing) when speaking Northern Sotho while very few of the Tswana and Southern Sotho people use code-switching (or code-mixing) with Northern Sotho terms when speaking their languages. This is because Southern Sotho and Tswana terminologies are regarded as 'prestigious' by the Northern Sotho community, while the Tswana and Southern Sotho communities regard Northern Sotho terminology to be inferior to theirs. This discovery is based on the following observations:

(1) As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, in the various high schools and tertiary institutions which are meant for the Northern Sotho youth (in the Northern Province), very few Tswana and Southern Sotho speaking students (from the 'South') are admitted. Within a very short period the majority of the youth in these institutions start using Tswana and Southern Sotho terminology, imitating the few students who came with these languages from the PWV, while none of these few students ever bother to speak Northern Sotho (except for tuition purposes where Southern Sotho and Tswana are not offered in the class).

(2) The majority of the Northern Sotho people who go to the 'South' as migrant labourers or ordinary workers, come back to the 'North' speaking Tswana and/or Southern Sotho, and in most cases when they speak Northern Sotho it is a Northern Sotho which is mixed with Tswana and Southern Sotho terms, while they, in turn, are failing to influence the Tswana and the Southern Sotho people to abandon their language for Northern Sotho.

(3) Even though the Northern Sotho people do dominate (numerically) in other sections of the PWV, this domination only refers to ‘official ethnic grouping’ and not the practical language these people use in their daily lives. This is reflected in the research by Finlayson and Slabbert (1997:123) (quoted under 4.1.1 in this chapter), i.e.

“...Northern Sotho, while being a dominant language of the Northern Province, is nevertheless utilized to a far lesser extent in the Gauteng area.”

(4) The majority of the Sotho slang terms used in *tsotsi-taal* are derived from either Southern Sotho or Tswana, and very few from Northern Sotho. The same is true for the slang which is spoken by the Northern Sotho youth in the Northern Province. For instance, the ‘Sotho based’ *tsotsi-taal* by Mfusi (1992:43) in chapter 3 (3.1.1) shows how Southern Sotho and Tswana terminologies predominate over the Northern Sotho terminology in this register, e.g.

*Ho grand*

*ke teng rounding*

*A ko njwetse*

*Maobane jumpers*

*Ka blasa majasana wa seputla*

*Nou ke tshwerwe ke setlamatlama*

*Re ilo photha magrison a re kenye ko bukeng once*

#### 4.2.2 The Nguni languages

The majority of the Northern Sotho people regard some of the Nguni languages to be superior to Northern Sotho, especially the Zulu language. Apparently this is due to various factors such as the following:

(1) Historically, the Zulu (usually called **Mapono**, by the Northern Sotho people, - the name which is derived from the word 'nakedness', since the traditional Zulu warriors were half naked, carrying shields and assegais) were known and feared by the Northern Sotho people for their military superiority. During the 17th century, Shaka and his runaway generals, such as Soshangana and Mzilikazi terrorized the populations (including the Northern Sotho people) in the area which came to be known as the Transvaal. This gave most of the Sotho people the impression that the Nguni people are superior and invincible, which also resulted in the elevated status ascribed to their language.

(2) The second and most important reason for their (the Nguni) status rating is their numerical preponderance in the major cities and the metropolitan areas of South Africa, such as the PWV (the Zulu), Durban metropolis (the Zulu) and Cape metropolis (the Xhosa). Finlayson and Slabbert (1997:123) say the following regarding the numerical strength of the Zulu (and the Northern Sotho) community in the Province of Gauteng:

“According to the last census (1990) the predominant language group resident in Soweto are Zulu (38.5%) and the Northern Sotho (15.5%).”

The numerical strength of the Zulu, in particular, in the Johannesburg metropolitan area gave the Northern Sotho people the impression that the 'South' (**Borwa**) is a place for the Zulu, Tswana and the Southern Sotho, and anyone who wants to be associated with this area (**Makgoweng**) should know these languages to avoid being identified as a foreigner and possibly being despised by the city communities or even becoming a victim of *tsotsis* and gangsters.

(3) The other factor which helps to enhance the prestige of the Zulu language is the pride of the Zulu nation. Unlike most indigenous communities of South Africa, such as the Northern Sotho, who have an inferiority complex, the Zulu people are always proud to be Zulu and very few of them compromise to use a language other than Zulu in any communication. This superior attitude has both advantages and disadvantages for the Zulu people. The advantages are obviously connected with the

elevation of the prestige of the Zulu language as a result of its stability, resulting from the unwavering attitude of the Zulu people, while the disadvantages may be connected with the slow growth of the Zulu language through foreign acquisition since the pride of the Zulu people does not allow them to borrow words from other languages at the same rate as other languages (which the Zulu regard to be inferior) do. On the other hand, the inferiority complex of the Northern Sotho people works to the detriment of the Northern Sotho language since it creates the impression that the Northern Sotho community is being outnumbered in the metropolitan area (the PWV) by other indigenous communities, while the real truth is that the majority of the Northern Sotho people in this area identify themselves 'in hiding' (secretly) while practically they associate themselves with the 'prestige' groups such as the Zulu, the Southern Sotho and the Tswana people. The advantage of the inferiority complex is that Northern Sotho, by its association with the Zulu (and other prestige languages), acquires a large vocabulary through borrowing from these 'prestige' languages, while they, in turn, acquire very little from Northern Sotho.

The prestige of the Nguni languages is reflected in the use of some of its slang terms by most Northern Sotho speaking people. Besides Afrikaans and English, much of the terminology used in *tsotsi-taal* (and other South African slang) by the Northern Sotho people, is derived from Southern Sotho, Tswana and Zulu, rather than from Northern Sotho. For instance, the following terms which are used so often by the Northern Sotho youth may be taken as examples in this regard:

***mfowethu* or *mfo***

'my brother' or 'my friend', e.g.

***o tšwa kae mfowethu?***

'where are you coming from, my brother?'

'where are you coming from, my friend?'

***wakithi***

'my brother' or 'my friend' (or 'chum'), e.g.

***go bjang, wakithi?***

‘how are you, chum?’

‘how are you, brother?’

**-fukuza**

‘work very hard’, e.g.

**o sa fukuza ka mola serapeng**

‘he/she is still labouring in the garden’

**majita**

‘boys’ or ‘gentlemen’, e.g.

**le tšwa kae, majita?**

‘where are you coming from, boys?’

‘where are you coming from, gentlemen?’

**bari or baru**

‘a stupid person’ or ‘a moron’, e.g.

**e kae bari/baru yela?**

‘where is that stupid person?’

‘where is that moron?’

The other Nguni language which had a tremendous influence on the vocabulary of the Northern Sotho dialects in the vicinities of Potgietersrus and Zebediela (the so-called **Mokerong** district) is Ndebele. Even though the Northern Sotho people, in general, do not regard the Ndebele speaking community to be superior to them (especially those Northern Sotho communities who are not closer to **Mokerong**), this language had much influence on the vocabulary of Northern Sotho, and there are many terms used today in Northern Sotho which can be traced to have originated from this language in the Potgietersrus area. For instance, the word **sekhambeleni**, which refers to the ‘sweetened starch water’ used as cool drink, originated from Ndebele, *skhambeleni*, which literally means ‘what have we travelled for?’ (Mojela, 1991:92).

### 4.2.3 The Tsonga and Venda languages

While many indigenous languages in the south and south-western part of the Transvaal (i.e. the southern part of the Northern Province, Gauteng and the North-Western Province) contributed much to the development of prestige terminology in Northern Sotho, the Venda and the Tsonga languages in the north and north eastern part of the Northern Province and Mpumalanga contributed to the decline of the prestige of the Northern Sotho dialects in their neighbourhood. The Northern Sotho communities, whose dialects contributed much towards the creation of the standard Northern Sotho language (the 'prestige' dialects), despise the Tsonga and the Venda languages. All those Northern Sotho communities who are residents in the areas next to the Tsonga and Venda areas are also associated with the 'inferior' status accorded to these communities by those whose dialects are 'superior' varieties of Northern Sotho. In some cases these communities refer to Balobedu, Bakgaga, Baphalaborwa etc. (the communities who are adjacent to the Tsonga people) as **makwapa** (the nickname for the Tsonga people which was given by the Northern Sotho people). The inferior status of the Venda and the Tsonga people may be ascribed to, inter alia, the following reasons:

(1) The Tsonga and the Venda speaking communities are, traditionally, residents of the remote rural areas of the Northern Province, which are very far from the metropolitan areas of Gauteng, and as such, they are very far from the 'prestige' of **Makgaweng**. As a result, the Venda and the Tsonga communities (and their neighbours - some of the inferior dialects of Northern Sotho) are associated with rural poverty, unemployment, poor infrastructures, etc. which are all common characteristics of the life styles under traditional chiefs - the areas which may best be explained by the *tsotsi* term 'the **bundus**', (which refers to the undeveloped places in Africa which are inhabited by those people who are still very traditional and uncivilized).

(2) The Venda and the Tsonga communities are not only associated with the rural North, but also with the poverty in the countries adjacent to their territories (which are historically known to have links with them). The Tsonga (or the Shangaan), for instance, are associated with the Mozambican Tsonga (Vatsonga-Machangane, who are descendants of Soshangane and Ngungunyane) and the

poverty of the area. Most of the indigenous people of Mozambique are known by the Northern Sotho people as migrant labourers and illegal immigrants, who cross the Mozambican border illegally into South Africa under cover of the Kruger National Park to look for fortune in South Africa, while the Venda people are also associated with the Shona of Zimbabwe, who worked as migrant labourers in South Africa during the fifties and the sixties of this century. The Northern Sotho people nicknamed them 'Mapolantane', which was the name given to the indigenous people who came from the north of the Limpopo - named after the city of Blantyre in Malawi.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1 Prestige terminology and prestige language**

In this research, prestige terminology refers to all terms which are regarded as superior in status when compared to those terms which, in the opinions of most Northern Sotho speaking people, are regarded to be inferior in status. These 'prestige terms' are those lexical items which are used by the communities who are of the opinion that their languages are inferior in status, to elevate their status. The communities whose languages are regarded as inferior in status, substitute the indigenous terms with the 'prestige terms' in order to conceal their inferior status so that they may be associated with the 'prestige communities'. The prestige terms are usually derived from the 'prestige languages' or the 'prestige language varieties', i.e. the languages (or the varieties) which are spoken by the communities with a high status. These are those languages or varieties which:

- (1) have a written orthography
- (2) were favoured by standardisation (are either standard languages or are close to it)
- (3) are languages of education (used as media in schools)
- (4) are used in the courts of law
- (5) are used in all official government documents and correspondences
- (6) are used as *lingua franca* in churches, official rallies, commercial and market places, etc.

Furthermore, these are the languages which are used by:

- (1) those people who are educated
- (2) those people who are regarded as civilised
- (3) those people who have confidence in their language and are proud of it
- (4) those people who are regarded as *clevas* (in the case of urban slang - *tsotsi-taal* or *flytaal*)

On the other hand, the inferior languages (varieties) are those languages or varieties which:

- (1) do not have written forms
- (2) were sidelined by standardisation
- (3) are not used as media in education
- (4) are not used in courts of law; in official government correspondences, etc.
- (5) in general, are sidelined (or overlooked) politically, socially and economically

These inferior varieties (languages) are those varieties (languages) which are used by:

- (1) those people who are looked upon as being uneducated
- (2) those people who are regarded as uncivilised
- (3) those people who want to be associated with languages other than their own (the prestige varieties)
- (4) those people who generally have a feeling of inferiority when using their language in communicating with other communities
- (5) those people who are generally regarded as *mogots* (stupid - in *tsotsi-taal*)

The obvious prestige languages in South Africa are Afrikaans and English. These two languages prevailed over all the indigenous languages of South Africa for almost a quarter of a millennium and during this period (including today) these languages gained prestige as:

- the languages of the employers
- the languages of the rulers
- the languages of the rich people
- the languages of the educated and civilised people of South Africa
- media of instruction in schools, courts of law, parliament, the military, political rallies, and all official government correspondences
- *lingua franca* between the various peoples of South Africa

Besides Afrikaans and English, other indigenous languages of South Africa, such as the Tswana, Southern Sotho, Zulu, etc., seem to be regarded as superior in status to others (such as the Northern Sotho, Tsonga, Venda, etc.).

## 5.2 Factors which determine prestige terminology and prestige language

For a terminology to be prestigious, it should be derived from a 'prestige' language (variety). In most cases the prestige language is either a standard variety or a variety which is closer to a standard language. With reference to the standardisation of Swahili, Cluver (1996:43) summarises the important factors, leading to the elevation of a variety (language) to a 'prestige' status, as follows:

- “-The city varieties become more important as the cities themselves (here Mombasa and Zanzibar) became wealthy and powerful.
- The selection of the variety of the most powerful group as the basis of the new standard language.
- The role of the church in spreading a language.
- The role of dictionaries and grammars in standardising a variety.
- The role of language academy (in this case BAKITA) in standardising a language.”

There are several factors which lead to the elevation of a language (variety) to a prestige status, which inter alia, include the following: **the socio-political factors, the missionary activities, the economic factors and urbanization.**

### 5.2.1 Socio-political factors

Political factors played an important role in the development of prestige languages in every part of the world, and Africa in particular, especially with the development of standard languages. Some of the political influences in the development of prestige languages occur as follows:

(i) It is a known fact that the languages of the rulers are always placed before all other languages, thereby elevating them to a prestige position. In South Africa, for instance, English and Afrikaans (initially Dutch) as languages of colonial powers, were imposed on the indigenous population as medium of instruction in schools, in the courts of law, in the commercial sectors, in the government offices, etc., and as such, became the major prestige languages. Any indigenous person who is fluent in either of these two languages, or both, is respected by everybody in the community. Cluver (1996:107) summarises the advantages associated with the languages of colonial powers as follows:

“The colonial languages also helped to create new social classes: those who had access to these languages could change their socio-economic position very quickly. Knowledge of a colonial language could lead to a rise in power and wealth of an individual over the traditionally powerful groups. A new social class developed whose members were conversant in at least the colonial language and one or more local languages. Alexandre (1971:658) points out that interpreters became very powerful: ‘They formed a new, non-tribal or supratribal elite group, defined and, to a degree, hierarchized in terms of their mastery of the colonial language, which gave them a near-monopoly of access to the modern sector.’”

(ii) In most cases the colonial powers (or the politicians) take the initiatives to standardise the indigenous languages, thereby elevating some of the indigenous languages to a prestige status at the expense of other indigenous languages. This the politicians did by appointing and giving powers to certain officials whose responsibility was to standardise the indigenous languages. The example here is the standardisation of many indigenous African languages such as Swahili, Shona, the Sotho languages, etc. Cluver (1996:39) says the following in this regard:

“As in Europe, a city dialect was selected to serve as basis for the new standard language. However, in contrast to Europe, the selection was not done by the people themselves, but by colonists. Polome (1984:60) points out that ‘with the rising of the Zanzibar town dialect to the level of a standard, the designation “standard” was felt

more to be a European decision than an African choice in cities with a long cultural tradition like Mombasa...'. This observation shows an important difference between language standardisation in Africa and in Europe.”

(iii) In most instances, the nation which is powerful militarily, imposes its language on the defeated nations as medium of instruction, thereby elevating its own language to a prestige status at the expense of the languages of the defeated nations. According to Cluver (1996:29):

“...an external political or military force (that usually destroyed everything so that there was not much left to unify) is often needed. Only after this political unification can the language be unified so that everyone speaks in more or less the same way or at least writes in the same way. Note that unification here means the imposition of the dominant variety on speakers of less influential dialects.”

This political strategy of ‘unification’ is the one which helped to elevate the status of most indigenous languages of Southern Africa, such as the Zulu language (which grew to the status it has today as a result of the unification campaigns carried out during the 19th century by Shaka); the Ndebele language, which acquired a higher status after the victory of Mzilikazi and Lubengula over many tribes on their way to the present Matebeleland (Zimbabwe); the Tsonga-Shangaan languages (the unification of which was carried out by Soshangane when he conquered several smaller tribes, such as the Tonga, in the eastern part of the Transvaal and Southern Mozambique after running away from the Zulu), and the Pedi, who succeeded in subjugating various tribes in and around the area which is today known as Sekhukhuneland as well as the central and northern part of the Transvaal.

### 5.2.2 Missionary activities

The Western missionaries played a major role in the creation of prestige language varieties among the indigenous communities in Africa. In Southern Africa the missionary societies included, inter alia,

the London Missionary Society, the Moravian Missionary Society, the French Missionary Society, the Roman Catholic Missionary Society and the Berlin Missionary Society. Since it was not possible for these missionary societies to establish missionary stations in all the areas where all the various languages and dialects were spoken, the few communities who were fortunate to have missionary stations established in their areas automatically gained prestige. In these stations the missionaries established churches, schools, hospitals or health clinics, etc., which are primary requirements for civilization. The first communities to use these infrastructures were those who were in the vicinities of the missionary stations and the first indigenous language varieties used in these missionary schools were those which were spoken around the missionary stations. This automatically elevated these languages to a prestige status as languages of education. The missionary activities affected the status of the community in the following ways:

(i) The missionaries were the first to convert the indigenous oral languages into written forms, and as such, the varieties in the vicinities of the missionaries were first to be written. This gave these varieties a prestige platform since the varieties which had a written form stood a better chance of monopolising standardisation, thereby, remaining as sole prestige languages while all other communities belonging to other varieties had to associate themselves with these prestige varieties in order to pick up their statuses.

(ii) Western civilization started in the missionary stations in most parts of our country. By educating the indigenous people, the missionary societies created an elite group in the proximity of these stations which played a major role in the development of their respective languages. This development included their participation in the standardisation of their languages and, as such, the dialectal varieties (or languages) which were used by most of these elite groups had a better chance of gaining prestige at the expense of other varieties (languages).

The missionary activities played an important role in the creation of prestige varieties and prestige terminology in Northern Sotho. Most of the Northern Sotho communities whose dialects can be regarded as 'prestige' varieties are found in the areas which happened to be among the first to have

missionary stations in their midst. Between 1863 and 1867 Karl Endemann, of the Berlin Evangelical Missionary Society, established several missionary stations throughout Sekhukhuneland among the Pedi people. He also established a missionary station at Maleuskop among the Kopa of Kgoši Boleu. In 1865 he established a most important station at Botšhabelo near Middelburg where a famous educational institution developed which included a teachers' training college. He is among the first people who laid a foundation for the development of a written Northern Sotho language, and his publications, including his famous work '*Versuch einer Grammatik des Sotho*', of 1876 (Doke, 1961) are all written in Pedi-Kopa dialects. This is one of the reasons why the Pedi and the Kopa communities, together with all other communities which were fortunate to have missionary activities in their areas, were always vanguards of civilization among the Northern Sotho people. Most of the Northern Sotho communities who are regarded as inferior, are found in the area where the missionary activities were very low, or not available at all. In the Lowveld areas of the Northern Province and Mpumalanga, very few missionary stations were established during the 18th century and, even today, are still very few when compared to those in Sekhukhuneland and surrounding areas.

### 5.2.3 Economic factors

The economic position of a community determines its prestige status as well as that of its language. The community which is poor economically is accorded inferior status, while the one which is economically above average gets superior status. The economic status of a community is closely related to the environment in which the community finds itself. The rural community is generally poor in comparison to the urban communities. Apparently, this is due to the fact that the rural areas have very few and low paid job opportunities when compared to the metropolitan areas where there is an abundance of employment to cater for the majority. In the same way, the rural area which is next to the industrialised urban centres is usually better off economically than the rural area which is too remote from the industrialised areas. As such, the languages which are spoken by the communities who reside next to the urban centres are accorded a higher status, while the languages of the rural communities, especially those who are further away from the urban areas are generally regarded as inferior in status.

Besides the fact that English and Afrikaans were official languages in South Africa, the economic standard of the White communities in South Africa is very high when compared to all the other communities and this helped to elevate and sustain the 'prestige' of their languages. In general, the Whites in South Africa are regarded as employers by the indigenous communities since they do not only own the bulk of the wealth of the country, but also occupy most of the key positions (like CEO's, managerial, etc.) in most places of employment. It is customary for the indigenous people to go to the 'White' areas to look for employment as it is explained by the Northern Sotho term, **Makgoweng**, which refers to 'the White area' or 'employment place'. This is the reason why the indigenous people want to be associated with the Whites by learning to speak their languages to communicate fluently, or/and to use English and/or Afrikaans terms through code-switching with their own languages.

The majority of the Northern Sotho speaking people reside in the rural environments in the Northern Province. This is one of the major reasons why most of the Northern Sotho people have a feeling of inferiority when comparing themselves with other indigenous languages. The major metropolitan centres are found in the province of Gauteng, which is the wealthiest of all the provinces of the 'New South Africa', while the Northern Province which is the home of the Northern Sotho people, besides being largely rural, is regarded as the poorest of all the nine provinces. This poverty of the Northern Province is associated with its people. The majority of the Northern Sotho people regard the Tswana and the Southern Sotho communities as superior to them in status, apparently because they are closer to the Gauteng Province than most of the Northern Sotho communities. The prestige associated with the nearness to the industrialised metropolitan area is also observed within the Northern Sotho people themselves since communities such as the Pedi and Kopa, who are not too far from Gauteng, are accorded greater prestige than most of the communities who are far away in the northern and eastern parts of the Northern Province. The dialects of the latter communities are, as such, regarded to be inferior to the dialects of the communities who are nearer to the cities, i.e. the Pedi, the Kopa, as well as the Northern Sotho dialects spoken in the areas around Warmbaths, Nylstroom, Naboomspruit, Pietersburg, etc. These communities who are closer to the wealthy metropolitan areas are better off economically because they are next to better employment opportunities than those communities who

are far from the urban centres.

Besides their proximity to the rich province of Gauteng, most of the Tswana communities in the former Bophuthatswana have been fortunate enough to be in the area which is economically better off than most of the former Bantustan areas. The fact that Bophuthatswana used to be among the few top producers of platinum in the whole world meant that most of the Tswana communities did not experience the same unemployment problem as the indigenous communities in the other Bantustan areas, especially the Northern Province. As such, most of the people from the Northern Province went to Bophuthatswana to look for better-paid jobs, which are very scarce in their area. This economic prosperity was a booster to the prestige of the Tswana people which, in turn, elevated their language.

#### 5.2.4 Urbanization

Labov (1994:22) says the following regarding language and urbanization:

“New technology makes the rural vocabulary obsolete, and young people abandon traditional phonetic and grammatical forms in favour of urban standards, anticipating their own migration to urban centers. It is therefore commonly reported by dialectologists that local dialects are disappearing, and that we have entered a new period of linguistic convergence instead of divergence.”

Urbanization is one of the major factors which play a role in the creation of prestige communities. Communities which reside in urban areas are accorded a status superior to that of communities in the rural areas. The languages (varieties) of the urban residents are accorded a status superior to that of the languages (varieties) of the rural communities. The rural communities always imitate urban languages to elevate their own status. This is due to, inter alia, the following reasons:

(1) There is an abundance of employment opportunities in the urban areas unlike the situation in the rural areas. As a matter of fact, the majority of the adult population who live in the urban areas are employed, while in the rural areas the majority of the people are not employed. The communities in the urban areas usually get more attractive salaries than the rural communities, and as such, the socio-economic standard of the urban communities is always higher than that of the rural communities.

(2) In the urban centres the facilities are situated within reach. These include facilities such as schools, health centres, hospitals, standard shopping centres, recreation facilities as well as other infrastructures such as roads, etc. These facilities are very scarce in the rural areas and the few which are available, are of very poor quality. Technological advancements and industrialization usually start in the urban centres. If industrialization could start in the rural area, that area would automatically develop into an urban centre.

(3) In most cases the government and administration offices are situated in the urban areas and this helps to elevate the urban communities and their languages. The people in the rural areas usually have to travel several kilometers to reach the administration offices in the urban centres to get assistance. In South Africa, for instance, the central parliament and the government offices are situated in the metropolitan areas of Cape Town and Pretoria. The provincial parliaments and offices are situated in the various provincial capital cities and towns, i.e. Pietersburg for the Northern Province, Johannesburg for Gauteng, Cape Town for the Western Cape, Kimberley for the Northern Cape, Bloemfontein for the Free State, Bisho for the Eastern Cape, Pietermaritzburg for Kwazulu/Natal, Mmabatho for the Northwestern Province and Nelspruit for Mpumalanga. The residents in these capital cities are accorded a status which is not only higher than that of the rural residents, but also higher than that of some of the urban centres which do not have government offices.

(4) The other advantage for the urban communities in South Africa is that they are administered directly by the town and metropolitan councils, who are democratically elected, while the rural

communities are usually placed under the authorities of the tribal chiefs who are mostly unprofessional and autocratic with ill-defined powers.

In most cases, the urban communities are multilingual societies since there are many people from various linguistic backgrounds who are working and living together in the same area. This gives the people whose languages are inferior varieties an opportunity to get into contact with those people whose languages are 'prestige' varieties. Communications in multilingual societies are usually dominated by code-switching and the vocabulary and structures of the prestige languages dominate the conversations. The PWV is a good example of multilingual societies in South Africa and, in this area, people from various linguistic backgrounds meet and try to break down communication barriers through code-switching and code-mixing. Speakers of low prestige languages elevate themselves by using the terminology from the 'prestige' language, through code-switching, instead of using their own inferior terminology. This is one of the reasons why languages such as Tsonga and Venda are scarcely utilized in code-switching and code-mixing in the PWV when compared with other South African indigenous languages. Slabbert and Finlayson (1999:62) say the following in this regard:

"Not all languages are part of the CS (code-switching) repertoire of Gauteng. Tsonga and Venda, because of their generally accepted low status position in the past are not part of an accommodation factor in CS in the townships outside the Northern Province. With the move away from Afrikaans the status of English in general has grown. This would account for the relatively large frequency of English in CS."

(Parenthesis - V.M.Mojela)

In the Northern Province, for instance, the varieties spoken by the residents in the various urban centres and townships, are accorded a higher status than the varieties spoken by the surrounding rural communities under the traditional chiefs. These 'mini' urban centres include, inter alia, Pietersburg and its surrounding townships of Seshego, Lebowakgomo and Mankweng, Messina, Potgietersrus, Nylstroom, Warmbaths, Louis Trichardt, Duiwelskloof, Gakgapane, Tzaneen, Nkowakowa, Lenyenye, Phalaborwa and its surrounding townships of Lulekani and Namakgale. The rural

communities outside these townships consider it a prestige to speak like the people in the neighbouring townships in order to come closer to the 'prestige' varieties. This is usually due to the fact that the township varieties are mostly multilingual and in most cases in these rural towns the varieties are closer to the standard languages than the surrounding rural areas under the chiefs, where the communities are still 'purely' ethnic and dialectal in character. The main difference between multilingualism in the rural towns in the Northern Province and that of the metropolitan areas of the PWV (where many languages are involved) is that in the Northern Province, multilingualism is mostly dominated by standard languages in towns versus dialectal varieties in the adjacent rural areas.

#### 5.2.5 Standardisation

Standardisation plays an important role in the creation of 'prestige' language varieties. The language varieties which are elevated to standard languages and those varieties which are closer to the standard language are regarded as superior in status, while the varieties which are sidelined by standardisation are accorded inferior status. In Africa, standardisation of the indigenous languages was mostly done by colonial powers. The two common methods used in this regard were (1) the elevation of one variety (language) to be a standard language as in the standardisation of Swahili, or (2) the amalgamation of the major varieties to form one standard language as in the standardisation of Shona. The standardisation of Swahili in the East African Federation (Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda) led to the elevation of the Zanzibari dialect of Swahili above all other varieties in the mainland. With regard to the standardisation of Shona, six major dialects were amalgamated, i.e. Zezuru, Korekore, Karanga, Manyika, Kalanga and Ndau. Since it is not always possible to include all the dialects in this amalgamation, only few dialects happened to be closer to a standard language and, thus, only few dialects are accorded 'prestige' status. The standardisation of Northern Sotho seems to have followed the Shona pattern, i.e. that of amalgamating the major dialects in order to form one standard language. 'Major dialects' does not necessarily mean dialects spoken by many people, but dialects which:

- (i) happened to have a written form.

- (2) are spoken by influential people.
- (3) are favoured by the missionaries.
- (4) are next to missionary stations.
- (5) are favoured by the politicians.
- (6) are well-represented in the language boards and language committees.
- (7) are spoken by the educated groups.
- (8) are languages of the conquerors.

The standard Northern Sotho language is an amalgamation of dialects such as the Pedi, Kopa, and the dialects spoken in the areas around Pietersburg-Polokwane, Mokerong, Naboomspruit, Nylstroom and Warmbaths. These dialects are found in the areas where the missionary activities used to prevail during the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. The first missionary schools, churches, hospitals as well as tertiary institutions developed in these areas before spreading to other parts of **Lebowa**. As a result, the first group of the elite Northern Sotho men and women who played a major role in the production of most Northern Sotho publications originated in these areas. This group did not only contribute to the development of the Northern Sotho written language, but also contributed to the development of the Northern Sotho orthography by participating in the activities of the language boards and the language committees. This led to the elevation of their dialects at the expense of other dialects, such as Tlokwa, Hananwa, Lobedu, Phalaborwa, Khutšwe, Kgaga (Maake), Pulana, etc., which were sidelined by the standardisation.

### 5.3 The dialects of Northern Sotho

Van Warmelo (1935:108) divides the Sotho dialects into four groups, i.e. **Central Sotho** (Pedi, Tau, Kone, Roka, and Kopa), **Eastern Sotho** (Kutswe, Pai and Pulana), **North Eastern Sotho** (Phalaborwa, Lobedu, Mamabolo, Letsoalo, Mametša, Mahlo, Kgaga), and **Northern Sotho** (Mphahlele, Tšhwene, Mathabatha, Maja, Mothapo, Matlala, Molepo, Tlokwa, Dikgale, Moletši, Hananwa). Mokgokong (1966:3) classifies Northern Sotho dialects into dialect clusters, i.e. (a) **Central Sotho dialect cluster** (from whose dialects the written Northern Sotho language has

developed), e.g. Pedi, Tau, Kone, Mphahlele - i.e. the dialects of Sekhukhuneland and adjacent parts (b) **Eastern Sotho dialect cluster**, i.e. Pulana, Khutšwe and Pai (c) **North Eastern Sotho dialect cluster**, which includes Lobedu, Phalaborwa and related languages such as Kgaga (or Khaha) (d) **North Western Sotho dialect cluster**, which includes dialects common to the Pietersburg and Potgietersrus districts, i.e. Hananwa, Matlala, Tlokwa, Mamabolo and Birwa.

Mokgokong's (1966) dialect clusters include the Central Sotho dialect cluster and the North Western Sotho dialect cluster which are generally regarded as prestige dialects, while the Eastern Sotho and the North Eastern Sotho dialect clusters include the Lowveld dialects, which are regarded as inferior dialects of Northern Sotho. The written Northern Sotho language developed from the Central Sotho and the North Western Sotho dialect clusters which elevated them above all other dialects. This gave the speakers of the prestige dialects an impression that their varieties represent the standard Northern Sotho language, while the Lowveld varieties are regarded (in accordance with Allen and Linn, 1986:220) as 'uncouth, ugly, imperfect and corrupt versions' of the Northern Sotho language. In accordance with this superiority attitude, the speakers of the prestige Northern Sotho varieties regard their dialects as languages while the unwritten, inferior (Northern Sotho) varieties are reduced to the status of 'mere dialects' (Allen and Linn, 1986:220). This superiority attitude of the speakers of the prestige varieties may be compared to what Allen and Linn (1986:220) refer to in the following assumption:

“... it (attitude towards unwritten languages) is closely related to the last definition that is important, the idea that a dialect is something like a patois, in the French sense, a distinctive and honorable but rural and moribund by-form of a language.”

(Parenthesis - V.M. Mojela)

In contrast to the superiority attitudes of the speakers of the prestige Northern Sotho dialects, the Lowveld communities, whose dialects are regarded as inferior, have an inferiority complex when communicating in their own dialects in the presence of other communities, especially in the presence of the speakers of the prestige dialects. Most of them learn to speak the prestige varieties in order

to elevate their status. For this reason, most of the people who belong to the Lobedu, Phalaborwa, Khutšwe, Kgaga, Tlokwa and other so-called 'inferior' dialects can speak (and understand) most of the prestige dialects, while most of the communities whose varieties are prestige dialects can neither speak nor understand these 'inferior' varieties. This is apparently due to the fact that the speakers of the inferior dialects see the advantages of a knowledge of the prestige dialects, while the speakers of the prestige dialects do not see any advantage of speaking the dialects which they believe are inferior to theirs. These contrasting attitudes of the communities whose varieties are prestige Northern Sotho dialects and those communities whose varieties are 'inferior' varieties, can be summarized as follows:

- (1) The communities whose varieties are prestige dialects have an attitude of 'dislike' for the 'inferior' dialects, while the communities whose varieties are 'inferior' dialects have an attitude of 'appreciation' for the prestige dialects.
- (2) The communities whose varieties are prestige dialects have an attitude of 'contempt' for the 'inferior' varieties, while the communities whose varieties are 'inferior' dialects have an attitude of 'respect' for the prestige dialects.
- (3) The communities whose varieties are 'prestige' dialects have an attitude of 'superiority' towards the 'inferior' dialects, while the communities whose varieties are 'inferior' dialects have an attitude of 'inferiority' towards the 'prestige' dialects.
- (4) The communities whose varieties are 'prestige' dialects have an attitude of 'avoidance', and 'dissociation' from the 'inferior' dialects, while the communities whose varieties are 'inferior' dialects have an attitude of 'attraction' to and 'association' with the 'prestige' dialects.
- (5) The communities whose varieties are 'prestige' dialects associate the 'inferior' dialects with a 'lowering' of their own status, while the communities whose varieties are 'inferior' dialects associate the 'prestige' dialects with the elevation of their own status.

## **5.4 The role of foreign acquisition in the development of prestige terminology in Northern Sotho**

Foreign acquisition is the process whereby the speakers of a particular language fill the gaps which exist in the vocabulary of their language with foreign terminology and culture, thereby facilitating improvements in the development of their language. In the context of this research, foreign acquisition is directly concerned with the acquisition of terminology and culture from the languages which carry a higher prestige than Northern Sotho. These languages include the two official languages of the 'Old South Africa', i.e. English and Afrikaans, urban slang and some of the indigenous languages which acquired prestige from their association with the South African urban metropolitan environments, i.e. Tswana, Southern Sotho, Zulu, etc.

### **5.4.1 The role played by English and Afrikaans**

The indigenous languages of South Africa borrowed much more vocabulary and culture from English and Afrikaans than vice versa. This is due to the prestige accorded to these languages resulting from their status as:

- (1) official languages
- (2) languages of education and educated people
- (3) languages of technology
- (4) languages of commerce
- (5) languages used in law courts, the military, political rallies, etc.
- (6) languages of the rich, White communities
- (7) lingua franca between the various peoples of Southern Africa, etc.

Mackey & Ornstein (1979:278) regard the type of borrowing which takes place between, for instance,

English and Northern Sotho or between Afrikaans and Northern Sotho, as ‘word-borrowing between a dominant culture and a subordinate culture’. In this type of borrowing more words are acquired from the dominant language into the subordinate language than vice versa. This is the reason why the terminology of Northern Sotho is made up of many words which are derived from English and Afrikaans, while there are very few words in English and Afrikaans which are derived from Northern Sotho. This is due to the fact that the Northern Sotho people have more to gain from a knowledge of English and Afrikaans, while the English and Afrikaans communities do not find it necessary to learn Northern Sotho because it has nothing to offer them.

#### 5.4.2 The role played by urban slang

In defining slang, Anderson and Trudgill (1990:69) say:

“The linguist Paul Roberts said that slang was ‘one of those things that everybody can recognize and nobody can define’. This is a realistic characterization, but there are also several more colourful ones. The American poet Carl Sandburg said that ‘slang is a language that rolls up its sleeves, spits on its hands and goes to work’. G.K.Chesterton, the English novelist, said even more admirably that ‘the one stream of poetry which is constantly flowing is slang. Everyday some nameless poet weaves some fairy tracery of popular language. ... All slang is metaphor and all metaphor is poetry’.”

Although it used to be disliked by most of the elite, the language authorities and most academics, urban slang is generally accepted as status ‘language’ by the youth from all racial groups in our country, especially the Black youth. The old generations of the elite and academics disliked urban slang because they associated it with juvenile delinquency, crime, disobedience and other types of unruly behaviour, which used to be the life-style of the urban youth and *tsotsis*, especially in the past. The famous urban slang in South Africa is *tsotsi-taal* or *flytaal*. The South African youth regard this

'register' as prestige 'language' due to its association with the urban metropolitan areas. Most of the youth in the rural areas today learn to speak this 'register' as a means of associating with the urban youth, whom they regard as role models. The following are some of the reasons which culminated in the use of *tsotsi-taal* in the metropolitan areas of South Africa:

(1) **Multilingualism:** The development of the mining industries in Johannesburg and surrounding areas led to the creation of a multilingual society which created a problem of communication among people of different linguistic backgrounds. *Tsotsi-taal*, which is a mixture of terminology from the major languages spoken in these areas, served as *lingua franca* among the youth who came from different linguistic backgrounds since it was not too difficult to understand.

(2) **Euphemism:** This is when people prefer to substitute the indigenous (Northern Sotho) words with urban slang terms, i.e. the so-called 'lexical avoidance'. The indigenous words may not only be associated with the harsh and unpleasant reality of their meaning but, according to Stern (1931:331), 'they mean exactly what they mean'. In this way, the Northern Sotho terms which are taboo, especially those referring to private parts of the body, sexual activities and many other types of indecencies are replaced by the slang terms. This is in line with the natural feeling that a foreign taboo word does not have the same impact as its counterpart in one's own language. The following are examples of slang terms used for the purpose of euphemism in Northern Sotho:

<i>skhebereshe</i>	(slang)	instead of	<b>kwababane</b>	'a lady who is morally weak'
<i>tšheri</i>	(slang)	instead of	<b>nyatse</b>	'girlfriend'
<i>slaeza</i> or <i>chafa</i>	(slang)	instead of	<b>utswa</b>	'steal'
<i>tšhafo</i>	(slang)	instead of	<b>tšhila</b>	'rubbish'
<i>propha</i> or <i>phosha</i>	(slang)	instead of	<b>apiša</b> or <b>loša</b>	'propose love'

(3) **Disguise:** Anderson and Trudgill (1990:79) comment as follows with regard to the disguise and secrecy associated with slang:

“It has been said that one function of the language of thieves and drug addicts is to keep the content of their conversations secret - outsiders should not understand what is being said. This is sometimes called anti-language. Since, however, most of the words they use are not at all hard to understand, this claim is dubious. However, there are other ways to keep outsiders outside. A member of the narcotics police has informed us that the language of drug addicts changes rapidly, which makes it very hard for the police to train informers for infiltration into these groups. It is easy to learn the slang words, but it is hard to keep up to date and use and combine words correctly. In this way it is easy for the group members to tell who is a true member of the group.”

This may be equated with urban slang in South Africa, especially the so-called *tsotsi-taal* or *flytaal*. *Tsotsi-taal* originated initially as a ‘language’ of *tsotsis*, i.e. the South African outlaws, the gangsters, the robbers and other types of urban criminals who were sometimes called ‘*boRabaneka*’ (singular: *Rabaneka*). As such, their ‘language’ was always designed for secrecy and disguise in order to conceal information which might lead to their arrest. This is one of the reasons why urban slang terminology keeps on changing all the time, or why there are sometimes so many *tsotsi* terms referring to one concept, e.g. the synonyms for *tsotsi*: *cleva* or *klewe*, *motsieng*, *man* (plural: *mannes*), *mnca*, *rabaneka*, *mjita*, etc. *Tsotsi-taal* is not only designed as a disguise against the police, but also against ordinary people in the street, especially those they want to rob, so that they may not understand their ‘*mission*’ (their strategies).

(4) **Short and to the point:** Many people prefer urban slang because most of its terms are short and direct to the point when compared to most of the indigenous terms. This is usually the case where the indigenous languages have coined terms through indirect borrowing from English and Afrikaans to refer to new concepts which were not known before. These coined words are usually long and ambiguous since they are mostly made up of compound words to suit the new meanings, e.g. *seyalemoya* for ‘radio’. The following are examples in this regard:

<i>squiza</i>	(slang)	instead of	<b>mogatša-kgaetšedi</b> ‘brother-in-law’ or ‘sister-in-law’
<i>magrison</i>	(slang)	instead of	<b>mosadimogolo</b> ‘the old lady’
<i>puza-face</i>	(slang)	instead of	<b>sefahlego sa go bontšha botagwa</b> ‘facial features of an alcoholic person’
<i>pholaka</i>	(slang)	instead of	<b>go tšea mahlo a tšhipa</b> ‘drink a bit of liquor to get courage’

(5) **Prestige and recognition:** Perhaps one of the major causes of popularity for the use of urban slang is the prestige accorded to this ‘language’ by the South African youth. The Northern Sotho youth in the rural areas of the Northern Province, for example, want to associate with the urban societies and a knowledge of *tsotsi-taal* seems to be a key to this effect. Those juveniles who do not know *flytaal* are regarded as:

- (a) too rural
- (b) too primitive and uncivilized
- (c) stupid

These young people are therefore despised by their counterparts in the urban areas whose languages are rich in *tsotsi* terminology. As such, the youth in general want to be recognised as part of the ‘clever’ society, and a knowledge of urban slang helps them to reach this objective.

#### 5.4.3 The role played by the indigenous languages of Southern Africa

The indigenous languages of Southern Africa played a role in the development of prestige terminology in the vocabulary of Northern Sotho. The common languages here include Southern Sotho, Tswana and the Nguni languages, especially Zulu. These are mostly the languages which are spoken in and around the PWV. These indigenous languages are accorded superior status by the Northern Sotho communities, and this is usually due to the following reasons:

(1) When compared to the Northern Sotho people, the Southern Sotho, Tswana and Nguni communities are nearer to the urban areas of Pretoria-Witwatersrand and Vereeniging. As such, they are associated with the prestige of the PWV. The Northern Sotho people in the 'North' regard Tswana and Southern Sotho as the languages of **Makgoweng** (the languages of the White area), and anything which is associated with **Makgoweng** is accorded a high status.

(2) The environment in which the Southern Sotho, the Tswana and the Zulu communities are found, (i.e. next to the urban areas of Gauteng) is highly industrialized and rich in mineral deposits as compared to the Northern Province which is the poorest of all the South African Provinces. This means that problems of unemployment, poverty etc. will not rate as high as in the Northern Province where the majority of the people are unemployed.

### **5.5 The consequences of prestige terminology in Northern Sotho**

Besides the emotional consequences associated with prestige terminology, i.e. superiority and inferiority complexes, prestige terminology leads to various linguistic consequences in the development of the languages, especially in the lexical and morphological domains and in the vocabulary of the language.

#### **5.5.1 Emotional consequences**

'Prestige' terminology is the type of terminology which is associated with the 'prestige' languages or the 'prestige' varieties. Most of the people whose languages are 'prestige' varieties tend to have a feeling of superiority when comparing themselves with those people whose languages are inferior varieties. In most instances these people have a misconception that their varieties are real languages and the 'inferior' varieties are 'mere' dialects. The people whose languages (dialects) are inferior varieties have a feeling of inferiority when using their languages in public. The majority of these people prefer to use code-mixing with the terminology from the 'prestige' languages in order to elevate their own status.

### 5.5.2 Expansion of vocabulary

Besides emotional consequences, 'prestige' terminology also helps to increase the vocabulary of the low-prestige varieties. The speakers of a low-prestige variety get used to the application of the lexical items of the 'prestige' languages to substitute their own 'inferior' lexical items, and this leads to an increase in the number of synonymous words in a language, e.g.

#### **Dialectal:**

##### Watermelon

**Lesalabu** : inferior dialects, i.e. Lobedu, Phalaborwa, Khutšwe, etc

**Legapu** : prestige dialects, i.e. Pedi, Kopa, etc.

##### Marula beer

**Mokhope** : inferior dialects, i.e. Lobedu, Phalaborwa, Khutšwe, etc.

**Morula** : prestige dialects, i.e. Pedi, Kopa, etc.

#### **Indigenous languages:**

##### Play

**Bapala** : inferior language, i.e. Northern Sotho

**Tshameka** : prestige language, i.e. Tswana

The other important consequence of 'prestige' terminology, regarding the increase in vocabulary, is the fact that the inferior languages (varieties) benefit much more than the prestige languages (varieties). This is usually due to the inferiority and superiority complexes of the speakers of these languages. For instance, the communities whose languages are inferior varieties acquire much vocabulary from the 'prestige' languages in order to have substitutes for their own 'inferior' vocabulary when communicating in the situations where their vocabulary can expose them to

contempt and ridicule by other communities. Contrary to the inferiority complex of the 'inferior' languages, the communities whose languages are 'prestige' varieties have a pride which does not allow them to speak the languages of the inferior communities. As such, they will absorb very little, or none, of the 'low-prestige' terms from the inferior languages (varieties).

### 5.5.3 Pronunciation shifts

As a result of 'prestige' terminology the Northern Sotho people are gradually moving away from the traditional way of pronunciation of foreign lexical items. This is due to the fact that many people today strive to get closer to the original pronunciation of the foreign words in order to be associated with the communities concerned. Traditionally, Northern Sotho did not tolerate the pronunciation of words which have consonants or consonant combinations such as the following:

(1) Within one syllable without a vowel between them: /tr/, /pr/, /kr/, etc., e.g.

Latest : **trapa** 'wallop' (from Afrikaans: **trap** which means 'trample')  
 Traditional : **terapa**

Latest : **kreya** 'find' (from Afrikaans **kry**: which means 'find')  
 Traditional : **kereya**

(2) Words with consonants like /sq/, etc., e.g.

Latest : **squiza (squeeze)** 'sister/brother-in-law' (*tsotsi-taal*)  
 Traditional : **sekhwitsa**

Even though these latest morphophonological changes have not yet been accepted as standard in Northern Sotho, the pronunciation of these words has shifted tremendously from the traditional system as a result of a high rate of literacy among the indigenous people. Most of the Northern Sotho

people do not want to be associated with illiterate people who cannot pronounce English, Afrikaans or *flytaal* terms in the way they are pronounced by the mother tongue speakers or the *tsotsis* themselves (in the case of *flytaal*).

## 5.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to realise that all the languages are cultural carriers for the communities, irrespective of what we regard them to be or how we classify them. Haas (1982:31) concludes as follows in this regard:

“Every language lost is a cultural impoverishment: a loss of points of view, perspectives and discriminations. Some consolation may be found in the fact that there is always extensive borrowing from an eliminated ‘upper’ language to a prevailing ‘lower’ one. The language more adapted to a higher and more sophisticated civilization tends to leave its successor a heritage.”

Even though it is not possible to classify the languages according to status, i.e. as inferior and superior languages, it is important to realise that every language exists for the purpose of communication and carries culture for the community. As such, every language is important. Every language is in the process of developing through foreign acquisition, in order to enrich its culture with culture from other languages. In this regard, the so-called ‘inferior’ languages grow much faster than the ‘prestige’ languages since the ‘inferior’ communities strive to know the ‘prestige’ languages. Consequently, the ‘inferior’ languages (varieties) acquire much vocabulary and culture from the ‘superior’ languages (varieties) while on the other hand, the acquisition of vocabulary and culture from the ‘inferior’ languages by the speakers of the ‘prestige’ languages is minimal because the prestige communities are reluctant to learn the inferior varieties. Consequently, the languages of the ‘inferior’ communities are full of ‘prestige’ terminology which is derived from the ‘prestige’ languages which enables the ‘inferior’ communities to communicate in both their variety and the ‘prestige’ varieties, while the ‘superior’ communities have a disadvantage of knowing their own

varieties only. In South Africa, for instance, almost 90% of the indigenous population can communicate in English while about 80% can communicate in Afrikaans. These two languages are used by the indigenous communities to communicate among themselves since very few of them know more than one indigenous language. Contrary to this, almost 90% of the Afrikaans and English communities cannot communicate in any of the indigenous languages. Furthermore, many Northern Sotho people can speak Tswana and Southern Sotho fluently while few of the Tswana and Southern Sotho people can speak Northern Sotho. Many speakers of the 'inferior' dialects of Northern Sotho, e.g. the Lobedu, Khutšwe, etc. can speak Pedi and Kopa dialects while the latter cannot speak Lobedu or Khutšwe varieties. Most of the Venda and Tsonga speaking communities can communicate in Northern Sotho, while very few Northern Sotho people can communicate in Venda and Tsonga.

With regard to Northern Sotho language planning, the research has the following implications:

- Language planning should always take cognisance of the rapid growth of vocabulary among the speakers of Northern Sotho, and the effect of multilingualism.

- This research aims at promoting greater understanding of the reality of inferiority and superiority attitude among speakers of the various dialects of Northern Sotho. In their efforts to effect uniformity language planners should be sensitive to the gap existing between the so-called 'inferior and superior' dialects.

- Based on a thorough knowledge of all the major dialects of Northern Sotho and existing language attitudes, language planners should be able to make more informed decisions. They can even be instrumental in promoting positive attitude and respect among speakers of the various dialects of Northern Sotho.

- The research also implies that slang terminology is not always destructive to Northern Sotho as is believed by some people. On the contrary, most slang terms can be used to enrich the language and provision should be made for the recognition of such terms by the language planners.

- This research can be used as basis for further research in aspects such as the following: prestige dialects in Northern Sotho, Northern Sotho standardisation and slang terminology in Northern Sotho.

## GLOSSARY

Even though there are many types of ‘prestige’ terms used by the Northern Sotho communities (as mentioned in this thesis), I have decided to list a few of the slang terms, since this type of terminology is rarely recorded and most of us ignore them as if they don’t exist while we use them everyday. These are some of the slang terms used in informal situations by most of the Northern Sotho students at the University of the North:

- Authi*** ‘boyfriend’ or ‘a young man’, e.g.  
**o na le *authi* la gagwe**  
 ‘she is with her boyfriend’  
**ke a fe *maauthi* ale?**  
 ‘who are those young men?’
- Baiza (Peaza)*** ‘to be confused’ or ‘to be puzzled’, e.g.  
**o ya *baiza***  
 ‘he is puzzled’
- Baizane*** ‘a type of fowl’, e.g.  
**o apeile *baizane***  
 ‘he has cooked chicken’
- Bantwana*** ‘girls’, e.g.  
**ke mošemanyana wa *bantwana***  
 ‘is the boy who always socializes with girls’
- Bari (Baru)*** ‘stupid’, e.g.  
**mošemane yo ke *bari***  
 ‘this boy is stupid’

- Blasa** 'drink (liquor)' or 'play music'  
**re blasa majasana wa seputla**  
 'we drink a bottle of gin'  
**mmino wa gagwe o blasa lekker**  
 'his music is playing very nice'
- Blind (Blaend)** 'bad' or 'too much', e.g.  
**maisa a a blaend** 'these men are bad'  
**ke jele blaend** 'I ate too much'
- Bloma** 'sit', e.g.  
**re ka bloma kae, mfowethu?**  
 'where can we sit, brother?'
- Blusa** 'woolgathering' or 'absent-minded', e.g.  
**o a blusa, warra?**  
 'are you absent-minded, brother?'
- Bombai** 'an imitation (which is not up to standard)', e.g.  
**o tshwere sethunya sa bombai**  
 'he is holding a toy gun' or 'he is holding an imitation of a gun'
- Bra** 'friend' or 'tsotsi' or 'brother', e.g.  
**o tšwa kae, my bra?**  
 'where do you come from, my friend?'
- Buz** 'liquor', e.g.  
**a nke o re buz fao**  
 'please give me liquor'

- Chafa** 'hide' or 'steal', e.g.  
**o ichafile kae, brother?**  
 'where do you hide yourself, brother?'  
**ke rata go chafa piri tše pedi fela**  
 'I want to steal two beers only'
- Chafo** 'rubbish' or 'nonsense', e.g.  
**ke chafo (tšhafa) fela tše a re botšago**  
 'what he/she is telling us is nonsense'
- Chandis** 'good', 'in good order' or 'right', e.g.  
**dilo ka moka di chandis, my bra**  
 'everything is right, brother'
- Chin** 'money', e.g.  
**ke be ke sa tshwara chin ge ke hlakana le yena**  
 'I didn't have money when I met him'
- Chomi** 'friend', e.g.  
**ke chomi ya ka**  
 'he/she is my friend'
- Cleva** 'a *tsotsi*' or 'a wise person', e.g.  
**maruana ke dijo tša dicleva**  
 'dagga is meant for the *tsotsis*'  
 (literal: 'dagga is food for clever people')

- Cook (Khuk)** ‘drunk’, e.g.  
**monna yola is klaar gecook**  
 ‘this man is already drunk’
- Cuza (Khuza)** ‘money’, e.g.  
**ga a na cuza**  
 ‘he/she has no money’
- Daa** ‘there’ or ‘that other side’, e.g.  
**malome o šoma ka daa**  
 ‘my uncle works on that other side’
- Daai** ‘that’, e.g.  
**daai moggo ga e so fihle**  
 ‘that moron has not yet arrived’
- Daesa** ‘sell’, e.g.  
**re ka e daesa bokae watšhi ye?**  
 ‘how much can we sell this watch for?’
- Des** ‘nice’ or ‘beautiful’, e.g.  
**o na le tšheri ye des**  
 ‘he has a beautiful girl’
- Dimas** ‘sunglasses’, e.g.  
**mosetsana o be a shaile ka dimas**  
 ‘the girl was wearing sunglasses’

- Dingiba** ‘at night’, e.g.  
**o fihlile gae ka dingiba**  
 ‘he arrived home late at night’
- Diwithi** ‘dagga’, e.g.  
**ba ja diwithi**  
 ‘they smoke dagga’
- Diza** ‘to give money or present(s) to a girlfriend’, e.g.  
**o diza ditšheri ka mogolo kamoka**  
 ‘he gives his whole salary to girlfriends’
- Dlala** ‘play’, e.g.  
**ba dlala bolo kua stediam**  
 ‘they play soccer at the stadium’
- Dladleni** ‘home’, e.g.  
**ke fihlile dladleni**  
 ‘I have arrived home’
- Dolly (doli)** ‘in order’, e.g.  
**go dolly, warra**  
 ‘is in order, brother’
- Dou** ‘money’, e.g.  
**ga ke na dou, warra**  
 ‘I don’t have money, brother’

- Dwesh** ‘two’, e.g.  
**ba nwele dwesh ya dipoplar fela**  
 ‘they drank two quarts of beer only’
- Ekse! (Eksela)** ‘listen here’, e.g.  
**eksela, majita, re swanetše go phakiša**  
 ‘listen here, boys, we must hurry up’
- Fasa** ‘propose love to a girl’ or ‘to be in the company of a girlfriend’, e.g.  
**ke rata go fasa tšheri ye**  
 ‘I want to propose love to this girl’  
**o be a fasitše maabane**  
 ‘yesterday he was with his girlfriend’
- Flopa** ‘fail’, e.g.  
**mishen wa gagwe o a flopa**  
 ‘his/her plan is failing’
- Fokol** ‘nothing’, e.g.  
**ga ke na fokol**  
 ‘I have nothing’
- Fokuza** ‘work heavily’, e.g.  
**o fokuza mola**  
 ‘he works (labours) there’
- Fostana** ‘understand’, e.g.  
**moisa yo o a fostana**  
 ‘this chap understands’

- Gantja*** ‘dagga’, e.g.  
**mahlo a gagwe a swana le a moji wa *gantja***  
 ‘his eyes look like those of a dagga smoker’
- Gesop*** ‘drunk’, e.g.  
**monna yola is *klaar gesop***  
 ‘this man is already drunk’
- Ghieliek (Kilik)*** ‘too much’, e.g.  
**o swere *ghieliek (kilik) mazuma mo potleng***  
 ‘he has too much money in the pocket’
- Heita (Heit)*** ‘hallo’, e.g.  
***heita, my bra, o fihlile neng mo?***  
 ‘hallo, brother (friend), when did you arrive here?’
- Hesha (Hesh)*** ‘to force issues’, e.g.  
**mošemane yo o rata go *hesha* le ge go sa kgonege**  
 ‘this boy likes forcing issues even though it is not possible’  
**ke mo tšere ka *hesh***  
 ‘I took him/her by force’
- Hii*** ‘here’, e.g.  
**etla ka *hii***  
 ‘come here’
- Hoezit (Huzet)*** ‘how are you?’, e.g.  
***hoezit, warra?***  
 ‘how are you, brother?’

- Holy herb (heb)*** ‘dagga’, e.g.  
**o jele *holy herb***  
‘he smoked dagga’
- Jiwish*** ‘attire’ or ‘clothes’  
**o be a *jivishitše***  
‘he/she was in good attire’
- Jojo*** ‘money/gift given in exchange for a favour’, e.g.  
**maphodisa ba *corrupt*, ba phela ka *jojo***  
‘the police officials are corrupt, they take gifts for favour’
- Jola*** ‘a love affair’, e.g.  
**Tom le John ba a *jola***  
‘Tom and John have a love affair’
- Josi*** ‘Johannesburg’, e.g.  
**ke dula *Josi***  
‘I stay in Johannesburg’
- Juba*** ‘boyfriend’, e.g.  
**o etetše *juba* ya gagwe**  
‘she visited her boyfriend’
- Juleiti (dulate)*** ‘work’, ‘employment’, e.g.  
***juleiti* ya gagwe ke eng fa?**  
‘what job is he doing here?’

- Jumpers (Jampas)*** ‘at night’ or ‘in the evening’, e.g.  
**o fihlile maabane ka *jumpers***  
 ‘he/she arrived yesterday at night (in the evening)’
- Kapela*** ‘to be well-dressed’, e.g.  
**o be a di *kapetše***  
 ‘he/she was well-dressed’
- Kaya (Gaya)*** ‘give’, e.g.  
**ke *kaya lethaima la gagwe nyuku***  
 ‘I give money to his father’
- Kgašu*** ‘stupid’ or ‘moron’, e.g.  
**e gona fa *kgašu ye?***  
 ‘is this moron present here?’
- Khamisa*** ‘to wait in vain’, e.g.  
**ba hlwele ba *khamisiše* ba mo letetše a seke a boa**  
 ‘they waited in vain for him to come back’
- Khawada*** ‘to disappoint’ or ‘to terrorize’, e.g.  
**o *nkhawadile maabane***  
 ‘you disappointed me yesterday’, or  
 ‘you terrorized me yesterday’
- Kuruba*** ‘have a nice time’, e.g.  
**Siphiwe o ipshina ka go *kuruba***  
 ‘Siphiwe enjoys a nice time’

- Kuza** ‘money’, e.g.  
**a ke o mphe kuza**  
 ‘please give me money’
- Kwaza** ‘stab’, e.g.  
**ba mo kwazitše ka thipa maabane**  
 ‘they stabbed him with a knife yesterday’
- Laiti** ‘a boy’ (usually a young boy or diminution), e.g.  
**laiti ye e dira eng mo?**  
 ‘what is this boy doing here?’
- Lani** ‘A White man (lady)’, e.g.  
**naa o sa ratana le moisa yola wa lani?**  
 ‘is she still having an affair with that White man?’
- Lelaita** ‘a *tsotsi*’ or ‘a criminal’, e.g.  
**o bethilwe ke malaita**  
 ‘he/she was beaten by the *tsotsis*’
- Lingo** ‘*tsotsi-taal*’ or ‘language’, e.g.  
**dibari ga di kwešiše lingo**  
 ‘the morons don’t understand *tsotsi-taal*’
- Magegeba** ‘money’, e.g.  
**ga ke na magegeba**  
 ‘I don’t have money’

- Magrison*** ‘the old lady’ or ‘mother’, e.g.  
**a re kgopele *magrison* a re fe bjala sekoloto**  
 ‘let’s ask the old lady to give us liquor on credit’
- Majat*** ‘dagga’, e.g.  
**ke seji sa *majat***  
 ‘he/she is a dagga smoker’
- Majita*** ‘boys’ or ‘*tsotsis*’, e.g.  
**a re sepeleng, *majita***  
 ‘let’s go, boys’
- Makoko (Magogo)*** ‘the old lady’ or ‘grandmother’, e.g.  
**o kae *magogo*?**  
 ‘where is the old lady?’ or ‘where is grandmother?’
- Malundas*** ‘away from home’, e.g.  
**ba robala *malundas***  
 ‘they don’t sleep at home’
- Mang*** ‘arrest’ or ‘detain’, e.g.  
**ge o sa lefe motšhelo *hulle sal jou mang***  
 ‘if you don’t pay tax they will arrest you’
- Mannes*** ‘*tsotsis*’ or ‘wise men’, e.g.  
**ba ga se *dibari, dis die mannes***  
 ‘these ones are not simpletons, they are *tsotsis*’

- MaRashiya** ‘the Basotho *tsotsis*’ (usually from Lesotho), e.g.  
**MaRashiya ba kotsi kudu**  
 ‘the Basotho *tsotsis* are very dangerous’
- Maruana** ‘dagga’, e.g.  
**ke seji sa maruana**  
 ‘he/she is a dagga smoker’
- Mathara** ‘girl’ or ‘girlfriend’, e.g.  
**ke mathara wa gagwe’**  
 ‘she is his girlfriend’
- Matirinkwane** ‘tricks’, e.g.  
**ke dirile matirinkwane gore ke tšwe mathatheng**  
 ‘I did some tricks to get out of trouble’
- Mazuma (mazumba)** ‘money’, e.g.  
**ga ke na mazuma**  
 ‘I don’t have money’
- Mchana** ‘friend’, or ‘a young boy’ e.g.  
**ke mchana wa ka**  
 ‘he/she is my friend’  
**ke mchana go nna**  
 ‘he is younger than me’
- Mfowethu** ‘my brother’ or ‘my fellow man’, e.g.  
**etla mo, mfowethu.**  
 ‘come here, fellow man’ or

'come here, brother'

**Mingas (mingus)**

'dagga', e.g.

**o ja mingas**

'he/she smokes dagga'

**Mishen (mision)**

'plan' or 'arrangement', e.g.

**mishen wa gagwe o a flopa**

'his/her plan is failing'

**Mnca**

'good', 'beautiful' or 'nice', e.g.

**o na le mnca tšheri (cherry)**

'he/she is with a beautiful (nice) girl'

**Mogo**

'a fool' or 'stupid', e.g.

**e fihlile mogo yela?**

'has that fool (stupid) arrived?'

**Mometch**

'fool' or 'stupid', e.g.

**e fihlile daai mometch?**

'has that fool (stupid) arrived?'

**Mongol**

'fool' or 'stupid', e.g.

**e fihlile daai mongol?**

'has that fool (stupid) arrived?'

**Mpara (Mampara)**

'fool' or 'stupid', e.g.

**mpara yela e fihlile**

'that fool has arrived'

- Mtekeni** ‘a girl’, e.g.  
**o sepela le mtekeni wa gagwe**  
 ‘he is walking with his girlfriend’
- Ncanda** ‘take’, e.g.  
**ke ilo ncanda selepe ka ntlong**  
 ‘I am going to take an axe from the house’
- Ndadiama** ‘money’, e.g.  
**ga ke na ndadiama**  
 ‘I don’t have money’
- Ngamola (Ngamla)** ‘a rich person’ or ‘a Whiteman’, e.g.  
**tše ke dikoloi tša dingamola**  
 ‘these are rich men’s cars’
- Nkwenya** ‘a hero’, ‘a boss’ or ‘a gangster leader’, e.g.  
**ke mang nkwenya mo?**  
 ‘who is the boss here?’
- Notch (notcha)** ‘look’ or ‘be careful’, e.g.  
**o swanetše go notcha ge o sepela**  
 ‘you must look out (be careful) when walking’
- Ntantjana** ‘tie’, e.g.  
**o be a bethetše ka ntantjana**  
 ‘he/she was wearing a tie’

- Ntwana* ‘a small boy/girl’ or ‘diminution of a person’, e.g.  
**ga ke e tšhabe ntwana yela**  
 ‘I am not afraid of that small boy/girl’
- Nyuku* ‘money’, e.g.  
**ga ke na nyuku**  
 ‘I don’t have money’
- Okei (Ok)* ‘in good order’, e.g.  
**dilo ka moka di okei**  
 ‘all things are in good order’
- Oulady (Ouledi)* ‘mother’, e.g.  
**ke be ke na le my oulady**  
 ‘I was with my mother’
- Phosh (posh)* ‘In good order’, e.g.  
**dilo ka moka di phosh**  
 ‘all things are in good order’
- Phosha* ‘propose love’, e.g.  
**ke rata go phosha tšheri ye**  
 ‘I want to propose love to this girl’
- Photha* ‘ask’ or ‘request’, e.g.  
**a re yo photha magrison a re fe bjala sekoloto**  
 ‘let’s go and ask the (old) lady to give us liquor on credit’

- Phouka*** ‘to provoke’ or ‘to make angry’, e.g.  
**ke ile go ba *phouka* ge ke fihla kua**  
 ‘I am going to provoke them when I arrive there’
- Plaka (Pholaka)*** ‘take a bit of liquor for courage’, e.g.  
**ke mo tšeeše *pholaka (plaka)***  
 ‘I took a bit of liquor to have courage to face him’
- Poplar*** ‘quart of beer’, e.g.  
**ba nwele *dwesh ya dipoplar***  
 ‘they drank two quarts of beer’
- Puza-face*** ‘facial features of an alcoholic person’, e.g.  
**o šetše a na le *puza-face***  
 ‘he is already having the facial look of an alcoholic’
- Rabaneka*** ‘*tsotsi*’, e.g.  
**patše ke dijo tša bo *rabaneka***  
 ‘dagga is food for the *tsotsis*’
- Sat*** ‘dead’ or ‘die’, e.g.  
**monna yola is *sat***  
 ‘that man is dead’
- Sbilo*** ‘brother/sister-in-law’, e.g.  
**ke tšile le *sbilo***  
 ‘I came with my brother/sister-in-law’

- Scquila*** ‘refuse’, e.g.  
***o scquila ka zak ya rena***  
 ‘he/she refuses to give us our money’
- Shap (Shapo)*** ‘right’ or ‘to be in good order’, e.g.  
***dilo ka moka di shap***  
 ‘everything is right’
- Skeif*** ‘share smoke’, e.g.  
***a ke o re skeif moo***  
 ‘may you please share your cigarette (smoke) with me?’
- Skele*** ‘school’, e.g.  
***mosetsana yo o sa le skele***  
 ‘this girl is still attending school’
- Skhebereshe*** ‘a lady who is morally loose’, e.g.  
***ga ke rate skhebereshe ka ntlong ya ka***  
 ‘I don’t want a morally loose lady in my house’
- slaeza (sliza)*** ‘dodge’ or ‘steal’, e.g.  
***majita a a rata go slaeza***  
 ‘these boys want to dodge’
- Smeka*** ‘money’ e.g.  
***ga ke na smeka***  
 ‘I don’t have money’

- Smoko*** ‘trouble’, e.g.  
***smoko ke eng?***  
 ‘what is the trouble?’
- Spane*** ‘employment’ or ‘job’, e.g.  
***o spana gona mo***  
 ‘he/she works here’
- Spaza*** ‘stupid’, e.g.  
***ga ke spaza bjalo ka ge o nagana***  
 ‘I am not as stupid as you think’
- Spinza*** ‘to drink liquor’, e.g.  
***a re yo spinza kua thabeneng ya magrison***  
 ‘let’s go and have liquor at the old lady’s tavern’
- Spita (Spida)*** ‘to act without prior thinking’ or  
 ‘to be rough and careless’, e.g.  
***o ya spida, mošemane yo***  
 ‘this boy is rough and careless’
- Squinch*** ‘revenge’, e.g.  
***re ilo dira squinch***  
 ‘we are going to pay revenge’
- Squeza (squiza)*** ‘sister/brother-in-law’, e.g.  
***ke squeza sa ka***  
 ‘she/he is my sister/brother-in-law’

***Staf (stafo)*** ‘to board/alight a moving vehicle, train, etc.’, e.g.  
**mitsotsi di fologa tereni staf (stafo)**  
 ‘*tsotsis* alight trains while in motion’

***Stalala*** ‘Johannesburg’, e.g.  
**ke tšwa Stalala**  
 ‘I am from Johannesburg’

***Swit (Sweet)*** ‘fine’ or ‘in good order’, e.g.  
**go swit (sweet)**  
 ‘it is fine’

***Timer (Thaima)*** ‘father’, e.g.  
**ke be ke na le thaima maabane**  
 ‘I was with father yesterday’

***Tiza*** ‘teacher’  
**moisa yo ke tiza sekolong sa rena**  
 ‘this chap is a teacher in our school’

***Topi (Topie)*** ‘father’, e.g.  
**ke be ke na le my topie maabane**  
 ‘I was with my father yesterday’

***Tšheri*** ‘girl’ or ‘girlfriend’, e.g.  
**ke tšheri ya gagwe**  
 ‘she is his girlfriend’

**Vaya (Waia or Vaiya)** ‘to go’ or ‘to leave’, e.g.

**re ya vaya**

‘we are leaving’

**Wakiti (Wakithi)** ‘my fellow man’ or ‘my brother/sister’, e.g.

**o tšwa kae, wakiti?**

‘where are you coming from, my fellow man?’

**Zak**

‘money’, e.g.

**ga ke na zak**

‘I have no money’

**Zol**

‘a folded parcel of dagga for smoking’, e.g.

**ke swere zol e tee fela**

‘I have only one parcel of dagga’

**Zola**

‘to fold dagga/tobacco in a paper for smoking’, e.g.

**ga a kgone go zola sekata**

‘he/she can’t prepare dagga/tobacco for smoking’

**Zwakala**

‘come’, e.g.

**zwakala ka keno**

‘come this side’

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