

The Influence of Learners' Textbooks on Sepedi Writing Skills in A Grade 7 Classroom in Lebowakgomo Circuit

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to investigate the influence of Sepedi Grade 7 textbooks on the writing skills of learners. Textbooks have a long tradition and play a significant role in language teaching. They have a strong status in the culture and the power to define the language and what the studying of it is (Vanha, 2017). Textbooks play a significant role in the teaching and learning of language due to the content and activities that assist learners to understand the importance of language and to understand better what is expected of them in terms of the skills that are imparted to them (Department of Education, 2022). The qualitative research approach was employed for the study, with the case study research design and interpretive paradigm. The data collection instruments followed for the study were semi-structured interviews, document analysis of Grade 7 textbooks and learners' written essays. The Genre Theory and Cognitivist Theory were adopted for the study. The findings of the study was that textbooks have negative influence on the learners writing skills, whereby learners use wrong spelling and unnecessary loaning of words that are influenced by their prescribed textbooks. The researcher discovered that textbooks negatively affect the writing skills of the learners that result in learners not respecting their own language, with their cultural aspects also being affected. The Department of Education must make sure that the relevant and skilled people are employed to thoroughly review textbooks before being distributed to schools, to avoid giving learners books that do not support their indigenous language and its orthographic rules.

Keywords: Sepedi Grade 7 textbooks, indigenous language, orthographic rules, Genre theory

INTRODUCTION

Textbooks are regarded as having a long tradition and playing a significant role in language teaching because they have strong status in the culture of the learners and the power to define what indigenous language is and what the studying of it is (Vanha, 2017). Well-written and arranged textbooks make learners interact to improve their communication skills, maintain learner-centered environment and enhance critical thinking amongst them (Koutsompou, 2015). The same significance of textbooks stated by the above authors is also important and expected in the teaching of Sepedi Home Language, because the textbooks used in class should consider the culture, traditions and the quality of the language to motivate learners to learn and know more about their language. Content and context of textbook activities should relate well with the learners' cultural and traditional background that are represented in their language.

Authors of Sepedi learners' textbooks do not take cognizance of the spelling mistakes and unnecessary loaning of words when writing textbooks. Textbooks language should not be tempered with because it may affect the learners' understanding of their background, culture, beliefs and traditions that will also contribute to their poor performance in their written activities. The impact of wrong spelling and wrong transcription of loaned words in Sepedi language are presented during the essay writing activities where learners use words they have learned from their textbooks instead of the acceptable words from their home language. Authors of learners' textbooks have a tendency of unnecessary loaning words from other languages and not transcribing them correctly. Languages such as English and Afrikaans are mostly infused into Sepedi language textbooks and negatively affect the writing skills of the learners.

Example 1: “*mmotoro*”. The word ‘mmotoro’ is loaned from the English and Afrikaans word ‘motor’, which in Sepedi should be ‘**sefatanaga**’.

Example 2: “**Tropo**”. The word does not exist in Sepedi, therefore is loaned from an Afrikaans word ‘dorp’, but should follow the correct orthographic rule and be represented as ‘**toropo**’ and not ‘*tropo*’ as used in the textbooks. The word did not follow the orthographic rules that should be employed to loaned words. Authors should also know about ‘Zero equivalence’. Equivalent words are the words that have the same meaning, therefore words must not be loaned if there are relevant words in a language (Prinsloo and de Schryver, 2002).

South African schools depend on the South African Schools Act (SASA) for the availability of textbooks and other teacher and Learner Support Materials (LTSM). It is the responsibility of SASA (Act 84 of 1996, Section 5A), for the purpose of textbooks, to require the National Minister of Basic Education to prescribe norms and standards for the provision of stationary and supplies, learning and teaching material as well as equipment in schools for all subjects including Sepedi language. Amongst those materials, there are the core learning and teaching support materials (LTSM), and the supplementary LTSM, whereby textbooks are regarded as the core LTSM, together with workbooks, educator guides and the core readers and novels. SASA (1996) should make sure that it employs relevant people during the review of indigenous language books in order that learners get books that do not confuse their home language, instead empower them to know more about it.

Basic Education Rights (2017) in line with Section 29(2) of the constitution, offer learners the right to receive education in the language of their choice. The right to language will make the diversity and individuality of learners to be recognised and enable them to unlock their potential without any language barrier. Every language taught as a school subject like Sepedi language as an indigenous and home language for Bapedi tribe and a school subject for learners belonging to such a tribe, is prescribed a curriculum that guides its proceedings during the teaching and learning process, in terms of its standard, needs and levels of learners. Different language skills (*mabokgoni*) are expected to be achieved when teaching and learning Sepedi language as a school subject (Language in Education Policy (LiEP, 1997).

Sepedi CAPS document *Setatamente sa Pholisi sa Lenaneothuto le Kelo* (SEPHOLEKE: 2011) outlines three types of skills that are arranged in pairs, being; reading and viewing (*Go bala le Go bogela*), *writing and presenting* (*Go ngwala le Go hlagiša*), and *listening and speaking* (*Go theeletša le Go bolela*). There are Learner and Educator Support Materials (LTSM) prescribed for the skills taught in schools in order to make teaching and learning of Sepedi language effective.

There are two types of texts specified in the Sepedi CAPS document to guide teaching and learning on the writing and presenting skills (*‘Go ngwala le Go hlagiša’*) as in SEPHOLEKE (2011) for creative writing, being; longer transitional texts (*ditšweletšwa tša tirišano tše ditelele*), example: essay, formal and informal letters, curriculum vitae; and shorter transitional texts (*ditšweletšwa tša tirišano tše dikopana*), example: invitation, e-mail writing, advertisement, memorandum, obituary, and directions. For this article, the investigation was focused on the texts in Sepedi textbooks and their influence on the writing skills of learners, which in the evidence was collected through the analysis of learners’ written essays.

Makgai (2018) articulates how different types of essays are taught and how easy they are made for the learners to understand the rationale of writing an essay. Makgai further asserts that no essay can be written comprehensively if both the educator and learners are unable to interpret the words in a topic. Learners’ inability to write well is believed to be due to insufficient knowledge of grammatical rules and concepts (Charantjiti, 2017).

The experience of the researcher with Sepedi Home Language textbooks, as an educator, shows that there is an infusion of other languages like English, Afrikaans and Nguni because learners in their essay writing present the wrong language they have learned from their textbooks thinking that is correct. The problem that motivated the researcher to undertake this study with two schools to address the problem in order to find a way of dealing with spelling mistakes and transcription of loaned words that occur in the textbooks so that the textbooks could be of value to learners, educators and other Sepedi language users.

Theoretical Framework

Theory explains why something is as it is or does as it does (Hofstee, 2015). The study was driven by the Genre Theory which regards writing itself as social (Dean, 2008). Genre Theory is explained as being more helpful to the writers when they invent and revise their work because knowing about it, will make writers to be in order and consider readers’ expectations. Understanding and following the writing process of genre theory will lead the authors towards a better solution of the written products. As a framework, genre theory is used to analyse the writer’s texts with the intention of paying attention on how they write words and their syntactic form of writing words, since there must be a connection between the form of writing and the meaning (Martínez-Lirola, 2015). Bawarshi and Reiff (2010) attest that genre theory helps the writers to gain access to the knowledge of the context in their writings. When writers practice and learn features of literature they will be focused on and generate knowledge, and when learning the social context, they also learn its forms.

For this study, genre theory assisted the researcher in the analysis of the word usage within the Sepedi prescribed textbooks, to check if they serve the expectations of the learners in terms of language usage. The researcher has identified unnecessary loaning and wrong presentation of loaned words in the textbooks, together with spelling and come up with recommendations on how they can be rectified to improve the quality and value of indigenous Sepedi language.

The Cognitivist Theory in support of Genre Theory, assisted the researcher to identify the influence that the learners are getting from their Sepedi home language prescribed textbooks that contradict to their Sepedi standard language which is used during teaching and learning. This was achieved by giving learners essay writing activity that exposed the influence of textbooks into their language proficiency looking at spelling and loan words transcriptions.

Problem of the study.

Grade 7 learners at a primary school in Lebowakgomo Circuit are faced with challenges of language proficiency due to spelling mistakes and wrong transcription of loaned words when writing essays. It has come to the researcher's attention that the written texts in the Sepedi learners' textbooks have an influence on their language proficiency and that is clearly presented in their written essays. The infusion of languages such as; English, Afrikaans and Nguni by authors of Grade 7 Sepedi textbooks was identified as the cause of the problem. The following are some examples of the English words infused into the textbooks:

- Example 1: “*Thoma go theeletša morutiši ge a go balela athikele*” (Letšema, page: 177). The word ‘athikele’ comes from English word ‘Article’ meaning a piece of academic writing. The word was used unnecessarily because the Sepedi word for it is ‘setšweletšwa’ or ‘sengwalwana’.
- Example 2: “*Mini taxi e fapana bjang le thekisi ye e tlwaelegilego*” (A Re Šogeng Thari, page.101). The words “Thekisi” and “mini taxi” are English words that are supposed to have been avoided, and using Sepedi words ‘*Kolointefe*’ and ‘*koloyanantefe*’. The question should have been “*Kolointefe e fapana bjang le koloyanantefe?*” In this case learners would be able to know by the minimal suffix –‘ana’ attached to the noun ‘*koloi*’ that one is big and the other one ‘*koloyana*’ is small.

Significance of the Study.

- The study will be of value to the Department of Education as it will guide them on the importance of appointing knowledgeable reviewers for book screening and to improve their screening instruments.
- The study will highlight to the writers of textbooks to avoid unnecessary use of loaned words in their writing of learner textbooks.
- Educators will gain more knowledge on how to spot the wrong spelling and unnecessary use of loaned words that do not following grammatical rules in textbooks during screening when selecting textbooks for learners from different publishing companies.

- The study will add more value to language education studies and assist other scholars to gain more understanding of relationship between textbooks and the value of language in education.
- The society will gain value towards the quality of their language since it will be used correctly by authors of textbooks and in turn benefit their society as their heritage.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study was to investigate the influence of learners' textbooks on Sepedi essay writing skills.

The following objectives will be followed:

- To identify factors in textbooks that influence the learners' language usage during the essay writing in a Sepedi classroom.
- To examine transcription of loaned words influenced by textbooks in the learners' written essays.
- To establish the remedial actions towards the identified spelling errors and unnecessary loaning of words during writing skills.

Methodology

Population

The population for this study were 10 primary schools in Lebowakgomo South Circuit and the Grade 7 learners from the two primary schools that served as the sites for the study, being; Eureka Full Service Primary School and Dr. Dixon Mphahlele Primary School in Lebowakgomo Circuit. All prescribed Grade 7 textbooks supplied from different publishing companies served as sources for the study.

Sampling

The study followed the non-probability purposive sampling with an element of random sampling. Learners were randomly sampled from their registers, whereby five (5) learners per school served as participants, and that amounted to 10 learner participants. Two (2) Sepedi textbooks were purposively sampled as the researcher worked with one from each school, with the total number of books being 2. Two (2) Grade 7 Sepedi educators per school were purposively sampled as they were the ones responsible to teach Grade 7 Sepedi learning area, with the total of Four (4) educators as participants for the study.

Data Collection.

Data collection involves a process of acquiring data for the research study by using different methods or techniques of data collection (Creswell, 2012). The qualitative data collection methods that were used in this study are as follows:

Textual and discourse methods

The researcher analysed the textbooks and learners' written essays. In support of textual and discourse analysis, Fairclough (2003) says that the analysis of language is beyond the sentence, since their analysis is based on the larger discourse context to understand how it affects the meaning in the sentence. The researcher used this method to analyse the spelling and transcription of loaned words in the textbooks to find out the influence they have on the language usage of learners during their writing. Learners' written essays assisted the researcher in identifying unnecessary use of loaned words and errors that were committed by learners during their writing, which served as evidence for the study.

Semi-structured interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 4 Sepedi language educators of the sampled schools, being 2 educators per school, following the interview schedule attached as (*Appendix A*). Semi-structured interviews helped the researcher to be able to probe for more information from the educators. Interview schedule, voice recorder and field notes are the tools to support the interviews. With this method, the researcher had face-to-face discussions with educators, to find out about their experiences with the content of the textbooks that affect the language usage of the learners, and how they assist learners in that regard.

Data Analysis

The purpose of data analysis is to reduce data by selecting important points for the research to have a clear direction (Punch, 2014). Thematic data analysis was followed, whereby data was reduced, organised and sorted into codes or categories, then looking for patterns or relationships between the categories (Bertram & Christiansen, 2017:116). Data collected through textual and discourse analysis approaches from textbooks, and learners' written work, were arranged into themes that were formed by arranging data according to how categories are related in order to get headings and subheadings for the study. Data were represented in tabular forms according to different themes that emerged. Data collected from educators' interviews through voice recorder were transcribed, organised, classified and described.

Discussion and Findings.

The Study identified different data from documents analysis such as the analysis of Grade 7 learner's textbook, the written essays from Grade 7 learners and from the semi-structured interviews with the educators. The tables below show the findings of the study arranged in different categories or themes from the textbooks and learners' written essays.

Analysis of data from the educators' Interviews

Four Teachers where asked questions and they answered with their experience. Teachers where given symbols to show that answers are from different teachers. Two teachers from School A are A1 and A2 and teachers from School B are A1 and A2.

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

QUESTION 1: What are the importance of Sepedi Home Language textbooks in teaching and learning the skill of writing in the classroom?

Responses

A1: Textbooks teach learners to read texts and interpret pictures, and whatever they read they should be able to write during the writing exercises.

A2: Textbooks, I can say, they store information and help us teachers with the content and activities that we should teach to learners. Learners also use their textbooks to read, write, view pictures and write activities.

B1: According to my knowledge and the way I work with learners, I always refer learners to their textbooks so that they get detailed information on the subject matter. I give them activities from their textbooks when they have to write or read. That makes them to see the importance of textbooks because they use them daily to increase their knowledge and understanding of their language.

B2: Textbooks store the information that learners are using when learning how to write, not forgetting other language skills. Remember the skills are integrated in such a way that we do not only look at writing. Writing goes with reading and speaking, therefore as a teacher I cannot achieve the goal of teaching writing without engaging other skills. When learners read, that will prepare them to write and speak the language.

The teachers have shown a clear understanding of the importance of textbooks in line with the writing skills. They explained that textbooks have activities that guide them and their learners on the content and assessment activities that will make the teaching and learning effective. Their responses are more similar in that the textbooks have information that teaches learners on how to write, therefore you will realise that textbooks have a huge effect on what learners are writing. Teacher B also elaborated on the importance of integration of skills, showing that all skills are important integrated together for effective teaching and learning.

Question 2: Which challenges have you experienced with Sepedi textbooks in terms of the written texts?

A1: I have realised that textbooks have spelling errors and some errors I think are caused by typing, as a sign that textbooks are not well edited, also have the English words and pictures of white people as if our people are not important.

A2: The language used in the textbooks have words from other Sepedi dialects and foreign languages like English, to which some do not follow the grammatical rules.

B1: There are spelling errors in the textbooks and an infusion of loaned words from English and Afrikaans, especially on the pictures that might have been avoided by the authors making their own pictures that support the language used.

B2: Textbooks use words from other different languages, which was not necessary because in the textbooks of languages like English and Afrikaans you will not find our language written there. I do not understand why our language is not taken serious because it affects the learners' performance.

The teachers' responses show that they encountered almost the same challenges, while Teacher B2 also added by emphasising the realisation of the use of foreign languages in Sepedi textbooks but not finding Sepedi words in the textbooks of such languages.

Question 3: How do the challenges experienced in the textbooks affect the learners' writing skills?

Answers

A1: They affect the writing skills as learners believe that textbooks are the relevant sources that have the correct words to be used when writing. Learners write loaned words without realising the incorrect loaned words.

A2: Learners use the words that they have learned when reading the textbooks when writing text without realising the unnecessary loaning of words.

B1: If learners read the textbooks alone without the help of an educator, even without knowing the grammatical rules when loaning words, and if they end up writing incorrect spelling of loaned words.

B2: Learners do not have a problem of writing loaned words that were presented in the textbooks because they think everything in the textbooks are correct.

Answers from the educators shows that learners perceive textbooks as the relevant source and there are no errors in the textbooks. Learners write loaned words without following the grammatical rules.

Question 4: How do you assist learners with the challenges caused by textbooks to their written language?

Responses

A1: When I read with learners from their textbooks I tell them to use pencils to rectify the mistakes in the textbooks, either spelling or unnecessary loaned words. We correct such words, and in the case of permitted loaned words, I show them the correct way of writing them.

A2: I correct learners' spelling mistakes after they have written texts. Sometimes you may find that you cannot escape from loaning, therefore I give them the correct spelling that will make the word to be acceptable in the Sepedi language.

B1: I make it a point that learners write the correct words. I feel better when they write words from Sepedi dialect than from other languages like English, Afrikaans or Nguni

B2: I always make learners aware of the mistakes that are in the textbooks and correct them. Most of the time I teach learners grammatical rules on how to write words correctly from other languages, even though it steals my teaching time.

Teachers show understanding of what is needed in a language to be effective. Good language practice is the core for language teaching, especially the indigenous language because it is not only about writing, but the culture and heritage of a certain group of people. The teachers' responses were more similar because teachers said they will correct the errors that are in the textbooks and show learners the right words and correct transcriptions.

Question 5: What are you doing to make learners avoid unnecessary loaning of words and incorrect spelling when they write texts?

Responses

A1: I teach learners the correct spelling and advise parents to buy their children Sepedi dictionaries so that they learn the correct spelling of words. Most importantly, I teach them to be able to identify wrongly spelled words in any kind of a text. I engage them with the orthographic rules while still young so that they grow up having a good understanding of word structures.

A2: Learners are given many written activities as a practice that will make me know where they make mistakes so that I can assist them.

B1: Every time when my learners write essays or any other text, I make them aware of the unnecessary loaned words in their written work and help them to rectify them. I have realised that the more they write and being corrected, they will learn to do it the right way.

B2: The exercise I like doing with my learners is dictation. Learners are given a dictation with a mix of original and loaned words to check if they write the words following the grammatical rules.

The responses of teachers show that it is important for teachers to engage learners with many writing activities so that they get used to writing in order that they get used to spelling words. Learners should also be guided on how to transcribe loaned words following the orthographic rules of Sepedi language. Teachers should always be willing to assist learners with their spelling of original words and transcription of loaned words. The above responses show that if learners are not assisted, they may think that every word or spelling appearing in their textbooks is correct and take them as they are. It is the responsibility of the teachers to help their learners so that they achieve their objectives in terms of writing skills.

Analysis of data from the textbooks:

Loaned words from the textbooks

Names of the months.

According to the table below, It was not necessary for the author to loan and translate the names of the months from English language because there are Sepedi names for the months

of the year that were supposed to have been used. The correct names appear on the table below in the third column.

English words	Loaned words	Words in Sepedi
January	Janeware	Pherekgong
February	Feberewary	Dibokwane
March	Matšhe	Hlakola
April	Aporele	Moranang
May	Mei	Mopitlo
June	June	Phupu
July	Julai	Mosegamanye
August	Agostose	Phato
September	Septembere	Lewedi
October	Okotoboro	Diphallane
November	Nofembere	Dibatsela
December	Desembere	Manthole

General words

The words on the table below are extracted from the Grade 7 Sepedi textbooks, being loaned words from English and Afrikaans languages. Authors should have avoided unnecessary loaning of such words and use the Sepedi words as they appear on the third column of the table. This will help to maintain the quality of Sepedi Home Language, doing that will help in making learners to take their indigenous language as important and respected.

English and Afrikaans words	Loaned words	Sepedi words
watch (English)	Watšhe	Sešupanako
maar (Afrikaans)	Mara	Eupša
radio (English)	radio	Seyalemoya
phone (English)	Founu	Sellathekeng
motor (Afrikaans & English)	Mmotoro	Sefatanaga/koloi

Loaned words written without following Sepedi Grammatical rules.

Loaned words should follow the orthographic rules of the loaning language. Words translated into Sepedi should follow the grammatical rules, wherein most consonants should be adjacent to vowels to form syllables to make them sound Sepedi. The correct spelling is shown in the last column of the table below.

English/Afrikaans words	Incorrect spelling	Correct spelling
University (English)	Unibesithi	Yunibesithi
Africa (English)	Africa	Aforika
Dorp (Afrikaans)	Tropo	Toropo
Rubric (English)	Rubriki	Ruburiki

Analysis of learners written essays

Loaned words from Learners' written essays

Learners' written essays from the two schools showed unnecessary loaning of words that are also not following the grammatical rules influenced by the mistakes in the textbooks. The tables below show the loaned words used by learners from two different schools.

School A

English/ Afrikaans words	Loaned words	Sepedi words
Motor (English/ Afrikaans)	Mmotoro	Sefatanaga
Radio (English)	Radio	Seyalemoya
Office (English)	Ofisi	Kantoro
Dorp (Afrikaans)	Tropo	Toropo
University (English)	Unibesithi	Yunibesithi
Phone (English)	Founu	Sellathekeng
Watch (English)	Watšhe	Sešupanako
Key (English)	Khiye	Senotlelo
Hospital (English)	Sepetlele	Bookelo

School B

English/Afrikaans word	Loaned words	Sepedi words
Mall (English)	Mmolong	Dikgwebong
Lekker (Afrikaans)	Malekere	Dimonamonane
Hotel (English)	Hoteleng	Ntloborobalelo
Petrol (English)	Pheterole	Makhura
Snap (English)	Dinepe	Diswantšho
Hospital (English)	Sepetlele	Bookelo
Park (English)	Phaka	Lebala la boithabišo
Test (English)	Thesta	Teko
Straat (Afrikaans)	Strata	Mmila
Traffic (English)	Therafiki	Moela wa difatanaga

Teachers must make learners aware of the Sepedi words that should be used when engaging with writing instead of loaned words, and it is their responsibility to teach and show them how to transliterate loaned words correctly.

Looking at the data collected through the three sources of data collection, being; teachers' interviews, learners' textbooks and learners' written essays, it is evident that textbooks affect the writing skills of Sepedi Home Language as the textbooks show the unnecessary loaning of words and wrong transcriptions, whereby some words are written without following proper Sepedi orthographic rules. The impact was seen from the learners written essays.

Conclusion

Loaned words in the Sepedi textbooks affect the value of indigenous language, more especially the learners' writing skills. It is evident that the ignorance of Sepedi authors and the Department of Education failing to employ skilled reviewers for learners' textbooks before they are distributed to schools, are the major problems that affect the writing skills of learners. Learners perceive textbooks as sources of information that according to them are flawless because they are provided by the Department of Education, educators and government structures that are deemed professional, responsible and caring. The researcher recommends that the Department of Education should ensure that textbooks are thoroughly reviewed by relevant and skilled people who will yield good results in terms of language and content. Curriculum advisors should have knowledge of the structure and content of textbooks in order to be able to verify them after review before books are taken to schools. Learners must be taught the orthographic rules of their language so that they are able to identify and correct mistakes in the textbooks and in their own writings.

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