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Investigating the onomastic principles of naming an official lamguage: the case of the Sepedi and Sesotho sa leboa (Northern Sotho} language names

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ABSTRACT

The main focus of the study embraced the investigation the onomastic principles and also the socio-cultural factors to be taken into consideration when naming an official language. The fundamental objective of the study was to consider the two names *Sepedi and Sesotho sa Leboa,* to decide which one should be used and to determine which name is supported by the investigated onomastic principles of naming a language (official).

Research was conducted involving a group of Higher Education students and lecturers; employees at the Sesotho sa Leboa National Lexicography Unit; employees at the Sesotho sa Leboa National Language Body; employees at the Pan South African Language Board; employees at the National Department of Arts and Culture and its sub-departments in Limpopo and Gauteng Provinces; and Traditional Leaders in almost all the District Municipalities that are inhabited by the first language speakers of the language under investigation. The Department of Justice and Constitutional Development and the Office of the Public Protector of South Africa were also involved in the study as to obtain a legal and constitutional implementation point of view on the current use of Sepedi and Sesotho sa Leboa as language names in official and policy documentation as one and the same language name while they are not.

A mixed-methods research approach, including both quantitative and qualitative methodologies was employed in the study. In this quest, survey questionnaires, interviews, observations and text analysis were mainly considered as methods of data collection. The findings of the study revealed that neither the language names Sepedi nor Sesotho sa Leboa is supported by the onomastic principles of naming a language. An overwhelming majority of the participants in this study opined that the language under onomastic scrutiny should be reconsidered and replaced with a neutral and inclusive name that cannot in any way be associated with the influence of power and politics as well as with ethnic and dialectal status of a particular speech community. In summary, it was found in this study that the language under scrutiny was not properly named in the first place, since both Sepedi and Sesotho sa Leboa were found to have strong ties with colonialism as concomitant part of the Apartheid regime.