

## USING NORTHERN SOTHO AS MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN VOCATIONAL TRAINING<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

The main aim of Le3o is to demonstrate empirically that the use of Northern Sotho as medium of instruction (MoI) in the teaching of Industrial Electronics in Grades 10 to 12 at two colleges for Further Education and Training (C/FET) will lead to improved knowledge and better developed skills in the selected subject area.

Currently, the official MoI in all CFET is English: learners are taught in English, they have to learn in English (that is, master complex concepts and principles, understand how complicated systems function, read text books in English), and they have to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills in their selected fields of study in English (i.e. write tests and exams in English). However, learners' are generally not proficient enough in English to perform these tasks effectively, and their educational performance is therefore not satisfactory (see the opening paper of the Le3o conference). The use of English as MoI, in fact, operates as an obstacle to effective educational development at the colleges.<sup>2</sup> Le3o therefore wants to construct the case for using Northern Sotho as MoI, arguing on theoretical as well as empirical grounds that such a decision will contribute towards improving educational performance in the CFET and, subsequently, lead to more competitive performance in the workplace.

The main questions Le3o has to ask regarding the use of NS as MoI are (a) whether Northern Sotho has the linguistic capacity to function effectively as MoI, and (b) if it is found that NS does not have the linguistic capacity to function effectively as MoI, how this capacity should be developed? Both of these questions will be dealt with in this paper.

### The linguistic capacity required for a language to function as MoI in an effective way

It goes without saying that, in principle, NS possesses the linguistic capacity to function effectively as MoI at any level of instruction: it has the necessary general vocabulary and the

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<sup>1</sup> Appreciation is due to Dr. Elsabe Taljard and Ms Rose Bogopa, Department of African Languages, University of Pretoria, for comments on an earlier version of this paper. However, they obviously carry no responsibility for any part of it.

<sup>2</sup> This was also the case with Zulu-speaking Chemistry students at the University of Durban-Westville in KwaZulu/Natal, for which English is also the MoI. In a report on a research project on the use of Zulu in teaching Chemistry at that university, Shembe (2002: 6) points out that "the hierarchical nature of chemistry is such that the understanding of certain key concepts is fundamental to the proper acquisition of subsequent knowledge" and that if this understanding does not occur effectively (because of an inadequate proficiency in English), students then "memorise certain points from the text-book (just) long enough to regurgitate them during tests and exam time." Such "learning" is not effective, of course, and inevitably "leads to a high percentage of African students who either drop out in the first year or fail."

morphological and syntactic capacity<sup>3</sup> to express whatever meanings its speakers wish to express. What it does not have, as yet, are the vocabulary of technical terms (examples from Industrial Electronics - obtained from college exam papers and text-books - include: *circuit diagrams, volt drop, kilowatt, conductors, nominal cross-section area, three-phase transformer, diode, short-shunt compound*); and the necessary technical styles and registers.

An important point in this regard is, of course, that learners' *knowledge* of the academic and technical vocabulary items and the grammatical devices as well as their linguistic *skills* in using them must be developed. Considering the fact that high-level educational contexts are often context reduced and cognitively demanding, as Cummins (XXX) points out, it is essential that learners' academic language proficiency be maximally developed. This must obviously occur in both the language class and in content subjects.

A more revealing approach to determining whether NS has the capacity to function effectively as MoI at high levels of educational usage is to evaluate it from the perspective of the concept *standard language*, the variety typically used in formal education.

Modern language communities (including the NS language community) are typically constituted by a variety of groups with differing socio-cultural identities speaking a diversity of social and geographical dialects in contexts that differ in terms of formality (using different styles) and domains of activity (using different registers). Formal education, however, being centrally controlled, requires the use of a "unified, non-local, relatively stable and multifunctional medium of communication" (Deumert, to appear a, p. 9) for all its tasks: teaching and learning, the production of text-books, learner assessment and certification, and teacher training. This (unified) language must necessarily be a standardised language. This applies equally to NS: to function effectively as MoI in formal education, NS has to have been standardised.<sup>4</sup> The question, thus, is: Is NS a standard language?

To determine whether NS has been effectively standardised (and is thus an adequate medium of learning and teaching in a modern society), it is necessary to be explicit about the distinctive features of standard languages<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> For example to express relations such as additive, temporal, causal, adversarial and resultative in complex sentences and complex texts through relational words such as *thus, therefore, however, consequently* and to construct derivations and compounds, conditional clauses, passive sentences and direct and indirect speech, and so forth. It also has, or can easily develop, the "learning words (or academic vocabulary) required in educational contexts (such as *classify, define, state, give, explain, calculate, determine, make a labelled sketch, show, refer to, illustrate, differentiate, discuss, compare, contrast, demonstrate, motivate*, and nouns such as *symbol, term, concept, type, method, characteristic, feature, component, (dis)advantage, purpose, principle, value, formula*)

<sup>4</sup> The prominence given in this paper to the standard language must not be taken to imply that the vernacular varieties in a linguistic community are in any way less important than the standard language. The views expressed by the Indian sociolinguist, Khubchandani (1984), are explicitly supported in Le3o: that vernacular varieties have important functions to fulfil, and that their meaningfulness and integrity should not be compromised by a one-sided emphasis on standard languages.

<sup>5</sup> Technically, the term should be "standard *variety*", since a standard language is only one of the many varieties which collectively constitute a language, the others being the different styles, dialects and registers of the language.

Fully-fledged standard languages are varieties which “cut across regional differences, providing a unified means of communication ...” (Kembo-Sure and Webb, 2000: 65) and which:

- (a) Have clearly defined norms, and are fully codified, i.e. described in grammars and dictionaries
- (b) Are structurally relatively uniform, exhibiting minimal formal variation
- (c) Are prescribed by authoritative bodies
- (d) Are known by all educated members of the language community
- (e) Are accepted by the language community as the appropriate varieties for high-function formal contexts, thus having prestige
- (f) Are functionally fully elaborated, in the sense of having the capacity to be used to perform any high level public function any member of their speech communities may wish to perform, and
- (g) Are transmitted through instruction in formal education.

Deumert (in press, a and b) makes the following additional remarks:

- (a) Standardisation occurs through individuals modifying “their linguistic behaviour ... to achieve communicative efficiency (and) to position themselves socially. (S)peakers/writers (unconsciously) adjust their speech to reduce or to emphasize differences between themselves and their interlocutors” (in press, a: 4-5)
- (b) The production, propagation, institutionalisation and assimilation of standard languages within a speech community are linked to a language ideology: “(T)he structural properties and social prestige of standard languages in modern societies are legitimized by a specific type of language ideology which includes not only references to beauty, eloquence and the authority of the “best usage”, but which centrally reflects on the invariance or “fixity” condition of standard languages”(in press, a: 10-11)
- (c) Since standard languages “incorporate speakers of different dialects into a single speech community whose linguistic boundaries to the surrounding speech communities are unambiguously defined”, they “serve as symbols of national solidarity as well as national distinctiveness”, and thus have symbolic meanings (in press, a: 9)
- (d) Since standard languages are “used strategically to demonstrate linguistic and social cohesion, that is, ‘to depict a group of people as a coherent and ordered community based on shared values and goals’” (quoting C. Bell, 1997 on ritual theory) (in press, b: 4), language standardisation functions as part of ethno-linguistic awareness (identity construction through language), and is often accompanied by language festivals and language monuments

Given these features of standard languages and the standardisation process, the question is to what degree NS has a standard language?

Generally, NS is said to be a standard language. It is based on the dialect of the Pedi, historically the strongest tribe in the NS area. sNS<sup>6</sup> is used for teaching and learning purposes in some primary schools and in primary school text-books, learners are expected to use it in writing tests

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<sup>6</sup> The term *standard NS* is not used in the NS community, nor does it seem to be known. Generally, the term people use to refer to the standardised version of NS is *Northern Sotho*. In this contribution a distinction between the two terms will be made for the sake of clarity.

and examinations at these levels, and it is taught as a subject. NS linguists point out, though, that sNS exists only in a written form, and is not known very well by learners and possibly even by teachers. In fact, in classroom situations learners are usually allowed to use their vernaculars (their regional dialects or the urban vernacular, Pretoria Sotho), but in formal school tasks (assignments, tests, exams) they are required to use (written) sNS. This arrangement obviously does not apply in the study of NS as a subject.

If one uses the features of a fully-fledged MoI and a fully-fledged standard language, listed above, as criteria for determining whether standard Northern Sotho is a meaningful reality, the status of sNS seems to be slightly marginal. It is true that NS has been codified (through an orthography and rules of spelling, several grammars and 12 dictionaries – see the addenda), that it is taught in school, that many educated persons are proficient in it, that it was used in state administration in the former NS self-governing region and that it is also occasionally used today by political leaders. However, it is also the case that:

- all educated members of the community do not seem to know and use sNS effectively, for instance teachers are reported to be unsure about the norms of sNS
- many members of the NS community do not accept the standardised variety of NS (which is based on the dialect of the Pedi) and that there is evidence of language-internal conflict in the community (see later), and that
- though it has been (and is being) used (in some degree) in high-level public functions, it has not been functionally fully elaborated in the sense of having the capacity to be used to perform all the functions members of the speech communities may wish to perform (for instance in science and technology)

In addition, the standardisation of NS is not linked to a standard language ideology according to which there is a drive towards developing a fully-fledged standard language with prescribed norms being regarded as “beautiful”, “correct” and “proper” (and with vernacular forms regarded as “deviant” and “incorrect”)<sup>7</sup>. Similarly, NS has not served to unite its speakers “into a single speech community whose linguistic boundaries to the surrounding speech communities are unambiguously defined”, thus serving as a symbol of national solidarity and national distinctiveness. The unstable position of NS is reflected in the uncertainty about the notion “standard NS” in the language community in general.

If NS is to serve as an effective instrument of educational development, it is thus necessary that its standardisation be taken further. This will not be an easy task since there are at least two obstacles to such a process.

The first problem with the further standardisation of NS lies in the delineation of the Sotho languages.

Since their arrival in southern Africa in the course of the later Iron Age (sometime after the 11<sup>th</sup> century), the three “Sotho-speaking” communities of southern Africa (the modern day NS community, the Tswana – or “Western Sotho” - and the Southern Sotho), constituted a single

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<sup>7</sup> There is, it is reported, a strong sense of “purity” among rural, dialect speakers, who regard the NS of urban speakers as “corrupt”.

cultural and linguistic unit. However, as a result of factors such as internal rivalry and conflict, this unified group split into geographically dispersed tribes, each with its own leaders, and gradually developing its own dialect, totalling, today, in the vicinity of 50 dialects. Further internal differentiation occurred through political manoeuvres (e.g. planned marriages) and conquests, so that the different groups attained different degrees of power within the larger community. (Bergh ed., 1998:107-8; Davenport, 1991: 9, 52-53)

The differentiation of the Sotho community into three groups (NS, Tswana and Southern Sotho) probably began as a result of early missionary work. Missionaries from different societies began working among the most powerful tribes, translating the Bible into the languages of these tribes, in the process producing three Bibles (one of which was in the dialect of the Pedi). Later, these divisions were formalised by the implementation of the policy of Apartheid. The Africanist R. K. Herbert (1992), argues in this regard that, besides missionary politics, language boundaries were based on the implementation of Apartheid. Northern Sotho (which he calls Pedi), he points out, is internally diverse enough to “raise some doubts about its essential unity”, and is so similar to Tswana that it is difficult to draw “any real boundary between Pedi and Tswana”. Despite this, “Pedi” and Tswana were claimed to reflect distinct ethnic identities. The Apartheid government, he says, seem to have created ethnic groups and standard languages to justify their policy. The homeland Lebowa, for example, the “self-governing” region of the Northern Sotho/Pedi people, was designated as a ‘homeland’ for people who “themselves came into existence only through the legislative action of apartheid policy. Linguistic autonomy here and elsewhere has more to do with socio-political criteria than linguistic ones” (1992: 2-3). The apparent irrelevance of linguistic considerations is also illustrated by Bogopa (in prep), who points out that NS dialects such as Kutswe, Pai, Lobedu and Pulana, are mutually not wholly intelligible. Further evidence in support of the contention that the division between Northern Sotho and Tswana was contrived in the 1960s is that the graphisation of the Sotho languages was initially handled as if they were one language. It was only after 1960 that the government appointed three different language boards to deal with the orthographical representation of each.

The relative confusion about the language boundaries is reflected by the differences in opinion in the NS community about the names which should be used to refer to Northern Sotho. Firstly, the name “Northern Sotho” is said to be an “umbrella term” for the collection of dialects recognised as constituting the language. No one, however, is said to “speak Northern Sotho”. Secondly, the decision (by government agencies) to name NS “Sepedi” (used in the 1996 constitution), has been rejected, as pointed out below. (The current official language name is once again “Northern Sotho”, announced in a recent Government Gazette.) Thirdly, the term sNS is not used (or generally known); instead, the term “pure” NS is used, presumably to refer to what would be called sNS.

Today, Northern Sotho, Tswana and Southern Sotho are regarded as distinct languages.<sup>8</sup>

The second problem relates to the social relationships between the different dialects of NS.

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<sup>8</sup> The speaker numbers of these three groups in 1996 were: NS: 3 695 846, Tswana: 3 301 774, and Southern Sotho: 3 104 197. South Africa’s total population is 43 million.

NS is said to comprise 23 regional dialects. However, there does not seem to be agreement among linguists regarding their identification and designation (in some cases not even the spelling of their names), their classification into subgroups and, indeed, the criteria used to identify these dialects. (See Addendum A for a list and geographical classification of the NS dialects, following Bogopa, in prep.) In addition to the regional dialects there are also urban vernaculars<sup>9</sup> – Pretoria-Sotho and Tsotsitaal, which differ phonetically and lexically from sNS (see later for Pretoria Sotho).

The dialect issue that is most relevant to the development of NS into a fully-fledged high-function language is the question of the social meaning of the NS varieties. Four aspects of this issue can be mentioned:

- There is some resistance against the name *Sepedi*. sNS is based on Sepedi, the vernacular of the Pedi people from Sekhukhuneland in the central territory, who are historically the strongest tribe in the broader community, previously being governed in a federation of tribes/chiefdoms. Given this fact, the standard language of the broader linguistic community was named *Sepedi*. However, there was strong resistance to this name, based on the argument by speakers of non-Pedi dialects that *Sepedi* is the name of a dialect and that they did not want their varieties/dialects to be classified as “dialects of a dialect”. The name of the language was recently changed by government decree to *Northern Sotho (Sesotho sa Leboa)*.
- NS’s regional dialects have a negative social meaning in urban areas. Speakers of these dialects are regarded as inferior, of low class, and uneducated. Since “pure NS”/sNS is based on a rural dialect, it, too, is stigmatised, and city dwellers are said to prefer Pretoria Sotho and Tsotsitaal.
- There are dialect communities grouped within NS who reject their inclusion into NS. Speakers of Lobedu, for example, insist that they do not speak NS, but a different language. (In fact, in the late 1990s a delegation of this community requested the Pan South African Language Board that Lobedu be recognised as a national official language.)
- Within the broader linguistic community, particularly in the case of the dialect communities and from people who have an attachment to these dialects, there is a strong commitment to the notion of linguistic “purity” and “correctness” despite the fact that these notions have no sociolinguistic validity. Pretoria Sotho and Tsotsitaal are regarded as corrupt forms of the Sotho languages.<sup>10</sup>

From these observations it is clear that “pure NS”/sNS is not regarded as the “legitimate language of the community”, that there is, in fact, an absence of societal unity linked to a common

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<sup>9</sup> It is common practice in language planning circles to distinguish between *standard language* and *non-standard language*, with the latter term referring to the social and regional dialects of the language. In this paper this terminological distinction will not be used. Instead the terms *standard language* and *vernaculars* (or dialects) will be used.

<sup>10</sup> Sociolinguistically seen, of course, a “standard language” should NOT be linked in any way to considerations of “purity” or “correctness”. “Pure languages” and “correct languages” do not exist. What does exist is the notion “appropriateness”: all language varieties are “normalised”, either through external regulation (by a language body) or spontaneously, in the speech community, and the use of a particular variety may be appropriate or inappropriate to the context within which it is used.

identity<sup>11</sup> and that there is a degree of language-internal conflict (or at least tension) within the NS community.

If sNS is to become a fully-fledged standard language an “ideology of standardisation” (as Deumert calls it, that is: a need for “uniformity and correctness” within the linguistic community) needs to become operative and the legitimacy of the ensuing standard needs to be accepted. For this to happen some degree of linguistic awareness is presumably necessary.

### **The present state of sNS**

Given that there are problems with the general acceptance, knowledge and use of sNS, the important question for Le3o is: If sNS is to be used as MoI in teaching Industrial Electronics at the two colleges for FET, what development does NS need to undergo to produce sNS? In order to discuss this question, it is necessary to consider the current state of corpus development, status development and acquisition development in NS.

#### *Corpus development*

##### Orthographic development

The initial graphisation of Northern Sotho was begun in 1861 by the Berlin Missionary Society who translated the Bible into the vernacular of the community in which they first settled in the early nineteenth century, the Pedi. Being non-linguists, they followed the orthographic conventions of German. From 1928, however, more systematic attempts were made to produce a writing system. Initially, the 3 Sotho languages were treated as one as far as orthographic matters were concerned, but from 1961 (the high point in the Apartheid era) the three languages were been treated as three distinct languages (Bogopa, in prep.), by government-designated language bodies, viz. the former NS Language Board<sup>12</sup>.

The basic document on NS orthography produced by the NS Language Board is the *Northern Sotho Terminology and Orthography No.4*, last revised in 1988. It contains a list of terms and an explanation of the spelling rules/orthography of NS. According to Taljard (2002:2), however, this document is “outdated and in need of serious updating and revision”; and its guidelines, are “to a large extent inadequate and the terminologist is largely left to his/her own device as regards for example the adaptation of syllable structure and resultant spelling of especially transliterations”. The spelling rules, she adds, are “not clear, consistent or phonologically sound”. Furthermore, she points out, the document “is not readily available, since it is not commercially marketed”.

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<sup>11</sup> The degree to which sNS and the NS dialects function as identity markers still has to be investigated, and it has to be established whether dialect speakers consider themselves primarily as “Northern Sothos” or primarily as speakers of a particular dialect. Do Lobedu speakers, for example, regard themselves as primarily having a Lobedu identity and secondarily a NS identity, or the other way round?

<sup>12</sup> The NS Language Board was disbanded soon after 1994 and has now been replaced by the NS National Language Body.

One of the first tasks of the (recently established) NS National Language Body, which is currently legally responsible for the standardisation of NS, should thus be to finalise the orthographic conventions of NS.

#### Lexicographic work

A number of NS dictionaries have been produced, as listed in Addendum B. Gouws, 1990: 55, however, sees lexicographic work in the African languages in general (and thus also in NS) as the “result of limited efforts, not reflecting a high lexicographical standard”.

Lexicographic work is currently managed by the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) who has established national dictionary units for each of the official South African languages. The eventual aim of these units is to compile comprehensive monolingual explanatory dictionaries. The Northern Sotho Dictionary Unit was established in 2001, with two full-time first-language lexicographers. This unit makes use of the Pretoria Sepedi Corpus, which was assembled over the past decade by the University of Pretoria’s Department of African languages. The corpus samples were drawn from “*several hundred ... written sources by several hundred mother-tongue speakers, and roughly corresponds with the equivalent of three hundred books ...*” (approximately 6 million words) (de Schryver and Lepota, 2001: 3).

#### Terminographic work

The terms contained in the *Northern Sotho Terminology and Orthography No.4*, mentioned above, are not of great significance in the standardisation process since they were “intended in the first place for use in the primary school and were mainly taken from the syllabuses for the various subjects of the primary school” (*Terminology and orthography No 4*, 1988: 1) (Taljard, 2002: 2). The body currently officially responsible for term creation in South Africa is the terminography section of the National Language Services of the Department of Arts and Culture. In addition to them, there are non-governmental projects which are also developing terms for specific fields. An example is the project at the University of Pretoria which is directed at creating and standardising linguistic and literary terms. (See also the dictionary of grammatical terms compiled by Louwrens, listed in Addendum B.)

#### Grammatical descriptions

Several grammars of NS have been produced, giving a full-scale description of the grammar of NS. There are also school grammars, written in NS (see Addendum C).

#### *The social status of NS*

Very little systematic and verifiable work has been done on the social status of NS, and the information available is either inferred from secondary sources (such as book publications and the MoI policies and practices in formal education), based on incidental and subjective observations or obtained in restricted research projects. The following information can be provided:



## Book production

According to a survey undertaken by Rall and Warricker (Rall and Warricker, 2000: 22) 505 books were published in NS from 1990 to 1998, distributed as follows:

1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	TOTAL
62	48	31	56	48	81	64	59	56	505

Source: Quoted in Webb, 2002: 253

These figures compare well with the other African languages in South Africa (Tswana: 494, Southern Sotho: 502 and Zulu: 1052), but not well compared with Afrikaans (9 537) or English (21 060).

## Selection of NS as MoI

The degree in which NS is selected as MoI also reflects negatively on the status of the language. This is apparent from a comparison of the selection of NS as MoI in specific provinces with the numbers of first language speakers in those provinces. In 1997, these figures, in percentages, were as follows:

Gauteng		Limpopo		Mpumalanga	
% NS 1 <sup>st</sup> language speakers in province	% who selected NS as MoI	% NS 1 <sup>st</sup> language speakers in province	% who selected NS as MoI	% NS 1 <sup>st</sup> language speakers in province	% who selected NS as MoI
8.3%	2.0%	56.7%	32.8%	10.8%	3.0%

Source: Quoted in Webb, 2002: 185

The selection of NS as MoI is furthermore largely restricted to the first four grades of the formal school. The main reason for this situation is, of course, the belief among parents that their children need to acquire English if they are to have access to employment opportunities in adult life. (See the comments on this argument in the opening paper of the Le3o conference.)

## NS as subject of study

The low status of NS is also reflected in the attitude of school authorities and learners towards its study. Learners argue that there is no need to study NS since they “already know the language”, and school managements are said to use their less effective teachers to teach NS as a subject. Teachers, especially those who teach history, science and English, are also said to ridicule their colleagues who teach or have majored in African languages. Furthermore, learners are discouraged from further study of NS at tertiary level, because, they are told, such study will not give them access to any employment prospects (Malimabe, 1990).

The study of NS (and the African languages in general) at universities is in an equally poor shape. Although there are Departments of African Languages at all the South African

universities, enrolment numbers have reduced radically over the past 10 years. [SUPPLY STATS.]

#### Domains of use

Like all the African languages in South Africa, NS is generally speaking used only for low-functions and in low-status contexts, namely for social interaction with family and friends, for cultural practice and for religion.<sup>13</sup> NS is not valued in the community as a language of science and technology.

#### Language attitudes

As indicated above, the systematic, verifiable study of attitudes to NS has not yet been undertaken in a significant way. There are, however, some small scale surveys relating to the African languages in general. An example of such a survey is the work of Strydom (2002), who compiled a sociolinguistic profile of Atteridgeville and Mamelodi from fieldwork<sup>14</sup>: Some of her findings are presented in Tables 1 to 4:

**Table 1: Language the President should use in addressing the nation as %, in A(tteridgeville) and M(amelodi)**

	Eng	NS	Tswa	Sso	Zulu	Xhos	Ndeb	Afr.	Swaz	Tson	All
<b>A</b>	86.7;	3.3;	0.67;	0.67;	1.3;	1.3;	1.3;	0.0;	0.0;	0.0;	0.67;
<b>M</b>	66.7	4.7	2.0	0.0	4.7	0.67	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.0	4.7

Abbreviations, in order of columns: English, Northern Sotho, Tswana, Southern Sotho, Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele, Afrikaans, Swazi, Tsonga and Venda.

Source: Strydom 2002: XX

**Table 2: Preferred language if all magazines, books and newspapers could be printed in ONE language as %<sup>15</sup>**

	Eng	NS	Zulu	Tsw	Afr	Ndeb	Swaz	Tson	ML
Atteridgeville	79.7;	5.4;	1.4;	1.4;	1.35;	1.4;	0.7;	1.0;	5.7;
Mamelodi	67.3	4.7	8.0	2.7	0.7	1.3	0.0	0.0	14.6

Source: Strydom 2002: XX

<sup>13</sup> As indicated above, the Lebua government in the time of Apartheid and contemporary politicians on rare special occasions are exceptions.

<sup>14</sup> Strydom's research was conducted with 300 respondents in Mamelodi and Atteridgeville using a questionnaire method (Strydom 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Data on the preferred language for *listening to the radio and TV viewing* also shows a strong preference for English (with 59% in Atteridgeville, for instance, in favour of its use as the *only* language, as opposed to 9%, for example, in favour of NS).

**Table 3 : Mean scores for value of languages for getting a job (1 = valuable, 3 = not valuable)**

	English	Afrikaans	NS	Tswana	Zulu
Atteridgeville	1.02	1.29	1.65	1.76	1.76
Mamelodi	1.15	1.6	1.85	2.13	2.02

Source: Strydom 2002: XX

**Table 4: Mean scores for value of languages for obtaining respect (1 = valuable, 3 = not valuable)**

	English	NS	Tswana	Zulu	Afrikaans
Atteridgeville	1.07	1.17	1.22	1.42	1.58
Mamelodi	1.34	1.57	1.9	1.85	2.0

Source: Strydom 2002: XX

If one considers the fact that 65% of the inhabitants of Atteridgeville and 80% of the inhabitants of Mamelodi were first language speakers of NS according to the 1996 census statistics, Tables 1 to 4 need very little comment: it is clear that, although NS is generally the language with the most support among the African languages (with the exception of Zulu in one case), it is overwhelmed by English (as are all the other languages).

#### *Acquisition development*

As indicated above, sNS is taught and studied as a subject at all three levels of formal learning, also at the doctoral level. However, it is reasonably clear that there are serious problems in this field. Very little research has been undertaken on the problems of teaching NS in primary and secondary schools but it is likely that the following observations may have some validity:

- The curricula of sNS are said to be experienced as irrelevant to the needs of learners, and non-stimulating
- The learning materials used (including prescribed works) may be experienced as uninteresting and non-challenging
- The didactic methods used may be inappropriate
- Teachers of NS are reported to be unenthusiastic about their subject

A further complicating factor may be that Northern Sotho teachers are not confident in their proficiency in sNS, as Nfila (2002: 71) puts it: (It may) “be assumed that teachers are unsure of the norms; thus, they might not be sure of what is to be regarded as standard and what is not”.

#### *Summary*

Given the above sociolinguistic profile, one can say that NS has been partly standardised, but that, judged in terms of the concept standard language described above, current sNS does not qualify to be regarded as a fully fledged standard language, possessing the capacity to perform the function of MoI in Grades 10 to 12 effectively. This is particularly apparent from the fact that sNS does not possess the status usually associated with a standard language, that there is no

strongly developed “ideology of standardisation”, and that, though it has been argued that the division of communities on linguistic lines in the time of Apartheid, has engendered some sort of ethnolinguistic self-awareness, there is currently very little evidence of any “linguistic loyalty” driving the standardisation of sNS, nor has sNS played a significant role in promoting “societal unification and a common identity”. On the contrary, there are signs of language-internal conflict, particularly between some dialects and “NS”.

Given these facts, Northern Sotho clearly still has some way to go before one can think in terms of a standard variety of the language, and thus an effective MoI.

### **The relationship between sNS and Pretoria Sotho**

Since most of the learners in the two colleges for FET in the project come from the Tshwane area, it is important to take note of the linguistic and sociolinguistic relationship between sNS and Pretoria Sotho, and to determine whether Pretoria Sotho is a barrier in the educational context.<sup>16</sup>

Malimabe (1990:10) points out that Pretoria Sotho is based on the Kgatla dialect of Tswana, but includes many words from NS as well as from Afrikaans and English.<sup>17</sup> According to Calteaux (1996: 65-68), it is spoken by most black citizens (all generations, all genders, professionals as well as less-educated persons) residing in and around Pretoria/Tshwane, and is mostly used in informal domains (between people using public transport, in taverns and shebeens) but it is also used in formal domains such as political rallies and school classrooms. It serves as an urban lingua franca, has a unifying function and has become the vernacular norm in the Tshwane area, symbolising modernity and progressiveness (being “city-wise”).

For the purpose of Le3o it is necessary to note that Pretoria Sotho is commonly used in schools as a medium of communication.<sup>18</sup> There are at least two reasons for this, as Calteaux (1996: 148) points out: firstly, many families are linguistically mixed (e.g. a Zulu-speaking father and a Northern Sotho-speaking mother), so that the language of the home (as well as the language of social interaction) is often either code-mixed or is the local urban vernacular (in Tshwane Pretoria Sotho). Secondly, schools are also generally linguistically mixed, which leads to teachers using a variety all the learners are reasonably comfortable with. This means that Pretoria Sotho becomes the common medium of discourse in the schools as well. The only time that sNS is used, it seems, is in the NS class, that is, when it is being studied as a subject.

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<sup>16</sup> The STANON Research programme (“STANON” refers to “standard and non-standard African languages”, see Calteaux, 1996) argues that “there are indications that the colloquial languages are impacting on the use of the standard language in various spheres, *inter alia*, in the classroom. ... There is ample evidence that these varieties are causing problems in the classroom situation” (p. 9). As a result, ways of addressing these problems have to be found. To begin with, “a detailed description of the grammatical, lexical and functional differences between the non-standard varieties and the standard language, is required. This will be of value to mother tongue speakers as well as L2 and L3 learners” (p. 10).

<sup>17</sup> Bogopa, personal communication, asserts that Pretoria Sotho is primarily a form of Tswana which developed when speakers of NS who migrated to urban Pretoria decided to speak Tswana in an attempt to disguise their NS identity.

<sup>18</sup> Pretoria Sotho (or any other urban vernacular) is obviously not allowed in writing tasks, such as tests, assignments and exams.

The linguistic character of Pretoria Sotho and its linguistic relationship to sNS has been studied and described to some extent by Malimabe (1990). She points out that the two varieties differ in all the ways usually found in contact situations: extensive borrowings, phonological adaptations, morphological and syntactic interference and semantic shifts. However, despite these differences, Pretoria Sotho and sNS are mutually comprehensible. The problem regarding the effect of Pretoria Sotho in the educational context seems not to be linguistic, but rather sociolinguistic.

For urban dwellers, Pretoria Sotho symbolises modernity and progressiveness (being “city-wise”), as pointed out above. However, for purists in the African language communities the urban vernaculars are “corrupt, adulterated, bastardised, and impure linguistic behaviour” (Zungu, 1995, quoted in Calteaux, 1996: 5), and the speech of these speakers is regarded as having defects and its speakers are seen as having need of remedial education (Calteux, 1996:6). In contrast to this, the social meaning of standard Northern Sotho for urbanites is: “being uncivilised”, traditional, old-fashioned and backward, and its speakers are looked down upon.

There are many examples (and comprehensive research findings about them) of the role of negative language attitudes in educational success and failure, for example Black English Vernacular (Afro-American English/Ebonics) and Cape Afrikaans. Negative attitudes among teachers towards Pretoria Sotho could also lead to educational failure,<sup>19</sup> and negative attitudes among learners (and teachers) towards sNS could likewise lead to educational problems, and a failure to acquire sNS effectively. It therefore seems to us that the major focus in any programme designed to address the issue of the use of sNS as medium of instruction should be focused on the issue of language attitudes.

### **What must be done in order to establish a standard Northern Sotho?**

The second of the two questions Le3o has to deal with regarding the use of NS as MoI (see the beginning of this paper) is how its linguistic capacity to function effectively as MoI should be developed?

The standard response to a question like this is that corpus, status and acquisition planning should be undertaken:

The norms of sNS should be unambiguously determined<sup>20</sup> and codified and its vocabulary adapted to provide the means for high-function usage (corpus development); the functional capacity of sNS must be comprehensibly expanded and it must at least be used as MoI at all levels of teaching (status development); and the teaching (and learning) of sNS should be radically addressed (through upgrading its curriculum, establishing effective didactic approaches and developing meaningful and stimulating educational materials) (acquisition development). To this (standard) response one needs to add “prestige planning”: negative attitudes need to be

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<sup>19</sup> The use of Cape Afrikaans, considered to be non-standard, impacted (impacts?) negatively on learners who used it: teachers tended to think its speakers were somehow retarded, cognitively and culturally deprived. Such learners inevitably lose faith in their ability to be successful, and then begin dropping out.

<sup>20</sup> Perhaps the NS national language body should consider broadening the base of sNS, recognising vocabulary items, pronunciations and morphological and syntactic structures from other dialects of NS. It is, after all, commonly accepted that language standardisation is generally the result of dialect levelling, and is not based on one dialect alone.

addressed in a serious way, language-internal conflict must be dealt with, and language policies need to be developed which will eventually provide sNS with clear economic value (for example by making proficiency in it a prerequisite for appointment to government posts).

It is clear, however, that language planning efforts may not lead to meaningful results if they are not accompanied by some sort of political will, a socio-cultural commitment, an ethno-linguistic awareness, and a dedication from the intellectual leadership to promote a particular language, something akin to what Deumert calls the “ideology of the standard language”, that is, a movement which emphasises “the need for uniformity and correctness” and the need to become successful, and which contributes to some sense of identity, unity and community loyalty. It is not possible to predict whether this will develop in the case of NS.

Le3o is, clearly, designed to contribute towards the promotion and development of NS. Acknowledging that effective language promotion and the development of a fully-fledged standard language typically occurs over a very long time, it does not presume to be able to make a significant difference. However, the following tasks it wishes to undertake, should contribute in some degree:

- (a) Demonstrating on theoretical and empirical grounds that sNS can be used effectively as MoI in technical vocational training
- (b) Developing (codifying and standardising) academic and technical terms in NS<sup>21</sup>
- (c) Translating the handbook for Industrial Electronics into NS and designing it according to document design principles and the principles of effective didactics
- (d) Training teachers of Industrial Electronics to teach through the medium of NS
- (e) Making content teachers aware of the fact that they also have a responsibility to develop learners’ sNS proficiency (“language-across-the curriculum”)<sup>22</sup>
- (f) Contributing to the development of the proficiency of both teachers and learners in sNS
- (g) Addressing attitudes towards sNS among learners, teachers and parents

The success of the Le3o project and also the success of using NS (and the African languages in general) as MoI in South Africa depends to a large degree on changing attitudes towards sNS, and we therefore wish to list the tasks which need to be performed in this regard. These tasks are as follows:

1. Obtaining a description of the language attitudes of the learners, using a sociolinguistic questionnaire (see Netshitomboni, 2002)

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<sup>21</sup> This will involve transforming the relevant handbook into an electronic text (by scanning), excerpting the learning words as well as the technical terms in the text, developing NS equivalents for these terms, standardising their spelling as well as their meanings (with the aid of the National Language Service of the Department of Arts and Culture) and producing a first version of a technical dictionary for Industrial electronics.

<sup>22</sup> This will require that these teachers be provided with information about learners’ existing proficiency in sNS (or the inadequacy of such proficiency), what proficiency they need to develop, and how the teachers should go about developing the latter proficiency. In order to provide teachers with this information it is obviously necessary to determine learners capacity in sNS at the outset of the project. This will be done with a NS proficiency assessment instrument which is also being developed as part of Le3o.

2. Performing a SWOT analysis of the proposed language development programme, in particular, listing the social, political and economic forces (such as globalisation) which pose threats for achieving a change in language attitudes
3. Designing the programme to reflect the following logic: to change language attitudes, peoples' thinking has to be changed first; this should lead to changes in their affective responses; which, finally, should lead to changes in their behaviour
4. To restructure role-players' ways of thinking it is necessary, firstly, to demonstrate to them what the reasons are for their negative attitudes towards NS (and sNS), followed by demonstrating through argument and examples that there is no linguistically valid reason to regard NS as inferior. In this way their opinions, convictions and beliefs can be changed
5. These opinions must then be reinforced with positive experiences, for example through the example of high-profile persons (political and business leaders) who use the ALs in dignified and cultivated ways in urban contexts
6. Finally, the state must be persuaded to accept and implement aggressive language-in-education policies designed at using the African languages as MoI at the higher levels of educational provision.

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### ADDENDUM A: The dialects of NS

The dialects of NS were classified into 5 groups by Van Wyk, 1966: Central; East-central; Northern; Eastern; and North-eastern:

North-eastern	Central	East-central	Northern	Eastern
Lobedu	Pedi	Kutswe	Tlokwa	Pai
Phalaborwa	Kopa	Pulana	Gananwa	
Letswalo	Tau		Kone	
Hlabeng	Mphahlele		Kwena	
Kgaga	Masemola		Matlala	
Mahlo	Kone		Hlaloga	
Kone	Kwena		Birwa	
Roka	Molepo			
	Mmamabolo			

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