

AFL1504

Department of African Languages

**LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS
ACQUISITION IN AN AFRICAN LANGUAGE II**

GUIDE FOR 7 LANGUAGES

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA
PRETORIA**

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LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

We would like to extend a warm word of welcome to you as we introduce you to some aspects of the literature of the African languages! Not only will you get to know more about African literature, but in the process you will also be able to extend your knowledge of the grammar of the languages and continue to develop your speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. In addition to this, you will gain insight into some matters of cultural interest and increase your understanding of the African language speakers and their way of life. This is especially important for your day-to-day interaction with Africans. Remember that you have to read this study guide together with the CD-ROM where you will find information which is language specific. In other words, if you have chosen to learn more about Northern Sotho, you should select Northern Sotho on the CD-ROM and there you will find all the applications for your selected language.

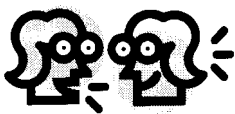
LEARNING OUTCOMES



After the completion of this module you should be able to:

- read a Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga text and grasp its overall contents, without necessarily knowing the meaning of every word;
- understand an increased number of vocabulary items;
- demonstrate insight into a number of literary genres;
- recognise grammatical constructions, without necessarily being able to analyse and explain them;
- give the content of Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga passages in your own words;
- think and write creatively in Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga;
- answer content-based questions on Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga texts;
- demonstrate a greater cultural awareness of the Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga speaking community.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION



What is your greatest ambition as a language learner? Think about it for a moment ... Is it just to get to know the rules of a language as an intellectual exercise or would you like to aim for something more?

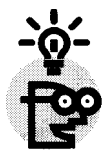
Imagine a person who studies the manual of a car for years until he/she knows everything about its performance off by heart, but he/she never gets to driving the car to experience its performance for him-/herself. If I were this person, I would certainly feel very unfulfilled and disappointed. In the same way, the basic grammatical equipment which you have acquired in the first module of the beginner's course will be of no practical value and bring you no sense of satisfaction, unless you constantly put it to use.

As you develop a habit of applying your acquired knowledge, you will eventually be rewarded in that you will be able to communicate effectively and express your ideas in the new language. As a non-mother tongue speaker, I remember the thrill of actually beginning to understand what an African speaker was saying in his/her language.

This experience can also be yours and it will be worth all the hard work! The road to success may be a long one, but you have already achieved much by completing the first module. All that remains now is dedication, perseverance and practice, practice, practice.

In this module you will have many opportunities of improving your reading skills, demonstrating your comprehension of Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga texts, writing creatively and translating passages. Sharpen your listening skills and practise the correct pronunciation as you listen to and repeat the recorded passages on your CD-ROMs. As you listen, speak, read and write, your vocabulary will be extended and you will find it increasingly easy to communicate with a mother-tongue speaker of Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga on common everyday topics. Remember, communication improves relationships and changes attitudes. We hope that you will find your study stimulating and meaningful and that it will help you grow in your personal and professional capacity.

START TO THINK IN NORTHERN SOTHO/ ZULU/ TSWANA/ VENDA/ XHOSA/ SOUTHERN SOTHO/TSONGA



At first you will tend to think in your mother tongue when speaking and writing, and you will want to express your thoughts by attempting to do direct translations. May we discourage you from doing that with your still limited knowledge of grammar, since you will only become frustrated at your inability to literally express what you have in mind. Let your knowledge of already learnt structures guide you and the sooner you start thinking in the new language, the better. You will discover that the African languages have their own way of expressing ideas and you need to make every effort to express yourself in the idiom of the specific language. Where constructions that you may not have been exposed to yet, are used, grammatical analyses will be given where necessary. However, in selecting the reading material, we have tried to select simple, accessible passages.

CONTENTS OF THE GUIDE



We have divided the guide into two study units. Each study unit is divided further into three lessons:

Study Unit 1:

In this study unit you will be introduced to aspects of African history, culture and folklore.

Lesson 1: In this lesson you will acquire some background on the cultural and historical origins of the African language speaking people and the close relationship between languages which belong to the same language family. You will remember some of this information from the AFL1503 module. You will also gain insight as to why it is important in a beginner's course to engage in a study of literature.

Lesson 2: In this lesson you will get to know aspects of African folklore and discover what folktales are all about.

Lesson 3: In this lesson you will share in the excitement of praise poetry, songs and riddles and their characteristics. You will also be able to learn more about the culture of the African people through a number of well-known idioms and proverbs.

Study Unit 2

This study unit offers you opportunities for developing your reading, listening and writing skills further.

Lesson 4: You will be able to develop and improve your reading and comprehension skills based on simple Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga passages on everyday topics. You will learn the techniques of translating from an African language to English and from English to an African language.

Lesson 5: You will be exposed to the essay, paragraph, dialogue and friendly letter as types of creative writing.

Lesson 6: You will gain insight into the use of African languages in the media (found in readers, magazines, pamphlets, advertisements, newspapers, television, radio, etc.).

STRUCTURE OF LESSONS

In each lesson there are a number of activities to stimulate your inquiring mind and to allow you to develop the skills needed to communicate effectively in an African language. These are followed by the lecturer's feedback, response or evaluation of your understanding.

PRESCRIBED BOOK

Your prescribed book for this module (if applicable to your language) is indicated on the CD-ROM/Tutorial Letter 101.

As you will be encountering a whole number of new vocabulary items, you are advised to also acquire a suitable dictionary, if you have not already done so for the AFL1503 module. Please consult the CD-ROM for recommended dictionaries for each of the languages.

STUDY UNIT 1

LESSON 1

EXPLORING THE CULTURAL AND HISTORIC BACKGROUND OF THE AFRICAN LANGUAGES AND THEIR ORAL LITERATURE

1.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES



At the end of this lesson you will:

- be able to give reasons as to why the African languages are said to belong to the same language family;
- have gained greater understanding of some cultural issues of African language speaking people;
- be able to motivate why it is important to study African literature.

1.2 ORIGINS



In this country the term 'African languages' is preferred to 'Bantu languages' due to the negative connotations attached to the latter during the apartheid era. However, for purely linguistic, classificatory purposes, the term Bantu is still used internationally. It seems that available evidence points to the fact that there was first one single parent language of the Bantu languages. Linguists have given it the name Ur-Bantu or Proto-Bantu and it is said to have been located in the region of the Great Lakes in Central Africa about five centuries ago. Researchers are of the opinion that migrations occurred in a succession of waves rather than all at once. It appears that the great Sotho migrations preceded the Nguni migrations. It is assumed that the Kgalagadi were the first Sotho speaking people, and probably also the first Bantu speaking people to reach Southern Africa, around the 13th or 14th centuries. They settled in the present Botswana and interbred with the Bushmen.

1.3 AFFINITY BETWEEN AFRICAN LANGUAGES

The Bantu languages of South Africa share the same characteristics with a large number of other languages in Africa. Due to striking correlations in their syntax, morphology and sound systems, these languages have been grouped together into what is known as a language family, namely the Bantu language family. The most striking feature of these languages is that they make use of a so-called class system, according to which nouns are divided into a number of classes. The nouns generate concordial morphemes which are responsible for establishing agreement between elements in a sentence.

1.4 SOCIAL ORGANISATION AND PRACTICES



In African culture, extreme individualism is something which is frowned upon. The prevailing philosophy is that individuals owe their existence to the existence of the group. Many proverbs bear this out, as seen in Sotho and Nguni proverbs *motho ke motho ka batho* / *Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu* / *Umntu ngumntu ngabantu* (a person is what he is because of other people), respectively. The importance of independence and individualism is not denied, but the social group in which a person exists is regarded as important for the success of the individual. The family and extended family play a crucial role in the social organisation. Terms to indicate family relationships are very specific, for example, the word for *uncle* cannot simply be translated into an African language, without the specification as to what the nature of the relationship is, i.e. *malome* (mother's brother in N. Sotho) / *umalume* (in Zulu and Xhosa), *rangwane* (father's younger brother in N. Sotho), *ubaba omncane* (in Zulu), *utatomncinci* (in Xhosa) or *ramogolo* (father's older brother) / *ubaba omkhulu* (in Zulu) / *utatomdala* (in Xhosa).

Traditionally all activities are permeated by ritual, be they marriage rites, initiation or rain-making ceremonies, economic activities, political gatherings or legal proceedings. Special customs are observed at certain occasions and certain times of the year. For example, a year after the death of a woman's husband, a special ceremony is held to mark the end of her mourning period. This period may be reduced due to circumstances or other events taking place in the village or in the family. During her period of mourning she would not have shaved her hair and she would have worn mourning clothes (generally black – but also navy or dark green). The dark clothes serve to make members of the community aware of her widowhood and alert them to be sensitive and considerate when they are around her. At the ceremony another woman from her family, who also has to be a widow, would shave the widow's hair as a sign of cleansing. In Northern Sotho this ceremony is called *go apola* (to discard mourning clothes) or *go tloša setšhila* (to cleanse). In Xhosa it is *ukukhulula izila*. There are several other dialectal equivalents to denote this cleansing ceremony. At the ceremony the widow may be presented with gifts, mostly in the form of clothes or blankets.

1.5 LANGUAGE AND INTERPRETATION OF REALITY



A nation's language reveals the cognitive processes, cultural needs, philosophy of life and world view of members of a community, in other words, how they perceive, interpret and analyse reality. For example, the existence of a complex system of colour terms for domestic animals in many African communities arose out of a cultural need. Much of traditional African life revolves around cattle and goats and specific terms were needed to distinguish unambiguously between livestock. The absence of such fine colour distinctions in most Western cultures, clearly points to the absence of such a cultural need with regard to domestic animals in these communities. No single equivalent term exists in English, for example, to capture all the detail expressed by just one term in an African language.

There are also instances where only one term may exist in an African language, for more than one meaning in Western culture. For example, one and the same basic term may be used in the African languages for 'blue' and 'green', namely *-tala* (N.Sotho) and *-luhlaza* (Zulu and Xhosa). This does not mean that speakers of the language are unable to distinguish perceptually between these two colours, but that the distinction between 'blue' and 'green' was not a needful one in their culture. If necessary, it is possible to draw a distinction by way of description, namely *tala leratadima* '(sky) blue' and *tala morogo* 'green' in Northern Sotho. This observation is not restricted to Northern Sotho, but may be noted in other African languages as well.

In African tradition, the use of the passive sentence, rather than the active one, is preferred in order to set an individual free from any liability under disagreeable circumstances. In this way any direct blame is directed away from the individual to an unidentifiable agent beyond his/her control. Instead of, for example, 'I missed the train' or 'I lost my knife', the preferred expressions in Northern Sotho would be 'I was left behind by the train', i.e. *Ke tlogetšwe ke setimela* or 'I was lost for by my knife (my knife got lost)', i.e. *Ke lahlegetšwe ke thipa ya ka. / Ndilahlekelwe yimela yam* (in Xhosa).

1.6 WHY IS A KNOWLEDGE OF AFRICAN LITERATURE IMPORTANT?

1.6.1 Development of proficiency

Foreign language learners usually shy away from engaging in a study of the literature of a language. You too might regard it as 'difficult', because you may not recognise the simple language structures which you have been exposed to in your introductory grammar lessons. Literature is language operating on the highest level of expression and it is therefore true that simple structures do not usually appear in literary works, but this does not mean that a study of literature should be discarded as a non-profitable exercise in acquiring proficiency.

1.6.2 Grammar in action

Literary texts show how the grammatical constructions which you have acquired are actually applied in a functional way. There are obviously degrees of complexity and it would be inappropriate to confront you at the outset of your studies with intricate texts which contain complicated structures and idiomatic expressions. In this module we strive for simplicity and have purposefully chosen literature intended for the younger child. The stories are not too long and usually have an easy-to-follow theme and a few central characters. Many folktales are part of children's literature. They are especially suitable for foreign language learners, because the sentences are simple, usually in the same tense. A lot of repetition also occurs. In addition to this some of the folktales make extensive use of dialogues. This gives you an opportunity of learning about different forms of taking turns in a conversation and of appropriate expressions which you may use in your own conversation. Where more complicated phrases do occur, explanations will be provided on your CD-ROM. As a student of an African language you should not feel offended to study children's literature. It is a good starting point for anyone learning a new language, even if you are a grown-up person.

1.6.3 Cultural insight

Literature studies, including literature written for or told to African children, are an invaluable source of cultural insight, which will assist you to communicate more effectively with native speakers in Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga. Learning one of these languages may remain a purely academic exercise, or it may blossom into a rewarding engagement with a new culture and society as you embrace all the modes of expression of the language you have chosen to study, including its literature. We conclude this section with the following quotation from Msomi (1996:45):

“... literature enlarges the learners' background knowledge and at the same time helps the learners explore the culture in which the native speakers live. It also helps them appreciate and tolerate cultural differences. Put otherwise, literature enhances understanding of cultural values and thus promotes tolerance. And this, in turn, promotes successful communication between the L2 learners and native speakers because the L2 learners would be aware of the natives' culture and values.”

1.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Can you think of any examples to support the claim that language holds the key to a better understanding of a nation's culture, philosophies and perception of reality?
2. Give three reasons why you think it is important to study African literature in a beginner's course.

Sources consulted:

- Louwrens, L.J. 2000. Anthropocentrism, utilitarianism and supernaturalism in African world view: some linguistic evidence. *South African Journal of Ethnology* 23 (2/3):91-101.
- Mönnig, H.O. 1967. *The Pedi*. Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik.
- Msomi, P. 1996. Literature and L2 teaching: towards a literary approach. *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies*.7:42-47.

LESSON 2

ORAL LITERATURE IN AFRICAN LANGUAGES (1) THE FOLKTALE

2.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES



At the end of this lesson you will be able to:

- list a number of genres which are regarded as ‘folklore’;
- demonstrate a better understanding of the oral tradition of the Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga folktale;
- recognise certain formulae which characterise folktales;
- read a Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga folktale and grasp its overall contents, without necessarily knowing the meaning of every word;
- answer questions in English relating to the content of some of the folktales.

2.2 ACTIVITY

If you were asked to ensure that a story will remain preserved for future generations, what methods would you employ? Write down a few suggestions before looking at my feedback.

2.3 FEEDBACK

With modern technology there is more than one way of ensuring that a story will be preserved. I’m sure your suggestions included the written medium, audio and video recordings. Have you thought about how you would have managed in a world without a writing system or recording devices? These media were not available on the African scene for many centuries, and yet stories remained alive from one generation to another. Before the development of a written form of African languages just over a century ago, the only means by which communities could preserve their history and folklore for posterity, was by reciting the stories at suitable occasions so that the younger generation would be able to hear them and in turn convey them to their children. This required excellent memorising skills.

2.4 FOLKLORE

Folklore is essentially verbal art which is produced, preserved and handed down by word of mouth from one generation to another. Examples of folklore are **folktales, myths, fables, legends, praise poems, folk songs, proverbs, idioms and riddles**. Different types of folklore are associated

with a specific time of the day or year. They are told under different circumstances, for different purposes in different social settings. They also differ in the degree of creative freedom allowed. In folktales, for example, it is quite acceptable for narrators to add to a text, thereby giving their own personal touch to the way the story is presented. The message, however, remains basically the same.

In the African languages we may distinguish four types of narrations which are part of folklore, namely:

- folktales,
- myths,
- fables and
- legends.

The folktale is the most common type of narration, and you will learn more about it in this lesson. In Lesson 3 you will get to know other types of genres which are also part of oral tradition, namely the praise poem, song, riddle, proverb and idiom.

2.5 VALUE AND PURPOSE OF FOLKTALES

Folktales are narrated to entertain, educate and instruct both children and adults. From an early age children learn to relate to their natural and social environment through the spoken word. Through storytelling social values are instilled and encouraged, while malpractices are condemned. In African culture storytelling has always been an important vehicle of cultural preservation. Though the stories happened a long time ago and the setting is usually in an unreal world, they still have timeless messages and universal qualities. They are usually a means of introducing subjects for discussion, such as moral issues and warnings about anti-social behaviour. Abrahams (1983: xvi) sums up the nature of stories concisely by stating that they: “embody the inherited wisdom - social, personal and moral - of the people whose world we see through the filter of folklore.”

2.6 STORYTELLER - AUDIENCE INTERPLAY

2.6.1 Activity

What type of relationship do you think exists between a storyteller and his/her audience in African culture? Try to write down a few thoughts which come to mind.

2.6.2 Feedback

Before giving you my answer, let me first ask you the following: Have you ever noticed that in African culture a narrator is often interrupted by the audience in a public performance? If so, what was your feeling about this? Did you perceive the audience’s interjections as inappropriate? If you come from the same Western background as I do, you might well consider the interruption of a performance as a sign of disrespect. This is because in Western culture different norms apply. In Western culture the audience is expected to listen attentively and in silence up to the end of a storyteller’s tale, before applauding. In African culture interruptions, which are often delivered in choir-like fashion by the audience, are not a sign of disrespect,

but rather one of politeness in that through it the audience assures the storyteller that he/she still has their attention. In fact, if they cease to respond, the narrator will not continue with his/her story.



Folktales are traditionally narrated in the evenings around the fire place while the family members sit together enjoying each other's company. In African culture oral communication is highly valued and storytelling constitutes a crucial part of daily life. The listeners usually consist of an extended family and the grandmother is usually the narrator.

2.7 THE STRUCTURE OF A FOLKTALE

Folktales have formulae, i.e. words that uniquely mark the introduction, the response and the ending. As an introduction, the narrator would usually say in Northern Sotho: "*E ile e le nonwane*" (There was a story), in Sesotho: "*Ba re e ne e re*" and "*Kwesukesukela ...*" (Long, long ago ...) in Zulu and "*Kwathi ke kaloku ...*" (Long, long ago ...) in Xhosa. As explained above, the listeners of folktales are not supposed to be passive. Throughout the narration they respond by saying (in Northern Sotho) "*Keleketla*" or (in Sesotho) "*qoi*" at certain points in order to show that they are following the story and are not falling asleep. This storyteller-audience interplay establishes a strong sense of mutual supportiveness. The narrator uses various gestures and tones of voice to imitate and to portray the characters. To mark the end of the folktale the narrator says (in Northern Sotho): "*Pho! Sa mosela wa nkota.*", or "*Se seo! sa mosela wa seripa.*" or in Sesotho "*Ke tshomo ka mathetho*" and in Zulu he/she will say "*Cosu cosu iyaphela*" and in Xhosa he / she will say "*Phele phela ngantsomi*". This phrase is intended to bring the listeners back from a world of fantasy to reality.

Stories often end with a message or a truth to remember for the future as one grapples with life's problems. In Western culture, stories generally have a strong and definite conclusion. In African culture, however, a sense of closure is not a requirement and is indeed often absent, as the purpose of the narration is to invite further debate and thought on the issues of life. This open-ended story structure, is further underlined by interruptive repetitions which are encouraged. In a community, traditional stories may be so familiar that they might merely be referred to rather than told in full, as a way of making a point in a conversation or in an argument.

2.8 THEMES OF FOLKTALES

Folktales always contain a theme that educates or that raises some kind of awareness on very important issues in life. People are educated about the dangers of jealousy, arrogance, greed, unfaithfulness, cruelty, laziness, etc., while on the other hand, the importance of qualities like wisdom, bravery, cooperation, love, kindness, patience, obedience, etc. is highlighted. The choice of characters and the correct setting (milieu) help the theme to make a life-long educational impact.

2.9 TYPES OF FOLKTALES



Folktales may be classified according to themes or characters. As regards characters, the following types are the most common: cannibal tales, trickster tales, monster or ogre tales, human tales and animal tales. There is usually an interaction between types in a given folktale, for example, between human and animal characters, between cannibals and ordinary human beings, between ogres and humans, between tricksters and animals, and so on. Animals usually display human character traits, i.e. they compete with and talk to each other and to human beings.

2.10 THE FUTURE OF THE FOLKTALE

It appears that storytelling in the traditional sense is slowly declining. Away from the fireside and family circle where stories were always told, often accompanied by singing, the folktale cannot maintain itself very long. Any attempts at preserving folktales through the written medium inevitably lose the quality of immediacy, since they cannot reflect all the elements which directly or indirectly contribute to the impact which an oral performance makes on the audience (e.g. through sight, sound, smell, touch, etc.). When reading a verbatim transcription of an oral performance, the reader may easily get bored with the numerous repetitions and hesitations so uncharacteristic of a written style, yet so typical of the live performance. Anyone attempting to render a live performance in a readable and enjoyable form therefore, is indeed faced with a big challenge.

Stories will continue to be told, only the settings and characters will change with urbanisation and modernisation. New styles and new forms will constantly evolve out of the old to provide entertainment and to pass on knowledge.

2.11 EXAMPLES OF FOLKTALES

Please refer to your CD-ROM for examples of folktales selected for your language of choice. A detailed (quite literal) English translation is supplied, followed by a summary of the main theme of the folktale. In some cases we also supply a glossary in which the more complex grammatical structures and idiomatic expressions are explained. Do not be overly concerned if you are not familiar with all the grammatical structures. You do not have to learn the grammatical structures and rules and you will not be examined on them, but you need to be able to recognise them in a text. The analyses are given for the sake of completeness.

We would like to suggest that, before reading the translation, you listen to each folktale on the CD-ROM while following the text in your prescribed book or language specific section on your CD-ROM. Thereafter you can test how much of the contents you have grasped by looking at the translation, analysis and grammatical explanations. The grammatical explanations (of which only those are given where you might encounter

difficulties) are kept simple, as we feel that this module is not the right place to introduce new and intricate linguistic terminology. Once you know what the story is about, sit back and enjoy listening to the recording again.

2.12 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Briefly explain what you understand by oral tradition.
2. What role do the narrator and the audience play during the narration of a folktale?
3. How were folktales used to solve problems in the past and how do they apply in a contemporary situation?
4. What does it mean when we say folktales have an open-ended structure?
5. Which four types of narrations are distinguished in African languages?
6. Are folktales told by anyone, anywhere, anytime? Write an explanatory paragraph regarding these issues.
7. Folktales are recognised by particular structural elements. Explain.

Source consulted:

Abrahams, R.D. 1983. *African folktales: The traditional stories of the Black world*. New York: Pantheon Books.

LESSON 3

ORAL LITERATURE IN AFRICAN LANGUAGES (2) PRAISE POETRY, SONGS, RIDDLES, PROVERBS AND IDIOMS

3.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES



At the end of this lesson you will be able to:

- explain the nature of a praise poem;
- recognise the features of a typical African song;
- describe the nature and purpose of riddles;
- indicate the use and function of proverbs and idioms;
- distinguish between proverbs and idioms.

3.2 PRAISE POETRY

3.2.1 Activity

In your opinion, what would you say are the characteristics which make poetry to differ from, say, prose? Write down a few elements which you would expect to find specifically in a poem.

.....

.....

.....

.....

3.2.2 Feedback

If your background is English or Afrikaans, for example, you would probably have mentioned the following elements as typical characteristics of a poem: rhythm, metre, rhyme and stanzas. You will be interested to learn that these characteristics are not universal requirements for a piece of work to be classified as a poem. As you will find out soon, totally other criteria apply in the poetry of the African languages.

3.2.3 Structural features



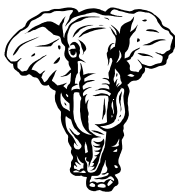
Rhythm is an important factor in all poetry. It refers to a sense of movement created by the writer's use of emphasis and tempo. It

may be realised in many different ways in various languages. In Afrikaans and English, for example, rhythm is achieved by the manipulation of stress patterns in the lines of verse. In the African languages movement is created by means of syllable length and high tone. The long syllables in a line of verse act as a “beat” or “pulse”. Together with syllable length, high tone on a syllable acts as a secondary beat. In order to appreciate the rhythm and beauty of a poem it must ideally be read out aloud. It will only find its full expression in an oral performance.

Rhyming in the African languages must be approached in a totally different way to rhyming in Afrikaans or English. The latter have a wealth of vowel and diphthong sounds which may be used to create rhyme, especially end-rhyme. The African languages, on the other hand, have at the most seven vowel sounds, which makes rhyming in these languages rather difficult. Tone rhyme may be employed, however, in which two verse lines correspond by having the same tone pattern, irrespective of what the vowel or consonant qualities may be. Alliteration (repetition of similar sounds in a line) and assonance (repetition of the same vowel sounds) are the easiest sound patterns one can pick up. They serve to link words expressing related ideas or they may be used for emphasis. Repetition of sounds can also suggest certain movements or feelings in the poem.

3.2.4 Themes and functions

Poems have a social function, expressing a nation’s deepest thoughts about matters of common interest. They generally embrace a people’s philosophy of life and may also contain history, tell about a person’s character, express criticism or protest. It is a misconception that every poem must be didactic. Poems may contain instructions on human behaviour, but this is not the prime aim of poetry. Poetry is there to be enjoyed.



Praise poetry is a special type of poetry, which is part of the folklore of a nation. A praise poem is composed in honour of a specific person or persons. A ruler in a society will usually be likened to an animal or object for its admirable qualities or physical appearance (e.g. the lion, the elephant, the sun, stars, etc.). Either a praiser will compose a poem for a chief, or individual chiefs may compose their own poems. Apart from kings, chiefs and prominent warriors, poems may also be written about animals, birds, mountains, rivers, etc. in which these are praised for their wisdom, bravery, strength or beauty. Praise poems are usually chanted at ritual ceremonies and gatherings and are intended for adults, not children.

3.2.5 Composers

Traditional praise poetry is orally composed, recited and carried on to the next generation. As a result, the original composers of some of the well-

known praise poems are not known. It is possible for several people to have contributed to the composition of a single praise poem.

3.2.6 Formulae and linguistic devices

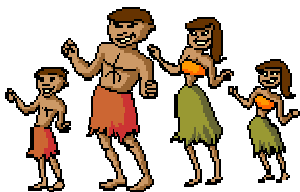
Most traditional praise poems have specific formulae as an introduction, a response, and as a conclusion. Examples of these for all the specific languages can be found on the CD-ROM.

Compound nouns, comparisons, repetition of words and phrases, metaphor, figures of speech and imagery are often used in praise poetry. The writer organises his words in such a way that his perceptions, reflections and experiences strike us as being original and artistic. He is free to manipulate the syntax of the language to suit his purpose, as long as it still has a pleasing effect on the reader or listener and doesn't become too forced or unnatural. He may, for instance, use a sentence without a predicate (verb) in order to enhance conciseness and compactness. The essence of poetry is that it is a concentrated and intense form of expression.

3.2.7 A traditional praise poem

On the CD-ROM you will find a traditional praise poem in your language of choice in order to familiarise you with some of the characteristics of this form of oral art. An analysis of the selected poem as well as explanations will follow on the CD-ROM. (Remember that only traditional poetry, but not modern poetry, is regarded as constituting folklore.)

3.3 SONGS



3.3.1 Function of songs

Traditional songs are also part of a people's cultural heritage. They are composed and sung for various reasons at various occasions, e.g. in work groups, when asking for rain, in times of war, for weddings and other traditional ceremonies, and for children. For each of these types of songs there is a relevant rhythm to suit the mood. For instance, a struggle song has a totally different rhythm from a lullaby. The lyrics of these songs have emotional connotations, e.g. happiness, suffering, courage, praise, etc. Work songs associated with African cultures throughout the world display the value of collaborative activity and coordination of efforts in the execution of manual labour, for example in grinding corn, pounding, sifting, cultivating fields or herding cattle. Songs serve to encourage workers and to combat tiredness. They increase the effectiveness of an action by setting a continuous pace. One person normally takes the lead in chanting, to which the others respond, generally before the leader has finished. The role of song leader may be seized by anyone (or more than one person), but normally someone with a strong voice will do the leading. Songs can be

purely for recreation or amusement. Children's songs may be used in children's games or to train them to develop certain skills.

3.3.2 Structure

Folk-songs are not rigid. Flexibility and variability characterise the tune as well as the text. Different singers may give different renditions of the same song or the same folk-singer may sing a song somewhat differently on different occasions. The same song may also differ according to the area in which the song is sung. A number of lines or parts of lines are usually repeated throughout the song.

3.3.3 Examples of African songs

You will find explanations and examples of songs in your preferred language on the CD-ROM.

3.4 RIDDLES



Riddles are part of folklore and are meant for entertainment, as are the folktale, praise poem and song. In African cultures riddles are plentiful. Doke (1947:117) says that among the Africans

“the propounding of riddles constitutes a form of entertainment, an indoor game, commonly indulged in around the fire at night, particularly by the young folk of the village. The riddle describes something in obscure metaphor and calls for the exercise of intellectual skill in answering it.”

3.4.1 Function of riddles

Riddles serve a three-fold function:

- they are a form of entertainment and combat boredom
- they fulfil a very important social and moral function
- they play a very significant educational role, as they are meant to stimulate and sharpen the intellect of the young so that they would be able to listen carefully, and after careful analysis of a riddle, come up with a well thought-out answer. Riddles also encourage the youth to study their environment and their culture.

3.4.2 General setting and participants

Almost in all traditional societies, riddling takes place in the evening around a fire. At this time people can afford to relax, having completed their chores. It is believed that if you ask a riddle during daytime, you will grow horns or become an imbecile. The performers and audience are normally children. However, they may be joined by adults, especially their parents or relatives.

There is always a team and it is very rare to find just two people riddling each other. The audience naturally does not remain passive. They take turns to propound a riddle.

3.4.3 Nature and structure of riddles

Riddles are questions that should be answered, but they may not necessarily be in the form of a question. They are often in the form of simple statements. The contents of a riddle provides clues towards finding the answer.

A stereotyped phrase is usually used to introduce a riddle. The questioner starts by saying in Northern Sotho “*Thai!...*”, and in Sesotho “*Ka u lotha*”, “*Ngiyakuphica ...*” in Zulu and “*Qashi-qashi*” in Xhosa, and then the audience has to guess the correct answer to the statement or question being posed. A variety of poetic devices may be encountered in riddles, such as parallelism (similarity in successive passages), contrast, ideophones (e.g. sound imitations), repetitions, compound words, interjectives, personification, metaphors and direct speech.

3.5 PROVERBS

Nature and function of the proverb



The proverb

- expresses a general truth
- makes use of wording which is compact and forceful
- is figurative
- enjoys general acceptance in the culture group
- makes use of a range of topics to create imagery and parallels for comparison

The proverb serves various purposes, such as to express general truths, to warn, advise or encourage to do good. It is mainly used to comment on a social situation where a human being interacts with another human being. It also serves a didactic function. Its impact may be positive (encouraging, advisory) or negative (warning, judgmental). Proverbs serve as an effective and picturesque way of putting across ideas and their messages reflect on the culture of a people. Many of the images used in proverbs stem from traditional settings and customs.

3.6 IDIOMS



Function and structure of idioms

Idioms are linguistic forms which add colour to speech and render expressions more effective. They are used to enrich a person's language. Another reason why they may be used is euphemism, i.e. as polite ways of saying things. They consist of a fixed pattern of words which go together, but they are not as rigid in form as proverbs. They may change form, for example, when an idiom is used in a sentence it conforms to the tense or mood (verb form) of that sentence.

An idiom's meaning cannot be logically or literally ascertained from its component parts.

3.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. How are praise poems composed?
2. Which formulae are characteristic of the traditional praise poem?
3. What was the purpose of a song in a traditional setting?
4. Use the knowledge you gained about folk songs in this lesson to write a song of your own. Choose your own theme.
5. What is the function and nature of a riddle?
6. Why are proverbs said to reflect on the culture of a people? Choose any appropriate proverb to explain this statement.
7. Explain in what way proverbs differ from idioms.
8. Choose any three idioms and use them in one or more Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga sentences of your own. Your sentence(s) must show that the idiom has been used in an appropriate context.

Sources consulted:

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STUDY UNIT 2

COMPREHENSION, TRANSLATION, CREATIVE WRITING AND THE MEDIA

LESSON 4

COMPREHENSION AND TRANSLATION



In this lesson we would like you to achieve the following goals, namely to be able to:

- read a Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga text with understanding;
- grasp the overall contents of a text, without necessarily knowing the meaning of every word;
- answer Northern Sotho / Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga questions based on the given texts;
- translate passages from a Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga text into English;
- translate simple sentences from English into Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga;
- paraphrase the contents of a Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga text in English;
- improve your listening skills.

4.1 READING WITH COMPREHENSION

Before being able to write your own short paragraphs, dialogues, letters or essays (see lesson 5), you need to be able to read given passages with comprehension, so that you will become increasingly familiar with the way vocabulary and phrases are used in an African language.

How to tackle the reading work

I'm sure that many of you have tried to read a continuous piece of Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga, only to find your progress halted by words and constructions you do not know yet. Don't let this discourage you. We want to suggest that you tackle the reading work as follows:

- (a) Read through the reading lesson a couple of times and then try to form a picture in your mind about its contents. Listen to the recording on your CD-ROM while following the text in your guide. Obviously, when you read texts in everyday life, no recorded versions are supplied, but in this module the recordings are added

for your benefit to help you tune your ear to the correct pronunciation.

- (b) If you still do not know what has been said in the lesson, read the English translation.
- (c) Read through the Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga text again without looking at the translation. It should be much easier for you because now you know what the lesson is all about. You should, however, still avoid trying to translate every word. Keep in mind that the aim of this reading work is *reading with comprehension* and not *translation*.
- (d) If you still do not understand certain parts of the Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga text, you may compare these parts with the translations in order to find the correct English translation. You should always go back to the Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga text and try to read it with comprehension.
- (e) Read all the reading lessons in this way and try progressively to make less use of the English translation. The more you read, the more you will comprehend and often you will be able to deduce the meaning from the broader context.

4.2 COMPREHENSION TEST

4.2.1 The purpose of a comprehension test

What would you do if you wanted to test someone's insight into a passage that he/she has read? You could expect the person to narrate the passage in his/her own words, but better still, in order to assess the degree of his/her comprehension, you would have to ask context and content related questions. Comprehension entails being able to state not only what is said, but also to interpret what is meant in a written passage.

The purpose of comprehension exercises is to test whether you are able to read with understanding. To accomplish this, you need to:

- study words, phrases and sentences in their contexts;
- get at the meaning, i.e. the thought behind the words;
- detect the relations of the meanings and parts of the sentence, or situation;
- discover the purpose of the words and structure - the purpose envisaged by the writer;
- demonstrate a knowledge of question words by applying them correctly;
- answer questions based on the text.

4.2.2 How to do a comprehension test

- First read through the given passage so that you know what it is all about.
- Then read through the questions that follow. The questions provide further clues as to what the passage deals with. Make sure that you understand every question that has been asked.

- Read through the quoted passage again before you answer the questions one by one in Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga. Pay attention to the mood (verb form) and tense of the verbs in the questions, because this will in most cases determine the mood and tense in which your answer will have to appear.
- Remember to answer the questions in full sentences.
- Familiarise yourself with the set of question words (interrogatives) in Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga and make sure that you use the correct word order in your answers.
- Establish whether the question demands a straightforward answer or rather an interpretation. In the latter case, ensure that your opinion is expressed clearly and coherently.
- Check all your answers. Make sure that they are well formulated. Check whether you have explained words in context.

4.2.3 Degrees of insight

Comprehension tests differ in the degree of insight which they want to test. In some cases the questions and their answers may be quite transparent, since they emanate directly from the given text. In other cases, your ability to make deductions and interpretations may be put to the test, when the given text forms an extract from a larger text. The questions posed may not be derivable from the actual given text, but from the story from which the passage has been extracted.

4.3 TRANSLATION

4.3.1 Aims of translation

The ideal aims of a translation are:

- to express as clearly as possible the ideas or thoughts expressed in the original text;
- to produce a translation which is stylistically good and which preserves the meaning of the original as closely as possible;
- to produce a translation which is properly informed by the overall context.

4.3.2 Important aspects of translation

4.3.2.1 Literal translation

When asked to do translations, you as a learner of Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga, will naturally, as a first step, want to establish the exact equivalent for each word. Keep in mind, however, that no two languages are the same, and that it is not always possible to provide a word for word translation. The literal translations need to be rephrased in order to convey the intended meaning of the original sentences.

The role of context is also one of the most important aspects to be considered when translating. Each sentence forms part of a larger paragraph and each paragraph forms part of a larger text. These sentences and paragraphs can only be translated correctly, if their meaning is interpreted against the background of the larger context in which they occur.

4.3.2.2 Idiomatic translation

Literal translations will help you to understand what a passage is all about, but the real test lies in reproducing the contents as a meaningful, stylistically well-formed whole. This step could be referred to as idiomatic translation.

4.3.3 Translating from Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga into English

Guidelines

- Read through the given passage to get an idea of what it is all about.
- Now start with a draft. Read each sentence carefully and write down the literal meaning of every word. If you cannot translate a particular construction, leave it out and go on to the next phrase or sentence.
- When you have gone through the whole passage, go back to those words that you could not translate initially. Try to establish from the context what the meaning of each word should be. Also, if a literal meaning of a form doesn't make sense, try to determine what the author is trying to convey.
- If you come across a Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga idiom, use an equivalent English one. If you do not know any English equivalent, give a literal translation of the Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga idiom, or explain the idiom.
- Now rewrite your draft into good, idiomatic English.
- Finally, read through your translation carefully and check for any mistakes.

4.3.4 Translating from English into Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga

4.3.4.1 Guidelines

- Read through the given passage attentively to see what it is all about.
- Now go through the passage, sentence by sentence, and translate every word or construction (literally, if it would help you). While doing this keep in mind the correct sequence of words in Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga, for example,

English: The big boys saw me.

Northern Sotho and Zulu sequence:
The boys big me saw.

Northern Sotho:
Bašemane ba bagolo ba mpone.

Zulu:
Abafana abakhulu bangibonile.

Leave out those forms that you cannot translate and go on to the next phrase or sentence.

- When you have gone through the whole passage, go back to those forms you left out and try to translate them. If you cannot translate the English into an equivalent Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga form, try alternatives, i.e. try to say the same thing in a different way. For instance, if you have to translate 'The sun is very hot today' and you can't remember the word for 'sun' (*letšatši*) (N. Sotho)/ *ilanga* (Zulu), then translate the sentence as *Go fiša kudu lehono* (N. Sotho)/ *Kushisa kakhulu namuhla* (Zulu) 'It is very hot today'.
- Now rewrite your (literal, preliminary) translation into grammatically acceptable Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga (You might not have to change it much). Stick to simple sentences and concentrate while you write, so that your translation is as grammatically correct as possible.
- Read through your translation carefully and check for any concordial or spelling errors.

4.3.4.2 Activity



Now try to translate the following into Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga on your own, before looking at our answer in the language specific sections on the CD-ROM:

- (1) The children and their parents are on the road in (with) the car.
- (2) They are going to visit uncle.
- (3) They are glad, because they like their uncle very much.
- (4) Father is watching the speed of the car, because he doesn't want to break (cross over) the law.
- (5) After a little while father reduces (weakens) speed when he sees the road is full of cars.

(6) A policeman stops them (causes them to stand still) and says to father that there is a big hole in the road because of the rain of the previous night (of the night that had passed).

4.3.5 Paraphrasing

“Paraphrase” roughly means “sameness of meaning”. Therefore, to paraphrase, means to reproduce the content of a passage in your own words. This reproduction may be done within the same language (e.g. a restatement of a Northern Sotho passage in Northern Sotho) or it may be done in a different language, in which case paraphrasing goes hand in hand with translation (e.g. a restatement of a Northern Sotho passage in English).

When it is expected of you to paraphrase a Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga text in English, the aim is to determine whether you know the translation of words, whether you have mastered certain grammatical structures and whether you understand the content of the text. Though you may translate the given text literally as a first step, the aim is for you to move from the literal translation to a free translation (paraphrase), which will render the contents more understandable and stylistically correct. The free translation is not bound to the form and language structure of the original text. On the other hand, if a passage is translated too “freely” into another language, some of the meaning of the original passage may be lost in the process. One should thus strive to strike a happy balance between a literal translation and one which is too broad.

Paraphrase and translation are not only instruments to test your knowledge of the vocabulary of Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga, they also help you to get more familiar with certain grammatical structures and idiomatic expressions in the language. Knowledge gained in this manner is permanent, because it can never be a matter of memorising only. It is always a challenge and you must view it as such.

LESSON 5

CREATIVE WRITING

5.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES



In this lesson we aim to enable you to:

- develop your ability to communicate in Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga by means of the written word;
- write your own short paragraph, dialogue, letter and essay;
- improve your listening skills.

5.2 CREATIVE WRITING ACTIVITIES

Creative writing covers a large spectrum, but in this section we shall only concentrate on the writing of an essay, a dialogue, a letter and a paragraph. We could say that the writing of essays and dialogues in particular is perhaps the most creative activity in language. Especially dialogues, as you may know, are very important in foreign language learning as they equip a person with everyday communication skills. Some students enjoy this activity, others do not particularly like it, the reason being that their knowledge of the application of language is not on the expected level. You as a foreign language student should, however, not be discouraged as we won't expect you to know as much about the language as a mother-tongue speaker. To enrich your creative writing skill a knowledge of proverbs, idioms and idiomatic expressions will come in handy.

5.3 WRITING AN ESSAY

5.3.1 What is an essay?

For our purposes we regard an essay as a text that deals with a single topic, written in a natural style and which forms an integrated whole within the limits of the prescribed number of pages or words.

5.3.2 Language usage and content

Of great importance when writing an essay is the use of simple, though correct language. Give attention to the usage of mood and tense. Most of the time a narrative essay is written in the consecutive or in the indicative past tense, while the factual descriptive essay can be written in either the present or the past tense. Decide in advance which tense you are going to use and stick to it. Where possible use short and well planned sentences. See to it that the contents of the essay is applicable to the topic throughout

the essay. The essay must form an integrated whole. The same line of thought must flow from one sentence into the following in order to develop a central or main idea. A series of unrelated sentences is less satisfactory.

5.3.3 Orthography

It is important that you use the correct orthography (symbols) when writing an essay in Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga. If you follow the orthography on the CD-ROM, there is nothing to worry about.

5.3.4 Planning

Most of us are inclined to start writing an essay immediately without drafting a well planned framework. There are, however, a few important things to keep in mind before writing an essay. Firstly, it is very important that you make the right choice when selecting a topic.

You need to ask yourself the following questions, before deciding on a topic:

- Do I understand the given topic?
- Do I have the knowledge of what the topic entails?
- Do I possess the necessary vocabulary that is needed to write on this topic?
- Will I be able to express my ideas on the topic with my present knowledge of the African language?

5.3.5 Style

Insufficient vocabulary gives rise to another problem, namely style. Owing to insufficient vocabulary, students are inclined to think in English. Some are even tempted to draft their essay in English and then translate it into Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga. The result is often an unimpressive literal translation which lacks coherence. Remember that an essay in which language usage is flawless (e.g. correct concords, constructions, spelling, idiom) will, in spite of poor content (i.e. lack of originality or limited vocabulary), earn considerably more marks than one which is rich in content but poor in language usage. It is possible to write a touching, lyrical or even a pompous essay, but this is not expected from you as someone who tackles Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga for the first time. Your main concern is correct language usage in a natural style, using short and well planned sentences.

Try to think in Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga, because by doing so you will eliminate a lot of problems.

5.3.6 Bridging the gap



Although the ideal situation would be for you to think and write in Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga right from the start (instead of translating from your own language), we cannot deny the fact that you will want to bridge the gap from the familiar to the unfamiliar by resorting to your own language in the planning phase. There is nothing wrong with that, as long as you remember that most of your English sentences cannot be translated literally and need to be adapted to the way thoughts are expressed in Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga. Compare the following sentence:

- In English: "I started going to high school last week."
- In Northern Sotho English: "I started to enter school which is raised (elevated) week of to pass by."
- In idiomatic Northern Sotho: "Ke thomile go tsena sekolo se se phagameng beke ya go feta."

You will soon develop a natural feeling for this way of expression if you read Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga regularly.

5.3.7 Structure

When you have decided on a particular topic, write down everything that you want to say on the topic. Arrange these thoughts by grouping together the ideas that belong together. Any essay is usually divided into an *introduction*, a *body* and a *conclusion*.

5.3.8 Activity

Write a short descriptive essay of about 10 lines, using simple Northern Sotho / Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga sentences on one of the topics indicated below. The reason why we specify that you write a *descriptive* essay, is because that allows you to use the present tense for most of the time, unlike in a *narrative* essay, where you would be expected to make use of the past tense, which you may not be so comfortable with yet:

- I love my home town
- A dog is a man's best friend

5.4 WRITING A DIALOGUE



5.4.1 Planning

As in the case of the essay, you need to plan the structure and content of your dialogue. In a dialogue thoughts are exchanged on a certain topic (normally between two people, but several people can also participate). After the appropriate greetings the topic is introduced by one of the speakers and the conversation centres around it. The dialogue is concluded by a farewell. Depending on the situation, however, a dialogue may assume various forms and the exchange of greetings and farewells may not necessarily be included.

5.5 WRITING A LETTER



5.5.1 The nature of a letter

The nature of letters may differ depending on the purpose which they need to fulfil, e.g. a formal business letter, an informal letter to a friend, a request or report which needs to be put in writing, etc. However, what most of them have in common is a form of address, the main part or body of the letter which deals with one or more topics and finally a conclusion in which the addressee is bid farewell, followed by the name of the writer.

5.5.2 Example of a friendly letter

You will find an example of a friendly letter in your language of choice on the CD-ROM.

5.5.3 Activity

Write a letter to your friend, informing him/her about one of the following:

- the new neighbours that have moved in;
- that you would like to visit him/her;
- why you decided to study Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga.

Make a list of a few suitable vocabulary items, before starting to write. This will help you to get your thoughts organised.

5.6 WRITING A PARAGRAPH

The hints which have already been given to you for writing an essay or a letter, are also relevant when you are expected to write a paragraph in

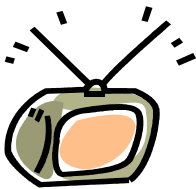
Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga on a specific topic. The requirements for a good paragraph are the following:

- It must form a unit. All sentences must be connected with one another and must be centered on one main thought.
- The main thought must be developed clearly and logically through the way that every sentence leads naturally and clearly to the next.
- The first sentence of a paragraph usually introduces the main thought (it does not necessarily have to be the case). The other sentences may be explanatory regarding the main idea.
- A paragraph must be clear and brief. Therefore use, as far as possible, short, but well-considered sentences.

5.6.1 Activity

Write a paragraph of about five Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga sentences on each of the following topics:

5.6.1.1 Television



5.6.1.2 The bicycle



5.6.1.3 Our doctor



5.6.2 Comment

You will find our suggestions regarding the three preceding paragraphs in each language on the CD-ROM, but we urge you to first write down a few sentences of your own, before looking at our examples.

5.7 DESCRIBING A PICTURE

Pictures and illustrations can be used effectively to improve your writing and comprehension skills. This is actually a very creative exercise, because you have to use your imagination to interpret the picture in order to gradually put your original ideas in writing. As a foreign language learner you should interpret a given picture in Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga, using the vocabulary you have at your disposal. You will find an exercise and guidance on how to describe a picture in your language of choice on the CD-ROM.

LESSON 6

AFRICAN LANGUAGES IN THE MEDIA

6.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES



At the end of this lesson you will be able to:

- appreciate the use of different forms of the media in Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga;
- understand the use of Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga in the South African multicultural and multilingual context which the media is part of;
- appreciate that Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga is used in the media to accomplish different goals, such as informing, teaching, instructing and entertaining.

6.2 ACTIVITY

Tune into a news bulletin which is presented in an African language on television (consult a TV guide to find out which news bulletins are read in Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga). How much do you grasp of what is being said by listening to the presenter? Try another experiment by first watching a news bulletin in English or Afrikaans and thereafter tuning into a later broadcast of the same news in an African language. Do you now recognise any words or phrases in the stream of speech of the Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga presenter?

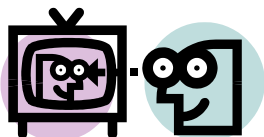
6.3 FEEDBACK

I'm sure that your second experiment was more rewarding. Having first watched the news in a language familiar to you, it would now have been easier for you to anticipate certain phrases and items of vocabulary used in association with particular headlines in the news reports. Watching the news in the way suggested here, will help you to identify familiar words and expressions as they are used in natural speech. Especially the presenter's form of greeting (*Dumela/Thobela ka lapeng* (Northern Sotho) / *Sanibonani ekhaya* (Zulu), *Molweni* (Xhosa) - Good day/evening, (to you) at home), should be something you can pick up quickly, because it is used often at the beginning of the news reading.

6.4 RANGE OF MEDIA

There are different forms of the media, such as television, film, radio, newspapers, magazines and of late, the internet. They are used to perform different functions like advertising, informing, teaching and entertaining.

6.5 THE AUDIO-VISUAL MEDIA



Different programmes are presented on television, such as sitcoms, dramas, talk shows, news, sport and educational programmes. Sitcoms, dramas, talk shows and educational programmes are characterised by code-switching and codemixing. This means that African languages as well as English and Afrikaans are used in one and the same conversational topic. By code-switching and code-mixing the writers and producers may try to reach as wide a target audience as possible in their sitcoms and dramas. In talk shows code-switching and code-mixing is a common occurrence and reflects the way in which people actually talk in everyday situations, for example, an interviewee might say regarding some unfortunate people who have lost their home:

What I'm actually saying is that batho bao ba na le **problem** ruri. Re tlo **decida** gore re tlo **contacta** mang ka selo se. (Northern Sotho)

What I'm actually saying is that labo bantu ban**problem** enkulu. Siz**decida** ukuthi siz**contacta** ubani ngalokho. (Zulu)

What I'm actually saying is that abo bantu ban**problem** enkulu. Siz**decida** ukuba siz**contacta** bani ngaloo nto. (Xhosa).

As far as news bulletins are concerned, you will find that the language(s) in which a bulletin is presented appears in brackets in the TV guide, for example Sotho/Tswana/Sepedi (implying Southern Sotho, Tswana and Northern Sotho respectively). This may be confusing to you as you may not be in a position to identify which of the three Sotho languages is being used. However, you will see the caption "Ditaba" during the broadcast if the news is in Northern Sotho or Southern Sotho or "Dikgang" when the news is presented in Tswana. The caption will be "Izindaba" for Zulu and "iindaba" for Xhosa. The main presenter(s) will usually adhere to one language throughout the reading of the news, but it is possible that the other African languages may also be heard, since reporters make use of their preferred language as they comment on topics of the day. Some lexical items may be clear pointers regarding the language in which a report is presented, for example, a Northern Sotho reporter would use *lehono*, *bolela*, *dula*, *phela*, *rena* and *lena*, while a Tswana reporter would use *gompieno*, *bua*, *nna*, *tshela*, *rona* and *lona* whereas a Zulu reporter would use *namuhla*, *khuluma*, *phila*, *thina* and *nina* and a Xhosa reporter would use *namhlanje*, *thetha*, *hlala*, *phila*, *thina* respectively for 'today', 'talk', 'sit', 'live', 'we' and 'you'.

The news bulletins which are presented make use of a more standard type of language than the dramas and sitcoms mentioned above.

Film, which paved the way for television, is obviously also part of audio-visual communication, as are videos, video games and computer games.

6.6 THE AUDITIVE MEDIA



The most wide-spread and common medium of information and entertainment is the radio. It is the most affordable medium to most people. Although it only addresses the sense of hearing, it also makes an impression on other faculties such as visual imagination, as explained further on. The African language stations provide entertainment, information and education and offer a mixture of news, music, current affairs, talk shows, education, dramas and serials, sport, weather and traffic reports.

Sport programmes provide popular entertainment, especially those covering soccer matches and horse races.

The music repertoire consists of Jazz, Rhythm and Blues, Kwaito, House, Gospel and African traditional music.

Talk shows look at various issues of public interest. Different topics are addressed in the programmes, such as politics, religion, arts, culture, science, technology, agriculture, youth issues, family and health issues and other issues of national interest. The programmes afford the public an opportunity of voicing their views on the relevant topic. Experts and other people who have authority in respective fields are either invited to the studio or are interviewed telephonically. The use of standard Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga is promoted on these stations, although it is inevitable that code-switching and code-mixing will occur in interviews and talk shows.

Radio plays are very popular. The radio playwright has no restrictions regarding place, setting, number of characters, kind of actions or movement of time. The writer can take the audience anywhere and make the characters do anything, as the radio has no visual limitations (contrary to the situation in a stage play with its décor, costumes and make-up) and no physical space limitations. The primary dramatical elements, i.e. the word and sound, are the only carriers of meaning. The invisibility of the characters has its advantages, since it offers great freedom to the listeners' imagination. Listeners can create their own fantasy picture of the characters and décor.

6.7 THE PRINTED MEDIA



What applies to the media of television and radio, equally applies to the printed media in African languages. The printed word serves to inform, teach, instruct, advertise and entertain.

The government's campaign to make pamphlets on different issues such as health, elections, finance, agriculture, arts and culture available in all of the nine official African languages, has led to an increase in the production of, African language texts. Advertisements and instructions on the use of products may in some cases also appear in African languages.

Activities:

- As you go about your daily business, make a list of indigenous business names which come to your attention and find out what they mean. Approach the owners of the business if necessary and ask them.
- Use an automatic teller machine at any ABSA Bank and select an African language. Follow the prompts further and see if you can understand them. If you feel uncertain about an instruction, you can always cancel the transaction, but at least you will get familiar with the different options on the ATM machine in an African language.
- Try to read familiar passages in a Northern Sotho/ Zulu/ Tswana/ Venda/ Xhosa/ Southern Sotho/ Tsonga Bible on a regular basis. You will be amazed at how quickly you will pick up vocabulary, seeing that you already know the contents.

6.8 THE INTERNET



All computer-based programmes are multidimensional as they involve sight, sound, animation and the written medium to varying degrees. Although English is the global language of the internet, African linguists have spent much energy and innovative thinking on the development of computer software which gives prompts in the indigenous African languages. This presents quite a challenge as there are not always exact equivalents to prompts like “undo” and “save”, “insert” and “paste”, to mention but a few.

In response to government's campaign to develop and promote African languages, there has been an increased offer on the market of language teaching programmes to non-mother-tongue speakers. These programmes come with a CD-ROM and offer the learner the best of three worlds, i.e. the written, visual (this may include animation) and the auditive media. A further advantage of this form of self-instruction, is that it can be done at the learner's own pace and can be repeated as often as is needed.

Excellent African language dictionaries are also available on-line. It allows one even to listen to the correct pronunciation. For information on an on-line dictionary for your language of choice, please consult the CD-ROM.

6.9 CONCLUSION

The last few decades have brought a revolution in the media. Great developments continue to take place such as the development of programmes which make the conversion of written text to spoken language possible. Answering systems are being investigated which will be able to interpret spoken telephonic queries automatically and to give appropriate vocal responses (for example when a client makes a booking for a hotel accommodation).