

The Inclusion of Cultural Meanings in Northern Sotho Dictionaries

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ABSTRACT Many Northern Sotho words in various dictionaries are treated not taking into account the cultural attributes with which they are associated. These dictionaries are often bilingual and were mostly compiled by non-native speakers of the language. Ziervogel and Mokgokong's *Comprehensive Northern Sotho Dictionary* (1975) seems to be the only dictionary that contains description of words in various denotations, including their cultural context. It explains meanings and gives cultural information about them. As nine of the eleven official languages in South Africa are African languages, new dictionaries which explain the words both in general and cultural terms are necessary. The cultural context of the words is important because the nature of the interaction between people and their culture is revealed.

INTRODUCTION

Dictionaries are and will remain the main sources of information about the general meanings of words. However, they do not always serve the needs of all different cultural groups. The ideas presented in them do not always reflect the opinions of all these groups, especially those living in Africa. Because these dictionaries do not often include information about the culture of these groups as reflected in the language, this omission should be rectified. African lexicographers, linguists and academics have a great responsibility to document fully and accurately information about the words as far as their cultural associations are concerned. Cultural knowledge must be presented for ready use in situations in which the society finds itself. Information in the dictionaries should also reflect the thought and behaviour of the African people.

History

The history of many dictionaries forms part and parcel of the culture of a specific people. Therefore, dictionaries should reflect not only the evolution and growth of the languages they record but also the development of the speech communities they serve. As many dictionaries of English have their roots in medieval European culture and its international language at that time, Latin, this article will contend that African languages stand to benefit considerably should they follow the example of English. Af-

ricans should start in the right direction by indicating the etymology of words. This direction will cause the works to reflect the growing interest in people of different cultures around the globe.

Jackson's (2002: 2) view is that bilingual dictionaries started during the first decade of the eleventh century when English pastors had to learn Latin so that they could conduct services, read the Bible and other theological texts. In those days, the Roman Church was using Latin as the medium of communication. When they were studying, English monks would write the English translation either above or below the Latin word. That was a way of trying to help other subsequent readers to learn. This is also validated by Watson (1976: 964) when stating that "the Roman Empire had brought urban civilization and a high degree of material prosperity as well as Roman law, the Latin language and the Christian religion to a large part of Europe." The focus was on English and Latin because Latin was regarded as the most prestige language in the European languages.

Dictionaries were compiled mostly by incompetent non-linguists in the very less researched indigenous languages. They were also compiled in the context of a very limited part played by the indigenous languages in the respective communities in which they are utilized. Chabata and Nkomo (2010: 75) assert that "it is important to bear in mind that several dictionaries were produced in these languages many years ago as part of missionaries' efforts to develop

the languages so that they could be used for evangelism. These were complemented by the colonial governments' efforts of standardizing and developing the languages, which were meant to educate the Africans so that they could easily be converted to European culture, which was anti-African." In these types of dictionaries, it is very simple to find the imbalances between languages, kinds of dictionaries and lexicographic systems. During the colonial period, dictionaries were compiled by missionaries who did not have sufficient linguistic competence in the African languages.

Present Study

Today reputable dictionaries are produced by trained staff, researchers, linguists, specialized editors and other skilled people. Computers are also employed in this regard. Lexicography is no longer a one-man enterprise as in the past. Some of the dictionaries of African languages are compiled by African lexicographers themselves. They are familiar with the language they deal with, in both speech and writing and in their historical, social, regional and stylistic varieties. According to Chabata and Nkomo (2010: 74), every lexicographer should be skilled in inferring the exact meaning of locutions in context, in differentiating the often subtle nuances of usage and grammar, in judging the relative probability of disputed derivations, in arranging the many-faceted aspects of the treated locutions, and in writing accurate, comprehensive, clear and economical definitions, including cultural ones. According to Jong and Peng (2007: 27-28), the present study of bilingual lexicography tries to form a triangular model of communication and views it as a strategy of intercultural communication between the lexicographer and the dictionary users.

Future Study

In future dictionaries, not only the general meanings of words should be given but also the cultural contexts of these words. The phonetic features of the words (pronunciation) should furthermore be indicated. Grammatical notations are needed for irregular verb forms, plurals and comparisons. Definitions in some of the existing dictionaries of African languages are often inadequate. These dictionaries must

be used as basis for revised editions. In Northern Sotho, for example, Ziervogel and Mokgong's *Comprehensive Northern Sotho Dictionary* (1975) is one of the very best dictionaries which should be considered for revision. The words in this dictionary are arranged according to their stems, which is an unfamiliar method for the users. It is, however, regarded as the only scientific method which can be used in Northern Sotho. This dictionary also includes the dialectal forms found in written sources and known to a large number of Northern Sotho speakers. Such dialectal forms are written in the official Northern Sotho orthography.

The cultural context of words forms the fundamental portion of the collective memory of African peoples. It is the basis of their spiritual and mental life because their philosophy of life is contained therein. Therefore, African peoples should be encouraged to preserve their culture. These cultural aspects cause every African language to be rich mostly in figurative speech. In Northern Sotho, for example, the noun *mpša* literally means 'a dog' but figuratively it means 'a low class person' or 'a person of coarse or low habits'. No matter the culture, to be referred to as 'a dog' is humiliating. To African people in particular, this is an insult. The same applies to the verb *khora* which literally means 'to be satisfied (with food)' but figuratively 'to be drunk'. When this verb is used in the sentence *o bolela ka mokgwa wo ka gore o khoše* which literally means 'you are talking like this because you are satisfied (with food) / your stomach is full', African people take this as an insult because figuratively the sentence means 'you are talking like this because you are drunk'.

WORDS AS SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATIONS OF CULTURE, TIME AND SITUATION

A bilingual dictionary presents the lexicon and phraseology of one language called the source language and translates these components into a second language referred to as the target language and vice versa. This process is known as reversibility. Mashamaite (2001) says that bilingual dictionaries between South African languages have been there for over three centuries. Only bidirectional dictionaries started making use of African languages as source language contrary of having Afrikaans and English

as source languages in ordinary bilingual dictionaries. *Oxford Pukuntšu ya Sekolo School Dictionary* and *Sesotho sa Leboa Pukuntšu Dictionary* are the examples of bidirectional dictionaries which use an indigenous language as a source language. In bidirectional dictionaries, lexicographers should apply reversibility to make sure that the users are satisfied although they may meet some challenges when compiling translation dictionaries. They should not choose equivalents randomly but research thoroughly which equivalents are used more often and are expected in the target language.

Dictionaries must indicate the kind and level of the culture of African people. Culture is conveyed and supported by the living language which actually becomes a bond between members of a particular group of people. The survival, welfare and growth of a language rely entirely on the speakers of that language. They also affect culture. If African people cherish and nourish it through dictionaries and other reference works like encyclopedias, they will keep it alive and it will develop. Giving the cultural usage of words in dictionaries is an intellectual investment.

When words are used in their contexts in dictionaries, the Northern Sotho-speaking people's common cultural practices, for example, will not only lead to their identification but also to reconstructions of historical processes and developments for their survival. Every person is unique and, therefore, learns in his/her own way, but what remains is that people of a specific group have one thing in common, that is, the culture with which they are associated. Language and culture are equally invested in the process of describing the meaning of the word. They form structures of interpreting historical and traditional systems of a group of people. Morris (1986: 94) continues to say:

Interpretation is a process of making or of finding meaning, and meaning is fundamentally — although not exclusively — an activity of language.

Many bilingual dictionaries only translate the words of one language into another, and other contexts of the same words are not considered. This damages the cultural usage of words. Many people, including the Northern Sotho speakers themselves, only know, for example, *lapa* as 'a courtyard' but in its cultural context it means 'a family made up of a man (husband), woman

(wife) and children'. Any grown-up man, even one over the age of forty or fifty will remain a boy as long as he is unmarried. He is not even allowed to talk during the traditional meetings called *dikgoro*. The reason is that a person who lacks the experience of running a family cannot contribute anything to the welfare of the village which is composed of many families. Also an unmarried woman, in other words, a woman who does not have a family of her own even if she may have children is not treated with the same respect as a married woman.

Usage of compound nouns made up of two or more words also play an important role in the culture of African people. In Northern Sotho culture, for example, *monnanna* does not mean *manman*, as it does in the literal translation, but it means 'a very good man'. Compound nouns with verbal heads where intransitive verbs are used with prepositional phrases are also relevant in this case. Prepositions *ka* and *le* may be used in the following examples:

Humans

- Class 1/2: *motla-ka-kgomo* (*batla-ka-kgomo*): It literally means 'a person who comes on account of a cow', but it culturally means 'a married woman'. Derivation: *tla* (come, intransitive verb), *ka* (by/with, instrumental preposition), *kgomo* (cl. 9, cow). Locative: *Motla-ka-kgomong*. Diminutive: *Motla-ka-kgongwana*.
- Class 7/8: *sehlwa-le-banenyana* (*dihlwa-le-banenyana*): It literally means 'one who is fond of staying with girls', but it culturally means 'a lazy herdboy'. Derivation: *hlwa* (spend the day, intransitive verb), *le* (with, associative preposition), *banenyana* (cl. 2, girls). Locative: *Sehlwa-le-baneny-aneng*. Diminutive: *Sehlwa-le-baneny-ananyana*.

Compound nouns like these two examples do not appear in many Northern Sotho dictionaries. They, like other nouns, have singular and plural forms and consist of three different parts of speech. These are in the form of the perfect participial clauses as shown in the following example:

Human

- Class 1a/2a: *Mafihla-di-sotšwe* (*Bomafihla-di-sotšwe*) (One who always arrives when

the food is ready/when the food has been dished out). Derivation: *fihla* (arrive, intransitive verb), *di* (them/they, objectival concord), *sotšwe* (dished out/served up, perfective verb). Locative: No locative suffix. Diminutive: *Mafihla-di-sotšwenyana*.

Culture

- Class 3/4: *molwa-o-dutše* (*melwa-o-dutše*): It literally means ‘fight while seated’ but it culturally means ‘medicine believed to cause quarrels and unrest among tribes’. Derivation: *lwa* (fight, intransitive verb), *o* (Agr, S of cl. 3), *dutše* (seated, perfective verb). Locative: *Molweng-o-dutše*. Diminutive: *Molwa-o-dutšenyana*.

Artifact

- Class 7/8: *Sehlwa-se-eme* (*Dihlwa-di-eme*) (Statue). Derivation: *hlwa* (spend the day/remain for a time, intransitive verb), *se* (it, subjectival concord), *eme* (stood, perfective verb). Locative: *Sehlweng-se-eme*. Diminutive: *Sehlwa-se-emenyana*.

The compound nouns discussed above are regarded as a summary of the experiences of the Northern Sotho speaking-people. These experiences are epitomized in these compounds which form part of their heritage and which should therefore always be nurtured and guarded. The recording of words such as these in dictionaries will be a conscious effort to standardize the Northern Sotho language. The cultural content or imagery of these words is solely derived from the environment from which the speakers of the language come. The summarized expressions have their origin in historical experiences. Their usage again is an indication of the mastery of a language and its underlying culture.

Because of an inadequate knowledge and a biased perception of African culture, the cultural dimension of words is sometimes treated unsatisfactorily in dictionaries of African languages. For example, the literal translation of the word *ngaka* is ‘doctor’ which in some bilingual dictionaries is given as ‘witch doctor’ (Ziervogel and Mokgokong 1961: 110). This clearly illustrates the misconception and misrepresentation of African culture which is some-

times found in dictionaries. Africans themselves opted to use the English compound noun ‘traditional doctor/healer’ which is on par with ‘medical practitioner’. This is also applied in the word *lelopo*. Ziervogel and Mokgokong (1975: 777) literally translate the word as ‘evil spirit’ which is an insult to the Northern Sotho people. They are comfortable if it is translated as the ‘spirit sent by ancestor’, which culturally indicates that there is a communication between the ancestor and the living person. The other literal translation of the word *mokome* is ‘prophet’, but in some bilingual dictionaries it is given as ‘witch hunter’ (Ndlovu 2012: 159). The derogatory philosophy used by English to translate Northern Sotho concepts has a negative impact on the Northern Sotho people. This false philosophy is destructive as it makes people believe that the two cultures cannot be equal. In this case, the English culture is superior while the Northern Sotho culture is inferior. The main reason may be that all the foreign concepts are in English and these concepts are introduced through colonialism and plunder Northern Sotho technology. Culture is, therefore, unique to each and every community. Cohen (1974: 9-10) reports that culture, through the interpretation of words, is not only an abstract but also a very real concept for a particular group. This idea is supported by Linton (1936: 848) who says that there is a basic uniformity in the personality organizations of all individuals who are of the same cultural group.

The dictionary users need active guidance from the lexicographers informing them that a given word is the appropriate one for a specific technical context. A form of giving unambiguous prescription of a word is required. Some lexicographers still often make use of a prescriptive approach in bilingual dictionaries by giving only one translation equivalent for a given word instead of giving other translation equivalents with examples. The dictionary users cannot have a problem of deciding on a translation equivalent since the lexicographers have already made a decision. If the lexicographers employ less prescriptive approach and give quite a number of translation equivalents in the dictionary article, the experts will have sufficient information of the subject field to be able to decide which translation equivalent to choose for a specific context or text. Lay people, in this case, will need help in the form of glosses, notes or labels

so that they can decide on the correct equivalent. Words of languages which have cultural meanings should be explained in different ways. The Northern Sotho language, for instance, has a wide range of traditional medical and health care concepts. It is very important, in dictionaries dealing with this field that the traditional variants should be provided along with the official Western concepts. In most cases, patients who consult medical doctors use traditional concepts to explain their problems. When many Northern Sotho speaking-people have abdominal pains, for example, they say 'they have been beaten by a snake'. Doctors who did not understand the cultural meaning treated such patients with snake bite serum which never solved the problem. This means the dictionary should not only provide the recommended concept, but also indicate the prevailing variant. When a dictionary is compiled, it must be born in mind that its greatest value is to give access to the full resources of a language and should be seen as a source of information that will enhance knowledge of the mother-tongue.

African cultures, including the Northern Sotho one, are known to be independent in the fields of health and medicine. Afrika (1993: 21) advances that "ancient African holistic health science produced many healing instruments. These instruments required the usage of higher developed psychic and spiritual energy for their proper use. The names of the instruments have been distorted and acculturated by Europeans". Africans, including the Northern Sotho people, mastered their own technology and developed it. Afrika (1993: 12) supports the existence of technology in the African continent before the coming of the White people by stating that "African civilization did not and has not lacked knowledge. Ancient Africa was the first civilization that used its vast knowledge base to master technology and holistic medicine". Africans have their own cultural pride and each ethnic group possesses its cultural heritage which has not been completely wiped out by the advent of colonialism. Every community has a living traditional culture which governs its people. The culture of every community is inculcated into its members though informal education. Smith and Fischer (1970: 32) point out that:

No evidence has appeared to challenge the primacy of culture as an explanation for the differences in behaviour that distinguish social groups from one another.

The description of words in dictionaries will lead to the comparative study of African cultures. The indisputable fact which will be revealed by such a study will be that cultures have some features in common, but at the same time each culture is, to a certain extent, different from every other one. It solely depends on the group's context.

Suffixes

Suffixes also reveal culture. When they are affixed to nouns, there is a change in meaning. In Northern Sotho, for example, the noun *batho* changes its meaning when joined to the suffix *-ng* as in *bathong*. *Bathong* literally means 'to the people' while it culturally means 'to the traditional doctors/healers'. In other words, the noun *batho* which can be translated as 'people' in English becomes locativised when it is used with the suffix *-ng*.

Another suffix is the diminutive *-ana*. It can have the following two cultural expressions:

— *It Can Express Derision*

In Northern Sotho, for example, when the noun *lehodu* (thief) is affixed to *-ana*, the word becomes *lehotšwana* (small thief). This word expresses derision but does not refer to the smallness of the thief. The thief here is despised because of his/her behaviour.

— *It Can Express Admiration*

When the adjectival stem *-botse* (beautiful), for example, is affixed to the diminutive *-ana*, the word becomes *botsana*. *Botsana* here expresses admiration but does not refer to the smallness of the beauty.

— *It Can Express Gender*

It is important to note that the diminutive suffix *-ana* can only denote female gender with regard to animals when used with adjectives which express colour. The diminutive suffix *-ana* is suffixed to adjective stems to express feminine gender as in the words *swana* (black cow) and *tilwana* (brown spotted female dog). In this case, the diminutive has been suffixed to *ntsho* (black ox or bull) and *tilo* (brown spotted male). In the examples given above, it is obvious that

the adjective stems are *-so* (black) and *-tilo* (brown spotted) respectively. In the latter example, it must be noted that *ntsho* falls away when *-ana* is suffixed to the adjective that denotes black ox or bull. The word that falls off is replaced by *-s*.

The suffix *-gadi* can also be used to express female gender although it is found with a very limited number of noun stems. The examples of the words that are very common are *kgošigadi* (queen/female chief) and *morutišigadi* (female teacher) while the opposites are *kgoši* (king/ chief) and *morutiši* (male teacher).

Meaning of Words

Finding meanings of English and Northern Sotho equivalents for each basic word is not always possible. A meaning can sometimes only be given by way of explanation simply because an English or Northern Sotho equivalent does not always exist. It may even be necessary to give a short ethnographic explanation of the background in order to understand a word in its context. The following examples are some of the words which many people are familiar with:

Northern Sotho-English

Kgekgetha (verb) – strike hard repeatedly (as when killing a snake) (Ziervogel and Mokgokong 1975: 623).

Molatša (noun) – porridge left over from the previous day (Ziervogel and Mokgokong 1975: 739).

Podišahlaka (noun) – first rain that falls after reaping (Ziervogel and Mokgokong 1975: 973).

Theri (noun) – species of plant whose powder is taken by a traditional doctor to stimulate his/her memory (Ziervogel and Mokgokong 1975: 1335).

Thophi (noun) – porridge made from pumpkin (Ziervogel and Mokgokong 1975: 1355).

Tsurr (ideophone) – to come down in torrents or squirt down (e.g., sound made by milk when milked into a pail) (Ziervogel and Mokgokong 1975: 1447).

Nxanxae (interjection) – Sorry (expression of sympathy) (Lombard, van Wyk and Mokgokong 1985: 183)

When a lexicographer comes across the words mentioned above when compiling a dic-

tionary, it will be a very serious challenge to translate them into English on the basis that they do not exist in this language. Because of the difference in terms of languages and cultures, it becomes extremely difficult to translate items in bilingual dictionaries, more especially in South Africa. Words indicated above are cultural based terms. Mpofu (2001: 243) emphasizes this point by definition when saying that the problem where functionality relevant feature in a source language does not exist in the target language is referred to as cultural untranslatability. In actual fact, some English and Northern Sotho words are not necessarily equivalents as indicated in the following example:

English-Northern Sotho

Court (noun) – *lekgotla* (a place where cases are heard), *ferea* (to ask to make love (as when a man talks to a woman)) (Kriel 2009: 210).

Yeast (noun) – *mohlodi* (taste), *mohlaba* (germinated corn ground and used in making beer (Ziervogel and Mokgokong 1975: 298).

Good (adjective) – *loka* (right), *botse* (beautiful) (Kriel 2009: 238).

Difficulty (noun) – *bothata* (hard), *boima* (heavy), *molato* (case) (Ziervogel and Mokgokong 1961: 259).

Idiom (noun) – *seka* (idiom), *seema* (proverb) (Ziervogel and Mokgokong 1961: 269).

Rise (verb) – *tsoga* (wake up), *emelela* (stand up), *kokomoga* (swell) (Ziervogel and Mokgokong 1961: 285).

Sentence (noun) – *kahlolo* (judgement), *lefoko* (phrase) (Ziervogel and Mokgokong 1961: 286).

A good dictionary should describe the meaning of the words and illustrate how they are used in a context. The following example bears the testimony:

kgoro noun **1.** a door or other opening by which one can enter a building or other place: \diamond *to be refused entrance.* **2.** a place where justice is administered: \diamond *the court dismissed all the charges against them because of the lack of evidence.* **3.** a department at the institution of higher learning: \diamond *he is heading the Department of Anthropology at the University of Venda.* **4.** a Department of State: \diamond *she was elected as the Deputy Minister in the Department of Health.* Culturally, it may mean **5.** a

social group with a common ancestor, usually under patriarchal control: *◇ they met a member of Dithamaga clan* or **6.** a meeting place of men: *◇ men gathered in the chief's kraal to discuss about the duties of members of the royal family and to perform communal religious rites.*

This is an important point which should be taken into consideration when compiling dictionaries. If they are properly compiled, they will be regarded as reliable sources of the communities with whose words they deal. The cultural interpretation of every word will show that in traditional African life, the concept of 'community' is extremely important and has a strong bearing on the expression of traditional African religion. This will again make people from other cultural groups aware of the existence of an African religion which is still often rejected. Steyn and Motshabi (1996: 57) assert:

Misinterpretations of the beliefs and practices of African people have persisted, due to what appears to be continuing lack of accurate knowledge of what African world view and religion are all about. Works written by some Western scholars even in the 1980's describe the beliefs and practices of African people in terms offensive to African readers, to say the least.

Before the modern system of education was introduced in South Africa, oral folk narratives and initiation schools were used to transfer moral education from one generation to the next. Young people were indirectly taught, among other things, to respect life, share with others and value their culture. Through these different activities, they were taught from an early age to differentiate between good and evil. The young people grew into responsible individuals who respected others through the inculcation of the culture of the community. With the introduction of Christianity and modern system of education, the young people were introduced to a foreign culture. They were actually forced to adopt this culture due to the fact that it was considered better than their own. Rich (2008: 78) observed that the globalizing technology and many different concepts spread among the African people, including the Northern Sotho community, by Western colonial administrators and Christian missionaries proved to be a threat to their distinctive spiritual identity. The idea above is supported by Sepota (2000: 199-200) when he says that:

Christianity and Western culture have been eroding African culture to such an extent that

most Africans today find themselves in a dilemma. Ever since the arrival of the missionaries and their contact with black Africa, most blacks have tended to believe that everything said and practised by Christians is perfect and unconditionally acceptable. This maladjusted way of thinking has done and is still doing irreparable damage to African culture.

Cultural experiences of Black South Africans have been undervalued as having little to contribute to the future. Their voices have largely been unheard and their stories left untold. Because of this, some tried to adopt other cultures but later returned to their own. Steyn and Motshabi (1996: 62) go further by stating that:

Some African people, who were at one time converted to Christianity and Islam, have failed to find meaning in them and have gone back to traditional beliefs and practices.

According to them, the concept 'meaning' affects people and their culture. It is impossible to belong to two cultures at the same time. Northern Sotho speaking-people know that the verb *tsoga*, for example, has the literal meaning 'to wake up', to Christians it has the Biblical meaning 'to rise from the dead' and culturally it means 'to practice witchcraft'. The last two are conflicting and confusing ideas. The other cultural meaning refers to 'a shopkeeper who was bankrupt but is now prosperous again. Another popular example can be found in the noun '*moya*' which scientifically is known as 'the atmosphere, the mixture of gases surrounding the earth which all people and land animals breath' and Biblically is 'the Holy Spirit who is the third person of the Trinity' whereas it culturally means 'the spirit that comes from the death of someone's body to protect the living person from any harm which may cause his/her death'. This is referred to as the ancestor spirit. Mönnig (1967: 54) adds by saying that "the ancestor spirits have, on their part, unlimited powers over the lives of the living. There are no restrictions to either the chastisement or the blessings that they can confer on their descendants. They have power over life and death, over sickness and health, and over poverty and prosperity. The Pedi say that nothing is impossible for the ancestor spirits".

It is the culture of a society that determines the patterns of the environment in which the language can occur. The cultural usage of every word is marked by a certain type of behaviour.

This usage should be seen as symbolic of tradition forming an indefinite continuum from the past to the future. Dictionaries must, therefore, provide Africans with their cultural and historical backgrounds. In Northern Sotho, for example, many different cultural and historical restorations such as good habits and certain accepted behavioural patterns make the Northern Sotho people a respected community. The restoration of behaviour is part of everyday personal interaction through which people are positively influenced. Chr  achain (1992: 48) emphasizes that present-day people must be inspired to play an active part in determining the course of their history. When culture can be recorded in dictionaries, it will not only be concerned with the inner life of individuals, but will also mirror their outside world. Through culture in dictionaries, the identity memory can be the source for developing the tradition of every community. Jonas and de Beer (1973: 20) also accept that the universal cultural pattern is closely connected to the inborn ability of man and his environment. Words and their cultural explanations will, therefore, be regarded as public aids through which African people can learn. They will form an institution where cultural lessons are given.

VALUES OF CULTURAL MEANINGS IN DICTIONARIES

Words explained from their cultural point of view form part and parcel of African people's lives which emanate from emotions, attitudes, values, beliefs, perceptions and the entire system of feeling and thought. Such explanations supply the Northern Sotho-speaking people in particular and African people in general, with communication techniques. This type of literature helps people to grow. Roberts (2010: 2) continues to say that "it links us with the broader cultural, philosophic and religious world of which we are part. It helps us to develop mature sensibility and compassion for the condition of all living things — human, animal, and vegetable. It exercises our emotions through interest, concern, tension, excitement, hope, fear, regret, laughter, and sympathy. It enables us to develop a perceptive on events occurring locally and globally, and thereby it gives us understanding and control. It is one of the shaping influences of life.

The dictionary that includes the cultural meanings is like a house which has a great number of windows. As people look out through each window, they see a different part of the world. This clearly shows that as they learn about the world, they learn about themselves. The dictionary can highlight the significance of culture in their daily lives and what they can do to ensure a brighter future for themselves. This is a way to boost the communities' growth. The cultural meanings form a basis of what we may call 'traditional school education'. They supply people with the necessary knowledge and facts that help them in their daily activities. By acquiring necessary knowledge and facts, people automatically become good and honest. They start to realize things which surround them at home and in their environment. This results in a feeling of confidence and success instead of the feeling of confusion and defeat. In many instances, these initial experiences can be decisive for their whole lives. Their culture, which is assimilated into a structural unit, deals with material world that surrounds them.

In the olden days, culture was transferred to children in a group by oral art which is a highly differentiated form. During the process, there was no classification of the less gifted and highly gifted children. This implies that their own individual capabilities were ignored even if it is a well-known fact that large individual differences exist between people. The value here is that children are assisted to develop as a group. The uses of culture make us human because they influence our actions which take place in the real life situations. In the dictionary, the author as an important person responsible for communicating culture from generation to generation can reflect every aspect of the life of the people, that is, the way they live and interact with other members of the community (Dreeszen 1998: 7). For such a dictionary to be credible to the readers, the authors should know intensively about the culture of the people that they are writing about because every community does things in its own way. This shows that the authors do not write about the foreign events, but about the ones which take place in their own environment.

The inclusion of cultural meanings can inspire in the Northern Sotho people a determination to achieve solidarity and prompts them to seek unity for the sake of their own survival. All aspects of cultural life can be addressed in a

systematic and integrated manner. This inclusion can help the academics, including the lexicographers, to assess the community needs and develop a plan of action that directs arts and cultural resources to address those needs. When harnessed to strategic objectives of government, this inclusion can help the academics to tackle social exclusion, contribute to moral regeneration, build safer community, improve community well being and encourage healthier lifestyles. Katsioloudes (2008: 15) adds by saying that “to thrive and survive in the twenty first century, individuals and institutions must incorporate cultural sensitivity and skills into their relations, strategies and structure”. Where “cultural identity” is emphasized, it is tied up with promotion of tourism, and in this regard culture becomes only a means to an end. Through the interpretation of the cultural meaning, the young people learn roles and norms of the community. If the word is not interpreted in various ways and/or not linked with the culture of the community, people will find it very difficult to understand its meaning. Knowledge about their culture will definitely help them in identifying themselves. It is the essential part of the process by which identity differentiates itself from other social groups. Every aspect of adult life is shaped by culture. In this way, culture is seen as a reflection of the norms that identify a national character. Cultural planning is, therefore, important in order to establish a national “common culture” among the multi-racial citizens of South Africa (Rafapa 2009: 76). The preservation of culture may reinforce the element of humaneness of our society in particular and in the county at large.

CONCLUSION

Although the role of the African parent in transmitting culture by means of oral folk narrative has been reduced, this must not be the end of it. This type of literature can be a very important instrument in transmitting culture to future generations. The African parent should, therefore, adapt to the times and utilise the modern education system to transmit culture. As oral folk stories were meant for all children in a society, this type of written literature is meant to be read by all kinds of people. African intellectuals should play an important role in upgrading existing dictionaries and this will necessitate scientific research.

African intellectuals themselves should assume the responsibility for recording this valuable traditional heritage because it is gradually wiped out. They should never sacrifice what is theirs. It is important to preserve and unite it with the modern world. Culture should be preserved and transmitted from one generation to the next in that it protects the norms and values of a society. If it is not preserved, it will obviously degenerate. It is compared to a house that protects its inhabitants from nature. It is a house which they continually renovate by human laws which become part of nature.

The education system nowadays scarcely caters for the transmission of African culture from one generation to the next. Even if the folk narrative is taught at some schools, teachers and learners do not take the messages included in the narrative seriously on the basis that their focus is only on examinations. In this case, the examination is more important than the messages. As times change, African young people acquire a foreign culture which they practice incorrectly due to the fact that they do not understand it. The undisputed fact is that this has resulted in a very huge decline in morality among African societies. There are very few people these days that transmit culture to many others that ignore it and this has hampered knowledge dissemination to those less privileged. This situation breeds what experts regard as “top-down” or “banking concept” of information instead of the preferred “bottom-up” mutual concept of information sharing”. This is indeed a huge waste of the potential of our youth and must be tackled as a matter of urgency. The use of this type of a dictionary is one way of tackling this pressing issue head on. Culture has a much larger footprint in the country than any of the other education and training systems. There is absolutely no excuse for people who say that they do not understand what their culture is all about and what the priorities of their country should be. It is a very serious problem because this involves loss of life. The adherence of one’s culture means long life.

There has been cultural decay and degeneration not only in the Northern Sotho community, but in different communities in South Africa. This cultural decay has led to a decline in morality. As responsible citizens of these communities, academics should try by all means to fight this decline. One of the ways of arresting the indicated decline is the use of dictionaries which

include cultural meanings. Such dictionaries can bring about cultural liberation in South Africa. Indubitably, this should provide the people of South Africa with a sense of belonging.

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