L .T. Marole and Dictionary Writing: The Emergence of Lexicography in Tshivenḓa

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Abstract

Tshivenḓa, one of the minority languages in South Africa, was given the status of an official language in 1994, together with the other ten languages: isiXhosa, isiZulu, isiNdebele, Sesotho, Sesotho sa Leboa, Setswana, Siswati, Xitsonga, English and Afrikaans. As with other South African indigenous languages, missionaries reduced Tshivenḓa to writing. Although the Berlin Missionaries were responsible for reducing the language into writing, their contribution to Tshivenḓa lexicography was minimal. They compiled a list of Tshivenḓa words and provided German equivalents, for use by the missionaries. In 1904 they produced a booklet on Tshivenḓa verbs entitled Die verba des Tsivenda. The first Muvenḓa who involved himself in lexicography work was L. T. Marole. Marole published a number of lexicography works, including Phrase Book*, which is the subject of this discussion.* Phrase Book*, the first lexicography publication of the author, and the first lexicography work in Tshivenḓa, consists of a list of English words and phrases with their Tshivenḓa equivalents. The list includes words for body parts, wild animals, domestic animals, prepositions, seasons, relationships, sickness, conjunctions, verbal phrases and domestic work. The needs and interests in using dictionaries are part of the necessities and amenities of our cultural life (Hüllen, 1989). This paper aims at investigating the validity of this assertion in* Phrase Book*. Marole's presentation of lexicography aspects in* Phrase Book *will be analysed in this regard.*

Keywords: *Dictionary writing, bilingual dictionary, headword, illustrative example, lexicography, meaning, phrase book*

Introduction

The majority of the indigenous African languages in South Africa were reduced to writing by missionaries, among them the Berlin Missionaries, Swiss Missionaries, London Missionary Society, Roman Catholic Missionaries, Methodist Missionaries, etcetera. The missionaries further established schools to teach locals to read and write so that they could access the Bible. The Berlin Missionaries were responsible for reducing spoken Tshivenḓa to writing. Tshivenḓa is one of the nine indigenous African languages of South Africa recognised as official languages in the country together with English and Afrikaans. Rev. C. F. Beuster established a missionary station at Beuster in 1872, which was responsible for recording Tshivenḓa. The aim of establishing the mission stations was to spread the Christian gospel. Missionaries established schools to teach the local people to read and write, which in turn gave them (the local people) an opportunity to read the Bible. Beuster and Klatt began to learn Tshivenḓa and developed symbols to represent the sounds (Mafela, 2005, pp. 36-37). These missionaries did not reduce spoken Tshivenḓa to writing only; they produced the first books that include *Die verba des Tsivenda,* which is a terminology list. When Vhavenḓa

became enlightened educationally, they began to write their own books, including dictionaries. L. T. Marole was the first Muvenḓa to publish a bilingual dictionary in Tshivenḓa entitled *Phrase Book* in 1932.This dictionary, which is the focus of the discussion, was meant for people learning Tshivenḓa (missionaries at that time), and who were eager to learn the indigenous languages so that they could communicate with the local people. In this regard, Mafela (2005, p. 36) states:

> All over South Africa, missionaries had a problem with language communication because they did not know any African language. This was also true of Beuster and Klatt, and that hampered their mission of spreading the gospel. Communication with the local people was a fundamental activity of missionaries because without it they could not function. For missionaries to overcome this problem they had to learn an African language in the area.

Phrase Book, a 16 page long dictionary, contains terms relating to body parts, wild animals, domestic animals, prepositions, seasons of the year, relationships, sickness, conjunctions, verbal phrases and domestic work.

Dictionaries address the needs and interests of dictionary users, which are part of the necessities and amenities of our cultural life (Hüllen, 1989). Since *Phrase Book* is the first lexicography work by a Muvenḓa, it is worthwhile to check if it has all the features of a dictionary. This paper seeks to investigate the validity of the assertion that dictionaries address the needs and interests of dictionary users with reference to the first lexicography work in Tshivenḓa by L. T. Marole. This will be achieved by analysing some aspects of a dictionary in *Phrase Book*.

Writing a dictionary

Writing a dictionary is not an easy task; it involves skills and knowledge of the language. This is so because a dictionary is a reference book about words and language (Jackson, 2002, p. 21). Landau (1984, p. 2) argues: "In order to understand how to construct a dictionary, one must first appreciate both what a dictionary is and what it is not, what kind of information it is designed to convey and what it cannot." Van Sterkenburg (2003, p. 8) defines a dictionary as:

> … a reference work [which] aims to record the lexicon of a language, in order to provide the user with an instrument with which he can quickly find the information he needs to produce and understand his native language. It also serves as a guardian of the purity of the language, of language standards and moral and ideological values because it makes choices, for instance in the words that are to be described.

For one to be able to address all this, a lexicographer must be trained. Some of the functions of a dictionary as suggested by Gleason Jr (1975) are to:

- be an index to the grammar
- serve as amendment to the grammar

- serve as a system of cross-reference and correlation of entries within the grammatical statement
- serve as a device to correlate several structural systems, grammar being one of them, which bear on the usage of individual items.

The main function of the dictionary is to describe the meanings because dictionaries are filled with words and their meanings (Fromkin & Rodman, 1998). However, there are many aspects, which should receive attention when a lexicographer describes the meanings of headwords. Landau (1984, p. 5) states:

> A dictionary is a book that lists words in alphabetical order and describes their meanings. Modern dictionaries often include information about spelling, syllabification, pronunciation, etymology (word derivation), usage, synonyms, and grammar, and sometimes illustrations as well.

Organising the information alluded to in the above quotation needs training and the knowledge of the science of a language. One cannot describe the pronunciation of a word without a knowledge of phonetics, or describe the syllabification of a word without a knowledge of morphology and phonology. One should receive some form of training regarding the arrangement of the different parts of a dictionary and that of the headwords. For many of the first African languages, lexicographers did not receive any form of formal training in writing dictionaries. They engaged themselves in the compilation of dictionaries out of their love. However, they managed to produce products that benefitted the users.

About L. T. Marole

L. T. Marole was a teacher by profession. He was one of the first educated men under the guidance of the Swiss Missionaries. He had an interest in the education of his fellow Vhavenḓa. He was one of the Vhavenḓa pioneers who published books on different subjects. He published historical narratives, a hymnbook, a book on totems and proverbs, legends and a number of lexicography works. He was the first Muvenḓa to publish lexicography works. He established a publishing company, Marole Book Depot, which is still in operation. The book titled *Phrase Book,* his first lexicography work, was published in 1932. In 1954, he co-authored *English – Venda Vocabulary* with F. J. De Gama. This was followed by *Afrikaans – Venda: Vocabulary and Phrase Book* in 1955*. Phindulano* was published in 1956. The second edition of his historical narrative titled *Makhulukuku* was published in 1966. In 1969, a legend titled *Mwali-Raluvhimba* was published. A reprint of his *Mitupo na Mirero* (*Totems and Proverbs*) was published in 1998. The ninth edition of *Nyimbo dza Pesalema* was published in 2005. He published some of these books by the publishing company he established, Marole Book Depot. All lexicography works by Marole are mono-directional bilingual dictionaries and contain two vocabularies, one for each language; their primary purpose is to help the user in his or her task of translating from one language to the other (Malone, 1975).

Unlike current lexicographers, Marole did not receive any form of formal training in lexicography. He compiled the lexicography booklets out of his limited knowledge. He did not have the facilities such as those current lexicography units, whose sole function is to produce dictionaries, have. There was no incentive for him to produce the lexicography works. He did

not receive funding from the government or any private institution. In fact, lexicographers in the indigenous African languages at the time did not receive funding from the government to produce dictionaries. However, English and Afrikaans lexicographers received financial support from the government. Marole's books were printed in Morija, a town in the neighbouring country, Lesotho.

Phrase Book and the needs of users

Dictionaries differ in scope in respect of the subjects they cover (Landau, 1984). Frequent users of dictionaries are students, learners and academics. In this regard, Swanson (1975, p. 63) asserts: "They use them for different reasons. Many users look for the meaning of the word, while others will be checking on the spelling, pronunciation, morphology, etymology and even the usage of the headword." A bilingual dictionary can be useful and desirable to different target users, for example, travellers, translators and linguists (Swanson, 1975). Therefore, a dictionary should address the needs and interests of the users. Haas (1975, p. 45) comments:

> The ideal bilingual dictionary would anticipate every conceivable need of the prospective user. 1. It would provide for each word or expression in the source language (SL) just the right translation in the target language. ... 3. It would contain all the inflectional, derivational, syntactic and semantic information that any user might ever need. ... 7. It would contain all necessary information about correct spellings, as well as information on alternate or commonly encountered incorrect spellings.

A dictionary should have front matter, main matter and back matter. The front matter gives attention to aspects such as pronunciation, usage, regional varieties and guide to the use of the dictionary. The back matter, on the other hand, contains information such as the lists of biographical and geographical names, irregular words and spelling guides (Landau, 1984).

Phrase Book is a bilingual dictionary with English as the source language and Tshivenḓa as the target language. Al-Kasimi (1983, p. 58) states: "The major task of a bilingual lexicographer is to find appropriate equivalents in the target language to the units of the source language." In addition to the provision of the equivalent word, a dictionary is expected to give a certain amount of information about affixation, inflection, and classification; and may include historical information, such as etymology of entry words (Malone, 1975).

Phrase Book consists of one part, i.e. the main matter. There is no style guide, which can guide users regarding how they can access lexical information, and how they can identify the grammatical information, if available. Most guides describe every part of the dictionary article: entry word, syllabication, pronunciation, inflected forms, various kinds of labels, cross-references, variants, etymologies, synonyms, and usage notes (Landau, 1984). Even if dictionary users seldom read the front matter articles, it would be good if they were added in the dictionary. Marole did not include the back matter either. The dictionary focuses on the presentation of words and phrases in the source language and their corresponding equivalents in the target language. The discussion of *Phrase Book* and the needs of users entails the following aspects: the choice of words, arrangement of headwords, finding the meaning of a headword, and the use of illustrative examples. The aspect of grammatical

information will not receive attention in this discussion because Marole does not cover it in his definition of headwords.

The choice of headwords

As mentioned above, *Phrase Book* is a bilingual mono-directional dictionary, with English as the source language and Tshivenḓa the target language. Its target group is the non-Tshivenḓa-speaking people who want to learn Tshivenḓa vocabulary. The choice of headwords was influenced by English vocabulary. For example, the equivalent of *firmament* (Marole, 1932, p. 10) in Tshivenḓa is *tshibakabaka tsha ṱaḓulu* (Marole, 1932, p. 10). It is not clear what *tshibakabaka tsha ṱaḓulu* means. Guralnik (1981, p. 358) defines *firmament* as follows: "to strengthen the sky thought of as if it were a solid arch". It would seem Marole was influenced by the English definition when he coined this equivalent. The same holds for the headword *monkeynut* (Marole, 1932, p. 10), whose Tshivenḓa equivalent is *nḓuhu*. *Nḓuhu* is part of Tshivenḓa vocabulary, but its English equivalent is *peanuts*. However, the type of peanuts called *monkeynuts* are foreign to Tshivenḓa. Marole has included foreign words that need to be provided with Tshivenḓa equivalents. His choice of headwords was therefore influenced by the source language and not dictated by the target language which is Tshivenḓa. Missionaries and non-speakers of Tshivenḓa would expect that a lexicographer could have selected words that reflect on Vhavenḓa culture and their environment because they want to learn the language. However, general users, including Vhavenḓa speakers, would appreciate the inclusion of English words that do not have translation equivalents in Tshivenḓa so that the lexicographer could coin the necessary equivalents.

Arrangement of headwords

Dictionary users need to access the word they are looking for as quickly as they can. This is determined by the arrangement of headwords. The quickest way to find a word in a dictionary is when the headwords are arranged according to the letters of the alphabet. Landau (1984) states that dictionaries usually alphabetise letter by letter rather than word by word.

Marole did not arrange the words according to the letters of the alphabet, but according to subjects. Arranging headwords by subjects can be difficult for a dictionary user who is looking for a word because if one cannot identify the group in which the word is found, he or she will end up searching for the word in all the groups, leading to time wasted and even failure to find the word. For example, in *Phrase Book*, Marole grouped headwords according to parts of the body (lips, mouth, stomach, heart); wild animals (elephant, giraffe, zebra, lizard, baboon); domestic animals (cow, bull, goat, pig, mule, hen); relationships (parents, mother, aunt, cousin, bride, brother-in-law); seasons (spring, autumn, seed, vegetable, summer, cabbage); sickness (blind, leper, smallpox, headache, diarrhoea); conjunctions (and, but, or, however), verbal phrases (come here, sit down, run, come in); house work (open the door, light the fire, cover the pot, lay the cloth, fry the meat); and interrogative pronouns (Who says so? What do you want? What tree is this?). If one is looking for the meaning of the headword *tongue*, the user will have to look for it under *parts of the body*.

It is equally difficult to locate the headword in a group because even here, the headwords are not arranged according to the letters of alphabet; they are haphazardly arranged. We can take the first five headwords in the subject *parts of the body*, for example:

Head	*Ṱhoho*
Hair	*Mavhudzi*
Skull	*Dethe ḽa ṱhoho*
Brain	*Vhuluvhi*
Ears	*Nḓevhe* (Marole, 1932, p. 3)

Arrangement by letters of the alphabet was not followed in the above examples. The list begins with words whose first letter is *H*, followed by the word whose first letter is *S*, and those with letters *B* and *E*. Even in words whose first letter is *H*, Marole should have put *Hair* first, then followed by *Head*, because the first letter following the letter *H* in *hair* is *a*. This shows how difficult it was to find the intended word during the early writing of dictionaries among the Vhavenḓa. Users can find the dictionary user-friendly if the headwords have been arranged according to the letters of alphabet.

Finding the meaning of a word

The main purpose of using a dictionary is to find the meaning of words. Word meaning involves the lexical meaning that a particular word contributes, in and of itself, to the understanding of an utterance (Key, 1995). In a bilingual dictionary, the purpose is to find both the target language equivalent of the headword and sometimes its meaning. According to Al-Kasimi (1983, p. 60), "The translations of entry words in a bilingual dictionary are usually of two types: (a) translational equivalents, and (b) explanatory equivalents." Al-Kasimi (1983) defines translational equivalent as a lexical unit which can be immediately inserted into a sentence in the target language, and an explanatory equivalent as one which cannot be always inserted into a sentence in the target language. *Phrase Book* provides users with the target language equivalents, and they are translation equivalents. The lexicographer does not explain the meaning of the headword. It would seem the lexicographer assumes that the users are aware of the meaning of the source language's word. From this assumption, there is no need to look for the meaning. What Marole did was to address the problem of equivalents. For example:

Elephant	*Nḓou*
Lion	*Ndau*
Leopard	*Nngwe* (1932, p. 5)

The definition of the headword here is brief, that is, only one aspect of the definition has been provided—the equivalent in the target language. Although the dictionary provides the equivalents of the source language words, users learn very little if the definition does not cater for aspects such as grammatical information. Jackson (1985, p. 53) notes: "Grammar is concerned with the general rules affecting the classes of items in a language." Grammatical information is more essential for the person who is trying to speak or understand a foreign language than for the native speaker (Landau, 1984, p. 88). In addition to the equivalent, readers would like to know grammatical information such as the spelling of the word, the

noun class of the word, the syntactic and semantic information. Fromkin and Rodman (1998, p. 14) note: "To understand the nature of a language we must understand the nature of this internalized, unconscious set of rules, which is part of every grammar of every language." Al-Kasimi (1983, p. 50) states that a bilingual dictionary for production should include all necessary grammatical information about the target language for two reasons: (a) to enable the foreign learner to produce adequate sentences in the target language, and (b) to provide the foreign learner with all the information they need without referring them to handbooks of grammar.

Grammatical information is not included in *Phrase Book*. African languages are characterised by classes. *Phrase Book*, as a lexicography work in one of the African languages, should have included matters pertaining to the members of classes (and sub-classes) to which a lexical item belongs (Al-Kasimi, 1983). Users expect a dictionary to indicate the part of speech to which an entry word belongs, for example: the noun, verb, adjective, etcetera.

At the time of the publication of *Phrase Book*, it is assumed that users were not interested in all the above, but to know the equivalent in the target language. However, they could learn the pronunciation of words, for example, which could help them to communicate with the target language speakers. Pronunciation is an essential part of the linguistic description. Learners of the language must know how to pronounce each entry word. In this regard, Wells (1985, p. 45) has this to say: "The purpose served by pronunciation indication is much the same in monolingual as in bilingual dictionaries: to advise the user who is unsure of the spoken form of a word by recommending a suitable pronunciation for it."

Illustrative examples

Illustrative examples are important in a dictionary. An illustrative example is any phrase or sentence that illustrates the use of the item defined or translated (Al-Kasimi, 1983, p .88). Cowie (1989, p. 55) cites Fowler and Fowler who identified two major functions of usage, namely, that of clarifying a sense and distinguishing between related senses. In line with the above definitions, Dalgish (1975, p. 335) states: "Illustrative examples are example sentences that follow the definition. They are useful because they provide extra denotative and connotative information, and can convey or reinforce grammatical information by exemplifying its behavior."

Marole did not use illustrative examples to bring clarity on the meaning of headwords. Instead, he provided sentences in Tshivenḓa, in many instances with a meaning not related to words in the subject. These usage examples are provided at the end of each subject. For example, at the end of the subject *wild animals*, Marole provides the following sentences:

> We have ploughed for ourselves - *Ro ḓilimela riṋe vhane*
> You have been enjoying yourselves – *No ḓitakadza inwi vhane*
> I am used to walking – *Ndo ḓowela u tshimbila* (1932, p. 6)

Marole brought in illustrative examples to train learners of Tshivenḓa about sentence structure. He provided the English sentence that is followed by its Tshivenḓa equivalent. However, the main words used in the sentence do not refer to the headwords presented in

the subject. No word in *Ro ḓilimela riṋe vhane* refers to wild animals. The words *ro, ḓilimela, riṋe,* and *vhane* do not refer to wild animals. It is hard to believe that learners of Tshivenḓa will understand the sentence structure in Tshivenḓa, unless the sentences contain the headwords defined. Sentence examples used by Marole are not related to the subject of the grouping. Contrary to Malone (1983)'s assertion, Marole does not use illustrative examples above to prove that a word exists, to illustrate the meaning of a word, and to illustrate the grammatical behaviour of the word described.

Discussion

Missionaries in South Africa were responsible for teaching the local people to read and write in their languages. However, they did not provide them with formal training regarding the writing of lexicography work, Marole included. He did not receive formal training regarding the writing of dictionaries. Neither did he receive financial support to conduct research and compile dictionaries. He ventured into dictionary writing out of his own will. The mere fact that he had the knowledge and science of Tshivenḓa, that was motivation enough for him to be involved in lexicography.

As indicated above, Marole did not receive formal training regarding the arrangement of the different parts of a dictionary and that of the headwords. It is not surprising to find that the front matter and the back matter are missing in the dictionary. Further, the headwords in *Phrase Book* do not have a specific arrangement; the arrangement is unsystematic. This makes it difficult for dictionary users to find specific words quickly, especially if the dictionary has many entries. A good systematic and easy way of arranging headwords is that of arranging headwords according to letters of alphabet. Fortunately, *Phrase Book* is not a huge dictionary, but thin, and consisting of sixteen pages. Readers could still find the words that they are looking up.

Whereas the source language in *Phrase Book* is English, the target language is Tshivenḓa. Some of the words Marole included in his headword list do not reflect on the Tshivenḓa culture and environment. This led to the provision of wrong equivalents in some of them. It shows that, in his choice of words, Marole was not influenced by the Tshivenḓa culture and environment. However, learners of the language expect all Tshivenḓa equivalents of the English words to be correct.

Finding the meaning in *Phrase Book* is not difficult, especially if one knows the meaning in the source language, in this case English. The lexicographer assumed that non-speakers of Tshivenḓa know the meaning of English words. In all cases, Marole provides the equivalent of the source language word or phrase. Nowhere in the whole dictionary does Marole provide the description of other aspects of the entry that make the meaning clear. Grammatical aspects such as pronunciation, morphological structure, etymology, illustrative examples, etcetera, are not included in the definition of the headword. The meaning of words is part of linguistic knowledge and is therefore a part of the grammar (Fromkin & Rodman, 1998). Jackson (1985, p. 53) states:

Arguably, Grammar and Dictionary are complementary parts of the overall description of a language. This applies whether the aim of the description is the general linguistic one of providing a comprehensive account of a language, or whether the aim is an applied one of serving the needs of an identifiable group of language users.

Nevertheless, some of the grammatical information can be learnt when the learner communicates with the target language speakers. For those who solely depend on the dictionary to learn a language, they will find it difficult to understand the meaning of the word because of the absence of grammatical information. Learning a language means to know the pronunciation of words, their morphological structure, the etymology of some of unfamiliar words, illustrative examples for those words which have more than one meaning, etcetera.

Illustrative examples in the form of sentences provided at the end of each grouping of headwords in *Phrase Book* do not assist the learner because the sentences do not relate to the headwords in the group. Tshivenḓa learners would have benefitted much if the illustrative examples contained some of the headwords listed in the group.

Notwithstanding the shortcomings stated above, *Phrase Book* is a real contribution to Tshivenḓa lexicography because it is the first in the language. During the time of its publication, it was valuable to both Tshivenḓa speakers and non-speakers of Tshivenḓa learning Tshivenḓa. The lexicography work is still valuable because it contains information that the current generation among the Vhavenḓa is not familiar with, for example, words such as *mavhuyahaya* (autumn)*, phanzi* (accident)*, nayo (foot)* and *tshifafa* (epilepsy)*. Such terminology is not included in many of the current Tshivenḓa dictionaries. Whereas *Phrase Book* afforded Tshivenḓa speakers with an opportunity to learn English vocabulary, non-Tshivenḓa speakers learnt Tshivenḓa vocabulary and culture.

Conclusion

Although *Phrase Book* is lacking in many aspects of dictionary writing, including spelling errors, it was necessary at the time of its publication, because non-Tshivenḓa speakers—specifically missionaries—were only interested in the Tshivenḓa equivalents. Learners of Tshivenḓa during the early stages of the reduction of the spoken language into writing knew very little about the Tshivenḓa equivalents of the English terms. Therefore, the Tshivenḓa equivalents were meant to help missionaries to communicate effectively with Vhavenḓa.

Ten Hacken (2009, p. 414) cites Hausmann (1985) who defines a dictionary as:

> … a collection of lexical units (mainly words), presented by means of a particular medium and giving particular information for the benefit of a particular user. The information is ordered in such a way that fast retrieval of individual details is possible.

From the above quotation, two questions can arise regarding the value of *Phrase Book*, namely, 1. Does *Phrase Book* benefit the users? 2. Is the information in *Phrase Book* ordered in such a way that fast retrieval of individual details is possible? In response to the first question, *Phrase Book*, as shown above, benefitted the users then and is still benefitting them presently. In addition to knowing the Tshivenḓa equivalents of the English words, users,

especially non-speakers of Tshivenḓa, get to know relationships in Tshivenḓa culture, house work among the Vhavenḓa, animals with which Vhavenḓa live, etcetera. Although Marole did not order the headwords according to the letters of alphabet, the retrieval of individual details is possible because the dictionary consists of few pages, that is, 16 pages, even if this will be slow.

Even if Marole was not a trained lexicographer, he had the necessary skills and knowledge of the languages concerned, which he used successfully to produce the needed first lexicography work in Tshivenḓa. The publication of *Phrase Book* is considered a good start for lexicography work among the Vhavenḓa.

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