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**LANGUAGE DIFFERENTIATION AND GENDER
IN SOUTHERN SOTHO**

BY

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Language differentiation and gender in Southern Sotho

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis we examine language differentiation based on gender in Southern Sotho. We indicate that there is a direct relationship between a language group and the culture behind it, resulting in culture-bound linguistic practices.

Our research shows that language differentiation based on gender starts at an early age, so that young Sotho girls and boys show differences in the way they use their language. We observe that the structure of Southern Sotho itself reveals gender-denoting aspects, encouraging the existing gender-based linguistic practices.

Generally, masculine terms are generic while feminine ones are derived from them, mainly by adding feminine suffixes although there is no linguistic justification for this apparent prioritization of the masculine forms. Female-denoting terms tend to be more often pejorative than do male-denoting ones. For certain verbs the active form is used with male subjects, while the passive form is used for female subjects, reflecting the real life situation where the male makes the decisions and the female is expected to go along with them.

We also indicate that in cases where culture or Sotho norms have changed, language lags behind in reflecting these changes. For instance, Sotho women still have the status of minors, though many of them are breadwinners, unlike in the past where men worked outside the home and women took care of families; rendering the latter depend on their husbands' finances. Also the language is slow in effecting the entry of women into the professions.

An analysis of traditional song also shows that men and women use language differently. It indicates that, generally, men tend to use adversarial language while women use talk to foster relationships.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

	PAGE
Chapter 1 Introduction	
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Theoretical framework	5
1.1.1 Feminist thought	5
1.1.2 Stylistic criticism	7
1.2 Literature review	8
1.3 Methodology	12
Chapter 2 The culture behind Sotho	
2.0 Introduction	14
2.1 Marriages and language usage	16
2.2 Married women and language usage	22
Chapter 3 The Structure of Sotho	
3.0 Introduction	25
3.1 Morphology	25
3.1.1 The suffix <i>-hadi</i>	27
3.1.2 The suffix <i>-ane</i> and <i>-ana</i>	30
3.1.2.1 Nominal derivation	30
3.1.2.2 Adjectival derivation	32
3.1.3 The suffix <i>-atsana</i>	34
3.1.4 Adjectival stems <i>-tona</i> and <i>-tshehadi</i>	35
3.1.5 Possessives and gender	38
3.1.6 Prefixes <i>-mma</i> and <i>-ra</i>	42
3.2 Lexicon and semantics	48

3.2.1	Lexical ordering	49
3.2.2	Componential analysis	52
3.2.3	Neutral words	57
3.2.4	Forms denoting femininity and masculinity	58
3.2.5	Coinages with prefixes <i>-mma</i> and <i>-ra</i>	66
3.2.6	Titles	69
3.3	Syntax	73
Chapter 4	Gender-based language usage	
4.0	Introduction	82
4.1	The language of children in single-sex groups	85
4.2	The language of children in mixed groups	94
4.3	Adult talk and Sotho culture	102
4.4	Christianity, Sotho life and language	105
4.5	Silence as a communicative device	110
4.6	Gender differentiation, respect and politeness	114
4.6.1	Requests	125
4.6.2	Questions and suggestions	130
4.7	Power language	134
4.8	Females, males and talk	148
4.8.1	Insults	149
4.8.2	Parent-child communication	149
4.8.3	Compliments	156
4.8.4	Terms of endearment	158
4.9	Gossip	159

Chapter 5	Oral literature, gender and language differentiation	
5.0	Introduction	161
5.1	Oral literature, language and gender differentiation	162
5.1.1	Gender issues as manifested in Sotho proverbs	162
5.1.1.1	Proverbs in context	164
5.1.1.2	The generic use of proverbs	168
5.1.1.3	Proverbs about females	168
5.1.2	Proverbs that compare men and women	171
5.1.2.1	Domestic power	171
5.1.2.2	Sexual behaviour	171
5.2	Gender differentiation and the language of songs	172
5.2.1	Traditional song accompanied by instruments	180
5.2.1.1	The music of male artists/groups, themes and the language used to address them	181
5.2.1.2	Masculine supremacy and the striving for survival	182
5.2.1.3	The changing Sotho values	187
5.2.2	The music of female artists/groups: themes used to address them	192
5.2.2.1	The theme of survival	193
5.2.2.2	The changing status of women	194
5.2.2.3	Migrant labour and women	199
Chapter 6	Conclusion	202
	Bibliography	211

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Southern Sotho has a wealth of sociolinguistic phenomena which lies unstudied. The relationship between language differentiation and gender is one such phenomenon. To study this relationship we need to look at the structure of the language itself, the way that male and female speakers use this language, the expectations of society on the two sexes, the requirements of the sexes of each other and the culture behind Sotho. As we support the notion that rural languages are relatively stable, in comparison with urban languages, we intend to look closely at rural Sotho.

The observation that Sotho males and females show differences in language usage seems substantial. We believe that there are various reasons behind this difference, with culture and lifestyle being some of them. Generally, women and girls take care of domestic chores, while men are responsible for the rest of the work. A traditional Sotho man would never imagine himself near a *motsheo* 'traditional Sotho cooking place', as he considers that women's territory. Similarly, a woman cannot be part of the traditional judges in a Sotho court, as she has to be around the home. Clearly, women will be best equipped with vocabulary peculiar to domestic chores, while men will excel in language associated with legal matters. However, language variation is also observed even in cases where both sexes engage in similar activities, so that when women and men talk about wearing clothes or eating, they speak differently; the question we ask is why we have these differences.

The perception that men and women use language differently is neither new nor unique to Sotho. Chambers [1995:137] makes the following point:

The observation that men and women use language differently in different societies goes back several years. The assumption that usually accompanies such suggestions is that the differences are gender-based.

On a similar note Holmes [1994:164] says:

The linguistic forms used by women and men contrast—to different degrees—in all speech communities.

There are differences in the way Sotho men and women use language in different situations, hence speakers might say:

1. *Thabo o bua jwaloka mosadi.*

Thabo speaks like a woman.

The example verifies the point that male and female speakers have their way of speaking Sotho, making it easy for one to realise if speakers do not use language as is expected of them.

The structure of South Sotho has gender-denoting aspects. For example, the suffix *-hadi* is normally associated with two things, namely, denoting that the object is augmentative or that it is female, so that *tau* would refer to a male lion, while *tau-hadi* would be a lioness. Although language is a linguistic entity we cannot ignore its social and cultural aspects. For example, the fact that the Sotho are patrilineal means that Sotho males are at liberty to use Sotho as it pleases them especially when addressing females, while on the other hand, females have language

limitations. A Sotho male can safely say to a female speaker:

2. *O leshano.*

You are lying.

while a female is not expected to say exactly the same sentence to a male, in fact even a mere:

3. *Le wena.*

You too.

can earn the female speaker the wrath of the male who actually used the sentence first. If, however, a Sotho woman must say that a male is lying she is supposed to be euphemistic and say:

4. *Ha o bu e nnete.*

You are not telling the truth.

It should be noted that even the euphemistic sentence might still cause the woman trouble as the powerful male speaker can ask her:

5. *O re ke leshano?*

Are you saying that I am lying?

This behaviour is observed among Sotho boys and girls too, indicating the early age at which language dominance starts among the Sotho. Although Sotho women may complain of the fact that males do not respect them, the paradox is observable as they try very hard, through their language, to bring up their daughters with a deep sense of dependence on males and male-opinion, while they strive to make their sons the best chauvinists they can be. The question:

6. *O tla nyalwa ke mang ha o le botswa tjee?*

Who will marry you when you are so lazy?

is constantly asked of girls inculcating the belief that the best woman is the one

whose qualities will market her well to men. On the other hand, a mother who has both daughters and sons will not hesitate to say to her son:

7. *O bohlaswa hoo o tlamehang ho nyala kapele.*

You are so untidy that you must marry soon.

What the mother is actually saying to her son is that he does not need to try to change his habit, as his wife will always clean up after him. Language such as used in the above sentences is sexist; it gives males the freedom to live as they please, while females have to shape their lives according to the needs of male speakers.

Today some Sotho-speakers may wonder why their language looks oppressive to them. Somehow, language as we speak it now developed according to social norms. As Romaine [1994:105] clearly puts it, language is one of the crucial factors in the construction of the world, but humans too have created it. We surmise either that only men created Sotho, or that it was mainly they who created it; due to their general dominance on most aspects of Sotho life. The advent of feminism, coupled with sociolinguistic studies of gender differences in language, have meant that many more-educated women have begun to rebel against what they perceive as sexist language which perpetuates male dominance. This applies also to Sotho society where some women believe that they are disadvantaged interlocutors. We are, however, aware of the existence of women who strongly support the status quo. We want to find out why some women maintain that the current state of Sotho is acceptable, while others want things to change.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

In this study we use Feminism and Stylistics to analyse our data, with Feminism as the overriding approach, while Stylistics is applied in the analysis of literary material.

1.1.1 Feminist Thought

Feminism originated in America but has since spread to the rest of the world, and as a movement it became popular in the 1960s. This movement was based on fighting for the rights of women. However, as a school of thought, Feminism is diverse, it has different interpretations from various groups of women and men. Schneider [2002] discusses over thirty different types of Feminism, many of which are American. These types vary from the early Radical Feminism to the milder forms such as the Prolife or Christian Feminism. Of the former type Schneider [2002:19] says it “provides an important foundation for the rest of ‘feminist flavors’”. Some forms of Feminism have strong links with Marxism and Socialism. One such type is Marxist and Socialist Feminism, on which Schneider [2002:16] comments:

Marxism recognizes that women are oppressed, and attributes the oppression to the capitalist/private property system... Marxists and socialists often call themselves “radical”, but they use the term to refer to a completely different “root” of society.

This relationship between Feminism and Marxism is logical; both are philosophies which seek, among other things, to conscientize the oppressed to fight for their rights. Bono and Kemp [1991:2] comment:

all current forms of feminism grew out of the women’s movements and consciousness-raising groups of the 1960s, and were initially based occupationally in publishing and journalism, and politically in Marxism.

Because women are not homogeneous, not only are there many types of Feminism in one area, but women from different localities seem to have initiated their own type to cater for their specific needs. For instance, Bono and Kemp [1991] discuss the Italian Feminist thought, while Collins [1991] addresses Feminism from a standpoint of Black women in America. However, for purposes of this study, we use the type that Schneider [2002:19] refers to as Power Feminism, and describes as follows:

Power feminism, ideologically, is Feminism Lite: dogma-free, except for an unequivocal belief that “women matter as much as men do”. Among other things, power feminism “seeks power and uses it responsibly,” “hates sexism without hating men,” is “unapologetically sexual,” and “wants all women to express their own opinions.”

In this thesis we observe that Sotho sometimes disfavours women, but we also respect women who believe that they should be powerless language users, and those who argue that they are not disfavoured in any manner.

Like all other schools of thought, Feminism has its opponents. Zulu [2001:323] highlights some of the criticisms that are levelled against it. One such attack is that this approach is political and that “it seeks to expose, not to perpetuate patriarchal practices.” However, we observe that when people feel oppressed in one way or another, they look towards some form of political movement to free them from their bondage. This criticism against Feminism fails to appreciate that Feminism is not the only philosophy with political connotations. For instance, the theories of Protest and Commitment in literature are political and would not impress oppressors. Another problem is the apparent failure by the critics of Feminism to appreciate the

rich diversity of Feminist theories; while some are clearly political types, proponents of Pro-life Feminism would be insulted at being labelled political.

1.1.2 Stylistic Criticism

Stylistic criticism is a linguistic approach used to analyse literary texts. Spencer and Gregory [1970:81] comment as follows on linguistics and the study of literary material:

Linguistic science has a history stretching over many centuries. It has had its dark ages and its renaissances, and it has still much to do; but it does now offer a body of scholarship concerning language which the student of literature can ill afford to ignore.

And Ngara [1982:10] says:

Although a work of art consists of various elements—such as plot, theme, characters and ideas—without language these elements would not be what they are; in other words they are realized and given form through the medium of language.

Although Ngara's observations are based on the novel, we extend the theoretical applications to the study of oral literature, which in this case comprises proverbs and traditional song accompanied by instruments. Our stance is that Stylistics as a theory of literary language is just as applicable in our choice of data as in the novel. For instance we analyse the literary style of the song '*Ha ke a nka mosadi*' by Tlou Makhola:

Ha ke a nka mosadi
Ke nkile lerato. (x3)

Mosadi ke wa hao
Lerato ke la ka. (x3)

I have not taken (your) woman
I have taken (her) love. (x3)

The woman is yours,
The love is mine. (x3)

The song is not numbered as we only number sentential examples, and not literary quotes. In this song, the artist uses words in a poetic manner to justify an extramarital affair in a way that ridicules the aggrieved husband. He says that the wife still belongs to her husband, but only the lover has the woman's love. This message is communicated through the artist's poetic language.

Our thesis is that female and male artists, more often than not, use different styles, to varying degrees, and that the language tools that culture and other factors make available to female and male artists differ too. It is these differences that form the heart of our argument. In cases where female and male artists have stylistic similarities we indicate why that is so.

1.2 Literature review

We propose that language differentiation based on gender is as old as language itself. Studies of English and other European languages support the observation that there are significant differences in the way that male and female speakers of a language use it. These differences become observable early in people's lives. The language that Sotho boys use, for example, is different from that used by girls.

Many sociolinguists support the notion that language variation between male and female speakers starts at an early age. Goodwin [1980:165] indicates that boys and girls, among other things, format directives differently in English.

While boys' directives are imperatives,
girls format theirs as proposals.

Similarly, Romaine [1994:117] says that boys use their speech to assert their dominance, while girls "use language to create and maintain cohesiveness." This is also observed among Sotho-speaking children. Boys tend to use language to show their dominance among themselves and also to assert their superiority over girls. A Sotho-speaking boy referring to a girl can, for example, use the word *ngwanana* 'girl', but a girl learns from a tender age that *moshanyana* 'boy', might not be accepted by some boys. This results in the following similar sentences being received differently by girls and boys, respectively:

8. *Ngwanana enwa ke Lerato.*

This **girl** is Lerato.

9. *Moshanyana enwa ke Thabo.*

This **boy** is Thabo.

Ngwanana and *moshanyana* in Sotho mean a female and male child, respectively. Girls do not normally have a problem with being called 'girls' while boys sometimes believe that the word 'boy' is used to undermine them, instead they prefer to be referred to as *abuti* 'big brother'. It should be noted, however, that if a boy is asked whether he is a boy or a girl he will gladly say:

10. *Ke moshanyana.*

I am a boy.

but will ask a girl uttering sentence 9 above the following question:

11. *Moshanyana ke mang?*

Who is a **boy**?

We believe that this early language differentiation is a result of the fact that parents and society as a whole treat boys and girls differently from a very early age. Philips [1987:1] indicates that:

socialization effects appear at a very early age. Parents speak differently from each other; they speak differently to boys than to girls; and boys and girls speak differently.

From the quotation above we see that it is almost impossible for girls and boys to use language in a similar manner as they are exposed to gender-based variation by their parents from their early years. It therefore follows that for the current cycle to stop, parents would not only have to change the way they talk to their children, but also how they talk to each other. However, we wonder if Sotho boys and girls will ever use language similarly because of the discrimination that some parents display towards their children. A typical Sotho family is normally never satisfied until it has a baby boy, since boys are highly regarded among the Sotho. Girls in a family may be constantly reminded that:

12. *Thabo ke ntat'a lona.*

Thabo is your father (even though in actual fact he is their brother).

but the boy will not be told that one of the girls is 'his mother'. This culture inculcates an early sense of superiority in the boy while girls have no alternative but to develop an inferiority complex as they are forced to respect their brothers, older or younger, because of the language used by their parents. This high regard for boys influences the language. For example, the dictionary meaning of the word *mojalefa* is 'heir', but when a Sotho man says:

13. *Ke na le mojalefa.*

I have an heir.

what he actually means is that he has a son. However, when we analyse the word *mojalefa* 'heir', there is no indication of the gender of the child. This compound noun derives from *moja-* 'one who eats (in this case, one who gains what he did not work for)' and *lefa* 'inheritance'. It is clear that gender is not part of the denotation of the word *mojalefa*, and that it is the *social connotation* of 'heir' that would carry the attribute [+male]. Because of the culture of leaving family wealth to male children, young or old in the family, society knows that only male children inherit their parents' wealth. A daughter only inherits her family belongings if she's the only child.

The argument behind sons as the only heirs is that girls get married and leave their homes for their in-laws' homes. However, we do not see why a daughter may not be left her family wealth to enjoy alone if single, or with her husband and children if she is married just as a son would.

Many sociolinguistic studies maintain that language differentiation based on gender is a result of the gender inequality within which societies operate (cf. Kramarae [1980], Spender [1981], Holmes [1994] and Foley [1997].) Other studies indicate that culture perpetuates gender inequality, and therefore, sexism in language (cf. Borker [1980], Thipa [1980], Lyons [1986], Ehrlich and King [1998] and Sheldon and Johnson [1998].) However, there are other factors which influence language variation between male and female speakers, and Coates and Cameron [1988] mention the conservatism of women, their status and the feeling of solidarity among them as playing an important role in shaping their language usage. Other studies suggest that the language of subordinates shows differentiation from that of those in

power, irrespective of the gender of the speakers (cf. Romaine [1984] and Reynolds [1998].)

There are gender stereotypes among the Sotho, as in many other cultures, that women are more talkative than men (cf. Tannen 1998:461]), and that the former indulge in gossip while the latter do not. However, research shows that both men and women gossip at one time or another, as Cameron [1998:281] illustrates. On women's talkativeness Meunier [2002:1] maintains "Women have been shown to talk more in private with female friends about topics often considered trivial and unimportant to men". This observation alludes to the observation that men talk most in public domains (cf. Jaworski [1993:118-9] and Holmes [1995:2]).

1.3 Methodology

For Sotho we use the South African orthography, except in quotations in the Lesotho orthography. We use data collected in various ways. We use interviews and informal conversations for analysing speech patterns of different Sotho-speakers. We have used male research assistants to talk to males so as to get male-male conversation, as Milroy [1989:81] correctly states:

A female fieldworker certainly will not have access
to some of the characteristically male speech events...
By the same token a male fieldworker will not have
easy access to conversations with adolescent girls,

We talked to, or observed, females and males from different social and geographical backgrounds in both Lesotho and the Free State province of South Africa. We have also used Sotho material in written form. These include different Sotho dictionaries used to check the vocabulary and the prescribed forms of words; and texts in which

traditional genres such as proverbs and songs are recorded. Use was also made of Sotho music audiotapes. All these are used to compare the language of, and about female and male Sotho-speakers.

CHAPTER 2: THE CULTURE BEHIND SOTHO

2.0 Introduction

Sesotho 'Sotho culture' is one of the major forces behind Sotho, the language. This is not peculiar to Sotho. Languages and the cultures of their speakers influence each other in one way or another. Salzmann [1993:56] supports this observation:

In a sense... a language is just as culture-bound as are the traditional habits and value orientations characteristic of the society whose members use it.

According to Sotho culture, a woman is a man's subordinate and subordinates must be polite and show respect when addressing superiors. Holmes [1994:337] has the following to say on politeness:

Linguistic politeness, then, is one expression of cultural values...

In Sotho, this respect goes beyond just using a polite version of Sotho, it also includes being silent if the superiors will feel challenged if either a woman or child disagrees with them in any way. Culturally, a husband is awarded a fatherhood role over his wife. This role is normally extended to other women. This means that the male does not only believe that his wife is one of his children, but he also expects her to behave like one when it suits him, and to be transformed into an adult the minute he needs an adult by his side. Although there are women who feel they want to be treated as the adults they are, some believe that men are supposed to treat them as subordinates or inferiors. In Sotho, as in many other African cultures, mothers-in-law are notorious for ill-treating their daughters-in-law and taking their sons' sides in times of disagreements, especially if the family does not support their daughter-in-

law. This is in line with the following observation by Mueller [1997:324]

The two mostly frequently verbalized beliefs about women by women are; first, women are children. Second, women are spiteful, untrustworthy troublemakers.

Mueller [1977:324]

The mother-in-law may constantly tell the daughter-in-law:

14. *Monna ha a arabiswe.*

A man must not be answered back. (Even when speaking nonsense)

but never:

15. *Mosadi ha a arabiswe.*

A woman must not be answered back.

What this means is that instead of posing a threat to a man, a wife should give up her right to speak, and remain silent. Sometimes if a woman keeps on talking when her husband does not expect her to, he may use the following imperative to silence her:

16. *Thola!*

Shut up!

It should be noted, however, that it is unheard of for a woman to use the above imperative to her husband, or to any man, but it is acceptable for men to use it as they please. This practice is also dictated by culture, a fact also noted by Sheldon and Johnson [1998:76]:

Language is a major force in a culture's gender ideology because through language we reflect, construct, and perpetuate gender expectations.

We will come back to the different expectations that a typical Sotho community has on the two genders later.

An understanding of the institute of marriage among the Sotho may clarify why married women have language limitations that do not affect men. This does not mean that single women are free to use language as their male counterparts do. This is because single women are made to believe that they are at the mercy of men who will marry them some day, therefore, they too can use the “appropriate” women’s language so as to please men who in return will reward them with marriage. Sentences such as the following are normally used in this context:

17. *Thabo o mpaleisitse bofetwa.*

Thabo saved me from spinsterhood.

It seems rare, however, to think of a man who might be thankful to his wife for saving him from bachelorhood:

18. *Lerato o mpaleisitse bosoha.*

Lerato saved from bachelorhood.

This is because, as we will see below, in Sotho culture, marriage is something that a man does to a woman.

2.1 Marriages and Language Usage

Among the Sotho marriage is one of the most important institutions; it is supposedly the greatest achievement; hence people may acquire material possessions and social status, but if they are not married no one takes them seriously. Thipa [1980:36] also makes this observation:

Marriage to African people in general,
and to Basotho and amaXhosa in particu-
lar, is regarded as a status symbol and
as a symbol of maturity.

It should be noted, however, that, not only in Southern Sotho culture, but also in

Northern Sotho culture (as indicated by Sekhukhune [1988:130-31]), the concept of marriage is different from Western norms where a couple seems to be relatively equal, resulting in the possibility of the following sentences in the latter culture:

19. John and Jill are getting married.
20. Jill is marrying John.
21. John is marrying Jill.

Because in Sotho culture, the man is the one who is said to do the 'marrying', while the woman is 'being married', the Sotho equivalents of sentences 20 and 21 are not acceptable as they do not conform to Sotho norms. Instead, the following sentences are acceptable Sotho sentences:

22. *Sekgwane (male) o nyala Dineo (female.)*
Sekgwane is marrying Dineo.
23. *Dineo o nyalwa ke Sekgwane.*
(Dineo is being married by Sekgwane.)
Dineo is marrying Sekgwane.

If a female is in the subject position then the sentence must be in the passive so that the male is the agent acting on the subject, hence translation 23 above. If we had the sentence:

24. *Dineo o nyala Sekgwane.*
(Dineo is the one who marries Sekgwane.)

which is acceptable according to English norms, we would get questions such as:

25. *O mo nyala jwang?*
How does she marry him?

This is because Sotho marriage entails, among other things, the following: parent

approval and involvement; *bohadi* 'cattle or money given by man's parents to woman's parents'. Without both the prerequisites, a marriage does not exist. A Sotho couple with a marriage certificate but with the man's party not having given *bohadi*, is not considered a marriage, and in the absence of *bohadi* the families will always say:

26. *Sekgwane ha a a nyala Dineo.*

Sekgwane has not married Dineo.

In the examples above we show that a particular grammatically correct utterance does not form part of the repertoire of Sotho sentences, because it does not adhere to Sotho cultural norms. This culture stipulates that women are the ones who are being married because of the *bohadi* that their parents receive when they get married. Although the culture of *bohadi* was meant to unite the two families, it has however, been abused by families who have interpreted it to mean that the woman has been exchanged for the cattle, and even worse, now that we have money or cattle, that she has been bought and therefore will be treated like any other item that is a personal belonging. In some Sotho marriages, women stay because they do not want to embarrass their parents who have enjoyed their *bohadi*. It is easy to see how some women may give up their right to speak every now and again so that their husbands may see them for the respectful women they are expected to be after *bohadi* has been given to their parents. This is why we have sentences such as:

27. *Re mo nyetse ka kgomo tsa rona.*

We paid cattle for her.

We have obtained her in marriage through our cattle.

28. *Ke mosadi wa kgomo tsa rona.*

We married her with our cattle.

The sentences above are used when a family believes that a married woman is not behaving in accordance with this fact. Sometimes they may be justified in reminding her that she needs to remember that she has responsibilities as a family woman, but giving the reason as the cattle given to her parents is, from a feminist viewpoint, unacceptable.

Sotho culture results in the construction of sentences such as the following:

29. *Banna, ke hlohetswe bana ba ka.*

Men, I miss my children (wife included).

We indicated earlier that culturally a man acquires a fatherhood role over his wife, while the woman shifts from being her father's child to being her husband's child.

Ngcangca [1984:8] makes a similar point:

When a Mosotho man says: "Ke sa ilo bona bana" (I am visiting my children.) In this context the people referred to are the wife and children or his wife only. The image thus created is that of a loved subordinate.

Khaketla [1996:133] makes a similar point when one of his male characters says:

Basali ke bana ... ha ba tsebe litaba.

Women are children; they do not know anything.

The quotations above give a general picture of the adult-minor relationship that exists between a male and female, respectively, among the Sotho. Some of the males we talked to uttered a similar sentence:

30. *Mosadi ke ngwana, monna ke hlooho.*

A woman is a child; a man is the head (of his family.)

Similarly, some women also implied that they are minors:

31. *Monna ke hlooho.*

A man is the head (of the family.)

Although women leave out the first part of sentence 30 above they still suggest that they accept that they are their husband's subordinates, and that this relationship is not meant to change. When a Sotho woman says:

32. *Ke ilo phehela bana ba ka.*

I am going to cook for my children.

she means her children only, as she cannot refer to her husband as one of her children. On the other hand, when a married woman utters the following sentence, it may have two meanings because of the parent-child relationship between a Sotho man and his wife:

33. *Nkeke ka apara borikgwe hobane ntate ha a bo rate.*

a) I cannot wear pants because **my father** does not like them.

b) I cannot wear pants because **my husband** does not like them.

It should be noted that culturally women are supposed to refer to their husbands as *ntate* 'father'; hence a woman may not call her husband by his name only. To show respect she must refer to him as follows, as children would do to their father, if they do not say *ntate* 'father'.

34. a) *Ntate* + first name

Father + name

Ntate Thabo

Father Thabo

b) *Ntate* + surname

Father + surname

Father Radiperekisi

This ambiguity emerged when we asked women questions which incorporated the word *ntate* 'father', and some of them responded with the question:

35. *O re ntate wa ka kapa monn'aka?*

Do you mean my father or husband?

This seemed to be the case with women who still believe in the cultural hierarchy system, as liberated women interpreted questions with *ntate* 'father', as referring to their biological fathers.

Today when women attend high schools and go to tertiary institutions with men, meet and date them in these institutions, in-laws are fighting hard to try and encourage their daughters-in-law to call their husbands and former schoolmates *ntate* 'father', or *abuti* 'big brother'. The shift from colleagues and equals to fathers and daughters is overwhelming to some women, especially professionals. However, it seems as if rural, uneducated and unemployed women believe that they somehow deserve to be their husband's subordinates as their husbands maintain them, just like their children.

Those outside Sotho culture, and who have a different culture, may wonder why some Sotho women who believe in the equality of the two genders appreciate marriage. We assume that it is because there are incentives for the women, including some language advantages. Because a married woman gets the respect of

society, language used to refer to her is different from that used when single women are involved. For example, the word *ausi* 'big sister', can be used to belittle and undermine single women, while *mme* 'mother', may be used as a way of elevating married women. Although we should expect to hear Sotho-speakers referring to a forty-year-old female as *mme* 'mother', and to a sixteen-year-old female as *ausi* 'big sister', this is not always the case. A sixteen-year-old married female is culturally *mme* 'mother', while a forty-year-old single female is *ausi* 'big sister'.

2.2 Married Women and Language Usage

In Sotho when a woman gets married she is lectured on how to behave at her new family. Among the many things, she is told to respect her in-laws. This respect includes watching her language. There are things that she may not say to, or about, her in-laws. She uses what is known as *hlonepha* language, the language of respect, among the Sothos and Ngunis. Kunene [1958:161] says the following about *hlonepha*:

Hlonepha as manifested in the language of the married women who observe it, is applied with reference only to male relatives of the husband.

According to the *hlonepha* or 'respect custom', a married woman may show respect by not mentioning her father-in-law's name. She is also expected to respect a few other male relatives. If a father-in-law's name is Thabo the woman will not only avoid saying the word *thabo* 'joy', but she may avoid all constructions which are similar to the name she is avoiding. The following is an example of how the limitations may affect the woman's language:

36. Ke *thabile kajeno*.

I am glad today.

This could be replaced by:

37. *Ke nyakaletse kajeno.*

I am glad today.

and

38. *Thaba tsena di ntle.*

These mountains are beautiful.

may be changed to:

39. *Marallahadi ana a matle.*

(These big hills are beautiful.)

These mountains are beautiful.

We observed that while rural women seem to stick to this rule while urban women do not necessarily do so, or those who show this respect, only do so when their in-laws are around. Perhaps rural women are used to this rule as some of them stay with their in-laws in extended families, while in towns people are moving towards nuclear families.

It should be noted that a son-in-law has no language limitations; instead his in-laws have to watch their language when he is around. This advantage is perhaps best explained by the Sotho saying:

40. *Mokgwenyana bohweg ke sebatso.*

A son-in-law is the apple of the eye of his in-laws.

However, there is no Sotho saying which indicates a similar sentiment about the daughter-in-law.

That language operates in culture is undoubtable. Sotho culture is still one of the major driving forces behind the language; hence we cannot divorce the two. This argument will surface again later in this thesis, verifying that the influence of culture goes beyond language usage as culture does seem to affect even the structure of language.

CHAPTER 3: THE STRUCTURE OF SOTHO

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter we examine certain aspects of the structure of Sotho in relation to the differentiation of language based on the gender of the addresser or addressee. Our hypothesis is that aspects of Sotho structure perpetuate the differentiation that exists in the use of the language.

3.1 Morphology

Tau-tshehlana ya Mohato, Lekena,
Tau-tshehlana ya eng, e se mosadi?
E-re, mokopohadi wa Letsha Leholo,
(Mangoaela 1984:227)

The **tawny lioness** of Mohato, Lekena –
Why the **tawny lioness**, when he wasn't a woman? –
Say a powerful spring of the Great Lake,
(Damane & Sanders 1974:237)

We start this chapter with the above quotation from the praise-poetry of Lerotholi Mojela to reveal an aspect of Sotho structure. Lerotholi Mojela was a great-grandchild of Moshoeshoe I, founder of the Sotho nation. In the above quotation Lerotholi Mojela is praised for having served in the Allied forces in France during the First World War. Although, he is said not to have actually fought, he is praised for his bravery in this war. The metaphor that is used, that of a tawny lioness, appears inadequate as it refers to a female, instead of a male lion. In Sotho, a lion is *tau*, and a tawny male lion is *tau-tshehla*, while a female one is *tau-tshehlana*. The poet in the above quotation shows that he is

not content with referring to such a warrior as a lioness, because that belittles the brave chief, associating him with femininity. The use of the female-denoting suffix in the metaphor changes everything: once the suffix is added, the respected lion changes from being the king of the jungle to being a belittled animal, a female one. This is why in the third line the poet feels it more appropriate to refer to the chief as a powerful spring instead, as he is not as weak as a woman or lioness. The example cited above illustrates how words denoting femininity can be formed in Sotho; a male term is used as the standard form and a suffix added to give a feminine form. Salzmänn [1993:185-6] refers to a similar practice in English:

Masculine terms in most languages are grammatically basic – that is, feminine forms are usually derived from masculine forms (as *goddess*, *lioness*, *aviatrix* and *usherette* are derived from *god*, *lion*, *aviator* and *usher*.)

On a similar note Holmes [1994:337] says:

Many words reflect a view of women as a deviant, abnormal or subordinate group. For example, the English morphology – its word-structure – generally takes the male form as the base form and adds a suffix to signal ‘female’: e.g. *lion/lioness*, *count/countess*, *actor/actress*; *usher/usherette*; *hero/heroine*; *aviator/aviatrix*... The male form is the unmarked form, and therefore, it is argued, implicitly the norm.

The above English examples reveal the masculine as the unmarked form, while the feminine form is marked as a derivation of the canonical, and masculine, form, a process observed also in Sotho.

In Sotho there are basically three suffixes that may be affixed to masculine forms to derive feminine forms. They are *-hadi*, *-atsana* and *-ane*.

3.1.1 The Suffix *-hadi*

As we indicated earlier, *-hadi* may be used in two different ways; it may be augmentative, and it may also be used as a feminine-marker, as we show below.

As an augmentative *-hadi* may be used with any noun as the following examples illustrate:

	Basic		Augmentative	
41.	a.	<i>motho</i> ‘person’	<i>mothohadi</i>	‘large person’
	b.	<i>kgaba</i> ‘spoon’	<i>kgabahadi</i>	‘large spoon’
	c.	<i>apole</i> ‘apple’	<i>apolehadi</i>	‘large apple’

These examples show that this suffix may be used with both animate and inanimate nouns. With some animate objects, suffixing *-hadi* may be confusing as it may mean that the object referred to is either large or female, or even both.

The following nouns are typical examples:

42.	a.	<i>tau</i> ‘lion’	<i>tauhadi</i>	‘lioness’/‘large lion’
	b.	<i>kgomo</i> ‘cow (of either sex)’	<i>kgomohadi</i>	‘cow’/ ‘large cow’

The two meanings can be used as follows:

43. a. *Thabo o harotswe ke tauhadi.*
- i) Thabo was devoured by a huge lion.
- ii) Thabo was devoured by a lioness.
- b. *Palesa o ruile dikgomohadi.*

i.) Palesa has huge cattle.

ii) Palesa has cows.

A similar suffix is found in Zulu and Xhosa. Both these languages use *-kazi* to denote the feminine. In Zulu, for instance, we have the following examples which illustrate this point:

	Masculine		Feminine
44.	a.	<i>indoda</i> 'man'	<i>indodakazi</i> 'daughter'
	b.	<i>utishala</i> 'male teacher'	<i>utishalakazi</i> 'female teacher'
	c.	<i>umufu</i> 'fellow'	<i>umfazi</i> 'woman'

Indodakazi literally means a female man, the first part of the word, *indoda*, means man, while the suffix *-kazi* indicates the female gender.

The use of this suffix in Nguni languages is what results in some speakers referring to me as *Sothokazi* (a hybrid Sotho-Nguni word), to indicate that I am not only Sotho, but also female. These Nguni speakers are not aware that in Sotho there is no distinction between a male a female in this regard; all are Sotho, *Basotho*.

However, it must be noted that not many nouns take *-hadi* as the feminine-denoting suffix. Khaketla [1951:235] gives the following list of nouns, orthography changed to that of South Africa:

rare	'father' (obsolete)	>	rakgadi	'paternal aunt'
mora	'son'	>	moradi	'daughter'

tau	'lion'	>	tauhadi	'lioness'
nkwe	'leopard'	>	nkwehadi	'leopardess'
mofumi	'man' (obsolete)	>	mofumahadi	'woman / queen'
mohwe	'father-in-law'	>	mohwehadi	'man's mother-in-law'
Morwa	'Bushman'	>	Morwahadi	'female Bushman'
kgama	'deer, male'	>	kgamahadi	'female deer'
Lekgowa	'white person'	>	Lekgowahadi	'white woman'
kgomo	'bull'	>	kgomohadi	'cow, female'

In Sotho the suffix *-hadi* (reduced to *-adi* in two cases) occurs with a limited number of nouns, referring to both humans and animals, to indicate “female”.

With an augmentative significance, *-hadi* occurs freely with [-human] nouns, though in the case of some animal names (e.g. *tauhadi*) it is ambiguously augmentative or feminine. In the case of [+human] nouns, augmentation by the use of *-hadi* can be avoided. Instead, the adjectival stem *-tona* ‘male: right-hand’ is used with a possessive concord together with the second half of the adjectival prefix to indicate ‘large’; e.g.

45. a) *monna wa motona* a large man
b) *lesole la letona* a large soldier

Nouns which do not take *-hadi* to indicate femininity do not confuse speakers, in any way as they know that whenever the suffix is used with such nouns it is purely as an augmentative. These include all inanimate nouns and animate ones such as the following:

46.

Basic	Augmentative	Basic	Augmentative
<i>monna</i> 'man'	<i>monnahadi</i> 'large man'	<i>mosadi</i> 'woman'	<i>mosadihadi</i> 'large woman'
<i>mokoko</i> 'rooster'	<i>mokokohadi</i> 'large rooster'	<i>sethole</i> 'hen'	<i>setholehadi</i> 'large hen'

In examples such as the above where different nouns exist for the feminine and masculine, males may not be offended by the use of *-hadi* as they know that it can, in no way, refer to femininity, a characteristic that is objectionable to them. Hence a chief would be more content than not if the following sentence were uttered to him:

47. *O morenahadi sebakeng sena.*

You are a great chief in this place.

In the above example the noun has no feminine connotations, as we indicated.

3.1.2 The Suffix *-ane* and *-ana*

Below we analyse the suffixes *-ane* and *-ana*.

3.1.2.1 Nominal derivation

Like *-hadi*, *-ane* can be suffixed to a masculine form to derive a feminine form.

This suffix is normally used to coin female names from common nouns as the following examples show:

48.

Common noun	Man's name	Woman's name
<i>jwala</i> 'alcohol'	Jwala	Jwalane
<i>Tsela</i> 'road'	Tsela	Tselane
<i>Pula</i> 'rain'	Pule	Pulane

In Sotho, as in many other African cultures, people may be named according to the occurrences that happened around the time they were born. A girl may get the name Jwalane because on the day she was born there was a lot of beer brewed. Similarly, one born on a rainy day may be called Pulane. Even when people are named after objects, the masculine form is still the basic form, while the feminine is the marked form. Because the above names are gender-specific, when they are used, speakers automatically know the gender of the person with such a name; hence a sentence such as the following would be unacceptable:

49. **Pule o apara mese e metle.*

Pule (a male) wears beautiful dresses.

Although the above example is grammatically correct, it is not a likely Sotho sentence as Pule, a male, would not wear dresses, but if instead of Pule we had Pulane, a female, the sentence would be acceptable:

50. *Pulane o apara mese e metle.*

Pulane (a female) wears beautiful dresses.

Unlike, *-hadi* which is augmentative, *-ane* has connotations of the diminutive, an aspect that no Sotho man would wish to be associated with.

3.1.2.2 Adjectival derivation

Adjectives, especially those denoting colour, may also be used with suffixes which show the gender of the referent. In this case, too, Sotho has the masculine form as the standard, and the feminine as the diminutive of the standard. Khaketla [1951:236] supports this notion:

Ha sehla kisi se nyenyefaditswe, mme se hlalosa leereo
le supang motho kapa phoofolo, se supa hore ntho
eo e hlalotwang e tshedi.

When the diminutive form of the adjective has been derived, and is used to qualify a person or thing, it indicates that what is qualified is feminine.

We have examples such as the following:

		Masculine	Feminine
51.	a) brown/black	<i>-sootho</i>	<i>-soothwana</i>
	b) yellow/light complexion	<i>-sehla</i>	<i>-sehlana</i>
	c) light brown	<i>-kgunong</i>	<i>-kgunwana</i>
	d) black	<i>-tsho</i>	<i>-tshwana</i>

which could be used:

52. *Monna e mosootho o tsamaya le mosadi e mosoothwana.*

A black man is walking with a black woman.

53. *Kgomo e kgunong e shwele, ha e kgunwana yona e phela.*

A light brown cow (male) has died, while the light brown female one is alive.

Note the unacceptability of the following:

54. **Kgomo ya Mpho e kgunong e sisa haholo.*

Mpho's light brown (*male*) cow gives plenty of milk.

55. **Monna e mosehlana o mobe.*

A light-complexioned (female) man is ugly.

Examples 52 and 53 above are acceptable Sotho sentences because in them the nouns that are qualified are appropriately described by those adjectives. On the other hand, example 54 is not acceptable, though grammatically correct, because the adjective bears no feminine suffix, while the verb indicates an action marked [+female]. In example 55 there is lack of agreement between the masculine noun and the feminine adjective. As we indicated, Sotho employs generic colour adjectives for males, while the affixing of the diminutive suffix to the generic (and masculine) form marks femininity. As we use the Feminist Thought in this thesis, we choose to substitute the usual [±male] with [±female] as we have yet to come across a convincing linguistic argument against this. Cf. O'Grady and Katamba [1997:274]:

Nothing depends on the choice of feature names here;
the analysis would work just as well with the feature
±female as ±male.

And Crystal [1998:77]:

Š can be stated in terms of [+male] v. [-male] or
[-female] v. [+female].

The examples also illustrate that Sotho does not only have masculine forms as the standard, but it also has the feminine form not only as the marked form, but it is also the diminutive. This aspect of language is indicative of Sotho life, women are 'diminutive men', in a way. Even when the feminine form seems to be respected, the connotations behind the obvious meanings normally suppose that femininity is synonymous with contempt. A good example is the proverb which sometimes

impresses women who do not understand its underlying meaning:

56. *Mosadi ke morena.*

A woman is a king.

This proverb does not mean that a woman has the last word like the king does in Sotho culture, or that she is worthy of respect. What it actually means is that a woman should be respected like a child.

3.1.3 The Suffix *-atsana*

-atsana may be suffixed to some masculine forms to derive feminine forms as is the case with the two suffixes which we discussed above. This suffix may be used as follows:

	Masculine		Feminine
57. a)	<i>kgomo</i> ‘bull’		<i>kgomoatsana</i> ‘cow’
b)	<i>kgosi</i> ‘chief’		<i>kgosatsana</i> ‘chief’s daughter’
c)	<i>tlou</i> ‘male elephant’		<i>tlowatsana</i> ‘female elephant’

As with the other feminine suffixes, using *-atsana* when referring to a man may be interpreted as belittling him, thus when the following sentence is said to a Sotho male it becomes unacceptable:

58. *Thabo o matla a tlowatsana.*

Thabo has the strength of a **female** elephant.

All the suffixes discussed here are unacceptable to men because they denote femininity, a feature that is synonymous with weakness, powerlessness and not being worthy of respect, characteristics loathed by Sotho men.

For nouns which do not take any of the above suffixes, different lexical items are used to indicate gender. These include the following examples:

	Masculine	Feminine
59. a)	<i>mokoko</i> 'rooster'	<i>sethole</i> 'hen'
b)	<i>moshanyana</i> 'boy'	<i>ngwanana</i> 'girl'
c)	<i>mme</i> 'mother'	<i>ntate</i> 'father'

3.1.4 Adjectival Stems *-tona* and *-tshehadi*

Sometimes the adjectival stems *-tona* and *-tshehadi* may be used to qualify nouns in order to differentiate the gender of both people and animate beings. Instead of saying *ngwanana* 'girl' for example, Sothos may say *ngwana e motshehadi* 'a female child'.

60. *Lerato o filwe ngwan'e motshehadi.*

Lerato gave birth to a female child.

This is the form which is used in the idiom:

61. *Ngwan'e motona kabelwa-manong.*

A male child, an offering to the vultures

This idiom means that a man can die anywhere, even far from home where he will not get a proper burial, but will be devoured by vultures. It should be noted that it is normally with pride that a Sotho man will indicate that he has a male child; hence the following grammatically equivalent utterances are of different value and connotation in a typical Sotho community:

62. *Ke na le ngwan'e motona.*

I have a male child.

63. *Ke na le ngwan'e motshedi.*

I have a female child.

The examples are different because of the connotational inequality between the adjectival suffixes *-tona* 'male' and *-tshedi* 'female'. Although these suffixes mean 'male' and 'female', respectively, the masculine-denoting suffix, more often than not, connotes more respect than its feminine counterpart. With cattle, a female one may be loved because it helps families with milk. This is the one which may fondly be referred to:

64. *kgomo ya lebese*

the milk cow

But even then, when the milk part is forgotten, bulls, and even oxen, become more important, and enjoy the respect of society as a Sotho man is proudly referred to as:

65. *Ngwan'e motona, pholo ya letlaka*

A male, the **ox** which is meant to be devoured by vultures.

and not,

66. *Ngwan'e motona sethole sa letlaka*

A male, a heifer which is meant to be devoured by vultures.

(cf. "*Tau-tshehlana ya Mohato, Lekena*")

"The **tawny lioness** of Mohato, Lekena" on page 23)

Sotho does not have individual words for 'left' and 'right', as English does. Instead, the phrases *tsoho le letshedi* 'female hand' and *tsoho le letona* 'male hand' are used. When informants were asked why they thought these hands were named thus,

some came up with answers such as the following:

Female informants:

1. Le a fokola le letshehadi, ha le na matla... le letona ke lona le matla ho feta lona (pointing at the left hand), lona (pointing at the left hand), ke motshehetsi feela.

The left hand is weak, it doesn't have any strength... the right one is stronger than this (pointing at the left hand), this, (pointing at the left), is just a helper.

2. Ke bona eka ke hobaneneng mohlomong matsoho ana a bitswa ka mokg'ona hobane mosadi a ile a ntshwa lehopong la ntate.

I think that these hands were named thus because a woman was made from a man's rib.

Male informants:

1. Nthw'e tshehadi ha e sebetse ka boima ho lekana le ntate.

A female thing does not work as hard as a man.

2. Ho thwe botona ke bona bo boholo, ka mokg'oo ho buehang ka teng ka mantswe a maholo, mme ha re sheba matsoho ana re a bona hore ka nnete le matsoho ana a a bolela hore le letona ke lona le leholo.

It is said that masculinity is superior, that's what is said in great sayings, and when we look at both hands we really see that these hands prove that the right, is the superior one.

When we asked informants what exactly they meant by saying that men work harder than women, most of them alluded to the fact that men can handle physically challenging jobs, such as chopping wood and digging graves, better than women. Follow-up questions on the many things that Sotho women do better than their male counterparts, such as bringing up children almost single-handedly while men are migrant labourers, did not seem to matter to most informants, either male or female.

The act of comparing males and females based on what they can or cannot do is subjective. It is a fact that generally men have more muscle-power than women, making it easier for them to handle muscle-demanding tasks. However, the same strong man is not capable of, for example, giving birth, because naturally he does not have childbearing organs. This fact, however, does not mean that, since labour is one of the toughest exercises that humankind may experience, men are weaker than women, only that they are incapable of giving birth to children. Some informants even suggested that just as the right hand (male in Sotho), is strong enough to carry things on its own, Sotho men can survive without women, while women cannot live without them. Others indicated that women are 'mere' helpers, both verifying that socially *-tona* 'male', and *-tshehadi* 'female', do not have the same value, with the masculine suffix being superior, while *-tshehadi*, like the gender it denotes, is subordinate.

3.1.5 Possessives and Gender

In Sotho, possessives may be used to refer to masculinity and femininity. This is the technique used when a supposedly neutral word has been used initially, as in the following examples:

67.

Neutral	Female	Male
<i>kgoho</i> 'chicken'	<i>kgoho ya sethole</i> 'hen'	<i>kgoho ya mokoko</i> 'rooster'
<i>motho</i> 'person'	<i>motho wa mosadi</i> 'woman'	<i>motho wa monna</i> 'man'
<i>ngaka</i> 'doctor'	<i>ngaka ya mosadi</i> 'female doctor'	<i>ngaka ya monna</i> 'male doctor'

However, even words which are supposedly neutral, may be used to denote masculinity, while their marked forms may refer to femininity. For example, *ngaka* ‘doctor’ is neutral, but it is normally used to refer to male doctors, while female doctors are *dingaka tsa basadi* ‘women doctors’. This practice is not peculiar to Sotho. English, too, makes use of this technique as Poynton [1989:59] comments:

The second technique for indicating that a human referent is female is by using a word explicitly indicating this (e.g. woman, lady, female, girl) in combination with the occupational or agent word, producing such forms as woman doctor, lady lawyer, female attendant, and girl reporter.

In Sotho we have examples such as:

68.

Neutral and Masculine-connoting	Feminine
<i>ngaka</i> ‘doctor’	<i>ngaka ya mosadi</i> ‘female doctor’
<i>lepolesa</i> ‘police officer’	<i>lepolesa la mosadi</i> ‘female police officer’
<i>teraefara</i> ‘driver’	<i>teraefara ya mosadi</i> ‘female driver’

Because Sotho men became doctors, police officers and drivers long before Sotho women could join them, one may surmise that the above neutral words are associated mainly with males, because by the time females qualified as doctors and other professionals, the professions were mainly populated by men. Hence for a long time, *ngaka* ‘doctor’ meant male doctor. But, *ngaka ya mosadi* ‘woman doctor’ doesn’t only mean that women are relatively new in that field, it also means that they do not belong in that field and are inferior to their male counterparts, and therefore, do not enjoy the same status as their male counterparts. Even traditionally, doctors

were mainly men, while women attended to medical affairs of other women, such as helping as midwives.

When informants were asked what they understood by *ngaka ya mosadi* 'woman doctor' and *lepolesa la mosadi* 'woman police officer' some said:

Females informants:

1. Ha ke re o nts'a le motshehadi, k'ore o nts'a beuwa kamorao.

Remember that she is a female, that is, she is always inferior.

2. Ho hlaka hore mme ke motho ya eisehang, a ntseng a nyenyefatswa nako yohle.

It is clear that a woman is despised, she is always undermined.

Male informants:

1. Ke tla re hobaneneng ho etsuwa kgethollo enono ka baka la hobane bontate ntse ba nkuwa e le ntho e kahodimo, jwale bomme o so hlile o hlalohanya o bontsha hore ha se ya kahodimo jwaloka hlooho.

I think that this discrimination is a result of the notion that men are superior to women, while you understand that women are not as important as men.

2. Atjhee, k'ore ke bona ekare mosadi ke... ke... ntho... k'ore motho wa mme ke motho ya saletseng morao, k'ore... ha se motho... k'ore bonyane mapoleseng re dumela hore bopoleseng **se ba mpa** ba beuwa **feela** hobanyaneng ho ka bontshwa hore o sa tla tshwara bomme. (the bolding is ours)

You see, I think that a woman is just a thing...
she is always left behind. She is not human...
in the police service we believe that **she is**
just there to catch other women. (the bolding is ours)

Male 2 above indicates another important meaning of femininity, that “*mosadi ke ntho*”, “a woman is an object”, more often than not, and not human like a man. The bold words show that although there are good female police officers, some people take them for granted, simply because they are women, even after the training they undergo. Some informants indicated that they did not know why a distinction is normally made when a female police officer is referred to, others said it was because for a long time men were the only ones in the police force, while others, as quoted above, indicated that this was done to belittle women, or to show that they are not true police officers. We gave answers from both female and male informants to give a balanced picture of the situation in a Sotho-speaking community. In the rural areas, we came across women who supported notions such as the above, because, generally, they believe that the only thing women can do is look after families, while the men in their lives do everything else. Referring to a woman as *ngaka ya mosadi* ‘woman doctor’ or *lepolesa la mosadi* ‘woman police officer’ may have the same effect as *motho wa letsopa* ‘a clay person’ and *sethunya sa polastiki* ‘a plastic gun’ -- all are simulations of the authentic objects, which in the case of humankind will be males.

3.1.6 Prefixes *Mma-* and *Ra-*

Mabille and Dieterlen [1985:378] define the prefix *ra-* as follows:

Father (always followed by proper or common noun, as *Ra-Mohato*, father of *Mohato*, *Raboroko*, father of sleep.) It is used to note a person's peculiarities; *ranko*, the father of the nose, name or nickname given to a person who has a big nose; or to indicate ownership; *radinku*, father of sheep one who owns many sheep.

Mma-, a feminine prefix, carries similar meanings to *ra-*. *Mma-* is a commonly used prefix in Sotho names, indicating that the referent is the mother of a said child. Based on the term 'patronymic' we shall use the term 'paedonymic' for a name derived from the name of one's child. A Sotho woman acquires both a new surname and first name upon marriage. Her new first name always has the prefix *mma-* 'mother of' indicating that she is expected to bear children, one of whom will have the name prefixed with *mma-*. Hence a woman whose name is *Mmathabo* 'Mother-of-Thabo' will have one of her children as *Thabo*, if she has sons. Culturally, it is stated that the reason behind giving daughters-in-law new names is to fully accept them as part of their new families. On the other hand, the implication of the paedonymic with the prefix *mma-* 'mother of' may be seen as a constant reminder to the woman that she is supposed to bear children for her husband and his family who have given her the new name. Mokgokong [1975:105] says the following on the giving of names to daughters-in-law:

In many dialects of the Northern, North-western and North-eastern Transvaal the giving of a name to a new bride is regarded as an honour. This same name suggests that she will bear a child by that particular name, e.g. *MmaMaropeng* (Mother of Maropeng.)

Although Mokgokong sees this practice as an honour for daughters-in-law, we believe that it may be used to discriminate against single, and, or, childless women who do not qualify to get such names. But, sometimes girls get similar names from their families when they are born. Examples include the following:

	Name	Literal meaning	Connotation
69. a)	<i>Mmaserame</i>	'mother of cold'	born on a cold day
b)	<i>Mmantsho</i>	'mother of black'	dark-complexioned
c)	<i>Mmathabo</i>	'mother of joy'	bringer of joy

In some instances girls are given such names because they are named after relatives who had them, sometimes those relatives may have got the names upon marriage. However, even a woman who already has a *mma-* name gets a new one from her in-laws.

In instances where two women are called, and one is *Mmapalesa*, while the other is *Puleng*, for example, people who hear their names are automatically capable of making a few assumptions; *Mmapalesa* is married and has a child named Palesa. *Puleng* is confusing because the woman may not be married, or if she is, she doesn't have children because that is what her name may imply. Sometimes married women stop using their birth names completely, especially if they have children. A woman named *Lerato* at birth, whose children are Mokebe and Thabo, may be popularly known as Mmamokebe or Mmathabo. It should be noted that while some women struggle to keep their birth names alive, others reject them from the day they get married. One of our informants called another woman by her birth name. To our surprise, the woman in her early twenties, said:

Ke Nthabiseng yang na? Ha ke ngwanana,
ke na le bana. Ha o ka re ke Nthabiseng
hape, ke tla itholela. Jwale bana baa ba
ka ha ba na mmabona ha o nts' o mpitsa
Nthabiseng. Ke Mmalerato nna.

Why do you call me Nthabiseng? I am not
a girl, I have children. If you call me
Nthabiseng again, I'll ignore you. Don't
my children have a mother when you call
me Nthabiseng? I am Mmalerato.(Mother of Lerato)

The above statement shows the importance of naming, and the connotations behind names. The name *Nthabiseng* might mean that the bearer is single, or that she is married but childless. In some families daughters-in-law are not given paedonymics until they have children, making it socially demeaning for them when they are among women in that family who have paedonymics. We argue that whether a woman gets a new name upon marriage or not does not really matter, what is significant is the fact that she knows she must produce children who will eventually earn her herhusband's family's name, without which she is not a real woman. While women such as *Nthabiseng* or *Mmalerato* mentioned above believe that marriage is supposed to change their identity by stopping the use of their birth names, some use both their birth and new names, resulting in examples such as the following:

70. a) *Disemelo Mmalerato*
b) *Palesa Mmathabo*

These women may choose to use their paedonymics when dealing with their in-laws and the in-laws' friends and acquaintances, and their birth names elsewhere. Others decide not to use the acquired names at all. Professionals and some urban women, mostly, try to either use both names or just their birth names, rather than their marriage names only. However, in rural communities, especially in extended

families, women's birth names disappear upon marriage, both by choice and because of circumstances. It should be noted that women who want to be distinguished from single, and/or, childless women, consciously or unconsciously use their paedonymics as passports to getting respect from the community. As we indicated earlier, marriage is one of the greatest achievements among Sothos. For example more often than not, a family with uneducated and struggling, but married children, would normally earn more respect and envy than a family with successful and financially stable children who are single. It is clear that in urban communities education is held in high esteem, but above all, marriage must follow all success, a woman must eventually be called *Mma-so-and-so*.

Mma- may also be used to mean 'Mrs'; hence Mrs X in Sotho would be *Mma X*.

Some women are commonly known as *Mma-* + surname:

71. *Mmapitso o rekile kolo e ntjha.*

Mrs Pitso has bought a new car.

Mmapitso's husband would be *Pitso*, without the feminine prefix, *mma-*:

72. *Pitso o rekile kolo e ntjha.*

Mr Pitso has bought a new car.

This is, however, a relatively new practice among the Sothos who did not use the surname and title system until the arrival of the missionaries among them.

Although *ra-* may mean 'father of', it is generally not used to mean that the referent has a child whose name he has taken, as is generally the case with women and the

feminine prefix *mma-* ‘mother of’. It is however, normal especially in rural communities to hear a man called ‘father of so-and-so’, especially by his in-laws. This is because he is so respected that his mother-in-law wouldn’t like to use his name. A man whose children are *Thabo* and *Lerato* may be called:

73. a) *Rathabo* ‘father of Thabo’
 b) *Ralerato* ‘father of Lerato’

He may be called by either child, but culturally he is supposed to be called by his first child. Unlike with women who may introduce themselves as *MmaX* ‘mother of X’, Sotho men would not normally introduce themselves as *RaX* ‘father of X’ even if they have children:

74. *Kgotso, ke nna Mmalerato.*

Hi, I’m Mmalerato (mother of Lerato.)

But:

75. *Kgotso ke Thabo/Sekgwane, wena o mang?*

Hi I’m Thabo (first name) or Sekgwane (surname.)

and not:

76. *Ke Ralerato.*

I’m Ralerato.

unless Ralerato is his birth name. Birth names with the prefix *ra-*, include:

	Name	Literal meaning
77. a)	<i>Ramatshediso</i>	‘father of consolation’
b)	<i>Ramohau</i>	‘father of mercy’

Although Doke and Mofokeng [1957:93] discuss *ra-* ‘father of’ and *mma-* ‘mother of’ as if the only thing that differentiates them is gender, these prefixes differ more.

They comment:

The names in *Ra-* are masculine, those in *Mma-* feminine; they are often given at birth, but are more usually assumed by people on the birth of a child. Thus a woman, who has a child called *Moretlo*, will be called *Mmamoretlo*, and her husband *Ramoretlo*. The use of such names in place of the original name are considered a very polite form of address,

Unlike *mma-* which also means ‘Mrs’, *ra-* is not used to mean ‘Mr’. This is understandable, as a man is ‘Mr’ from birth to death, while a woman’s title is determined by her marital status. Because of this difference in meaning between the male prefix, *ra-*, and the female prefix *mma-*, the following names may be understood as follows illustrating our argument here:

78.

Male name: Rapiro	Female name: Mmapitso
<p>Possible meanings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ male’s first name or surname ▪ the man has a child called Pitso 	<p>Possible meanings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ female’s first name ▪ the woman has a child called Pitso ▪ the woman has no child yet, but is expected to bear one named Pitso ▪ Mrs Pitso

While a paedonymic may be given to a woman upon marriage, a man does not get such a name. He may acquire a patronymic when he actually has a child. Even then, this cannot take the place of his birth name, as is generally the case with married women with paedonymics, so the use of *ra-* is not as prevalent as that of its feminine

counterpart. However, when *ra-* and *mma-* are used to refer to people's peculiarities their meanings are generally similar. This means that the following examples only differ in the gender of the referent:

79.	Feminine	Masculine	
a)	<i>mmaleshano</i>	<i>raleshano</i>	'liar'
b)	<i>raditaba</i>	<i>mmaditaba</i>	'gossiper'

3.2.0 Lexicon and Semantics

In this section we discuss lexical items, their meanings and significance in Sotho. Not only do we look at the words and their meanings, but we also study the culture behind them because of the relationship between language and culture. This connection is summed up by observations such as the following:

The interrelation of language and other aspects of culture is so close that no part of the culture of a particular group can properly be studied without reference to the linguistic symbols in use. [Hoijer, 1964:456]

and Lyons [1986:248] says:

Every language is integrated with the culture in which it operates; and its lexical structure (as well as at least part of its grammatical structure) reflects those distinctions which are (or have been) important in the culture.

In Sotho, culture dictates that adults must be addressed by their name and title of respect. These titles include the following:

Title	Meaning 1	Meaning 2
<i>ntate</i>	Father	any man respected by speaker
<i>mme</i>	Mother	any woman respected by speaker
<i>ausi</i>	Big sister	girl/woman older than speaker
<i>abuti</i>	Big brother	boy/man older than speaker

A five-year-old would normally say *ausi/abuti* 'big sister/brother', when talking to a ten-year-old, but would generally call a 30-year old *mme/ntate* 'mother/father'. We surmise that it is this practice that led to the current usage of referring to nuns, who are called *masistere* in Sotho, being called *bomme sistere* 'nuns', literally 'mother sisters/nuns'. Because Sothos believe it is improper to call a respected person by their name only, nuns are still called *bomme sistere* 'mother sisters/nuns. This is an example of to what extent culture can influence language. Although it can be argued that some Sothos say *bomme sistere* 'mother sisters', because they are not aware of the etymology of *masistere* 'sisters', even those who know that it is from the English word 'sister', still call a nun *mme sistere* 'mother sister', as a way of showing respect to the nuns who enjoy respect among the Sothos.

3.2.1 Lexical Ordering

Before examination of the lexicon *per se*, we look at the order of feminine and masculine terms in Sotho (no doubt my ordering of 'feminine' and 'masculine' struck an uneasy note for at least some readers). As with English and many other, if not most, or even all, languages, masculine forms come before feminine ones. It is

true that like with the English “ladies and gentlemen” style, some Sothos try to mention a feminine term before its masculine counterpart, resulting in the sequence:

81. *bomme le bontate*

ladies and gentlemen

It must be noted, however, that this is not very common, as speakers still prefer the norm: masculine first, feminine after: *bontate le bomme* ‘gentlemen and ladies’.

Smith [1989:47] discusses this issue in English:

Another asymmetry in the representation of women and men in language is reflected in the order of precedence given to males and females when they are referred to together. It seems that the old maxim “Ladies and gentlemen”, is more often honoured in the breach than in the observance... You might like to describe a test to verify that this really is the more expected order:

husband and wife
 son and daughter
 brother and sister

In Sotho we have a similar case, with examples such as the above:

82.

English	Sotho
Husband and wife	<i>monna le mosadi</i>
son and daughter	<i>mora le moradi</i>
Brother and sister	<i>abuti le ausi</i>
king and queen	<i>morena le mofumahadi</i>
Boyfriend and girlfriend	<i>mohlankana le morwetsana</i>

Sotho grammar books nouns are written in this precedence:

83.

<i>leqai</i>	‘uncircumcised boy’	<i>lethisa</i>	‘uncircumcised girl’
<i>monna</i>	‘man/husband’	<i>mosadi</i>	‘woman/wife’
<i>mohlankana</i>	‘young man’	<i>morwetsana</i>	‘young lady’

[Lekhotla la Sesotho, 1995:39]

Khaketla [1951:235] has the following examples:

84.

<i>mosharyana</i>	‘young man’	<i>morwetsana</i>	‘young lady’
<i>lekolwane</i>	‘circumcised boy’	<i>setswejane</i>	‘circumcised girl’
<i>molala</i>	‘bachelor’	<i>lefetwa</i>	‘spinster’

The precedence discussed above exemplifies the organization of people in a typical Sotho community; men are first in importance, followed by women and children, with male children being very close to their fathers. In most Sotho families men do not get anywhere near household chores. A Sotho woman normally gives her husband food before she eats herself. If there isn’t enough food the husband must eat while the wife gets little or nothing at all, after all she is to blame because she is the one who does the cooking. If there isn’t sufficient water in the house, the man will have his bath before everybody else, while those who sometimes struggle to fetch the water may wash with a few drops. This lexical ordering is somehow an illustration of norms such as these.

3.2.2 Componential Analysis

Meanings of words may be affected by the gender of the referents, so that a pair of words which is supposedly similar except for gender, does have marked connotational differences. Generally, it seems that feminine forms are synonymous with negativity. This observation is also made by Romaine [1994:105]:

Words for women have negative connotations, even where the corresponding male terms designate the same state or conditions for men.

Below, we look at a few examples to show this trend. It should be noted that the meanings we give below are a combination of Mabilie and Dieterlen's [1985] dictionary, our interviews with informants and general day-to-day language usage observations.

85. *mosadi* 'woman' *monna* 'man'

Denotation	+ human	+ human
	+ female	+ male
	+ adult	+ adult
	± married	± married
Connotation	+ child of husband/partner	+ father to spouse/partner
	+ stupid	+ intelligent
	- own boss	+ own boss
	+ lazy; preferring easy tasks	+ hardworking
	- independence: financial and otherwise	+ independence: financial and otherwise

	+ child-bearer and child-raiser	+ child maintainer, if willing
	- allowed misbehaviour, e.g. drinking, staying out late and extramarital affairs	+ allowed misbehaviour, e.g. may drink, stay out late and have extramarital affairs
	- power	+ power

86. *lefetwa* 'spinster' *lesoha* 'bachelor'

Denotation	+ human	+ human
	+ female	+ male
	- married	- married
Connotation	+ derogation	- derogation
	+ ugly	
	- capable of attracting a man	+ single by choice
	+ unhappy	- looking for a woman
	+ frustrated	- frustrated

87. *ausi* 'big sister' *abuti* 'big brother'

Denotation	+ human	+ human
	± adult	± adult
	+ female	+ male
	± married	± married
Connotation	+ derogation	- derogation
	± children	± children
	- responsibility	+ responsibility
	- morals	+ morals

88.

*ngwetsi**mokgwenyana*

'daughter-in-law'

'son-in-law'

Denotation	+ human	+ human
	+ adult	+ adult
	+ female	+ male
Connotation	+ child-bearer	+ child-producer, if ready
	+ in-laws' slave	- slave
	+ in-laws' donor	- donor
	- in-laws' love	+ in-laws' love
	- in-laws' respect	+ in-laws' respect

89.

ngwanana 'girl'*moshanyana* 'boy'

Denotation	+ human	+ human
	- adult	- adult
	+ female	+ male
Connotation	- stability	+ stability
	- heir	+ heir
	+ child	+ young man
	+ marriage-grooming	± marriage-grooming
When used to refer to adults	- married	- married
	+ married but – child	± child
	- responsibility	± responsibility
	- morals	± morals

The examples above are just a few of the many forms which illustrate the negativity associated with being a female person in the Sotho language and culture. Thus a

conversation we heard between our informants:

Informant to somebody she knows: *Dumela ausi.*

Speaker: *Tloo kwano, tloo re tlo buela ka tlung.*

(In the house)

Speaker: *Hobaneng o re ke ausi? Ke tello e makatsang.*

Ha ke ausi, mosadi ya mokaa ka nna ke ausi kae?

Ke na le monna le bana, kgale ke fetile taba tsa

boausi. I've never been irresponsible my whole life,

ke a kgolwa ausi ke motho ya irresponsible, nna ke

mosadi ya ikemetseng ka boyena. Ha ke ausi ho hang.

Informant to somebody she knows: Morning, big sister.

Speaker: Come, let's talk in the house.

(In the house)

Speaker: Why do you call me 'big sister'?

That's sheer lack of respect. How can I be 'big

sister?' I have a husband and children, I have

long passed the 'big sister' stage. I've never been

irresponsible my whole life. I believe that 'big

sister' is somebody who is irresponsible. I am an

independent woman. I am not 'big sister' at all.

Similarly, a woman who is not Sotho-speaking but has been in Lesotho long enough to be conversant in it became furious when sales people in a haberdashery shop called her *ausi* 'big sister'. This is because the woman is aware of the negative connotation of the form. This case got so serious that the customer reported the sales assistants to the manager of the shop, complaining about the lack of respect shown by the staff.

This negativity means that the difference between forms such as *ausi* 'big sister' and *abuti* 'big brother' and *mosadi* 'woman', and *monna* 'man', is not that one is feminine while the other is masculine, there is more to the difference than just gender. This is why the two women cited above complained vehemently when called *ausi*. We would not expect a man to demand to see any manager when he has been called *abuti* 'big brother'. Romaine [1994:106] says:

Words for women have negative connotations, even where the corresponding male terms designate the same state or condition for men.

One example is that of the female term *lefetwa* 'spinster' and the male *lesoha* 'bachelor'. As our table above illustrates, the difference between these forms is not just about gender. *Lefetwa* 'spinster' is not just a single and female person, but is also a woman who is single because she has failed to attract men, either due to her ugliness or her loose morals. On the other hand, *lesoha* 'bachelor' means a male who is single. It is understood that when a man is single, it is by choice, not because women were not interested in him.

As suggested earlier, anything associated with being female may be associated with powerlessness, stupidity and not being fully adult. This is why a Sotho man may not be referred to as a woman, a person he has no respect for. If men call one of their own *mosadi* 'woman' the implication is that he is not man enough to be as significant as a Sotho man. On the question of the implied insignificance of women, one informant told us that he sees the issue of gender differentiation the way he sees democracy. He indicated that as there are ordinary people, MPs, ministers and finally the vice-president and president, each with different powers, he sees men as presidents in a democratic society, and women as MPs. However, what this informant seemed to ignore is the fact that in a democracy leaders are elected, while in the prevailing man-is-president, woman-is-MP situation, nobody was voted into power, hence the unhappiness of some women.

3.2.3 Neutral Words

There are many words in Sotho which are supposed to be neutral. What this means is that, at least their dictionary or original meanings were not gender specific, or are similar for both genders. These words lose their neutrality because of cultural and social connotations attached to them. Below we look at a few such words:

90. *ngwana* 'child'

Denotation		+ human
		± male
		- adult
Connotation	If referent is female	If referent is male
	- adult: + her father's child	- child only: his parents' child
	+ adult: + her husband's child	

91. *sethoto* 'fool'

Denotation	+ human
	± adult
Connotation	+ human
	+ female

The examples above illustrate how neutrality may be overshadowed by bias in language. Ehrlich and King [1998:178] make this point:

Because linguistic meanings are to a large extent, determined by the dominant culture's social values and attitudes, terms initially introduced to be non-sexist may lose such meanings in the 'mouths' of a sexist speech community and/or culture.

This leads us to our next task, analysing feminine and masculine terms in Sotho.

3.2.4 Forms Denoting Femininity and Masculinity

In Sotho there are many words which indicate unacceptable female behaviour. On the other hand, outstanding female behaviour is hardly illustrated by the lexicon. It may be argued that women are expected and encouraged to be models because they are closer to children than Sotho men could ever be. But all the same, this does not justify the lexical gap that is so obvious when it comes to praising them when necessary.

As in English and many other languages, Sotho has more words which derogate women than men. Graddol and Swann [1992:138] say the following about English:

The number of derogatory words for a woman compared with those for a man, the historical process whereby many such words have acquired derogatory meanings, these facts all seem to support the social mirror view of language; that the language has evolved in order to meet the communicative needs of its speakers.

Although male and female speakers may have similar language needs, it seems as if male speakers have their needs taken care of by the structure of their language and the social rules that are laid down to control the language. The power hierarchy that exists among Sothos has found its way into the language. The following examples verify this point:

92. *nyopa* 'barren woman'

Almost all the informants we talked to know what a barren woman is called in Sotho because infertility is mainly, if not solely, associated with women. *Nyopa* 'barren woman' does not just denote infertility; it is also synonymous with one of the worst insults that may be levelled at women. This is because, as Thipa [1980:41-2] says, traditional African society takes a serious view of childlessness, which is believed to be purely a woman's problem. This is why a childless woman may be called all sorts of names. Some men may even take a second wife to bear them children; similarly, a man may take an extra wife if he does not have a son. However, a man who can't bear children does not suffer the scorn that *nyopa* 'barren woman' suffers. Community blames his wife for the state. This norm is the direct cause of the obsolescence of the masculine form *leqhalaha* 'barren man'. We were unaware of the existence of a Sotho word for "infertile man", and had almost concluded that Sotho lacked such a word, since the informants we talked to in both urban and rural areas were unable to provide a specific lexeme. After questioning both teenage and elderly Sotho people in vain, our male assistant, decided to talk to the male initiates at an initiation graduation ceremony in Quthing, a rural place, and one of these provided the word *leqhalaha*. It is evident that the word *leqhalaha* is obsolete, with few people, young or old, urban or rural, knowing it. By contrast, the word *nyopa* 'barren woman' is generally known, so much so that there is even a folktale entitled *Nyopakatala* 'barren woman'. This is a story of a woman who gets the name *Nyopakatala* because of her failure to bear children. Her husband has nothing to do with this state because he has children with his other wives. We now study words which denote unacceptable sexual behaviour. Most of these are used to refer to females, specifically, although initially some were neutral. These words are used more by men than women, and they include the following examples:

93. *letekatse* 'whore'

Meanings:

Dictionary: "woman who has deserted her husband and lives with other men; harlot"

Popular: a) a woman who sleeps around
b) a woman with more than one partner

94. *sefebe* 'whore'

Meanings:

Dictionary: "adulterer"

Popular: a) promiscuous woman
b) woman with more than one partner
c) any woman, especially one who doesn't behave as men expect her to

Although *sefebe* means an adulterer of either gender, it is normally understood to refer to females. We believe that this is because women are not expected to be adulterers while men's adultery is somehow condoned in Sotho. Also in Sotho culture, men's weaknesses are generally pushed under the carpet.

95. *sehlola* 'adulterer'

Meanings:

Dictionary: "evildoer, prostitute"

Popular: adulterer, but mostly woman

Our informants said a promiscuous man is called *sehlola* in Sotho. However, they also indicated that they could use the word to refer to a woman too. It should be

noted that although this word exists, it is not as popular as examples 93 and 94 which are mostly associated with women, as we indicated that generally Sotho men are not blamed for their promiscuity.

As indicated, both *letekatse* 'whore' and *sefebe* 'whore' may be used to refer to any woman who doesn't behave according to men's expectations. A woman may be insulted thus for sleeping around, but she may also be so labelled for sticking to one partner, or even for not having a partner at all. The following sentences are heard daily from Sotho males:

96. *Thato o robetse le banna bohle sekolong; ke letekatse.*

Thato (female) has slept with every man at school; she's a whore.

97. *Matekatse ana a mmusong a hana ho re sebeletsa.*

These whores who work for the government don't want to serve us.

In example 96 we may say that because the speaker knows the female, he is able to conclude that due to her behaviour she may be called *letekatse* 'whore'. However, even if the female is not guilty of promiscuity she may still be a woman of loose morals, *letekatse*, to any Sotho man. In 97 the speaker does not necessarily know the women, but he is capable of commenting on their social practices simply because he is not happy with the type of service given to him. Referring to women as *matekatse* 'whores', seems to be therapeutic to frustrated people, especially men. Women may also direct their bitterness at other women by calling them whores. When a woman discovers that her husband has an extramarital affair she may say:

98. *Letekatsa leno le nkile monn'aka.*

That whore has taken my husband.

But seldom say:

99. *Monn'a ka ke letekatse.*

My husband is a womaniser.

What example 98 means is that the other woman is promiscuous, like all women, and therefore to blame for the relationship, while the man is not necessarily at fault. In Sotho man is seldom referred to as an adulterer although his mistress is called all sorts of names.

Even though *sehlola* 'adulterer' is not gender-specific, it may generally be used to refer to married women. For a man to get this name he must really be highly promiscuous, while a married female may get the name after one short fling. Although men protect each other in this respect, seldom calling each other names, they are quick to use derogatory words to refer to women. Women too, use these words to insult other women, as indicated in example 98 above.

Though Sotho men may feel comfortable with referring to women they don't approve of as *matekatse* 'whores', if the same term is used to refer to a woman a man cares for, trouble is likely to arise. After a barbecue on a beach, a group of drunken male students had a quarrel in our bus. During the quarrel a woman who was a girlfriend of one of the young men was called *sefebe* 'whore'. Because the boyfriend knew what an insult the word is, he started fighting the speaker, the fight ended up attracting friends from both sides, and eventually the bus driver had to go to the police station. Although all looked well at the police station, later in the bus, the fight started again. The boyfriend of the insulted woman kept on saying:

100. *A ka re tjheri ya ka ke sefebe, ke tla mmolaya.*

How can he say my girlfriend is a whore, I'll kill him.

This example shows how men insensitively use derogatory words to refer to women they have a problem with, but might not tolerate it when the women they approve of are insulted. It is fine for a woman to be insulted if a male has negative feelings towards her.

101. *Mmadithatshana* 'a committed Christian woman'

This word is sometimes used to ridicule women who are strong followers of Christianity, and are active in church activities. Although Christianity and Sotho culture sometimes clash, some of those who are not serious Christians believe that *bommadithatshana* are active in cultural and Christian practices, and that they are the worst witches. The following sentence is frequently heard among Sotho-speakers:

102. *Bommadithatshana ke baloi.*

These committed Christian women are witches.

What this means is that because of the bias against women, when females do good, they are suspected of hiding evil behind the good, hence the ridicule. The word *mmadithatshana* is now more synonymous with witchcraft in particular, and evil in general, than with Christianity among many Sothos. However, males who are active in church affairs enjoy the respect of society. They are called *baholo* 'elders', in the Evangelical Church, and *batiakone* 'deacons' in the Catholic Church. Apart from the feminine form *mmadithatshana* having negative connotations, it also reminds us that males who are active in church affairs get formal recognition by being given responsibilities which earn them the respectable title, *moholo/motiakone* 'elder/deacon'. In church, women normally get full recognition, for example, when visitors are expected and preparations need to be made, then they are put in the

forefront. However, males do the general running of churches, which is why females who dedicate their time to church affairs have this negative name, since their importance is considered second to that of men.

As discussed, forms that exalt males are common in Sotho, while their feminine equivalents are almost non-existent. For example, a brave man is *mohale*, but there is no equivalent form for women. This does not mean that bravery doesn't exist among females, rather that both society and language ignore it by showing this lexical gap which reflects this positive characteristic of some women.

The dictionary meaning of *senatla* is 'strong person'. However, generally, the connotation is that it means 'a strong man', rather than, a strong person. If the word is used to describe a woman, then it is stated, more often than not. The following examples illustrate our point:

103. *Ke senatla.*

Denotation: He/she is a strong person.

Connotation: He is a strong person.

but:

104. *Mmampe (female) ke senatla.*

Mmampe is a strong person.

Or even:

105. *Mmampe ke senatla sa mosadi.*

Mmampe is a strong woman.

Without stating that the subject is female, it would not generally be assumed that a female is referred to, hence the clarification.

In the following sentence it is generally understood that the referents are female:

106. *Ho tshwerwe baloi ba bane.*

Four **witches** have been caught.

Sotho men have allegedly been caught practising witchcraft, but it is normally assumed that only women are witches and speakers will not even think that with the women there might have been even a single man.

Names and metaphors that describe men are positive more often than not, while those about females are generally negative. These positive forms include metaphors of wild and dangerous animals. In African cultures, such metaphors are considered positive in that they reflect the presumed male attributes of power, strength and fierceness. Mukama [1995:378] says, about Gwere, a language spoken in Uganda:

Being male is highly venerated and elevated in African cultures and the languages portray that male superordinacy in many ways. In Lugwere..., for instance, men are commonly stereotyped as fierce animals whose maleness is visibly imposing...There are no equivalent comparisons for women.

A Sotho man may be called *tau* 'lion', *pholo* 'ox', *mokoko* 'rooster', or even *satane* 'Satan', to show how strong and fierce he can be. He is said to be *tau* 'lion', because the lion is the king of the animals, and a man is king of everything else. If a woman is worthy of such praise, she is called by the diminutive form, *tawana*, as she could never be compared to a "real lion". Similarly, *pholo* 'ox', is a big, strong and dangerous animal, and therefore must be feared like a man is by females.

3.2.5 Coinages with Prefixes *Mma-* and *Ra-*

With the introduction of new concepts, and new professions and trades, Sotho is constantly challenged to expand its lexicon to cater for the change in the social lives of its speakers. For some of the new occupations, a lexicon with the above prefixes has been coined:

107.

Masculine Form	Literal Meaning	Denotation
<i>Ramehala</i>	Father of wires	one who works with telephones
<i>Rametjhine</i>	Father of machines	technician
<i>Radipolane</i>	Father of plans	architect

108.

Feminine Form	Literal Meaning	Denotation
<i>Mmaphepo</i>	mother of nutrition	nutritionist
<i>mmadiapole</i>	mother of apples	woman who sells fruit on the streets

The new coinages also include:

109.

Businessman	<i>rakgwebo</i>
Lawyer	<i>ramolao</i>
post master	<i>raposo</i>
bus/taxi owner	<i>radikoloi</i>
bus owner	<i>radibese</i>
taxi owner	<i>raditheksi</i>

Feminine Form

110. hawker *mmathoto*

The word for a hawker is, *mmathoto*, which means one who carries plenty of luggage, because hawkers are normally seen carrying many goods which they deliver to their customers. This name is degrading, unlike *rakgwebo* ‘businessman’, which is superior, and makes the male important while *mmathoto* ‘female hawker’, shows no respect for the woman. She is not a businessperson like her male counterpart. There is nobody called *mmakgwebo* ‘businesswoman’, although this term could be used to refer to the female hawkers and business people in general. A male hawker does not have a specific name in Sotho.

We believe that the new coinages could be altered to cater for females who now work with males as colleagues. There are many women who are lawyers or business people who can’t be referred to as *boramolao* ‘male lawyers’, or *borakgwebo* ‘businessmen’. It is true that in some instances neutral words exist, but the gender-specific ones show language bias, somehow. Below we look at the neutral words:

Sotho

111. lawyer *akgente, mmuelli, leqwetha*

businessperson *mohwebi*

postal officer *moposo*

An examination of older words incorporating the forms *ra-* ‘father of’ and *mma-* ‘mother of’ reveals that the masculine ones tend to be positive, while the feminine ones more often refer to insignificant or negative people, including fictional ones:

112.

Masculine form	Literal meaning	Denotation
Ramasedi	father of lights	God
Raseokamela-batho	the man above people	God
Rasefabatho	generous man	generous man

113.

Feminie form	Literal meaning	Denotation
mmadibetjheng	talkative woman	talkative woman
mmantilane	mother of lies	one who lies
mmankgukgu	mother of nkgukgu	woman dressed so as to frighten children

Although we have both negative feminine and masculine forms, the feminine forms are more commonly used than the masculine. It is generally believed that a Sotho man has more important things to do, for instance, than to gossip, while gossiping is seen as a pastime for women. This is why *mmaditaba* and *mmaleshano* ‘a woman who likes lying or gossiping’ are commonly used, while *raleshano* and *raditaba* ‘a man who lies or gossips’, are seldom heard. Because of this cultural and social bias, when the following neutral sentences are said it is women that are implied, and therefore understood to be guilty:

114. *O leshano*.

Denotation: He/she lies.

Connotation: She lies.

115. *O dula a le mathateng ke ho bua hona.*

Denotation: He/she is always in trouble because he/she is talkative.

Connotation: She is always in trouble because she is talkative.

3.2.6 Titles

Titles are relatively new to Sothos, having been introduced by the missionaries in the 19th century. Before then, Sothos did not use such a system. Having been copied from English, titles in Sotho are based on the same principles as in English. Poynton [1989:42] indicates how they are determined in English:

in choosing titles in English two pieces of information are needed to make a correct choice for women (gender and marital status) but only one for men (gender)

The above is exactly what happens in Sotho. The following Sotho titles, which are equivalent to some of the current English titles, verify the above quotation:

116.

English	Sotho	Abbreviation	Initial Meaning
Mrs	<i>Mofumahadi</i>	<i>Mof</i>	Queen, princess, lady
Miss	<i>Mofumahatsana</i>	<i>Mofts.</i>	Diminutive of mofumahadi, little queen
Mr	<i>Monghadi</i>	<i>Mong.</i>	Master, lord, chief, owner

We discussed *Mofumahadi* in 3.1.1. *Mofumahatsana* 'Miss' which is the diminutive of *Mofumahadi* is even more degrading than *Mofumahadi*. It should be noted that neither of the feminine forms symbolises any significant power in a Sotho community, while *Monghadi* 'Mr' is synonymous with power, being either, master,

lord, chief or owner. This is why when a *Monghadi* gets married his wife takes his surname. It seems as if the wife joins the list of her husband's property, as he is the lord or owner.

As the initial meanings indicate, the Sotho words that are used to refer to Mrs, Miss and Mr, originally had nothing to do with titles, but only acquired their new meanings with the introduction of titles to Sothos. However, even when they do not refer to titles, they still show gender differentiation, with the males having one blanket title, while married women are differentiated from their single sisters. In the case of females, titles tell if they are married or not, while for men such information is not revealed. With more urban and professional women being aware of the implications of using either Mrs or Miss, there has been an observable number of women who changed to the neutral feminine title Ms. In Sotho, however, this switch is not easy in Sotho as there is no equivalent of Ms, itself a relatively new coinage. But the same arguments that led English-speaking women to drop the biased Mrs or Miss are slowly dawning on Sotho women. The following are some of the observations made by women about these titles:

In English-speaking countries, most commonly a woman loses her own name with marriage. On the day of the wedding she becomes "Mrs". Like the slaves of old, she takes the name of the man who "owns" her. [Key, 1975:48]

While women such as the above author see using 'Mrs' as disrespectful of women, others support its use fully. One of our female informants told us that it is acceptable to her to use *Mof* 'Mrs' and *Mofis* 'Miss' with women, and *Mong* 'Mr', only for the men. Her argument was that women are flowers; before marriage they

are their fathers' flowers, while after marriage they become their husbands' flowers, and this must be clarified by the title they use. What this informant means is that a woman is only human if she is associated with a certain man, be it her father or husband. For English-speaking women who disapprove of the titles 'Mrs' and 'Miss', there is a choice of 'Ms', though one must be aware of the following point made by Lakoff [1975:41]:

The change to Ms. will not be generally adopted until a woman's status in society changes to assure her an identity based on her own accomplishments. (Perhaps even more debasing is the fact that the woman in marrying relinquishes her own name, while the man does not. This suggests even more firmly that a woman is her husband's possession, having no other identity than that of his wife).

Just as English-speaking women suggested the use of "Ms" as a legitimate title for women who wanted a neutral term, Sotho women may someday come up with a similar title as there are already those who use the English 'Ms', which does not have a Sotho equivalent. It must be noted that the majority of Sotho-speaking women use either *Mof* 'Mrs' or *Mofis* 'Miss'. Some of these women are not happy with the titles, but have no way of changing them. For a married Sotho woman to wake up one day and tell her husband that she is changing her title and, or surname, may result in severe discord. The husband may say sentences such as the following:

117. *O batla ho itaola?*

Do you want to control yourself? (and not be controlled by me, your husband.)

118. *O batla ho nyalwa hape?*

Do you want to get married again?

119. *O s' o fumane ba bang.*

You have found somebody else.

120. *K' o nyetse, jwale o kgutlela faneng ya hao hobaneng?*

I married you, why do you have to go back to your surname? .

and many other such sentences, the woman may also experience physical abuse meant to discipline her. The single woman might not encounter any serious problems with her father and other male relatives. However, if she tries to address the gender inequality that is the lot of Sotho women, she might be told that:

121. *O nahana hore o so rutehile.*

You think that you are now educated.

122. *O s' o batla ho itaola?*

Do you want to control yourself? (and not be controlled by us, your male relatives.)

It is quite understandable that Sotho men are generally opposed to the use of the neutral title Ms. It is never easy to relinquish power, and the drastic move by women calling themselves what they want and not what men want is frightening to them. They ask themselves what women will come up with next that might be a threat to their masculinity. Although it is an advantage for Sotho families to have financially independent women, it can also be stressful, as men, who acquired the power they are clinging to now because of their controlling the family wealth, and generally being the main bredwinners, are getting anxious. It is mainly this self-sufficient woman who states how she is to be called and treated. A housewife who only spent a few years in primary school is generally not even aware of the move towards female liberation, and would not care about changing her title even if she knew she

had a choice. We surmise that it will take years before Sotho women can coin a neutral and acceptable title for themselves, but it will be a reality someday. But we are aware that for some this might mean divorce or serious tensions in their families and among their male colleagues.

3.3 Syntax

Language differentiation and gender in Sotho go beyond the use of individual words used to refer to either gender. The syntax of certain Sotho forms is also indicative of the general life in a Sotho community, there are clear discrepancies in the way males and females are expected to behave, and to treat one another, and Sotho syntax sometimes mirrors these distinctions. There are syntactic constructions which are grammatically correct, but unacceptable because they fail to adhere to the existing cultural and general social norms of the Sothos.

As we indicated earlier, the verb *nyala* 'marry' in Sotho exemplifies the relationship between a man and the woman or women in his life. In Sotho, and other African languages, the woman is the passive object in marriage, while the man is the subject. Sekhukhune [1988:130-1] says the following about North Sotho, a sister language of Sotho:

O nyala lehono. (He marries today.)
O nyalwa lehono. (She is being married today.)
The use of the passive form in the second utterance reveals sex differentiation in the dyad. Moreover, it is the influence of Northern Sotho cultural belief and custom that the man is always the one who initiates and advances the act of marrying. This leads to the question; who marries the other? Owing to the Western influence where either a man or woman is said to be marrying, the modern tendency

today has influenced Northern Sotho-speakers
to utter such an unnatural statement as:

Ba a nyalana.

(Lit. They marry each other, i.e. they marry)

In Sotho the 'natural' statement would also be one with the man as the subject, and
the woman as the object:

123. *Thabo o nyala Seipati.*

Thabo (male) marries Seipati (female.)

If the female occupies the subject position then the verb must be passivised:

124. *Seipati o nyalwa ke Thabo.*

Literally: Seipati (female) is being married by Thabo (male.)

Seipati is marrying Thabo.

In Tsonga, as in Sotho, females are either objects or passivised subjects of the verb
marry, while males are subjects;

125. *Risenga u teka Tsakani.*

Risenga (male) is marrying Tsakani (female.)

126. *Tsakani u tekiwa hi Risenga.*

Tsakani (female) is being married by Risenga (male.)

As Sekhukhune [1988:130-31] argues, the syntax of the verb *nyala* 'marry' is
culture-determined, because in both Northern and Southern Sotho it is the man who
proposes to the woman, and gives *lobola* to her parents. However, after all the cattle
or money has been given to the woman's family, it is both the woman and the man
who get married; marriage is not something that one person does to the other, it
should be more like a union than what is signified by the syntax of this verb in these
two Sotho languages.

Mukama [1995:382] shows us that the Sotho languages' treatment of the verb *nyala*

'marry' is not peculiar to them:

The syntax of the verb to **marry** in many East African languages is quite unfair to the women: it stereotypes them as passive objects in the marriage relationship. Data from ten Tanzania Bantu languages (including Kiswahili), even Uganda Bantu languages and from both Ugandan and Kenyan Luo ... show that traditionally, the subject (or the Agent) of the unmarked verb to **marry** must be a male referent; it is only men who are supposed to marry, the women **get married** so they can only be the object of that unextended verb, or subject of the marked (extended), that is, the passivised verb to **be married**, which emphasizes their status as passive entities in the relationship.

Mukama's observation sums up what happens in Sotho well. The woman who is said to 'be married' by the man is expected to be a passive participant when it comes to making major decisions in her home, while her husband runs the family as he pleases. The passiveness does not just end with marriage proposals and *lobola* 'bride price'; it is expected to last throughout the marriage. Women normally make decisions about household chores, while their husbands generally do the rest of the planning. As we indicated earlier, we surmise that this relationship between a wife and her husband is encouraged by the norm of paying out *lobola* 'bride price' to her family. This is why a married woman is be reminded of her status if she is thought to be misbehaving:

127. *O nyetswe*

Denotation: You are married.

Connotation: Cattle have been given to your parents in return for your docility.

The syntax of the verb *nyala* 'marry' is not the only one which portrays women as passive objects in their relationships with men. The following forms also illustrate this relationship:

128.

Verb	Masculine	Feminine
<i>shobela</i> 'elope'	<i>shobedisa</i> 'cause to elope'	<i>shobediswa</i> 'be made to elope'
<i>bona</i> 'see'	<i>bona</i> 'see'	<i>bonwa</i> 'be seen'
<i>kopa</i> 'ask for permission'	<i>kopuwa</i> 'be asked for permission'	<i>kopa</i> 'ask for permission'
<i>ja/hlaba</i> 'eat/prick i.e. have sex'	<i>Ja/hlaba</i> 'have sex with a woman'	<i>jewa/hlajwa</i> 'be eaten/pricked, i.e. have sex with a man'

All the feminine forms in the examples above are in the passive, while masculine forms are not. For the first verb, the masculine is in the causative, which gives the man power over his passive object, the female. Because the above forms are gender-specific, when they are used the gender of the person referred to can easily be told as we show below:

129. *O re o tlo shobedisa ka Labohlano.*

Lit. She/he says he (because of the causative suffix *-is-*) is going to cause a girl to elope with him.

He is eloping on Friday.

130. *O re o tlo shobediswa ka Labohlano.*

Lit. He/she says she (because of the passive suffix *-w-*) is going to be made/caused to elope on Friday.

She is eloping on Friday.

When a man is interested in marrying a woman, in Sotho it may be said that, he has 'seen her':

131. *Thabo o bone moradi wa Sekgwane.*

Lit: Thabo (male) has seen Sekgwane's daughter.

Thabo (male) is marrying Sekgwane's daughter.

However, if the subject is a female the syntax of the verb *bona* 'see' changes:

132. *Seipati o bonwe ke Thabo.*

Seipati (female) has been seen by Thabo (male.)

Seipati is marrying Thabo.

The verbs *ja* 'eat' and *hlaba* 'prick', which mean having sex with women, are frequently heard among male students at university and college, and their friends, as they boast about their physical relationships with women. *Hlaba* 'prick', when used to refer to sex, is quite new in the lexicon. Although rude, these are some of the words which are commonly heard from men, especially younger men. It is normally with pride that a Sotho man utters sentences such as the following:

133. *Ke tlo ja banana ba bangata.*

Lit. I am going to eat many girls.

I am going to have sex with many girls.

134. *Kgale ke hlaba ngwanana eno.*

Lit. I have been pricking that girl for a long time.

I have been having sex with that girl for a long time.

However, a woman would not use the above forms to describe her relationship with a man. Being passivised, and not being impressed by the passive forms, no woman can say:

135. *Ke tlo jewa ke Thabo.*

Lit. I am going to be eaten by Thabo.

I am going to have sex with Thabo.

136. *Thabo o ntlhaba kamehla.*

Lit. Thabo pricks me daily.

I have sex with Thabo daily.

While Sotho men boast about their sexual experiences, and have both crude and euphemistic forms at their disposal, the syntax of the forms which are used to refer to women's sexual encounters do not allow them to brag about such acts, being objects in those events. If a female speaker wants to tell her friends about her physical relationship with a man, she would opt for euphemistic forms such as the following:

137. *Ke robala le yena.*

Lit. I sleep with him.

I make love to him.

138. *Ke arolelana dikobo le yena.*

Lit. I share blankets with him.

I make love to him.

It should be noted that men do use euphemistic sentences such as examples 137 and 138 above, if they choose to.

Other verbs, which show gender differentiation in Sotho, include the following :

139.

Verb	Form used by males	Form used by females
<i>bolela</i> 'say, tell'	<i>bolella</i> 'say, tell' especially women	<i>bolellwa</i> 'be told' especially by men
<i>sebetsa</i> 'work'	<i>sebeletsa</i> 'work for, maintain' especially women and children	<i>sebeletswa</i> 'be worked for, maintained' especially by men
<i>sapota</i> 'maintain'	<i>sapota</i> 'maintain' especially women and children	<i>sapotwa</i> 'be maintained' especially by men
<i>phela</i> 'live'	<i>phedisa</i> 'make to live' i.e. maintain	<i>phediswa</i> 'be made to live' i.e. maintained

140. *O phedisa bana ba hae.*

Lit. She/he works hard for her/his children.

Connotation: He maintains his children.

141. *Ha a ba sapote/phedise*

Lit. She/he doesn't maintain her/his children.

Connotation: He doesn't maintain his children.

Although the subject may either be female or male in the examples above, it is normally understood that males are the ones who should maintain their families, while women, like their children, are dependants. Even though both Sotho females and males have always worked together to guarantee the survival of their families, if a family struggles to make ends meet, the first person to be blamed is the man as he

is expected to care of his children; i.e. both his wife and children. However, this does not imply that women are exempted from working; they are bound to work very hard. One of the criteria that were used to determine the marriageability of women was to check how hard working they were, so that they could easily provide for their families. So there is no way we can say that Sotho women have ever had the luxury of relaxing at home while their men worked for them, especially if we acknowledge that even housewives work as hard as people with formal jobs.

The syntax of some verbs (*pheha* 'cook', *hlatswa* 'wash', *fiela* 'sweep', and *aena* 'iron') is such that: (a) the [+ female] arguments are subjects of applied verbs, or agents of passivised applied verbs; (b) the [+ male] arguments are either the objects in sentences where the verb is in the applied form or the grammatical subjects of equivalent passivised sentences:

142. *Seipati o phehela Thabo.*

Seipati (female) cooks for Thabo (male.)

143. *Thabo o phehelwa ke Seipati.*

Thabo is cooked for by Seipati.

The fact that the sentence syntax is determined by whether the arguments of the verb have the semantic features [+ male] or [+ female], is due to the fact that it is generally believed that actions denoted by verbs denoting household chores are "women's work". Even men who are unemployed would expect to be cooked for and washed for by their working wives. Thus the connotation in the following sentence:

144. *Ba tla ba hlatswetsa neng?*

Lit. When will they wash for them?

Connotation: When will the females wash for the males?

Sentences such as the following would, to the average Sotho person, indicate something amiss in the relationship between the two parties:

145. *Thabo o thwaetse ho aenela Seipati.*

Thabo (male) usually irons for Seipati (female.)

146. *Ha Thabo, ho pheha yena, mosadi ha a ho tsebe.*

At Thabo's, he's the one who cooks; his wife is not good at it.

The above sentences would normally produce a listener response such as:

147. *Thabo o jele phehla / o louwe.*

Thabo has been bewitched.

148. *Mosadi'a Thabo o a mo tella.*

Thabo's wife does not respect him.

149. *Thabo ke sehole sa monna, o phehela mosadi!*

Thabo is a weak man, how can he cook for a woman!

CHAPTER 4: GENDER-BASED LANGUAGE USAGE

4.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter we looked at the structure of Sotho. In this chapter we study language usage among female and male Sotho-speakers. That men and women use language differently has been evident for a long time, and Chambers [1980:137] says the following on this differentiation:

The observation that men and women use language differently in different societies goes back several years. The assumption that usually accompanies such suggestions is that the differences are gender-based. That is, even before the development of sociolinguistics, observers who noted female-male differences in speech usually assumed that the differences in their behaviour followed from differences in the sociocultural roles they fulfilled.

The differences may vary from language to language and from one culture to another, but they exist. It is also evident that gender differentiation starts at an early age, so that by the time children of different sexes reach adulthood they are already competent in using language differently from each other. For instance, a five-year-old Sotho boy sometimes speaks with the firmness and authority that cannot be expected from a girl his age. We assume that language differentiation in Sotho is realised even earlier than in English, as Connelly [1984:123] maintains that Sotho children develop speech earlier than their European and American counterparts. Although this thesis is not about the language of children, *per se*, we give a brief analysis thereof as background information to the language practices that become apparent in adulthood as these are not just acquired overnight but nurtured from childhood throughout adulthood.

Some sociolinguists who study children's language maintain that there are differences, no matter how subtle in some instances, in the way girls and boys use language. Some of these scholars concentrate on grammatical aspects, while others focus on pragmatics. Those interested in grammar include Cheshire [1982] and Romaine [1984]. Cheshire studied morphological variation between English-speaking girls and boys. The following table summarises her findings:

Frequency indices for non-standard features in the speech of boys and girls

Non-standard feature	Boys	Girls
present tense <i>-s</i> (regular verbs)	53.16	52.04
present tense <i>has</i>	54.76	51.61
present tense <i>does</i> (full verb)	71.43	50.00
present tense 3rd singular <i>do</i> (auxiliary)	57.69	78.95

Cheshire [1982:86]

Cheshire's results show that in some instances girls and boys use language in a similar manner, however we also see gender differentiation with some variants. Although this study does not tell us anything about Sotho-speaking children, it bolsters our view that in a preponderance of the world's languages, there is likely to be found a difference in the speech of boys and girls.

Romaine [1984] also concentrates on phonological variables. In her study she refers to the Cheshire study cited above from time to time. She says the following [1984:11]:

In my study of Edinburgh schoolchildren, I found some evidence for sex differentiation in the use of certain variables by children as young as six years old. Although all of the phonological variables I examined (with the exception of (ing) showed a trend towards sex differentiation, the results are not statistically significant.

Both these studies show two main points; that gender differentiation exists in language; and that it starts early.

Studies which concentrate on how girls and boys manipulate their language include the following: Goodwin [1980], Eder [1990], Romaine [1994] and Sheldon and Johnson [1998]. The crux of all these works is that girls and boys use language differently, and that, generally, girls use language to foster feelings of solidarity among themselves, while boys, on the other hand, usually use speech to assert power over others. Goodwin [1980:168] observes:

Boys and girls thus construct directives in quite different ways. Boys' directives are formatted as imperatives, or requests..., but girls phrase theirs as proposals for future activity and frequently mitigate even these proposals with a term such as maybe.

However, the full picture of boys' and girls' language is best given by Romaine [1994:11]:

Girls use language to create and maintain cohesiveness, and their activities are generally cooperative and non-competitive... Bossiness tends not to be tolerated, and girls, use forms such as 'let's' 'we're gonna' 'we could' to get others to do things, instead of appealing to their personal power... Boys, on the other hand, tend to have more hierarchically organized groups than girls, and status in the hierarchy is paramount.

In boys' groups speech is used to assert dominance, to attract and maintain an audience when others have the floor. They issue commands to other boys rather than suggest what should be done.

The quotation above sums up what we observe daily among Sotho-speaking children, though the sociolinguists of Sotho have not yet provided us with details of this phenomenon. Our observation is that Sotho girls use language to reinforce feelings of solidarity and sisterhood, while boys tend to bolster their authority over others with language. While girls generally use language to further the interests of the group, boys, by and large, further their individual needs whenever they get the opportunity to talk, or prevent others from talking.

Below we analyse the language of Sotho girls and boys. Though our research on gender differentiation in the Sotho of boys and girls is unfortunately not backed up by detailed statistical data, we nonetheless hope that it will make some contribution to this field of the sociolinguistics of Southern Sotho.

4.1 The Language of Children in Single-sex Groups

In Sotho culture, infants are taken care of by their mothers who carry, bath, feed, change, and play with, them. Later in the child's life the father comes in. Sotho women normally carry infants on their backs while doing household chores, and in their arms when relaxing. These babies are sung to and praised while carried by their mothers, sisters, female relatives and friends of the family, so that by the time they start developing speech they have been exposed to the language of the females in their lives rather than that used by males. But, at the same time, it should be noted that when females talk to babies they differentiate between girls

and boys, making them aware that they are different, and, therefore, must manipulate language differently. Boys are allowed to use language with more liberty than girls, who are constantly reminded that they cannot say something, because girls are not supposed to be rude. This, however, does not mean that Sotho boys are encouraged to be rude and disrespectful, but that when they do, they can easily get away with it, while girls cannot. This attitude is not peculiar to the Sotho, as this is shown by the following quote with reference to English-speaking children, from Holmes [1994:172]:

Little boys are generally allowed more freedom than little girls. Misbehaviour from boys is tolerated where girls are more quickly corrected.

The following example, although extreme, illustrates this point clearly. This involved a boy of around 10 years, his mother and a female nurse of around 30 years:

150.

Boy (Screaming at nurse):	<i>Ha ke qeta mona, ke tlo o nyedisa. Nilohelle, moleko towe.</i>
Nurse:	<i>Jwale o nrwakelang?</i>
Boy's mother:	<i>Mme o thusa wena leha o halefile tjena ...</i>
Boy (interrupting):	<i>O nthusang a nthonkga?</i>
(To nurse):	<i>Nilohelle moleko towe!</i>
Boy's mother:	<i>Thola hle, ntate, re thusa wena.</i>
Boy (Screaming at nurse):	When I finish here I am going to make you shit. Leave me alone you, devil.
Nurse:	Why do you insult me?
Boy's mother:	Even though you are angry, she is helping you
Boy (interrupting):	How can she be helping me when she is hurting me? Leave me, you devil!
Boy's mother:	Calm down, father, we are helping you.

The above scene happened at a hospital in a semi-rural area in Lesotho, where a boy came with a badly burnt leg. The nurse was trying to wash and dress the leg, and this caused the boy the pain that made him scream at her. The boy and his mother looked rural, while the nurse seemed urban. The boy's mother seemed to condone her son's behaviour as she didn't make a serious attempt to stop him from verbally abusing the nurse who was not only helping him, but was also much older than him. This behaviour is understandable when we consider that in the rural areas of both Lesotho and South Africa speakers do tolerate language varieties which are labelled rude or abusive, and are therefore unacceptable in urban areas, Rapeane [1996]. Because the boy and his mother looked uneducated, it made sense that they did not have a problem with vulgar language, while the nurse was clearly offended by it. At around the boy's age, rural boys herd sheep and goats. It is also around this age that they show little, or no, respect for young women. This is why the boy's mother, in the example above, does not attend to the problem, since to her it is normal for a boy to speak in that manner, and because of the value placed on boys in Sotho families. It must be noted that a girl in a similar situation would normally not threaten the nurse. Instead she would cry for help, bearing in mind that she is not in a position to challenge the nurse.

If a girl hurled abuse at people she would usually be reminded that she is not expected to be abusive in any manner. The following utterances might be made:

151. *O ngwanana ya jwang ya ditlhapa?*

What type of a girl are you who insults people?

152. *O tla nyalwa ke mang ha o le ditlhapa tjee?*

Who will marry you when you insult people like this?

The sentences above remind girls that they should only say what society expects them to say, while boys can come up with surprises. If a boy uses vulgar language he is reminded that such a variety is not acceptable, however, no gender issues are brought up. Hence it would be normal to reprimand such a boy in the following ways, for example:

153. *Mm, o ditlhapa hakaakang!*

Mm, you like insulting people!

154. *Batho ha ba rate bana ba ditlhapa.*

People do not like children who insult others.

It should be noted that reprimanding girls for behaviour that would be condoned in boys is normal in Sotho culture. Not only do adults monitor girls' language, but also their upbringing is generally more structured than that of boys who are allowed to experiment with their language and other aspects of their lives. Differences in the upbringing of girls and boys include the observation of the following rules:

Girls

- take care of younger siblings
- do household chores, and therefore, can't leave home if it is dirty or can't do homework before finishing chores
- be home by sunset

Boys

- chop wood
- herd livestock, especially in rural areas

The argument behind the strict upbringing of girls and the flexibility enjoyed by boys is that girls could bring dishonour to their families when they leave their families for marriage. This, therefore, means that girls' good manners, including acceptable language norms, need to be nurtured from quite an early age if they are to be marketable to suitors and their families later in life, and to meet societal expectations as they grow older.

We believe that it is this different socialisation that results, in the long run, in differentiation in the languages of girls and boys. Although we realise that children's first exposure to learning is in their homes, we are also aware that they learn from outside sources in the form of friends, schoolteachers, relatives and society as a whole.

When Sotho children start developing language they usually start making utterances such as the following:

155. *M-m!*

No!

156. *Ke a hana.*

No/ I refuse.

The utterances are made from time to time, and parents, especially mothers, normally say the following when they hear boys refuse to do or say something:

157. *Hee, bashanyana ba manganga!*

Oh, boys are so stubborn!

This observation is normally made in acceptance that there is nothing that can be done to change little boys' behaviour, as they are naturally stubborn. Although girls use the same utterance, the frequency is significantly lower than that of boys their age.

At around 5 years, boys have the following utterances as an integral part of their repertoire:

158. *Hei wena, monna!*

Hey you, man!

159. *Ke tla o mula/otla.*

I will hit you.

The above utterances are used as part of the language of a group which is hierarchically structured. Boys who believe that they are strong enough to challenge others normally use the utterances above. However, they are normally followed by counter statements from other members of the group, hence questions such as the following are asked by boys who feel challenged by the initial statement:

160. *O re monna ke mang?*

Whom do you say is a man?

161. *O tla mula/otla mang?*

Whom will you beat?

or the following counter statements may be made:

162. *Le wena o monna.*

You are a man too.

163. *Ke tla o mula/otla le nna.*

I will beat you too.

emphasising the point that when boys have the floor they usually try to use that opportunity to make others feel their might. Either physical fights or verbal abuse more often than not follow examples such as the above.

In a typical rural setting, where boys still herd livestock, the hierarchy system is exaggerated, with the best herdboys in fighting getting the respected position of *mmampodi* 'eldest, strongest or most important boy'. Among other things, this boy's package includes the use of polite language when addressed by the other boys in that particular group; while he may say what he wants all the time. Examples in this system include the following:

164.

Avoided

moshemane 'boy'

monna 'man'

wena monna 'you man'

Recommended

abuti 'brother'

abuti 'brother'

abuti + name

It should be noted that the examples cited under 'avoided' above can be used jokingly by boys or men who are friends or have similar societal statuses, or by a boy or man whose status is higher than those of the addressed, but not vice versa.

In urban areas, *mmampodi* 'headboy' is the boy with some status admired by the other boys. He may have money or material goods, or just go to a prestigious

school. This boy can either impose himself on the group, or his peers who envy him and his success may promote him to be their 'headboy'. This 'headboy', just like his rural counterpart, enjoys the respect and envy of his peers who may end up running his errands and laughing when he tells dry jokes. His language is also that of a boss to his juniors, although they are supposed to be friends.

We are of the view that this headboy system instils, from early years, the desire to exercise power over the defenceless. This means that those in subordinate positions yearn to acquire the senior status, so that they too can control their friends. This, however, does not end with male groups only, as later, females are treated as junior members of the headboy's group too, just like a headboy would do to his subordinates in a male group. On the other hand, girls' groups are generally based on the notion of sisterhood, as said earlier. What this means is that girls do not view control over others as the route to go. As Goodwin [1980:165] indicates, in girls' groups "all participate jointly in decision making with minimal negation of status." Instead, a girl who tries to dominate others is shunned. For example, a girl who normally beats others usually ends up with no friends, while one who tries to control them is discouraged:

165. *Wena o rata ho laela batho.*

You like controlling others.

because in such a group, members see themselves as equals, and try hard to discourage dominance. Unlike in boys' groups, girls do not have a concept similar to that of the 'headboy', as generally all have the same status. However, older ones may enjoy the respect of their juniors, and might try to abuse this respect, but they are usually taken care of when younger girls run away from their abuse.

Sotho girls are frequently heard using the following words fondly when addressing others:

Sotho	English
166. <i>mmannyeo</i>	mother of so-and-so
<i>mmastate</i>	mother of so-and-so
<i>ngwanana</i>	girl
<i>mosadi</i>	woman

The nouns above have a similar connotation, that of friend or sister. Even when arguing, girls still use them, verifying that in their groups the spirit of sisterhood and friendship is the prevailing thing. Unlike in boys' groups where winning a fight is important, girls concentrate on making their friendship work amicably. It is not unusual to hear an angry girl ask her friend:

167. *Hao na mmannyeo, o nkotlelang?*

Why do you beat me friend?

Although boys may use a similar sentence, it is not normally filled with the general tone of girls wanting their friendship to work. The notion of argument handling among men and boys, to a large extent, is best described by the following idiom:

168. *Kgang ya monna e kgaolwa ka letlaka.*

A fight solves men's misunderstandings.

The above saying is indicative of the differences between argument handling among boys and girls. While we observed that boys prefer fighting, girls prefer to talk things over, resulting in their friendship surviving all sorts of

misunderstandings through dialogue. This does not mean that Sotho girls never fight, but rather that fighting is normally their last resort, while boys fight every now and again.

4.2 The Language of Children in Mixed Groups

Sotho girls prefer to cling to their girl friends, and boys hang around other boys, generally. However, there are instances when the two groups come together, say when playing house. In these cases, there are times when there is harmony, but sometimes arguments erupt, resulting in each group blaming the other for one thing or another. The general observation is that boys prefer to act as 'big brother' to girls, both younger and older than they are. This relationship manifests itself in two basic ways; boys consider girls as their juniors, and therefore, try to exercise control over them; if boys believe that girls need protection from either older girls or boys who threaten their own girls, they normally come to their rescue. Similarly, older boys see it as their responsibility to take care of younger and helpless boys who are outside their own group.

Thabo, now around 7 years old, is one of the boys we observed. He lives in the same village with his cousins Seipati, and Esther, who are girls around 6 and 9 years old, respectively. Thabo has two friends, Teboho and Thabiso, who are aged 7 and 9, respectively. Thabo's family is playing music, and six girls are dancing when Thabo's mother asks him to dance, and the conversation goes as follows:

169. Mmathabo: *Thabo, jaefa hle, ngwan'aka.*
Thabo: *Ke kgathetse, mme.*
Mmathabo: *(To the other boys) Jaefang hle, basadi.*
Teboho: *Le rona re kgathetse.*
Mmathabo: *Hee, le fetwa ke banana!*

Thabo: *Nna nke be ka fetwa ke Seipati. (starts dancing)*
 Thabiso: *Nna nke be ka fetwa ke Esther. (starts dancing)*
 Mmathabo: *Ne ke maketse na le ka fetwa ke banana.*
 Seipati: *Le rona re ke ke ra hlolwa ke bashanyana.*

Mmathabo: Thabo, please dance, my child
 Thabo: I'm tired, mother.
 Mmathabo: (To other boys) Please dance, friends.
 Teboho: We are also tired.
 Mmathabo: Hm, so girls are better than you are.
 Thabo: I can never be outdone by Seipati. (starting to dance)
 Thabiso: I can never be outdone by Esther. (starting to dance)
 Mmathabo: I was wondering if you could be outdone by girls.
 Seipati: Boys cannot do better than us.

The example cited above clarifies how gender-conscious some children can be. Although the three boys claimed to be tired, at the mention of the word *banana* 'girls', they forget about their problem and start dancing. To them, already, life is not about dualities, but contrasts. They believe that one is either a boy, and good at doing some things, including dancing, or one is a girl and bad at dancing, but good at doing things that do not belong with boys. The use of the noun *ngwanana* 'girl' in Sotho is motivation enough for a boy to strive for victory and prove his boyhood to the girl he is competing with.

Children in rural areas, families of the lower classes, especially those without television and other entertainment gadgets, still indulge in language games. The most popular game we observed is called *masomana* 'ridiculing each other'. This game is similar to what Eder [1990:67-68] describes as ritual insulting:

Conflict which is not aimed at resolution has sometimes been referred to as ritual conflict. The most common example is that of ritual insulting which has been studied primarily among pre-adolescent and adolescent males. It typically involves the exchange of insults between

two peers, often in the presence of other peers who serve as an audience. This activity is usually competitive in nature, in that each male tries to top the previous insult with one that is more clever, outrageous, or elaborate.

Romaine [1994:117] comments about a similar game in Black communities in America, indicating that it is usually insults about mothers that are hurled at each other.

Although we cannot describe the Sotho game as ‘ritual insulting’ as such, insults form part of the game, especially among boys. In Sotho, this game is mainly popular among boys, although girls try it often enough to be associated with it. Boys normally win in mixed games. Sometimes the competitors use known and boring challenges, but the winner is the one who is creative enough to coin new but sensible challenges. The old challenges we came across included:

170. *Mmao o phusha terene ka matswele.*

Your mother pushes a train with her breasts.

171. *O no nwe Brooklax o re ke tjhokoletse, jwale ba o tjhweisa.*

You took Brooklax (a laxative) capsules, thinking that they were chocolate, and it gave you the shits.

We got the following new challenges from boys:

172. *O tlohetse mosebetsi ke ho beta bafu.*

You left your job because of raping dead people.

173. *Ne be re ya Gauteng, ka nka phaspoto, wena wa nka lekhokho. Ka reka orenje juse, wena wa nka fish oele. Ka palama koloi, wena wa lata fariki. Ha ke nwa orenje juse ya ka wena wa nwa fish oele, jwale ya o tjhweisa. Ha re fihla ka borogong ka ntsha phaspoto ya ka, wena wa ntsha lekhokho, jwale batho ba o tsheha, hwa thwe re state dikoloi tsa rona, nna ka stata ya ka, wena wa*

*lata fariki, wa e tshwara ditsebeng mona, ya lla ya re hweeee,
hweee, jwale batho ba o tsheha ho feta.*

We were going to Gauteng, and I took my passport, while you took the hard layer of porridge at the bottom of the pot. I bought orange juice, and you bought cooking oil. I got into my car, while you went for a pig. When I drank my orange juice you took cooking oil, and it made you shit. When we got to the border post, I produced my passport, while you took out your hard layer of porridge at the bottom of the pot, and people laughed at you. They asked us to start our cars, I started mine, while you went for your pig, and held its ears, it squealed and squealed, and people laughed at you.

174. *Ka reka mahe, wena wa reka ditene. Ka ja mahe a ka, wena ya loma ditene. Wa utlwa ntho e nts'e re 'tswee-tswee'. Wa re 'tswee-tswee tjheleteng ya mang, tswee-tswee tjheleteng ya mang?'*

I bought eggs, and you bought tennis balls. I ate my eggs, and you bit tennis balls. Then you heard something go 'tswee-tswee'. And you said 'tswee-tswee with whose money, tswee-tswee with whose money?'

In all the cases we observed boys beat the girls, who tried hard but either came up with old challenges or failed to create funny ones. Laughter is one of the main ingredients in this game, hence a competitor or side which fails to evoke it in the spectators and even the rivals, has failed. We also observed that even those children who would not normally use insults in their everyday language would proudly include them in *masomana* 'ridiculing each other' to highlight their linguistic competence.

On the other hand, girls came up with uncreative and well-known challenges such as the following:

175. *O hlooho e kang kwenya le hatuweng ka phoso.*
Your head looks like a vetkoek (cake made from fried dough), which has been stepped on accidentally.

176. *O tenne kwalla-bosudu.*

You are wearing a fart-storer.

177. *O leshano le ntshang moruti ka kerekeng.*

You are such a liar that your lies chase a pastor from church.

We surmise that although there are girls who are good in *masomana* ‘ridiculing each other’, generally boys excel in it, making it more their game than that of girls. This finding makes sense since in this game, insults form an integral part, and girls are not as comfortable as boys are with using insults, especially saying them out loud in the presence of an older person. However, girls showed their linguistic abilities in the second language game that Sotho children play. This game involves the creation of a secret language by breaking up words into their syllables, and inserting a formula after the syllables, resulting in an exclusive conversation, as the following example illustrates:

178. A: *Kebl rabltablanabl lebl Thablbobl
Weblnabl obl rabltablnabl lebl mablngbl?*

I am in love with Thabo. With whom are you in love?

B: *Lepe Mopoepetipi, ope apa mopo tsepebapa?*

With Moeti. Do you know him?

A: *Ebl*

Yes.

B: *Hopo lopokipilepe*

Ok.

Although the boys we observed tried this game, and the boys we met gave it a try, they could not compete with girls who excel in this game. Girls also seem to learn this secret language earlier than boys; this is perhaps because girls develop

language before boys. Chambers [1995:132] also supports this observation:

There is, in the psychological literature, a long record of evidence of female verbal superiority.

We surmise that it is this verbal superiority which makes it easy for girls to coin all sorts of formulae with much more ease than boys, who need to concentrate seriously before decoding the secret message encapsulated in the game. It is vital for boys to decode messages made by girls, as one of the main functions of the secret language is to gossip about boys in their presence, or to talk about any other girl-secret. This language is also used among teenagers and even young women for any business that is not meant for non-members of a certain group.

As girls and boys reach their teenage years and start being involved in relationships, their language repertoires become significantly gender-specific. For instance, a boy demands 'respect' from his girlfriend and all the other girls around him. His older sisters may be included in his group of subordinates, but his girlfriend and younger sisters are his main juniors. In rural areas, among the uneducated and lower classes, it is normal for a girl to refer to her boyfriend as *abuti* 'older brother', getting ready to call a future husband *ntate* 'father' later in life. However, a boy does not use any title when referring to his girlfriend. By contrast among the urban, educated and middle class, referring to boyfriends as *boabuti* 'brothers' is almost non-existent. One might argue that a girl normally dates a boy older than she is, hence the *abuti* 'older brother', as stipulated by Sotho culture. However, we believe that age is not an issue, but power is, because whether the girl and boy are of the same age, the girl may still refer to the boy as her older brother. The teenage boy knows that he is physically more powerful

than his girlfriend and can therefore get away with anything, including physical abuse when he feels the girl deserves it. It is at this stage that Sotho boys say:

179. *Banana ba a tella.*

Girls have no respect.

demanding to be 'respected' by the girls they themselves do not respect. It is also around this age that boys aim to sound very important and serious when they speak; often adopting husky voices when they speak. This feature serves two main purposes, it indicates that boys are ready for manhood, and it scares girls, reminding them that they are now dealing with strong men who might overpower them.

As we have shown, at home, their families and society as a whole somehow nurture boys' language dominance over girls. Another added advantage is that even at school, boys get the support they need to be independent language users from their teachers. This point is not peculiar to Sotho-speaking children as Graddol and Swann [1992:71] make a similar observation:

Since talk is thought to be so important, it would seem reasonable to suggest that all pupils should have equal access to it. Yet many studies of classroom interaction have shown that boys talk more than girls... Many explanations of such discrepancies have placed at least a measure of responsibility on the teacher. For instance, there is evidence that teachers pay more attention to boys, giving them both more disapproval and also more praise and encouragement.

The support that boys enjoy at school, more often than not, emphasises attitudes that boys develop due to their nurturing at home. This reinforcement prepares

boys for speaking in public domains, while girls learn and to listen with appreciation to their classmates, knowing that getting an opportunity to challenge them may never come, or if it ever comes, they will not get the approval that boys enjoy in classrooms. This frustration results in girls and weak boys uttering statements such as the following:

180. *Nna, mme mmisi/ntate titjhere ha a nkgethe leha nka phahamisa letsoho.*

Our teacher never gives me the opportunity to speak even if I raise my hand.

We assume that it is experiences such as these, which drive girls towards developing inferiority complexes, and hinder their ability to use language effectively in public domains, while boys are encouraged to be the best they can. In fact the practice of educating girls is relatively new among Sothos, as parents, especially fathers, believed that equipping girls with education was a waste of time since they marry and serve no use good to their families. Although, generally, the majority of Sotho-speaking women and girls are educated, in some rural areas girls are still discriminated against when it comes to education, especially if funds are limited and a choice has to be made between taking either a boy or girl to school.

When we tried to interview girls, their mothers did not hesitate to tell us that:

181. *Banana ba dihlong, ausi.*

Girls are shy, sister.

This statement was sometimes used to describe even girls who were talkative and confident among familiar company, but who were not bold enough to say anything in the midst of the researcher. Although there are girls who are confident all the

time, *dihlong* 'shyness' is more associated with girls than boys in Sotho. This, however, does not imply that all boys are always comfortable in the presence of strangers, but rather that they fare much better than girls in this regard as they are generally more courageous than girls in expressing themselves, mainly because of the type of socialisation that each group gets.

4.3 Adult Talk and Sotho Culture

The notion that African women are the epitome of the oppressed is somewhat a misrepresentation of reality. Women, and also defenceless men, are oppressed the world over. Although quantitatively advantaged, women have been, and are, leading lives of deprivation and toil. Both culture and religion have worked closely to bring women down. In Southern Africa, for instance, it has mainly been the work of Christianity and the Southern African cultures to subjugate women. Similarly, women in Asia, Europe and the Americas have had their cultures and religions as the main forces behind their oppression. While the feminist movements in Europe and America have done much for the upliftment of women in those parts of the world, Asian and African women still have a long way to go. Among the Sothos, Christianity, and later other foreign religions, helped enforce the work that had been started by Sotho culture. Because Sotho life today comprises traditional cultural, as well as Christian values, the lives of women typify the constraints that are laid down by these two philosophies. For example, a Sotho couple wishing to get married will go the cultural route first, attend to *bohadi* 'bride price', and then go to church as dictated by Christianity. The crux of both these cultures is that women must humble themselves before men, among other things, watching their language when men are involved.

The language that women use is mainly tailored around their roles as wives, daughters-in-law and mothers. This argument is encapsulated in Chambers [1995: 137]:

even before the development of sociolinguistics, observers who noted female-male differences in speech usually assumed that the differences in their behaviour followed from differences in the sociocultural roles they fulfilled.

However, the preparations start at birth, so that a girl watches her language from as early as possible. When a woman gets married she goes through a process called *ho lauwa* 'to be instructed in marital affairs'. Sekhukhune [1988:118] refers to this session as "the greatest moment of spiritual depression on the part of the bride". This process involves, among other things, prescribing the following laws to the bride-to-be:

1. *A utlwe matsal'ae e motona le matsal'ae e motshehadi, mme a ba utlwe nthong tsohle, jwale ka ba mo tswetseng; a fele a nn'a hlonphe bohle ba mofuta wa habo monna ya mo nyetseng, le hona a thabele ho ba fepa ka tshwanelo, mme a ba rate.*
2. *Ho se ke ha utluwa taba e hlabisang dihlong e bolelwang bakeng sa hae ke matsal'ae, kapa ke monna wa hae; a ntse a hopola hoba o nyetswe ka dikgomo tseo mohlomong ekabang di se di senyehile, mme a kenya baholo ba hae tsietsing.*
3. *A leke kahohle kamoo a ka tsebang ho kgahlisa monna wa hae, le bao a a tswetsweng ke bona mme a ba rate jwale ka ha eka o tswaletswe tlung eo .*
4. *A fepe monna wa hae ka nako ya teng, mme a se ke a ba meharo dijong; a fepe bana babo monna wa hae jwale ka ha eka ke bao a tswetsweng le bona.*
5. *A boloke ntlo ya hae hantle, mme a thabise monna wa hae kamehla.*

[Sekese, 1983:9-10]

1. She should listen to her male and female parents-in-law, and heed them in all aspects, as if they were her biological (parents); she should respect all her husband's relatives, and serve them food appropriately. She should love them.

2. Her family should never hear a bad thing said about her by her in-laws, or husband; and she should always remember that she has been married by cattle that may even have been used by her family, therefore landing her family in trouble [if she is to be sent back for misbehaving.]
3. She should do everything possible to please her husband and his relatives and love them as if they were her blood relatives.
4. She should give her husband food at the right time, and she should not be greedy; she should also feed her in-laws as if they were her blood relatives.
5. She should keep her house tidy, and please her husband at all times.

By contrast, no set of rules is laid down for the groom. In Sotho, *hlonepho* ‘respect’ is a multifaceted concept. Sothos can respect with their clothes, language, in fact with their whole being. Married women show respect to their in-laws by covering their heads and shoulders, for instance, and with their language they are expected to be humble. Because language is an integral part of culture, a special kind of language was coined, mainly to address societal expectations of married women. Although dying a natural death, the language of respect is still associated with daughters-in-law in some Sotho families, especially rural and poor ones.

In the rules presented above, we see that when a woman gets married her task is to respect her husband and his family without expecting any respect herself. Because the groom does not go through a similar process of *ho lauwa* ‘being instructed in marital affairs’ at this stage, we assume that the prescribed rules are not binding to him. A Sotho man is encouraged to respect his family and take of it. However, we did not find literature with rules similar to those presented by Sekese above. In fact, instead of a son-in-law being expected to respect his in-laws, they are bound to respect him. Sekese [1983:9] says:

*Mokgwenyana ha a bitswe ka lebitso ke ba habo
mohats'a hae! Ho mo bitsa ka lona ha se ho mo
hlonepha...*

*Basadi ba bang ba balehela bakgwenyana,
ha ba ke ba dula hammonho le bona...*

*Mabitso a bapileng le lebitso la mokgwenyana,
ba bohwenng ha ba a bitse; ba reile asele.*

A son-in-law is not addressed by his name by his wife's family! To do so is not to show respect...

Some women run away from their sons-in-law, they never hang around them.

Names similar to the son-in-law's are not used by his in-laws; they use new ones.

The respect that is enjoyed by a son-in-law is similar to that experienced by a woman's in-laws. What this implies is that the groom's party give up cattle in return for respect. As the second law above states, a bride is obliged to humble herself before all her in-laws because failure to do so may result in their claiming back the cattle they have given her family. Although Sothos say the purpose of *lobola* is to show appreciation to the bride's family, our view is that the underlying purpose has always been for the groom and his family to have the upper hand.

When Christianity was introduced into the lives of the Sothos, the message was similar; God meant men to control women, hence the eagerness of the Sothos to accept it.

4.4 Christianity, Sotho life and language

The first foreign religion to be introduced to Sothos was Christianity. Although the early missionaries tried to persuade Sothos to leave their culture for the European way of life, they failed, because most Sothos preferred to let their

culture and Christianity coexist. As much as some aspects of culture were given up, others stood the test of time, surviving side-by-side with Christianity. Some Sotho traditional norms and Christianity merged with ease as they preached similar messages, one such message being that men are meant to dominate the women and children in their lives. The main difference was that the missionaries used the 'Holy Book', the Bible, to reinforce their dominance of women, while proponents of traditional Sotho culture refer to cultural rules.

The practice of *ho laya* 'instructing the bride in marital affairs' exists in Christianity; hymns and the scripture emphasize it. The following hymn, sung at a ceremony we attended, is an example of how Christianity approaches marriage and the process of *ho laya* 'instructing the bride in marital affairs':

Dumelang banyadi
Le fane lerato
Le sa kokobeleng;
Phomotsanang tseleng,
Wena, monna hloho,
Disa ka bonolo;
O baballe ka hlonepho
Molekane wa hao.

Mosadi, o kgabe
Ka mosa le kutlo,
Monna wa hao a nn'a thabe,
O mo fe dipuo. [Lifela tsa Sione: 212, emphasis ours]

Hello, bride and groom
 Give one another love
 That does not abate;
 Relieve one another along the way,
 You **husband**, the **head**,
Watch over carefully;
 Take good care of, and respect
 Your spouse.

Woman, you should shine
With **kindness** and **obedience**,
Your husband should always be happy,
Watch your **language**.

As in Sotho culture, in Christianity the man assumes responsibility as the head of his family upon marriage. In the hymn above, the groom is ordered to watch over his bride. The symbol that is used is that of a shepherd and his flock because of the verb *disa* 'herd'. The relationship between a shepherd and his flock is well known. The former is powerful, wise, all-knowing and capable of making sound decisions for his flock which is associated with stupidity and powerlessness. So, in a Christian marriage, the man is as wise as a good shepherd, while his wife is as inferior as sheep are to a shepherd. This symbolism of the shepherd and his flock is also used in the Bible to portray the relationship between God and Christians; He is the Shepherd, while Christians are his sheep. In Psalm 23, the Psalmist says:

The Lord is my Shepherd.

In a similar manner, a wife would correctly say:

My husband is my shepherd.

in accordance with the Christian doctrine. The second verse of the hymn cited above is aimed directly at the bride. Among other things, she is instructed to listen to her husband and honour him with her language. Because language has the ability to empower its speakers, those who must watch what they say become disempowered. According to Christianity, it is women who have to mind their language, and use it to please their men, compromising their linguistic repertoire at times, while men are not advised to please their wives with their speech. The hymn was followed by the following scripture which emphasised the relationship between a wife and husband in a Christian or modern marriage:

and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.
Wives be subject to your own husbands, as to
the Lord. For the husband is the head of the
church, He Himself being the Saviour of the body.
But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives
ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands,
love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church
and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify
her, having cleansed her by the washing of water
with the word, that He might present to Himself
the church in all her glory, having no spot or
wrinkle or any such thing; [Ephesians 5:21-27]

The message from the Bible is clear, there are three entities in Christianity, the junior, senior and superbeing, epitomised by women, men and God, respectively. This relationship is also such that men are the ladder between females and God, as men answer directly to God, while women answer to men. It is this relationship which dominates the day-to-day lives of Sothos, including deciding on language which is good enough for women to use as minors in their families.

When a Sotho bride leaves church for the rest of the marriage celebrations, she has had two similar sermons, one cultural the other Christian. But the theme is the same; only her husband has the power, from God and Sotho forefathers, to use language in whichever manner suits him, while she gives hers up to her husband and protector. Christianity, strengthening the patriarchy that already existed, also imposed the concept of titles and surnames on Sothos. The use of both the surname and title meant that Sotho women had extra issues to attend to, on top of the existing cultural stereotypes.

The bearers of Christianity also brought with them European jurisprudence. As the church states that a man is the head of his family, so does the present legal

system of Lesotho. The Sotho man controls all major aspects of his family. For instance, in Lesotho, a married woman may not do any of the following without her husband's consent:

- a. apply for a loan from major financial bodies
- b. go to school outside Lesotho through a government loan
- c. have property registered in her name
- d. apply for a passport for her children

Her husband's signature is needed for two purposes before any of the above can materialise; firstly, to set her free as his minor, and secondly, in the case of (a) and (b) to promise to pay back whatever she owes. In all these circumstances, the implication is that on its own, a woman's voice is so faint that she cannot use it to address serious issues. This rule is applicable even in families where women are breadwinners and husbands are unemployed and in no way capable of paying for anything.

For a long time, churches have silenced women by denying them the opportunity to be ordained as priests. This is in agreement with the general philosophy of Sotho custom; in all important spheres of life, women are refused the chance to speak and give their own interpretations of issues. Although some churches are slowly changing this policy, others do not even want to consider the thought of having women preaching to males in a Christian gathering. Other important areas where Sotho women are silenced include the traditional judiciary and marriage negotiations.

With Sotho culture, foreign religions and the current Lesotho legal system working hand-in-hand to silence and disempower women, their desire to use Sotho as freely as their male counterparts will not come easily.

4.5 Silence as a Communicative Device

Sotho society, like many others, imposes silence on the disempowered in order to maintain the *status quo*. When a Sotho man says:

182. *Thola!*

Shut up!

to his wife and children, he means that he is the only one who has the power to speak, and as a result cannot stand anybody else speaking. As women and children are generally considered subordinate, they are the two groups that are usually silenced. A similar observation is made by Pauwels [1998:104]:

Language in a patriarchal society is seen to silence women; to treat them as secondary or appendages, to make them invincible.

While Jaworski [1993:119] says:

Silence has been a prescribed state for women for centuries

Any 'good' Sotho woman knows when she may say something, and when she is supposed to be silent. At home she understands that if her husband, partner or male relatives speak angrily, she is to remain silent unless ordered to say something. This is why when a Sotho woman gets married she is told in earnest:

183. *O se k'a arabisa monna.*

Don't talk back to your husband.

meaning that she may only say something if her husband gives her permission to do so. On how vital silence is to women, one informant told us:

Ee, kgopolo eo re reng e ka tlisa boiketlo dipakeng tsa ntate le mme ha a bua le ntate, o tlameha hore pele a hopole ka boikokobetso ... a ka mpa a thola ho na le hore a mo kgarumanye.

Yes, I believe that the first thing that brings peace between a husband and his wife is for the woman to remember humility when she speaks to him ... **she could rather remain silent** than shout at him. (emphasis ours)

It should be noted that the Sotho word *kgarumela* ‘shout at’ may be interpreted as any acceptable language behaviour by a subordinate towards a superior. For instance, in the following dialogue a female may be said to be “shouting at” her husband or male interlocutor:

- Male: *O kgaotse ho fihla ka nako ena.*
Female: *Empa ke hona ke tswang mosebetsing.*
Male: *Oo, o a nkgarumela jwale?*
- Male: Stop coming home at this time.
Female: But I’ve just knocked off at work.
Male: Oh, so you decide to shout at me?

What the male is expressing in his last statement is that he does not want the female to challenge his order, so for the sake of harmony, Sotho females normally resort to silence in such cases, even when they know that there is no way they can obey the instruction. It is due to instances such as the above that Coplan [1994:157] makes the following comment on Sothos:

in rural life there are few occasions for a woman to express herself directly to a mixed audience... If she sought to express explicit disapproval in the presence of authority, she affected a stony, sullen silence that spoke more powerfully (and more safely) than angry words.

In most cases such silence saves women from both verbal and physical abuse from powerful members of their families or communities -- men. Failure to remain silent when expected to, normally earns women descriptions such as:

184. *O a tella.*

She is disrespectful.

disadvantaging her in many ways. She may not get help from her authorities when she is desperate for some, making sure that she is secluded so as to discourage others from following her example. On the other hand, there are women who use silence to their advantage, therefore defying the men who want them to talk. By choosing silence over speech, the female is communicating that she has no desire to divulge information or cooperate with those in power. Although silence is the lot of women, it is so, because males have made that choice. The following example illustrates how it can be used as a woman's choice:

185. Male: *O tswa kae ka nako ee?*
Female: (silent)
Male: *Ke re na o tswa kae ka nako ena?*
Female: (silent)
Male: *O tla ntjwetsa o s' o nts' o lla.*
- Male: Where do you come from at this time?
Female: (silent)
Male: I asked you where you come from at this time?
Female: (silent)
Male: You will tell me in tears.

In this case silence means trouble for the woman as the male wants her to respond. So silence does not always signal peace on the part of the woman. As Jaworski [1993:4] says, sometimes it can cause trouble; that is when it is not the expected response.

Unlike females, for whom silence is a discourse device forced upon them by male oppression, males may freely choose to use silence as a signal of defiance or to express dominance over subordinates. The examples below illustrate this point:

A. Male with female boss:

186. Female: *Ke mang ya robileng motjhini oo?*
Males: (silent)
Female: *Helang batho, ke mang ya robileng motjhini oo?*
Males: (silent)
- Female: Who broke this machine?
Males: (silent)
Female: Good people, who broke this machine?
Males: (silent)

B. Males at home to wives/partners

187. Female: *Ntate, tjhelete ela o s' o e qetile?*
Male: (silent)
Female: *Ntate, ne ke re na o la qeta tjhelete yane?*
Male: (silent)
- Female: Father, have you finished that money?
Male: (silent)
Female: Father, I was asking if you finished that money?
Male: (silent)

In conversation A, what the males are communicating to the female who is their senior is that although she is their boss, she is still a woman and therefore a minor who can't bring them to order. On the other hand, in conversation B, the male is reminding the female that she is his junior at home as he is the head, and therefore will only discuss issues if he so wishes. These two messages are similar, a Sotho male doesn't answer to a woman, but may choose to share information with her on his own initiative.

In our view, a “respectful and polite” woman is forced into silence, so that a man’s viewpoint on a particular issue may be stated and accepted as the valid one. In general, the women who are not affected by this constraint of watching their tongues when dealing with males – as is expected of “good, Sotho-Christian” women – are those who are believed by society to be of loose morals. Among such would be women who drink in what are called *dipoto* ‘bars’, who speak freely under the influence of liquor. Such women are called names such as *matekatse* ‘whores’. This again, shows that Sotho women are not empowered language users, as they can only use language if it doesn’t offend society. Generally, females have two alternatives: to use language cautiously; or forfeit using it completely.

Below we study the implications of the implementation of these doctrines on the speech of female and male Sothos.

4.6 Gender Differentiation, Respect and Politeness

The language of respect in many African cultures is synonymous with women in general, and married ones in particular. As indicated, this language observance is mainly directed at a woman’s in-laws, as a result of the existence of patriarchy.

The structure of such language among Sothos is outlined by Kunene [1958:159]:

The name of a woman’s father-in-law is never mentioned by her, and she must also avoid all words related to it either in a purely phonetical manner, or morpho-phonemically. Such a relationship is based on sounds occurring in the radical of the name, and the radical of any given word. Various other relatives-in-law are also accorded this mark of respect, there being, however, local differences in detail as regards the

in-laws who fall under this category. Briefly, one may say that the *hlonepha* custom is observed by married women with respect to certain of their male relatives-in-law.

This respect language does not only entail the avoidance of a woman's in-laws' names, but comprises general conversation rules. It has been observed that rural communities are more passionate about it than their urban counterparts. Similarly, the lower-classes, the illiterate and semi-literate, observe it more than their educated and successful counterparts. In instances where daughters-in-law live together with their in-laws in extended families, or where they come into contact more often, this language thrives. As implied, the daughter-in-law may call her mother-in-law's name, provided she uses *mme* 'mother' to show respect. But she would not even think of uttering her father-in-law's name.

Generally, all women are expected to respect men, and junior women should also respect women who are their seniors in one-way or another. For example, a married woman respects her husband and his male relatives, but she is expected to respect all men, and to refer to them as *bontate* 'gentlemen' or 'fathers', while men usually call women *basadi* 'women', and not *bomme* 'ladies' or 'mothers' which is equivalent to *bontate*. In public gatherings men tend to use the polite form *mme* 'mother', although some find it hard to switch from the impolite to the polite form.

Among the Sothos politeness is identified with women more than men. Universally this seems to be the case. Hence, Holmes [1994:164] says:

The linguistic forms used by women and men contrast -- to different degrees--in all speech communities... It is claimed that women are more linguistically polite than men.

and Ige and De Kadt comment as follows on the findings of a research carried out on politeness among Zulu-speaking students at the University of Natal in Durban:

These women perceive clear gender differences: women are more polite, women are willing to apologise, both to their cultural group, and to those outside it.

In societies which emphasise the use of polite forms of speech, research indicates that women are still more polite than men. For instance, among the Javanese, politeness is an important linguistic feature in the speech of both females and males, but there is differentiation as Foley [1997:290] indicates:

When we turn to linguistic practices, however, significant differences emerge between men and women's speech. Both sexes use the system of speech styles for politeness, but not in identical fashions. Within the family, wives typically use a more polite form of speech to their husbands than their husbands do to them, reflecting and declaring a somewhat higher status of the man.

Similar to the Javanese example above, in Sotho, even a man who respects his family will still not be as polite as his wife is, or at least is expected to be. If a Sotho man is more polite, or even as polite as his wife, society normally says:

188. *O louwe.*

He has been bewitched.

189. *O jele phehla.*

He has eaten harmful muti (medicinal harm).

Both these utterances imply that normally a man would not be as polite as women.

As indicated, it is normal for a married woman to refer to her husband as *ntate* 'father', but it is unmanly for a man to call his wife *mme* 'mother', again indicating the linguistic differences that exist between the two sexes. Having observed that in families or in relationships between men and women, it is mainly women who adhere to politeness rules, we asked informants how they thought communication should be in such situations. The following are some of the responses we got:

Female informants:

1. *Mosadi o tlameha a ikokobetse ho monn'a hae. A bue hantle a se ka nna shauta monna.*
Le yena (monna) o tshwanela a hlomphe mosadi, ba hlomphe.

A woman **should** respect her husband. She should talk to him properly, and not shout at him.
He should also respect his wife; they should respect one another.

2. *Motho wa mme o lokela ho bua ka mokg'o kgethehileng ha a bua le ntate, a diele hlomphe, a diele hlomphe, k'ore a be le boikokobetso ka nnete bo phethahetseng. Le ntate ka mokg'o tshwanang o lokela hore a o hlomphe, a tsebe hore o mme ka lapeng. Wena ka har'a lapa la hao o tla fumana hore ntate ka nnete, ya hao, hlomphe ha a na yona, ebile o lebeletse wena feela hore o mo hlomphe haholo.*
(with emphasis)

A woman is supposed to talk to her husband in a dignified manner, she should really humble herself, really humble herself. She must show complete humility. In a similar manner, a man is supposed to respect his wife, he should remember that she is his wife. However, it happens that in your family your husband does not respect you, yet he expects you to respect him **very much**.
(with emphasis)

3. *Mosadi o tlameha ho bua a ikokobeditse le hlomphe, o tlameha ho sia hlomphe e kgethehileng. Le ntate o tswana hantle le motho wa mme, o tlameha hore a bue hantle a se k'a hlekefetsa mofumahadi wa hae...*

A woman is supposed to speak with humility and respect. She should show special respect for him. Similarly, a man is supposed to be polite to his wife, he should not be rude to her...

Male informants:

1. *Ho ntate, o (mosadi) tshwanetse hore a bue a bontsha hore ke moratuwa wa hae, a buwe ka boikokobetso, a nts'a re "ae hle, ntate". Re utlwane ka puo.*

To her husband, she should show that she is talking to her sweetheart, showing humility. She must say "No, father". We should understand one another.

2. *Kgopolo eo re reng e ka tlisa boiketlo dipakeng tsa ntate le mme ha ba bua, ke hore, mme a tlameha hore pele a hopole boikokobetso ... bana ba runa [sic] hakere ba kena sekolo, ba kena sekolo se e seng sa runa, jwale ha ba rutwe ka tsela eo runa re neng re tla ba ruta ka yona. O tla tla ngwanana, mohla a nyalwang, o tswa sekolong kwana a neuwe buka ya ho re jwang-jwang. Ke yona ntho e etsang hore ka lapeng ka mona jwale ho bontshahale hore ha re na ho ba ntswe-leng, ho na le batho ba babedi ba nang le dithuto tse pedi.*

I believe that in order to have peace between a husband and wife, when they speak, the wife should first remember humility ... our children go to schools which are not run by us, and they teach them in a way that we would not teach them. And such a girl comes to marriage from school where she has been given books telling her what to do. This is what causes misunderstandings in families, because there are two people, with two different teachings.

Both female and male informants agree on one thing, that women's humility is vital in Sotho relationships. Although some believe that men should also try to respect women, many are aware that the prevailing notion and practice is that humility belongs with women and children, and not men. However, it should be noted that all of the informants above were over 40, and that even though younger men generally agree with their fathers and grandfathers that women should treat them with respect, their female counterparts in urban areas and formal employment preferred to have some respect from their men too.

The first male informant above says, a wife should always say "*ae hle, ntate*" "oh

dear, father”, even when he has made her angry. But husbands may say their minds to their wives when it suits them.

Among the older speakers, the following words summarize the expected behaviour, which is more than just addressing one’s husband as *ntate* ‘father’:

190. *hlompho* respect

191. *boikokobetso* humility

Culturally, it is said that both men and women are supposed to respect each other, but respect has different meanings when used with the two genders. However, a man is never expected to humble himself before a woman, unless such a woman is his mother or any other older relative. Even then, because mothers tend to treat their boys with respect, by the time they reach manhood they are respected to the extent that mothers do not want to compromise the egos of their sons in any way, so that they are never faced with a situation where they need to show that they can also be humble. Perhaps this is so because respect and humility carry different meanings in Sotho, depending on the gender of the addresser and addressee in speech.

Underlying meaning of hlompho ‘respect’ when used by women to men

- humility
- subordination
- child in a child-parent relationship
- no talking back, unless asked/ordered to do so
- asking for husband’s permission before doing/saying things

- obeying husband's instructions without challenge
- remembering that husband has the final word

Underlying meanings of hlopho 'respect' when used by men to women

- being reasonable
- behaving like father in a child-father relationship
- showing pity

Outside the language domain, a man who is said to respect his wife is generally one who makes sure that she does not discover his unacceptable behaviour. On the other hand, for a woman to be respectful of her husband, she must not behave badly either in his presence or absence. For instance, a man who has a mistress, but makes it a point that the relationship is a secret, is believed to respect his family. However, a married woman with a lover is a whore, no matter how she handles the affair. Thetela [2002:179] comments:

The stability of the Southern Sotho family revolves around a woman's sexual morality – a woman's reputation in society is judged on the basis of her monogamous sexual behaviour, and any sexual misconduct has implications for the whole honour of a marriage.

In some families a man can be said to respect himself if he has one known mistress, but his wife is still obliged to complain about the affair in a humble manner, befitting the subordinate she is to her husband. But it is neither natural nor culturally acceptable for a woman to have a lover who will be tolerated by her husband. We give the following fictional examples to illustrate the differences discussed here:

Angry wife to husband who drinks a great deal:

192. Wife: *Ak'o tlohelle jwala hle, motho wa Modimo, bo tla o bolaya. Bo so ntso bolaisa le bana tlala.*
- Husband: *Hakere jwala boo bo nowa ke nna, jwale bo o tshwenya kae? Le wena o a sebetsa, rekela bana dijo.*
- Wife: *Jwale ke kgathetse ke ho bua ka taba ena, ha o sa bo tlohelle ke a tsamaya. Ke tla nka bana ba ka ke ikgutlele heso.*
- Husband: *O tlile le bana moo? Bana ke ba ka.*
- Wife: Please, dear, stop drinking, or this alcohol will kill you. The children are already dying of hunger because of it.
- Husband: But I am the one who drinks, so what is your problem? You are working too, buy the children food.
- Wife: I am tired of talking about this problem, now I am leaving you if you don't stop. I will just take my children and go back to my parents.
- Husband: So you brought the children here? Those children are mine.

Angry husband to wife who drinks a great deal:

193. Husband: *Letawa towe la mosadi, a k'o tlohelle jwala hle pele ke o bolaya. Ke tennwe jwale ke ho o kgalemela, ha o sa tlohele, o nke thoto ya hao o kgutlele heno.*
- Wife: *Ao ntate, mme ke inweletse biri e le nngwe hee kajeno. Ha ke a nwa le haholo.*
- Husband: *Ke re ke tla o bolaya ha o sa tlohelle jwala!*
- Wife: *Ntshwarele hee ntate, ke qetetse.*
- Husband: You drunk of a woman, stop drinking before I kill you. I am tired of talking to you, if you don't stop, take your things and go back to your parents.
- Wife: Oh father, I just had one beer today. I did not drink much.
- Husband: I say I will kill you if you don't stop drinking!
- Wife: Forgive me, father, I will never drink again.

It should be noted that the examples above do not signify what happens daily in Sotho families, but rather what is feasible. Not all Sotho men are as rough as the man in our example, but when some do get that angry, it is normally understood that their wife's behaviour drove them into that state. Similarly, not all Sotho

women portray the meekness that is illustrated above, but the example shows what is normal and acceptable. These dialogues are an attempt to show that in Sotho culture, a woman should never forget to show her husband that she “respects” him no matter how angry or frustrated he makes her, and that she should tolerate his wrath. Although generally discouraged, sometimes a Sotho man may be encouraged to beat a woman if it is believed that she does not behave properly. Historically, this practice resulted in men beating women they did not even know. Later, a traditional law was passed, which protects women from being abused by men other than their husbands, implying that in marriage a woman may be beaten by her husband, especially if it is not done frequently enough to cause her to go back to her home.

Generally, women’s language tends to reflect a reconciliatory role more than that of men, who usually emphasize the notion of fighting over issues. It is women who worry about people’s feelings more than men in speech. This seems to be a common feature, as Holmes’s [1990: 269] survey indicates:

the evidence surveyed in this paper suggests that New Zealand women pay more attention to the feelings and ‘wants’ of their conversational partners than New Zealand men do.

It is not clear whether external factors or intrinsically inherent qualities are responsible for Sotho women behaving in the manner outlined above, but our observation is that they tend to use polite and respectful speech even in instances where they are not bound to. For instance, it is common for women who are friends to refer to each other as *mme MmaX* ‘mother, mother of X’ in which case the first occurrence of *mme* reflects respect. On the other hand, men who are

friends would normally address one another by first name, or even surname, without using any respect-denoting forms as in the case of women. Our data indicates that Sotho men and women interpret politeness strategies differently.

As rules that govern politeness differ from society to society, what is acceptable in one language might not be in another. In English, for instance, a 10 year-old can comfortably respond as follows to a 30 year-old:

194. 30 year-old: Do you like fruit?
10 year-old: Yes.

While in Sotho, especially in Lesotho, a polite response would include a title of respect:

195. 30 year-old: *Na o rata dipapadi?*
10 year-old: *Ee, ausi.*
30 year-old: Do you like sports?
10 year-old: Yes, big sister.

However, even within one culture group there may be several societies with several rules. Although these rules are mainly culture-based, other factors also determine what is generally acceptable as polite. Sifianou [1992:13] discusses these factors as follows:

The rules of politeness, that is rules which determine appropriate behaviour, are one of the aspects of culture which are clearly reflected in language. The relationship of the interactants, their age, the specific situation, and so on, will directly affect their language use to degrees determined by the culture.

while Holmes [1995:24], commenting on the relationship between culture and politeness, says:

Linguistic politeness, then, is one expression of cultural values, and accurate analysis involves identifying the relative importance of different social dimensions in particular cultures .

As cultures change, so do their politeness rules. In the example of a 10 and 30 year-old given above, the case is different in some South African communities. When we talked to children from some of the farms in the Free State the response was similar to the English where children do not use a title of respect to address an adult. We have examples such as the following:

196. Adult: *O kena sekolo moo Freistata?*

Child: *Ee.*

Adult: Do you attend school here in the Free State?

Child: Yes.

Similarly in, Bloemfontein, an urban area, we came across this change in politeness rules:

197. Adult: *Ke yona tekisi ya Ficksburg ee?*

Child: *Ae, ke ya Wepener.*

Adult: Is this the Ficksburg taxi?

Child: No, this is the Wepener one.

If adults in Lesotho were to listen to a conversation such as the above, they would not hesitate to conclude that the child does not respect the adult, as the language used is not polite enough. In common with many cultures, Sotho culture requires subordinate to be more polite than a superior. Women and children use polite forms when addressing men, and junior men address their seniors with politeness. Below is a general illustration of the subordinate-superior relationships that exist in Sotho:

Subordinate	Superordinate
child	parent
child	adult
woman	man
dependant	supporter
junior at work	boss

Although we give the above relationships, we use them only as guidelines as other factors determine the type of language that speakers may use. For instance, although a parent-child relationship in Sotho may be described as a subordinate-superordinate one, the intimacy between mothers and their children makes it acceptable for children to use forms that would not necessarily be polite enough when addressing fathers.

We believe that linguistic politeness, or lack therefore, is vividly illustrated in requests and suggestions in Sotho, hence they are discussed below. Brown and Levinson [1987] indicate that politeness in requests is mainly dependent on the directness of such statements; the more direct a request is, the less polite it becomes. They maintain that:

when making the sort of request that is doubtful
one should make at all, one tends to use indirect
expressions. [Brown and Levinson, p57]

4.6.1 Requests

While Brown and Levinson's observation holds for English, it fails to give a complete picture of what happens in Sotho, where both direct and indirect

statements may be used as polite linguistic forms. On the other hand, indirect statements can be used in an impolite manner. Similarly in Ganda, a language spoken in Uganda, indirectness does not guarantee politeness as Lwanga-Lumu [1999:90] indicates:

my results have indicated that indirectness does not indicate politeness in Luganda. Thus Brown and Levinson's [1987] claim that indirectness is essentially a universal signal of politeness is not valid for Luganda, since the two notions are interpreted differently.

In Sotho, for instance, if a child comments that it is cold when her father leaves the door open, instead of asking him politely to close it, it may be understood that the child does not want to ask her father politely to close the door, and therefore that she does not respect him. On the other hand, a child can politely ask her father to stop drinking a lot by telling him that she gets embarrassed when her friends gossip about one of their friends' father who drinks a lot.

We use Gough's [1995] study of Xhosa requests as it gives a picture of how some African languages are structured. He says:

The use of performatives such as:

- 1a. *Ndicela ukuba undiphe imali*
I-request that you-me-give money
'I request that you give me (some) money'
- 1b. *Ndicela amanzi*
I-request water
'I request/am requesting water'

is a common strategy of making requests in superordinate-subordinate exchanges in Xhosa as well as other Bantu languages.

[Gough, 1995:123]

We give the following Sotho examples:

198. *Ke kopa dieta, ntate.*

I request shoes, father.

199. *Ke kopa ho ya toropong.*

I request to go to town.

The use of the verb *kopa* 'request' is the most polite, and one of the most common way of making requests; hence subordinates generally use it. It is also used in formal contexts such as business and the academic arena. A junior employee of a company would use it to his senior; similarly a pupil uses it to address teachers at school:

200. *Ke kopa ho sebedisa koloi ya mosebetsi.*

I request to use a company car.

201. *Ke kopa ho ya kantle, mme mmisi.*

I request to go out, Miss.

However, if the superordinate-subordinate relationship is a more relaxed one, *kopa* 'request' is replaced by *ak'o* (<ake o 'please you) 'please', which is less formal and polite, though not disrespectful. This is the form which is used by many Sotho children to their mothers, yet they use *kopa* to make requests to fathers:

202. *Ntate, ke kopa o kwale festere.*

Father, I request that you close the window.

203. *Mme, ak'o nkaenele mose oo.*

Mother, please iron this dress for me.

In families where the relationship between a husband and wife is highly traditional, or where the husband insists on being treated with utmost respect, we observed that women use *kopa* 'request' when making most requests, while in

relationships which are relaxed, women generally use *ak'o* 'please' when addressing their spouses. However, men have the choice as to which politeness form they use. Some female informants said that husbands or the males they associated with usually used *kopa* when in a very good mood, which occurred quite seldom, so that this polite form is mainly associated with happy men, while the command, popular with most men, symbolises the style of a typical Sotho man. It should be noted, however, that Sotho men may use commands when addressing their wives, but choose to use polite forms to their children:

204. A. To wife: *Nngwathele, ke lapile.*
Give me food, I'm hungry.

205. B. To child: *Ak'o tlo dula le nna.*
Please, come and sit with me.

Similarly, an adult son can speak as follows to his parents and wife:

206. A. To mother: *Ak'o bue le bana ba ka.*
Please, talk to my children.

207. B. To father: *Ke kopa o leme masimo a rona.*
I request that you plough our fields.

208. C. To wife: *Tloo kwano.*
Come here.

We have observed that another factor in determining politeness levels in Sotho is the financial position of the speaker, so that a female who maintains males does not find herself bound to be as polite as she would be if she were their dependant.

Although this practice is not acceptable in Sotho culture, it is becoming frequent as more and more females are becoming financially independent, and therefore

transforming themselves from the status of a junior to that of a superordinate. Similarly, the parent-child relationship of subordinate-superior is sometimes reversed when parents become dependent on their children, so that we have the following types of conversation:

209.

Child to independent parent	Independent child to dependent parent
<p><i>Ntate, ke kopa ho ya phathing.</i> Father, I request to go to the party.</p>	<p>Ntate, ke kopa ho ya phathing. Father, I request to go to the party. Ke sa ya phathing. I'm going to a party.</p>
<p><i>Mme, ke kopa o bake dikuku.</i> Mother, I request that you bake cakes. <i>Mme, ak'o ntjhebele dieta tsa ka.</i> Mother, please look for my shoes.</p>	<p><i>Mme, ke kopa o bake dikuku.</i> Mother, I request that you bake cakes. <i>Ak'o pake dikuku.</i> Please bake cakes. <i>Mme, ak'o ntjhebele dieta tsa ka.</i> Mother, please look for my shoes. <i>Ak'o ntjhebele dieta tsa ka.</i> Please look for my shoes.</p>

Our research showed that sometimes when men and other superiors use *kopa*, they do so in a sarcastic manner:

210. Man: A. Ist time: *O kgaotse ho fihla bosiu.*
Stop coming late.
211. B. Successive times: *Ke kopa o kgaotse ho fihla bosiu.*
Common meaning: I request that you stop coming late.
Intended meaning: I don't have to request you to stop coming late, so stop it now.

Although B may be used to signify politeness, in the context above it is used to indicate the speaker's impatience, therefore losing its politeness status.

Instead of using *kopa* to make requests, women, children and other subordinates also use a past tense (here the past present, also known as the past continuous) in polite speech. As Gough [1995:123] says, a past tense may be used as a "distancing or hedging device", and it is mainly for this reason that subordinates use it in Sotho. It may be used as follows:

212. *Ke ne ke kopa tjhokolete.*

Lit. I was requesting chocolate.

I request chocolate.

213. *Ke ne ke kopa ho tsamaya.*

Lit. I was requesting to go.

I request to go.

214. *Bana ba ne ba re o k'o ba kadime koloji.*

Lit. The children were requesting that you lend them your car.

The children are requesting that you lend them your car.

The use of this past tense as a politeness strategy in Sotho requests leads us to its other functions in linguistics politeness: in questions and suggestions.

4.6.2 Questions and Suggestions

It is common for Sotho-speakers to use this past tense in contexts where the intended meaning is in the present tense. Subordinates trying to avoid offending superiors by impolite language normally use this strategy. It is generally women and children who are associated with this tradition, though other subordinates

practise it from time to time. This use of the past tense results in relatively long sentences, in comparison with the type that is normally used by men and other superiors in conversations where status unequals are involved. The following examples illustrate our point:

215.

Subordinates (usually females and children)	Superiors (usually males and people in power positions)
<p><i>Ke ne ke re na e be o tla pota le laebrari?</i> I was wondering whether you will go via the library? Will you go via the library?</p>	<p><i>O tla pota le laebrari?</i> Will you go via the library?</p>
<p><i>Ke ne ke nahana hore mohlomong re reke dikgaretene tse ntjha.</i> I was thinking that maybe we should buy new curtains. I think that we should buy new curtains.</p>	<p><i>Ke nahana hore re reke dikgaretene tse ntjha.</i> I think we should buy new curtains.</p>

When used in questions, such past tense utterances may be indirect requests, so that one sentence may have more than one meaning:

216. *Ke ne ke re na o tla nkisa sekolong?*

I was wondering whether you would take me to school?

Please, take me to school.

As suggested by Gough [1995] for Xhosa, and as is also the case in the English translations of the above examples, the use of a past tense, and longer sentences, by subordinates when posing questions or making suggestions makes them less confrontational than corresponding forms in the present tense. This however, does not mean that females, children and other subordinates always use sentences in the

past tense, which happen to be longer. In the following examples, the use of the past tense is extended to sentences which are implied requests:

Child to father:

217. *Ke ne se ke batla ho tsamaya, ntate.*

Lit.: I was now wanting to go, father.

I want to go, father.

218. Instead of: *Ke batla ho tsamaya.*

Instead of: I want to go, father.

Junior to senior: (maid to boss, for instance)

219. *Ke ne se ke tjhaisa.*

Lit.: I was knocking off.

I am knocking off.

Instead of:

220. *Ke a tjhaisa.*

I am knocking off.

Our research indicates that some children, and speakers who seem to lack confidence, include *haebanyaneng* 'that' to emphasise their linguistic politeness:

221. *Ne ke re na haebanyaneng le tla nwa tee kapa senomaphodi?*

Lit.: I was saying perhaps will you take tea or cold-drink?

Will you take tee or soft drink?

Example 221 above could be shortened as follows:

222. *Le tla nwa tee kapa senomaphodi?*

However this form is not polite, especially because it does not have a title of respect, (see 4.6), therefore it may be used only by a superior to a subordinate or by speakers of the same status.

The arguments in this section indicate that although traditionally politeness belonged with women and children, this trend seems to be changing in Sotho. As Holmes [1995:24] says, politeness is indicative of the culture of speakers of a language:

Linguistic politeness then, is one expression of cultural values, and accurate analysis identifying the relative importance of different social dimensions in particular cultures.

Since Sotho culture, like other cultures, is not static, it makes sense that Sotho culture today, or the culture that some speakers adhere to, has relaxed rules that determine their linguistic politeness. As indicated, for instance, it is acceptable in some South African Sotho communities for minors not use titles of respect when addressing adults, this is indicative of the Sotho culture in these communities. Although initially Sothos in both Lesotho and South Africa had very similar cultures, it is observable that differences exist, and we surmise that the South African culture is changing faster than that of Sothos in Lesotho, so that in Lesotho speakers tend to be more conservative with respect to issues of politeness.

Women tend to be more linguistically conservative in most societies. Many of the male migrant workers do not come back regularly – if at all – so we have a population of many females, and an unusually high proportion of old men. The high proportion of older males again would lead to conservatism, as would the predominantly rural nature of Lesotho. On the other hand, in urban areas as more and more women become equals or even seniors of men professionally, it becomes normal for a Sotho man to take the subordinate status and be polite to a woman, something that was unheard of traditionally.

4.7 Power Language

As said earlier, languages live alongside the cultures of their speakers. For instance, in a typical Sotho community, harmony prevails when both men and women use speech with the awareness that they hold different powers in society at large, and families in particular. This conscious language-usage is vital for the maintenance of the *status quo* among Sothos, and proponents of traditional Sotho culture believe that change will mean doom to Sotho life. Sothos learn early in their lives how to use language to foster male supremacy, which is justified in different ways; men protect, and provide for, their families; therefore they deserve to exercise power; God made it for men to head families; and that women are physically weaker than men. As with other nations, Sothos learn early in life to use language accordingly. On this appropriate language usage, Sheldon and Johnson [1998:76] say:

Each culture (or subculture, or community) creates an ideology of femininity and masculinity... when we learn language we are taught how to use it in ways that uphold a preferred social order. We are taught what to believe about our community and how to use language in ways that are consistent with a prevailing world view.

When witchcraft was rife among Sothos, for instance, the prevailing notion among men was that it was the pastime of women; therefore Sothos were 'taught' to believe that men did not practise it. This resulted in, among other things, the noun *moloi* 'witch', which is supposed to be gender-neutral, meaning an evil *woman* who may or may not practise witchcraft. This noun is seldom used to refer to a man who has the respected name *ngaka* 'doctor'. This male doctor can be notorious for causing lightning strikes, but he will still be referred to as a doctor

and not a witch. According to this worldview, Sothos believed and still maintain that men are endowed with positivity, while women are not, and that women can only get proper appreciation from the men around them if they bewitch them.

There are disparities emerging between Sotho women in Lesotho and those of South Africa. This is mainly due to the two groups operating under two different legal climates. In Lesotho, a woman is a minor, and her voice is not very different from a child's. On the other hand, the new South African constitution recognises women as adults, and therefore, protects them from the discrimination which is the norm in Lesotho. What this means is that the South African government allows qualified women to be considered for positions of power, while in Lesotho women struggle to be in power. In both countries, men hold the vast majority of senior positions in both the government and private sector. The irony is that sometimes even women refuse to give other women the opportunity to hold these posts, resulting in the continued disempowerment of women. With men's positions comes the language of power, while powerlessness remains the lot of women. When women get power positions, they struggle to operate smoothly because of their backgrounds as minors in their homes, in both countries.

Although we indicated that the South African government recognises women as adults, society has a long way to go before the stereotypes disappear. A great number of African men still believe strongly that they cannot take instructions from women. Appalraju and De Kadt [2002:143] comment that among Zulu-speakers, women are subservient to men. Sometimes women find it hard to hold power positions since most are either poorly equipped, or not equipped at all, with

the necessary skills and confidence vital for operating effectively in such atmospheres.

Macaulay [1994:97] makes the following comments on the implications of power in the English-speaking society:

It is also obvious that those in positions of power often expect to be treated with deference by those over whom they have power. To the extent that in Western industrialized societies men have more often been in positions of power over women rather than the reverse, it is hardly surprising if women are sometimes found to have used deferential language.

In a typical Sotho community, men are in authority in both the domestic and public domains. Although it is a fact that in most homes women do the day-to-day running of the household, they do not have the power, as they must consult with their husbands before engaging in anything the husband deems major. It is because of this potency of men, that Albert [1972:85] says the following about the Rundi:

As in other communities, there are polite formulas for numerous occasions, e.g. greetings, thanks, apologies, or terminating a visit. Men usually offer thanks for hospitality and leave. Women will offer their excuses: ... "I must go home now, or my husband will beat me." Rundi women may not properly leave their homes without permission from their husbands, so that reference to the common and socially-accepted practice of wife-beating means simply that permission to leave the house had not been requested.

The observation above holds also among the Sothos. As indicated, wife-beating is somehow condoned; as a result, women who experience it are not as ashamed of talking about it as their Western counterparts. Although a woman may be beaten

for leaving the house without her husband's permission, a man may not be asked about his movements if he does not want to talk about them. Those who do tell their wives see the giving of information as an option. On the other hand, other Sotho men, if asked where they are going, might simply say:

223. *Ke a tla.*

I am coming.

indicating that they have no desire to discuss their destination, and therefore the time they are expected to be back home. Two different verbs distinguish between men's and women's behaviour:

224. *Monna o jwetsa mosadi ntho.*

A man **tells** a woman something.

but,

225. *Mosadi o kopa monna ho etsa ntho.*

A woman **asks for permission** to do something.

A male informant said he fully supports the liberation of women, and went on to say:

Ha ke bone phoso ha ba itseka, ha feela mme a sa batle... a se ka tjhaya katara ha a le hara lelapa. Yena leha a ka fumana ditjhelete tse itseng tse kahodimo ho tjhelete ya ka, a nna utlwe ka nna hoba ke hlooho, hakere ho ngotswe jwalo!

I don't see anything wrong with women fighting for equality, as long as the woman does not want to... she should not want to control me in the family. Even if she gets more money than I do, she must listen to me because I am the head, is it not what is written (in the scriptures)!

It is attitudes such as the above that hinder women's full development as leaders, and therefore, users of power language.

Although the above informant professes that he supports the liberation of women, he expects to be boss in his own home; nevertheless, it would not be surprising to find that he also believes that gender should not be a discriminatory aspect in his daughters' lives. Today many Sotho men support their daughters' dreams to be the best they can, even if it means that such women will hold power positions. However, the very men may prevent their wives and workmates from holding similar positions. On the other hand, there are men who believe that all women, their daughters included, should not be given the opportunity to rise above their male counterparts. It is these men who would rather find rich or hardworking husbands for their daughters than empower them with education. There is irony in the fact that while some fathers try to empower their daughters at home, they at the same time deny their wives similar opportunities. This is confusing to the girls, who learn more from their mothers than their fathers, as they are normally closer to the former. So in the end, even such families fail to create atmospheres which are conducive to the full development of daughters as equally-empowered language-users.

The results become observable especially when females work and communicate with males. Societal expectations, gender-based stereotypes and experience impact negatively on female language-users. The following observation, made by Penelope [1990:81] on Japanese women, shows how their language impacts negatively on them:

The stereotype of Japanese women is partially constructed by the way women talk, but it is also emphasized by how men talk **about** them.

because of their nurturing and all other contributing factors, women portray

themselves as ineffective language-users.

So, what exactly is it about women's language that disadvantages them, while the language that males use empowers them? Several factors have been discussed before. On one of these factors, Sheldon and Johnson [1998:94] say:

Cultural restrictions on conversational style, which in same-sex groups channel females toward mitigation and concession and males to resistance to being told what to do, may facilitate girls' and women's interaction in same-sex groups. But using their preferred style can disadvantage females in mixed-sex forums, such as classrooms, playgrounds, business firms, or the United Nations, where the masculine single-voicing style (and voice) is often how power is brokered.

The quotation above shows how societal exposure impacts on both male and female speakers of a language, allowing men to cope both in single-sex and mixed-sex groups, while females, on the other hand, do well in female-only groups but struggle to communicate effectively where men are involved. Lakoff [1975:4] makes a similar point:

women experience linguistic discrimination in two ways: in the way they are taught to use language, and in the way general language use treats them.

The language experiences discussed above are a result of male domination in several ways. For example, Holmes [1994:73] indicates that:

society expects women to speak more correctly and standardly than men especially when they are serving as models for children's speech.

This observation reiterates society's expectations of female and male users of language. It is this practice, *inter alia*, that normally results in female speakers

being expected, and trying, to speak correctly both at home and in public, sometimes compromising their content.

Although indicated that men may use language as they please, in both public and domestic spheres, the public arena has traditionally been their main territory. On this point Tannen [1990:78] says:

Home is the setting for an American icon that features the silent man and the talkative woman.

Sotho men, and men in general, can be silent at home because in this context silence communicates effectively as the men feel they have no need to explain themselves or their actions to women. However, they do not usually use the same communicative strategy in public as they value this domain as theirs solely. However, men may use silence to indicate defiance, especially if women are involved as their seniors. This is why in many African (and even Western) communities, women are denied the opportunity to speak in public as they are characteristically viewed as children. Remarking on several African cultures, Mukama [1995:378] says:

Just as children are not supposed to speak when adults are speaking; women too are not supposed to speak in the presence of men, especially in public .

While Foley [1997:305] gives a picture of English-speaking Americans:

Patterns of dominance are also apparent in male and female patterns in speaking American English: men hold the floor longer than women, interrupt more frequently or even refuse to respond, all indications of greater male power in conversations .

Foley's point touches on one of the differences between women and men as language-users: men speak and remain silent when they choose to, while women participate when allowed to do so, and have silence imposed on them when it is convenient for males to have them mute. For instance, a Sotho man may decide not to tell his wife anything, but will make sure that he extracts all the information he wants from her. On the other hand, if he gives their children instructions, or lies about something, the woman knows that she has two alternatives: to remain silent; or support everything the man says.

Apart from Sotho men, and men in general, holding the floor longer than women, when women speak in mixed-sex groups they usually use polite forms, especially if they are to be listened to. Macaulay [1994:97] also makes this point:

In Western industrialized societies men have more often been in positions of power over women rather than the reverse, it is hardly surprising if women are sometimes found to have used deferential language.

However, the powerful, modern and professional woman seems to be going through language-usage shifts. She seems to be asserting herself, and slowly showing signs of an empowered language-user, just as her male counterparts. This poses problems for both female and male interlocutors. To the woman, the challenge is a result of her not having had practice in the use of self-confident, unapologetic language that would be advantageous in the public domain; therefore, to be acceptable she has to shed her traditional role and speak like a man. On the other hand, the man who has been enjoying the sole use of power language has to share this power with women, who initially have been considered

unfit for power positions and language. It is this background that drives women, especially professionals, to develop two distinct repertoires: one, which is similar to that used by men, for public purposes; and another for every other context. On this point Jaworski [1993:119] says:

women have lost their language and have become inarticulate; they have been forced to adopt the male (the dominant group) perception of reality together with the masculine language that describes and represents this reality.

while Smith [1992:79] quoted by Elarbi [1997;168-69] says the following about the Japanese:

Women who acquire positions of authority in non-traditional domains do, indeed, appear to experience linguistic conflict.

Women come to realise that in the male-dominated world of business or government, their survival depends partially on their adopting masculine language, even though they may experience 'linguistic conflict'. The traditional role of a female speaker described by Sheldon and Johnson [1998:81] below fails to get her the attention she needs:

Gender ideology in American cultures gives males the licence to argue in direct, demanding, and confrontative ways with unmitigated rivalry. Girls and women cannot or they will be called such things as "bossy", "confrontational", "difficult", or worse for the same behaviors that for boys and men are called "manly" or "assertive."

Today it is not unheard of for a Sotho woman in a power position to confront her male juniors or demand to have things done her way. This, however, is not achieved without resistance in some cases. Although many Sotho men would still want to claim that they would not take instructions from women, many know that they have

to if they are to survive. For example, Sotho men ranging in age from the late teens to over thirty, understand that for their loan bursaries to be processed at the offices of the National Manpower Development Secretariat (NMDS), in Maseru, they are to humble themselves before the women in said department. Although there are men in the NMDS, it is the women who have left their traditional role and become vocal, sometimes going overboard, resulting in their department being notorious in the whole of Lesotho, and even some parts of South Africa. As powerful language-users, the women also refuse to be interviewed by both the Lesotho and South African Broadcasting Corporations. We often watch meek men at the NMDS offices transform into typical Sotho men as they leave, speaking their minds about the women they have just obeyed. The following are examples of conversations in that department:

226. Clerk (female): *Le nahana hore re tla le sebeletsa jwang ha le sa etsa laene tjee? Etsang laene!*

Students: *Re e entse.*

Clerk (female): How do you think we will serve you if you have not queued? Queue properly!

227. Clerk (female): *Dirisaltse tsa hao di kae hobane ha ke di bone ka faeleng?*

Student (male): *Yunifesithi e itse e di rometse, mme.*

Clerk: *Jwale di kae ha ke sa di bone tjee? Le a be le feitse, jwale le qala mashano.*

Student: *Ke re ba di fekse, mme?*

Clerk: *Ha re sa dumela difekse ka baka la lona.*

Clerk (female): Where are your results? I can't find them in your file?

Student (male): The university said it has sent them, ma'am.

Clerk: Where are they? I can't find them. You fail and usually fabricate lies about your results.

Student: Should I ask them to fax them?

Clerk: We don't accept faxes anymore because of you.

As students leave, they utter sentences such as the following:

228. *Basadi ba a tella, bana ba mona.*

These women have no respect.

229. *Hee, basadi ba sele, bana ba mona.*

These women are silly.

The above instances illustrate that although gender is a major differentiating factor in language usage, power seems to be a critical attribute too. It is because of observations such as these that Romaine [1984:112] says:

Perhaps most importantly, however, other research has suggested that the features comprising women's language are not used solely by women, but more generally by those in subordinate positions and roles in society.

In examples 226 and 227, clerks, although female, are in power positions in comparison with the students who are desperate for government funding. Similarly, where a woman has a gardener, he is her subordinate and must be polite to her, using a title of respect when addressing her. This however, does not mean that she will not use such a title herself, yet address him as a subordinate, while he is expected to use deferential language to her, as his boss. Their dialogue may go as follows:

229. Employer (female): *Ntate Thabo, lema mokopu ona kajeno.*

Employee (male): *Ee, mme ke tla o lema.*

Employer (female): Mr Thabo, plant this pumpkin today.

Employee (male): Yes, ma'am I will plant it.

Yet the same male will not use a title of respect when addressing another woman unless she is his senior.

The current minister of Gender, Youth and Sports in Lesotho is a woman. She has the power to speak like a man when addressing everybody in her ministry, and we expect her Principal Secretary (PS), who is a man, to take instructions from her without insubordination. For instance, in the Hansard of the parliament of Lesotho, [2001:32], a male senator addresses the minister of Health and Social Welfare, who was a female as follows: “Kea leboha, ’M’e Letona le Khabane.” “Thank you, honourable (madam) minister.” We assume that this picture is similar to that of the life of the Premier of the Free State who is also a woman. Politically she can use language as she sees fit, interrogating and ordering her staff, and embarking in debates with them. At work these two women can have their subordinates disciplined if they believe that they do not behave accordingly, but we believe that these powers do not go beyond their workplaces. Professional women operate within their realms of economic and social empowerment, and have their power posts backing them, but in their families they are controlled mainly by the cultures observed by the males in such families. Hence Macaulay [1994:97] comments:

It is also obvious that those in a position of power often expect to be treated with deference by those over whom they have power.

It is mainly due to this newly acquired status that women have the audacity to use imperatives when addressing men; and they now expect men who do not have power positions to respect them. The following conversation between a superior woman and a subordinate man is now normal, in the appropriate context:

230. Female: *Mphe faele.*
Male: *Oo, mme.*
Female: Give me a file.
Male: Yes, lady.

Or even:

231. Female: *Lata bana ba ka sekolong.*
Male: *Oo, mme.*
(Later) *Mme Nthabiseng se ke kgutlile.*
Female: Pick up my children from school.
Male: Yes, lady.
(Later) I am back, Ma'm Nthabiseng.

It should be noted that the examples cited above do not necessarily mean that female bosses always use imperatives when addressing their male juniors, but rather that they can, and do, when they believe they need to. When the same woman talks to her husband or male relatives the following dialogue is expected according to Sotho norms:

232. Female: *Ke kopa o late bana sekolong.*

Or less formal:

A k'o late bana sekolong.

- Female: Please, pick up the children from school.

Meanwhile, her husband who might have a female boss might communicate as follows:

At work:

233. Male: *Ke kopa ho lata bana sekolong.*

Female: *O tla kgutla neng?*

Male: *Hona jwale.*

234. Female: *O phakise, mosebetsi o mongata.*

Male: *Oo, mme.*

Male: Can I pick up my children from school?

Female: When will you be back?

Male: Shortly.

Female: Hurry up, we have a lot of work.

Male: Yes, ma'am.

At home:

235. Male: *Ke lata bana sekolong.*

Female: *O tla kgutla neng?*

Male: *Ke tsebella kae?*

Female: *Ke kopa o phakise.*

Male: (Keeps silent.)

Male: I am picking up the children from school.

Female: When will you come back?

Male: How do I know?

Female: Please hurry up.

Male: (Keeps silent.)

Both the discussion and examples above indicate how both female and male speakers are changing their language practices to suit their new roles in society. Although it is unquestionable that in many societies women have shifted from

their traditional responsibilities as housewives, childbearers and minders, to those of professionals with financial independence, many languages have not developed vocabulary to indicate this shift. In Sotho, a woman's success is usually associated more with her husband than her hard work. As a result, such a woman is normally described:

236. *Monna o mo hlokometse.*

Her husband is taking good care of her.

meaning that she looks good. Sothos still have to get used to saying:

237. *Mosadi eno o a itshebeletsa.*

That woman is a hard worker.

In some families, financially independent women do not ask for their husband's permission before using their money. But some of them pay a heavy price for that: unstable marriages. As indicated, a typical Sotho marriage or relationship between a female and male is mainly anchored around the female's humility at all times, and never challenging her partner. This is one of the reasons why some Sotho marriages or relationships in which the wife or female partner is a professional woman are crumbling. Men believe that their roles as providers are under threat by their working partners who no longer have to humble themselves.

4.8 Females, Males and Talk

In Sotho, as in many languages, females and males sometimes seem to use talk to achieve different goals. The use of males to achieve dominance, and the bonding function of female speech are discussed on page 82.

4.8.1 Insults

The use of insults among boys has been discussed on page 83.

But it is not uncommon for Xhosa males to verbally attack one another in a seemingly unbecoming manner to raise hearty laughter.

Mkonto [1996:95]

Mkonto's observation holds for Sotho men, they sometimes use friendly insults. The phrase, *O a nyela* 'You are shiting', is frequently heard in friendly male talk. It should also be noted that vulgarity forms a major part of the everyday conversations of some groups of men; thus the vulgarity becomes normal and less vulgar. In many taxis, for instances, in both Lesotho and South Africa, Sotho men are frequently heard using insults jokingly. Unlike men's insults, women's insults are usually meant to inflict pain on fellow women. These insults are normally heard among rural and uneducated women, more than their urban and educated counterparts. Sotho women seem to use insults for therapeutic purposes, for instance, when a woman insults her husband's mistress.

4.8.2 Parent-child communication

Our research shows that, generally, there is more talk between mothers and their children than between children and their fathers, even in families where both parents have jobs and come home late and tired. Perhaps this is because women generally enjoy talk more than men, as Holmes [1995:2] says:

Most women enjoy talk and regard talking as an important means of keeping in touch, especially with friends and intimates. They use language to establish, nurture and develop personal

relationships. Men tend to see language more as a means to an end, and the end can often be very precisely defined – a decision reached, for instance, some information gained, or a problem resolved. These different perceptions of the main purpose of talk account for a wide variety of differences in the way women and men use language

We also observed that as boys grow up they tend to talk less at home, while girls enjoy communicating to mothers, be it about friends or problems at school, while boys do not seem to confide in fathers as girls do to mothers. In fact, when boys do choose to confide in a parent, it is normally to their mothers, more often than not.

Sotho mothers use talk to measure their families' wellbeing, hence the popular questions:

238. *O kwatile?*

Are you angry?

239. *O nkwatetse?*

Are you angry with me?

In most families, because of this interest in talk, mothers end up getting more intimate with their children than fathers, resulting in, among other things, the semi-polite and informal language that children use when addressing the former versus that used to talk to the latter. This, however, does not mean that fathers do not talk to their children, but rather that they generally talk less than mothers in most families. Although in modern Sotho families, parents spend time together with children in family rooms and as a result find themselves talking more than in many traditional homes, women will still be seen as talking more in their families

as their talk goes beyond living room hours, unlike some fathers.

As indicated, the status of a father in Sotho is that of a highly respected figure in the family. It is this deference that sometimes makes fathers unapproachable in most cases. While some Sotho men make themselves inaccessible by their silence, limited speech or serious talk, others are made demi-gods by women who teach children that fathers are not to be taken lightly. It is sentences such as the following which alienate fathers from their children:

240. *Ke tlo jwetsa ntate.*

I'm, going to tell father.

241. *Ntat'ao o tla o shapa ha o nts'o etsa tjena.*

Your father will hit you when you behave in this manner.

The message that the child gets is that fathers are not as lenient and sympathetic as mothers are, although this is normally the case, some fathers do not necessarily follow this trend. However, there are fathers who yell at their children so much that when they arrive at home their children warn each other:

242. *Ntate ke eo!*

Denotative: Here comes father!

Connotative: Here comes father, here comes trouble!

This sentence has the power to quieten noisy children and discipline unruly behaviour because of the association of fathers with impatience and strict rules.

This is why, we surmise, children are often heard saying:

243. *Ntate o bohale, mme o hantle.*

Father is harsh, mother is nice.

because some fathers do not engage in casual talk with their families but choose to

dictate laws or use talk to solve problems. The picture of a man who is friendly and relatively talkative at work and elsewhere outside the family, while he's mute and unfriendly at home is quite popular in Sotho. Hence the song "*Bontate ba bang ba ya makatsa*" "Some men are unbelievable", became a hit in the late 1970s. It went:

Bontate ba bang ba ya makatsa
Kantle ba bonolo, e s'e ka ke dinku
Empa ha ba fihla hae
Ba bohale ba tau.

Some men are unbelievable
Outside their homes they are as meek as sheep
But when they get home
They are as fierce as lions.

Some male informants indicated that they did not believe that there was a space for casual talk between them and their subordinates, hence the limited or formal talk at home. However, women said they viewed talk as important in almost all contexts; hence they even enjoy talking to infants who don't understand what is being said to them and can't talk back. Some males said they choose to be reserved at home because they don't want women to relax fully in their company, as they will show them disrespect:

244. *Mosadi o tla o tlwaela hampe ha o bua haholo.*

A woman will get too familiar with you if you talk very much.

Apart from encouraging and participating in talk in their homes, women enjoy talk outside their families, and this talk is not meant to promote individualistic needs, but to show that they care about the communicative needs of others. Others seem to get the quality adult talk that they are denied at home by their partners. On a similar study, Holmes [1990:269] says:

New Zealand women pay more attention to the feelings and 'wants' of their conversational partners than New Zealand men do.

In Sotho, it is common to come across a conversation such as the following, indicating how women may show that they care about the linguistic and social needs of others:

245. A: *Hee, ha ke a robala ke lehlaba maobane!*

B: *Ao hle. E s'e ka le ka fola.*

Hee, batho re a kula, le nna ke dujwa ke hlooho.

A: Hey, I couldn't sleep last night because I had pain.

B: Oh no. I hope it gets better.

Hey, we are sickly, I'm also bothered by headache.

What B is telling A is that she is not alone, that there are other women who understand and share her problem with her. We suppose that this is more a communicative strategy that is meant for assurance than just to show how sickly every woman is. However, if A talked to a Sotho man, she is more likely to get a different response because of the different ways in which they use language. A dialogue such as the following could be heard:

246. Female: *Mahetla a ka a opa hore.*

Male: *Mm.*

Female: *Ekare a nts'a otlwa ka hamore.*

Male: *A ise ngakeng.*

Female: My shoulders ache so much.

Male: Yes.

Female: It's like they are being hit with a hammer.

Male: Take them to the doctor.

What the man is saying is that if the woman has a problem she should solve it and not merely talk about it. The point he is missing is that the woman knows that a doctor might help her, but she needs to hear comforting words and not quick fixes for her problems. But the man believes that he should shoot straight to the solution and not to words of encouragement, as women would normally do. Pilkington [1998:262] discusses this quality of women as users of language:

in general the women are cooperatively involved in the enterprise of joint talk. ... They also support one another with their responses.

We observed that when a Sotho man talks about his problems, what he is generally communicating is that he needs to be helped with solutions, and not necessarily with the type of solidarity that is normally expected by and of women as in the following examples:

247. Male: *Ha ke na tjhelete ya ho palama tekisi.*

Female: *Ho tla bo ho loke, hle.*

Male: *Ke tla ya mosebetsing jwang?*

Female: *Re tla leka mahlale.*

Male: I don't have taxi fare.

Female: It will be fine.

Male: How will I get to work?

Female: We will see what to do.

We also observed that sometimes Sotho men raise issues just because they need an attentive ear as they either have solutions already, or do not want to get them from other people, especially women:

248. Male: *Pula e a na.*

Female: *Nka jase ya hao ya pula, hee.*

Male: *Ke a tseba ke tlameha ho e nka, nka tsamaya jwang ke sa e apara?*

Male: It is raining.

Female: Take your rain coat, then.

Male: I know I am supposed to take it, how could I go without it?

In a male to male conversation the exchange such as the following is often heard:

249. A: *Di a matha ka Moqebelo.*

B: *Ha re betjheng haholo, banna.*

A: *Ehlile!*

A: They are running this Saturday.

B: Let us place some bets, guys.

A: Exactly.

Although speaker B seems to be advising the male in example 249, just like the female in the example 248, his advice is acceptable for two reasons: it is from another man and therefore does not offend the speaker because the two are status-equals; the male in 248 believes that it is unmasculine to be told what to do by a woman.

4.8.3 Compliments

Another linguistic area where there seems to be gender differentiation is in compliments. Holmes [1998:100] says:

Compliments are prime examples of speech acts which notice and attend to the hearer's 'interests, wants, needs, goods'.

If, as indicated earlier, females generally pay more attention to the linguistic interests, wants and needs of others than men, then it makes sense that women use compliments more than men when addressing each other, children and men. However, it should be noted that Sotho men generally compliment women and children more than they compliment each other. But, it should be stated that sometimes these males use compliments to flatter women, especially when they want to get something from them. For instance, a young man may tell a young woman that she is beautiful as a strategy for winning her love or for getting sexual favours from the woman:

250. *Hee, o motle hle Lerato!*

Gosh, Lerato, you are so beautiful!

251. *Morwetsana ya bohlaletjee ka wena a ka hana ho nwa waene jwang?*

How can a lady as wise as you are refuse to take wine?

Similarly, the following compliments are often used to flatter children:

252. *Sisi, o motle hakaakang!*

Wow, you look beautiful!

253. *Palesa ke morwetsana ke ho qeta dijo tsa hae!*

Palesa is a big girl because she finishes her food.

When Sotho women use compliments, they still avoid pejoratives, while men

sometimes use them amelioratively, especially when complimenting other males.

We came across compliments such as the following:

Female to female:

254. *Tjhee, o a sebetsa, nmake!*

Hey, you are such a hardworker!

255. *O phehile masutsa!*

You've cooked tasty food!

Female to male:

256. *Le bapetse!*

You've played well!

257. *Kgidi, ba (banna) poletjhile hee!*

Wow, they (men) have polished (their shoes) beautifully.

Male to female:

258. *Bana ba hao ba hlompha hakaakang!*

Your children are very polite!

Male to male:

259. *Tjhee, o satane wena monna!*

You are the devil, man!

260. *O itjele, poho!*

You are well dressed, man!

With regard to verbal flirting, pick up lines, and so on, this remains the prerogative of males. A man may make complimentary remarks such as the following (depending on the context, and her interest, the target may or may not find them offensive):

261. *E motle ngwana!*

What a beautiful baby!

However interested a woman may be in a man she doesn't know, it would be culturally unthinkable for her to utter equivalent statements in public. This practice is not different from the use of terms of endearment to women by men who are not acquainted with them.

4.8.4 Terms of Endearment

Just as compliments can be inappropriate and sexist, so can terms of endearment used by men to women they are not acquainted with. Although Hill [1986:86] indicates that close friends, families and lovers, use these terms, she also says that they are inappropriately used to women by strangers. In taxis in Lesotho with migrant labourers from South Africa, we came across the following kinship terms which are also used as terms of endearment used to address female passengers who are strangers:

262.	<i>mmangwane</i>	maternal aunt	darling
	<i>rakgadi</i>	paternal aunt	darling
	<i>ratu</i>		darling
	<i>lafi</i>		darling

Female informants indicated that they did not understand why such terms are frequently used outside their homes, where they are unacceptable, and not by their partners, where they would be greatly appreciated.

Our data shows that Sotho males generally have a rich vocabulary, both positive

and negative, used in the description of women. Women do not seem to have this rich vocabulary to describe men, perhaps because men describe women in sexual terms, while talking about sex is almost taboo to women. Although both female and male-speakers told us how much they valued their families, women complain that men seldom use terms of endearments at home. Below we give examples of nouns which are also used as terms of endearment to women:

263.

<i>semomotela</i>	beauty
<i>setshwana</i>	black beauty
<i>pabala</i>	beauty
<i>mmabanabaka</i>	mother of my children
<i>mosadi wa kgomo tseso</i>	woman married with my father's cattle

4.9 Gossip

The Sotho utterance:

264. *O leshano jwaloka mosadi.*

He is as talkative as a woman.

He gossips like a woman.

sums up the stereotype that Sotho women are talkative and gossipers while their men are not. Holmes [1998:461] makes a similar observation about English speakers:

One widely held stereotype is that women talk too much.

However, research does show that both men and women gossip, as Cameron [1998:281] states:

Many researchers have reported that both sexes engage in gossip, since its social functions (like affirming solidarity and serving as an unofficial conduct for information) are of universal relevance, but, its cultural meaning (for us) is undeniably 'feminine'.

This stereotype is no doubt based on the belief that what women talk about is trivial and therefore not worthy of men's time as the latter discuss serious issues such as finance and politics. What seems to be the case is that this bias is based on the gender of the speakers and not the content of their speech. A Sotho man who talks about his neighbour's child might be said to be making an observation, while a female who talks about a similar issue will be gossiping. The practice of judging women and their speech using the criteria for an 'ideal' man does not do the women justice as the two sexes use talk to achieve different goals. Coates [1995:21-2] says:

the language of the professions, like all male discourse, tends to be information-focused and adversarial in style, favouring linguistic strategies which foreground status difference between participants. Women's talk in the private sphere by contrast, is interaction-focused, favouring linguistic strategies which emphasise solidarity rather than status.

It is observed that attitude is the prime factor in labelling the type of talk that women and men engage in in single-sex conversations. As Coates [1996:1] comments, when women are involved in talk, this is referred to as 'gossip, chit-chat, natter', but men's talk has no derogatory names. Men do not place the same value on friendly talk, especially when it comes from women, and hence label it 'gossip'. We conclude that the act of friendly talk or 'gossip' is not peculiar to one sex only; both women and men indulge in it.

CHAPTER 5: ORAL LITERATURE, GENDER AND LANGUAGE

DIFFERENTIATION

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter we focus on the language of Sotho literature. It may be asked why a sociolinguistic study tackles issues of such a nature. The answer is simple: such a study is vital because of the relationship holding between languages and the literatures produced in them. The interrelatedness of fields of study in social research also justifies this focus. After all, Sociolinguistics is about observing and analysing language as used by society. This usage includes, *inter alia*, day-to-day speech *and* the language used in literary works. The endeavour to study literary texts using linguistic tools is not new. MacCabe [1991:432] states:

For if we look back to the first recognisable beginnings of linguistics, we find that they take place in the context of an attempt to establish and comment on literary texts.

These literary works could not be produced without language. Wellek and Warren [1978:22] comment as follows on this relationship:

Language is the material of literature as stone or bronze is of sculpture, paints of pictures, or sounds of music. But one should realize that language is not mere inert matter like stone but is itself a creation of man is [sic] thus charged with the cultural heritage of a linguistic group.

As stated earlier, a nation's culture and belief systems are generally reflected in the way such people use their language. If literature is "charged with the cultural heritage of a linguistic group", then traditional Sotho literature is saturated with the language practices of the Sotho. It is natural that some aspects of language

differentiation based on gender that exist in everyday Sotho will be observed in traditional literature.

5.1 Oral literature, language and gender differentiation

Oral literature is essentially about the past, the present, and the future. It represents a window into the world view of a particular society, its values and beliefs.

Kaschula [1993:vii]

Oral literature is our starting point because it is the earliest form of literature in any society, hence Kaschula [ibid] sees it as being about a people's past, present, and future. Our main interest, however, is in the language and gender issues in oral literature. Within the field of oral literature we have decided to focus on proverbs and traditional song accompanied by instruments because of their popularity among Sothos. Coplan [2001:260] says that these traditional songs "constitute Lesotho's national popular music".

Okpewho [1992] comments that the early non-African students of African oral literature could not do this wealth of literature the justice it deserves as they were not fully conversant with the cultures and languages of the people whose literature they were interested in. He emphasises the complex relationship between language, literature and the culture behind them. We therefore analyse Sotho proverbs with the full awareness of the culture behind them.

5.1.1 Gender issues as manifested in Sotho proverbs

There are various approaches to the study of proverbs, but the culture-analytical one that we use here is encapsulated in the following quote from Honeck [1997:31]:

The cultural view emphasizes the use of proverbs in sociocultural contexts. The basic premise is that proverbs are cultural linguistic products, created and used in social situations for social purposes. These purposes largely entail the codification of important lessons in the culture.

Studies of proverbs, as material for gender issues, are not common in African languages. For South Sotho, Machobane [1996] carried out such a study, while Mokitimi [1991] looks at proverbs from a text-context approach. The latter approach is common among researchers of African proverbs (cf. Khuba [1985] on Venda proverbs and Mathumba [1988] on Tsonga proverbs.)

It is, however, observable that the use of Sotho proverbs is declining among younger speakers, especially in urban areas. Generally, youngsters do not use proverbs like their parents. However, we also suppose, this decline might be a result of some urban-dwellers renouncing their culture in their search for modernity and perfection in Western ways. However, proverbs are far from disappearing, as the majority of Sothos still use them every now and again and new ones are coming up to describe the life of the modern Sotho. Our definition of proverbs cannot overlook the observations outlined in the works of many scholars of oral literature; (cf. Finnegan [1984], Mokitimi [1991], Okpewho [1992], Mieder [1993] and Honeck [1997].) In general they state that proverbs :

- (a) are concise metaphorical statements
- (b) express certain truths
- (c) illustrate the wisdom of the people behind them
- (d) can be traced back to antiquity

Mokitimi [1991:18] makes the following statement on the origin of Sotho proverbs:

There must have been first a situation which was observed or experienced by the speaker who then formulated a proverb, which in retrospect, could be seen as a creative event in its own right... The formulated sentences which became proverbs reveal the feelings, emotions and attitudes of the speaker.

Okpewho [1992:226] on a similar note, comments that:

Like every other piece of oral literature, every proverb must have started its life as the product of the genius of an individual oral artist. But it becomes appropriated by the people at large... because it contains a truth about life.

Having highlighted cultural aspects of Sotho life, it is argued that the sole artist who created individual proverbs could not have been female. If women were ever given the opportunity to participate in the making of these wise sayings, we suppose it would probably be on issues relating to childbearing and nurturing, since these responsibilities are their lot. Also, Sotho women are not raised for the public domain, let alone encouraged and allowed to show their intelligence and creativity in situations where they would be seen to be competing with men. We therefore are of the notion that although proverbs are wise words conveying some truths about the Sotho, it should be noted that they are primarily based on truth and feelings as perceived by Sotho *men* who have always been dominant in society.

5.1.1.1 Proverbs in context

Though we appreciate that proverbs serve as a valuable communicative tool among the Sotho and many other linguistic groups, we also observe that because of the gender insensitivity of some of them, they possess the potential to disempower women, or rather that speakers may purposely abuse them to their

own advantage. Mieder [1993:x] writes:

If used to manipulate people economically or politically, proverbs might even become dangerous weapons as expression of stereotypical invectives or unfounded generalizations. But, for the most part, it can be said that if used consciously and perhaps somewhat sparingly, proverbs remain to the present day a most effective verbal tool.

It is this dark side of the use of proverbs that we study in this section. We see that they are used to differentiate between females and males in a way that portrays women negatively, while at the same time promoting and condoning men's behaviour no matter how unacceptable it may be. Our discussion touches on the stereotypes that are either stated clearly in the proverb itself, and/or those that are encapsulated in the definition. This is because a proverb and its definition have a horse and carriage relationship, therefore it would not suffice to study one part and leave out the other.

In Sekese [1983] we find 39 proverbs which we use as data for language and gender research. Although proverbs may be used to serve different purposes, we observe that generally, those that describe males or male attributes do so favourably, while others seem to condone behaviour that would be thought improper in females. On the other hand, women's weaknesses are at the fore of proverbs about them, except when describing their roles as mothers. Also in exactly a third of the gender-mentioning proverbs the nouns *monna* and *banna* 'men' appear, while the nouns *mosadi* and *basadi* 'women' are mentioned in five proverbs only. Just as a commodity that features frequently in the media would normally gain more popularity than its rivals (especially if its strong points are

highlighted at the expense of the latter), so we believe that the higher frequency in proverbs of positive messages about males, as against negative messages about females, not only reflects sexism, but also perpetuates it. Similarly, in Matšela and Moletsane [1999], proverbs about males and their positive characteristics still appear more frequently than those that revolve around females and their strengths.

Proverbs about males or male qualities will be analysed under the headings below:

Determination

265. *Le-ka-ka-lenyatheli la monn'a mosepeli (motsamai) monna h'a hloke khomo a tsamaea; ho ea ho ee a e fumane.* Sekese [1983:155]

(A man, a traveller, a man searches for a cow until he gets it.)

A man works hard until he achieves his goal.

266. *Ngoan'a moshemane kabeloa manong.* Matšela and Moletsane [1999:67]

(A male child, a sacrifice to the vultures.)

Males might die away from home and be devoured by vultures (instead of having proper burials at home), in search of food for their families.

The proverbs above give the impression that men work with determination while women do not necessarily do so since they only refer to males and not people in general. It is true that with the migrant labour system, it was men who left home in search of work in South Africa; however, they left behind women who had to take care of families and till the land with determination too.

Strength

267. *Monna h'a tšoere sethole ka mohatla, ha se lese.* Sekese [1983:140]

(When a man is holding a cow by its tail, he does not let it go.)

A man is not only strong, but he also works hard.

268. *Ngoan'a moshemane, pholo'a letlaka.* Sekese [1983:128]

(A male child, an ox for the vultures.)

Males are strongwilled and may die away from home in their search for a better life.

The first proverb above relates men to a chore which is theirs, that of tending livestock. However, because it does not have a counterpart praising women for some of the hard chores that they are associated with, the proverb leaves a picture of a man as the epitome of strength while a woman will be understood to be capable of taking care of minor jobs only. The second proverb says males do not run away from tough responsibilities; they are tough themselves, hence the metaphor 'a man is an ox'.

Awesomeness

In one Sotho proverb about men, they are said to be awesome:

269. *Monna ke leholimo, tse mpe tseo a li bonang oa li koahela.*

Hlalele [1972:16] in Machobane [1996: 36]

(A man is heaven, he covers the bad things he has seen.)

'A man never reveals secrets'.

The metaphor 'a man is heaven' is strong and vivid enough to sum up our argument that Sotho proverbs may be used as material for gender studies as they do verify the fact that gender bias is found in them. We cannot overlook the metaphor in this proverb as Monye [1996:64] comments:

Paremiologists are in complete agreement that metaphor is one of the most striking characteristics by which we can identify any true proverb.

If a man is said to be heaven, the implication is that he is above all on earth (especially women) just as heaven is above the earth.

5.1.1.2 The generic use of proverbs

Machobane [1996] shows that in a significant number of proverbs males are used in a generic manner. Our examples include the following:

270. *Ho ja khomo 'a moshemane `maaja.* Matšela & Moletsane [1999:28]

(To eat a boy's cow.)

To relax because of the reigning state of peace.

271. *Monna ha hloloe ke letho.* Matšela & Moletsane [1999:60]

(A man is capable of doing anything.)

A wise person takes precautions before acting.

272. *Seja-monna ha se mo qete.* Sekese [1983:209]

(The one who eats a man does not finish him.)

A person can survive being cheated.

At face value, especially to children, proverbs such as the above , (and the idiom in example 272, which is also called *maele* in Sotho) may be understood to mean that the favourable characteristics associated with males belong specifically to them, as the noun *motho* 'person', a gender-neutral word, has not been used. This again impacts negatively on the language that is used to refer to women, it is devoid of the positivity that men are endowed with.

5.1.1.3 Proverbs about females

Although there are proverbs about females that highlight their weaknesses, we intend to analyse those that are built around women's roles as mothers since

Machobane [1996] deals at length with the former. It must be indicated that the belief that women are merely good as mothers is not peculiar to the Sotho, it is universal. Rogers [1991:11] states:

The most important role for women, defining their entire life, is portrayed as the bearing and bringing up of children.

It is against this background of gender differentiation that proverbs such as the following were created:

273. *Hosasa ho sang ngoana o ea ja ba 'm'ae.* Sekese [1983:137]

(Very early in the morning a child will eat its mother's (bread.))

There will be trouble.

274. *Se-aka ngoana ke se-aka-'m'ae.* Sekese [1983:207]

(One who kisses a child kisses its mother.)

One who loves a child loves its mother.

275. *Sehole se setle ho 'm'a sona.* Sekese [1983:207]

(A disabled child is beautiful to its mother.)

A child is loved by its parents.

Similar proverbs are found among the Tsonga:

276. *Amhuti leyo swa nkila yi chabela xihlahline.*

A barren woman has a sense of shame and hides herself, fearing an

accusation of witchcraft. Junod [1978: 34-5]

The proverb above touches on two points; women are endowed with negative characteristics, or they are only good as mothers; hence the childless woman referred to in the proverb is ashamed by her childlessness, her main defining factor

as a woman of value to her society. Other Tsonga proverbs on motherhood include the following:

277. *Aximbutana a xi kohlwi hi nyini wa xona.*

A kid cannot be forgotten by its mother. Junod [1978:161]

278. *Nkava wu koka n'wana.*

The umbilical cord pulls the child.

The tie between mother and child is never broken. Junod [1978:161]

Although we appreciate the said existence of a special bond between a mother and her child as illustrated in the proverbs above, we are of the view that Sotho proverbs should indicate other positive aspects of a woman's life. These could include her hard work for those around her, her husband included.

We found only four Sotho proverbs in which women have been used in a generic manner:

279. *Ngoana o nyela 'mae.* Matšela and Moletsane [1999:68]

(A child shits on its mother.)

A parent endures problems that she or he is caused by their child.

280. *Sehole se setle ho 'm'a sona.* Sekese [1983:207]

(A disabled child is beautiful to its mother.)

A child is loved by its parents.

281. *U se 'na u re 'm'ao o motle o le mong.* Sekese [2002:80]

(Do not say that your mother is the only beautiful woman.)

Do not praise yourself.

282. *Lemena le nyala mosali.* Machobane [1996:40]

(A pitfall trap marries a woman)

One's success depends on one's efforts.

The first three proverbs still refer to motherhood though the meaning concerns parenthood in general, and not just motherhood. In example 282 women are not mentioned in relation to their roles as mothers, instead a female is used in a generic manner to show that those who work hard become successful.

5.1.2 Proverbs that compare men and women

There are proverbs in Sotho with the structure of two contrasting phrases. One of these phrases is about a male attribute while the other is about female characteristics.

5.1.2.1 Domestic powers

283. *Monna ke hlooho, mosadi ke ngwana.*

(A man is head, a woman a child.)

A man is head of his household, a woman is a child (her husband's).

This proverb means that a man is not answerable to anybody as he is the head of his household, but his wife is his child and therefore answerable to him.

5.1.2.2 Sexual behaviour

284. *Monna ke mokopu, o a nama, mosadi ke khabetjhe, o a ipopa.*

(A man is a pumpkin he spreads out, a woman is a cabbage, she wraps herself.)

It is natural and acceptable for a man to have many sexual partners, but a woman may have one partner only.

This proverb is similar to the following:

285. *Monna ke ntja.*

(A man is a dog)

A man likes every woman he sees.

Although the first proverb is relatively new, (it does not appear in any written work on Sotho proverbs), it is frequently heard from males who cite it to justify their adultery. Males, together with females who support the status quo on gender issues normally interpret these proverbs to mean that men are incapable of changing their promiscuity, as it is a natural characteristic of theirs. Also the proverbs are generally understood to mean that it is therefore acceptable for Sotho men to be adulterous, unlike their partners who are expected to be faithful.

We conclude that the language of some Sotho proverbs is indicative of differentiation based on gender. This differentiation tallies with the gist of this thesis, male is the norm and therefore described in a positive manner, more often than not, while female is generally understood and described in a demeaning manner.

5.2 Gender differentiation and the language of songs

In this section we analyse the language of three categories of songs, the first being the traditional *koma*, and the other being the *Difela tsa ditsamayanaha*, migrant workers' songs, and traditional songs accompanied by instruments. As an integral part of any culture, songs provide another field for linguistic analysis.

Sotho music as seen today is the end product of traditional music and modern music. Although artists such as Tlou Makhola and Puseletso Seema are classified

as traditional Sotho artists by recording companies, their music has influences of both the traditional and contemporary worlds. To appreciate the nature of the language in some songs that Sothos compose and listen to today, it is useful to point out that the main influence seems to be from their earlier counterparts which sometimes glorified males at the expense of females. Obscenity, which sometimes features in Sotho music today, appears to have existed also in earlier forms. This, however, does not mean that all traditional Sotho music was and is obscene, but rather that foul language is used in some of it. Commenting on such language found in the *dikoma*, Mokhali [1966:8] says:

Since boys are initiated into manhood, they are taught what social attitude they should adopt towards women, subsequently the songs are in connection with women, and the words are of an abominable and vulgar nature. In view of this vulgarity these “Likoma” are pitched so low they may not be audible, and the singing is performed till late in the night.

The *dikoma* are songs that are sung in boys’ initiation schools to teach the initiates about their culture. According to Sotho culture, the *dikoma* are supposed to be kept secret, and knowledge of them is traditionally confined to initiates. It should be noted that our study of the language of this ‘secret’ genre is in no way meant to divulge the secrecy surrounding *dikoma*, and thus disrespect this culture. The material illustrated here is all already in the public domain through earlier publications. This aspect of Sotho culture is studied because of its great value as scholarly literary material and because of the history encapsulated in it.

The following *koma* verifies what Mokhali [1966:8] says about the language of this genre of oral art:

*Nnyo ahlama,
Ntoto e kene.
Nnyo ka mothamo
Ya futa ntoto,
Ntoto ya e hlatsetsa.*

*Thole sa ngwananyana
Sa roba-roba,
Ho bonahala
Se tla tswala.*

Vagina open,
That the penis might enter.
The vagina with a gulp
Swallowed the penis,
And the penis vomited in it.

A virgin girl
Became restless,
Indicating that
She would give birth.

Guma [1965:245]

The *koma* above may be interpreted as the height of vulgarity as Sotho culture today does not accept the use of nouns referring to people's private parts as in the *koma* above. Instead euphemistic forms have replaced them. However, this *koma* blatantly uses names referring to women's parts while it uses a relatively euphemistic noun for males. It might be argued that the vulgar language used in the *koma* was acceptable before the advent of Christianity in Lesotho. Makhisa [1979], who discusses female circumcision among the Sotho, also liberally mentions the vulgar words used to refer to people's private parts. As circumcision has been a part of Sotho life long before the arrival of Christianity among the Sotho people, we assume that the use of these words was not as offensive as it is today. On the other hand, the issue of the speaker's profile should also be considered, as we mentioned that one's geographical area and level of education are some of the defining factors in how one uses the language resources at one's disposal. Generally, the Sotho in Lesotho observe circumcision only if they are:

- (a) primary school dropouts or completely illiterate
- (b) rural dwellers
- (c) have circumcised parents

Hence circumcision is now associated with the educationally and geographically disadvantaged in Lesotho. This is however not necessarily the case among the South African Sotho. In the Western Cape, for instance, Sotho males go to initiation schools during the summer school break and go to tertiary institutions at the beginning of the academic year in their initiation graduation gear. This means that it would be strange for a professional from Maseru (the capital city of Lesotho) to send her son to initiation school. But if farmers from Quthing (a rural district) send their children for circumcision, nobody would raise an eyebrow. It is common to hear educated and Christian Sotho utter the following sentence:

286. *O ditlhapa tsa babolli.*

Her/his language is as vulgar as that of people from initiation schools. illustrating that maybe the language used in initiation schools differs in politeness levels from everyday Sotho which is heavily influenced by Christianity and Western cultures. A comparison of Sotho and English dictionaries highlights that in English the noun 'vagina' appears, while in Sotho there is only one dictionary which refers to people's private parts: Paroz [1961], but he says that great caution should be exercised in the use of *nnyo* 'vagina', although he does not say that it is rude. The recent promotion of the Ensler's play "The Vagina Monologues" also shows how these two cultures differ, it is still unthinkable for Sotho women to shout in pride about their private parts for the world to hear. Giannini [2001:2] says:

You'll find the v-word 128 times within the play's 106 pages, ... With the monologues, Ensler's use of language is more of an examination of what the word is and why people are afraid to say it.

Although we might say that the missionaries who wrote the first Sotho dictionaries were prescriptive enough not to include these 'vulgar' nouns, but even new dictionaries by Sotho lexicographers do not have such entries, indicating that their use is now unacceptable (cf. Matšela [1992] and Pitso [1997]).

The second *koma* is as follows:

*Motshetshe sesila
O a itahla-tahla,
O se o le ho monna:
Kgaola matenwana!
Monna o a hana.*

A woman is dirt;
She throws herself about
And is already on a man:
Remove your loin coverings!
A man refuses.

Guma [1993:121]

Both the *dikoma* above are teachings about sexual matters. The first is a description of the sexual act, while the second as Guma [1993:121] says, is a warning to the young initiates "to be careful in their dealings with women" as it is said that some are of loose morals and will try to seduce the young men. The lesson from the second *koma* is inexceptionable insofar as it teaches about possible sexual dangers that may face young men, but it gives a biased picture of the reality, of Sotho life as far as intimacy is concerned. The metaphor 'woman is dirt' does not only show prejudice towards women, it is also an insult to them, in that it depicts them as throwing themselves at uninterested men. The norm in

Sotho life is that intimacy is the right of males and therefore women would feel uncomfortable throwing themselves at men. The last line of this *koma* depicts men as strong-willed and not easy to tempt with sexual advances. So in short the message of this *koma* is understood as follows:

- (a) women are dirty; they seduce uninterested men
- (b) men are in control of their sex lives; they cannot be tempted easily
- (c) women are not allowed to initiate sex as they will be labelled dirty.

This argument is in line with the idiom *Mosadi o hana ka dikobo* 'A woman refuses to sleep with her husband', which means that men should have sex with their partners whenever they so wish. According to Sotho culture, a woman who initiates sex is generally understood to be loose in Sotho culture, and can be turned down just to prove that she is oversexed. When a husband refuses to sleep with his wife, nobody says *Monna o hana ka dikobo* 'A man refuses to sleep with his wife'. This is probably the case since in Sotho culture, husbands control their wives' sexuality as Women and Law in Lesotho [1997:35] also state:

It is the husband who controls the sexuality of the wife,
rendering her powerless to protect herself against
HIV/AIDS infection.

The third *koma* is about women's infertility, a topic we have discussed earlier in this thesis:

Nyopa di sa tswale;
E re di tlo tswala
Ho ke ho ne pula.

Barren women who do not reproduce
Before they can do so,
Rain must first fall. Guma [1993:128]

The use of the noun *nyopa* 'barren woman' has been discussed before in 3.2.2. It

shows bias towards women who are labelled barren, yet no medical tests have necessarily been carried out to prove that it is the woman and not the man who is infertile. The verb *tswala* 'give birth' is impolite as the verb is associated with animals in Sotho. For human beings the following polite forms are used: *pepa/ba le bana* 'give birth'. Hence the following sentences:

287. *Nku di tswala mariha.*

Sheep give birth in winter.

288. *Mpho o ilo pepa.*

Mpho has gone to have a baby.

However, in the perfect tense *tswala* 'give birth' can be used in an acceptable manner:

289. *Mpho o tswetse bana ba bane.*

Mpho has given birth to four children.

The use, therefore, of *tswala* 'give birth' in the last line of the first *koma* and lines 1 and 2 of the third *koma* above is not only vulgar, but it also degrades women by bringing them to the level of animals by referring to them as if talking about animals. The hyperbole used in the third *koma*, that before such women give birth rain must first fall, exaggerates the hopelessness of the said woman.

The *dikoma* are powerful educational tools in initiation schools; the initiates absorb whatever lesson they profess to teach without question. The influence of these songs is perhaps best illustrated by the relationship between a herdboys and his flock, this relationship forms part of the success, perhaps, of the edifying nature of *dikoma*. The following *koma* illustrates this point:

*Ho se be modisana
Ya dumellang tsabo di hapuwe
A eso hlajwe,
A phungwa ka kwebe,
Madi a keketla.*

Let there be no herdboys
Who allows his cattle to be captured
Before he is stabbed
And ripped open with a barbed spear,
And blood trickles down. Guma [1993:121]

This *koma*, together with other cultural lessons, has helped in the making of responsible Sotho herdboys who jealously nurture their flocks. In a similar manner, we infer that the first three *dikoma* cited above have a similar effect on the young men, who believe what is taught through them. The lesson results in the initiates choosing to disrespect women through both their language usage and their behaviour in general. In contemporary Sotho music, the use of language to demean women is popular, especially in Afro pop (popularly called *kwaito* in Southern Africa.) Although this musical genre does not form part of our thesis, it is worth mentioning, albeit in passing, as it is popular among the youth in this region and therefore capable of influencing their language practice. Chimhundu [1995:152] observes:

Although, unlike proverbs, the songs do not remain popular forever, some of the key images and recurrent lines in their lyrics continue to be used as popular sayings.

Thebe, a popular South African artist, became notorious because of his preference for obscenity in his music. Our efforts to get hold of some of his vulgar songs were in vain as the South African Broadcasting Corporation banned them because of their unpopularity among many parents. In some of these songs Thebe sings about women's private parts in a way that no Sotho or Tswana would think

possible on radio or television. These lyrics became popular among the youth, especially boys and young men, who saw them as a licence to insult young women. We now move our attention to traditional song accompanied by instruments.

5.2.1 Traditional song accompanied by instruments

Our focus is on traditional song accompanied by instruments. This genre is a descendant of *Difela tsa ditsamayanaha* 'Migrant workers' poetry'. Mokitimi [1998:1] comments that Sotho miners who travelled to the early mines composed the poetry as they took the long journeys on foot. This means that the poetry was more like meditation to the artist and traveller; it prevented him from worrying about the distance he was to cover. However, the modernised form, traditional song accompanied by instruments is now meant to serve different purposes, mainly economic, though the similarities cannot be overlooked. Traditional song is now highly commercialised, therefore the best artist today is generally considered to be the one who sells more records and not necessarily the one who produces high material of quality. Mokitimi and Phafoli [2001:233] comment as follows on this music:

Sotho accordion music is not just a form of entertainment but a mouthpiece through which Sotho artists express their feelings.

Some of the themes that are addressed in this music and the language that is used to address them illustrate language differentiation based on gender. On the artist's style Ngara [1982:16-17] comments that the artist chooses:

lexical items, grammatical structures and symbols to talk about his subject, to create characters, to bring about his theme.

It is linguistic aspects of traditional music such as those mentioned by Ngara that we study below.

5.2.1.1 The music of male artists/groups, themes and the language used to address them

We start this section with a chorus of a song by an artist called Mahase:

*Basadi ba tshwana le makotikoti a biri,
Hee, ba tshwana le makotikoti ho nna mona.*

Women are like beer cans,
Hey, they are just like beer cans to me.

This song was very popular in the 1980s. The artist uses a strong simile --“women are like beer cans”. The meaning of this chorus is that women are of no significant value to the artist. Like beer cans, he just disposes of them after using them. We use this example to show that the music of male artists or groups addresses issues that directly affect males; hence the artist above shows how he, and probably many other Sotho men, sees women. In their songs these men grapple with problems *inter alia*, that most artists have to live away from their families and homes in South Africa where the recording companies are based. Like the *difela* poems, the songs normally depict the artist as a hero who has overcome certain problems in life. However, this is usually achieved through the use of boastful lyrics. Kunene in Coplan [1990:255] says:

Lifela are most often egocentric, reflecting the male migrant's existential self-concept as a contemporary hero in traditional Sotho mould.

While Wells [1994:114] reiterates this point:

Like *lithoko tsa makoloane*, the *lifela* songs are self-praises, composed and performed by the same man.

Below we study some of the themes addressed in this genre and the language used to address them.

5.2.1.2 Masculine supremacy and the striving for survival

Semi-literate and illiterate rural artists populate the Sotho traditional music industry. This is largely due to the high unemployment rate in Lesotho, so these artists turn to music as a career to save themselves and their families from poverty. Because of the popularity of this industry today and the birth of many recording companies, are great rivals as every artist or group tries to be the best in this highly competitive world. However, talent alone is not enough to keep the artist in this industry. One major problem resulting from the competition in the industry is wars between the different artists and groups; wars that threaten the existence and survival of such performers. This means that the artist or group has to have some protection from their rivals. In the song '*Ha ke Tjhalentjhuwe*', by the group Seeiso this problem is addressed:

1. *Hee, helele Chakela*
2. *Nna ha ke tjhalentjhuwe,*
3. *Ke itse, Chakela*
4. *Ntse ke utlwa,*
5. *Bashanyana ba ntse ba re ba tla ntjhalentjha, Rethabile.*
6. *Ha ke motho wa difeisi,*
7. *Ha ke bapale ditebele, Sotho,*
8. *Ha ke Lewis,*
9. *Ha ke Mike Tyson,*
10. *Ha ke yena Dingane Thobela.*
- ...
11. *Ke itse le ke le jwetse bashanyana bana,*
12. *Ya ntsa nahana ho ntjhalentjha, Rethabile,*
13. *A jwetse ba ha habo,*
14. *Ba kene mokgatlo ona wa mpate-sheleng,*
15. *Ba kene 'society' sa lefu,*
16. *Ba patalle 'diundertaker', kolozi tsa mmoshara,*
17. *Tse ntsho, tsa 'disix-door'.*
18. *Joo mnanna, Mosotho,*

19. *Ke re, ha ke tjho jwatso, ke bua nnete,*
20. *Ha ke bue leshano,*
21. *Ba patalle lekase,*
22. *Ba tjheke mokoti,*
23. *Hobane nna Mosotho Chakela,*
24. *Moshanyana ha a le nkane ya dikgomo,*
25. *Ke a e ntsha.*
26. *Ke itse se nna le re 'Metsi a lekwa ka lere noka e tletse',*
27. *Ntse ke utlwa hore ntse le re le tlo itekela,*
28. *Le tla nyamela,*
29. *Le tla hlaha kotsi.*
30. *Noka bomadimabe ba yona,*
31. *Ha e nka motho,*
32. *E a mo tsolisa,*
33. *E ka ntsha borikgwe ya siya lebanta thekeng,*
34. *Ya ntsha dikausi ka hara dieta, Mosotho,*
35. *Joo, Mosotho Chakela.*

1. *Hee, helele, Chakela,*
2. *I cannot be challenged,*
3. *I said, Chakela,*
4. *I hear that*
5. *Boys are saying that they want to challenge me, Rethabile,*
6. *I don't fight with fists,*
7. *I don't play boxing, Mosotho,*
8. *I am not Lewis,*
9. *I am not Mike Tyson,*
10. *I am not even Dingane Thobela.*
- ...
11. *I said you should tell these boys,*
12. *Whoever is thinking of challenging me, Rethabile,*
13. *Should tell his relatives*
14. *To join a [funeral scheme],*
15. *To join a 'death society' (funeral scheme),*
16. *And pay for undertakers, mortuary vehicles,*
17. *The black ones with six doors.*
18. *Hey, Mosotho,*
19. *I say, when I say so, I tell the truth,*
20. *I am not telling a lie,*
21. *They should pay for a coffin,*
22. *And dig a grave*
23. *Because I, Mosotho Chakela,*
24. *When a boy is full of nonsense,*
25. *I take it out.*
26. *I said you should stop saying that you are trying your luck,*
27. *I hear that you are saying that you want to challenge me,*
28. *You will disappear,*
29. *You will be in trouble.*
30. *Unfortunately when one is drowned in a river,*

31. It undresses him,
32. It takes off his pants and leaves the belt on his waist,
33. It takes off his socks from the shoes, Mosotho,
34. Hey, Mosotho Chakela.

The language that the artist uses in this song is full of threats and self-praise of what he says he is capable of doing to his enemies. He uses two metaphors to highlight the trouble that his challengers will be in. The artist calls himself *noka* 'river', while he refers to his challenger as *moshanyana* 'boy'. To call another man a boy shows that the two men are not status equals. The artist makes it clear that his challenger is no match for him who is understandably a man and not a boy like the challenger. The metaphor 'river' signifies danger; the artist is dangerous and will devour his enemies just like a river does to those who drown in it.

In lines 6 to 10 of the song the sentences are in the negative. In the Sotho version there is repetition of the words "*Ha ke*" 'I am not/I don't' used to show that because the artist does not even box like some of the great boxers he mentions, he is a greater fighter than all of them. The language used portrays vivid images of the artist's ominous nature; those who wish to challenge him should do the following before the challenge:

- (a) join a funeral scheme
- (b) pay undertakers
- (c) pay for their coffins
- (d) dig themselves graves

The artist is saying, in unequivocal terms, that he will not hesitate to kill his enemies, hence the mention of the buying of coffins and digging of graves; the challengers will not survive fighting him. We appreciate that the rivalry in the

music industry in South Africa results in jealousies and fights among artists, however, we observe yet again that the use of this adversarial language is more common among men than women. Though women face similar problems, we have not come across this type of language in their music. It may be argued that they do not bother to threaten their rivals because women are at a physical disadvantage in fighting men, or that they would not normally wish to fight their female rivals. But they could still threaten their rivals because they do have some male support necessary in times of fights, but they do not seem to do so. Also this industry has produced some fearless women. Coplan [1994:171] says:

While their songs may not be termed *lifela*,
women shebeen singers are *litsamaea-naha*,
worldly travelers as intrepid as their men.

Coplan refers to the female artists as 'shebeen singers' because initially they performed mostly in sheebens in urban areas, but they have gone beyond shebeen performances only. One such fearless artist is Puseletso Seema. Her song '*Lemong sena ba dutse mashala*' 'This year they are sitting on hot coal/This year they are sad', is about the hardships that her daughters are enduring in their marriages. Being an old record, in a rapidly moving industry, it could not be found for analysis. However, in the performance, Seema has a scene where she confronts her sons-in-law, and she fights with her *molamu* 'stick' like Sotho men, much to the surprise of the audience. Even her language is powerful; it lacks the timidity that is generally observed in women's language especially when addressing men.

We now analyse a song '*Hake na Le Tsoalo*' (sic) 'I don't have fear' by the group *Sediba*. This song starts with a chorus followed by a *sefela*:

1. *Hei, hei, ha ke na letswalo, (x2)*
2. *La banna, letswalo,*
3. *Hei, hei, ha ke na letswalo,*
4. *La banna, letswalo,*
5. *Letswalo la banna, (x2)*
6. *Ha ke na letswalo la banna,*
7. *Letswalo la banna.*
- ...
8. *Hee, helele Chaena,*
9. *O bolelle Tankiso, ngwana mme 'Manyefolo,*
10. *Motlatsi ke poho,*
11. *Motlatsi ke poho ya lefatshe la ha Makhakhe*
12. *Poho ya monna ha e bewe,*
13. *Nna ke ipeile kgale-kgale.*

1. Hey, hey, I don't have any fear (x2)
2. Of men, fear,
3. Hey, hey, I don't have any fear
4. Of men, fear
5. Fear of men, fear (x2)
6. I don't have any fear of men,
7. Fear of men.
- ...
8. *Hei, helele, Chaena,*
9. Tell Tankiso, child of 'Manyefolo,
10. Motlatsi is a bull,
11. Motlatsi is a bull of the land of Makhakhe,
12. A man who is a bull is not put in a power position,
13. I put myself in this position a long time ago.

The lyrics of this song are clear. The artist says that he is not scared of other men.

We surmise that this message is directed to those who intend to challenge him; they are warned, just like in the previous song, about the artist's heroism in fights.

This metaphor is popularly used among the Sotho to refer to the said male quality.

It is repeated in three lines to emphasise the artist's strength and bravery. The artist ends his song by using a proverb that means that he has earned his status because of his fearlessness.

5.2.1.3 The changing Sotho values

In Sotho society, as in many African cultures, kinship ties are highly regarded. This means that even those who live in nuclear families still consult with their other relatives whenever they deem it necessary. It is this relationship that makes it easy for in-laws to volunteer to be involved in the running of nuclear families in the absence of the migrant head of that particular family. This involvement causes problems, sometimes, as the women who are usually left as heads of their nuclear families feel that their husbands' families are interfering in their family affairs. Tichagwa [1998:44] comments as follows on a similar practice in Zimbabwe:

Kinship ties remain strong, often giving in-laws
the right to involve themselves in the decision-
making in their sons' households.

In some families when the husband leaves for South Africa, his parents assume the husband role to his wife; they control her like her husband does, and in most cases they do so because they have their son's support. The song, '*Dingwetsi*' 'Daughters-in-law', by Sediba highlights the high expectations that society normally has of daughters-in-law. It starts with a chorus:

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| 1. <i>Dingwetsi tsa mehleng ena, ee,</i> | |
| 2. <i>Ha di na hlompho.</i> | (x2) |
| 3. <i>Di rwaka le batswadi ba rona,</i> | |
| 4. <i>Ha di na hlompho.</i> | (x2) |
| | [Chorus x2] |
| 5. <i>Di nwa jwala di a tawa,</i> | |
| 6. <i>Ha di na hlompho.</i> | (x2) |
| | (Both lines x2) |
| 1. Today's daughters-in-law, <i>ee,</i> | |
| 2. They have no respect. | (x2) |
| 3. They even insult our parents, | |
| 4. They have no respect. | (x2) |
| | [Chorus x2] |
| 5. They take alcohol and get drunk, | |
| 6. They have no respect. | (x2) |
| | (Both lines x2) |

The language used in this song illustrates the group's disappointment at the change in women's values and lives. Normally, a daughter-in-law respects her parents-in-law as if she were their child, and they on the other hand consider her their child, especially in relation to dictating terms to her. The use of the noun *dingwetsi* 'daughters-in-law' is synonymous with hardships for the woman as indicated in 4.3. More often than not this woman is treated unfairly by her in-laws simply because she is a *ngwetsi* 'daughter-in-law'. *Tawa* 'get drunk' is a verb that is culturally appropriate when used to refer to males, not females, and therefore its use in the song says the women have now invaded territory that is foreign to them. Insults (*ho rwaka*) are not encouraged in Sotho; however, when men insult other people, this is usually interpreted not to be as bad as when females insult other people, see 4.8.1.

Although in the song '*Dingwetsi*' 'Daughters-in-law' the group says that drinking alcohol is wrong, they say so because they are referring to women. Hence the group Seeiso says in their song '*Ke Hlaphola Hloho*' 'I am relaxing':

1. *Ha ke nwa jwala,*
2. *Ke mpa ke hlaphola hlooho,*
3. *Ha se hobane ke le letawa,*
4. *Hlee, banna ee,*
5. *Ho monate.* [Chorus x2]

...

6. *Jwala bona ha e le bona ha bo na phoso,*
7. *Phoso ke motho,*
8. *Aa, teng bo ntlela hantle,*
9. *O a bona biri, e be be yona,*
10. *Kapa boranti,*
11. *Aa, bo tla hantle.*

1. When I take alcohol,
2. I am just relaxing,
3. It is not because I am a drunk,

4. No, men, no,
5. It is fun. [Chorus x2]
- ...
6. There is nothing wrong with alcohol,
7. What is wrong is how one uses it,
8. No, I get fun from drinking,
9. Especially beer,
10. Or brandy,
11. No, I have fun.

In the song above, the male artist justifies his drinking by commenting that he uses alcohol because it is a relaxant and not because he is a drunk. He goes on to say “There is nothing wrong with alcohol, what is wrong is how one uses it.” These words make sense; it is acceptable for adults to drink alcohol, but problematic to abuse it. However, those outside the Sotho society might believe that the statement is applicable to all adults; but our appreciation of this culture makes us realise that the words are used to condone only men’s drinking habits. This is so because it is generally believed that a Sotho woman should not take alcoholic drinks, hence the song, ‘*Dingwetsi*’ ‘Daughters-in-law’, above rebukes female drinking. The artist indicates that beer and brandy are his favourite drinks. It is generally expected that even in cases where women do drink, hard stuff is not for them; they can drink wine. It is true that urban women enjoy some of the liberties that their rural counterparts do not. Some of the former are allowed to drink by their urban and educated husbands or partners. However, the women have limitations on what, where and when to drink. In most rural areas in Lesotho, women who choose to drink do so without their husbands’ or partners’ consent. Because of the high migration rate of rural men, rural women are on their own most of the time, hence they end up doing what their men disapprove of in their absence.

The next song to be analysed is entitled 'Nnyale' 'Marry me', sung by the group Ba khenne bomme which comprises three female and one male artist. A female artist starts the song by telling the male artist to marry her, and he responds:

1. *Ntate Maliehe Secoama,* [x2]
2. *Le re ke nyale e mong mosadi,*
3. *Ke mo nyale ke mo ise kae?*
4. *Ke nyetse,*
5. *E motle kgalala, motjhesi wa 'Mabafokeng,*
6. *Nyamatsana ke Khahliso,*
7. *Ke monna wa sekebekwa,*
8. *Ke theoha kwana mabalane kwana,*
9. *Ha ke siile motho, ke mo rata,*
10. *Motjhesi ee, wa 'Masechaba,*
11. *Moleleki moshanyana wa ka Mothibeli,*
12. *Wa heso monna wa Koro-koro,*
13. *Nkekebe ka nyala habedi, Khahliso,*
14. *Nka mpa ka fetoha lelwabe,*
15. *Gauteng mabaneng ke bone hore,*
16. *Ditsietsi di bakwa ke mathata,*
17. *Basadi ba makgoweng,*
18. *Hee, ntate Maliehe Secoama,*
19. *Monna towe wa ha Mohale,*
20. *Ke batla o k'o jwetse moshanyana wa ka,*
21. *Motho wa Mapoteng dingakeng,*
22. *Sajene ee,*
23. *Ditsietsi di bakwa ke mathata,*
24. *Gauteng mabaneng ke batlang,*
25. *O k'o hlonphe mosadi wa hao,*
26. *Mme 'Matefo kgalala,*
27. *Ya tla ya tswala lekako la mohlankana.*

1. Mr Maliehe Secoama (twice)
2. You say that I should take another wife,
3. Take her and do what with her?
4. I am married,
5. The beautiful one, 'Mabafokeng's lover,
6. Wild animal I am Khahliso,
7. I am a highwayman from far,
8. I come down from the plains afar,
9. When I have left a loved one,
10. The lover of 'Masechaba,
11. Moleleki my boy Mothibeli
12. The one from my home, from Koro-koro,
13. I can't marry a second wife, Khahliso,
14. I would rather be the most irresponsible person (adulterer),
15. Gauteng in the lights I have seen that

16. Troubles are caused by problems
17. Urban women
18. *Hee* Mr Maliehe Secoama
19. You man from Mohale's,
20. I want you to tell my boy
21. The person from Mapoteng where the doctors are,
22. Sergeant *ee*
23. Troubles are caused by problems,
24. Johannesburg in the lights what do I want,
25. Please respect your wife,
26. 'Matefo, the beautiful one
27. Who gave birth to a no nonsense young man.

It should be noted that Maliehe Secoama is the promoter of this group, and is frequently praised by the several groups he promotes. This song addresses one of the implications of migrancy on family life. Due to the long distances and time spent away from home, migrants end up having extra-marital affairs. The artist uses his language meticulously. He says "*Ke nyetse*" "I am married", instead of "*Ha ke batle ho o nyala*" "I don't want to marry you". The former statement has two connotations, namely that the man cannot get married as he already has a family, and secondly that the lover knows that her partner is unavailable for marriage, without being rude or insensitive to the addressee. Also by mentioning his wife, the man is indirectly communicating that he belongs to her and nobody else. Eventually he indicates, although now addressing other men, that he cannot get married again, and advises other men to respect their wives, "*O k'o hlonephe mosadi wa hao*" "Respect your wife". However, we deduce that for this man respecting a wife means having an affair as long as it is under cover since he states that in Johannesburg he will not get married but will rather be a *lelwabe* 'a highly irresponsible person'. This means that the man is willing to jump from lover to lover if suits his desires, but will not marry any of the women. The man's mention of "*Basadi ba makgoweng*" "Migrant women" is suggestive of the notion that he

does not trust migrant women although he has affairs with some of them. He is aware of some of the implications of such affairs. If the advice “*O ko hlonephe mosadi wa hao*” “Respect your wife” could be understood to mean “Be faithful to your partner” or “Condomise” then the HIV/AIDS pandemic that is referred to below could perhaps be eradicated:

Men away from their wives as migrant workers
are undoubtedly a serious problem as men often
bring home the virus.

Women and Law in Lesotho [1997:34]

In the last lines of the song the man states some of the reasons why he chooses not to marry his lover. He indicates that he has a beautiful wife at home and that the wife has born him a son he is proud of. Beauty and fertility are two attributes that feature highly in the description of an ideal woman among the Sotho.

5.2.2 The music of female artists/groups: themes and language used to address them

Female artists and groups are relatively new in the *difela* song industry, mainly because it was men who left Lesotho for jobs in South Africa. But as some men never returned, or women found themselves widowed or as single parents for other reasons, some joined the migrant labour system. This means that the music that these female artists sing shows the influence of *difela* sung by males, who are their predecessors in the said industry. But women’s music exhibits language practices and themes that are peculiar to them and therefore a deviation from traditional *difela* sung by men. On the existing similarities between the music of women and men Coplan [1990:255] comments:

Women's songs proclaim a resolute, individualistic, and adventurous spirit imitative of male itinerant heroism, and deliberately contrary to the stationary domestic commitment expected of adult women in Lesotho.

Below, we study how this dichotomy manifests itself in the language the female artists use to address themes that feature in their music.

5.2.2.1 The theme of survival

Puseletso Seema is one of the most popular artists in this genre. She has been in the music industry long enough to be termed the queen of *difela* songs. Like male artists, female artists are faced with problems such as living in a foreign land and the break-up of the families they have left behind. However, unlike male artists who generally say they look to themselves for their survival as portrayed in their songs, Seema says she looks up to God for her triumph during trying times. Her song '*Hara Mathata*' 'During Hardships', which starts with a chorus, has the following lyrics:

- | | |
|--|------|
| 1. <i>Hara mathata, ngwaneso,</i> | (x2) |
| 2. <i>Hara mathata, ke tshepile thapelo,</i> | (x4) |
| 3. <i>Le ha ho le thata, ke tshepile thapelo</i> | (x2) |
| 4. <i>Hee, ngwan'a lejakane, hee,</i> | |
| 5. <i>Ao hee, ngwan'a lejakane, hee,</i> | |
| 6. <i>Ke re le hara mathata ke tshepile thapelo.</i> | |
| ... | |
| 7. <i>Hei, helele helele, lerwele le kubile le lefubedu,</i> | |
| 8. <i>Ke bona eka ntwā e tla tsoha,</i> | |
| 9. <i>Le re ke reng, banana ba ha Mojela, ee,</i> | |
| 10. <i>Ke tla lwana ka moya ke hlōle mathata,</i> | |
| 11. <i>Ke ngwan'a lejakane, ke tshepile torone.</i> | |
| 1. During hardships, my sister/brother | (x2) |
| 2. During hardships, I rely on prayer, | (x4) |
| 3. When life is tough, I rely on prayer, | (x2) |
| 4. <i>Hee, a Christian's child, hee</i> | |
| 5. <i>Ao hee, a Christian's child, hee</i> | |

6. I say during hardships I rely on prayer.

...

7. *Hei, helele helele*, dust has risen, it is red,

8. I think a fight is about to break,

9. What do you say I should say, girls from Mojela's *ee*,

10. I will fight spiritually and overcome problems,

11. I am a Christian's child, I trust the throne.

In the first line of the song above, the artist uses the word *ngwaneso* 'my sister or brother'. This word is used to indicate solidarity; among women it signifies the sisterhood that they value (cf. Romaine [1994:117] and Holmes [1995:2].) The artist says that when times are tough she looks to God. The line "*Hara mathata ke tshepile thapelo*" 'During hardships I rely on prayer' is repeated four times to emphasise this trust in God. Though we indicated that Seema can fight like Sotho men do, she does not praise herself by singing about her fighting skills like her male counterparts do. Instead, the lyrics have been chosen to indicate that her faith is in God and not her own strength. When she refers to a fight that seems likely to break out, she reiterates her Christian background by mentioning two things; that she will fight a spiritual war; that she has Christian parents. Hence the song is heavily influenced by Christian teachings, mainly that God fights wars for Christians.

5.2.2.2 The changing status of women

Graham [1988:10] comments as follows on the issues addressed in African music today.

The changing position of women, the introduction of money, the value of education, the role of the military and the conflict in Southern Africa are only a few of the topics which have been discussed in hundreds of songs.

In this section we analyse songs which address the changing status of Sotho women. The first song is 'Nnyale' 'Marry me' by the group *Ba khenne bomme*.

1. *Nnyale, nnyale, nnyale, abuti,*
2. *Ha o sa nnyale ke a o nyala kgetlong lena,*
3. *Ha re ye,*
4. *Ho nyalwa banna.*

1. Marry me, marry me, marry me, big brother,
2. If you don't marry me , I marry you this time
3. Let us go,
4. Men are being married.

We have discussed that in Sotho marrying is something that a man does to a woman and not vice versa. In the lyrics above, the woman artist uses power language to address her male counterpart. She uses the imperative “*Nnyale*” “Marry me”, which she repeats several times to emphasise her message; she talks about her desire to marry her lover unequivocally. She uses yet another imperative “*Ha re ye*” “Let’s go” indicating that she considers herself as the man’s equal and, therefore, she can initiate marriage negotiations. The words may also be understood to imply that the woman wants the man to live with her in her own home; hence she ends her proposal by telling the man that “Men are being married”. This sentence is usually used when a man lives in his wife’s or lover’s home or if he is younger than his wife. The woman also uses a firm voice, and does not show the timidity that would be expected of a woman when addressing a topic that is traditionally a male domain. Although the man refuses to marry his lover, mainly by indicating that he has a wife at home, the woman has used language in a manner that would not traditionally be associated with her. This language pattern is suggestive of the change in female-male relationships and the changing status of women today. Reynolds [1998:301] comments as follows on this type of communication:

Mixed sex interaction in which women and men talk almost as equals is no longer taken as exceptional. There are many situations in which a woman talks as a superior to her male subordinates.

The second song below touches on two aspects of women's lives today; their financial independence; and their status as adults in their families. It is sung by the artist 'Mankoko and entitled '*Phaphalasa*' 'Babalas'. It starts with a chorus followed by a *sefela*:

1. *Phaphalasa, phaphalasa, phaphalasa*
2. *Nna ke tshwerwe ke phaphalasa,*
3. *Phaphalasa, phaphalasa, phaphalasa,*
4. *Nna ke tshwerwe ke phaphalasa,*
5. *Phaphalasa, phaphalasa, phaphalasa,*
6. *Nkadimeng tjelete, ke tshwerwe ke stlamatlama. (x2)*
7. *Phaphalasa, phaphalasa, phaphalasa,*
8. *Nkoloteleng jwala, ke tshwerwe ke stlamatlama, (x2)*
9. *Phaphalasa, phaphalasa.*

10. *Hee, ha o mpona ke le tjena, matala,*
11. *Ntate Thabo leshodu,*
12. *Ha o mpona ke le tjena, monna,*
13. *Hee, nna ke 'Mankoko ha ke batle jwala ba mahala,*
14. *Ha ke bo nwe jwala ba dikgarafu,*
15. *Nna ke ngwananyan 'a ho fela motseng moo ke dulang,*
16. *Thoteng ha Chaba le tsebe,*
17. *Hee, bo jele motho ke mo rata,*
18. *Bo jele 'Makholu,*
19. *Bo jele motho ke mo rata,*
20. *Moshanyana wa ka Tšolo*

- ...
21. *Ha le mpona ke le tjena banna, ba hole-hole,*
 22. *Ke mohetene, ngwan 'a 'Masekopo,*
 23. *Hee, le kereke ha ke e kene,*
 24. *Hee, nna ke 'Mankoko,*
 25. *Nna ke kena koriana.*

1. Babalas, babalas, babalas, ¹

2. I am hung over,

¹ 'Babalas' is a South African English word for "hangover"

3. Babalas, babalas, babalas,
4. I am hung over,
5. Babalas, babalas, babalas
6. Lend me money; I am hung over. (x2)
7. Babalas, babalas, babalas,
8. Give me some alcohol on credit; I am hung over. (x2)

9. Babala, babalas.

10. *Hee*, when you see me like this, old man
11. When you see like this, man
12. Thabo the thief, when you see me like this, man
13. *Hee*, I am 'Mankoko; I don't want free alcohol,
14. I don't take free alcohol,
15. I am the last-born in my village
16. At Chaba's you should know,
17. *Hee*, it (alcohol) ate my favourite person,
18. It ate 'Makholu
19. It ate my favourite person,
20. My boy Tšolo.

- ...

21. When you see me like this men, from afar,
22. I am a heathen, 'Masekopo's child,
23. I don't even attend church,
24. *Hee*, I am 'Mankoko
25. I attend the accordion.

The messages in this song can be summarised as follows: the artist says she drinks to the extent of being hung over the next day; she buys herself alcohol; she does not attend church as she attends to music-related business on Sundays. The use of the words "*Ke tshwerwe ke stlamatlama*" "I am hung over" proves not only that the artist drinks, but she is also not ashamed of it. The artist says she does not drink free alcohol, meaning that she has the financial independence that enables her to buy her own. Thirdly, she states that she does not attend church, because it clashes with her music-related issues. A Sotho woman is not expected to do any of the things that the artist boasts about -- we have previously indicated that if a woman drinks, it should be through her husband's or partner's permission. If she

does not attend church, it must be due to serious problems and not just attending music rehearsals or recordings. There is a general trend in both Lesotho and South Africa of churches having a high proportion of female congregants while a relatively small number of men is seen there. The understanding is that men have other things to do on Sundays, which can include attending matches in stadiums and queuing for the tickets. The artist is defiant of Sotho cultural expectations. The language she uses generally resembles that of men; it is adversarial and full of self-praise. For instance, she refers to a man she is addressing as *monna* ‘man’, and not *ntate* ‘father’, or *abuti* ‘big brother’, as is usually the case, giving the impression that they are equals. Again the artist repeats the phrase “*Nna ke Mankoko*” “I am ‘Mankoko’” thus communicating a self-praise that explains why she does not behave as expected; she is her own person. The pronoun *nna* ‘I/me’ also appears several times in the song reiterating the egotism that is usually observed in the music of males.

The song *Mme Matsale* ‘Mother-in-law’ by Bomme ba Maphutseng denounces the status of a Sotho woman as a child and property of her mother-in-law. The song became an instant hit, perhaps illustrating the feelings of many other women apart from the group that sings it. It starts with the following chorus followed by a *sefela*:

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1. <i>Mme matsale o hana ha ke nwa jwala,</i> | (x5) |
| 2. <i>Hei ya, hee ya, nna ke hodile,</i> | (x8) |
| 3. <i>Mme matsale o hana ha ke nwa jwala,</i> | (x10) |
| 4. <i>Hei ya, hee ya, nna ke hodile.</i> | (x8) |
| | |
| 1. My mother-in-law does not want me to take alcohol, | (x5) |
| 2. <i>Hei ya, hee ya,</i> I am an adult, | (x8) |
| 3. My mother-in-law does not want me to take alcohol, | (x10) |
| 4. <i>Hei ya, hee ya,</i> I am an adult. | (x8) |

The words in the chorus above are used to defy not only the said mother-in-law but also all unreasonable mothers-in-law. In this case the mother-in-law does not approve of her daughter-in-law's drinking. However, the latter tells her unequivocally that she drinks because she is an adult, "*Nna ke hodile*". This resistance to authority is not only about drinking, but draws attention to some of the aspects of Sotho life in which women have empowered themselves with freedom from the dictatorship of those who were traditionally in control of their lives. This use of language to negotiate new relationships with those around them, without mincing words, is perhaps the direct result of this newly acquired status of women as adults. In the song under study, the women are mainly empowered by two things, namely spending time away from controlling families and the finances they earn in the music industry. Bukenya [2001:33] comments:

Command of the spoken word means just that: power. Productive oracy would entail self-definition, self-assertion, negotiation of resolution of conflicts, claiming of rights and indictment of their violation.

It is observable from the last two songs above that some women use language in a manner that shows that they are in control of both their lives and their language. They are now brave enough to fight for their rightful place in society.

5.2.2.3 Migrant labour and women

Women remain with prime concern for family well-being and when they perceive that the men are unwilling or unable to do their traditional share, they take on a productive role in addition to their conventional reproductive one. Dyer [2001:20]

Although Sotho women joined the traditional music industry in South Africa, they sometimes indicate grief over the families, especially children, left behind. As

Dyer [ibid] observes, Sotho women normally resort to working away from home when they believe the men in their lives are failing to take care of their families, or in the absence of male breadwinners. The following song ‘*Ke siile mme*’ ‘I have left my mother’ by Bomme ba Maphutseng is a lament over the children left behind while the mother works in South Africa:

1. *Ke siile mme le bana hae* (x6)
2. *Hee, ke mo siile, le mathata,*
3. *Hee, a lefatshe, kwana hae.* (last 2 lines x4)
(chorus x2)

1. I have left my mother with my children at home, (x6)
2. *Hee*, I have left her with problems,
3. *Hee*, problems of life, there at home. (last 2 lines x4)
(chorus x2)

The artist uses words that have connotations of mourning from the first line. She grieves over her being far from her children who are being taken care of by her mother. This song has characteristics of the *kodiyamalla* ‘women’s lament’.

Guma [1993:109] comments as follows on this traditional song:

The dirge or lament, was sung after the death of a loved one. It seems to have been sung by women only – a widow who had lost her husband, or a girl who had lost a brother. Men do not seem to have indulged in lamentations, and never feature them as singers. They were sung about, and not vice versa. This is probably in keeping with the Sotho saying that a man is sheep[sic], he never cries:

In lines 2 and 3 of the song above, the grief is depicted vividly. The use of the word “*hee*”, which could roughly be translated as “Oh my God” in this context, illustrates the dichotomous life of a migrant mother. The word indicates that the woman had no choice but to leave the children in her mother’s care while she works for them far away. The third line explains why the woman hurts; her family is experiencing problems, the very predicament which forced her into migrancy.

This reminds us that when the migrant labour system started, it only involved the loss of able-bodied men to the South African mines, but lately women have also joined them, leaving families with children and the old men and women who take care of them. In some cases children live on their own while their parents are in South Africa.

We observe that some women's songs show a transition from traditional language patterns to contemporary and power language. This, we observe, is an indication of the changing lives, responsibilities and status of women. The songs, however, illustrate two main characteristics; their influence from the music of males; and their uniqueness as a genre addressing issues that are either not dealt with in the music of males, or those that are handled differently from women's perspective.

It is observed that because oral literature is accessible to both the educated and uneducated Sotho, both urban and rural, it is a powerful language tool which can influence people's repertoire, while at the same time it can be used as a medium of addressing issues that affect the modern Sotho.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Our argument in this thesis is that there is language differentiation based on gender in Sotho. We indicate that women and men use language differently in intra-gender communication, and to speak to people of a different sex. Chapter 1 gives a cultural background to the study of Sotho. In Chapter 2 we show that the structure of Sotho has gender-denoting aspects. For instance, the suffix *-ana* can be affixed to some male terms to coin nouns with two meanings: denoting femininity; and indicating the diminutive. Generally, male terms are generic while female-denoting ones are derived from them, mainly by adding feminine suffixes.

In this study we argue that there seems to be no linguistic justification for coining new nouns in Sotho with the male denoting prefix *ra-* resulting in examples such as the following:

290. *raditeksi* taxi owner

291. *rabenkele* shop owner

In Xhosa, for instance, the same nouns are coined with the female denoting prefix *no-*:

292. *noteksi* taxi owner

293. *novenkile* shop owner

In Sotho the argument might be that men owned taxis and shops long before women. However, even when the latter have joined these businesses, the language does not show this shift. The situation in South African Sotho is somewhat different from that in Lesotho. In the former country, women's rights, which are indeed human rights, are beginning to be respected, at least by the government.

This move has resulted in the transition to gender-free language, among other things. The following examples illustrate this point:

	Initial noun		Current noun	
294.	<i>raposo</i>	postman	<i>moposo</i>	post officer
295.	<i>rakgwebo</i>	businessman	<i>mohwebi</i>	business person

All the same, Sotho-speakers in both countries still have a long way to go in the daily use of gender-neutral language where necessary.

We show that the syntax of verbs relating to courtship and marriage is such that they passivise women subjects in sentences or place them as objects of actions carried out by men:

296. *Thabo o nyala Palesa.*

Thabo (male) marries Palesa (female.)

297. *Palesa o nyalwa ke Thabo.*

Palesa is being married by Thabo.

We indicate that language is not only a linguistic entity, but is also a cultural tool. This means that every language operates not only according to its linguistic rules, but also within its social and cultural context. Gender is one of the main variables in determining the type of language that one uses, though other factors are also important. These include, *inter alia*, class and status, so that although a woman would normally be a disadvantaged interlocutor in a male-female conversation, when a woman addresses a subordinate, she can use language in a way that compromises the male's status. But the overall observation is that women's lives and language revolve around their relationships with the men in their lives; fathers

initially; lovers; then husbands; and sons later in their lives. However, in all these relationships the woman is a disadvantaged interlocutor.

Sometimes nouns with gender as their only differentiating attribute have meanings which go beyond the single linguistic difference between them as in the case of *ngwanana* and *moshanyana* which mean 'girl' and 'boy', respectively. However, these two nouns also have certain cultural connotations; *boy* also means 'future heir' and is associated with stability and value to the family; while *girl* sometimes means trouble; hence, sentences such as *O tla re tlisetsa bana* 'She will bring us children born out of wedlock'. In other instances, lexical items which are linguistically gender-neutral, are endowed with gender bias by Sotho norms, for instance the noun *moloji* 'witch' is understood to refer to a woman, yet there is nothing about it that suggests any gender.

The study also shows that the majority of derogatory terms in Sotho are used to describe females and female characteristics more than they do males and their attributes. The various names which are given to a woman of 'loose' morals are an example. One such noun which is commonly used is *letekatse* 'whore'. In most cases when a woman misbehaves, she carries the stigma alone as no particular word will be used to refer to the man with whom she misbehaves.

We observed that there are two major groups of women: those who are content with their language and culture; and the group that opt for change in their language and culture. On this point Kaschula and Anthonissen [1995:48] comment that women will only propose changes in their language if they believe that it restrains

them. They indicate that not every woman wants to see this sort of change as some do not see their language compromising them in any manner.

Chapter 4 shows that language differentiation based on gender starts at an early age. Sotho girls and boys are raised and talked to differently; they also hear their parents address each other differently; eventually children mimic their parents. We indicate that Sothos generally raise their boys in preparation for heading families and working in public domains, while girls are domesticated early in their lives; their language reflects this differing socialisation. Girls are said to use language mainly to foster solidarity and sisterhood among themselves, while boys usually use their language to maintain individual power within a group. This does not mean that boys do not value group solidarity, but rather that even within the context of groups, each boy wants to be a leader so as to prove his seniority.

We show that upon marriage, women are instructed to observe the appropriate language patterns, as when addressing their husbands and in-laws. However, no set of rules is laid down for a man upon marriage, instead his in-laws are expected to respect him. Both the woman and her close relatives use the language of respect towards their in-laws; the woman respects the males by not calling them by their names and may avoid constructions similar to such names. Similarly, her close female relatives do not call her husband by his name but use his paedonymic. Sotho culture is such that married women and their families generally assume the subordinate status in relation to their in-laws.

In general, women and children hold subordinate positions to men. The latter use power language to address women and children, who in return use polite and respectful language. Men seem to use impolite and vulgar language more than their female counterparts. The frequently heard insult 'Your mother's private parts' is not only abominable, but it portrays a vivid picture of the attitude of the men who use it towards women; they have no respect for them. When said in Sotho, the tastelessness of the phrase is emphasised much more than in its translation. The sentence is heard among men of all ages, suggesting that, in general, men of all ages lack the respect that women on the whole have for them.

Thetela [2002:180] comments:

The Sesotho version of the term 'vagina', for example, is derogatory, and therefore taboo. Saying to someone, 'Your (mother's) vagina' (in Sesotho) is a very grave insult, with serious consequences for the sayer. This is despite the fact that among men, talk about female genitalia forms part of everyday discourse.

In the study we show how different strategies can be used to communicate the politeness of minors to their seniors, using the past tense to mean the present as in saying *Ke ne ke re bana ba tsamaye* 'I was saying that children should go' instead of just saying 'Children should go'. Choosing not to talk back to a male when there are signs that the male wishes to silence his subordinates is another important strategy.

On silence, we indicate that women are silenced mostly when men and other superordinates do not value their talk. But women sometimes choose silence as a communicative device when they do not wish to verbalise something. On the other hand, men generally choose silence of their own accord. At home men

usually talk less than women, on average, while they enjoy talk in public domains.

On the other hand, women enjoy talk at all times.

Our research also shows that Sotho women compliment each other and their children more often than men do. On the other hand, men seem to compliment female strangers and even use terms of endearments to address them. For instance Sotho men can say to a female stranger *Tjhee, o motle, moratuwa* 'Ooh, you are beautiful, darling', indicating that they are talking to a subordinate hence using language in a manner that a woman could not use towards a man.

Sothos generally believe that women engage in gossip. But research verifies that both men and women do partake in gossip. The major difference is in the naming of talk between men and women and not in the content of such talk, so that when men talk about the same topic as women do, the former's conversation is not labelled gossip, while that of the latter may well be.

In Chapter 5 a linguistic analysis of oral literature is carried out. Our study shows that proverbs and traditional song accompanied by instruments are the most popular literary genres among the Sotho. This is mainly so because the two genres are easily accessible. Proverbs are heard at home from competent speakers and therefore learned easily, but they also form part of the Sotho syllabus from primary school on. Traditional song accompanied by instruments is popular among the educated and uneducated, especially migrant workers, because it addresses topical issues and is sold even on the streets of most towns in Lesotho. The production of pirate tapes makes such tapes cheap and increases their availability, resulting in

their popularity. Many taxis and shops also play this music so that at the end of the day the vast majority of Sothos is exposed to it. We show that there is language differentiation based on gender in both these genres. The general picture seems to be that in proverbs with gender connotations, males and male attributes are depicted favourably, while women are mainly described positively only in relation to their roles as mothers. We argue that proverbs are a valuable communicative tool, but we also observe that speakers can abuse them to serve their individual demands. An example is the relatively new proverb *Monna ke mokopu, o a nama, mosadi ke khabetjhe, o a ipopa* 'A man is a pumpkin he spreads out; a woman is a cabbage, she wraps herself'. When used, both by men and women, it condones male immorality and the implications thereof are overlooked. The reality is that in the process of 'spreading out' some men also acquire and spread infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS which not only affect the cultural 'pumpkin', but also cause havoc among everybody around the men: legitimate partners; children, if any; the extended families; the community; the government that provides -- or fails to provide health services for the affected; and the nation at large. We do not mean that women are not responsible for the spread of these diseases, but rather that proverbs such as the one cited above somehow fail to address the reality of the type of sexual challenges that face humanity today.

Our research shows that in some Sotho songs women are portrayed in a degrading manner. These songs include some *dikoma* sung by male initiates and the traditional songs accompanied by instruments. In most of their songs, male artists use the adversarial language that typifies day-to-day male communication. For instance, in the song '*Ha ke na letswalo*' 'I have no fear' by the male group,

Sediba, the words 'I have no fear of other men' reiterate this confrontational message over and over to emphasise that the male is not scared of anything. Sometimes women and men address similar issues, but from different angles. In the song '*Dingwetsi*' 'Daughters-in-law' by Sediba, the group highlights their frustration and disappointment as men, at the drinking of modern daughters-in-law, their wives. On the other hand, Bomme ba Maphutseng, in their song '*Mme Matsale*' 'Mother-in-law', protest against mothers-in-law who are opposed to women's drinking. This means that in this example men use their music to tell society that women should not drink, while women tell the same society that they drink.

Although women are relatively new in the music industry, they are now a force to be reckoned with. However, having learned the music from male artists, the language that they use to express themselves has qualities of both male and female languages. In 'Mankoko's song *Phaphalasa* we see the adversarial and defiant use of language, just as we would expect from male artists:

*Ke mohetene, ngwan'a 'Masekopo,
Hee, le kereke ha ke e kene,
Hee, nna ke 'Mankoko,
Nna ke kena koriana.*

I am a heathen, 'Masekopo's child,
Hee, I don't even attend church
I am 'Mankoko,
I attend the accordion.

The artist uses the lyrics above to defy the cultural stereotype of the docile and churchgoing woman. The words portray the artist as rebellious, because she states that Sundays are her accordion days, and not meant for churchgoing. The artist indicates that she behaves as she does because she is not just any woman but

'Mankoko; she is her own person. However, in their song *Ke siile mme* 'I have left my mother', Bomme ba Maphutseng show a shift from the example cited above; they mourn the loss of their reproductive roles as a result of their families' predicaments.

We appreciate that the speakers of a language do not necessarily need to create and reconstruct their languages in a manner that will result in languages that are entirely gender-free. However, we propose that the language differentiation that currently oppresses the female gender should become a thing of the past. This is not to say that males and females should not speak differently, if that is their desire, or their socialisation, but such differences should not be such that they discriminate unfairly against any one gender. We believe that the language should keep pace with the changing lives of the Sotho. For instance, now that both women and men are in business, the noun *rakgwebo* 'businessman' should be replaced by the already existing noun *mohwebi* 'businessperson' in news bulletins and new literature so that at least children will acquire the new words. Parents can also encourage their children to use gender-free language by changing their own language use. We surmise that children who grow up in this environment will become models for the new trend. Parents and society as a whole can emphasise to the children, leading by example, that gender differences are simply biological and should not be used to disempower and disrespect people. In classrooms, teachers can highlight pupils' strong points without reference to their gender.

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