S'ncamtho Lexico-semantics and the *Isichazamazwi sesiNdebele (ISN)*: Implications for Lexicography and Standardisation

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Abstract—S'ncamtho is an urban youth variety which uses Zimbabwean Ndebele as its matrix language. The youth language has had influences on the Ndebele language over time. This article argues that Ndebele benefits from S'ncamtho, its urban youth variety in terms of vocabulary although efforts at linguistic purism often moderate this contribution. The article avers that S'ncamtho terminology creates synonyms and polysemy in some cases whereby S'ncamtho lexis become as popular as the Ndebele counterpart and in some cases the S'ncamtho lexemes are more popular. The article goes on to evaluate the treatment of popular S'ncamtho terminology in the only Ndebele monolingual dictionary *Isichazamazwi seSiNdebele (ISN)* and gives recommendations on standardising some S'ncamtho terminology in Ndebele. The article is motivated in part by the debate that arose after the S'ncamtho term for prostitute *umahotsha* was included in a grade seven (primary school) examination. However, looking closely at S'ncamtho and Ndebele it is not linguistically and socially possible for S'ncamtho and Ndebele to share space and speakers and remain independent of each other's influences on the other.

Index Terms—lexicography, Ndebele, tsotsitaal, S'ncamtho, slang, pragmatism

I. INTRODUCTION

S'ncamtho is a Ndebele based urban youth language, the term S'ncamtho is popularised by Ndlovu (2012) after he realised that the Nguni based slang lingonym, iScamtho in South Africa is usually pronounced with an audible alveolar nasal sound [-n-] in Zimbabwean Ndebele. Hadebe (2002) has identified lexical variation as following the speaker's geographical, social, ethnic, and gender profiles, but indicates that in *ISN* they were interested more in the variation according to geography. The question here is; what about other speaker profiles such as social variation? Hadebe (2004) notes that Ndebele dictionary editors used their assumptions not user needs in their compilation. African languages were affected by colonial language policies and they diminished in their creative capacity. Alexander (1999) confirms the loss of creativity in African languages due to colonial language dominance. However, youth, especially urban male youth have been creative and have produced African urban varieties. Aitchison (2006) argues that: 'a leap in vocabulary size around the age of 14 is associated with the acquisition of standard rules for word formation' (p. 20). When the youth master the rules of word formation they creatively work through the base language to create their social varieties that impact on the base language over time.

When the youths create their variety, all aspects of language are stylistically affected to create the "slangs", Ndlovu (2010:86) points out that metaphors are created in the youth varieties and calls such metaphors the lunatic fringe idiomatic expressions. Youth languages ride on the grammar of the base languages, they have no separate grammar of their own, and it has been difficult for linguists to call them slang or languages, Mesthrie and Hurst (2013) propose the term stylect for the phenomenon as their study of Xhosa based tsotsitaals reveal that the grammar of the base language does not change. Momanyi (2009) makes a similar observation on Sheng the Kanyan youth variety: 'Sheng is based primarily on Kiswahili structure' (p. 131). However, due to common elements in urban youth languages, Mesthrie (2008) suggests the term tsotsitaals in small letters as a collective term and S'ncamtho fits into this broad term.

People have had negative attitudes towards urban youth varieties. Calling these varieties tsotsitaals and associate them with criminals and justifies their banishment and detest, yet they have had a lot of influence on society. Others have classified them as anti-languages while others view them as metaphor codes that have a high lexical turn-over, and as such cannot be taken seriously. Ugot (2013) argues that slang is ephemeral like fashion and music trends. Ncube (2005) also notes that some loan words actively used in youth varieties do not last in the lexicon of the varieties. The assumption here is that no style is permanent, and such an assumption cannot be true suffice to note that style in linguistic theory is the same as register. While it is true that most slang vocabulary is ephemeral there are some terms that are established and are spread to the matrix language, and these are the terms that warrant recognition in lexicographic work so that they are standardised and fill in the gaps created by the general lack of creativity in African languages.

The influence of youth varieties on matrix languages and society in general needs serious attention from researchers. De Klerk (1995) argues that whatever the attitudes towards slang, it deserves serious attention from linguists. While,

Bembe (2006) avers that slang influence cannot be ignored by linguistic and sociological inquiry. The youth who speak these varieties are key players in society today, and they in a way control popular culture and this means these tsotsitaals spread even faster and influence people more through, music, internet, media, and social media. Tsotsitaals across Africa and the Americas are known to be actively used in popular culture that involves popular music such as Rap in America (Dixon et al, 2009), Kwaito in South Africa and Zimbabwe (Mfusi, 1992), Bongo Flava in Tanzania (Englert, 2007, Suriano, 2007), American Jazz (Dalzell, 2012), and Zim-dancehall in Zimbabwe (Mpofu and Tembo, 2015). Some people dismiss S'ncamtho inclusion in Ndebele lexicography and standardisation because it corrupts the Ndebele language. However, Sebba (1997) scoffs at the idea of a pure language and he argues that languages cannot and should not be "pure". The influence of S'ncamtho has been felt in Ndebele and the ISN has a number of S'ncamtho words, however, this article avers that the S'ncamtho in ISN is not well representative of the pragmatic use of S'ncamtho in Ndebele today.

II. METHODOLOGY

The research is a descriptive survey which is aided by quantitative data and it uses both primary and secondary data. It employs Nippold and Taylor's (2002) methodology which they apply for testing idiom familiarity and usage. In their methodology participants perform three tests to measure metaphor knowlwdge which are: Familiarity Judgment, Idiom Comprehension and Transparency Judgment. S'ncamtho vocabulary was collected from Bulawayo male youth through interviews and participant observations, the data is derived from an on-going research project under the University of Cape Town on African urban and youth varieties. S'ncamtho vocabulary was then identified in the ISN, there after the words were tested for familiarity and pragmatism on samples of Ndebele speakers. Participants for familiarity and pragmatic testing were divided into eight groups along the variables of; youth/adult, male/female, and rural/urban, each group had a total of five respondents.   The groups are identified in the paper as; A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, D1, and D2, these are explained in table 1 below:

TABLE 1:
PARTICIPANTS GROUPS.

Group	Participants
A1	5 urban male youth, age range- 14-20 years, location-Nketa Bulawayo
A2	5 rural male youth, age range-14-21 years, location- Silobela rural area
B1	5 urban female youth, age range-14-19 years, location-Pumula Bulawayo
B2	5 rural female youth, age range-14-20 years, location- Silobela rural area
C1	5 urban male adults, age range-40-65 years,- Great Zimbabwe University Masvingo
C2	5 rural male adults, age range-35-72 years, location- Silobela rural area
D1	5 urban female adults, age range- 40-75 years, location- Entumbane Bulawayo
D2	5 rural female adults, age range- 42-63 years, location- Lower Gwelo rural area

A total of 14 S'ncamtho terms found in the ISN were tested on the samples, and a further 20 that are not included in the *ISN*, totalling 34 S'ncamtho words tested on the population samples.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research is framed around the principle of pragmatism in selecting headwords. The reasoning is that more S'ncamtho vocabulary is used in Ndebele because the urban youth who are the speakers of S'ncamtho have risen in influence. A Social Psychology theory, The Social Impact Theory is employed to frame the spread of S'ncamtho lexis. According to Aronson et al (2007), Social Impact Theory posits that social influence of a human aggregate depends on the aggregate's importance, it's immediacy, and it's size. This view is supported by Argo et al (2005) who note that people are impacted by the presence or actions of an individual or group. They further note that the more the number of group members that greter the influence on outsiders and reduction in distance and importance of the members also make their group attract more members. The number of S'ncamtho speakers is increasing and their style is used in popular culture making it important and all these factors increase S'ncamtho influence on Ndebele language and culture.

IV. TREATMENT OF S'NCAMTHO LEXIS IN THE *ISN*

The influence of S'ncamtho or isiTsotsi as others have called it over the years on Ndebele has been viewed with suspicion as is the case with other slang forms the world-over. However, the growing influence cannot be resisted for ever and as a result editors of the ISN found it prudent to include some of the S'ncamtho terms in the dictionary. Their bias towards geographical variation could explain the small number of social variation inclined vocabulary including S'ncamtho vocabulary. Modern lexicographic work in Ndebele is a fairly recent exercise and more still has to be done to create a more pragmatic dictionary for the language. Hadebe (2004) notes that: 'research on lexicography in the Ndebele language is still in its early stages' (p. 90). There are many developments that have changed Ndebele vocabulary such as war and Christianity and S'ncamtho has had its fair share of change.

Hadebe (2002) and Khumalo (2004) justify the inclusion in the *ISN* of vocabulary that came with the war period in Zimbabwe such as umthengisi (sell out), umjibha (war collaborator), ukhijane (young boy), ogwa (guerrillas). The war

is not a permanent feature in Ndebele, but it left a mark, yet, S'ncamtho is permanently part of Ndebele and should indeed contribute more vocabulary to the language. Khumalo (2004) also alludes to the fact that Christianity also influenced vocabulary change in Ndebele and continues to do so through semantic changes and shifts on words such as ukukhuleka which originally meant a salutation when getting into someone's home, but Christianity brought the prayer meaning to the word and the ISN acknowledges the prayer meaning to the word. S'ncamtho like Christianity and the war has introduced new vocabulary and in some instances created synonyms and some of these are used across sex and age within Ndebele aggregates and they warrant inclusion in the Ndebele dictionary. Hadebe (2002) notes that in compiling the ISN they were guided by the principle that in cases of synonymy between an indigenous word and a loan word the indigenous one carries the meaning and the loan is cross-referenced and this can be done for popular S'ncamtho words that are widely used in Ndebele.

The *ISN* can be credited on pragmatic basis for including some S'ncamtho terms, but they do not account and represent all the popular S'ncamtho words used in Ndebele today. It is important to note that in the *ISN* some words are marked or identified as originating from S'ncamtho while, others are not a sign that they are so popular it is difficult to identify them as S'ncamtho. Table 2 below gives 14 words used in S'ncamtho that are included in the ISN, and indicates whether they are marked as S'ncamtho. The table also gives the ISN meaning of the terms and juxtaposes it with the S'ncamtho meaning of the same terms.

TABLE 2:
S'NCAMTHO WORDS IN THE *ISN*

S'ncamtho term in ISN	Marked as S'ncamtho	ISN definition	S'ncamtho meaning
nikisi	No	Nothing	Nothing
imenya	Yes	N-girlfriend	N-girlfriend
itshomi	Yes	N-friend	N-friend
idladla	No	N-small hut	N-house
itshamali	No	N-mistress	N-mistress
isipansula	No	N-dance	N-dance/culture
isikhokho	No	N-burnt food lining	N-expert
impintshi	No	N-friend	N-friend
ingamula	No	N-gentleman	N-gentleman
inyuku	No	N-new pastor	N-money
zwakala	No	VB-to be heard/felt	VB-come
sampula	No	VB-advertise	VB-sample
gawula	No	VB-chop	VB-eat
ikopo	No	N-head	N-head

A total of 14 S'ncamtho lexis are identified in the ISN, but only two of the 14 imenya and itshomi, are marked as originating from the youth variety. Some of the terms appear to have been adapted totally to the language such that the editors did not see the need to mark them as S'ncamtho or they did not recognise the S'ncamtho origin. While, youth varieties are popular for re-lexicalising base language lexemes to create polysemy there appears to be new S'ncamtho words in the *ISN* that are not re-lexicalised. S'ncamtho borrows from other languages and youth cultures to create new terms that are not there in the base language. In the new words, the meaning ascribed to them in the *ISN* and their S'ncamtho meaning correspond and this is in the case of words such as; imenya, itshomi, ingamula, nikisi, itshamali, impintshi, and ikopo. The new words that have corresponding meanings make up 50% of the sampled S'ncamtho terms in the ISN, a figure that vindicates the S'ncamtho contribution to Ndebele vocabulary outside re-lexicalisation. The *ISN* did a great job by including these terms to represent youth social profiles and their spread into Ndebele vocabulary. However, this article avers that there are some that are popular or even more popular than those included that the *ISN* editors left out and there is a case to have them included. Most of the new terms from S'ncamtho can carry meanings, and in cases where they are synonyms they can be cross-referenced to represent the pragmatic use of Ndebele today.

The other seven words are a result of re-lexicalising Ndebele words or extending meaning to derive meaning that differs from that given in the *ISN*. The way people speak the language determines what they want in a dictionary and capturing the polysemy in words affected by S'ncamtho meaning represents what users want and do. Benjoint (2000) argues that: 'lexicographers in many countries have recently felt the need to go beyond empirical observations on the use of the general-purpose dictionary, seeking to find out what the users really do, as opposed to what they are believed to do, in order to make sure that the dictionary really corresponds to the needs of the public' (140). The S'ncamtho meanings in the 50% of re-lexicalised words in table 1 are operational in spoken Ndebele today.

While revivalism was one of the guiding principles in the *ISN*, it is saddening that some old and obsolete meanings were chosen ahead of the pragmatic S'ncamtho ones. The editors could have given the old Ndebele meanings and given the current ones as second meanings, but they chose to ignore the S'ncamtho meanings, yet they are the popular ones today. The urban style has infiltrated Ndebele and their meanings are popular. Brookes (2005) has argued that urban youth languages can be fully understood as markers of urbanity and street style. The rural tradition is fast fading and S'ncamtho takes these archaic words and gives them new meaning and it is the new meaning that is pragmatic not the excavation of old meaning. The words; idladla, isikhokho, inyuku, and gawula were popularly recognised in their S'ncamtho meaning by participants across all the variables. While idladla is a small hut in old Ndebele, S'ncamtho

extended the meaning to any house, and this meaning was common among respondents only one rural male adult, three rural female adults referred to the old Ndebele meaning. All the respondents recognised inyuku as money and only after the researcher told them of the old Ndebele meaning did the adult samples claim to know the meaning too. Zwakala is not old Ndebele or a loan word, but S'ncamtho speakers re-lexicalised to word to mean "come here" and this meaning appears to be operational within the youth both urban and rural, and has not made much impact in Ndebele to warrant inclusion in the dictionary.

V. *ISN* PRAGMATISM IN THE SELECTION OF S'NCAMTHO VOCABULARY

Editors of the ISN tried to reflect of the present state on the language by including many loan words and some S'ncamtho ones, but as far as S'ncamtho is concerned the included words are a far cry from what obtains in Ndebele today. Hadebe (2002) notes that vocabulary selection in *ISN* was guided by the principles of pragmatism, revivalism, and historical concerns, and on pragmatism he notes that this was not measured on the population but rather it was the decision of the editors on what they thought was commonly understood currently. Ncube (2005) also notes that while it was argued that the ISN is a reflection of how the Ndebele speak the language at present critics of the *ISN* view it as a consolidation of Ndebele corruption by the African Languages Research Institute (ALRI). This article argues that no language can resist change, especially that which comes from within such as S'ncamtho. There are some S'ncamtho words and meanings that are popular from the research, but they are not considered in the *ISN*.

S'ncamtho is very common among Ndebele speakers much that a pragmatic approach to vocabulary selection in a dictionary should at least account for it. Swanepoel (1978) argues that the Tsotsi language in our towns is so common that many people recognise terms from the youth gangs in town. Winkler (2007) avers that slang has a tendency of spreading out of in-groups and some slang lose its slang characteristics and is used in the base language. This article argues that S'ncamtho is not slang, but a youth variety, some of the words may have originated from youth slangs, but they are now common to all Ndebele speakers and should be treated as Ndebele vocabulary. The research collected 20 S'ncamtho words that are not in the ISN and measured their popularity and usage within; urban youth male and female, rural youth male and female, urban adults male and female, rural adults male and female. The results of the familiarity and use tests on the population samples are given in table 3 below; the key to the table is guided by table 1 in the methodology. In the table; A- is for male youth, B-for female youth, C- for adult male, and D- for adult female, all groups marked as 1 are urban and those marked as 2 are rural.

TABLE 3:
FAMILIARITY AND USAGE OF S'NCAMTHO WORDS THAT ARE NOT IN THE *ISN*

S'ncamtho	Gloss	A1		A2		B1		B2		C1		C2		D1		D2	
Farmiliarity/Usage		F	U	F	U	F	U	F	U	F	U	F	U	F	U	F	U
ohata	police	5	5	5	4	5	3	5	3	5	4	2	1	4	2	2	1
umahotsha	prostitute	5	5	5	3	5	5	5	4	5	3	5	3	5	3	5	2
isipano	work	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	2
ideni	house	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	3	4	2	4	0
ukuyilahla	spoil/danger	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
shapu	sharp/ok	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
ivari	truth	5	5	5	4	5	3	5	4	5	4	4	2	4	1	3	0
ivathi	water	5	5	5	5	5	2	5	3	5	3	5	4	5	1	3	2
vaya	go	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	2	3	1
izozo	food	5	5	5	5	5	2	3	2	5	3	3	1	3	0	1	0
itayima	father	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	3	4	2	5	1	3	0
isigela	school	5	5	4	4	5	4	4	3	4	3	2	0	4	0	1	0
natshi	available	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	1	4	1
ijida	friend	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	2	5	4	5	3	5	2	3	1
ukukhupha	good	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	2	5	2	5	2
itsheri	girlfriend	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	2
idiski	soccer	5	5	5	5	5	3	5	2	5	4	3	2	4	1	1	0
umasalu	mother	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	2
uthini	hallo	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
hafa	pay	5	3	1	1	3	1	1	0	3	1	1	0	2	0	0	0

The social impact theory states that as a group's importance and numbers grow they become a force to reckon in society and the familiarity and use of S'ncamtho words in Ndebele is one such influence. Of the 20 words in table 3 above 16 are new words in Ndebele which is a significant contribution to a language that is lacking in lexical creativity. The usual crime given to youth languages is that they re-lexicalise and create metaphors out of base language lexemes, but S'ncamtho seems to be bringing in more new words than new meanings. There are certain areas of vocabulary whereby S'ncamtho is more prominent, Hurst and Buthelezi (2014) note that: 'the ten most popular topics in the Durban data were: girls and sex; drinking; smoking; other people; religion; famous people; music; race; crime and police; money; fighting and violence' (193). Some of the words in table 3 above are in the areas identified by Hurst and Buthelezi (2014).

All the 40 respondents in the different categories claimed to be familiar, and to use; ukuyilahla, shapu, and uthini, the

three words scored 100% in both familiarity and usage. The words pass the pragmatic test and should be included in Ndebele dictionaries such as the ISN. A further five words score 100% familiarity in the 40 respondents and these are; umahotsha, isipano, ziyakhupha, itsheri, and umasalu, their usage also averages above 60%. However, usage is relative as some people may not be honest because use of S'ncamtho words carries a stigma, especially among adults. All, but three words in table 3 have a high popularity and usage rating and there is reason to include the words and their senses in the ISN. The majority of the words in table 3 are more popular than those in table 2 which were included in the ISN. The low ranking words are hafa, izozo, and isigela, these are still at ephemeral stage and can be left out for now. Hadebe (2002) avers that: 'any dictionary compiler is caught in this dilemma where words are coming into the language while others are falling out. The big question on the dictionary maker is the timing when a new word should be included in the dictionary' (124). The time could be ripe for the other 17 words as they are popular and used in both urban and rural Ndebele vernaculars.

VI. CONCLUSION

Lexicographic work in Ndebele has been largely small bilingual dictionaries that were written without proper lexicography training. It was until the ALRI trained lexicographers that culminated in the production of the ISN which is the first general Ndebele dictionary. As the first general dictionary the ISN did a lot of ground breaking work and tried to reflect the current state of the Ndebele language. However, as an initial venture there are some aspects of the language that were left out. S'ncamtho as a Ndebele based youth variety has contributed a lot of words that are used in Ndebele today, and population samples show that most of these words are used by the youth, adults, males, females, rural, and urban Ndebele speakers. This research concludes that the number of S'ncamtho words in the ISN is not representative of the pragmatic use of S'ncamtho words within Ndebele aggregates and there is need to add more if the dictionary is to reflect usage at present. Controversies around S'ncamtho words arise because the dictionary excludes some of them, yet the population uses them creating a gap between standard Ndebele and the language as it is spoken today. Urban youths who are credited with originating and maintaining S'ncamtho are now an important social group in Zimbabwe through media, social media, education, music, and style making them a source of influence across the Ndebele language in the process spreading their variety. S'ncamtho may not be ignored in Ndebele lexicography.

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