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## Problems of Dialect Non-Inclusion in Tshivenda Bilingual Dictionary Entries

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*Tshivenda is characterised by a number of dialects which exhibit some linguistic features different from those of other groups. The standard dialect in Tshivenda is Tshiphani. This dialect is spoken in the areas of Tshivhase and Mphaphuli. The selection of the Tshiphani as a standard dialect in Tshivenda did not cause the other dialects to die out as they are still used by the Vhavenda as spoken language. However, there is non-inclusion of dialectal entries in some dictionaries, whereas in others, very few dialectal entries have been included. A lexicographer must always take into consideration that there is a variation in language. Lexicographers should not see the inclusion of non-standard dialects as corrupting the standard language. Tshiphani was superimposed on other dialects. A dictionary is expected to accommodate all dialects of a language because they have equal value in spoken language. It is important for a lexicographer to first carry out research regarding the existence of dialects in a language if one intends to compile a dictionary. This paper seeks to show that it is necessary to include lexicons from non-standard dialects in lexicography works such as bilingual dictionaries because there is no dialect which is better than others. The addition of non-standard dialects in dictionaries will enrich the languages.*

### 1. Introduction

The concept ‘language’ can be defined as human speech involving special words, phrases, and style of expression of a particular group or writer. A language is not absolutely homogeneous since there is variation. According to Francis (1983: 42): ‘Any community of speakers of a language, with the possible exception of very small ones, could be found to be subdivided into groups according to various parameters, each of which will exhibit some linguistic features different from those of other groups.’

There is variation in language, a variation that also concerns the lexical units. This is a fact which the lexicographer must always take into consideration (Zgusta 1971: 164). In any language one can expect to come across instances where certain speech differences may exist between various groups of people (Poulos 1990: 8). Speech differences in a language may arise due to the influence of a language in an adjoining area. Sometimes they are confined to the use of different sounds or tones, in order to express the same thing.

These speech differences are called variants. Variants of the same language are called dialects. Francis (1983: 1) defines the concept ‘dialects’ as ‘... varieties of a language used by groups smaller than the total community of speakers of the language. Any language spoken by more than a handful of people exhibits this tendency to split into dialects, which may differ from one another along many dimensions of language content, and function: vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, usage, social function, artistic and literary expression.’ When the language of one group of people shows regular variations from that used by other groups of speakers of that language, we speak of a dialect (Fromkin and Rodman 1998: 401).

The predominant dialect in a particular language group is referred to as a standard dialect. This is the dialect used for literature or printed documents, and is the dialect taught in schools. The standard dialect is considered to be the correct form of the language. Zgusta (1971: 170) argues that: ‘In the history of different languages, one can observe the frequent phenomenon that for various reasons, mainly of a cultural, political, and economic nature, one of the dialects of a language gains preponderance over the other dialects, or a good part of them.’ According to Milroy and Milroy (1991: 22-23):

Standardisation is motivated in the first place by various social, political and commercial needs and is promoted in various ways, including the use of the writing system, which is relatively easily standardised; but absolute standardisation of a spoken language is never achieved. Therefore it seems appropriate to speak more abstractly of standardisation as an ideology, and standard language as an idea in the mind rather than reality – a set of abstract norms to which actual usage may conform to a greater or lesser extent.

A standard dialect is supported by institutions such as government. It is the correct form of language that is used in schools and in published documents. In many instances it is superimposed on other dialects. Tshivenda, like other languages, has one standard dialect and a number of other dialects. The standard dialect in Tshivenda is Tshiphani. This dialect is spoken in the areas of Tshivhase and Mphaphuli.

The selection of Tshiphani as a standard dialect in Tshivenda did not cause the other dialects to die out; they are still used by the Vhavana as spoken language as it used to be in the period during the arrival of the missionaries. However, there is non-inclusion of dialectal entries in some dictionaries, whereas in others, very few dialectal entries have been included. No variation in pronunciation of some lexical entries has been provided as it would be found in the spoken language. Lexicographers of Tshivenda dictionaries ascribe to the idea that only lexical entries from the standard dialect should be included. They believe that by including lexical entries from non-standard dialects they will be corrupting Tshivenda because the other dialects are considered non-pure. As indicated above, Tshiphani dialect is a prescriptive standard language. Prescriptive rules are devised in the first place for writing rather than for speech. However, they are not supposed to be imposed on speech. Therefore prescriptivism should not be the central interest to lexicographers. A dictionary should be descriptive in nature, in this case, accommodating all dialects of the language. A dictionary, monolingual or bilingual, should accommodate all forms of a lexicon of a language.

This paper seeks to show that it is necessary to include lexicons from non-standard dialects in bilingual dictionaries since there is no dialect which is better than others. Dictionaries should label definitions according to their dialects if the words are not in standard dialect. This can be supported by Allen and Linn (1986: 3) when they say:

The concept that dialect differences deserve scholarly study instead of being considered bizarre deviations from a standard norm led Georg Wenter in 1878 to undertake what was to become a decades-long project, *der deutsche sprach-atlas*, the linguistic atlas of Germany. All dialects have equal value in a communication system. The inclusion of non-standard dialects in bilingual dictionaries will assist dictionary users to know more about variants in the language.

## **2. Background information**

The Berlin missionaries, who reduced spoken Tshiphani into written language, were responsible for initiating it as a standard dialect for Tshivenda on their arrival at Maungani. Maungani is an area in which the dialect Tshiphani is spoken. Tshiphani was therefore adopted by the Vhavana as their standard language. This dialect was considered to be less influenced by other neighbouring languages such as Xitsonga and Northern Sotho because it is spoken in almost the centre of Venda. Ziervogel, Wentzel and Makuya (1972: 1) comment on Tshiphani as proper Tshivenda when they say: ‘Venda proper of Tshivhase’s and Mphaphuli’s areas, which has probably been least subjected to foreign influences.’ The

dialect was superimposed on other dialects as standard language because missionaries reduced it to written language. The Tshiphani dialect is further spoken in areas under the leadership of senior Vhavenḁa chiefs, i.e. Tshivhase and Mphaphuli.

However, this does not mean that the Tshiphani dialect is better than other dialects of Tshivendḁa. As indicated above, it was given preference because missionaries landed in the area where Tshiphani is spoken and they reduced it to writing. According to Fromkin and Rodman (1998), one dialect is neither better nor worse than another nor purer nor more corrupt; it is simply different. The authors further state that: ‘A standard dialect (or prestige dialect) of a particular language may have social functions – to bind people together or to provide a common written form for multidialectal speakers. It is, however, neither more expressive, more logical, more complex, nor more regular than any other dialect or language. Any judgments, therefore, as to the superiority of a particular dialect or language are social judgments, not linguistic or scientific ones’ (1998: 409). All languages are equal as far as the linguist is concerned. Muller (1861) is quoted by Milroy and Milroy (1991: 7) as saying:

In the science of languages ... language itself becomes the sole object of scientific inquiry. Dialects which have never produced any literature at all ... are as important, nay for the solution of some of our problems, more important than the poetry of Homer or the prose of Cicero

All other Tshivendḁa dialects, for example, Tshiilafuri, Tshimbedzi, Tshironga Tshinia, are considered non-standard. However, they have a complete vocabulary with different pronunciation in other instances, but are not beneficiaries of institutional support. Tshivendḁa dialects are mutually intelligible because they are dialects of the same language.

A spoken language varies regionally, it varies according to social groupings of speakers, and it varies in the speech of individuals according to the situational contexts in which they find themselves from time to time (Milroy and Milroy 1991).

Tshivendḁa is characterised by regional dialects which are Tshiphani, Tshiilafuri, Tshimbedzi, Tshironga, Tshimaandḁa and Tshinia, with Tshiphani as the standard dialect. Some of the dialects differ from the standard dialect in vocabulary expressing the same object or idea, whereas some differ from the standard dialect in pronunciation of the same word. Poulos (1990: 8) writes: ‘The difference may vary in nature. They are mainly confined, on a limited scale, of course, to the use of different sounds or tones, or perhaps even different words, in order to express one and the same thing.’

Up to the present time, Tshivendḁa has so far produced one trilingual and a number of bilingual dictionaries. It is only now that the Tshivendḁa National Lexicographic Unit is compiling a monolingual dictionary. Therefore, dictionaries already published in Tshivendḁa have been directed to learners of both Tshivendḁa and non-speakers of Tshivendḁa, thereby serving both the target language and the source language speakers. When a target language speaker wants to comprehend a word in a foreign language, he or she will consult a bilingual dictionary (Mafela 2004: 501).

### **3. Dictionaries and non-standard dialects**

In writing the dictionaries, lexicographers kept the purity of the language by adhering to the Tshivendḁa Language Board’s stipulation that the purity of the language must be maintained. However, they forget that a language should be studied as if prescriptive phenomena play no

part. The Tshivenda Language Board, whose members were mainly learned people, looked down upon other dialects because they were considered non-pure. Most of the members of the board used to be drawn from the areas in which Tshiphani is spoken. The Tshivhase and Mphaphuli areas were the first to receive missionary education in Venda. As a result, they were in a good position to superimpose their dialect as standard language on other dialects.

The study of language involves linguistics, which is descriptive in nature. Aitchison (1978) is cited by Milroy and Milroy (1991: 5) as saying:

First and most important, linguistic is *descriptive*, not prescriptive. A linguist is interested in what is said, not what he thinks *ought* to be said. He describes language in all its aspects, but does not prescribe rules of ‘correctness’.

Prescription here is used to normalise language usage. However, a dictionary user, especially a learner of the language, will expect all forms of spoken vocabulary to be reflected. The following are some words found in the Tshivenda dialects and their equivalents in the standard dialect (Tshiphani):

<b>Tshiilafuri</b> <i>muhaliivo</i> (sister-in-law) - <i>eba</i> (to dig) - <i>dia</i> (to beat) - <i>nyaga</i> (to want/ to look for) <i>mugidi</i> (feast) <i>vhurwa</i> (south)	<b>Tshiphani</b> <i>muvhuye</i> - <i>bwa</i> - <i>rwa</i> - <i>ṭoda</i> <i>munyanya</i> <i>tshipembe</i>
<b>Tshimbedzi</b> - <i>kwasha</i> (to break) - <i>ṭavhutshedza</i> (to explain) - <i>vangula</i> (to extract a thorn) - <i>gwa</i> (to dig) - <i>gadza</i> (to put pot on fire) <i>muṭwadzi</i> (hat)	<b>Tshiphani</b> - <i>pwasha</i> - <i>ṭalutshedza</i> - <i>ṭomola</i> - <i>bwa</i> - <i>ṭadzia</i> <i>muṭadzi</i>
<b>Tshironga</b> - <i>ka</i> (to pluck) - <i>kwata</i> (to be angry) - <i>tshesa</i> (to stay until late) <i>masevhe</i> (mother-in-law) <i>mungana</i> (friend)	<b>Tshiphani</b> - <i>fula</i> - <i>sinyuwa</i> - <i>dzedza</i> <i>makhulu</i> <i>khonani</i>
<b>Tshimaanda</b> - <i>lwaa</i> (to be sick/ill) <i>lwaa</i> (large flat rock) <i>tshikoi</i> (mealie cob) - <i>humbea</i> (to ask for) <i>muambo</i> (river)	<b>Tshiphani</b> - <i>lwala</i> <i>lwala</i> <i>tshikoli</i> - <i>humbela</i> <i>mulambo</i>

### 3.1. Variation in Vocabulary

On looking at the words provided above one realises that some dialects differ from the standard dialect in vocabulary, even if the words express the same object or idea. Others differ from those of the standard dialect in pronunciation. From the examples given above, the following words in the non-standard dialects express the same idea as those in the standard dialect:

## Section 4. Bilingual Lexicography

<b>English</b>	<b>Non-standard dialect</b>	<b>Standard dialect</b>
sister-in-law (female person's brother's wife)	<i>muhalivho</i> (Tshiilafuri)	<i>muvhuye</i> (Tshiphani)
look for	<i>-nyaga</i> (Tshiilafuri)	<i>-toḁa</i> (Tshiphani)
feast	<i>mugidi</i> (Tshiilafuri)	<i>munyanya</i> (Tshiphani)
south	<i>vhurwa</i> (Tshiilafuri)	<i>tshipembe</i> (Tshiphani)
friend	<i>mungana</i> (Tshironga)	<i>khonani</i> (Tshiphani)

The non-standard dialects display a different vocabulary from that of the standard dialect. For example, the word '*muhalivho*' (sister-in-law: female person's brother's wife) is non-standard because it is used by the Vhavenḁa who speak the Tshiilafuri dialect. The Tshiilafuri dialect has some influences from the neighbouring Northern Sotho. The word has been borrowed from Northern Sotho *mogadibo* but has since been used extensively by the people who speak Tshiilafuri. The Tshivenḁa Language Board considered it non-pure, and therefore is not included in the Tshivenḁa lexicon, especially for written purposes. As indicated above, the majority of the Vhavenḁa authors come from the Tshivhase and Mphaphuli areas; even the first Vhavenḁa lexicographers came from these areas. They are reluctant to include words such as *muhalivho* in their written materials, the dictionary included, because other dialects are looked down upon. The truth is that the word *muhalivho* is at present not used solely by people who speak Tshiilafuri. It has infiltrated the other dialects, the Tshiphani dialect included. The same applies to *mugidi* (Tshiilafuri) borrowed from Northern Sotho *mokete*, *vhurwa* (Tshiilafuri) borrowed from Northern Sotho *borwa*, and *mungana* (Tshironga) borrowed from Xitsonga *munghana*.

The word *mungana* is not used solely in Tshironga dialect, it is also used in other dialects such as Tshiilafuri. However, this word is not included in Tshivenḁa dictionaries as a main entry or part of the main entries; the main reason being that it is non-pure.

The above-mentioned non-standard words such as *muhalivho* are not included in the Tshivenḁa dictionaries. However, their synonyms in the standard dialect are included. *Muhalivho*'s synonym, i.e. *muvhuye* is defined in dictionaries as follows:

**muvhuye** (vha-) skoonsuster (vroulike persoon se broer se vrou) | sister-in-law (female person's brother's wife) (Wentzel and Muloiwa 1982: 46)

**muvhuye** 1 (cf. -vhuya) sister-in-law (used only between a man's sister and his wife) (Van Warmelo 1989: 253)

*Muhalivho* does not appear in the definition of the lexical entry *muvhuye* as one would expect. A dictionary reader would expect to see it being entered as a lexical entry or as part of the definition of its synonym *muvhuye*, even if it is a non-standard dialect; as long as its etymology is traced. The same applies to the word *mungana*, whose synonym is *khonani* in the standard dialect. *Khonani* is defined as follows in the dictionaries:

**khonani** (dzi-) vriend|friend (Wentzel and Muloiwa 1982: 24)

**khonani** *dzin* friend (Tshikota 2006: 32)

**khonani** 9 (< -konana) friend (between persons of same sex) (Van Warmelo 1989: 105)

**Friend** (n.) khonani, ṭhama (Marole and Gama 1954: 22)

Because of the popular use of the word *mungana* among the Vhavenḁa, a reader would expect to see it reflected in the dictionary as a synonym of the lexical entry *khonani*. The non-inclusion of *mungana* in the dictionaries stems from the fact that Tshiilafuri is influenced by Xitsonga, whose vocabulary is not accepted in the written material, dictionaries included. No

matter the number of people who use the word from the non-standard dialects, as long as it is not from the standard dialect which is Tshiphani in this regard, it is not included in the Tshivenda dictionaries.

The words from the non-standard dialects should be included as main entries or part of the definition of main entries in the dictionaries to help readers communicate without difficulty in both dialects. However, the dialect under which the word is found should be mentioned in the definition.

One other interesting observation is that of the word *-kwaṭa*. The word is recognised as standard language. In the standard language it is associated with one meaning, whereas in the Tshironga dialect it expresses two meanings. The definition of the lexical entry *-kwaṭa* is as follows:

- kwaṭa**<sup>1</sup> *ḽii* become cross (Tshikota 2006: 35)
- kwaṭa**<sup>2</sup> *ḽiny* suddenly darting out of a hiding place (Tshikota 2006: 35)
- kwaṭa** (id.) suddenly pop up or dart out of a hiding place or opening (Van Warmelo 1989: 123)

The word *-kwaṭa* is not included in Wentzel and Muloiwa (1982). Instead the word *-kwata* is reflected with its definition denoting *to become cross*, which has the same meaning as that in *-kwaṭa*. The word *-kwaṭa* is included in Tshikota (2006) and Van Warmelo (1989). In Van Warmelo (1989) its definition is associated with one meaning, i.e. suddenly pop up or dart out of a hiding place or opening. This is the meaning recognised by the standard dialect. Tshikota (2006) considered both the standard and the non-standard dialects when defining the lexical entry. The Tshironga dialect recognises both the standard and the non-standard meanings, i.e. become cross and suddenly darting out of a hiding place.

### 3.2. Variation in Pronunciation

Sometimes the difference between standard language and non-standard language is realised in the pronunciation of words. In almost all the Tshivenda dialects words pronounced in a non-standard form are not accepted for written purposes. Pronunciation associated with other dialectal areas except the Tshiphani dialect is considered non-pure. The accepted pronunciation is the one that is spoken in the Tshivhase and Mphaphuli areas. The following are examples of pronunciation of standard and non-standard dialects:

English	Non-standard dialect	Standard dialect
to break	<i>-kwasha</i> (Tshimbedzi)	<i>-pwasha</i>
explain	<i>-ṭavhutshedza</i> (Tshimbedzi)	<i>-ṭalutshedza</i>
hat	<i>muṅwadzi</i> (Tshimbedzi)	<i>muṅadzi</i>
river	<i>muambo</i> (Tshimanḽa)	<i>mulambo</i>

The words *-pwasha*, *muṅadzi* and *mulambo* are defined in the dictionaries as follows:

- pwasha** (tr.) break, smash to pieces, shatter (Van Warmelo 1989: 318)
- pwasha** *ḽii* smash, shatter, break (Tshikota 2006: 62)
- pwasha** stukkend breek (pot/glas), inbreek in huis | break (pot/glass/house); smash, shatter (Wentzel and Muloiwa 1982: 55)

- muṅadzi** *dzin* hat (Tshikota 2006: 48)
- muṅadzi** 3 1 fur cap as worn by doctors, of skin, goat, sheep, jackal, hyena. 2 (mod.) hat (Van Warmelo 1989: 229)
- muṅadzi** (mi-) hoed|hat (Wentzel and Muloiwa 1982: 42)
- Hat** (n-) muṅwadzi, ḽhodzini (Marole and Dagama 1954: 25)

**mulambo** 3 river (Van Warmelo 1989: 221)  
**mulambo** *dzin* river (Tshikota 2006: 47)  
**mulambo** (**mi-**) rivier | river (Wentzel and Muloiwa 1982)

The definition of the lexical entry *-pwasha* does not reflect the non-standard pronunciation of the word *-kwasha* in Van Warmelo (1989) and Wentzel and Muloiwa (1982). A dictionary user will be interested in knowing how this word is pronounced in other dialects even if they are not standard dialects, especially when he or she is aware of its existence. Tshikota (2006) does not only provide the alternative pronunciation, both words, i.e. *-pwasha* and *-kwasha* have been included in the dictionary as main entries denoting one and the same meaning. The lexicographers deviated from the prescriptive rules by including the non-standard pronunciation in their dictionary. The definition of the lexical entry *muñadzi* in the first three dictionaries does not cater for the alternative translation of this word, i.e. *muñwadzi*. It is interesting to note that one of the first Tshivenda dictionaries, i.e. *English – Venda Vocabulary*, includes the word *muñwadzi* as part of the definition of the main lexical entry *hat*. One can conclude that this was possible before the introduction of language boards for African languages, whose other function was to preserve the purity of languages. One other example is that of *muambo* in which the *l* in *mulambo*, which is a standard dialect is elided. The alternative pronunciation, *muambo* is not included in the definition; neither is it reflected as the main entry in the three dictionaries.

#### 4. Conclusion

It is important for a lexicographer to first carry out research regarding the existence of dialects in a language if he or she wants to embark on the compilation of a dictionary. The investigation will assist him or her to include all the lexicon of a language, both spoken and written in the dictionary. The lexicographer must begin his work with an analysis of the language whose dictionary he is about to compile in order to see how the language is stratified and what differences there are (Zgusta 1971: 164).

The standard language is mostly used for written documents, whereas dialects are used in spoken language. The spoken language is the language of communication. Therefore, lexicographers should include both standard and non-standard dialects in a dictionary to cater for both written and spoken languages. This does not mean that the inclusion of non-standard dialects in dictionaries will raise their status to that of the standard dialect. Jackson (2002: 10) argues that: ‘Most British dictionaries nowadays claim an international perspective and include words peculiar to the vocabulary of other English-speaking countries, but still largely confined to North America, Australia and New Zealand, and South Africa.’ The non-standard dialects are included because together with the standard dialect they constitute the language of communication.

Non-standard dialects could be entered as main entries or entered as part of definitions of the main entries. For those dialects which differ from the standard dialect in pronunciation, different sounds and tones should be indicated in the process of the definition of the main entry. Dictionary users, especially non-speakers of the language will gain much from the different forms of a word. This knowledge will help them to learn much about communities from different dialectal regions of the same language. Although the inclusion of dialects should be in both the monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, it would be especially more valuable for non-speakers of the language, to have dialects included in bilingual dictionaries. The addition of non-standard dialects in dictionaries would enrich the language.

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