



Linguistic Features of Sesotho Languages

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THE ORIGIN OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES

- The African continent has many languages, - classified into four basic families namely **Afro-Asiatic**, **Nilo-Saharan**, **Niger-Congo** and **Khoisan** (Heine & Nurse, 2000:1).
- Except for English and Afrikaans, the languages of South Africa, fall under the **Niger-Congo family**.
- They are grouped into major families, namely
 - Nguni languages (isiZulu, isiXhosa, SiSwati and isiNdebele) and
 - Sotho languages (Setswana, Sepedi and Sesotho) have many features in common.
 - Tshivenda and Xitsonga.

The Sesotho Language Group

- Sesotho, Setswana, and Sepedi
- Part of the 11 official languages (South African Constitution 1996) (Sign Language)
- They are tonal languages
- Written disjunctively
 - ✓ Ke a ja (*I am eating*) in Sotho Languages (**Disjunctive**)
 - ✓ Ngiyadla (*I am eating*) in Nguni Languages (**Conjunctive**)

Common Features

- Sesotho languages (Setswana, Sepedi, and Sesotho) have many features in common.
- They have a rich agglutinating and complex morphology, such as:
 - ✓ A noun classification system that categorises nouns into noun classes;
 - ✓ A transparent orthography,
 - ✓ Are made up of different phonemes (sounds) and graphemes (the symbols/letters) with similarities in sounds and letters between languages (Department of Education, 2018).



Where these languages are mostly spoken

Language	Mostly spoken in:
Sepedi	Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Gauteng and Botswana
Sesotho	Free State, Eastern Cape, Gauteng, Lesotho, Namibia and Zambia
Setswana	North-West, Gauteng, Mpumalanga Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe

Sesotho languages - tonal



Sesotho words	Sepedi words	Setswana words
tshela (pour)	nòkà (body waist)	ágà (build)
tshela (cross)	nókà (put spice)	ágà (usually)
tshela (six)	nóká (river)	búà (speak)
thaba (be happy)	mòhlwà (termites)	bùà (skin the animal)
thaba (a mountain)	mòhlwá (grass)	

Vowels in Sesotho Languages

7 basic and raised vowels are brought through the phonological process of vowel raising

Vowel	Sepedi/Sesotho/Setswana	English equivalent
a	as in rata	'like, want, love'
e	as in lema/sebetsa	'plough'
ê	as in rêma	'chop' and lêma (spoil e.g. a child)
i	as in dira / bina	'do' / 'sing'
o	as in motho	'person'/'human-being'
ô	as in tôrô	'dream'
u	as in khudu	'tortoise'

Semi-Vowels in Sesotho Languages

w as in
wena (*you*)

y as in **ya**
(*to go*)

Combination vowels in Sesotho Languages



COMBINATION VOWEL	SESOTHO/SETSWANA/SEPEDI	ENGLISH MEANING
ao	maoto	feet
oa	boatla	careless
ae	mae	eggs
éi	eiye	onion
ia	diatla	hands
oé	boele	return

Simple and complex consonants for Sesotho Languages

d	Dula (sit)
f	Fofa (fly)
h	Hema (breathe)



kg	Kgaka (guinea fowl) kgomo (
ng	Ngaka (doctor)
tshw	Tshwanelo (appropriate), tshwana (same as)

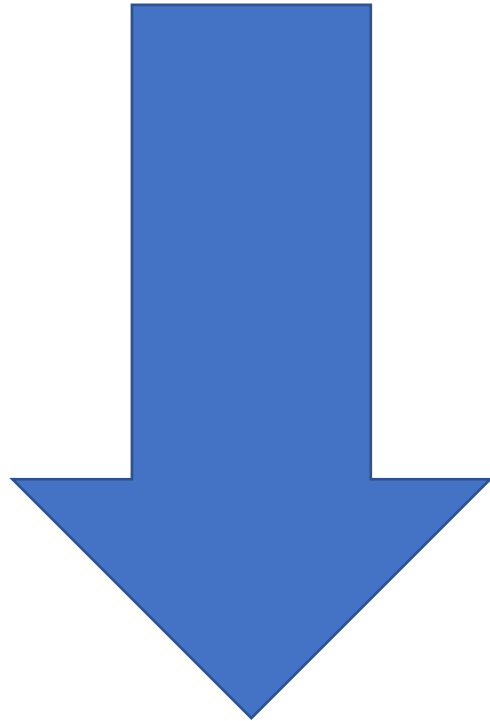
Alphabets

Although Sesotho are Alphabetical Languages, the following letters of the alphabet are not used in words except in exclamations:

- **C** > as in **nce-nce-nce-nce!** when undermining someone
- **X** > as in **Nxae!** when saying sorry to someone.



Differences in the Sotho Languages



The circumflex sign/diacritic mark in **Sepedi** and **Setswana**

Used to differentiate the ê from e and ô from o.

- lema (*plough*) setšhaba (*nation*)
- lêma (*spoil a child or shape horns*)
- pholo (*ox*)
- phôlô (*health*)

Differences

CONSONANT	SESOTHO	SEPEDI	SETSWANA
b - b'	/b/ bana (kids)	b (bilabial fricative) – bana (kids)	b' (bilabial plosive) > b'ana (kids)
j – bj – jw	/j/ jala (plough)	bj > bjala (plough)	jw > jala (plant)
ng – -ngw- kw	/ng/ ngola (write)	ng > ngwala (write)	kw > kwala (write)
ts - tš – ts	/ts-/ > pitsa (pot)	tš > pitša (pot)	ts > pitsa (pot)
hl – tlh	/hl/ > hlapa (bath)	hl > hlapa (bath)	tlh > tlhapa (bath)
pš – tšw		pš > bopša' (built)	tšw > botšwa (built)
ts – ts	/ts-/ > tsoma (hunt)	ts > tsoma (hunt)	ts > tsoma (hunt)
s - š – s	/s/ > sala (remain)	š > šala (remain)	s > sala (remain)
tšh – tsh		tšh > tšhuma (set alight)	tsh > tshuba (set alight)

Conclusion

- The Sotho languages display a lot of similarities
 - ✓ Vowels
 - ✓ Semi- vowels
 - ✓ Some simple and complex consonants
- Some differences in some of the consonants
- No circumflex sign/diacritic mark in Sesotho language
- Both Sepedi and Setswana do not have all letters of the Alphabet
- Sesotho has all the letters of the Alphabet.