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Chemistry in Sepedi: Translation strategies for success

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CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In this research report, the aim was to investigate translation strategies that were used in the translation of *Questions and Answers: Matric Physical Science* and the effects of these strategies on the target text and function, by establishing the attitudes and perceptions of learners and educators towards the translation. The framework for the analysis of scientific text and its translation is a contrastive analysis of the source and target texts to determine the types of translation strategies used.

A list of Sepedi terms compiled by Ntake and Pare contains more transliterations and loan words than indigenous equivalents. Most of these words also retained their English meaning. In most cases foreign loan words were Africanised by transliteration i.e. “by changing their phonological and morphological structure to accord with African language structures” (Mtintsilana and Morris, 1988:111). A much higher number of transliterations as well as loan words may be ascribed to an attempt at secondary term formation to make Sepedi a language for knowledge transfer. According to Sager (1990), most new terms are formed as and when new concepts are created in such instances as new discoveries, the restructuring of existing knowledge, incidental developments or new industrial developments. This type of term formation, termed primary term formation, accompanies concept formation and is monolingual (Sager 1990: 80). Secondary term formation occurs when a new term is created for a known concept. It may happen as a result of a revision of terminology or as a result of the transfer of knowledge (especially scientific and technical knowledge) to another linguistic community.

However, according to Mtintsilana and Morris (1988:111), although transliteration seems to be the easiest and most productive method of developing terminology, the language may run the risk of losing its character. I subscribe to the view that

it should not be regarded as wrong to coin terms according to transliteration or borrowing principles. The borrowed terms represent new concepts which are not represented in the existing word stock of Sepedi. Indeed, transliteration and borrowing develop the language.

A good number of words were borrowed from English and given Sepedi pronunciations. But while borrowing, transliteration and other means of translation processing made for a huge bulk of Sepedi scientific terminology, translating a scientific text from English into Sepedi or other African languages still poses a major challenge.

Circumlocutions are very few and this may indicate that the translators, Pare and Ntake, were aware of the requirements for term status (a measure of conventionality, length restriction, etc.). The reason for trying to avoid circumlocutions is because circumlocutions are often used with the deliberate purpose of explaining the meaning of an opaque English term.

The translation strategies were used randomly, that is no strategy was used specifically for certain type of terms. Sometimes, the translators used loan words, and transliterations and blending at other times. This type of analysis is performed not to evaluate the quality of a given translation but to understand the decision-making process underlying the product of translation and to infer from it the translational norms adopted by the translators. Conducting this type of analysis provides a basis for comparison of two texts, which does not privilege sameness, but also highlights difference in translation.

By analyzing the terms according to the categories suggested by Baker (1992), and Gauton, Taljard and De Schryver (www.up.ac.za), it was possible to establish where the translators adhered to the original and where they deviated from it. In the translation of *Questions and Answers: Matric Physical Science* the aim has been to preserve the content of the source text; consequently, the

preferred strategies have been foreignising (e.g. transliterations, loan words, possessive constructions containing both English and Sepedi elements). The translation seeks to evoke a sense of the foreign. According to Venuti (2000), translations that draw more heavily on the foreignising strategy demonstrate how translators maintain the foreign flavour of the source culture in the target text.

The issue of language is a very sensitive one. English is associated with education. For example, if someone can speak English very fluently, that person is considered to be educated. From the schools in which this research project was conducted, it was established that most learners and the educators feel more comfortable in using English as a language of learning and teaching. Although it was discovered in this study that some of the learners' command of English was very poor, they still portray a negative attitude towards their mother tongue, Sepedi. It is apparent that most learners are struggling to communicate in English, both verbally and in writing. Firstly, they are trying to learn English as a subject and at the same time trying to apply the limited knowledge that they have acquired to Chemistry as a subject taught and learnt in a foreign language. They attach little value to their mother tongue.

Some learners were comfortable in communicating and discussing issues pertaining to language in the language that they use on a daily basis, which is Sepedi. There were cases where they completed their questionnaires in both English and Sepedi. It was common that those who felt that they have good grasp of English communicated their ideas in English.

Although the learners and the educators admit that the use of the mother tongue plays a significant role in the teaching and learning of Science, they are hesitant to support terminologisation in Sepedi. The results suggest that the negative attitude might be due to the fact that empowerment through English as well as international participation is valued highly. They believe that the local African

languages will remain low in terms of status and that English, as an international language will open up better opportunities.
It was illustrated through the comments given by the educators and their learners that many people really do not understand what translation is about. Many people felt that these translations were not necessary because the translators used words that were borrowed directly from English. When looking at other terms that are used in Sepedi, one starts to ask himself/herself certain questions as to why people have negative attitudes towards the introduction of new words for certain fields. For example, the Sepedi word “borotho” is an equivalent of an Afrikaans word “brood”. Most Sepedi speaking people use the word “borotho” even though we have an indigenous equivalent “senkgwa”, but many people seem to have problems when new words are introduced into the Sepedi stock of words.

Among the reasons that were given in relation to the negative attitudes was the lack of terminology in Sepedi. There is a strong belief that Sepedi lacks terminology that will enable it to function effectively in the educational domain. But for Mutasa (2002: 244), the lack of terminology or academic register is advanced as the rationale for depriving African Languages of their rightful role in administrative and educational domains at all levels. I believe that our home languages are capable of functioning at all levels. Developing terminology for our indigenous languages will enable the learners to grasp concepts more easily and ensure better results and outcomes.

According to Cingo (cited in Duminy, 1967: 149), “the argument that while a language lacks the vocabulary and technical terms to serve as instruments of thought, of study, and expression in all fields of modern learning and science, it is better to use a foreign medium in the meantime, cannot be supported and is wholly unacceptable in the educational and other interests of the people …” For him, a language develops the necessary vocabulary as needs compel it to do so. I believe that every language has the capacity to grow alongside with

technological developments. It is apparent that the problem lies not in the lack of terminology in Sepedi but attitudes to translation.

Undoubtedly, people are active factors in changing our linguistic situation. The results illustrate that more and more people are and will in future prefer to learn and use English only in all domains instead of their indigenous local languages. This state of affairs calls for the attention of language-in-education planners because language development depends on the willingness of the government to implement policies that will guide this and direct resources in this regard. Such efforts to channel resources toward the promotion and development of African Languages would ensure that they are scientifically sophisticated and hopefully be on a state of equality for teaching and learning purposes. With the introduction of a Language policy, this was a way forward.

Sepedi curriculum should be improved to be in line with the focus towards science and technology. Developing scientific and technological terminology and also providing educational materials could improve the situation. According to Heugh (1999: 165), learning materials are of critical importance,

> there can be no equality of education in South Africa … until there are mateials in each of the learning areas from grades 1-12 in all official languages, and until matriculation examinations can be written through each of these languages.

Schools ought to ensure that conditions for the study of Sepedi are created in order to boost the motivation of learners. The learners need to be provided with relevant information about the purpose of using African languages as languages of tuition and what advantages will be provided by adopting them. Hence, the key is however, to educate parents to make informed decisions on behalf of their children. Because of the scope of this research and limited time the role played by parents was not highlighted.

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions of this research led to the recommendations for further research. It is necessary to conduct a pilot study in schools that showed interest to study Chemistry in Sepedi to write their examination papers in Sepedi. Their results will then have to be compared to those learners who wrote their papers in English. If the results of the learners who wrote in Sepedi show some improvements, an attempt should be made to inform learners, parents, educators, principals and other stakeholders of the advantages of using African Languages as languages of tuition.

Although it is difficult to change the negative attitude of learners and educators towards the use of Sepedi as the language of learning and teaching, it is recommended that various schools be provided with learning materials, for example, scientific terminology lists, dictionaries (both monolingual and bilingual) for reference. Sepedi should be used as a high function language.