

## 2010 PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW: SESOTHO SA LEBOA

## 1. PRELUDE

The subtext inherent within some of the presentations during the Sesotho sa Leboa and Sepedi Public Hearings chronically conjured a nonexistent dichotomy by phrasing the hearing as: *Sesotho sa Leboa vs Sepedi* contestation. It projects a narcissistic polemics that is flawed to the core. It fallaciously compared the incomparable and proceeded to presuppose that the two could contest for an *autoglottonymic* position. It however emerged consistently during the hearings and is attested by both the science of language study, research and History (oral and written) that this position (*autoglottonymic*) is an exclusive realm of Sesotho sa Leboa, a standard form which is an all encompassing language whose constituents are the *languages* with similar filial presence technically referred to as dialects. A dialect itself is an umbrella term that owes its existence to varieties, as much as the standard language form is indebted to dialects for its existence. The three forms of *language* i.e. Standard, Dialect and Variety bespeak of language use within a given context. The relationship among the three is marked by unremitting interplay and coexistence in which each conditions, and is conditioned by the others. The pecking order is:

- 1.1 Sesotho sa Leboa:** It is the standardized language used for official and formal context. Its orthography is overarching and is comprised of grammatical structure of all the 9 dialects. It is a collage, so to speak, of its dialects meant to maintain intelligibility and consistency in written and spoken form.
- 1.2 Seroka, Sephalaborwa, Sehananwa, Sepedi, Sepulana, Sekone, Setlokwa, Sekopa and Khelobedu:** These are dialects used in spoken form. They may be converted into written form, as the missionaries did, but their operational parameter is not extended to formal written context.
- 1.3 Sekgaga, Sethabine, Sekhutšwe/Sekororo:** These are varieties of the Seroka dialect. Likewise, each of the above dialects is a collective *language* of its own individual varieties. Varieties are not officially codified. They are informal and limited to a speech community united under the totemic ideation of its Kgoši. They are the *languages* of the hearth, Mmoto (a section where ntona/headman rules on behalf of the Kgoši) and ultimately Setšhaba sa Kgoši.

## 2. BOGOŠI AND LANGUAGE

The essence of an African nation, tribes, family and person is chiefly defined by, among others, language, totemic ideation and Bogoši. The trilogy is intrinsically linked to express an identity. The latter two are mediated linguistically and *crucibled* to manifest an identity framework. The nuclear of one's identity formation is keyed around language. It would be irresponsible, irrelevant and naïve to situate the polemic of these hearings outside this trilogy.

Basotho ba Leboa's conception of Bogoši should not be confused with Kingship/Monarchy. The two terms might be of the similar semantic field but they do not mean the same, in structure, operation and execution. The qualifier *paramount*, as in Paramount Chiefs/Kings, for instance do not define the essence of Bogoši bja Basotho ba Leboa as it would in Zululand, Swaziland or even in Western Nations. Domination and subjugation of one Kgoši by the other is an alien practice discouraged and not to be *lived* by Basotho ba Leboa. Magoši coexisted and respected each other's sovereignty, culture and language. They might have been attempt by a few to act differently, but the key intend hitherto is to maintain cordiality and neighbourliness. Ensconced within their individual totemic identity and culture each individual Kgoši and his/her nation speak a *language* of their own. No other Kgoši and his/her nation would either denigrate or impose his/her *language* (culture and totemic identity) on another Kgoši. Within the science of language study, this *language* is a variety or a dialect spoken by Magoši and their subject either residing within proximity or sharing the same totem and ancestry. The varieties under this cluster (dialect) share similar grammatical traits. Baroka cluster for instance, is made up of nations under the following Magoši: Kgoši Mogoboya, Kgoši Sekororo, Kgoši Maake, Kgoši Nkoana, Kgoši Mphahlele and Kgošigadi Mothapo. Clustering is also done at dialect level. Baphalaborwa and Bapedi are a case in point as reflected in the table below. This table is a snapshot indicative of the two clustering approaches.

CLUSTER	MAGOŠI	TOTEM	SETŠHABA/ NATIONS	VARIETY	DIALECT	STANDARD LANGUAGE FORM
BAROKA	Kgoši Sekororo	Nare	Makhutšwe	Sekhutšwe	Seroka	Sesotho sa Leboa
	Kgoši Mogoboya	Noko	Tlhabine	Setlhabine		
	Kgoši Maake	Kgaga	Bokgaga	Sekgaga		
	Kgoši Nkoane	Nare	Baroka ba Nkoana	Sekgaga		
	Kgoši Mphahlele	Kgaga	Ga Mphahlele	Sekgaga		
BAPHABORWA	Kgoši Shai	Tlou	GaMašišimale		Sephaborwa	
	Kgoši Makhušane Malatji	Noko	Ga Makhushane			
	Kgoši Maseke Malatji	Noko	Ga Maseke			
	Kgoši Selwane Malatji	Noko	Ga Selwane			
BAPEDI	Kgoši Mmapuru Sekwati (Sekhukhune)	Noko	Mamone (Bopedi)		Sepedi	
	Kgoši KK Sekhukhune	Noko	Mohlaletsi (Bopedi)			
	Kgoši Sekhukhune	Noko	Motodi (Bopedi)			

Figure 1: Clustering: Variety, Dialect and Standard Language

Clustering is never done carelessly. It is a clinical and methodological process that is principled on the following fundamentals:

2.1. Members of a cluster maintain their individual identity as is expressed by their individual totem, culture and language. Albeit classified in linguistic terms as either a variety or dialect, the individual *language* of the each cluster members remains *polelollanguage* of their nation. It would be an offence of the highest degree to regard it otherwise.

2.2. *Polelo/language* is a mark of one's own national and individual Identity (Boitšhupo bja Bosetšhaba). The names of each of Ditšhaba tša Magoši are established from their individual *languages (dialects)* and vice versa. For instance, Setšhaba sa Kgoši Mogoboya speaks Setlhabine and are therefore called Batlhabine ba Kgoši Mogoboya. They reside at Tlhabine Ga Kgoši Mogoboya. It is unacceptable to refer to them as, for instance, Baphalaborwa or Bapedi because the latter two have their own Magoši: Magoši a Baphalaborwa and Magoši a Bapedi respectively as reflected in the table above. The two might share the same totem but speak two different yet intelligible *languages (dialects)*, Sephalaborwa and Sepedi. One lives in Phalaborwa whilst the other resides at Bopedi. If one is born Mophalaborwa, speaks sephalaborwa such a person is Mophalaborwa. He/she is neither a Mopedi, or Motlhabine.

2.3. Each Kgoši remains the custodian of his/her own *polelollanguage*, culture and the totem that unites his nation. The trilogy is sacrosanct. It is never traded, transferred nor usurped.

2.4. *Dipolelollanguages (dialects)* spoken by all Magoši and Ditšhaba tša bona are mutually intelligible speech with common Sotho language roots. Of the three Sotho language groups (South Sotho-Sesotho, West Sotho- Setswana, North Sotho-Sesotho sa Leboa) these *languages (dialects)* situate themselves within Sesotho sa Leboa. Sesotho sa Leboa is an official language used at formal context both in oral and written form. It is the Language through which the children are taught at school as their mother tongue. The entire speech community that speaks this language is Basotho ba Leboa. This label is unashamedly theirs.

### 3. MYSTERY DEMYSTIFIED

Kgoši Sekhukhune of the Bapedi, similar to other Magoši and notable individuals, contributed greatly in the liberation of South Africa. His famed contribution is engraved in the historical record for posterity. Laudably, his legacy is further enlivened by among others, naming a district municipality after him, viz Sekhukhune District Municipality. It is among the four districts predominantly inhabited by Basotho ba Leboa in the Limpopo Province. In total, these municipalities and their *languages/dipolelo (Sesotho sa Leboa dialects)* are indicated below.

DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY	LOCAL MUNICIPALITY	DIALECT/ "POLELO/LANGUAGE"	STANDARDIZED LANGUAGE
MOPANI	Greater Letaba	Khelobedu	SESOTHO SA LEOBA
	Greater Tzaneen	Seroka	
	Maruleng	Seroka	
	Baphalaborwa	Sephalaborwa	
CAPRICORN	Aganang	Sekone	
	Polokwane	Sekone / <i>Seroka</i>	
	Lepelle-Nkumpi	Sekone	
	Molemole	Setlokwa	
	Blouberg	Sehananwa	
WATERBURG	Mogalakwena	Sekone - Setebele	
	Lephalale	Sekone / <i>(Seroka)</i>	
	Belabela	Sekone	
	Modimolle	Sekone	
	Mookgophong	Sekone	
	Thabazimbi	Sekone	
SEKHUKHUNE	Greater -Tubatse	Sepedi and Sepulana	
	Makhuduthamaga	Sepedi, Setau and Sekone	
	Fetakgomo	Sepedi, Seroka and Sekone	
	Ephram Mogale	Sekone, Seroka and Sepedi	
	Elias Motsoaledi	Sekopa, Seroka and Sepedi	

Figure 2. Basotho ba Leboa Predominant District Municipalities

It is inaccurate to suggest that the entire Greater Sekhukhune district is Bopedi. Bopedi is limited to Mohlaletse, Mamone and Motodi. These areas are ruled by the descendants of the great Bapedi King Sekhukhune. Mamone is under the reign of Kgoši Mampuru Sekwati, *Mampuru* Mohlaletse is ruled by Kgoši ~~XXX~~ Sekhukhune whilst Motodi is ruled by Kgoši Sekhukhune- the three are brothers. The rest of the communities are Bakopa, Bakone, Batau and Baroka speaking communities ruled by their own Magoši. It is worthy to give the table below a bird's eye view.

MAGOSI AND LANGUAGES/POLELO (DIALECT) AT SEKHUKHUNE DISTRICT					
NATION	KGOŠI	TOTEM	PLACE	LANGUAGE/POLELO (DIALECT)	STANDARD LANGUAGE FORM
BAKOPA	Matsepe	Kwena	Tafelkop	Sekopa	Sesotho sa Leboa
	Boleu Rammupudu	Kwena	Tafelkop		
BAKONE	Matlala	Hlanhlagane	GaMatlala	Sekone	
BAPEDI	<del>XXX</del> Sekhukhune	Noko	Mohlaletse	Sepedi	
	Mampuru Sekwati	Noko	Mamone		
BAROKA	Sekhukhune	Noko	GaMotodi	Seroka	
	Nkoana	Nare	GaNkoana		
	Phasha	Phuti	GaPhasha		
BATAU	Phaahla	Tau	GaPhaahla	Setau	
	Masemola		GaMasemola		
	Mogašwa		GaMogaswa		
	Selwane		GaSelwane		
	Nchabeleng		GaNchabeleng		
	Nkadimeng		GaNkadimeng		
Marishane	GaMarishane				

Figure 3. Magoši and Language/Polelo (Dialect) In Sekhukhune District

As much it is irresponsible to argue that Bakone are Baroka it is equally a misrepresentation and disrespectful to posit that Bapedi are Balobedu and vice versa. All of these are Basotho ba Leboa.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The voice and the tone of the argument throughout the hearings indicated with overwhelming conviction that Sesotho sa Leboa is the standardized language whilst the rest of the nine *languages* are operating at a dialect level. It is reasonable to request that the South African constitution in all its current eleven official languages and beyond bear any reference to this standardized form as Sesotho sa Leboa. Research, literature, United Nation, PanSALB, the language speakers attested to this fact. I solicit sobriety, rationality, good will and responsible citizenry.

I much appreciate the platform afforded to the rest of Basotho ba Leboa in such an identity defining moment.

---

Dr. RRM Monareng

Head: Language Unit

University of Johannesburg

(011) 551 2000

170016