

SESOTHO

LANGUAGE & CULTURE

There are two Sesotho orthographies. One is used in South Africa; and the other is the official orthography of Lesotho. Both orthographies fulfill their duty sufficiently and are clearly understood and fairly consistent. The following two examples illustrate the differences between the two orthographies.

Lesotho Orthography

- a) Mokhachane ke ntate oa Moshoehsoe è Mokhachane is Moshoehsoe's father.
- b) Kholu ke 'me oa Moshoehsoe è Kholu is Moshoehsoe's mother.K

South African Orthography

- a) Mokgatjhane ke ntate wa Moshweshwe è Mokgatjhane is Moshweshwe's father
- b) Kgodu ke mme wa Moshweshwe è Kgodu is Moshweshwe's mother.K

Basotho are the people who speak Sesotho. The people of the Mountain Kingdom (Basotho) see language as the means of transmitting the story of their sojourn on planet earth. The story of their journeys, wars, alliances and rituals. They see language as the means of conveying myths and legends, proverbs and idioms, songs and riddles and above all praises of the kings, warriors and animals to new generations. All the time a moral lesson of humility and of life giving values is instilled in the children.

Basotho have a very special relationship with animals, especially with cattle. Cattle play a prominent role in the culture of Basotho. In ceremonies, like the passage to manhood and womanhood, in marriage and weddings, in funerals and in the appeasement of the departed (the ancestors), cattle play a very significant role. Basotho have a culture, which is expressed in domains such as clothing, hairstyle, food, dance and crafts. Even as these domains change (as they often do), culture does not cease to exist.

STUDYING SESOTHO IN THE U.S.

Below is a list of some of the universities in the United States that currently offer Sesotho. For more information, please contact the National African Language Resource Center, or <http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu/>

Boston University
University of Pennsylvania



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A BASOTHO WITCH DOCTOR IN ROMA, LESOTHO

NATIONAL AFRICAN LANGUAGE
RESOURCE CENTER (NALRC)

WHY STUDY SESOTHO?

Sesotho, also known as Southern Sotho, is an indigenous African Language. It is the national language and second official language of Lesotho along side English. In South Africa, it is one of the eleven official languages (since 1996).

In essence, Sesotho is spoken without dialectal varieties. There are, however, pockets of a variety called Setlokwa spoken in Northern Lesotho and covering a stretch from central Free State to Southern Gauteng. The second variety is Sekgolongwe. It is spoken in the North-Eastern Free State from Clarens to Memel, and around Standerton, in Southern Gauteng.

Sesotho is one of three Languages in the Sotho sub-group of languages. The other two are Setswana, spoken in Botswana and South Africa and Sepedi spoken mainly in the Limpopo province of South Africa. These three languages are mutually intelligible.

The Sesotho language has a reasonably well developed literature one with at least one classical novel that has been translated into 31 languages. There are also a number of authoritative grammar books as well as a bulk of school book series written for learners who are first language speakers of Sesotho.

Different people will learn and study Sesotho for different reasons. There is the adventurous second language learner who wants to speak, read and write Sesotho so that she can communicate with Basotho in their own language. There is the linguist who enjoys playing around with language. There is the Anthropologist, the Sociologist, the African Historian, the Folklorist, and others whose research interests and demands may send them to Southern Africa. Students, both graduate and undergraduate, may need Sesotho to fulfill a foreign language requirement. The world has become a global village. There are linkages today between several Universities in South Africa and Universities in the United States. Exchange programs move faculty and students in various directions. When all is said and done, to know a people is to know their language; and to know their language is to know their culture.

WHO SPEAKS SESOTHO?

PEOPLE AND HISTORY

The Basotho Nation was formed in the beginning of the 19th Century by the amalgamation of a number of independent Basotho clans which occupied both sides of the Upper Caledon River. According to Jacottet (1927 :X1) Basotho clans have inhabited that country for centuries. Most notable of those clans were Bakwena, Bafokeng, Bahlakwana and others. Later on Batlokwa, Makgolongwe, and Bataung joined. That amalgamation was the result of the breaking up of individual clans during the sanguinary native wars which began North of the Drakensberg by the invasion of the Zulu under Shaka about 1820.

An extremely intelligent king of the Bokwena clan, one of the greatest diplomats of his time, succeeded in uniting the broken fragments of the Basotho clans and welded them into one tribe (Jocottet 1927 :X1). His name was Morena Lepoqo Moshweshwe, mora Thesele. In the preface to his book: "Survival in two worlds Moshoeshoe of Lesotho 1786-1870." Leonard Thompson (1975) has this to say :

Moshoeshoe was an African whose life extended from the old to the new the traditional to the colonial. During his thirties, Africans who had been displaced from Natal by Shaka invaded his homeland and triggered a series of catastrophes that caused bloodshed, social and political disintegration and collapse of confidence. It was then that Moshoeshoe emerged as a leader. Through moral influence and military prowess, he rallied the survivors and built a kingdom. He scarcely began to do so, however when the western world impinged upon him. In quick succession there came armed coloured horsemen, plundering; French protestant missionaries, evangelizing; British Officials bearing impressive presents and concocting ominous documents; and Afrikaner pastoralists appropriating the land. In time these intruders proved overwhelming.

The political unity produced, as a result, the unification of the different dialects spoken in the united clans. The language of the ruling classes, the Bakwena and the Bafokeng, became the language of the whole tribe.

In that way Lesotho had one language, the very same language being spoken from one end of the country to the other. The resulting language was Sesotho and it is spoken in Lesotho, Free State and Gauteng provinces of South Africa.



A Basotho woman in traditional outfit.



A rondavel, the traditional Basotho dwelling.



Basotho school girls performing at a school celebration.