

Research Article

Indigenizing Telecommunication Products and Services: The Case of the Econet Company in Lesotho

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explore Sesotho-named products and services of the Econet Lesotho Telecommunication Company (ELTC). Lesotho has two official languages, namely Sesotho and English. The former is the mother tongue and national language of the majority of the population, while the latter is a second official language. As a second official language, English serves as the language of business, education, and law. However, there seems to emerge a new trend in the marketing industry in Lesotho in as far as language use is concerned. Some companies have resorted to naming their products in Sesotho. Using interviews and company brochures, I collected data as in Sesotho-named products of the ELTC to explore the motivation and implication for their naming in Sesotho. The names are then analyzed for their morphological status. I argue that in naming the products in Sesotho, the company does not only convince customers to buy the products, but it also makes them like and own the products. It is also not just a marketing strategy but is an effort to indigenize the products and a contribution to the development of the Sesotho language.

1. Introduction

A name, according to Ekanjume-Ilongo (2012), "is a word or a combination of words constituting the individual designation by which a person, animal, place or thing is known, spoken of, etc." (p. 2). That is, a name is a token with which someone or something is identified. The concept of a name is, therefore, universal in that anything living or non-living has a name. However, different language communities adopt different ways of naming. Subject to what is named, be it a person, an animal, a business, or a product, the name-giver has to consider several factors. Considering product naming, there are several qualities common in product names. Among the many are; they help motivate customers to buy the product, hold appeal for the product's target audience, and allow companies to bond with their customers to create loyalty. Language is, therefore, central to the successful attainment of the mentioned attributes.

Lesotho has two official languages, namely Sesotho and English. In addition to being one of the official languages, the former is the national language and the mother-tongue language of the majority of the population. Besides the two, there are other languages such as isiXhosa, Ndebele, and Sephuthi that are used by the minority groups residing in the Southern districts (Mafeteng, Qacha's Nek and Quthing) and Northern district (Botha-Bothe) of the country. Although both English and Sesotho are awarded the official status, the former is bestowed higher status in that it is more dominant in different sectors such as commerce, education, and law. This follows that English earns most companies an international recognition as it is regarded as a global language. English has, from time immemorial, been used by many companies to name and sell their products and services. However, a new trend has emerged where companies seem to have resorted to the use of Sesotho for service provision and product naming. A language is a vital tool in business since it plays a significant role in the marketing industry. Taking care of a customer and talking to a customer in a language he/she understands can take a company to highest levels.

The study is premised under the auspices of the Onomastic theory. The theory explicates the meaning and origin of the names of all kinds. According to (American Name Society, 2020), the brand- name is the proper name for product, brand, or trademark. Brand-name covers different sub-areas such as names for medicine, automobiles, foods and beverages, sports teams, etc. The theory is adopted in this study to investigate the origins and meanings of the Sesotho names and services accorded the Econet Lesotho Telecommunications Company. The article also analyses the collected names to discover their morphological status. The following questions guide the findings:

- a) What is the semantic interpretation of the collected names and services?
- b) What reasons underpin the naming of Econet products in Sesotho language?
- c) What are the morphological processes involved in the formation of the collected names?

2. Literature Review

Product naming is not meant solely to distinguish one product from others but is also an investment to a company. The process requires creativity and expertise. Several factors are considered in the process of product naming because a name functions as a marketing tactic. Due to the significance of the process, several articles present guidelines, factors to be considered, and appropriate methods for product naming. They include (Kohli and LaBahn, 1995, Clinehens, 2019 & Danesi, 2013). Although the focus on naming has mostly been on people and places, research has also been conducted on the naming of different objects, especially in the commercial sphere. They comprise vehicles (Voss, 1992, Ntuli, 1999 and Kolobe, 2012), restaurants (Rapeane-Mathonsi and Mohlomi, 2012 & Chen, 2018) and beverages (Phafoli, 2019 & Nuessel, (2013).

3. Methods of data collection

The data was collected from the company’s brochure, the researcher’s mobile phone, and an interview. The researcher visited the Roma Econet branch for additional names of products and confirmation of the already collected names. The interview was conducted at the Head office of the Econet company in Maseru. During the session, I took notes and asked for clarification where it was necessary. Note-taking was preferred to voice recording and questionnaire because the interviewee objected to the use of the latter. The researcher has three main guiding questions that helped her solicit relevant responses. The questions are as follows:

- a) Does this company have Sesotho named products and/or services?
- b) Why are they named in the Sesotho language?
- c) What effect does the shift from English to Sesotho has on the company?

4. Data Presentation and Discussion

Products’ description and the meaning of the original terms

In this sub-section, the Sesotho-named products are presented and described. It is ideal to know the type of products that are given the Sesotho names. The collected names are *Ponto*, *mpate-sheleng*, *spache-fono*, *nchoathi*, *pokola*, *babatone*, and *skh’afthin*. Following the onomastic perspective, the description of the products and the original meaning of the given names are presented in the table below:

Table 1

Product name	Description of the product	Meaning of the original term
Babatone	a) Daily data bundles that are less in price and expires at midnight	A snuff container that is mostly recycled and used as a scale.
Mpate-sheleng (<i>Mpolokeng</i>)	The funeral scheme administered by the company, whose monthly contributions are deducted from the available airtime.	A local and affordable Basotho women burial society.
Nchoathi	a) The calling bundles that allow the user to talk to other subscribers at very low rates. It allows the user to talk non-stop for the period subscribed for	Talkative. Is a person who talks non-stop.

	such as a day, a week, or a month.	
Ponto	Daily calling bundles at a low cost of M 2.00	An M 2.00 coin.
Pokola	a) A product that allows subscribers to get airtime on credit and pay on the next recharge.	A donkey.
Skh'afthini:	An M 4.00 voucher that has 50 minutes to call Econet numbers, 5 minutes to call other local networks, 50 local SMSs, and 50 MB data all of which expire at midnight.	A container that is used to pack food when one leaves home and would eat while away or the food themselves are termed skh'afthin.
Spache-fono	a) A mobile wallet that allows Econet subscribers to send money, pay bills, and pay for goods and services.	It's a compound name made of wallet (money keeping object) and phone (a device that is used for communication).

The information in the table above forms the base for the analysis to follow. As said earlier, name-givers consider several factors when naming. Factors such as uniqueness, distinctiveness, relevance, target audience, etc. are considered in the naming process. Looking at the product names below, they have metaphorical meanings in that they share some characteristics with the object they are named after. We unpack the meanings and determine the relevance between the product, as the second object, and the item with which it relates.

Babatone: It is the name of a product whose container is recycled and used to measure food and drinks. The container was then called *Babatone*, as it is written on it, and is used as a scale to sell affordable portions at a lower price for those who cannot afford to buy large quantities. It is used to sell mealie-meal, homemade beer, salt, malt, beans, etc. Similarly, the daily data bundles are the cheapest meant to accord those who cannot afford the M5.00 data opportunity to buy as cheap as M1.00. It ends at midnight thus relate to *babatone* in that people opt for it to address their short term needs.

Ponto: This is a name for a two Maloti coin. The calling bundles are termed *ponto* because of their cost. If a customer cannot afford an M5.00 airtime voucher to make a call, he/she buys bundles that expire at midnight with just M2.00. The calling bundles come handy in times of need resulting in most people buying them because of their affordability. That is, with as little as M2.00 the subscriber can make calls. The name, therefore, relates to the price of the product.

Nchoathi: It is a Sesotho term equivalent to the English word talkative. It is an adjective. A person is regarded as talkative if he/she likes to talk a lot. The product allows subscribers to do a lot of talking for the period of subscribing. Only the stipulated period would mark an end to the talk and not a certain amount of data, as is the case with both *Babatone* and *Ponto*. The nature of the product earned it this name.

Pokola: The term is equivalent to a donkey but has acquired a new meaning. Alongside the given meaning, *pokola* is used in money lending schemes. People would borrow money from loan sharks and pay it back with interest. The common expression *ho raha pokola* is used for the action. The same happens with Econet subscribers in that they are granted an opportunity to get airtime or data on credit and pay on the next recharge. Upon payment, a certain amount is added to the debt as a service fee. This airtime advance is termed *Pokola*.

Skha'fthini: A container that is used to pack food when one leaves home and would eat while away. It is also used to refer to any food that someone takes along when taking a trip or going for work. In a lunchbox, there can be a variety of food. Like in the case of a lunch box, the product is a package consisting of both data and calling bundles. The calling bundles calls not only the Econet subscribers but also the subscribers of other local telecommunication companies. That says, with Skha'fthin a

subscriber is well equipped and would not have any challenges that concern communication as is the case with someone who has his lunchbox as the provision for the day.

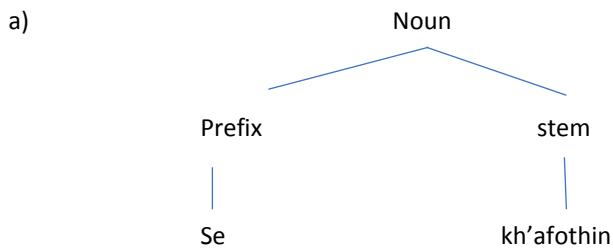
Mpate-sheleng: A local and affordable Basotho women burial society. Basotho women, would in the past, pay shillings (ten cents coins) as a monthly contribution towards the burial of their family members. This money would be kept and issued as condolence at the time of death. With *Mpate-sheleng* the company allows the subscribers to contribute towards the burial of their beloved. The contribution is deducted from the available airtime monthly and claimed at the time of death. The contribution relates the service to local burial societies that are known as *mpate-sheleng*.

Sepache-fono: Also known as Eco-cash is a product offered by the company that allows the subscribers to send or receive money through the use of their phones. The mobile devices function both as wallets and phones hence the combination of the two words to name the service. In this way, the phone is multifunctional. The two combined items, namely the wallet 'sepache' and the phone 'fono' are used for two different purposes (e.g. keeping money and communicating). However, since the phone does both, the words are combined to name the product. The function in this regard earned the product its name.

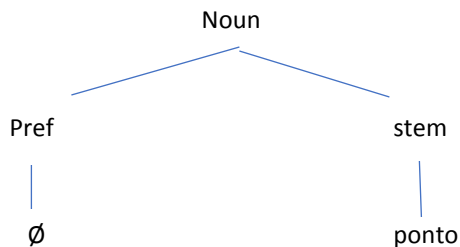
Morphological analysis

Languages equip their lexicon through the use of different word-building processes. As a result of this, words differ in their structure. Looking at the above product names, some are simple nouns while others are complex nouns. A Sesotho noun composes of a head and a stem. Be it a simple or complex one, it should be segmented thus. Words like *skh'afthin* 'lunch box', *pokola* 'donkey', *ponto* 'two maloti'; *nchoathi* 'talkative' and *babatone* 'snuff' are simple words belonging to class seven and nine, respectively. As Machobane (2010) states, classification is done based on prefixes, concords, and meaning. Class seven nouns are singular nouns with the prefix /se-/ while class nine nouns are in the singular form and bear the zero morpheme (∅) as their prefix. Most nouns in class nine are foreign words hosted in the Sesotho language for various reasons. Consider the examples below:

1.



b)

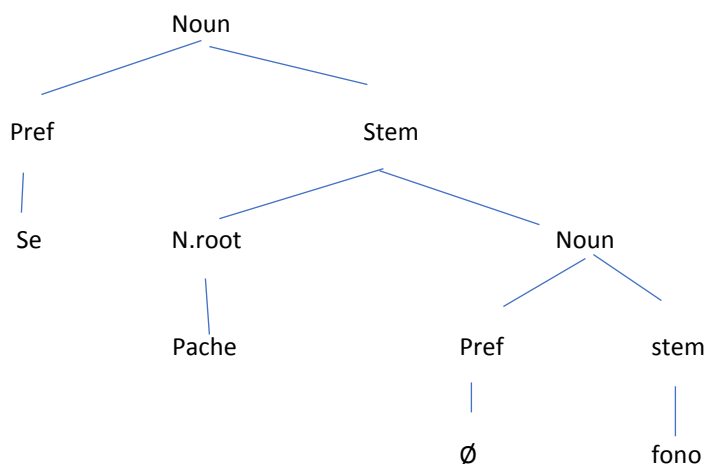


The words *skh'afthin*, *babatone*, and *ponto* are of foreign origin and are adopted into the Sesotho language. As foreign words, they should observe the phonological system of the host language. While both *babatone* and *ponto* observe the Sesotho syllable pattern, *skh'afthin* does not. I observe the cluster of consonants on the first and second syllables and a closed last syllable as follows; *skh'a-fthi-n*. This results in the word as a loan word in which both form and meaning are borrowed (Crystal:2008). However, the Basotho pronounce it *se-k'ha-fo-thi-ni* following their syllable structure.

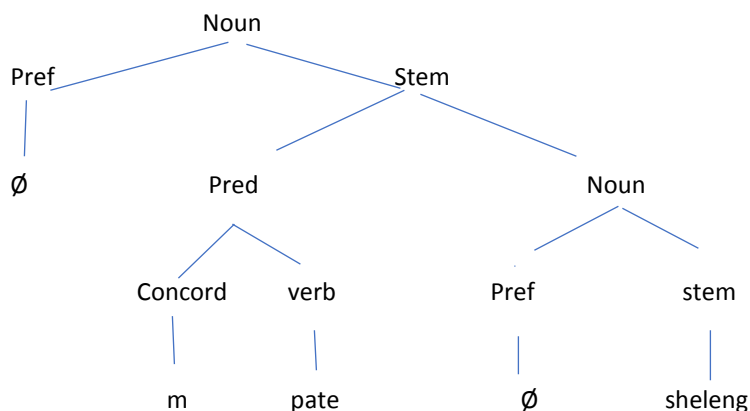
The words such as '*Spache-fono* 'Eco cash' and *Mpate-sheleng* 'funeral scheme' are compound nouns. The lexical items are made up of elements that could be independent in other circumstances (Crystal: 2008). The former is composed of two nouns while the latter is made up of the verb and the noun. Their analysis, therefore, differ as follows;

2.

a)



b)



Although a compound word is made through the combination of two or more words, it is a single word. Therefore, as Sesotho compound nouns, both *Sepache-fono* and *mpate-sheleng* are segmentable into two parts; the prefix and the stem. The complexity of the stem results in the further analysis as shown in (b) above.

The observation, therefore, is that most of the names are drawn from the Sesotho lexicon and have been used metaphorically. Although some are not of Sesotho origin, they were adapted into the language earlier before the company could use them. This has semantic implications in that the semantic value of the words has been broadened. In addition to their denotative meanings, the words have attained the connotative meanings, as such, they will be applicable in more contexts than they were before. Semantic broadening/widening denotes the change in the meaning of a word by expansion resulting in its application in more contexts and meaning (Crystal,2008).

5. Findings

The marketing industry is a very competitive area. The competition requires companies to use different strategies to attract customers. Central to the many marketing strategies lies the appropriate use of language. In this field, language does not only function as a means of communication, but it is a powerful tool that distinguishes a company's products from others. Using the Sesotho language shows that the products of the Econet company are meant for the local community and helps the company to reach a wide audience (Entrepreneur. com., 2016).

The Econet Telecommunications company's use of Sesotho for naming the products has localized the products. For instance, talking about *pokola* or *sepache-fono* to a Mosotho catches his/her attention and interest than using foreign concepts such as airtime advance and Eco-cash. The use of Sesotho names according to Maswabi (personal communication), makes customers relate and understand the products better. A customer can create a clear mental image of the product and easily understand

its description. In this way, the foreign concepts are drawn home and this affects the subscribers' attitudes towards the company and its products (Alserham,2019).

The naming has also expanded the Sesotho lexicon in that the words have acquired new meanings. The words like *mpatesheleng* are currently not used as they were before. Using such words to name the products restores their use and contributes to the development of the Sesotho language. In this way, not only the company benefits but also the community. For instance, the use of the Sesotho expressions *ho raha pokola* 'to request airtime advance' and *ho tsoepela* 'to have a small share' when they purchase data and voice bundles show the positive response to the effective conveyance of the message. In this way, the jargon is simple thus deeply rooted in the minds of the customers. The company is keeping the language regular to effectively convey what its products are so that the customers can easily associate with them.

The use of the Sesotho language in naming products further addresses the needs of the customers. It conveys the message to a wider community. It allows Basotho access to the company's products and services as (Webb,2002) indicates that language is an instrument of access and equity. The company shows appreciation of both the language and culture of the Basotho. This then influences the customers' perception of the products of the Econet company. It lures them into buying and loving the company and its products, thus the score for both parties.

Considering the findings of the study, it has come to mind that some companies do understand the role of language and the advantages of talking to people in the language they understand. I, therefore, recommend that companies should consider using Sesotho language experts in dealing with language-related matters. The incorporation of the language experts will enhance the status of the Sesotho language in the industry and the daily lives of the nation. The correct use of the Sesotho language in advertising and naming the products and services will help in the elevation of the Sesotho language resulting in narrowing the gap that exists between the two official languages of the country.

I would also recommend the use of other languages such as Sephuthi and IsiXhosa in the Northern and Southern parts of the country. In this way, the company would have contributed not only to the development of Sesotho but also to these other marginalized languages. Using regional languages will cater to the population speaking those languages and they will also feel that the products are not foreign.

6. Conclusion

This paper aimed to explore Sesotho-named ELTC's products. It seeks to investigate the motivation and implications of the use of the Sesotho language in naming the products. The morphological status of the products as lexical items was also investigated. The results indicate that the company has recognized the importance of talking to people in the language they understand. This then implies the development and elevation of the status of the Sesotho language. I conclude that the use of the Sesotho language in naming the products of the company has indigenized the products. The foreign concepts have been localized thus memorable and familiar to the subscribers.

The use of Sesotho has not only earned the company growth, but it has also contributed to the development of the Sesotho language. The metaphorical names are formed from different word-formation processes and are drawn from the Sesotho lexicon. The company shows respect and recognition of the value of the Sesotho language and culture thus strengthening the use and status of Sesotho. It has further developed the relationship between the company and the language users.

Future researchers can investigate the effect of the incorporation of the Sesotho language in the commercial sector. It can also look into the attitudes of the Basotho towards the use of their language in this sector.

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