

## Semantic Shift in Political Talk among The Basotho

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**ABSTRACT:-** The present study is prompted by the observation that though old expressions, idioms and proverbs in Sesotho are retained among the Basotho, their original meaning is shifting. The change in these expressions, idioms and proverbs results in amelioration and pejoration in Sesotho language. Expressions, idioms and proverbs which used to have positive meaning and refer to elevated status of a person/ people in a society currently have the opposite by being used to refer to the low status and negative meaning. When these expressions, idioms and proverbs are used by old people, their old positive meaning is retained. However, when they are used by people in different social groups they acquire other meanings dominated by negativity. Whether this is done consciously or unconsciously, they end up bringing a change in meaning which is worth documentation. The theory proposed for this study is Semantic-Amelio-Pejoration. This theory is employed in this study to understand the semantic shift and its consequences in Sesotho language that is used in political space in Lesotho. Data is collected through both formal and informal interviews. The WhatsApp facility is used to receive trending video clips which have the notion of interest. The findings of this study confirm that language is not static. Different factors influence the shift of meaning in a language including the political space. The way political space uses Sesotho expressions, idioms and proverbs among the Basotho shifts meaning of the expressions, idioms and proverbs from the original meaning.

**Key words:** Expressions, idioms, proverbs, semantic shift, amelioration, pejoration, political talk.

### BACKGROUND

Political space like all other spaces uses language in the way that suits context: expressions, idioms and proverbs. This means that the meaning of already existing expressions, idioms and proverbs changes to suit the political contexts. According to Grinker (2010) political institutions have their political discourse shaped by proverbs, parables, metaphors drawn from the body of tradition. The question is: why is this genre favourable in the political context? Generally, proverbs enable operative expressions and the inculcation of acceptable social ethics. According to Kimilike (2008) proverbs are important in the formation of the social and cultural foundations of a society. For Bemath (2005) echoes Kimilike by stating:

“African proverbs ... have played an important role in communication and orational stimulation, evoking varying types of imaginary and manipulation of ancestral symbols through the medium of words.”

Proverbs comprise undisputed truth. Their use is convincing hence their popular use by political leaders across Africa. Black (2007) indicates that Jonathan Charteris Black acknowledges Mandela frequent use of his native language (proverbs included), Xhosa. According to Alli (undated), Nyerere in the late 1960's and 1970's used proverbs and Swahili languages that made African socialism more accepted when they were proliferated in Swahili. Mazrui and Mazrui (1995) state:

“African socialism in Tanzania acquired an extra Africanness by the simple device of bearing an African name.....Nyerere in his pamphlet on Ujama added to the Africanness of his socialism by the further device of using an African proverb.”

Expressions, idioms and proverbs being popularized by political leaders is an old phenomenon among Africans. According to Alli (undated) the proverb *Sebatana ha se bokwe ka diatla* was endorsed by Mandela and *Marema-tlou a ntsoe leng* was endorsed by S. S. Matete (A founding father of the Marema- Tlou Freedom Party). Much as the use of proverbs is popular in the political space, the traditional meanings are not maintained as already stated in this paper. Alli (undated) observes this fact in Cameroonian proverb in a political use: “*la chèvre broute là où elle est attaché*” (The goat grazes where it is tethered). This proverb has both tradition and the political meaning. Traditionally, it meant that workers should enjoy their legal benefits that come along with their positions. According to Schatzberg (2001), in a political context, it connotes that those who occupy high

positions or responsibilities in management, they should enjoy and consume the public goods that they are assigned to conserve. Among the Basotho, the present study observes equivalent situation. Expressions, idioms and proverbs are used in political space are given meaning that suit the politicians. Therefore, the interest of this paper is to find out the semantic shift in the expressions, idioms and expressions used in the political space among the Basotho.

## I. INTRODUCTION

All languages of the world keep on developing due to different influencing factors including contact with other languages and as they grow a number of changes come into play. Sesotho language is not exceptional. It keeps on changing, semantically for example, due to different factors. Possa (2013) observes that change is part of live. She asserts that new discoveries and developments in different disciplines influence change in everything. Language as part of live therefore cannot avoid changes. Valdaeva (2003) concurs with Possa by indicating that changes brought by new discoveries surely affect language because every new idea and new manifestation requires its conveyer, who supports it to a new use. The thesis of this study is to find out how the political space among the Basotho influences semantic change of the already existing expressions, idioms and proverbs. According to MacMahon (1994) words are used in a variety of contexts by many different speakers, who may vary in the meaning they wish to convey. In this paper, the political space among the Basotho is used to substantiate. In a political space, changes are observable in expressions, idioms and proverbs. For Mieder (1993:xc) "Proverbs are flexible and adoptable to ever new contexts and interpretations because their metaphorical language is not limited to specific contexts." Mieder (ibid) advises that changing times require "adopting and antiquating" proverbs to the modern contexts. For example, some old words disappear and they are replaced by new ones, old words, expressions, idioms and proverbs acquire new meanings. In other cases both the old and the new meaning co-exist and their meaning is determined by the context and users. While in other instances new meanings and old meanings have connection, there are other cases where there is no connection between the old meaning and the new one. In the process the language experiences pejoration and amelioration. The question is: what is pejoration and amelioration?

Pejoration is a process in language whereby as language experiences semantic shift: words, expressions, idioms and proverbs acquire meanings which refer to smaller items/ people in low status while at first the words, phrases and expressions were used to refer to items/ people of higher status. Though this paper focuses on Sesotho language, English and Shona languages are referred to exemplify. For example, English language also experience semantic shift: traditionally mouse was a word which was synonymous to a rat. Currently the same word is also used to refer to a small handheld device which is used to move a cursor on a computer. Another example in English is the word virus. Virus could be an extremely piece of organic material that causes diseases in humans, animals etc. On the other hand virus has acquired another meaning which refers to computer virus which means infected programmes. A toilet is used interchangeably with the word "ladies".

Other examples are derived from Shona language. According to Chimuka (2019) in Shona *homwe* is used to refer to a pocket. Lately, as Chimuka (ibid) states, it is used to refer to a wallet. The Shona word *draiva* used to refer to a driver (someone who drives a car) and lately it is used to refer to a partner. Chimuka (ibid) continues that the Shona word *piritsi* used to refer to panado while currently it is used to refer to a sidekick or pain killer equivalent to extra marital partner, *nyatsi* in Sesotho. Stern (1968) states that change of meaning is when a word is employed to express a meaning which it has not previously expressed. Sesotho language is not unique. This study analyzed Basotho expressions, idioms and proverbs used in politics among the Basotho. These expressions, idioms and proverbs have existed in Sesotho for the time immemorial. However, in the political contexts they have acquired new meanings. Some of these new meanings have connection with the old meanings while others have no connection at all.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The related literature review for this study is categorized into two. The first section focused on the related review on scholars works which scrutinized semantic concept in different contexts. The second category looked at scholars who critiqued idioms and proverbs in different contexts.

### Semantics

For instance, Mathonsi (2009) explored on semantic variation and the notion of polysemy in Zulu language. Mathonsi finds out that semantic change of many indigenous words results in the appearance of polysemy. He therefore suggests how polysemy should be treated in a Zulu dictionary. Mathonsi study is crucial in this study as it informs it on how polysemy is reflected in Zulu language with special focus on lexical items. However, the present study is different from Mathonsi study in that it works on Sesotho language with special focus on expressions, idioms and proverbs. This study also focuses on a specific group of people which uses expressions, idioms and proverbs in a political space. This study on the different note from that one of Mathonsi,

intends to find out the consequences of the semantic shift on expressions, idioms and proverbs used in a political space among the Basotho.

Letsoela (2014) analyses Sesotho place names through a semantic perspective to find out the factors that could have motivated the naming of bus stops among the Basotho. She finds out that naming of bus stops among the Basotho could be classified into the following categories: descriptive, metaphorical, experiential and mythological. She concludes that through bus stops naming the Basotho provide their experiences, emotions and believe systems. This study finds Letsoela study important in that it used the theory that the present study is interested in. This study shoulders on Letsoela study to find how the semantics theory is used in a study. However, it is different from it as Letsoela focused on bus stop names among the Basotho while the present study focuses on the expressions, idioms and proverbs used in a political space among the Basotho. Above all else, this study endeavours also to find out the consequences of the semantic change in the notion of interest.

#### Idioms and Proverbs

The study of proverbs has attracted many scholars across the world. However, this study reviews some of scholars of idioms and proverbs in Sesotho.

Khotso (2019) scrutinized idioms and proverbs in Sesotho to establish the link between masculinity and HIV. Khotso (ibid) discovered that the use of some idioms and proverbs establishes rapport for a ground of unsafe sexual intercourse among old to young relationships. Khotso study is important in this study as it analyses the idioms and proverbs that is used by a group of people who have sexual relationships. This study benefits from that one of Khotso on understanding how different groups manipulate meaning of idioms and proverbs to have a new meaning. However, this study is different from Khotso study as Khotso study focused on idioms and proverbs which encourage old to teenage sexual relationships while this study is focusing on expressions, idioms and proverbs used in politics and how they can be said to be ameliorated or pejorated. Secondly, Khotso study employed cathexis theory while this study employs Semantic-amelio-pejoration approach in order to respond to this study questions.

Possa (2013) analyses the contemporary Sesotho proverbs in order to find out their relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. She finds out that both the old and the new proverbs follow a similar pattern in structure. She also finds out that both the youth and adults use proverbs in their day to day lives. She further discovers that proverbs meaning depends heavily on the contexts in which they are used. Possa study is important in the present study as it imbues it on how proverbs acquire meaning. however, the present study is different from it as it specifically focuses on expressions, idioms and proverbs which are used in a political space. Possa study focuses on the contemporary proverbs while the present study is on proverbs in general.

Alli (undated) examined the use of proverbs in a political space. He discovers that proverbs have a significant effect on masses concerned with the exception of the Sesotho proverb *Marema-Tlou a ntsoe le leng* which has failed to attract the majority for the Marema-tlou Freedom Party. He further discovers that proverbs use is capable of manipulating people's interests. Proverbs promote the ruling party's credibility and ethical worth. He also discovers that proverbs provide the cultural prism through which masses interpret and comment on political behaviour. The present study finds Alli study very important as it has unpacked the importance of proverbs in a political space. However, the present study is different from it as it is interested in the semantic shift of expressions, idioms and proverbs used in a political space.

#### Theoretical Framework

This study employs semantic-amelio-pejoration as a theoretical base. Khotso and Mashinge (2011) indicate that where one theory cannot help the researcher to respond fully to the research questions, the scholar has liberty to merge theories. Therefore semantics, amelioration and pejoration are merged into semantic-amelio-pejoration theory. Semantics is one of the linguistic theories concerned with meaning. Semantics theory has three aspects: content semantic shifts, moderate semantic shifts and polysemy semantic shifts. A content semantic shift is one aspect of semantic theory through which meaning is deduced from context. It is not easy to understand the meaning out of context unless the speaker is already conversant with the new meaning attached. Moderate semantic shift is another aspect of semantic theory in which the new meaning is related to the original meaning though it is replaced by other words. The last aspect of this theory is polysemy semantic shift. This aspect of the semantic theory is concerned with expressions, idioms and proverbs which convey multiple meanings. This theory will be merged with pejoration and amelioration to find out if the new meaning constructed has promoted (ameliorated) or demoted (pejorated) the use of expressions, idioms and proverbs to be analyzed in this research. This theory will be employed to respond to the following questions:

- What is the meaning of exemplified expression, idiom or proverb in the recent political space among the Basotho?
- What are other meanings in relation?
- What are the consequences in their use in this space?

The following aspects of the semantic theory are utilized to understand:

- content through content semantic shift
- new meaning related to the original meaning through moderate semantic shift
- meanings in an expression, idiom and expression: different contexts breeding multiple meanings, a range of meanings developing from a single idiom, expressions, idioms and proverbs shifting from low level to high one as well as from positive meaning to a negative one and expressions, idioms and proverbs shifting from high level in meaning to the lower one through polysemy semantic shift. multiple

### III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology proposed for the present study takes its departure from the theoretical framework proposed for it. The present study finds the theoretical framework as a direct influence of the methodology in any study. As thus the principles of the proposed theory have to be vividly shown in the methodology and how they are going to be used to unravel it in order to build a strong foundation for the analysis.

Content semantic shift was used to find out the meaning of expressions, idioms and proverbs selected for the study. Moderate semantic shift was used to find the connection between the old and new meaning of selected expressions, idioms and proverbs while polysemy semantic shift was used to find out several meanings that are produced by a single expression, idiom and proverb.

Content analysis was used to analyse data. Content analysis refers to a research methodology which takes into considerations social media: music, letters, diaries, newspapers, folk songs, short stories, literature, and messages from media, symbols and many more by examining the details and implications of the content, repeated themes and so forth. Prasard (2016:1) concurs with the above definition by indicating that through content approach a critic can study with reference to content meaning, contexts and interventions contained in messages.

Data required for the accomplishment of this research includes information pertaining to expressions, idioms and proverbs among the Basotho. The researcher listened to the Basotho who use these expressions, idioms and proverbs and asked them about them. She further attended political rallies. Political rallies are a fertile ground for the production and use of expressions, idioms and proverbs in a politically inclined manner. She collected data to only willing people. Informants were also used to collect meanings of expressions, idioms and proverbs which were not publicly communicated. In all research works, anticipating resistance is crucial. Fielding (2007) states that a researcher has to anticipate resistance and device means through which she or he will deal with it. According to Khotso (2017) finding informants minimizes obstruction in research. As the researcher in this study is not a politician, she used political party members to collect data where it was difficult for her to penetrate. WhatsApp facility was used to back up information collected from media and political rallies. The information collected through this device was transcribed later.

#### Analysis

##### Context shifts

As it is already indicated, content semantic shift is one aspect of semantic theory which meaning is deduced through context. The old expression, idiom and proverb though they have acquired a new meaning; they still retain old meanings. There are no new words or new syntactic arrangement. The category below exemplifies.

New idiom	Popular/ traditional context	Political Semantic shift
1. <i>Ho shebisa tlaase</i> (to direct the opening) down)	<i>Ho thulamisa</i> (to direct the opening down)	<i>Ho tlosa litulong</i> (to remove from a position) (Amelioration)
2. <i>Ho lieha ho tjeka</i> (to delay to turn)	to delay to turn in a <i>litolobonya</i> dance	To take too much time to take decision (Amelioration)
3. <i>Ho tšoara ka leoto</i> (to hold back)	To hold back	To exercise unfair discrimination (Amelioration)
4. <i>Ho tsolisa</i> (to remove clothes including the inner ones)	To leave naked	To expose someone by publicizing his/her weaknesses (Amelioration)

The above idioms call for semantic-amelio-pejoration theory to find out different meaning from a single expression, idiom or proverb conveyed among the Basotho in general and those in politics. Idiom 1 *ho*

*shebisa tlaase*, outside the political perimeter, in Lesotho, it provides a different meaning from when it is used in political context. Out of political setting, this idiom means to turn a container up-side-down. When a container's opening is turned down, it is obvious that whatever it contains spills. However, in the context of politics among the Basotho this idiom *ho shebisa tlaase* means to remove a person from his/her political position. This idiom is also used in the extreme case when a government is toppled. From the popular use to where it refers to political positions and government toppling, this idiom's use has been ameliorated.

Idiom 2 *ho lieha ho tjeka* out of context means the habit of being stiff/ not flexible. In the political space it means not to be able to take prompt decision. This character trait of failure to make timely decision, jeopardizes a political figure as sometimes one is expected to act fast in order to address the interests of his/her affiliates. Like the first idiom, the use of this idiom is ameliorated. Idiom 3 *ho tsoara ka leoto* out of political context means to hold one's foot. Holding one's foot makes it difficult for the one whose foot is held to take a step forward. In politics this idiom means that one is not given opportunities for improvement. This could both refer to personal and political improvement. On the personal level, it could be that one is not given opportunity to a better post while on a broader political perspective one is not given opportunity to develop his constituency or political party. Idiom 3 like the previously discussed idioms reflects amelioration in use in the political space. Idiom 4 *ho isolisa* (to leave naked) out of political context means to undress while in the political context means to publicize one's weaknesses especially a political figure who is in a high position. This act of undressing one another is easy and fast these days as the use of technology and media is popular especially the use of face book. According to informants, sometimes this is done by informing the public about the corruption of such a person on radio stations, television and mass media. In simple but expressive terms they say that they have "undressed him/her". Like the rest of the idioms in this category, its use has been ameliorated.

#### MODERATE SHIFT

Moderate shift is another aspect of semantic theory in which the new meaning is related to the original meaning. However, in the old expressions, idioms and proverbs sometimes new words can be used to replace old ones or there can be additional words or some words can be left out to suit the context. The category below exemplifies:

Idiom & translation	Popular/ traditional context	Semantic shift
5. <i>Ho tšela</i> (to cross)	To cross e.g bridge	To cross the bench (amelioration)
6. <i>Ho sebelisa thepa ea lekhotla</i> (to utilize the party property)	To use the political party property	To engage in extra marital relationship by members affiliating to the same party politics (Pejoration)
7. <i>Ho tsamaea linakeli</i> (to go to secret meeting in the evening)	To go to the secret meeting prior initiation training usually held in the late at night	To go to a secret political meeting usually held at night at a secret place with a secret agenda (amelioration)
8. <i>Seolo se senang bohloa / ho tšepa seolo se se nang bohloa</i> (Mokitimi 1997:36) (ant-heap without ants/to put one's hope on an empty out-heap)	Ant-heap without ants	A political leader without multitudes afflicting to his/her party politics (amelioration)
9. <i>Masepa a macha a ratoa ke litšintši replaces metsi a macha a ntsa a khale</i> (new hard excretion is mostly favoured by flies/ fresh water pushes out the dirty water (Mokitimi 1997:39)	new hard excretion is mostly favoured by flies	Newly launched party politics has many followers (Amelioration)
10. <i>likatana tse ntseng li fefooa/ sekatana sa kobo e fe?</i> (rags vagabonding/ rags from which blanket)	Less valuable materials which are disowned	All Basotho Convention faction led by Prof. Nqosa Mahao (Amelioration)

The idioms and proverbs in this category call for semantic-amelio-pejoration analysis. According to Breal (1964:120) "The expansion of meaning is a normal phenomenon which must have a place among all people whose life is intense, whose thought is active." Haywood (1966) shares the same observation with Breal (ibid) by indicating that folklore (which idioms and proverbs emanate from), is a living organism: growing and

developing wherever people live. Idiom 5 *ho tšela* (to cross) has both popular and political meanings. In popular use this idiom meaning has the aspect of moving from one side to the other side such as when one crosses a donga or a river. In the political use among the Basotho, the meaning of moving from one side to the other is still maintained. This idiom in politics is used to refer to a situation whereby one leaves one political party and joins the other. This idiom is politically popular in parliament of Lesotho when a member from a different party joins another party which he/she was first opposing. The use of this idiom in this manner is ameliorated. It has moved from an ordinary use to the parliament level.

Idiom 6 *ho sebelisa thepa ea lekhotla* which is equivalent to utilizing the party property in popular meaning, according to the informants, in politics it is used to establish rapport for party members to engage into extra marital affairs among its members/ affiliates as this idiom “forces” them to understand that they are party property and when they engage into extra marital affairs it means that they are legitimately “utilized”. Both in the popular use and political one the idea of being utilized is maintained. The use of this idiom in the utilizing of party property is ameliorated. Its amelioration is in use not in behaviour. Among the Basotho, engaging in extra marital affairs is immoral and unacceptable. Therefore, when members of a political party engage in extra marital affairs and justify their promiscuous behaviour by using this idiom its use and meaning becomes negative hence its pejoration. According to Gumperz (1971) Language change is alleged to cause the breakdown of traditional social structure and the formation of new tie. By utilizing this idiom negatively, the traditional social structure of not accepting extra marital affairs is broken down and the new tie of using this idiom to make extra marital affairs acceptable is formed.

Idiom 7 *ho tsamaea linakeli* (to go to secret meeting) is popularly used in the initiation culture of the Basotho. In this culture, boys who have grown up to the stage where they could be initiated, they had to learn the initiation basics in the evening at the *Khotla* before going to the initiation lodge. According to Matšela (1990) at the initial stage of initiation culture, boys would slip away several times in the evening when the moon is full to where they would start learning on superficial *likoma* (secrets). As they are surface *likoma*, Matšela refers to them as *likoma tsa basali* (secrets of women) which means shallow secrets. Much as they are not considered to be deep secrets, it must be kept undisclosed. The place called *khotla* where these boys go, is a male hut build at the chief place. Women and children are prohibited. Whoever attends these initiation basics is expected to go to the initiation lodge as the theories learned at this place precede those of the initiation hence they are kept as secrets. *Ho tsamaea linakeli* idiom, according to informants, is currently used in politics among the Basotho to refer to night secret meetings which all people who are not members of political party not allowed to attend and the contents of the meeting remain a secret. The similarities between the preliminary meetings of the Basotho initiation practice in the *linakeli* and the ones for the political ones is the secret place and time at which they are held and the secretive contents of these meetings. However, the levels at which they are used at are different. The level of initiation is lower than the level of party politics. Therefore, the use of this idiom is ameliorated.

Expression 8 *Seolo se senang bohloa* (ant-heap without ants) is a Sesotho expression popularized by Dr. Pakalitha Mosisili after experiencing a commotion within the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) with Mr. Mothetjoa Metsing who was the Lesotho Congress for Democracy secretary general by then. After Dr. Mosisili had left the LCD, the numbers of the LCD affiliates declined. It was the declination observed on political rallies of the LCD by then that Dr. Mosisili referred to the LCD as the *seolo se senang bohloa* equivalent to a party politic without many followers. Fayemi (2009:15) states: “In difficult situations, people turn to proverbs for answers. They are creatively employed to speed up communication, convey weighty messages and to sharpen arguments.” As the above political leaders were facing turmoil. It is not surprising therefore that they resorted to the use of proverbs in their Ssotho language. When scrutinizing expression 8, one finds that there is a relationship between the ant heap and the LCD by then. The relationship between ant-heap and the LCD is on the decline of the ants on the hip and the decline of LCD party followers after parting with Dr. Mosisili. The use of this expression in politics has ameliorated it.

Expression 9. *Masepa a macha a ratoa ke litšintši* (new hard excretion is mostly favoured by flies) as well is popularized by Dr. Pakalitha Mosisili after Dr. Thabane has launched his party politics All Basotho conversion (ABC) political party. When realizing that ABC was attracting more followers, the then Prime Minister, Dr. Mosisili referred to ABC through this expression. The similarity between the hard excretion and the newly formed party was the high attraction it give to flies while the new party politics attracts many new followers. Its use in this political space ameliorated it.

Expression 10 *likatana tse ntseng li fefoa* (rags vagabonding) is a Sesotho expression popularized by Dr. Motsoahae Thabane when like, Dr. Mokhehle and Dr. Mosisili, in his ABC party politics he faces a tumult on leadership succession. In a political rally, he pronounced that Professor Nqosa Mahao was not a member of the ABC by using the expression “*Ke sekatana se ntseng se fefoha...*” equivalent to “He is none member of my party.” Fayemi (2009) indicates that proverbs are used for blunt criticism and classification of difficult issues. He continues that the potential capabilities of proverbs are not in doubt as proverbs are replete with wit,

wisdom, imagination, amusement, instruction and insight. The situation of the ABC leader was not different from that one of the previously threshed political leaders above. In a similar manner like them, Thabane turned to the popular Sesotho expression. Expression 10 is developed from a popular Sesotho expression “*ke sekatana sa kobo e fe?*” equivalent to “out of which blanket is this rug from?” Like the expression *likatana tse ntseng li fefoa* (rags vagabonding), this expression is used to reflect that a person is illegitimate hence disowned by a clan or a social group that he is affiliating to. For Gleason (1985) semantic change also has semantic development. It is in semantic development where additions of new elements of meaning and reorganization of known ones have opportunity. As language is fluid, it became easy to extend the meaning of vagabonding rag to the flying all over rag. The ABC fraction which supported Professor Mahao took from it that they too are *likatana tse ntseng li fefoha* equivalent to rags that a vagabonding. The vagabonding rags and the ABC faction led by Prof. Mahao share the common quality of being disowned. The rag is disowned by the owner hence why it is vagabonding while the ABC fraction that is disowned by the party leader Dr. Thabane. The use of this expression in the political space is ameliorated.

### POLYSEMY SHIFT

Polysemy shifts is a principle of semantic theory which is concerned with expressions, idioms and proverbs which convey multiple meanings. Those meanings have no relationship. Each meaning is independent. It does not relate in any way to the other meaning. Its use is specific to a certain group of people. When people foreign to such a group are present in its use, they get lost as the response will totally be different from the response they would be expected to provide. The category below exemplifies.

Idiom & translation	Popular/ traditional context	Semantic shift
9. <i>Ho foralla</i> (to turn away)	To separate from	To disaffiliate with a political party (Amelioration)
10. <i>Khang sala moo</i> (quarrel has to be left behind)	To give up	To settle dispute by moving away from people who refuse for their settlement (Amelioration)
10. <i>Ho takalatsa</i> (One foot is apart from the other)	To be in dilemma	One is sitting at the neutral seat in parliament (Amelioration)
11. <i>Ho ea sephethong</i> (to go for results)	To go and collect results	Looting items in the shops (Amelioration)

The idioms in this category call for semantic-amelio-pejoration analysis. Through this theory the researcher attempts to understand a range of meanings developing from a single idiom. According to Ravin and Lealock (2000), Riemer (2005) polysemy as one aspect of semantics is a single item that has different distinctive meanings. Ullmann (1967) indicates that the idea of polysemy comes from the fact that a single sign can be used to refer to something without ceasing to refer to the other. For Mathonsi (2009) polysemy refers to multiple meaning of same word with related meaning.

Idiom 9 *ho foralla* (to turn away) has multiply meanings. On one hand it means to turn away from someone. On the political space among the Basotho, it means to disaffiliate from a political party. The later meaning of this idiom in politics was popularized by the late Dr. Ntsu Mokhehle who is one of the late former prime ministers of Lesotho. In 1994, in the political rally held in Setsoto stadium, when addressing the congregation on the Basotho Congress Party faction, he asked the party followers to turn away from those who were considered to be rebellious to him as a leader. In his words, Dr. Mokhehle said “*Le ba furalle*” equivalent to “turn away from them.” Since then this idiom is popular in politics to indicate that those who seem to be contradictory to the party leader should be done away with. This idiom’s use has been elevated from the ordinary use to the political one hence amelioration.

Expression 10 *Khang sala moo* is a Sesotho expression popularized by the former prime minister of Lesotho, Dr. Pakalitha Mosisili which was a motto of his political speech on the 24 January 2003 when he addressed his Lesotho Congress for Democracy party followers on the 6<sup>th</sup> congregation. He was facing a similar political turmoil to that one of Dr. Ntsu Mokhehle in his party by then, the Basotho Congress Party. When the upheaval heated to the climax, he decided to leave the Lesotho Congress for Democracy and launched another party; Democratic Congress. He salvaged the same motto “*Khang sala mong*” meaning there is no time to waste on quarrels. In his words Dr. Mosisili (2003:unnumbered) says “*Le joale ha re na ho ituba le ho ikopisa lihlooho ka ba lilelang lebesa le qhalaneng.*” equivalent to we will not waste our time by attending to people who mourn for what cannot be recovered. At the present when there are party political disputes, political leaders

reverberate the same expression to indicate that they will leave the party and form another one. This expression has existed among the Basotho for centuries but it was used at the lower levels. However, its use by Dr. Mosisili, as it is threshed above, has elevated its status hence amelioration.

Idiom 11 *Ho takalatsa* (One foot is apart from the other) has multiple meanings. One being that of having more than one interest and the other being to sit on the neutral place in parliament so that you give your vote to any of the parties in parliament any time you wish. The one who sits at this position is always proposed by both the government and the opposition to give them his/her vote. In simple terms it is like s/he is in the dilemma. So in simple terms s/he referred to as “*o takalalitse*” S/he has put his/ her legs apart. Therefore the use of this idiom in parliament refers to issues relating to the country governance hence the idiom’s use is elevated henceforth amelioration.

Idiom 11 *ho ea sephethong* (to go for results) has multiply meanings: to go for school results, to go for health results and to go for looting. In 1998 there was a political riot in Lesotho. It was in this political riot where people’s anger moved them into the breaking, stealing and burning down shops in Maseru into ashes. The reason behind was that Judge Langa’s commission was assigned to assess the 1997 elections outcomes as the Basotho National party leader by then, the late Mr. Retselisitsoe Sekhonyana claimed that the outcomes were fraudulent. Therefore Langa’s commission was assigned to make the findings and submit a report with recommendations. During the days that it was expected to release the report, the same report was claimed to be taken to Pretoria, capital city of South Africa. Then the Basotho who were not happy about the length of time that the commission took without releasing the report to the Lesotho government, started looting the Maseru town in the name “*ba ile sephathong Sephetho*” equivalent to “They have gone to collect the results.” Items that were looted were named “*sephetho*” and some of the children who were born during this period were named Sephetho (boys) which means results and Masephetho (girls) which means the mother of results. The word *sephetho* therefore has experienced amelioration.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that existing expressions, idioms and proverbs keep changing their meaning depending on the context where they are used. For example, Sesotho expressions, idioms and proverbs used in a political space have acquired new meanings different from the popular meanings among the Basotho. In the processes of change in meaning some expressions, idioms and proverbs acquire a higher status (amelioration) in use or they acquire a lower one (pejoration). Besides, these expressions, idioms and proverbs have a positive and a negative influence in the group which uses it.

The findings of this study have compelled the study to provide the following recommendations:

- ▶ As every group develops its meaning from already existing words, authors of Sesotho language dictionaries should include new meanings in their dictionaries so that old meanings cannot face extinction;
- ▶ Much as more expressions, idioms and proverbs have been ameliorated in this study, but their use is negative among the Basotho. This study therefore recommends that the use of expressions, idioms and proverbs be ameliorated by both raising its status in use and by influencing positive meaning to the nation.
- ▶ Most of the expression, idioms and proverbs in this study are not documented; therefore this study recommends that Sesotho authors should not leave this genre unnoticed so that the next generation can learn out of it.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Dr. Palesa Khotso** is a professional with 19 years of comprehensive experience in teaching. She was engaged in the training of student-teachers at Lesotho college of Education for a decade. She has joined the National University of Lesotho in 2018 September. She is fascinated in engaging with students in practical courses that she facilitates at the National University of Lesotho. Her research trajectory is on Masculinity, Onomastics, Toponym and Folklore. However, she is not limited to these areas. She has an outstanding record on both locally and international presentations of her research works. She has and continues to publish her academic works on accredited journals.

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#### Informal interviews

Chimuka, P. (2019) on an informal interview 23 July 2019.

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Dr. Ntsu Mokhehle (One of the late prime ministers of Lesotho)  
 Dr. Pakalitha Mosisili (The former prime minister of Lesotho)  
 Dr. Motsoahae Thabane (The current prime minister of Lesotho)

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