Article

The Relevance of Folklore in an Indigenous Language Teaching and Learning Situation: The Case Study of Sepedi

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Abstract

The article highlights folklore as an effective and genuine tool for indigenous language teaching and learning in the 21st century. There is a need to use pure, error-free and standardised language for it to be acknowledged and respected. In the campaign to sustain and preserve the revived indigenous languages—in this case, Sepedi—employing folk narratives in a text-based approach in teaching and learning Sepedi can develop in learners the desire to use language that is more refined, literary, figurative, symbolic and deep in meaning. Document study was adopted as the research method in this inquiry. Folk narratives in *Moepathutse* by Makopo were explored as they are rich in vocabulary and culture and promote indigenous knowledge. The study revealed that: a) Sepedi folk narratives are rich in relevant Sepedi vocabulary, b) employing folk narratives in a text-based approach results in teaching and learning the language in context and c) folk narratives preserve culture. The study recommends that language teachers promote and conserve indigenous languages through the use of folklore in a text-based approach. This is because folklore enhances relevant vocabulary. Furthermore, folklore supports languages to be learned in context – it is therefore, in the use of folk narratives that ethos, values, traditions, and cultures are preserved in communities. The study therefore, concludes that folklore is a relevant tool through which indigenous languages can be instilled and preserved by language users.

Keywords: folklore; folk narratives; indigenous languages; learner-centred pedagogy; teaching-learning situation; text-based approach

Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies
https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/SAJFS
Volume 28 | Number 1 | 2018 | #4293 | 11 pages

http://doi.org/10.25159/1016-8427/4293
ISSN 1016-8427 (Print)
© Unisa Press 2018

Introduction

The dawn of democracy marked the end of the marginalisation of indigenous African languages in education in South Africa. These indigenous languages have now been declared official languages, as a result of a call to develop indigenous African languages to the level of official languages. The situation above heralded the need to place emphasis on indigenous languages as part of the curriculum in education. This means that indigenous languages should be taught appropriately in schools and in institutions of higher learning to achieve the desired goals, and not just be imparted for the sake of teaching. The need to develop indigenous languages became even more imperative with the re-introduction of folklore as part of the written examination in home languages in the National Curriculum Statement document (Home Language-FET) Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education 2011, 12). This means that previously, folklore was dealt with superficially and with less attention than it would if it were a written subject in an examination. Indigenous languages preserve the African heritage, communication, and culture. This assertion is supported by Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986, 75), who alludes that every language has a dual character; and is used as both a means of communication and as a carrier of culture.

As argued by Vladmir (1993, 6), folklore is a literary phenomenon, as well as a genre that represents the African culture. It was conceived to share ideas, thoughts, issues and principles, as well as ideologies and beliefs that can broaden learners' horizons and shed some understanding on their culture. Although it focuses on understanding the formal features of this genre such as plot and alliteration, folk narratives can be employed effectively in the teaching of comprehension tests and summaries in the language classroom. It can also be used in a text-based approach in teaching and learning language structures and conventions in context—that is vocabulary and language use, sentence structure and critical language awareness.

Methodology

Document analysis was adopted as a research method for this inquiry. The following five folk narratives from *Moepathutse* (Makopo 1995) were used as a text-based approach in language teaching and learning: *Bohlale bja Tšhwene*, *Mmaphuti le Ledimo leja batho*, *Ga se rena ditšhwene, Nka se ke* and *Phukubje le Phiri*. The folk narratives were appropriate in the learning and teaching of idiomatic expressions and traditional nouns. These texts from *Moepathutse* were compared to texts derived from current literature such as *Lenong la Gauta* (Bopape 2008) and *Khupamarama* (Mamabolo 2015). The analysis of the current texts revealed that the texts appear devoid of indigenous language. As a result, they are irrelevant in the teaching and learning of indigenous languages. The above is reflected in the following discussion:

Literature Review

A broad review of relevant writings such as articles, journals and books on language teaching and learning, as well as the text-based approach was conducted. The main objective was to explore how language is taught and how the text-based approach can be effective in language teaching and learning.

Language Teaching and Learning

According to Liu and Shi (2007, 69), a teaching method is characterised by a set of principles, procedures or strategies to be implemented by teachers for achieving desired outcomes in learners. These principles and procedures are determined partly by the nature of the subject matter to be taught and partly by society's beliefs or theories about how students learn. Language teaching and learning involves the following skills: listening and speaking, writing and presenting, reading and viewing, as well as language structures and conventions. Language structures and conventions include vocabulary and language use, sentence structure and critical language awareness. It is interesting to note that according to the CAPS document, the skills are to be taught in isolation, except for the language structures and conventions, which should be incorporated into the other skills. This means that in this case, language structures and conventions are expected to be taught during a literature lesson in reading and viewing skills.

Separating vocabulary and grammar from the text in language teaching and learning is a continued tradition which needs attention in the 21st century (Mickan 2011, 17). This implies that grammar and words extracted from texts are thus functional and practical as part of the text. According to CAPS DBE (2011, 46), the language should be taught in context. This calls for the employment of the text-based approach. Although educators teach folk narratives focusing on the formal features of folk narrative as a genre, the same text is expected to be used to teach language structures and conventions. Ideally, such text should abound in Sepedi traditional words and culture so that such words and culture are taught and learned in context. Learners are likely to speak and write standardised, pure and error-free language provided they understand it. It is only when a language is learned in context that the language learner understands and uses it appropriately.

Text-based Approach

The approach to teaching and learning grammar is through text analysis. Maruma (2004, 4) states that the value of utilising text analysis in language learning and teaching is to make learners active participants in the teaching-learning situation. It is interesting to note that when teaching and learning language in a text-based approach, all language skills are involved. As learners read the text, other skills are applicable. Learners also view the words and pictures depicting them. If applicable, they listen to

their explanation and express themselves on how they relate to these words and pictures. Learners also write words similar to them and present them in class. In a text-based approach, learners engage with the texts for the purpose of understanding meaning, contributing to meaning-making and expanding the capacity to express meaning. Language can be taught and learned best by employing well-designed activities, which are fully learner-centred, using the text-based approach. This means that to teach indigenous languages effectively one ought to use folklore due to its richness in indigenous language vocabulary. The text-based approach employs folklore texts to teach and learn the indigenous language in context.

The text-based approach involves teaching and learning through engagement with the text. It is also learner-centred as learners work on the given text to identify and explore aspects under discussion. This requires the teacher to select text appropriately. Texts chosen need to be relevant, suitable and of interest to learners (DBE 2014, 20). The text should also be fit for a particular class and age, address current issues and be of the required length. In the case of language teaching and learning, relevance would mean that the text ought to abound in language aspects under discussion. It does not mean that only aspects appearing on the text ought to be addressed. Activities based on the text can call for other aspects outside the text. Assessment, especially at the end of the lesson, may require learners to provide examples of such aspects external to the text to demonstrate understanding. Halliday and Hasan (1985, 102) support this assertion and stress the importance of understanding the text in the context of a situation. Teaching idiomatic expressions and traditional nouns was identified for this study as they are stipulated in the CAPS document. Therefore, the analysis of some folk narratives in *Moepathutse* was based on the usage of idiomatic expressions to enhance relevant vocabulary in learners. Current texts were also analysed as a way of comparing their relevance in indigenous language teaching and learning.

Discussion

Idiomatic Expressions

Figurative expressions include proverbs and idioms as used in a language. The Sepedi language has a rich corpus of proverbs, which expresses figurative meaning. They constitute part of a culture and facilitate the understanding of the culture thereof. The usage of these proverbs only makes sense to those who understand their usage in Sepedi. In *Bohlale bja Tšhwene* (Makopo 1995, 14), Kwena was very hungry and envious of the baboon who was enjoying fruits on the tree. As a way of asking the baboon to give him some of the fruits, he used the expression: *Molomo ge o eja o roga wo mongwe* ("It is in appropriate/inhuman to eat in front of others and not invite them"). In *Ngwanenyana le Madimo* (Makopo 1995, 47), a girl was kidnapped by giants (*makgema*) that took her to their cave. The girl cried all night long and the idiomatic expression: *Masa ga a na swele* was used to express that even in that

situation, the next day would approach as usual. The girl was given instructions on what to do during the day when the giants went out for hunting. When cautioning her not to open the cave for anybody, they used the expression: *O tsebe gore moipolai ga a llwele*, meaning when opening for other people, she would be inviting serious personal problems and no one would feel pity for her.

In *Mmaphuti le Ledimo leja batho* (Makopo 1995, 25), Mmaphuti was forced to get married to a stranger who had visited them. After resisting for a long time Mmaphuti had no choice but to leave with the man to his abode. In pursuing Mmaphuti and the man to sleep over and leave the next day, Mmaphuti's mother said: *Bošego ga bo rone nta*, implying that there are certain things that cannot be done appropriately in the night. In *Ga se rena Ditšhwene* (Makopo 1995, 45), Phukubje eats the tigress and this is discovered by the tigers. They approach Phukubje and threaten to kill him if he does not tell them what happened to their young ones. Phukubje promises to find the victim, but devises the means and escapes by going out to the baboons. He finds them singing and appreciates their melody; and invites them to a party to sing. Here they are taught a song in which they confess that they ate the tigress. The tigers are livid when hearing the song, get angry and beat the baboons severely. Days after the incident the baboons confront Phukubje and blame him for their mishap. Phukubje explains his side of the story and states ''Then I realised that: *Ga bo lefšega ga go lliwe''* meaning that he ran away to save his life

Folk narratives in *Moepathutse* abound in idioms and the texts are relevant to teach indigenous language in context. In the folk narrative *Nka se ke* (Makopo 1995, 51–52) use is made of the following idioms: *Go nolega mooko, go hwa matwa* and *go swara pelo ka seatla*. The old lady is challenged by the situation in which she finds herself. In expressing that she will never give up, the idiomatic expression Mokgekolo *a se ke a hwa matwa* is employed. When the old woman is assertive and things are not as she wants them to be the idiomatic expression: *Mokgekolo a nolega moko* is employed—meaning that she is discouraged and without hope. At some stage, victory was certain, and in articulating her sense of hopefulness, the idiomatic expression: *A swara pelo ka seatla* is employed.

In the folk narrative *Phukubje le Phiri* Makopo (1995, 39), in articulating that Phukubje le Phiri are close friends, he uses the idiomatic expression *B*a *be ba ntšhana sa inong*. Phukubje uses the tactic of sleeping on the road as if he is dead. A man arrives in his wagon and tries to see if he (Phukubje) is dead for real, by beating him. However, Phukubje pretends to be dead. The man throws him at the back of his wagon, excited that he will enjoy meat in the evening. He also has fish at the back of his wagon. Phukubje throws them out one by one and escapes unnoticed. Upon arrival at home the man is very disappointed to discover that the fish as well as his other prey (Phukubje) are nowhere to be found. He becomes livid. In the evening Phukubje tells

Phiri his tactic and Phiri decides to do likewise. When the man approaches, Phiri raises his head to confirm if the wagon will not trample over him. The man is able to see that Phiri is not dead and beats him brutally. When explaining that Phiri tried to endure, the author employs the expression Phiri *a re ke beta pelo* ("He tried to endure the pain").

Analysis 1

In a language teaching and learning situation where folk narratives are employed the applicable skills are reading and viewing. The objective of the lesson is to ensure that learners know, understand and apply aspects of folk narrative in any narration. In incorporating language conventions into other skills, the teacher is expected to take cognisance of grammatical aspects found in folk narratives as the lesson progresses. Coming across the figurative expressions from their respective folk narratives, the teacher should engage learners in addressing them, based on the following:

- Completing incomplete expressions.
- Finding their literal and figurative meanings.
- When are they used in life?
- Other idiomatic expressions with similar meaning.

The proverb used in the folk narrative: *Ngwanenyana le Madimo* is used as an example in this discussion. The giants are cautioning the kidnapped girl not to open the cave for anybody and warns: *O tsebe gore moipolai ga a llelwe*. Learners will be instructed to give the complete version of the proverb. According to Rakoma (2012, 196), the complete version is: *Moipolai ga a llelwe sello sa gagwe ke moropa ge o lla re a bina*. Parts of the proverb such as this one will be analysed in relation to its literal meaning: self-killer, drum, sound, and dance. Learners will be shown how the literal meaning is un-related to the context. Its figurative meaning is: the girl will be in trouble if she does not heed instructions, and no one will feel pity for her. Instead she will be the laughing stock. Explaining its meaning in relation to the folk narrative from which it is found may enhance learners' understanding as it is explained in context. Learners will be expected to present proverbs about heeding instructions. This can be extended as homework or an assignment.

Traditional Nouns

Sepedi has a rich corpus of nouns, which are classified into categories. Traditional nouns are grouped into those referring to people, utensils, as well as those referring to attire. Five traditional nouns were identified from the five folk narratives. A traditional word normally calls for other nouns. In *Mmala wa Phiri* (Makopo 1995, 17) many

different colours are mixed in a *moeta* ("a bowl") to give the wolf its shade. In *Mpho ya Badimo* (Makopo 1995, 23), a woman gives birth to a bodiless, armless and legless baby boy; with only a head. The mother marries three wives on behalf of her son, but he was only seen by his mother. One of the wives sees him by mistake and gets very frightened and runs away. The head runs after her and when she crosses the river, the head falls into the river. A traditional healer is consulted and the wife is instructed to sing a song. The head gets out as a fully-fledged man. He is given *lekgeswa* ("men attire") to wear. In *Mmaphuti le Ledimo leja Batho* (Makopo 1995, 25), Mmaphuti discovers on the way that the man she has been forced to marry is a giant. She tries to trick him so that she can go back home. She tells her husband that she forgot her *mogopo* ("a wooden utensil to dish out porridge for men") at home and seeks permission to fetch it. Then she does not return. In *Mohlare wa Mokadiathola* (Makopo 1995, 28), a certain man, instructs his wives not to eat fruits from a certain tree. One day he decides to take a trip to some far- away places, and two of his wives disregards his instruction and have some fruits from the forbidden tree. The folk narrative has it that they went to the tree at night, having *leselwana* ("a bowl") to use as a container. In *Mokgonyana wa Lekgema* (Makopo 1995, 68), a woman is grinding on *lwala* ("the slate") to produce millet for making porridge.

Analysis 2

In a teaching-learning situation the teacher will engage learners on the explanation of traditional words as they appear in the text, based on the following:

- The category to which they belong.
- How they were constructed.
- What they are used for?
- Their current counterparts.

Table 1 represents traditional words identified above:

Learners can be given other texts to identify such words. They can also be instructed to compile and classify such words. Presenting these words in a language teaching and learning situation will enrich learners' vocabulary.

Table 1: Traditional world views

Name	*Category*	*Made of:*	*Use*	*Current counterpart*
Moeta	Utensils	Clay container	To carry/store water	Bucket
Lwala	Utensils	Huge rock	To grind millet and sorghum	Grinding machine
Lekgeswa	Attire	Animal skin	Men attire	Trouser
Mogopo	Utensils	Made of wood	To dish up food for the man; the head of the family	Plate
Leselwana	Utensils	Made of reeds	As a container	A bowl

Loanwords

Current literature addresses recent issues as stipulated in the CAPS document (Department of Basic Education 2011, 12). Texts on current issues are only relevant in addressing current aspects. Idiomatic expressions and traditional nouns are taught out of context in texts A and B (see Appendix) from Bopape (2008, 171) and Mamabolo (2015, 74–75 respectively. The texts are devoid of rich Sepedi vocabulary. They abound in *maadingwa* ("borrowed words"). The use of borrowed words implies a lack of vocabulary in Sepedi, which is not the case. In text A, the following borrowed words are used: *rakana, dipilisi, terowareng, disokisi* and *disakatuku.* If Sepedi is to be promoted, pure Sepedi words ought to be utilised. Although the vocabulary is guided by the content and the context, in the case where culture is promoted, cultural vocabulary should prevail. Text B also abounds in borrowed and modernised words such as the following: *maphodisa, megala, sethunya, dikolo, sefatanaga, dihaka, khwelakhwela*. This implies that texts A and B can best be used to teach modernised words. They cannot be used to teach standardised, deep and pure Sepedi vocabulary in context.

Findings

The study revealed the following:

a) Sepedi folk narratives are the best source of relevant Sepedi vocabulary.

b) Employing folk narratives in a text-based approach results in teaching and learning language in context.

c) Folk narratives preserve culture within learners.

Recommendations

The study recommends promotion and conservation of indigenous languages by using folklore in a text-based approach; in a language teaching and learning situation.

Conclusion

Having used texts from folklore to teach and learn idiomatic expressions and traditional nouns, one is inclined to conclude that folklore is a relevant and genuine tool through which indigenous languages can be instilled and preserved in language users. This brought to light the importance of the choice of texts in language teaching and learning. To promote and conserve indigenous languages, folklore ought to be utilised in a text-based approach. Using other texts other than folklore may result in indigenous languages' aspects being taught out of context. In this way these aspects will not be understood in such a way that they will increase learners' vocabulary—they will only be understood in the context of the particular lesson, while learners will find it difficult to apply such aspects in everyday use.

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Appendix

Text A

Ka phapošaneng ya ka godimo ya rakana go be go le dihlašana le dipilisi tšeo monnamogolo a felago a di šomiša nako le nako. Ka phapošaneng ya ka tlase go be go le dipuku tše mmalwanyana tša go bala. Dipuku goba go bala e be e se taba yeo e nkutswago maikutlo ka fao ke ile ka di hlokomologa ka pela, ka tswalela lebati.

Ka boitlhaganelo ke ile ka retologela lebating lela le lengwe. Ka terowareng ya ka godimo go be go le disokisi tše mmalwanyana le disakatuku tšeo di bego di phuthilwe ka bothakga bjo bogolo. Go be go le lešela le lebotse leo le bego le phuthilwe ka bothakga gomme go be go itaetša nke ke mokotlana wa mosamelo. Ke ile ka le emiša gore ke le fetleke. Ke ile ka emiša se sengwe le se sengwe seo se lego ka fao gore se lekolwe ka tlhoko le tlhokomelo, ke lekola le tikologo yeo di bego di le go yona. Go be go se selo sa go tanya mahlo. Ke ile ka kgoromeletša teroware madulong a yona ka bula yeo e latelago.

Ke terowareng ya bobedi go be go le mašela a go ala malao, ao le wona a bego a phuthilwe ka bothakga. Ke ile ka antšha ka go latelana, ka a thintha mola ka leihlo ke be ke utswa tikologo yeo a bego a le mo go yona. Go be go se selo sa go emiša dintšhi tša mahlo. Ke ile ka bušetša mašela bodulong bja wona, ka kgoromeletša teroware bodulong bja yona. Teroware e ile ya kgesemela bodulong ka boiketlo.

Seatla sa ka se ile sa goga teroware ya mafelelo ya boraro. Ka go yona go be go le dituku tšeo di bego di phuthilwe ka bokgwari. Go be go le diaparo tša basadi tše mmalwanyana ka go yona. Khutlwaneng ye nngwe go be go le boyanyana bjo bošweu bjo bo bego go rotogile ka gonnyane pampišaneng e boletiana yeo bo bego go phuthilwe ka yona. Ka tlhompho e kgolo ke ile ka emiša diaparo gore ke kgone go lebelela ka tlase ga tšona.

Ke ile ka topa boya gammogo le pampišana yeo bo bego go phuthilwe ka yona. Bo be bo le boima gomme go itaetša gore go na le selo ka gare. Ka boiketlo ke ile ka hlarolla boya go bona gore bo phuthetše eng ka gare. Selo se sethatanyana se ile sa

tšwa ka gare ga bjona mme sa wela ka gare ga teroware. Ke ile ke emišetša boya godimo ka menwana..(Lenong la Gauta: HDN Bopape letl :171)

Text B

Maphodisa a rile go lemoga go tlogelela ga sefatanaga sa Pano, le ona a tlogelela a ba a thoma go bitšana ka megala gore ba thibe kae le kae. Pano ge ba tšhaba bjalo a ntša sethunya sela a fa yo mongwe gore a thuntšhe maphodisa ale gore a se ba šale morago. Morago ga gore maphodisa a lemoge gore ke ntweng felo fao, le ona a swanelwa ke gore a letše wa ona morodi. Ka go ba le boitemogelo a ile a thunya yo mongwe hlogong. Masogana a napa a re go lemoga gore go befile, a fološa yola ba mo thuntšhitšego sefatanaga se sepela ka lebelo la go šia mahlo. Yola wa bobedi a re go lemoga sefako sa dikolo tša maphodisa, a itahla ka lebati la sefatanaga gore a ka upša a hwe. Ee, o rile ge a kgokologa kua maphodisa a letša kolo a gopola gore o a tšhaba. Kolo ya tsena hlogong, go hlakantša le go fologa sefatanaga se tšhabeša ya ba gona go tšea mapara.

Pano a napa a re go bona gore o šetše a le noši, a lemoga gore go tšhaba ga go sa le bohlokwa. A ema. Ge a fologa a emiša matsogo a lahlela sethunya fase go laetša gore o fentšwe. Ba rile ge ba fihla ba thoma ka go lomiša dihaka, ba fošetša ka gare ga khwelakhwela. Ba boetše morago go tšea bale ba tšamilego go etshwa ke sefatanaga fela bobedi e be e se sa le ba lefase le. Ba topelela ba iša kgolegong. Pano ka ge e be e le yena a šetšego, a swanelwa ke go fa maphodisa bohlatse bjoo bo tletšego le maina a bona ka moka. Ba mmušo ba letšeditše Molwantwa mogala go hlaloša seo se hlagetšego morwa wa gagwe le bale ba bangwe. Molwantwa o ile a kwa bohloko kudu gore nka be morwa a tšee sa gagwe sefatanaga go ena le gore a ye go utswa sefatanaga sa badiitšana. Ba ile ba emela tsheko. Morago ba otla lesogana mengwaga ye meraro kgolegong goba dikete tše senyane tša diranta. Molwantwa o ile a ntša mašeleng ao gore leitšibolo la bona le tšwe ka moo kgolegong.

Pano ge a boa gae a itshola maitsholo ka moka gore a ka se sa bušeletša. Batswadi le bona ba mo omantše ka dikgalo ka moka gore a tlogele go ba tsenya mahlo a batho, ge a nyaka sefatanaga a tšee tša gabo a ye go phetha mabaka a gagwe eupša e be e a go kwagala, a sego a bjala le makgarebe. Pano o kwele, a dira tše dibotse matšatšing ao morago ga dikgalo. O ile a lemoga gore bakgotse ba a lahletša. Morago ga tšeo o ile a lemoga gore a ka se dule ntle le bakgotse eupša o tla kgetha bakgotse ba bakaone ba go se lahletšane, a ba a bona go phela le makgarebe go phala go phela le masogana. Pano o ile a thoma go phela le basetsana, a ba fa ditšhelete. A imiša basetsana ka go latelana. (Khupamarama: Mamphoku Mamabolo letl: 74-75)