

SETSWANA

LANGUAGE & CULTURE

The Batswana people constitute the majority of the people in Botswana. Between 1964 and 1969, at the end of colonialism, the old Tswana states of Botswana were incorporated into a unitary state under a powerful central government. The dominant national culture of Botswana has since then been dominated by the dual heritage and intermingling of the Tswana and English culture. In South Africa, the Setswana language and cultures are subtly mixed with other African languages and cultures, such as Seshweshwe and Sepedi, as well as English and Afrikaans, especially in urban and official circumstances. It is estimated that, all in all, the Setswana language is spoken by 3,368,544 people in the three countries mentioned. There are television and radio programmes as well as films where Setswana is used as a medium, both in Botswana and South Africa.

One important feature of the Batswana people is their rich culture. The local mopane wood is used for carving figurines of humans, animals, household bowls and utilities. The mokomoto soft wood is used for toy carving. The Batswana women are noted for basket weaving. The Botswana people's beliefs include Christianity, which was accepted in the 19th century. They also practice some of their traditional beliefs. For example, they still believe in consulting the traditional healer ngak, who is supposed to have powers to intercede on their behalf with the ancestors.

Other Batswana still take their children to initiation schools, known as bogwera for boys and bojale for girls. Boys and girls who reach puberty are sent to these schools to learn their gender-based responsibilities, self-respect and respect between the sexes, as well as the values of Setswana culture. Upon their return from initiation schools, they are then regarded as men and women who are ready for marriage. Batswana believe in voluntary work on behalf of other families, especially during the ploughing and harvesting seasons. This form of voluntary work is known as letsema. The South African government has presently adopted the word letsema to encourage its citizens in volunteerism. The Batswana are a peace-loving people who promote respect for any adult, good morals, as well as peaceful co-existence with other nations.

STUDYING SETSWANA IN THE U.S.

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

Boston University
Michigan State University
University of Pennsylvania
Summer Cooperative African Language Institute (SCALI)



NATIONAL AFRICAN
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CENTER (NALRC)

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A SETSWANA WOMAN IN TRADITIONAL OUTFIT

NATIONAL AFRICAN LANGUAGE
RESOURCE CENTER (NALRC)

WHY STUDY SETSWANA?

Setswana is an African language spoken in South Africa, Botswana, and parts of Namibia. It is the national language of Botswana, and one of the eleven official languages in South Africa. The language is sometimes referred to as Tswana.

Setswana is one of three languages classified as the Sotho subgroup of the languages in the Southeastern Bantu group of the Bantu Language Family. The other two languages in this family are Southern Sotho (Sesotho or Seshweshwe) and Northern Sotho (sometimes referred to as Sepedi). Southern Sotho is spoken in South Africa and Lesotho, while Northern Sotho is spoken in the Limpopo province. The three languages are mutually intelligible, which means that speakers of these languages can carry on a conversation with each other, each one speaking his or her own language!

Setswana was the first language of the Sotho group to have a written form, emerging through the work of Heinrich Lichstein (1806), who wrote a book "Upon the Language of the Beetjuana," the first book about Setswana, and John Campbell, who published a book on Bootchuana words in 1815. The development of the Setswana language is partly due to the European missionaries whose aim was to translate the Bible into the local languages.

Some of the reasons many people study Setswana include a keen interest in the culture of the Batswana (speakers of the language); an undergraduate major or minor in an African Studies program; pure research interests; fulfillment of foreign language requirements; and preparation for study abroad programs.

Knowledge of the Setswana language is especially beneficial for scholars and students in Linguistics, Anthropology, Sociology, History, Literary Studies, and Folklore Studies, and for researchers in other fields such as Mining, Archaeology, and Mineralogy who plan to conduct research in any one of the countries where Setswana is spoken. International workers such as Peace Corps volunteers, diplomats, missionaries, scholars in different fields, and donor organizations will receive maximum collaboration from the local populations if they can communicate in Setswana. Furthermore, knowledge of the rich culture of the Batswana will assist in communication, especially in making business deals, as Botswana and South Africa are among the nations with the fastest growing economies in the world due to their mineral wealth (diamond, gold, platinum, etc.).

WHO SPEAKS SETSWANA?

PEOPLE AND HISTORY

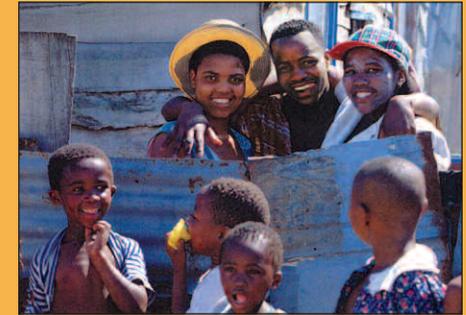
People who speak Setswana are known as Batswana. The first Motswana (singular) to contribute towards the writing of Setswana was Sol D. T. Plaatje, who assisted Professor Jones with the book on The Tones of Sechuana Nouns in 1929. The whole Bible was translated into Setswana by 1970, although versions of the Bible, such as the New Testament and the Old Testament, were translated in 1840 and 1857, respectively.

In the 16th century, the Batswana settled in what was known as the Western Transvaal in South Africa. They were divided into two main groups: the Rolong under Chief Morolong "the metal worker," while the other group called themselves the Bafokeng, meaning "people of the dew." In Botswana, the Tswana States started growing when the Kwena and Hurutshe migrants founded the Ngwaketse chiefdom among Khalagari-Rolong in south-eastern Botswana by 1700. They engaged in hunting, cattle raising, and copper production.

When gold was discovered in Botswana in the late nineteenth century, the Boers from South Africa flocked to Botswana, which led the independent nation to seek protection from the British government. Botswana subsequently became a British Protectorate. In South Africa, during the Apartheid regime, all the Batswana in South Africa were declared citizens of Bophutswana homeland, under the leadership of Chief Lucas Mangope. Bophutswana became independent in 1977. Today, homeland governments no longer exist. The country is now divided into nine provinces, with premiers as the heads of the provincial governments. All citizens are now South Africans.

The Setswana word for the most important social grouping is morafe. This means the people who give allegiance to a certain chief. Botswana people have eight morafes: The Bangwato, Bakwena, Bangwaketse, Batawana, Bakgatla, Bamalete, Barolong, and Batlokwa. The chiefs of these ethnic subgroups were known as kgosi, and the subjects were known as morafe. Kgosi was a hereditary traditional leader, who was well respected by his people, was treated with dignity and was granted authority by the tribe.

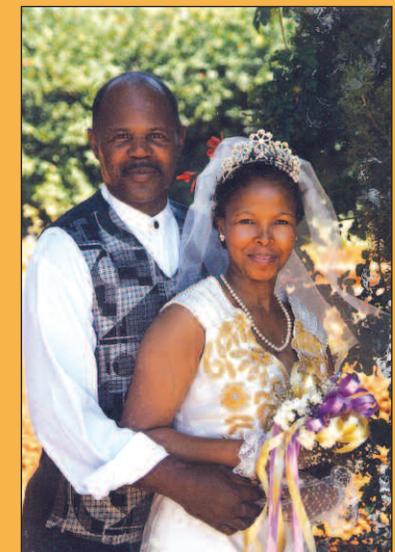
The unique institution in the Kgosi administration was the royal Kgotla, a traditional court at which the Batswana men could discuss issues of the tribe without fear. A selected group of dikgosana (princes) together formed an advisory group for the kgosi. Today, this chieftainship tradition exists side by side with the Western democratic system practiced in the three countries.



Setswana youths playing in a village in South Africa



Women weaving baskets in Botswana



Newly wedded Setswana couple