

RESEARCH ARTICLE:

The Impact of the Presence of Prosodic Features (Tone Markings) on Comprehending Setswana Words in Reading

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Received: 10 October 2022 | Revised: 17 February 2023 | Published: 08 March 2023

Abstract

The paper is about the impact of prosodic features, more especially tone marking, in extracting the meaning in Setswana readings, because of its contribution to meaning in Setswana. The research was conducted in response to the 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), which found that more than 80% of Grade 4 students tested in an African Language were unable to read for comprehension. The semiotic theoretical framework, which is concerned with how signs are used for interpretation, served as the foundation for this study. The focus of the study was on the Intermediate Phase learners from eight schools where Setswana is taught as a First Additional Language and/or as a Home Language. Qualitative and quantitative method approaches were used to collect data. Participants were chosen through random sampling. The study discovered that when words are not marked, learners are unable to determine which meaning is intended. It was discovered that in reading the most difficult aspect is comprehending what has been read. The study proposes that new means of emphasizing prosodic markers (such as tones, accent, stress, and rhythm) be given special focus in the South African education system so that learners may be able to extract meaning and comprehend what they read.

Keywords: reading; tones; semiotic; Setswana; prosody

Introduction

Literacy is one of the most critical prerequisites for academic success (Madiba, 2013). Reading is considered, at least from the standpoint of present education, a necessity for progress in the existing formal education system in South Africa, as in most other countries throughout the world (Christie, 2008). This paper responds to the 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), which stated that more than 80% of Grade 4 pupils tested in an African language could not read for meaning. In South Africa, reading difficulties are pervasive. According to recent media reports on the high matriculation (matric) failure rate, most learners still struggle with reading and writing, which negatively affect their overall matric score (Department of Basic Education, 2010: 30). There have also been reports of learners in upper grades who struggle to read and write, even when writing their own names (Barone *et al.*, 2005: 47). Many Senior Phase teachers' frustrations point to issues hailing from the Foundation Phase, where the inability to read and write has been identified as one of the key contributors to learners' poor academic performance across the nation (Johnson, 2006: 25).

For instance, the most recent Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (Howie *et al.*, 2017) found that 8 out of 10 children in South Africa are unable to read for meaning and that 78% of Grade 4 learners lack basic reading skills, placing South Africa at least 6 years behind the top-performing nations (Howie *et al.*, 2017). Ninety per cent (90%) of Grade 4 students tested in Setswana were unable to read for meaning, which is a notably low rate for reading proficiency in African languages. The Department of Basic Education (2010: 22) has acknowledged the difficulties faced by learners who are learning to read in their native tongue. Teachers in the Foundation Phase should consider a variety of factors, such as variations in sentence form, oral vocabulary limitations, and the necessity of teaching phonics explicitly. This paper examines the role of prosodic features (tones) in comprehending Setswana readings. The purpose of this paper is to determine how prosodic features (tone markings) can assist Grade 4 to 6 learners in understanding Setswana readings better. Reading is critical in the

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process of producing meaning, hence it is critical to investigate this element constantly to gain new insights and contribute to the existing body of knowledge.

Setswana is an indigenous language spoken by an estimated four million people in South Africa. It is sometimes referred to as Tswana or, more archaically, Chuana or Sechuana. It is also spoken by one million or more people in Botswana, where it is the official language, and by fewer than one million people in Namibia (Otlogetswe, 2004). Setswana is a tonal language in which syllabic pitch is utilized to differentiate between word meanings at both the lexical and grammatical levels (Batibo and Mae, 1999). Unlike Setswana, English is intonational, which means that it uses pitch variation to distinguish meaning at the word, phrase, and sentence levels without modifying a word's meaning (Roach, 2010). Prosody is a linguistic term that refers to the rhythmic and tonal characteristics of speech. Variations in pitch (intonation), stress patterns (syllable prominence), and duration (length of time) are examples of prosodic features that contribute to expressive interpretation of a text (Allington, 1983; Dowhower, 1991; Schreiber, 1980). The paper focuses on the role of tone in Setswana words and its contribution to reading for comprehension.

Crystal (1986) describes tone as the particular pitch level of a syllable, whereas Katamba (1989) defines it as changes in a syllable's pitch level, where pitch is the auditory experience caused by the frequency of vibration of the vocal folds: the stronger the vibration, the higher the pitch. Mok (2011) adds that as a prosodic feature that affects the length of the vowels in syllables, tone has a role in the rhythm of speech. Tone languages rely on syllable-level tone variation to alter a word's fundamental meaning (Van der Pas, *et al.*, 2000; Yip, (2002); Nguyen, *et al.*, 2009). Tonal minimum pairings are phonologically similar words that could have a different meaning due to a different tone pattern. Setswana is a two-level tone language that only distinguishes between high (') and low (˘) tones (Zerbian and Barnard, 2008). The combination of the two tones—high or low—creates "tone sequences" that signify various meanings. To convey the correct meaning, this combination of high and low tones inside a word must be easily distinguished from one another (Brunelle, 2009). According to Cole (1955) and Snyman (1989), tone is found in all vowels and syllable consonants in Setswana. Syllables can be made up of a single vowel (V), a single consonant (C) known as a syllabic consonant, such as /t/, /m/, /n/, and /b/, or a grouping of both C and V, which is known as a CV structure. There are four conceivable tone variation patterns for a Setswana word with a CVCV syllable structure: high-high (HH), high-low (HL), low-low (LL), or low-high (LH): example *fitlhà* (to arrive) *fitlhà* (to hide).

Day and Bamford (1998) and Grabe (2009), define reading as a process of creating meaning from print content; and involves a variety of decoding and comprehension techniques. The purpose of reading, according to education researchers (Saengpakdeejit and Intaraprasert, 2014; Alderson, 2000), is to understand what is read. This demonstrates the significance of reading, not just in imparting knowledge about the world, but also in paving the road for education and self-enlightenment. This paper employs a reading definition that focuses on the cognitive-linguistic abilities and the socio-affective components involved in reading, because it examines how prosody (tone) affects understanding Setswana readings. Pretorius and Lephala (2011:13) identify four major components in the cognitive-linguistic aspect of reading: decoding (i.e., deciphering the letters that make up words), comprehension (i.e., an interaction in which readers construct meaning based on their background and purposes for reading), response (i.e., how readers react to a text as they read; reactions may include excitement or boredom), and metacognition (i.e. the understanding of how reading comprehension occurs and the instructional strategies that facilitate reading comprehension).

According to Maria (1990), comprehension is a comprehensive process that involves generating meaning from written texts, using readers' prior knowledge, their ability to recognize words in context, their knowledge of words, and their understanding of linguistic conventions. However, knowing the words in a book is not enough to ensure that one understands what one reads. The literal level, inferential level, evaluative level and appreciating level are the four categories that Jack and Schmidt (2002), as well as Woolley (2011), use to categorize levels of comprehension. This method was also used in PIRLS (*Progress in International Reading Literacy Study*) research. Reading fluency comprises three key dimensions that serve as a bridge to understanding (McKenna and Stahl, 2009). The first dimension is word decoding accuracy. Fluent readers must be able to sound out words in a text with the minimum mistakes. In terms of skills, this dimension corresponds to phonics and other decoding strategies. Automatic processing is the second dimension. Readers must exert as little mental effort as possible in the decoding component of reading to devote their limited cognitive resources to meaning creation (LaBerge and Samuels, 1974). Linguists refer to the third dimension as prosodic reading (Schreiber, 1980, 1991; Schreiber and

Read, 1980). When words are grouped together improperly or without meaning, or when an expression is used improperly, poor prosody can cause confusion (Hudson, *et al.*, 2005)

Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies were used in collecting data through random sampling. The reason of using the above methodologies is to enable the researchers to provide answers to the research questions such as, (i) What strategies can be used to implement prosodic features (tones) in comprehending Setswana readings? and (ii) How does the curriculum support the use of prosodic features in reading Setswana outside the school environment? Both of these methods allowed the researcher to explore the positives and negatives regarding the impact of lack of prosodic properties on reading comprehension in the Intermediate Phase in eight Setswana schools. A total of 241 participants were selected, namely 215 learners and 26 teachers from eight schools in Gauteng province where Setswana is taught as either Home Language or First Additional Language. The exploratory method was chosen in the study as it looks at a problem (something that is not well-known) to build and clarify concepts (Struwig and Stead, 2001:7). The three data collection strategies used are interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. Descriptive statistics was chosen to analyse the data collected, as it provides extremely simple summaries of the sample and appeared to be an appropriate way for analysing the quantitative data collected (Jaggi, 2003).

Learners' written exercises were analysed based on how they (learners) used a word in a sentence. For example, the word 'bona' can be used as a pronoun 'they or them' or as a verb 'see' In sentences such as *Ngwana o bitsa bona* (The child calls **them**) or *Ngwana o bona buka* (The child **sees** a book). The meaning of these words depends on tone. If the child does not know how to use the correct tone, the meaning is affected. Hence, the study encourages the use of prosodic features to avoid confusion in reading Setswana at Intermediate phase. The theoretical framework that underpins this study is a semiotic theoretical framework, as it is concerned with how signs are used for interpretation. Semiotic theory involves everything that can be interpreted as a sign (Totu and Yakin, 2014). In this study a semiotic theoretical framework is used to examine the effects of prosodic elements of Setswana words, particularly on how tones affect the meaning of words. The semiotic theoretical framework serves as the foundation in this study because it is interested in the interpretation of signs and how people interpret signs to determine the meaning of words in their daily life.

Results

From the data collected for the purpose of this research, some findings are revealed. The results of these findings are thus presented below:

Learners' performances

The study found that the performance of learners in the Intermediate Phase was on average (69.2%) level; only 26.9% performed well in the subject and a small percentage of 3.8% performed poorly in Setswana. The question focused on checking the overall performance in general in the subject (Setswana), not on each learning skill or not comparing it to other learning areas. With the average performance, it indicated that the Intermediate Phase learners are trying their best when it comes to Setswana. In the four skills (speaking, reading, writing, listening) the study found that the learners excelled mostly in listening (34.6%) and writing (19.2%); while the performance of speaking skill (7.7%) and reading skill (7.7%) obtained the same percentage. These results indicated that most learners could listen and write, but more emphasis should be placed on speaking and reading skills in the subject of Setswana. What is so impressive of the results is that children learn by listening before attempting to write, speak and read. This shows that if learners excel in listening, they will be able to do better in other skills or in learning.

This study used reading comprehension to examine how words without signs can affect learners' performances. Setswana is a tonal language, which by reading or pronouncing words without any indication of tones, may cause poor performance or cause confusion when answering questions from a text. The study found that 11, 5 % of Intermediate Phase Setswana learners performed poorly in answering questions from a comprehension text. The indication is that most learners (46, 1%) struggle with understanding and (34.6%) of them struggle with pronunciation of words when reading. The causes might be the omission of signs or that the signs were not used correctly. Punctuation marks play an important part in reading as they extract meaning and emotions while engaged in reading. But if punctuation marks are omitted or wrongly used, the meaning is lost. The study found

that 65.4% of learners could recognise punctuation marks while reading, but the study noted that 34.6% learners were unable to recognise punctuation marks while reading. The performance of learners might be affected by lack of uniformity in planning. Most of the teachers (65.4%) compelled learners to read Setswana books twice a week; while other teachers required learners to read Setswana books once a week (26.9%) and others expected them read once a day. The lowest percentage (7.7%) of teachers was obtained on reading once a day.

Teaching of prosodic features was problematic to most teachers who were engaged with Setswana reading. Most of the Intermediate Phase teachers (53,8%) indicated that they did not know about prosodics features, as only 46.2% of them indicated that they know prosodic features, but they did not acknowledge their importance. This showed that the teaching of prosodic features and their values need to be taught first to teachers, as they play an important role in teaching learners to extract the meaning of Setswana words. The term tone, which is a component of prosodics plays a significant role in pronunciation in Setswana. Most (73.1%) of the teachers indicated that they were aware of Setswana tones; whereas 26.9% of them indicated that they did not know whether Setswana had tones. Stress words and rhythm also form components of prosodics. Most teachers (69.2%) were well-informed about stress words and rhythm in Setswana; however, 30.8% were not. Teachers claimed to have helped struggling readers by assigning them books from lower school levels to read at home.

The study found that teachers tried to improve students' reading fluency and comprehension by developing ways to help them. The following are what Intermediate teachers do when a learner struggles with reading fluency and comprehending:

- NM3** *I have given them words from grade 2 to do after school class for 30 min. I also ask them to ask parents to assist formulate sentences with words and mark the work*
- HM3** *I gave them lower grades book to read and the task*

The study found that the absence of subject advisors in the two districts had a detrimental effect on Setswana instructors, particularly those who had recently become teachers. The two districts had no Setswana subject advisors, whose duties include conducting workshops, meetings, and subject-matter monitoring, as well as providing a forum for teachers to discuss their challenges and successes. Teachers remarked the following:

- NM1** *As a new teacher, there is so much that I still need to learn, for instance I understand that knowing the theme I ticked (no) above can be incorporated in teaching to help learners improve their reading skill and comprehension of Setswana words. Therefore, I would appreciate more information on these themes*
- HM5** *Help with reading, writing, speaking, and listening using remedial work and using many methods which can yield better improvement*

Learners' exercises

Grade 4

The learners in Grade 4 received two exercises. The first exercise had words such as **bona** and **mona** that had no prosodic marks, (specifically tone markings). These are common words that learners engage with in their everyday Setswana readings. The first exercise was designed to assess Intermediate Phase learners' vocabulary and understanding of Setswana words.

The first word was **bona**, which has seven meanings in Setswana:

- **Meaning 1** – (see) Go leba motho/sengwe - Ke bōna mosetsana a tsamaya.
- **Meaning 2** – (to understand) go tšaloganya - Ke a bōnà jaanong gore palo e e tšile jang.
- **Meaning 3** – (to think) Go nagana - ke tša bōnà gore ke tša dira jang
- **Meaning 4** - (to make aware) Go tšhokomosisa /lemoga- bōnà, selepe seo se tša go sega.
- **Meaning 5** – (not harvest) Go kotula - Pula ga e a na, ga ke a bōnà sepe kwa masimong
- **Meaning 6** – (give birth) go tšhola - Phalatsi o ne a bōnà ngwana wa mosimane
- **Meaning 7** – (pronoun- them) Jaaka leemedi la leina - bōnà ba tšhabile botlhe.

The study found that most learners were able to construct a sentence with Meaning 1 (69.0%), whereas 14.0% of learners used the word **bona** as a pronoun. Only 3.0% used the word **bona** to mean 'to make someone aware of something'. The study found that 14.0% of learners did not attempt to construct a sentence with any meaning. Most learners (46.5%) were unable to compose a sentence with a different meaning for the word **bona**, whereas

33.8% repeated the meaning that they wrote in the first sentence of Meaning 1 and 7. There were no students who used the word **bona** to mean "understanding, thinking, harvesting", or "giving birth".

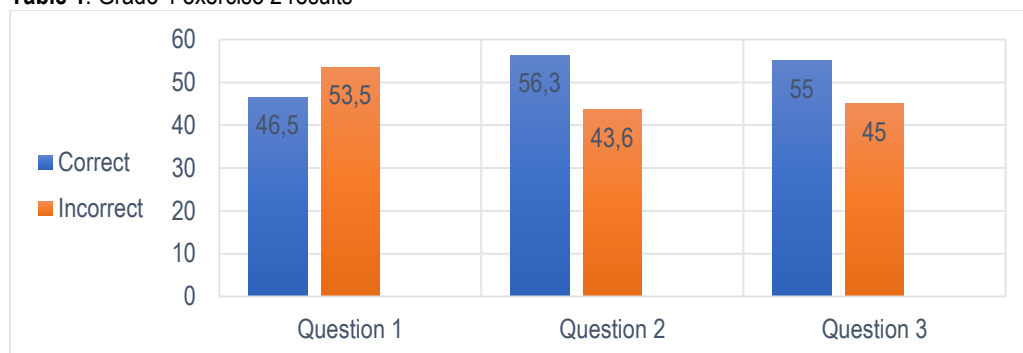
The second word was **mona** which has two meanings in Setswana:

- **Meaning 1** – (to lick)- Go latswa sengwe ka leleme - Ke mónà menwana ya me.
- **Meaning 2** – (jealous) - Go nna le lefufa – Mpho o nna le môná fa a bona ke tsamaya le wena.

The study found that most learners used the word **mona** to mean "to lick" (45.1%), and only 21.1% used the word **mona** to mean "jealousy". In the first sentence, 23.9% of Grade 4 learners could not form a sentence using any of the meanings of the word **mona**. In the second sentence, most learners (56.3%) could not form a second sentence that has a different meaning of **mona**, whereas 16.9% repeated Meaning 1 and 5.6% repeated Meaning 2 in the second sentence.

In the second activity, learners completed a short comprehension. The purpose of the second exercise was to check if the students could answer comprehension questions and recognize the use of words in different contexts.

Table 1: Grade 4 exercise 2 results



Q1: The first question used the word **buá** in a text and also in a statement that gives two different meanings. The study found that most learners (53.5%) could not select the right meaning intended and only 46.5% were able to select the correct meaning.

Q2: The second question used the word **tlhola** in a text and also in a statement that gives two different meanings. Most learners (53.5%) were able to get the intended meaning right, whereas 43.6% were unable to select the correct meaning.

Q3: The third question used the word **mona** in a text and also in a statement that has two different meanings. Most learners (55.0%) were able to get the intended meaning right and only 45.0% were unable to select the correct meaning.

Grade 5

The learners in Grade 5 received two exercises. The first exercise had words such as **tshela**, and **tlhola** that had no prosodic marks, (specifically tone markings). These are common words that learners engage with in their everyday Setswana readings. The purpose of the first exercise was to assess Intermediate Phase learners' vocabulary and understanding of Setswana words.

The first word was **tshela** which has four meanings in Setswana:

- **Meaning 1** – (pour) Go tshela metsi kgotsa sengwe – Mmemogolo o tshêlà metsi mo molelong.
- **Meaning 2** – (cross) Go kgabaganya/go tlola sengwe- Bana ba tshéla mosima o mogolo.
- **Meaning 3** – (how are you?) Go botsa matsogo/go tshela le batho – O tshéla jang?
- **Meaning 4** – (infect) Go tshela motho ka bolwetse – Ga twe o tla mo tshêla ka bolwetse.

The study found that 52.1% of learners used the word **tshela** in Meaning 1; whereas 32.4% used it in Meaning 2 and only 8.4% used it in Meaning 3. The study also found that 7.0% of learners could not form sentences with the word **tshela** in any of the meanings given. In the second sentence, 30.9% could not form a sentence that has a

different meaning from the first sentence, while 9.9% repeated Meaning 1. It was noted that 5.6% repeated Meaning 2 and 1.4% repeated Meaning 3 which they had already used in sentence 1.

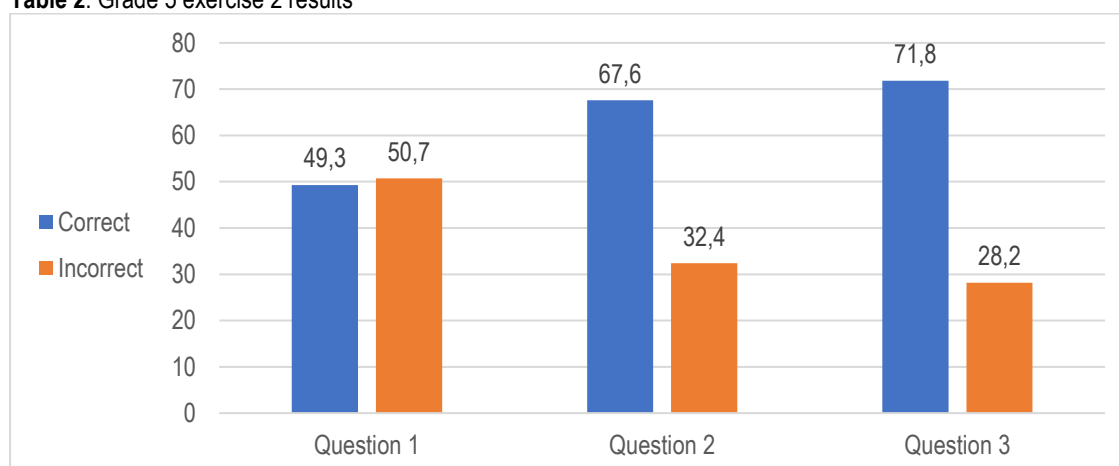
The second word was **tlhola** which has six meanings in Setswana:

- **Meaning 1** – (defeated) Go palelwa – Seesimane se a (n)tlhòla.
- **Meaning 2** – (taboo- culture) Letshwao la go direga ga sengwe- Mapula o tlhólá loso ka go lela bosigo.
- **Meaning 3** – (spend some time) Go dula le batho kgotsa sengwe – ke ya go tlhòla le rre motshegare otlhe.
- **Meaning 4** – (always) Selo se se diregang ka metlha – ke tlhólá ke mmona a tsamaya le ena.
- **Meaning 5** – (check)Go okomela/go tlhotlhomisa - Baoki ba ya go tlhóla balwetsi ka Ura ya bongwe.
- **Meaning 6** – (creation) - go simolola sengwe – Go tlhólá ditiro ke sengwe se se siameng.

The study found that 46.5% of learners used the word **tlhola** in Meaning 5, whereas 12.7% used it in Meanings 3 and 4. The meanings that were used the least were Meaning 1 (5.6%) and Meaning 2 (8.5%). In the first sentence, only 14.0% could not form a sentence with any of the meanings using the word **tlhola**. In the second sentence, most (47.9%) learners could not form a second sentence with the word **tlhola**. The study found repetition of Meaning 3 (2.8%), and Meanings 4 and 5 (5.6%).

In the second activity, learners completed a short comprehension. The purpose of the second exercise was to check if the students could answer comprehension questions and recognize the use of words in different contexts.

Table 2: Grade 5 exercise 2 results



Q1: The word **bu**a was used in both the text and in a statement with two different meanings in the first question. According to the study, 50.7% could not identify the intended meaning and only 49.3% could identify the correct meaning.

Q2: The second question used the word **tlhola** in a text and also in a statement that gives two different meanings. A total of 67.6% of learners were able to get the intended meaning right, whereas 32.4% were unable to select the correct meaning.

Q3: The third question used the word **mona** in a text and also in a statement that gives two different meanings. Most learners (71.8%) were able to get the intended meaning right and only 28.2% were unable to select the correct meaning.

Grade 6

The learners in Grade 6 received two exercises. The first exercise had words such as **se reke** and **mogolo** that had no prosodics marks, specifically tone markings. These are common words that learners engage with in their everyday Setswana readings. The first exercise was designed to measure Intermediate Phase learners' vocabulary and knowledge of Setswana words.

The first phrase was **se reke** which has two meanings in Setswana:

- **Meaning 1** – (instruction to buy) taelo ya go reka sengwe – Sé reke setlhako seo, rakgadi.
- **Meaning 2** – (opposing to buy) kganetso ya go laela go se reke sengwe –O sè reke se reke moseso o montsho.

According to the results, only 19.2% of learners could not construct a sentence using the phrase **se reke** in any of the meanings, whereas 69.8% of learners used it in Meaning 2 and 10.9% in Meaning 1. A total of 54.8% of learners were unable to construct a second statement using the word **se reke**. The study also found repetition of Meaning 2 (21.9%) and Meaning 1 (1.4%).

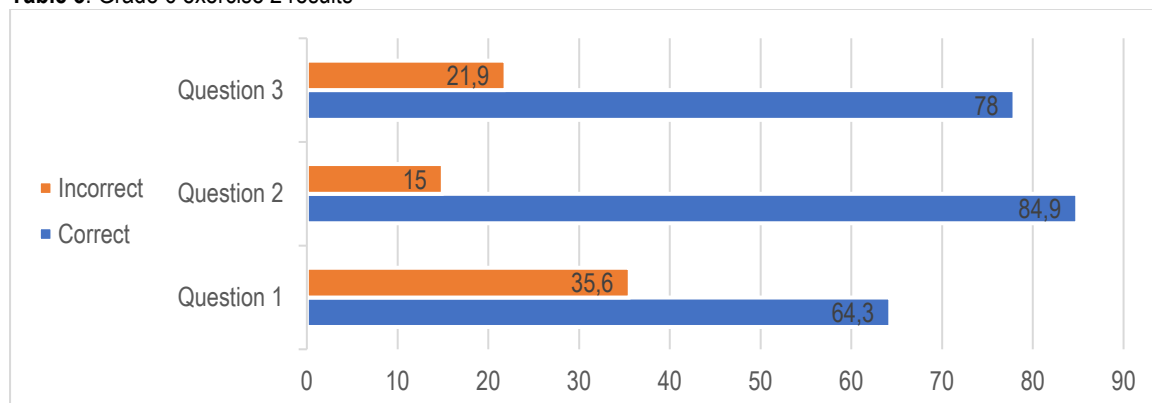
The second word was **mogolo** which has four meanings:

- **Meaning 1** – (elderly) Motho yo mogolo – Ke tlhompha mógóló ka dinako tsothe.
- **Meaning 2** – (throat) Karolo ya mmele - mògóló wa me o botlhoko.
- **Meaning 3** – (salary) Madi a tiro – ke amogetse mògólò wa me mo mosong.
- **Meaning 4** – (greatness) Bogolo ba sengwe kgotsa motho– Modimo o mógóló e le ka nnete.

The study found that 50.6% of learners used the word **mogolo** in Meaning 1 whereas 19.2% used it in Meaning 2. The study also noted that only 9.6% used the word **mogolo** in Meaning 3 and 1.4% in Meaning 4. It was found that 24.6% of learners could not form a sentence with any of the meanings of the word **mogolo**. In the second sentence, most learners (35.6%) could not formulate a second sentence with the word **mogolo**. Meaning 2 (20.5%) was used more in the second sentence. The study found repetition of Meaning 1 (17.8%) and Meaning 2 (4.1%).

In the second activity, learners completed a short comprehension. The purpose of the second exercise was to check if the students could answer comprehension questions and recognize the use of words in different contexts.

Table 3: Grade 6 exercise 2 results



Q1: The first question used the word **bu**a in a text and also in a statement that gives two different meanings. The study found that 35.6% could not recognise the right intended meaning and only 64.3% were able to select the correct meaning. In Grade 4 and 5, most learners failed to answer the first question correctly, but Grade 6 learners were able to get the question right.

Q2: The second question used the word **tlhola** in a text and also in a statement that gives two distinctive meanings. The majority (84.9%) of learners were able to get the meaning intended right and only 15.0% were unable to select the correct meaning.

Q3: The third question used the word **mona** in a text and also in a statement that gives two different meanings. Most learners (78.0%) were able to get the meaning intended right, whereas 21.9% were unable to select the correct meaning.

Discussion of Results

The discussion of the data is presented through themes. Three main themes were developed from the findings of the study which are discussed below:

Theme 1: Lack of prosodics on words

Guthrie (1948) argues that Setswana, Sesotho, and Sepedi are considered to form the indigenous Sotho language group and are also recognized as tonal languages. Tones are used differently in English than they are in the Sotho language family. English does not use tone to change the meaning of a word or to extract meaning from a word; rather, English uses tone to convey a speaker's emotions or to emphasize a point (Batibo and Mae, 1999). In the Sotho languages group, tones play an important role in the reading of these languages, and therefore tone in Setswana is considered as very important (Nfila, 2002: 22). Tone is the component that is used to assist in extracting the meaning of a word in a sentence in the Sesotho language group. The study found that while students had no trouble constructing the first sentence using the given word, they encountered trouble when they had to use it in a different context (in the second sentence). It was observed that learners in the Intermediate Phase have a restricted vocabulary in Setswana. It was also discovered that learners could not understand a word if it were used in isolation. They would only understand its meaning when it was part of a sentence. In addition, the study found that while some students were able to determine the intended meaning of a word in the second exercise, there was a concerning proportion of students who were unable to do so.

As a result of the learners' misunderstanding of the intended meaning of words like "**bona**," "**bua**," and "**tshega**," for example, the study concluded that such words should be marked. Ahrens (2004) emphasizes that in order for students to understand what they are reading; they must understand the function of prosodics in their language. According to Ahrens (2004), students need to be aware of the function of prosodic features in the languages they learn in class. Scrutiny of the sentences that learners formulated indicated clearly that prosodics has to be included in reading classes. Yenkimaleki (2017) supports this idea, noting that the teaching of prosody should be of the utmost importance in the school curriculum. Mary and Yegnanarayana (2008) add that the identity of speech which is presented by prosodic features such as rhythm, stress and intonation can provide important information about the utterance. It is evident that the marking of prosodic features in words is important according to its use per language. The lack of marked prosodic features in words in Setswana causes learners to misinterpret the intended meaning in reading. The teaching of prosodic features is essential in the teaching of reading in Setswana, especially when introducing new words. Lyon (2003) states that learners learn through listening to their teachers when speaking or reading, therefore teachers are regarded as a bridge between learners and their success in reading. Lyon's (2003) opinion emphasises the need for this study to assess the teachers' knowledge about the role of prosodic features in reading.

The study revealed that most of the teachers (53.8%) were unaware of the role of prosodic features, and 46.2% of the Intermediate Phase teachers indicated insufficient knowledge of prosodic features. It is quite alarming that the majority indicated that they did not know prosodic features, as they would thus be unable to aid learners in obtaining the correct pronunciation of words while reading and extracting meaning from words such as **tshega**, **bua**, **mafatlha**, and **fitlha** in readings. It is alarming that teachers do not know about prosodic features because prosodic markings are important in reading, comprehension and deciphering the intended meaning and pronunciation in Setswana. Cooper (2005:229) supports this, saying that the success of children in reading and their understanding of readings depend fully on the knowledge and the intention of a teacher on a specific topic. Literature clearly indicates that learning progresses from teacher to learner. This study noted that the teaching of prosodic features needs to be made a priority to teachers before they teach learners, so that the teachers can assist learners in recognising the markings when reading. The two exercises given to learners showed that the vocabulary of Intermediate Phase learners is not at the same level as their grade, and this is a concern because studies showed that rich vocabulary is important in reading with understanding (Ahmad, 2011). Not only are tone markers crucial for interpreting word meaning in Setswana, but they are also vital in other languages. This is stated by Gandour (1978) when he discusses how to determine a word's meaning in languages like Mandarin and Yoruba by using various tonal marks:

Mandarin

Mandarin is an official language in China and has four types of tones (Gandour, 1978):

- High tone (ˊ) - mā - mother
- Raising tones (ˊ) - má- hemp
- Falling tone (ˋ) - mǎ- horse
- Lower tone (ˋ) - mà- to scold

Yoruba

Yoruba is spoken in Nigeria, and it has three types of tones (Gandour, 1978):

- High tone (´) - Wá- to come
- Middle tone () – *not marked* - Wa- to look
- Lower tone (`) - Wà- to exist

The aforementioned instances demonstrate how important tones may be in communication. Additionally, it demonstrates that each of these languages has distinctive markings, leading to the conclusion that word markings are crucial for certain languages in order for tone to convey meaning.

Theme 2: Learners reading difficulties in Setswana

The reading competency of learners at school is one of the main challenges in education, thus nations are looking into strategies to increase literacy in classrooms (Lessing and De Witt, 2002). The poor literacy rate of South African learners alarmed South Africans, as revealed by the results of projects like PIRLS 2006, SACMEQ 2000–2013, TIMSS, and NAEP. These projects made it clear that South African learners have trouble in reading, particularly in comprehending in their mother tongue. This survey found that while the majority of learners (69.2%) can read Setswana books with confidence on their own, there is still a need to assist the minority who are unable to do so. Literature makes a strong case for the value of prosodic features in enhancing reading fluency, confidence, and comprehension in several languages. A study on literacy conducted in Turkey found that most studies did not pay attention to prosodic features in reading and that prosodics are typically included in music studies but are not stressed enough in reading (Turkish Language Association, 2005).

Reading is a skill that learners should be able to master since it serves as a link between their academic pursuits and professional achievement. As a result, reading comprehension is crucial, (Pretorius, 2002). Both Agak (1995) and Horbec (2012) emphasize how important it is for learners to be able to read to succeed academically. Understanding what has been written is the primary goal of reading, therefore if one is unable to do so, the goal of reading has not been met. It was noted that most of the Intermediate Phase learners struggle to read fluently (34.6%) and when they read Setswana books, they struggle with pronouncing words correctly and this is something that happens occasionally (69.2%). It was also discovered that learners perform better in comprehension tasks, even though some (38.5%) are on average level and require assistance. Regarding reading, the teachers reported that the two biggest difficulties for learners are understanding (46.1%) and pronouncing (34.6%) Setswana words. It was also noted that the majority of learners (65.4%) are able to recognize punctuation when reading, although 34.6% of learners still needed help spotting punctuation when reading. Punctuation marks are crucial because if they are overlooked, the meaning of a sentence could be lost. This was corroborated by the findings of the PIRLS 2016 project regarding the reading level of South African learners. This study also found that Intermediate Phase learners could read Setswana texts, but the major challenges were correct Setswana word pronunciation, comprehension, and reading fluently.

Theme 3: Support in Setswana subject

Many programmes, such as the Matlhasedi Basal Reading Programme, Buisa o Kwale Setswana tota, Fofela Godimo, Puo ya ga Mme, Maru a pula, and The Breakthrough to Literacy Programme, were designed to aid learners with reading. These projects concentrated on assisting learners with reading in classrooms rather than on teacher development. South Africa implemented a few curricular reforms that primarily trained teachers on how to teach, what to teach, when to teach, and how to use what to teach (Flippo, 1999:25). Flippo (1999:25) emphasizes that teachers can identify learners' reading issues since teachers spend a lot of time with learners and may easily detect the challenges learners face when reading. The most mentioned grievance raised by teachers was the lack of Setswana meetings or workshops for discussions or as a platform to share challenges in the teaching of Setswana. The teachers also added that they were struggling with resources in Setswana. This is because the two districts did not have subject advisors to organise meetings and to debate subject matters. To promote literacy in learners, parents, guardians, teachers, and the department must work together. If there is no collaboration or support towards learners, South Africa will be a country with citizens that cannot read or speak sense. To know how to read is an important and indispensable skill, but what is more important is to understand what one reads.

Conclusion

The study discovered that when words are not marked, there is a lot of uncertainty because learners are unable to determine and understand the intended meaning. As mentioned in the literature, the issue in reading Setswana is comprehending rather than reading. The study has been done on prosodic qualities, which are critical for grasping word meaning, boosting reading fluency and instilling a love of reading in children. Comprehending is one of four skills highlighted in reading instruction, and it has been included as a sub-skill rather than as a basic skill that must be acquired throughout, because comprehending is a prerequisite for the other skills. The study proposes that new means of emphasizing prosodic markers (such as tones, emphasis, stress, and rhythm) be given special focus in the South African education system so that learners may extract meaning and comprehend what they read.

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