

RESEARCH ARTICLE:

The Lexicographic Treatment of Xitsonga Kinship Terminologies in Selected Bilingual Dictionaries

Respect Mlambo¹ and Muzi Matfunjwa²

Received: 8 October 2024 | Revised: 01 June 2025 | Published: 15 June 2025

Reviewing Editor: Dr. Theophilus Adedokun, Durban University of Technology

Abstract

Kinship terminologies, which vary across cultures and languages, present challenges for lexicographers in creating bilingual dictionaries. Effective bilingual dictionaries must accurately and comprehensively reflect kinship terms and their equivalents. This study explores the lexicographic treatment of Xitsonga kinship terms in bilingual dictionaries, focusing on their definition, translation, and cross-referencing in English-Xitsonga contexts. It addresses the lexicographic challenges posed by kinship terms' cultural specificity and structural diversity across languages. Using a descriptive qualitative methodology, data were collected from the English-Tsonga/Tsonga-English Pocket Dictionary (Swiss Mission, 2008) and the Pharos Bilingual Dictionary: English-Xitsonga/Xitsonga-English (Pharos, 2021). This study is guided by the user-driven approach to lexicography. The study has found that even though bilingual dictionaries offer some accurate equivalents, they often lack full definitions and overlook specific cultural nuances. Cultural differences between English and Xitsonga were identified as key factors limiting the inclusion of kinship equivalents. To improve the accuracy and cultural representation of kinship terms, this study recommends expanding definitions to cover a wider range of familial relationships and ensuring all relevant Xitsonga equivalents are included to reflect its cultural distinctions. These findings contribute to understanding the challenges and opportunities of presenting kinship terms and informing the improvement of bilingual lexicographic resources for Xitsonga.

Keywords: Xitsonga; lexicographers; kinship terminologies; bilingual dictionaries; user-driven approach

Introduction

Xitsonga, one of South Africa's twelve official languages, is predominantly spoken by the Vatsonga, primarily residing in the Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and Gauteng provinces (Sibuyi, 2011). This language is mutually intelligible with Tswa and Ronga, both spoken in Mozambique (Vogt, Mastin and Aussems, 2015). Xitsonga boasts a rich linguistic heritage and is characterised by a complex system of kinship terminology that mirrors the social structure, cultural values, and familial relationships of the Xitsonga-speaking community. Passmore and Jordan (2020) described kinship terminologies as linguistic terms and classifications used to identify and describe relationships among family members and other relatives within a specific cultural context. These terminologies encompass the vocabulary used to denote relationships by blood (consanguinity), marriage (affinity), and social bonds (fictive kinship) (Brown, McIlwraith and de González, 2020). Such terms are deeply tied to the society's structure and the community's values, which have evolved over long periods (Wangia and Ayieko, 2016). The use and distribution of kinship terms depend significantly on the roles assigned by society to each kinship term (Suryanarayan and Khalil, 2021). As a result, kinship terms offer profound insights into the social structure, cultural values, and familial

¹North-West University, Respect.Mlambo@nwu.ac.za | <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0348-6726>

²North-West University, Muzi.Matfunjwa@nwu.ac.za | <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4553-3225>

roles of a community. In Xitsonga, kinship terms are not merely lexical items but they carry significant cultural weight and convey specific information about social roles, responsibilities, and hierarchies within family settings.

The intricacies of kinship terms present a significant challenge for lexicographers, particularly when creating bilingual dictionaries that aim to translate these terms between languages with distinct linguistic structures and cultural nuances (Wangia and Ayieko, 2016; Prinsloo, 2014; Prinsloo and Bosch, 2012). Bilingual dictionaries are specialised reference tools designed to translate words and phrases between two languages (Klapicová, 2005; Mafela, 2007). They also play a crucial role in promoting communication and understanding across linguistic barriers (Jumayev, 2024). However, these dictionaries often fall short of adequately capturing the complexity and specificity of kinship terms, highlighting the need for more precise lexicographic treatment. The lexicographic treatment of kinship terminologies has been extensively studied in various languages, particularly African languages such as isiZulu (Prinsloo and Bosch, 2012), Sesotho languages (Prinsloo, 2014), and Tshivenda (Mafela, 2007). These researchers have focused on how kinship terms are lemmatised in the bilingual dictionaries of these languages. However, there is a notable gap in research regarding the lexicographic treatment of Xitsonga kinship terms in bilingual dictionaries. The dearth of comprehensive studies in this research area limits our understanding of how Xitsonga kinship terms are translated and represented in English-Xitsonga bilingual dictionaries. It also hampers efforts to maintain and promote Xitsonga, especially in the face of globalisation and linguistic homogenisation.

This study aims to fill a gap by investigating the lexicographic treatment of Xitsonga kinship terminologies in English-Xitsonga bilingual dictionaries. The objectives are to analyse the current state of Xitsonga kinship terms in selected bilingual dictionaries, evaluate the effectiveness of existing translation methods, and propose alternative approaches. This study contributes to the field of lexicography in Xitsonga by addressing challenges and suggesting solutions for accurately handling culturally specific terms. Additionally, ensuring the accurate translation and documentation of kinship terms will help bilingual dictionaries to play a crucial role in preserving and promoting Xitsonga culture. This study is organised into six sections, starting with the introduction. Section 2 reviews related work, while Section 3 outlines the methodology. Section 4 details the theoretical framework. Section 5 presents and analyses the data. Finally, Section 6 provides the conclusion.

Related Work

Many scholars have analysed kinship terminologies from bilingual dictionaries from different languages. Batic (2022) explored the complexities of kinship terminologies and their lexicographic treatment in West African languages, with a specific focus on the Hausa kinship terminology. The study focused on the inconsistent and non-systematic treatment of these terminologies. It categorised lexicographic products into reference dictionaries, compact dictionaries, and dictionaries of minority languages, each with distinct treatments of lexico-grammatical information. The study also identified a significant disconnection between the kinship terms compiled and the translations provided by lexicographers. Batic (2022) elucidated several key factors contributing to this gap: the compilers' lack of anthropological training, the secondary consideration given to kinship systems within the lexical corpus, the neglect of interlingual isomorphism, and the compilers' tendency to prioritise the cultural framework and needs of the end users. Additionally, the study examined the cultural dimension of dictionaries and the diverse treatment of kinship terms across different types of dictionaries. It revealed that the incorporation of cultural context into the provision of equivalent terms is influenced, in part, by the intended audience or users targeted by the dictionary. The need for a more systematic and culturally nuanced approach to kinship terminology within lexicography was emphasised. It also proposed solutions to address these shortcomings, including establishing a systematic framework for collecting kinship terms and advocating for their inclusion in lexicographic resources.

Palanirajan (2019) investigated the challenges in bilingual lexicography concerning kinship terms between English and Tamil, emphasising the need for a comprehensive and user-friendly approach in bilingual dictionaries. The study highlighted the complexity of kinship terminology, which varies significantly between languages, and stressed the importance of considering cultural differences in providing accurate translations. It pointed out the insufficiencies in existing English-Tamil bilingual dictionaries, which often fail to provide all possible Tamil equivalents for English kinship terms, leading to potential misunderstandings for users. Palanirajan (2019) underscored the crucial role of lexicographers in bridging the gap between complex kinship terminology and the needs of dictionary users. This requires a deep understanding of cultural shades and linguistic variations to ensure accurate and comprehensive translations. Specific examples, such as aunt, uncle, cousin, niece, and nephew, were used to illustrate discrepancies in the provision of accurate equivalents in English-Tamil bilingual dictionaries.

The study also highlighted the idiosyncratic nature of kinship terms across different languages and societies, influenced by factors such as geography, caste, class, culture, and economy. It discussed the classification of kinship into primary, secondary and tertiary types, as well as the linguistic division of kinship terms into simple and compound categories. It concluded by emphasising the necessity for lexicographers to be well-versed in the cultural and linguistic differences of both the source and target languages to provide accurate and comprehensive translations in bilingual dictionaries.

Wangia and Ayieko (2016) examined the translation of kinship terminology in selected bilingual dictionaries in Kenya and its impact on cross-cultural communication. Their study highlighted the cultural and social significance of kinship terms, which were deeply rooted in the values and structures of Kenyan communities. These terms varied greatly between different Kenyan languages and English, posing significant challenges for translation. The researchers focused on three Kenyan languages: Ekegusii, Lulogooli, and Dholuo. They identified difficulties in translating kinship terms into English due to the lack of direct equivalents and the cultural specificity amongst the languages. By comparing kinship terminology structures across these languages, the study revealed both universal and language-specific aspects. Wangia and Ayieko (2016) also evaluated how kinship terms were treated in the selected dictionaries, finding that many dictionaries did not provide clear, accurate, and natural equivalents in the target language. This shortcoming led to potential misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication. To address this issue, the authors proposed an alternative model for handling kinship terms in bilingual dictionaries, drawing on Wentzel and Muloiwa's (1982) approach. This model involved entering each kinship term as a main entry with various sub-entries that encompassed all possible meanings and grammatical information. The authors believed that this model represented a valuable contribution to the fields of lexicography and translation studies, as it helped to ensure a comprehensive and accurate representation of kinship terms.

Prinsloo (2014) investigated the lemmatisation and treatment of kinship terms within a proposed English-Sotho, Sotho-English dictionary utilising an amalgamated lemmalist approach. The study emphasised the importance of creating a comprehensive list of Sotho language kinship terms and identifying the most frequently used terms for lemmatisation due to space limitations. Highlighting the importance of both macrostructure and microstructure planning in dictionary design, the author advocated for the use of the amalgamated model developed by Martin and Gouws (2000). This model prioritises the treatment of shared elements across the related languages, followed by language-specific entries. The study explored the applicability and challenges of this approach for the Sotho languages, focusing on the extent of overlap and potential space savings compared to separate dictionaries in the lemmatisation and treatment of kinship terms. The study further addressed the challenges of managing large numbers of kinship terms and proposed the use of lexicographic conventions to reduce redundancy effectively. It concluded by highlighting the potential benefits of amalgamated dictionaries for African languages and emphasised the importance of clear user guides to enhance user-friendliness. Prinsloo and Bosch (2012) conducted an examination of the challenges involved in lexicographically treating kinship terminology in dictionaries that translate between English and two Bantu languages, isiZulu and Northern Sotho. The authors argued that the complexity of kinship terms in these languages necessitated a reevaluation of how these terms were lemmatised in dictionaries, especially for the benefit of English-speaking learners of Bantu languages who required clear guidance for accurate text and speech production. They noted that Bantu kinship terms often varied based on the age and gender of both the speaker and the relative in question and that the same term could refer to relatives of different generations. Prinsloo and Bosch (2012) also addressed the issue of equivalent relations, observing that direct translations for certain kinship terms might not exist. They suggested the use of surrogate equivalents such as glosses and paraphrases to bridge these lexical gaps. The study critiqued the current state of dictionaries, revealing incomplete or inconsistent entries for kinship terms and a lack of proper treatment in English-isiZulu/Northern Sotho dictionaries.

Mafela (2007) explored the complexities surrounding the representation of kinship terminology within English-Tshivenda bilingual dictionaries. The study delved into specific kinship terms such as aunt, uncle, brother, sister, cousin, niece, and nephew to show how these English terms possess multiple counterparts in Tshivenda. It was established that certain bilingual dictionaries only provide singular equivalents which might lead to misunderstandings among dictionary users. For instance, some Tshivenda dictionaries offer *makhadzi* or *khaladzi ya khotso* (sister of one's father) as the equivalent for 'aunt', while they omit other equivalents like *mmame* (younger mother) and *mme-muhulu* (older mother). The study advocated for the inclusion of all conceivable equivalents under such entry words, stressing the significance of considering cultural disparities and linguistic intricacies to accurately represent kinship terminology. Moreover, Mafela (2007) addressed the disparities in kinship terminology

between English and Tshivenda, underscoring the importance of precise representation within bilingual dictionaries amidst the linguistic and cultural diversity of South Africa. The study emphasised that bilingual dictionary lexicographers must acknowledge the absence of one-to-one correspondences between words across languages due to cultural variations. Additionally, it highlighted the inherent value of language intertwined with cultural identity, knowledge, and comprehension to accurately portray kinship relationships in bilingual dictionaries. The author concluded by critiquing the deficiencies observed in the discussed bilingual dictionaries and advocated for lexicographers to acquaint themselves with the culture of the target language to ensure accurate representation.

The consulted works indicate that scholars have analysed kinship terminologies from a bilingual lexicography perspective across various languages, revealing the complexities of translating these terms between culturally distinct languages. Despite extensive studies, there is still a gap in understanding the lexicographic treatment of Xitsonga kinship terms. Thus, this study aims to address the gap by investigating the lexicographic treatment of kinship terminologies in English-Xitsonga bilingual dictionaries. By enhancing the accuracy and cultural relevance of Xitsonga kinship terms, this research will contribute to effective cross-cultural communication and language preservation.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by a user-driven approach to lexicography, focusing on the representation and organisation of kinship terms within an English-Xitsonga bilingual dictionaries context. According to Mpofu (2007: 362), the user-driven approach in lexicography involves the dictionary compiler's recognition of the importance of user needs, considering the type and function of the dictionary, as well as the structure of its entries at both the macrostructural and microstructural levels. Tarp (2008) further emphasised the necessity of compiling more user-friendly dictionaries by developing a target user profile to guide the dictionary design. Additionally, Gouws and Prinsloo (2010) noted that good dictionaries not only provide a linguistically sound treatment of specific lexical items but also serve as linguistic resources to their target user groups. This framework prioritises the needs and perspectives of dictionary users, aiming to ensure that dictionaries provide accurate and complete information. In this study, the user-driven approach was employed to evaluate the completeness of kinship term equivalents, the inclusion of cultural nuances and specificities as well as the clarity and user-friendliness of kinship term entries. This theoretical perspective was helpful in this study in understanding the lexicographic treatment of kinship terms in Xitsonga bilingual dictionaries.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to investigate the lexicographic treatment of Xitsonga kinship terms in bilingual dictionaries. This approach is rooted in the naturalistic inquiry paradigm, providing a deeper understanding of phenomena by examining them within the context of the real social world (Sullivan-Bolyai and Bova, 2021). The descriptive nature of the study aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of how kinship terms are organised, defined, translated, and cross-referenced in bilingual dictionaries that cater for both English and Xitsonga. Data was collected using purposive sampling in which the *English-Tsonga/Tsonga-English Pocket Dictionary* (Swiss Mission, 2008) and the *Pharos Bilingual Dictionary: English-Xitsonga/Xitsonga-English* (Pharos, 2021) were intentionally selected as sources for data. These dictionaries were chosen specifically because they include a range of kinship terms in English along with their corresponding equivalents in Xitsonga, offering the researchers sufficient material for analysis as well as reference resources for understanding how kinship terminology has been treated across both languages. The extracted data was triangulated using additional secondary sources, including relevant books, other dictionaries, and expert input from researchers. This approach strengthened the reliability and validity of the findings by allowing cross-verification of kinship terms from multiple sources, ensuring an accurate interpretation of the data. The analysis of this study will systematically examine the dictionary entries related to kinship terms, focusing on how these terms are defined in both languages, the accuracy and completeness of the translations as well as the presence and quality of cross-references to related terms.

Kinship Terms and Equivalence in English-Xitsonga Bilingual Dictionary

Yinhua (2011) described translation equivalence as the process in translation studies where a word or phrase in the source language (SL) has a corresponding word or phrase in the target language (TL), establishing semantic equivalence between SL and TL discourses. This involves re-creating the entire SL discourse in a comparable TL context with a similar function and communicative intent, rather than merely substituting individual words or

phrases (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2014). Achieving equivalence ensures that the TL carries the same intended meaning or message as the SL, reflecting the original text's meaning, style, tone, and intent (Pan, 2022). However, languages have unique features, and words often have multiple meanings or lack direct equivalents, presenting challenges in achieving perfect translation equivalence, especially in bilingual lexicography due to cultural differences. This issue is evident in some English–Xitsonga bilingual dictionaries with reference to kinship terms.

In English, the term "father" refers to a male parent, specifically the man who has either begotten or raised a child (Merriam Webster Dictionary n.d). It signifies a biological, adoptive, or legal relationship between a man and his offspring. Additionally, the term is often used more broadly to describe paternal figures who provide care, guidance, or support, such as a "spiritual father" or "father figure" (Thompson Jr., 2019). The concept of "father" can vary across kinship systems, particularly in cross-cultural contexts, where the roles, responsibilities, and perceptions of fatherhood may differ significantly. In Xitsonga, it denotes a biological, adoptive, or legal relationship between a man and his children, including a male parent in a marital relationship with the children's mother, even if he is not the biological father. The Xitsonga equivalents for "father" include *tatana*, *papa*, *bava*, and others, depending on the Xitsonga speakers' preference. The Swiss Mission (2008: 34) provides these equivalents, reflecting the same familial connections;

father, *tata*, *tatana*, *rharha*, *bava*

Meanwhile, in the Pharos Bilingual Dictionary (2021: 29), the equivalents for "father" are as follows:

father (n.) male person who has a child *tatana*; *bava*

Both the Pocket Dictionary and the Pharos Bilingual Dictionary provide accurate Xitsonga equivalents for the term "father", with lexicographers offering terms like *tata*, *tatana*, *rharha* and *bava* which are used in Xitsonga. Even through these translations are accurate, the definition of "father" in the Pharos Bilingual Dictionary may cause some confusion, as it only refers to a biological father, omitting other types of fathers, such as adoptive or stepfathers. To avoid this confusion, the definition should be expanded to encompass all forms of fatherhood.

In Xitsonga, the term "mother" is addressed in a similar way to "father", with variations depending on the language user. In English, "mother" typically refers to a female parent who has either given birth to or legally adopted a child (OED, 2002). The term can also extend to stepmothers, who assume the role of a parent through marriage, or surrogate mothers, who carry and deliver a child for another person (Day, 2019). According to Appell (2001), "mother" embodies the social and emotional responsibilities of nurturing, raising, and caring for a child, whether the relationship is biological or non-biological. It also includes a range of cultural and familial duties related to caregiving and guiding within the family. In Xitsonga, the equivalents for "mother" include *manana*, *mhani*, *mhake*, and others. The Pharos Bilingual Dictionary (2021: 51) provides the following equivalents:

mother (n.) female who has given birth to a child *manana*, *mhani*.

Similarly, the Swiss Mission Pocket Dictionary (2008: 51) gives the following equivalents:

mother, *manana*, mother of – *mana wa*

The lemmatisation of the term "mother" in both the Pharos Bilingual Dictionary and the Swiss Mission Pocket Dictionary provides accurate Xitsonga equivalents that are commonly used and correctly reflect the cultural usage of "mother". However, the definition of "mother" in the Pharos Bilingual Dictionary is problematic because it narrowly refers to a "female who has given birth to a child", limiting the understanding to biological mothers. This exclusion of stepmothers, surrogate mothers, and adoptive mothers may lead to confusion and misinformation for dictionary users, as it overlooks the broader concept of motherhood. Meanwhile, the Swiss Mission Pocket Dictionary states *manana* as one equivalent of "mother", omitting other terms used in Xitsonga, such as *mhani* or *mhake*. The lexicographer's failure to provide comprehensive definitions, could result in users acquiring an incomplete understanding of the term usage in various contexts. To ensure clarity and accuracy, the definitions should include all types of mothers such as biological, adoptive, stepmothers, and surrogate mothers. By broadening the definitions, the dictionaries will better align with the user-driven approach to lexicography, ensuring that they meet the needs of users by providing a complete and culturally inclusive understanding of the term "mother".

The treatment of the kinship terms "uncle" and "aunt" in bilingual dictionaries reveals how these familial relationships are also represented across different languages and cultural contexts. In English, the kinship term "uncle" refers to the brother of one's father or mother, or the husband of one's aunt (Read, 2013). This term denotes a familial relationship that can be either through blood (a parent's brother) or through marriage (the spouse of a parent's sister). However, some Xitsonga bilingual dictionaries have not fully captured all equivalents for the term "uncle". For instance, the Swiss Mission Pocket Dictionary (2008: 102) treated "uncle" as:

uncle - *tatana, kokwana, malume*.

The lexicographers have provided three equivalents for the term "uncle". The correct equivalent is *malume*, which refers to the brother of one's mother. However, the father's side has been excluded according to the definition of "uncle". The other terms *tatana* (father) and *kokwana* (grandparent) do not align with the provided definition, as they have their distinct meanings in Xitsonga. The equivalents omitted in the information from the father's side include *papantsongo* (younger uncle), *papahulu* or *papankulu* (older uncle), and *sivara* (the husband of one's aunt). This omission means that other kinds of uncles are not adequately represented in the dictionary. The lexicographer's failure to provide comprehensive equivalents indicates a lack of an appropriate user-driven approach.

The same approach used for the kinship term "uncle" was also applied to the term "aunt". In English, the kinship term "aunt" refers to the sister of one's father or mother or the wife of one's uncle, encompassing both blood relations (a parent's sister) and marital relations (the spouse of a parent's brother) (Mafela, 2007). In the Swiss Mission Pocket Dictionary (2008: 11), the term "aunt" was handled as:

aunt - *manana, hahani*.

In this entry, out of the four possible equivalents for the term "aunt", only one has been provided correctly. The term *hahani* that refers to a sister of one's father is accurate, while *manana* (mother) is incorrect as it has its distinct meaning. Consequently, aunts from the mother's side are not represented by the lexicographers in this dictionary. The omitted equivalents are *mhanintsongo* (little mother) for a younger aunt, *mhaninkulu* or *mhanihulu* (big mother) for an older aunt and *malumexisati* for an uncle's wife on the maternal side. This oversight highlights that the user-driven approach was not fully considered in compiling this dictionary. The representation of the Xitsonga equivalents for the kinship terms "uncle" and "aunt" in the Pharos Bilingual Dictionary (2021: 84) is partially lemmatised and includes most of the corresponding terms. The majority of equivalents for each kinship term are provided, ensuring that users of the dictionary can easily select the appropriate one without confusion. The equivalents for these English kinship terms are presented in the dictionary as follows:

uncle (n.) brother of your mother or father *malume; vavankulu; vavantsongo*

aunt (n.) the sister of one's father or mother *hahani; mhaninkulu; mhanintsongo*

The Pharos Bilingual Dictionary offers a detailed representation of the kinship terms "uncle" and "aunt", categorising them as nouns (n.) and reflecting the depth of familial relationships in Xitsonga. For "uncle", the entry includes *malume* for the maternal uncle, *vavankulu* for an older uncle, and *vavantsongo* for a younger uncle for the paternal relationship. Similarly, the term "aunt" is comprehensively covered, with *hahani* representing the paternal aunt, *mhaninkulu* being used for an older aunt, and *mhanintsongo* for a younger aunt for the maternal relationship. This distinct classification of the terms helps users differentiate between various types of uncles and aunts, emphasising the importance of age and maternal or paternal connections in Xitsonga culture. However, the Pharos Bilingual Dictionary has omitted the equivalents for an aunt's husband from paternal *sivara* and an uncle's wife from maternal *malumexisati*. By providing most of the relevant terms for different types of uncles and aunts, the entry highlights the complexity and specificity of kinship relations in Xitsonga. While this dictionary aligns partially with Mpofu's (2007) and Gouws and Prinsloo's (2010) user-driven approach by offering a wide range of equivalents, it could further enhance accuracy by including these missing terms in future dictionaries. Overall, the treatment of the terms has captured the intricate cultural distinctions in Xitsonga kinship, emphasising the importance of familial roles and relationships.

The kinship terms "sister" and "brother" represent essential familial bonds, making it important to examine how they are treated in English-Xitsonga bilingual dictionaries. In English, the term "sister" refers to a female sibling, someone who shares at least one parent with another individual. This term denotes a familial relationship where

two individuals have the same mother, the same father, or both. In Pharos Bilingual Dictionary (2021: 71), the equivalent of sister was treated as follows:

sister (n.) *a female born from the same mother as you, sesi*

The treatment of the kinship term "sister" as a female born from the same mother as you and translated as *sesi*, is problematic because it narrowly defines the term as referring only to maternal siblings. This definition might lead to the misinterpretation that *sesi* is exclusively maternal. In both English and Xitsonga, the term "sister" encompasses not only maternal sisters but also paternal sisters (females born from the same father but different mothers) and half-sisters (females who share only one parent). Therefore, the definition should be expanded to accurately reflect all possible sibling relationships, ensuring users do not misinterpret *sesi* as referring exclusively to female maternal siblings. Mafela (2007) noted that Tshivenda kinship terms typically have more than one meaning, and lexicographers should incorporate all the meanings of terms when compiling comprehensive and user-friendly dictionaries. This study also supports adopting this approach in the compilation of Xitsonga bilingual dictionaries. For instance, in Xitsonga a more accurate entry for the term "sister" would be:

sister (n.) *a female sibling, someone who shares at least one parent with you; this includes those born from the same mother (maternal sister), the same father (paternal sister), or both parents (full sister), female child of sister of one's mother (older or younger) sesi*

Such term entry, will enable users to understand that the Xitsonga term *sesi* refers to more than one familial relation.

The same approach used to lemmatise the term "sister" was applied to the English kinship term "brother". In English, the term "brother" denotes a familial relationship where two individuals share the same mother, father, or both. The Pharos Bilingual Dictionary (2021: 11) provides the equivalent of "brother" as follows:

brother (n.) *a male person born of the same mother as someone, buti*

The equivalent term for "brother" in Xitsonga is *buti*. However, similar to the term "sister", the definition provided before the Xitsonga equivalent can be problematic for users learning the language, as it emphasises maternal siblings without addressing paternal ones. To avoid misinterpretation that *buti* refers exclusively to a maternal sibling, the definition should be revised to include all possible sibling relationships. Additionally, Xitsonga has terms that emphasise seniority of male siblings, such as *ndzisana* (younger brother) and *hosi* (elder brother), which were not captured in the Pharos Bilingual Dictionary. Omitting these equivalents in the dictionary hinders a complete understanding of the concept of brotherhood in Xitsonga. In the Swiss Mission Pocket Dictionary (2008: 15), the lexicographers added the information as follows:

brother, *makwa wa*; *my* -, *makwerhu*; *your* -, *makwenu*; *his* -, *makwavo*; *elder* -, *hosi*; *younger* -, *ndzisana*.

This dictionary entry provides several equivalents for the term "brother", including *makwa wa* (sibling), *makwerhu* (their sibling), *makwenu* (my/our sibling) and *makwavo* (his/her sibling). However, these terms are not primarily kinship terms but rather possessive forms indicating relationships. Despite this, the lexicographers successfully included significant information used among the Vatsonga to emphasise the seniority between male siblings. The terms *hosi* (elder brother) and *ndzisana* (younger brother) are crucial in understanding these familial relationships. By incorporating these distinctions, the lexicographer ensures that users can accurately convey the nuances of sibling relationships in Xitsonga. However, the entry would benefit from a clarification of the primary kinship terms to avoid confusion and enhance the dictionary's utility for users.

The term "cousin" is another intriguing kinship term that varies across languages. Mafela (2007: 428) stated that "in English, cousin means the son or daughter of one's uncle (including one's father's younger and elder brothers) or aunt (including one's mother's younger and elder sisters)". However, this differs in Xitsonga, where the term "cousin" is more narrowly defined and refers to the son or daughter of one's father's sister or one's mother's brother. Additionally, the borrowed term *khazi* is used to refer to a cousin regardless of gender or parental side. Xitsonga lexicographers have difficulty in providing all equivalents for the term when lemmatising it in bilingual dictionaries. In the Pharos Bilingual Dictionary (2021: 19), the equivalents for "cousin" are presented as follows:

cousin (n.) *A child of your uncle or aunt mzala; ntukulu; makwavo*

The definition preceding the Xitsonga equivalents accurately captures the English meaning of "cousin". However, the provided Xitsonga translations are incorrect, as none of them refer to "cousin" in either Xitsonga or English. The approach used in the Pharos Bilingual Dictionary to translate "cousin" was also adopted in the Swiss Mission Pocket Dictionary (2008: 22) as follows:

cousin, makwavo, n'wana wa tatana, manana, hahani, kokwana.

The entry for "cousin" in this dictionary also reveals some significant inaccuracies in the provided equivalents. The terms *makwavo* (your/our sibling), *n'wana wa tatana* (child of one's father), *n'wana wa manana* (child of one's mother), and *n'wana wa kokwana* (child of one's grandparent) are incorrect translations for "cousin". The only partially accurate equivalent is the phrase *n'wana wa hahani* (child of the sister of one's father). The correct term should be *khazi* which in Xitsonga appropriately refers to the child of one's father's sister. This observation highlights that the lexicographers did not adopt a user-driven approach when compiling the dictionary, which can lead to confusion for users trying to find the correct equivalents. The lack of linguistic precision in the dictionary can obstruct effective communication and understanding of familial relationships (Hendriks, 2003; Vrbinc & Vrbinc, 2017). A more accurate and user-friendly dictionary entry for "cousin" would be:

cousin (n.): A child of your uncle or aunt

- *khazi*: child of one's father's sister or mother's brother
- *buti*: child of one's father's brother
- *sesi*: child of one's mother's sister

This structure accurately reflects the different Xitsonga kinship terms and avoids the problems of the inaccurate entries in the current bilingual dictionaries.

Another set of kinship terms that presents significant cross-cultural communication challenges in English-Xitsonga bilingual dictionaries are "niece" and "nephew". In English, a "niece" refers to the daughter of one's sibling (brother or sister) or the daughter of one's spouse's sibling (OUP, Dictionary Unit for South African English, 2010). However, in Xitsonga, as in many other African languages, the term "niece" depends on both gender and the relationship to the sibling. For males, "niece" refers specifically to the daughter of their sister, while for females, it refers to the daughter of their brother. When it comes to in-laws, a man would regard his sister-in-law's daughter as his own, while a woman would similarly view her brother-in-law's daughter as her own. In Xitsonga, terms such as *ntukulu*, *muzaya*, or *muzala* and *n'wana* are commonly used to denote a niece. The Pharos Bilingual Dictionary (2021: 53) defines "niece" as follows:

niece (n.) daughter of your brother or sister *ntukulu*

In contrast, the Swiss Mission Pocket Dictionary (2008: 59) provides the equivalent for "niece" as:

niece, n'wana wa xisati wa makwenu

In this entry, the Xitsonga equivalents provided for the term "niece" are *ntukulu* in the Pharos Bilingual Dictionary and *n'wana wa xisati wa makwenu* (the female child of your sibling) in the Swiss Mission Pocket Dictionary. While *ntukulu* is partially correct, it should have specified the gender, such as *ntukulu wa xisati*, to align more accurately with the concept of a niece. Additionally, the explanation "daughter of your brother or sister" and *n'wana wa xisati wa makwenu* in both dictionaries may confuse users, as they do not specify who qualifies as a niece or who should use the term when referring to their niece. This lack of clarity regarding relationships can cause misunderstandings about familial connections and the proper usage of the term. Furthermore, the lexicographers did not include other possible equivalents, such as "one's brother's daughter, if one is male"; "one's sister's daughter, if one is female"; "one's brother-in-law's daughter, if one is female"; or "one's sister-in-law's daughter, if one is male." It would be helpful for the dictionaries to offer more detailed definitions that clarify who is considered a niece and who can refer to them as such. They should also include all Xitsonga equivalents to provide a clearer understanding for users. For instance:

- niece (n.) granddaughter; daughter of one's sister, if one is male; daughter of one's brother, if one is female – *ntukulu* or *muzaya* or *muzala*

- one's brother's daughter, if one is male; one's sister's daughter, if one is female; one's brother-in-law's daughter, if one is female; one's sister-in-law's daughter, if one is male – *n'wana*

Similarly, the kinship term "nephew" presents challenges for Xitsonga lexicographers when providing equivalents in English-Xitsonga bilingual dictionaries. In English, "nephew" refers to the son of one's sibling (brother or sister) or the son of one's spouse's sibling (OUP, Dictionary Unit for South African English, 2010). Essentially, this term describes the male child of a sibling or in-law, distinguishing it from "niece," which refers to the female child. In Xitsonga, the equivalents follow a similar pattern, with the only difference being gender: "nephew" is referred to as *ntukulu* or *muzaya*, or *muzala wa xinuna* depending on the speaker's preference. The Pharos Bilingual Dictionary (2021: 52) treated "nephew" as follows:

nephew (*n.*) son of your brother or sister *ntukulu wa xinuna*

In contrast, the Swiss Mission Pocket Dictionary (2008: 59) offered a different translation for "nephew," confusingly rendering it as:

nephew, *n'wana wa xinuna wa makwenu*

The Xitsonga equivalents provided for the term "nephew" are *ntukulu wa xinuna* in the Pharos Bilingual Dictionary and *n'wana wa xinuna wa makwenu* (the male child of your sibling) in the Swiss Mission Pocket Dictionary. While *ntukulu wa xinuna* is an accurate equivalent, the explanations "son of your brother or sister" and *n'wana wa xinuna wa makwenu* in both dictionaries are somewhat ambiguous. The lexicographers failed to provide additional possible equivalents or specify who qualifies as a nephew and who should use the term when referring to their nephew. This lack of precision in defining relationships highlights that the user-driven approach was not fully considered in the compilation of these dictionaries, potentially leading to confusion for users trying to learn Xitsonga kinship terms. It would be beneficial for lexicographers to provide more specific definitions that clarify who qualifies as a nephew and who is entitled to use that term. They should also include all relevant Xitsonga equivalents to ensure that the dictionaries are user-friendly. For example:

- nephew (*n.*) grandson, one's brother's son, if one is female; one's sister's son, if one is male *ntukulu* or *muzaya*, or *muzala*
- one's brother's son, if one is male; one's sister's son, if one is female; one's sister-in-law's son, if one is male; one's brother-in-law's son, if one is female; *n'wana*

This proposed structure accurately captures the various Xitsonga kinship terms, particularly for niece and nephew, which are gender-specific in English but not in Xitsonga. Therefore, the structure proposed by Mafela (2007) should be implemented when handling all kinship terms in English-Xitsonga bilingual dictionaries. This will ensure that cultural differences between the languages do not hinder the compilation of bilingual dictionaries, benefiting users and fulfilling their purpose. By clearly specifying gender-based equivalents, future Xitsonga lexicographers can avoid issues seen in current dictionaries. Additionally, providing more detailed explanations of term usage will enhance users' understanding of familial relationships within Xitsonga. Incorporating cultural nuances will lead to more precise and user-friendly dictionaries, enriching the language learning experience for Xitsonga learners.

Conclusion

The analysis of kinship terms in English–Xitsonga bilingual dictionaries reveals significant disparities in how these familial relationships are represented, highlighting the challenges of achieving translation equivalence. While the dictionaries generally provide accurate equivalents, they often suffer from limited definitions, omitting crucial nuances and cultural distinctions. This leads to potential confusion and misinformation for dictionary users. The study underscores the importance of adopting a user-driven approach in the compilation of bilingual dictionaries, ensuring that the cultural and contextual usage of kinship terms are accurately reflected. This approach does not only enhance understanding among language learners but also fosters effective communication across cultural boundaries. By expanding definitions to encompass all relevant forms of kinship, lexicographers can contribute to a more accurate and comprehensive representation of familial relationships in Xitsonga, ultimately promoting greater linguistic and cultural awareness. The findings of this analysis offer valuable insights for future lexicographic endeavours, emphasising the need for more nuanced and inclusive approaches in translating kinship terms and other cultural-specific concepts. By addressing these challenges, bilingual dictionaries can contribute to a more accurate and informative understanding of different languages and cultures.

Declarations

Interdisciplinary Scope: This article demonstrates an interdisciplinary scope by integrating lexicography and language usage to analyse how kinship terms in English-Xitsonga bilingual dictionaries have been treated. It demonstrates challenges that lexicographers face when dealing with kinship terms equivalence between languages that are socially and culturally distinct.

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation (Mlambo and Matfunjwa); literature review (Mlambo); methodology (Matfunjwa); analysis (Mlambo and Matfunjwa); investigation (Matfunjwa); drafting and preparation (Mlambo); review and editing (Mlambo and Matfunjwa). All authors have read and approved the published version of the article.

Conflict of Interest: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding: This publication was made possible with the support from the South African Centre for Digital Language Resources (SADiLaR). SADiLaR is a research infrastructure established by the Department of Science and Innovation of the South African government as part of the South African Research Infrastructure Roadmap (SARIR).

Availability of Data: All relevant data are included in the article. However, more information is available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

References

- Appell, A. R. 2001. Virtual Mothers and the Meaning of Parenthood. *University of Michigan Journal of Law Reform*, 34(4): 683–790.
- Batic, G. I. A. N. 2022. The Lexicographic Treatment of West African Kinship Terminologies. *Ethnorêma*, 18: 1–13.
- Brown, N., McIlwraith, T. and De González, L. T. 2020. *Perspectives: An Open Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*. Arlington, Virginia: American Anthropological Association.
- Day, M. D. 2019. What Stepmothers Can Teach Us about Contemporary Family Life, the Institution of Motherhood, and the Reproduction of Gender Inequality. University of New Hampshire, Doctoral Thesis.
- Swiss Mission. 2008. *English-Tsonga/Tsonga-English Pocket Dictionary*. Braamfontein: Sasavona Publishers & Booksellers.
- Gouws, R. H. and Prinsloo, D. J. 2010. *Principles and Practice of South African Lexicography*. Stellenbosch: African Sun Media.
- Hendriks, K. 2003. The Treatment of Culture-Bound Lexical Items in Bilingual Dictionaries Intended for a Multilingual Environment. Stellenbosch University, Master's Thesis.
- Jumayev, S. J. 2024. Exploring Language Complexity and Navigation of Its Polysemy in Bilingual English and Uzbek Dictionaries. *Mental Enlightenment Scientific-Methodological Journal*, 5(3): 74–78.
- Klapicová, E. H. 2005. Composition of the Entry in a Bilingual Dictionary. *SKASE Journal of Theoretical Linguistics*, 2(3): 57–74.
- Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, B. 2014. Equivalence. In: Bogucki, L., Goźdz-Roszkowski, S. and Stalmaszczyk, P. eds. *Ways to Translation*. Lodz: Lodz University Press, 9–52.
- Mafela, M. J. 2007. Kinship Terminology: Problems in Some English-Tshivenda Bilingual Dictionaries. *Lexikos*, 17(1): 424–432.
- Merriam-Webster Dictionary. n.d. Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Available: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/father> (Accessed 28 September 2024).

- Mpofu, N. 2007. The User Perspective in Lexicography: The Lemmatisation of Fixed Expressions in "Duramazwi Guru reChiShona". *Lexikos*, 17(1): 360–371.
- Suryanarayan, N. and Khalil, A. 2021. Kinship Terms as Indicators of Identity and Social Reality: A Case Study of Syrian Arabic and Hindi. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, 25(1): 125–146.
- OED. 2022. Oxford English Dictionary. Available: https://www.oed.com/dictionary/mother_n1?tl=true (Accessed 24 September 2024).
- OUP, Dictionary Unit for South African English. 2010. *Oxford South African Concise Dictionary*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Palanirajan, G. 2019. Kinship Terms: An Issue in Bilingual Lexicography. In: Darwin, L., Palanirajan, G., Umaraj, K., Rajesh, L., Akilan, R., Kumaresan, P. and Radhakrishnan, S. eds. *Recent Trends in Language and Literature*. Thiruvananthapuram: University of Kerala, 7–21.
- Pan, X. 2022. Functional Equivalence in the Process of English Translation of Chinese Idioms From a Social Semiotic Translation Approach. In: Hyung, C. J., Jin, Z., Ying, L. F. and Peng, C. F. eds. *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Language, Art and Cultural Exchange*. London: Springer Nature, 281–285.
- Passmore, S. and Jordan, F. M. 2020. No Universals in the Cultural Evolution of Kinship Terminology. *Evolutionary Human Sciences*, 2: 1–23.
- Pharos. 2021. *Pharos Bilingual Dictionary: English-Xitsonga/Xitsonga-English*. Cape Town: Pharos Dictionaries.
- Prinsloo, D. J. 2014. Lexicographic Treatment of Kinship Terms in an English/Sepedi-Setswana-Sesotho Dictionary with an Amalgamated Lemmalist. *Lexikos*, 24(1): 272–290.
- Prinsloo, D. J. and Bosch, S. E. 2012. Kinship Terminology in English-Zulu/Northern Sotho Dictionaries: A Challenge for the Bantu Lexicographer. In: Fjeld, R. V. and Torjusen, J. M. eds. *Proceedings of the 15th Euralex International Congress*. Oslo: Reprosentralen, 296–303.
- Read, D. 2013. A New Approach to Forming a Typology of Kinship Terminology Systems: From Morgan and Murdock to the Present. *Structure and Dynamics*, 6(1): 1–26.
- Sibuyi, E. M. 2011. The Analysis of the Impact of Nonverbal Communication in Xitsonga Discourse. University of Limpopo, Doctoral Thesis.
- Sullivan-Bolyai, S. and Bova, C. 2021. Qualitative Description: A How-To Guide. Available: <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14038/46447> (Accessed 29 September 2024).
- Tarp, S. 2008. *Lexicography in the Borderland between Knowledge and Non-Knowledge: General Lexicographical Theory With Particular Focus on Learner's Lexicography*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.
- Thompson Jr, A. B. 2019. Sonship: Biblical Concepts and the Need for Spiritual Father and Son Relationships in the Church. Liberty University, Doctoral Dissertation.
- Vogt, P., Mastin, J. D. and Aussems, S. 2015. Early Vocabulary Development in Rural and Urban Mozambique. *Child Development Research*, 1: 189–195.
- Vrbinc, M. and Vrbinc, A. 2017. Approaches to the Treatment of Zero Equivalence in a Bilingual Dictionary. *Lexikos*, 27: 522–539.
- Wangia, J. I. and Ayieko, G. 2016. Translation of Kinship Terminology in Selected Bilingual Dictionaries in Kenya and Its Implication for Cross-Cultural Communication. *Chemchemi International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 10(2): 1–17.
- Wentzel, P. J. and Muloiwa, T. W. 1982. *Improved Trilingual Dictionary: Venda-Afrikaans-English*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Yinhua, X. 2011. Equivalence in Translation: Features and Necessity. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 1(10): 169–171.