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Chemistry in Sepedi: Translation strategies for success

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

After independence in 1994, the new government introduced a new language policy where local African languages were accorded equal status to English and Afrikaans. By recognizing and adopting the nine African languages which were elevated to official status along with English and Afrikaans, this was a clear step forward. Multilingual language policy was developed and enshrined in the new constitution (RSA, 1996). The new Constitution stipulates that:

> Recognizing the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages of our people, the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance of these languages (*The Constitution,* 1996, Chapter 1, Section 6 (2))

For many years the issue of language development has been controversial. According to Moyo (2002: 159), it is only through the study and development of indigenous local African languages beyond grade 12 that local mother tongue languages can become more scientifically sophisticated. In addition, Selepe cited in Owino (2002:210) contends that "the answer to the question of whether African languages are developed and promoted to become media of instruction lies squarely within the relationship between the African learner/student and the African teacher/researcher. In other words, the answer should be sought from what happens in the classroom or the lecture hall". This lays the foundation of my research project, which investigates whether vernacular languages, specifically Sepedi, can be used as the language of learning and teaching at matriculation level. To test this hypothesis, learners and educators from two government and two private schools were selected non-randomly for this project, to examine their attitudes towards the bilingual examination papers that were translated by Ntake and Pare (2001).

This project also deals with the application of translation strategies in the translation of scientific and technical texts and whether the translation strategies selected might prove to be successful in making Sepedi into a language of

learning and teaching in high schools. This objective is achieved by supplying extracts in English as well as in Sepedi. This ensures that the learner who speaks Sepedi will be able to access knowledge via the language that he/she knows best, yet remain in close contact with the language (s) used internationally within scientific and other domains.

1.1 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The aim of this research was to investigate the translation strategies that were used in the translation of *Questions and Answers: Matric Physical Science* into one of the South African languages, (Sepedi) by drawing the corpus from *Questions and Answers: Matric Physical Science* and its translation. Secondly, it was to investigate the effects of these strategies on the target text and its function, by establishing the attitudes and perceptions of educators and learners towards the use of Chemistry examination papers produced in Sepedi. The problem statements revolve around the following questions: whether equivalence can be achieved irrespective of language, whether the translator has to adhere to the original and if deviating from it, to what extent? Will the translation strategies used in the translation of *Questions and Answers: Matric Physical Science* be effective in promoting the status of Sepedi to be utilized as a medium of instruction for Chemistry in high schools?

Chapter Two gives an overview of relevant language phenomena (plural) in order to contextualize the thrust of language attitudes. It focuses on the language policies of South Africa and how they have contributed to the present attitudes of learners and their educators towards local indigenous languages, specifically Sepedi. It also provides a brief discussion of various translation strategies as outlined by Baker (1992) and Gauton, Taljard and De Schryver (www.up.ac.za), and discusses domestication and foreignisation as described by Venuti.

Chapter Three of this project presents how various data collection methods have been used, namely face-to-face interviews, observations and questionnaires. There are other data gathering methods that were used which are specific to translation. The term-extraction method was used to extract terms from the English and Sepedi corpuses for analysis in order to establish which translation strategies were used. Some definitions of concepts relevant to various chapters of this research project are given.

The data collected is then analysed, interpreted and discussed in Chapter Four. There are two sections to this chapter. The first section deals with the analysis of terms to identify which translation strategies were used. The second section focuses on the analysis of data that was collected through interviews and questionnaires in order to establish the attitudes of learners and educators towards the translated examination papers.

The final chapter gives a summary of the study, together with conclusions and recommendations.