

Lexical Entries and the Component of Pronunciation in Tshivenda Bilingual Dictionaries

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Pronunciation is defined by Allen (1990) as the way in which a word is pronounced, especially, with reference to a standard. It involves a set of symbols, each of which always represents the same sound. Languages pronounce orthographic symbols differently. In some languages, orthographic symbols written identically are pronounced differently. Tshivenda is characterized by orthographic symbols which are written identically, but can be pronounced differently. These are orthographic symbols such as tsh, ts, tsw and pf. The same orthographic symbol can be pronounced as an aspirated sound or ejected sound. For example, the orthographic symbol ts can be pronounced as [ts'] in tsika (to press down) or [tsh] in tsimbi (metal). Poulos (1990) says that the actual pronunciation is determined by the words in which the orthographic symbols are used. Definitions of headwords in a dictionary consist of many components, for example word category, morphology, pronunciation, etymology, meaning and illustrative examples. The pronunciation element becomes a necessity for bilingual dictionaries because the addressees of these dictionaries may be learners of a foreign language. "Pronunciation is, after all, the integral part of the lexical item", as Sobkowiak put it in 2003. Giving the meanings of words is often thought to be the main purpose of a dictionary. It should be also noticed, however, that "the dictionary also contains other areas of information useful to the user" (Underhill 1980). Knowledge about pronunciation helps in checking any spelling the user is not sure of. Almost all Tshivenda dictionaries are bilingual and are therefore learner's dictionaries. The compilers of the dictionaries did not include the component of pronunciation in the definition of lexical items. Therefore, learners of Tshivenda find it difficult to pronounce orthographic symbols which denote more than one phonetic sound. This presentation seeks to highlight the lack of pronunciation component in Tshivenda bilingual dictionaries and its effects on learners of the language. Three Tshivenda bilingual dictionaries will be used to illustrate some points in this regard.

Introduction

A dictionary is a reference book in which the entries are arranged in alphabetical order. The basic function of a dictionary is to define words and provide their meanings. Al-Kasimi (1983) writes that a dictionary presents, in alphabetical series, the words which have formed a vocabulary, with all relevant facts concerning their form, sense, history, pronunciation and etymology. In his definition of the concept of a dictionary, Al-Kasimi (1983:1) explains it further as:

...a book containing a selection of words usually arranged alphabetically, with explanations of their meanings and other information concerning them, expressed in the same or another language.

Dictionaries are divided into different types, that is, monolingual, bilingual, multilingual dictionaries, and so on. A bilingual dictionary, which is the focus of this discussion, is a book of words in one language explained in the words of another. Bilingual dictionaries are intended mainly to aid non-speakers of the language to learn it. A bilingual dictionary helps the user to understand a foreign language, especially in a multilingual society: Gouws (1996: 15) supports this: "The status of a bilingual dictionary as a source of semantic information is especially evident in a multilingual society." It is therefore important that lexicographers of bilingual dictionaries include in the definition of a lexical entry all those components that will assist the learner of a foreign language. Deuter (2004: 254) believes that, from the outset, a

bilingual dictionary must be conceived as a learner's dictionary, with specific users in mind to whom it provide focussed help.

Providing the meaning of words is often thought to be the sole purpose of dictionaries, but they include other types of information that are useful to the user (Underhill 1980). Information such as grammar, pronunciation, etymology and illustrative examples should be included in the definition of lexical entries in dictionaries since these all help users to understand the meaning of words. McHenry (1992: 78) states:

In addition to its basic function of defining words, a dictionary may provide information about their pronunciation, grammatical forms and functions, etymologies, syntactic peculiarities, variant spellings, conventional abbreviations, and synonyms and antonyms.

Pronunciation, grammar and meanings must all receive attention in the definition of any lexical entries in a bilingual dictionary. Pronunciation in particular is a prerequisite of bilingual dictionaries because this type of dictionary caters especially for users learning to speak a foreign language. Swanepoel (1989: 113) notes:

Information on the pronunciation is supplied in the dictionary for the user who is not sure of the pronunciation of the written form of a lemma. With this information an attempt is made to give the user guidance on the correct or desired pronunciation of a word.

Users of bilingual dictionary need to know how to pronounce words in the language they are learning. Knowledge about pronunciation will also help them to check any spelling they are not sure of. According to Underhill (1980: 16), correct pronunciation is an essential part of any language. Without correct pronunciation, words can lose their meaning.

However, if there is a correlation between the written and spoken form of a language, it is not essential to include the component of pronunciation in a dictionary. As Zgusta (1971: 326) writes:

The lemma should indicate also the pronunciation of the entry-word in its canonical form; but further indications are necessary if there is some unpredictable variation within the paradigm. The indication of pronunciation can be omitted only if there is a one-to-one correlation between the written form and the spoken one, i.e. if the user will be able to know how to pronounce the written form.

Broeders and Hyams (1983: 167) do not regard it as appropriate to list all pronunciations in their bilingual dictionary. They believe that:

Since a bilingual dictionary should not seek or pretend to be exhaustive and since we were not writing a pronouncing dictionary, a purely descriptive approach, listing all acceptable pronunciations, would clearly not be appropriate. Instead, we have chosen to give variants only when it was clear that they were roughly equally common.

Landau (1984: 93) believes that the chief difficulty in representing pronunciation in the definition of a lexical entry is that the letters of the alphabet often represent more than one sound. The component of pronunciation should therefore be reflected in the definition of specific words, for example, words with the same orthography but which are characterised by different speech sounds. By component of pronunciation in this instance is meant the phonetic sound system.

Almost all Tshivenda dictionaries are bilingual and are therefore learners' dictionaries. But the compilers of these dictionaries did not include a pronunciation component (phonetic sound) in the definition of lexical entries. Learners of Tshivenda thus find it difficult to pronounce orthographic symbols which denote more than one phonetic sound in the spoken language. The result is that these dictionaries are not always helpful to learners of the language. As a spoken word is recognised by its pronunciation, knowledge about pronunciation of orthographic symbols makes it much easier for the learner to learn a new word and its meaning.

This paper attempts to highlight the absence of a pronunciation component in Tshivenda bilingual dictionaries, the effects this may have on learners of Tshivenda as a foreign language and the importance of pronunciation in learning a foreign language.

Pronunciation in Tshivenda

Pronunciation involves selecting the correct speech sounds and the proper syllable stress. In Tshivenda, pronunciation means selecting the correct speech sounds and the proper tonal pattern: stress does not play a role in the pronunciation of sounds in Tshivenda, as will be shown in the paragraphs below.

Pronunciation is, after all, an integral part of the lexical item; it is one of the main concerns of learners and teachers of phonetically difficult foreign languages (Sobkowiak 2003). Sobkowiak notes that the pronunciation of a word is indicated by the use of accent marks and either phonetic symbols or diacritical marks. Each phonetic symbol represents a different sound. In Tshivenda, the pronunciation of a word is shown by the use of phonetic symbols and tone. The design of the pronunciation component of a dictionary should consider the needs of the user: indications of pronunciation should be included as learners consult a dictionary in order to spell words correctly or to check their meanings when they write (Mdee 1997).

Almost all orthographic symbols in Tshivenda are pronounced differently in spoken language. However, there are a few orthographic symbols which do not follow the rule. The speech sounds are pronounced differently, although they use the same orthographic symbol. These include orthographic symbols such as *pf*, *ts*, *tsh* and *tsw*. The same orthographic symbol may be pronounced as an aspirated sound or an ejective sound. Poulos (1990) notes that, in the case of affricates in Tshivenda, the orthography may be misleading when it comes to the difference between aspirated and ejective forms. The consonants *pf*, *ts*, *tsh* and *tsw* represent both the ejective as well as the aspirated forms in each case, but the actual pronunciation is determined by the words in which they are used. Only when a word is used in a particular context can one determine whether the ejective or the aspirated form is being used (Poulos 1990:490). For example, the orthographic symbol *ts* is written identically in the words *tsimu* [ts^himu] (cultivated land) and *kutsimu* [kuts'imu] (small cultivated land). The *ts* in *tsimu* is aspirated, whereas the *ts* in *kutsimu* is an ejective. Another example is that of the orthographic symbol *pf*. This symbol is written identically in both words *pfene* [pf^hene] and *kupfene* [kupf'ene]. However, the pronunciation of *pf* in the two words is different. *Pfene* is pronounced with the aspirated sound /pf^h/, whereas *kupfene* is pronounced with the ejective sound /pf'/. If the orthographic symbol *pf* in *pfene* is pronounced as the ejective /pf'/ then it will not mean a *baboon*. The same holds for the replacement of /pf'/ by /pf^h/ in the word *kupfene*. One will notice, for example, that the same orthographic symbol *ts* is pronounced differently in the words in spoken language. Pronunciation of the words mentioned above is not shown in the definition of lexical entries in the Tshivenda bilingual dictionaries under consideration, although each denotes a different meaning. This could be confusing to those who are learning Tshivenda as a foreign language. Bilingual dictionaries such as *The Pocket Oxford – Duden German Dictionary: English – German | German – English* include the component of pronunciation in the definition of lexical entries as shown below:

church [tʃɜ:tʃ] *n.* Kirche, die; **go to** ↘: in die Kirche gehen; **the C↘ of England** die Kirche von England.

Although it is claimed that German is written as pronounced, in the abovementioned dictionary pronunciation has been provided to help users to learn the language. The pronunciation component is provided immediately after the lexical entry. All the other components follow. This emphasises that pronunciation is very important in a bilingual dictionary. It should be remembered, however, that bilingual dictionaries do not have space for large amounts of information. In this regard Deuter (2004: 245) states:

Dictionaries which give fuller treatment to both languages will inevitably include large amounts of information which is superfluous to one or other of the user groups: information about pronunciation or irregular forms of the L1, for example, or notes explaining customs and culture in one of the language's communities.

If a developed language such as German can provide a component of pronunciation in the definition of lexical entries, it stands to reason that Tshivenda, as a developing language,

requires this inclusion of pronunciation even more. Before the learner can understand the meaning of a particular lexical entry in a bilingual dictionary, he or she must be shown how to pronounce this foreign word, particularly if it does not follow the rules. The examples below illustrate how one orthographic symbol can represent two speech sounds in Tshivenda.

Orthographic Symbol	Example Word	Meaning	Phonetic Sound
pf	<i>pfumo</i>	spear	/pf ^h / [pf ^h umə]
pf	<i>pfunya</i>	kick back	/pf ^ʼ / [pf ^ʼ una]
ts	<i>tsimu</i>	cultivated land	/ts ^h / [ts ^h imu]
ts	<i>tsikeledza</i>	press or bear down on heavily	/ts ^ʼ / [ts ^ʼ ikeredza]
tsh	<i>tshanda</i>	hand	/tsh ^h / [tsh ^h anda]
tsh	<i>tshopedza</i>	blink the eyes	/tsh ^ʼ / [tsh ^ʼ opedza]
tsw	<i>tswio</i>	kidney	/tsh ^h / [tsh ^h io]
tsw	<i>tswonzwa</i>	sip	/tsh ^ʼ / [tsh ^ʼ onza]

The word *pfumo* is pronounced with an aspirated *pf*. If one pronounces it with an ejective *pf*, one will miss the intended meaning. On the other hand, the word *pfunya* is pronounced with an ejective *pf*. If this word is pronounced with an aspirated *pf*, it becomes meaningless. The same applies to the word *tsimu*. When the *ts* is aspirated, it means *cultivated land*. However, pronounced with ejective *ts*, the word is meaningless. If the word *tsimu* is prefixed with *ku*, it means *small cultivated land*, but then the *ts* in *kutsimu* will be an ejective sound. It is clear that the manner of articulation in this regard is vital in differentiating the meanings of words. In the word *tshanda*, the orthographic symbol *tsh* is aspirated, and has the meaning *hand*. If it is not aspirated it also becomes meaningless. Lastly, the orthographic symbol *tsw* is pronounced differently in the words *tswio* and *tswonzwa*. *Tswio* is pronounced with an aspirated *tsw*, whereas *tswonzwa* has an ejective *tsw*. As in the examples given above, if *tswio* is pronounced with an ejective *tsw*, or *tswonzwa* with an aspirated *tsw*, the intended meanings will be lost. Because the orthographic symbols *pf*, *ts*, *tsh*, and *tsw* are pronounced variously, different phonetic symbols are used to represent their different sounds.

Pronunciation and Tshivenda bilingual dictionaries

Two dictionaries, the *Venda Dictionary: Tshivenda – English* by N. J. van Warmelo and the *Improved Trilingual Dictionary: Venda – Afrikaans – English* by P. J. Wentzel and T. W. Muloiwa will be used to demonstrate the absence of the pronunciation component in Tshivenda bilingual dictionaries. Lexicographers of the two bilingual dictionaries define some lexical entries differently, even though the meanings are related.

The definitions of lexical entries in *Venda Dictionary: Tshivenda – English* are reflected as follows:

pfumo 5 (pl. mafumo, mapfumo; Kar. Idem) 1. spear; sacred spear of ancestor cult. 2. warfare. Hu lwiwa --- there is war on (as distinct from ordinary fighting). -bva --- go on war party, go out against the enemy. Pfumo li a vhfha the war is getting tough, things are not going too well (pp. 300 – 301).

pfunya (So. -runya) buck, kick backwards, rear the hindquarters, as a horse (p. 301).

tsimu 9 (pl. masimu 6; <-sima, B. -tima) dry-land garden, that yielding the bulk of crop, only worked after the rainy season has begun (p. 438).

tsikeledza press or bear down on heavily (p. 437).

tsimba press down, pat or beat down; remove cotton fibre from the seeds by rolling on one's leg whilst another twists it onto a stick, acc. to others by teasing with bowstring (p. 438).

tsimba 9 Rusty-spotted Genet (*Genetta rubiginosa*). Luṭanya tsimba na lukhohe put people of the same nature together, so they will fight (p. 438).

tshanḁa 7 (pl. zwanḁa 8) 1. hand --- tshinna, tshihulu or tshauḁa right hand; --- tshamonde, --- tshisadzi left hand; nḁa ha tshanḁa back of hand. U na tshanḁa tsha kholomo he has luck with cattle, is prosperous in cattle farming (p. 388).

tshopedza (-tzhopedza) blink the eyes (p. 435).

tswio 9 (B. -piyo) kidney (p. 442).

tswonzwa (not reflected)

The definitions of these lexical entries in the *Improved Trilingual Dictionary: Venda –Afrikaans – English* are reflected as follows:

pfumo (ma-/mafumo) assegai, spies | spear, assegaai (p. 53).

pfunya (not reflected)

pfula skiet (met pyl); spiesgooi | (shoot with arrow); cast a spear (p. 53).

tsimu (masimu) tuin, landery, ploeg land | land under cultivation, garden (p. 72)

tsikeledza pers, druk | press (p. 71).

tshanḁa (zwanḁa) arm, hand; handskrif; mou | arm, hand; handwriting, sleeve; ---

tshinna/tshihulu/tshauḁa: regterhand | right hand; --- **tshamonde/tshisadzi**: linkerhand | left hand (p. 65).

tshopedza (not reflected)

tswio (dzi-) nier | kidney (p. 72).

tswonzwa suig (met strooitjie) | sip (with straw) (p. 72).

From these examples of lexical entries reflected in the two Tshivenda bilingual dictionaries, it is clear that the component of pronunciation is not included in the definition of a lexical entry, contrary to what a learner of the language might expect. It would seem that the basic function of these dictionaries is the provision of equivalents and meanings. Bilingual dictionaries, as learning tools, should provide more information than simply the meaning of words and their equivalents.

In certain instances in the *Venda Dictionary: Tshivenda – English*, Van Warmelo provides information about grammatical forms (noun class and plural forms), etymology and illustrative examples when defining lexical entries. But it is not indicated through the use of the phonetic sound system how any of the lexical entries are pronounced. Definitions of *pfumo*, *tsimu*, *pfunya* and *tshanḁa* are good examples in this regard. Lexical entries *pfumo* [pʰumɔ], *tsimu* [tsʰimu], *tsimba* [tsʰimba], *tshanḁa* [tʰanḁa] and *tswio* [tʰiɔ] are pronounced with the aspirated *pf*, *ts*, *tsh*, and *tsw* respectively. The lexical entries *pfunya* [pʰunya], *tsikeledza* [tsʰikeredza], *tsimba* [tsʰimba], *tshopedza* [tʰopedza] and *tswonzwa* [tʰɔnzɔ] [tʰɔnzɔ], however, are pronounced with ejective *pf*, *ts*, *tsh* and *tsw* respectively. Without including the phonetic sounds in the definition it is difficult for a learner to determine the pronunciation of these lexical entries. Only in the definition of the lexical entry *tshopedza* has the lexicographer attempted to indicate pronunciation by providing an alternative variant of the word. In this lexical entry, the orthographic symbol *tsh* /tʰ/ has been replaced by *tzh* /tʃ/ as an alternative variant to show how the word is pronounced. The orthographic symbol *tzh* is archaic. *Tzhopedza* is a Tshivenda word which means *blinking the eyes*, but this has since been replaced by *tshopedza*.

Regarding the lexical item *tswio*, the lexicographer provides the equivalent only. The lexical entry *tswonzwa* is not reflected in the *Venda Dictionary: Tshivenda - English*. Sometimes two words with the same orthography but are pronounced differently are reflected as separate lexical entries. An example of this is the entry *tsimba* provided by Van Warmelo in his dictionary. The lexical item *tsimba* appears twice as a lexical entry, as indicated above. The first lexical entry, *tsimba*, is a verb stem which generally means *press down*, whereas the second entry is a noun which refers to an animal (spotted Genet). The lexicographer does not provide information about word category as in the case of some lexical entries in the dictionary. Other than the use of tone, which does not help learners of the language in pronouncing the word, no indication of pronunciation by phonetic sound is given in the definition of the lexical entry. In the second lexical item, *tsimba*, the meaning is accompanied by an illustrative example. As in the case of *tsimba*, which is a verb stem, no information about the phonetic sound has been provided, except tone. Information regarding pronunciation (phonetic sound system) of the two lexical items should read as follows:

tsimba (verb) [ts'imba]

tsimba (noun) [ts^h'imba]

The orthographic symbol *ts* in the lexical entry *tsimba* (verb) is pronounced with an ejective, whereas the orthographic *ts* in the lexical item *tsimba* (noun) is pronounced with an aspiration. Without the provision of the phonetic sound symbols in the definition of these two lexical entries, a learner will be unable to differentiate between these two words, and will confuse their meanings. Therefore, the inclusion of the component of pronunciation through the use of phonetic symbols is indispensable in a bilingual dictionary, especially when the orthographic symbols do not follow the rule. Van Warmelo commented on pronunciation in the front matter of his dictionary. The front matter in the *Venda Dictionary: Tshivenda – English* comprises information on stress, tone, orthography, dialects, grammar and abbreviations. The comment does not include the phonetic sound system to help learners in pronouncing lexical entries. In the front matter of his bilingual dictionary, Van Warmelo (1989) indicates that stress is not included in the definition of lexical entries because stress of the kind found in English is not found in Tshivenda. Ziervogel, Wentzel and Makuya (1972) support Van Warmelo, agreeing that stress is not important in Tshivenda. Van Warmelo also stresses the importance of tone in the pronunciation of a lexical entry. However, tone without the accompanying phonetic sound symbols will not benefit learners of a foreign language.

The *Improved Trilingual Dictionary: Venda – Afrikaans – English* provides both Afrikaans and English equivalents for Tshivenda words. In addition to the provision of equivalents, Wentzel and Muloiwa (1982) provide the component of grammar (word categories and plural forms) in the definition of lexical entries. As in the case of Van Warmelo's bilingual dictionary, no information is provided on how lexical entries are pronounced. Learners of the language learn very little about the pronunciation of words which are characterised by identical orthographic symbols. Since the component of pronunciation does not feature in the definition of lexical entries in this dictionary, a learner of Tshivenda as a foreign language would expect information about pronunciation to be reflected in the front matter of the dictionary. However, little information about pronunciation is provided here. In the front matter of *Improved Trilingual Dictionary: Venda – Afrikaans – English*, lexicographers comment instead on the use of diacritics, singular and plural forms, tone, symbols and abbreviation. Wentzel and Muloiwa (1982) do not include information regarding the phonetic sound system to help users to pronounce lexical entries; they comment only on tone. Tone is certainly an important part of the sound system in Tshivenda. According to Wentzel and Muloiwa (1982: 150), tone determines the meaning of lexical items in this language. However, the lexicographers have not included tone as a system to help users to pronounce lexical entries in their bilingual dictionary. They argue that:

The non-Venda speaker will not be able to apply these rules without help from a speaker of the language. Such a person will benefit more by mimicking what he perceives by ear.

Venda speakers on the other hand do not have a problem with the tone of the language.

The failure to include phonetic sounds as an aid to the pronunciation of words in the definition of certain lexical entries is a limitation to dictionary users who wish to learn Tshivenda effectively. As Mdee (1997: 100) writes: "The argument that a dictionary is a tool for language learning is proven by the encoding functions for which it is used." The encoding functions of importance here are components such as spelling, pronunciation and word categories.

Conclusion

The exposition above has shown that Tshivenda has orthographic symbols which represent more than one speech sound in the spoken language. However, pronunciation of these orthographic symbols is not indicated in the definition of such lexical entries in Tshivenda bilingual dictionaries; and only tone is included in Van Warmelo's dictionary. According to Mdee (1997: 102), it is important to single out those lexical items where pronunciation does not follow the rule, and to indicate how they are pronounced. The component of

pronunciation is important for learners of a foreign language. For this reason, in the case of words which do not follow the normal rules of the language, pronunciation should be indicated in a bilingual dictionary. Moreover, there are few instances where it is necessary to provide the component of pronunciation. Not all lexical entries in a bilingual dictionary require the inclusion of a pronunciation component. Only the definition of those orthographic symbols which represent more than one speech sound need be accompanied by the component of pronunciation. This would assist dictionary users in differentiating the meanings of these lexical entries. A user needs to know the correct pronunciation of these words in order to communicate in the language. If a learner is able to say a word correctly, it is easier for him or her to learn the word and its meaning. Knowledge of the pronunciation of lexical entries will help learners of a foreign language to hear sounds better, and will make it easier for them to learn the spelling of the word and its meaning. In addition, a learner of the language will be better understood when he or she speaks. If lexicographers find it difficult to include the component of pronunciation in the definition of lexical entries, it is recommended that some explanation regarding pronunciation of orthographic symbols representing two speech sounds be included in the front matter of the dictionary. The omission of the component of pronunciation from the description of lexical entries in a bilingual dictionary is a great drawback to any language learner.

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