

THE NATURE AND ORIGIN OF SEX-RELATED EUPHEMISMS IN SETSWANA

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate sex-related euphemisms in Setswana. Although sex matters, as embarrassing phenomena, are not usually talked about in Setswana communities, they have recently been brought to the open by the incidence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The assumption in this study is therefore that, with more open discourse of sex-related matters in Botswana, more euphemisms have been created to camouflage the embarrassing nature of the various referents in this field. The sex-related matters include private parts, sexual activities, sexual secretions, sexual diseases and related phenomena. This study describes the nature, origin, and types of these euphemisms and considers their place and role in the social interaction of the people of Botswana.

Keywords: Sex-related euphemisms, Setswana, HIV/AIDS

Introduction

Setswana is one of the languages in southern Africa belonging to Southern Bantu, together with languages like IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, Siswati, Sesotho, Sepedi and Sindebele. It is spoken in Botswana, South Africa and Namibia by about 4.5 million people. It is the national language of Botswana and one of the official languages of South Africa. With its increased status in the region, Setswana has considerably expanded its domains to include both formal and technical usage. Many of the new domains demand discourse forms which involve high levels of politeness and decency. In ensuring appropriateness in its discourse, Setswana has employed the use of euphemisms to deal with any taboo words or expressions which would otherwise be considered as unpleasant or embarrassing.

According to Mathews (1997: 119), a euphemism is a word or expression "used in the place of another word which is avoided because of being offensive, indecent or alarming". Usually a euphemism is a well-established and commonly used form in a given speech community. Strictly speaking, therefore, a euphemism differs from a slang, which is normally restricted to a particular generation or group of people in a confined area. It also differs from a jargon, which is usually confined to people in a specific profession. Thus, a euphemism is a word or expression which is used to respond to a particular style of speech prompted by a specific context of situation that requires decency and politeness. Usually euphemisms are used in polite or formal social contexts (Akmajian et al. 1984: 332). The euphemized items are said to be tabooed, that is, the corresponding lexical

items are avoided or prohibited in formal speech (O'Grady et al. 1996: 554). In this case, indirect words or phrases, or less offensive expressions are used so as to make the conversation less embarrassing or unpleasant, and therefore more acceptable than it really is. The most common lexical fields where one finds taboos, and therefore where the use of euphemisms is frequent, include private parts, sex, body secretions, death and swearing (O'Grady et al. op. cit.). Euphemisms and taboos are therefore two faces of the same coin. In this study, slang words will be considered as euphemisms, as the two share many common features (Munro 1993).

What is considered as taboo language is often determined by culture, and not by anything inherent in the language itself, since the phonemic or morphemic structures of taboo words are not different from the other words. Neither are the euphemisms different from the other parts of speech. Given that euphemisms often replace the original and usually authentic words which have become taboo, they are very often identified by their specific, usually non authentic or indigenous origins, such as being loanwords, compounds, paraphrases or idioms.

In this study, we shall investigate the nature and origin of the euphemistic expressions in Setswana. However, given the wide range of euphemisms in Setswana, we shall confine ourselves to those in a specific field, that is, the domain of sex-related phenomena.

Although sex matters, as embarrassing phenomena, are not usually talked about in Setswana communities, they have recently been brought to the open by the incidence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The assumption in this study is therefore that, with more open discourse of sex-related matters in Botswana, more euphemisms have been created in this country to camouflage the embarrassing nature of the various referents in the field. The sex-related matters include private parts, sexual activities, sexual secretions, sexual diseases and related phenomena.

Setswana Euphemisms

The researchers selected three locations in Botswana for their investigation, namely Gaborone, Selebi-Phikwe and Letlhakeng. The three locations were chosen not only because they represented three typical areas where Setswana is spoken, but also because each location had its own peculiarities. Gaborone is a cosmopolitan centre, Selebi-Phikwe is a mining centre with one of the highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the country, and Letlhakeng being an area where, apart from a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, there is a strong ethnic mixture. Letlhakeng is also a village where a minority language, Shekgalagarhi, is predominant, while Setswana is used as the national medium.

The data were collected by means of structured questionnaires, interviews and observation. The number of euphemisms for each of the sex-related objects or activities in each of the locations is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The Number of Euphemisms Used for the Various Objects and Activities in Each of the Locations

	Item	Gaborone	Selebi-Phikwe	Letlhakeng
1	male organ	8	24	14
2	female organ	7	21	20
3	female breasts	4	10	3
4	testicles	10	12	7
5	pubic hair	7	8	6
6	semen	10	16	6
7	vaginal fluid	6	12	9
8	sexually transmitted disease (STD)	5	13	7
9	homosexual	6	7	8
10	oral sex	3	4	4
11	male condom	5	14	8
12	female condom	4	12	8
13	to play sex	9	27	12
14	to penetrate sexually	12	19	16
15	to ejaculate	12	12	16
16	to masturbate	14	16	18
	Total	122	227	162

As shown in Table 1, the highest number of euphemisms in Setswana refers to common referents such as male/female organs, male condoms as well as common actions such as playing sex and sexual penetration. On the other hand, the less commonly referred practices in Setswana communities such as oral sex and homosexuality have fewer euphemisms. This could imply that there is a high correlation between the frequent use of a referent and the number of euphemisms referring to it.

As observed from Table 1, another interesting finding was that Selebi-Phikwe had many more euphemisms than the other two locations. This could be explained by the fact that the former, being a vibrant mining town and a place where group relationships are common, has generated many euphemisms which are not found in the other two locations.

The insurgence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic has given rise to an array of euphemisms which are restricted in usage and levels of formality. These slang-type euphemisms are only used in specific locations among peer groups or in specific institutions. Many of them tend to be used in informal speech, especially in the oral mode. Because of the difficulties in making a strict distinction between slang and typical euphemisms and in view of the fact that slang, like typical euphemisms, are expressions which emerge in a speech community for social reasons and for the facilitation of language use, we shall treat slang, in this study, as special types of euphemisms.

The Origin of the Sex-Related Euphemisms in Setswana

The Origin of the Setswana Euphemisms

After making an inventory of all the euphemisms collected in the three locations, 313 items were recorded. These items were categorized according to their origins. Several origins were identified and are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: *The Origin of the Sex-Related Euphemisms in Setswana*

	Origin	Number of items	Percentage
1	Extension of meaning	97	30.9%
2	Borrowing	89	28.4%
3	Compounding	80	25.6%
4	Derivation/Affixation	34	10.9%
5	Coinage	8	2.6%
6	Acronym	4	1.3%
7	Back-formation	1	0.3%
	Total	313	100%

As it can be seen from Table 2, the most common origins for the euphemisms in Setswana are extension of meaning, borrowing, compounding and derivation/affixation. These sources coincide with the most common strategies in the creation of Setswana lexical items.

Euphemisms Originating from Extension of Meaning

By far the most common strategy in the creation of Setswana lexical items is the extension of meaning, accounting for 30.9% of the data. This process has been used very extensively in the formation of the sex-related euphemisms in Setswana. The process involves the establishment of new meaning besides the usual one. In some cases, the original meaning has become overshadowed by the new one. The new meaning may be transparent, that is semantically related to the usual one (e.g. *bosadi* 'womanhood' which also means 'female organ'), or oblique, that is semantically unrelated to the usual one (e.g. *mapodisi* 'policemen' which also means 'semen'). Sometimes one needs high imagination to relate the two semantic fields. An example of sex-related euphemisms formed through extension of meaning is given in Table 3.

In some cases, borrowed words have been accorded new euphemistic meanings. Such words include *gerasi* (grass) and *bushi* (bush), both of which mean 'pubic hair'. Equally the word *dibole* (balls) refers to 'testicles' and *kama* (come) or *richa* (reach) which refer to 'ejaculation'. Such developments could be referred to as multiple processes of word formation (Yule 1996:70).

Table 3: Euphemisms Created by Extending the Meaning of Existing Lexical Items

Item	Original meaning	New meaning
sekausu	sock	condom
mosimane	boy	male organ
bosadi	womanhood	female organ
rmele	body	female organ
matametu/letlametlo	big frog	breast
boladu	pus	semen
metsi	water	semen
moroto	urine	semen
magodu	dish of beans and melon	semen
go tsena	to enter	to penetrate sexually
go ja	to eat	to have sex
morobalo	sleep (n)	sex act
go momona	to lick	to kiss
mae	eggs	testicles
go kgwa	to vomit	to ejaculate
go rota	to urinate	to ejaculate
go ithusa	to help oneself	to masturbate
moji	consumer	a man who likes sex
letopo	crest	female organ

From the examples given in Table 3 and the foregoing paragraph, it is clear that the process of extension of meaning involves carrying over or transferring one semantic field of reference to another, which is characteristic of metaphor (Finch, 2000: 167). In this way, the words are given another semantic orientation extending or creating new prototypical characteristics.

Euphemisms Originating from Loanwords

Another common source of origin for the sex-related euphemisms in Setswana is borrowing, which constitutes 28.4% of our data. As it is the case in most languages (Akmajian et al., 1984:333), loanwords tend to be less repugnant than indigenous words. It is for this reason that most words in English, which depict private parts, such as "vagina", "penis", labia minora" and "testicles" have originated from Latin. In Setswana, the most commonly used source language is English, which plays a major role in Botswana as both official and second language. Setswana euphemisms which originate from English form the majority of the loaned euphemisms. The other sources include Ikalanga, IsiZulu and Tsotsitaal. Some examples of loaned euphemisms are given in Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 4: Loanwords from English

Item	Origin	Gloss
samshiti	some sheet	sexually transmitted disease
diki	dick	male organ
paepelaene	pipeline	male organ
kuku	cookie	female organ
pusi	puss	female organ
maeporopate	my property	female organ
semene	semen	sperm
faka	fuck	to penetrate sexually
mastabeita	masturbate	masturbate
romansa	Romance	oral sex
dibole	balls	testicles'
dairi	dairy	female breasts
paepe	pipe	male organ
kogi	cog	male sexual organ

Table 5: Other Euphemisms of Foreign Origin (Other than English) in Setswana

Item	Gloss
ntombela	male organ
mozanga	male organ
mochechaphanzi	male organ
setlhabalaza	a girl or woman who likes sex
khanda	resist to have sex
moninxo	to have sex
tlaskotolo	ejaculate
condrixoko	condom'
congri	condom
polorekere	condom
legwimba	prostitute
xenza	to use condom
leizulu	male organ (literally, a Zulu person)
shaka	a male organ (from Shaka Zulu)
mfana	male organ (literally, boy)
sehlenza	prostitute
ledomba	condom

The realization of loan words would normally depend on the degree of nativisation. The more nativised a loanword is the more it would conform to the phonological and morphological structure of Setswana. The degree of nativisation, on its part, would depend on a number of factors which include education of the speaker, relationship with the interlocutor, context of situation and embedded personal

habits. In fact, since most of the users of these types of euphemisms are bilingual in Setswana and English, some of the incidences where the un-nativised forms are used could be regarded as cases of code-switching in which the loaned euphemisms are the embedded code elements. The nativised English verbs normally end in the suffix *-a*, consistent with the structure of verbs in Setswana, just as is the case in most other Bantu languages. Examples of the newly nativised verbs are given in Table 6.

Table 6: Some of the Newly Nativised English Verbs

Item	origin	Gloss
go enjoya	to enjoy	to ejaculate
go faka	to fuck	to play sex
go sepema	from sperm	to ejaculate
gp saka	to suck	to have oral sex
go masetabeita	to masturbate	to masturbate
go karna	to come	to ejaculate

All the Setswana nouns are typical of Bantu languages and must belong to a specific noun class. They must, therefore, be preceded by class prefixes. Where the first syllable corresponds to a given prefix, the item would normally be placed in that noun class, such as the nouns in Table 7, whose first syllable resembles the prefix of noun class 7 in Setswana.

Table 7: Nouns whose First Syllables Coincide with Class 7 in the Setswana Noun Class System

Source Language	Nativised Form	Gloss
sperm (English)	<i>se-peme</i> (noun Cl 7)	semen
semen (English)	<i>se-mene</i> (noun Cl. 7)	semen
sex (English)	<i>se-kese</i> (noun Cl. 7)	sex

In cases where the first syllable does not correspond or resemble a regular prefix, the noun would usually belong to the noun class which has \emptyset - (zero) prefix, namely class 9. The plural form would have the prefix *di-* (Class 10). This is exemplified in Table 8.

Some of these loanwords are restricted to specific groups of speakers, particularly the younger people, and often used as slang. However, many of them have spread wide and far, and have become institutionalized in the language. Such forms include *paepe* (pipe) 'penis', *pusi* (pussy) 'female organ', *kuku* (cookie) 'female organ' and *semene* (semen) 'sperm'.

Table 8: English Nouns Nativised in Class 9 (Ø-)

Source Language	Nativised Form	Gloss
pipe (English)	ø-paepe	male organ
virgin (English)	ø-vejine	female organ
dairy (English)	ø-daere	breast
pussy (English)	ø-pusi	female organ
ball (English)	ø-bole	testicle
overall (English)	ø-obarolo	condom

Given that many of the loaned euphemisms are used as slang, they are usually restricted to certain social groups or areas and often fall in disuse after a certain time. Most of the loanwords in this category could be said to be metaphorical in that they have been accorded a new semantic orientation either trans-culturally or in terms of semantic shift.

Euphemisms Originating from Compounding

Compounding is another common process in the formation of euphemisms in Setswana. In our study, it accounted for 25.6% of the data. In fact, the process of compounding is one of the most common strategies of word formation in the language, and has been used very extensively in recent years in creating new lexical items, particularly technical terms.

Table 9: Euphemistic Compounds in Setswana

Item	Constituent words	Gloss
dijotsame	<i>dijo</i> 'food' + <i>tsame</i> 'mine'	sexual organ
nyobaphefo	<i>lenyoba</i> 'release' + <i>phefo</i> 'wind'	masturbate
polorekere	(<i>polo</i> 'penis' + <i>rekere</i> 'rubber')	condom
matlhomatlho	<i>matlho</i> 'eyes' + <i>matlho</i> 'eyes'	a person with many partners
gojamathe	<i>go ja</i> 'to eat' + <i>mathe</i> 'saliva'	to kiss
mojimogolo	<i>moji</i> 'consumer'+ <i>mogolo</i> 'big'	a man who likes sex
mmakgwebo	<i>mma</i> 'mother/lady' + <i>kgwebo</i> business	'prostitute
bomma-monatenate	<i>bomma</i> 'ladies/women' + <i>monate</i> 'sweet' + <i>nate</i> 'sweet'	a prostitute, a woman who provides pleasure.
mmapelotshweu	<i>mma</i> 'mother/woman' + <i>pelo</i> 'heart' + <i>tshweu</i> 'white'	easy going woman, prostitute
sekgwasentsho	<i>sekgwa</i> 'forest' + <i>sentsho</i> 'dark'	'pubic hair'

The most common compounds involve the combination of two and sometimes several lexical items into one entity whose meaning is different from the sum total of the constituent items. Thus, most compounds could also be considered as forms of idiomatic expressions. The most common combinations involve the following: two juxtaposed nouns, a nominalised verb and an object noun, a noun and a qualifier (adjective, possessive or demonstrative) and a nominalised verb followed by an adverb. Examples of sex-related euphemistic compounds are given in Table 9.

Some of the compounds are formed by the use of connectives which link the relevant lexical items. The most common of these link words include the genitive formative *-a*, which usually links a possessor noun to a possessed noun. The other types of linking involves the locative prefixes *mo-*, *fa-* and *ga-* as well as the copular prefixes. Examples of such compounds are given in Table 10.

Table 10: Compounds Created through Combination with Link Words

Item	Constituent words	Gloss
tankayametsi	<i>tanka</i> 'tank' + <i>metsi</i> 'water'	female condom
kgomoyamashi	<i>kgomo</i> 'cow' + <i>mashi</i> 'milk'	breast
moretlwawatsela	<i>moretlwa</i> 'fruit' + <i>tsela</i> 'path'	easy going person, prostitute
morotowamaoto	<i>moroto</i> + 'urine' + <i>maoto</i> 'legs'	semen
gobayafantshung	<i>go baya</i> 'satisfy' + <i>ntshung</i> 'little'	to penetrate sexually
Gotsenyabonna-mobosading	<i>gotsenya</i> 'to put in' + <i>bonna</i> 'manhood' + <i>bosading</i> 'into womanhood'	to penetrate sexually
thobalanoyalegano	<i>thobalano</i> 'sleeping together' + <i>legano</i> 'mouth'	oral sex
mafuraabosadi	<i>mafura</i> 'oil' + <i>bosadi</i> 'womanhood'	vaginal fluid
nama-monameng	<i>nama</i> 'meat' + <i>nameng</i> 'into meat'	sex without condom
moragoasehuba	<i>morago</i> 'behind' + <i>sehuba</i> 'chest'	testicles

Some of the compounds are made of entire clauses or sentences. The most common of these are relative clauses and imperative forms. Examples of such compounds are given in Table 11.

In fact, as mentioned above, the process of compounding could also be described as one of the strategies of forming idiomatic expressions in Setswana. In most cases, the euphemistic meaning differs substantially from the sum total of the individual words. This peculiarity adds a literary and decorative dimension to the communicative power of this type of words.

Table 11: Compounds Consisting of Clauses or Sentences

Item	Literal meaning	Gloss
nthoesafoleng	(literally: the sore which does not heal)	'female organ'
tse naoitseele	(literally: come in and get it for yourself)	'easy going person, prostitute'
ngwanayoophuthetsweng	(literally: a child who has something still wrapped)	'virgin'
morobalo-ophepa	(literally: a sleep/sex which is pure/intact)	'safe sex'
modimooankgopola	(literally: God has answered me)	'climax in the sexual act'
batho-babaitshotlang	(literally: people who do not care about themselves)	'prostitutes'
batho-babathusang	(literally: people who provide help)	'prostitutes'
bula-retsene	(literally: open and let us in) 'easy going person,	prostitute'

Euphemisms Originating From the Derivational Process

Derivation is a common process in the formation of new words in Setswana. It involves the affixation of new prefixes or suffixes to the root or stem in order to derive new lexical items with specific meanings. The same process is used in the formation of sex-related euphemisms. As in the case of compounds, the resultant meanings are totally different from the sum total of the individual morphemes. The most common mechanism is the attachment of a verbal derivative (verbal suffix) and/or one of the nominalization suffixes (-i or -o) to the root or stem, as exemplified in Table 12.

Table 12: Euphemisms Formed through Suffixal Derivatives

Verb root/stem	Gloss	Derived form	Euphemistic meaning
-j-a	'eat'	moj-i	a man who likes sex
-j-a	'eat'	se-jes-i	prostitute
-robal-a	'sleep'	mo-robalan-o	act of having sex
-tshol-a	'serve food'	-tsholol-a	to ejaculate
-gopal-a	'remember'	-gopal-w-a	ejaculate
-dir-a	'do'	mo-dir-el-a (setshaba)	prostitute
-rek-a	'buy'	ba-rekis-i	prostitutes
n-tsutsu	'penis'	n-tsutsw-ane	male organ

The other strategy used in creating new lexical items through derivation is the attachment of new prefixes, such that the usual prefixes are substituted with less regular ones, as exemplified in Table 13.

Table 13: Euphemisms Formed through Derivation Involving New Noun Prefixes

Usual form	Gloss	New form	Euphemistic meaning
<i>mma</i>	'mother, woman'	<i>bo-mma</i> (Cl.14)	female organ
<i>monna</i>	'man, person'	<i>bo-nna</i>	male sexual organ
<i>lelwapa</i>	'home, family'	<i>o - lwapa</i>	male sexual organ
<i>go-robal-a</i>	'to sleep, lie down'	<i>mo-robalo</i>	sex
<i>go-thus-a</i>	'to help'	<i>mo-thusi</i>	easy going person, prostitute
<i>go-latlh-a</i>	'to throw away'	<i>mo-latlhi</i>	easy going person, prostitute
<i>-sha</i>	'new'	<i>mo-sha</i>	virgin
<i>pelo</i>	'heart'	<i>o-pelo</i>	easy going person, prostitute

The reflexive prefix *i-* has also been used to derive new meanings and therefore create new lexical items. This is exemplified in Table 14.

Table 14: Euphemisms Formed through the Prefixation of the Reflexive *-i-*

Verb root	Gloss	Derived form	Euphemistic meaning
<i>- fapha</i>	'tidy up'	<i>ikgapha</i>	abstain from sex
<i>- baya</i>	'satisfy'	<i>ipaya</i>	penetrate sexually
<i>- thusa</i>	'help'	<i>ithusa</i>	masturbate
<i>- robala</i>	'sleep, lie down'	<i>ithobala</i>	masturbate
<i>- gomotsa</i>	'console'	<i>ikgomotsa</i>	masturbate
<i>- tshameka</i>	'play'	<i>itshameka</i>	masturbate
<i>- somela</i>	'give out something'	<i>itsomela</i>	masturbate
<i>- ja</i>	'eat'	<i>ija</i>	masturbate
<i>- bolaya</i>	'kill'	<i>ipolaya</i>	have unprotected sex

As it can be seen from Table 14, the reflexive *i-* has usually been used to derive a verb in which the action is directed to the doer. The common derived meaning is that of "masturbate", which usually involves an action to oneself.

The use of derivative suffixes may tone down an otherwise repugnant word. This is the case with *nnywana* (*nnyo-ana*) 'female organ' which is the diminutive form of the usual word *nnyo* 'vagina'. The latter is direct and repugnant, and is therefore not used in public or in normal speech.

Euphemisms Originating from Coinage

Coinage is one of the processes of word formation in which new lexical items are established through mere creation. This process is not very common in Setswana,

except where onomatopoeic and ideophonic forms are created to represent sounds, qualities or feelings. In the case of sex-related euphemisms, there are only a handful of coined items, most of which are ideophonic in nature, as they have repetitive sounds and eccentric syllabic forms. The following (Table 15) are typical examples.

Table 15: *Euphemisms Formed through Coinage (Mainly Based On Ideophonic Forms)*

Item	Gloss
phephe	'female organ'
senana	female organ'
monokonoko	virgin'
jojo	'female condom'
lebelele	prostitute
semme	a girl/man who likes playing sex
sebebere	a girl/man who likes playing sex
sefefe	a girl/man who likes playing sex

Most of these lexical items belong to the noun category. Their meanings are usually associated with certain emotional feelings or imaginations.

Euphemisms Originating from Acronyms

Acronyms are abbreviations which are used as lexical items. An abbreviation may become so commonly used that the full form may no longer be available in the speaker's memory. This is the case of common acronyms such as UNESCO, NATO, UNICEF, SADC, ATM or VCR. Usually where a full name like Venereal Disease or Water Closet is repugnant, the acronym may be used to make the form less irritating. Hence the forms VD or WC are often used with euphemistic connotations.

In Setswana, the euphemistic acronyms include STD (for Sexually Transmitted Diseases), CD (for condom). One ought to note that the abbreviation AIDS has never been euphemistic because it was introduced in its acronymic form. Thus it has remained repugnant. Setswana speakers have come up with new euphemisms for it which include *mogare* (lit. 'germ'), *phamokate* (lit. 'take away suddenly and bury in the ground'); *segajaja* (lit. 'a very strong cry, a wail'). Many people prefer to refer to HIV even in situations of fully blown AIDS condition.

Euphemisms Originating from the Process of Back-Formation

Only one euphemism was found to originate from the process of back-formation. This is the verb *belet-a* 'to practice prostitution', which appears to emanate from the coined noun *le-belete* 'prostitute', which, on its part, was first used by mine workers to refer to mistresses who regularly visited the mine workers. The verb *belet-a*, which has developed from that word, is not well known among the Setswana speakers, as it is a relatively new creation.

Euphemisms Originating from Other Sources

The study did not find any euphemisms originating from the other processes which are used to create new words, such as clipping (the process of shortening a word, such as *phone* from *telephone*) or blending (the process of joining parts of words to form a new word, such as *motor* and *hotel* forming *motel*). These processes are very rarely used in Setswana language. In fact, they are not common strategies in word formation in most languages (Yule 1996).

Special Characteristics of the Sex-Related Euphemisms in Setswana

In general the origins, forms and types of the sex-related euphemisms are not different from the other euphemisms in Setswana. In fact, they do not differ substantially from the other lexical items in the language. However, they are distinct in the following ways.

First, one notices an abundance of forms for the same concept. Concepts such as 'male organ', 'female organ', 'penetrate sexually', 'masturbate', 'ejaculate', 'play sex', 'semen' and 'condom' have many lexical items. This could be explained by the frequency in which these concepts are referred to or the multiple origins in various social groups. Hence, many terms have developed and often cross into other locations, particularly given the centrality of sexuality in human life as well as the taboos associated with it.

Second, many of these euphemisms have slang origins and use. Although as euphemisms they provide an indirect reference to otherwise repugnant or irritating sexual phenomena, many of these items have originated in specific geographical areas or among defined social groups, and may not spread to other locations or into wider social circles. Also, some may not be institutionalized in the mainstream Setswana speaking society.

Third, as expected, most of these euphemisms are used by the younger generation. Most users are young people, mainly students, young workers and village youth, who belong to the sexually active age. They are also people who interact easily and create close relationships. Such frequent interactions allow free discussion of sexual matters and the use of specific register.

Fourth, the lexical items referring to sex-related euphemisms have recently been enhanced by the incidence of HIV/AIDS which has created more terms as well as brought new conceptions and attitudes. Thus, new lexical items relating to safe-sex, abstinence and female condoms have been added. Moreover, less used terms such as *condom*, *masturbate* and *friendship without sex* have been enhanced.

New attitudes have also been formed. The earlier attitudes of praising those who were "bulls" in sexual indulgence have been replaced by attitudes of pity for such people. Thus terms such as *lebelele* (originally meaning 'misfit') and *seaka* (originally meaning 'lost item') have emerged in reference to 'prostitute'. Or the term *batho-babaitshotlang* (literally: 'people who do not care about themselves', in reference to 'easy going persons') are now used with negative connotations (Batibo and Kofi, forthcoming).

Lastly, many of the euphemisms begin as colloquialisms or casual expressions of slang nature. However, with time and extensive use, they usually spread geographically and become institutionalized in the language. Many of the euphemisms described in this study are still in the process of fossilization, that is becoming fixed and stable in usage as well as extending to other parts where the language is used. What is interesting in the study is that, many of the metaphorical processes used in the choice of expressions resemble those which are used in other countries. In Table 16 we present a list of items used at the University of Botswana which resemble items representing similar notions at Makerere University (Uganda) (Ndoleriire p.c.).

Table 16: Some English Expressions which are Commonly Used by Students at the Universities of Botswana and Makerere (Uganda)

Concept	University of Botswana (Botswana)	Makerere University (Uganda)
'small pieces of paper with jotted answers in an exam thrown to colleagues'	<i>bullets, scuds</i>	<i>bullets, scuds, compacts</i>
'condom'	<i>CD, sock, (sekausu), overall</i>	<i>CD, sock, glove, raincoat, warhead, boot</i>
'breasts'	<i>dairy</i>	<i>dairy (cooperative)</i>
'stamina in having sex'	<i>fuel</i>	<i>gas</i>
'large buttocks'	<i>mountain</i>	<i>mountain, hemisphere</i>
'to have sex'	<i>throw out, put</i>	<i>put, hump</i>
'bring a girl/boy in one's room'	<i>import</i>	<i>import, conquer territory</i>

The similarity, such as the one shown in Table 16, demonstrates not only the identity of objects in the speakers' lives but also their imaginations and manner of conceptualization.

Conclusion

Like all other societies all over the world, the Setswana-speaking community has set certain modes in the use of its language. Different forms of register are used in specific situations. The community is, for instance, sensitive to taboo words or any repugnant or irritating expressions in situations which call for polite and respectful speech. Hence more pleasant expressions, namely euphemisms, have to be used in order to render any reference to such phenomena less unpleasant or alarming. One of the sensitive areas where euphemisms are used more readily is in sex-related discourse.

Like it is the usual pattern and strategies in the formation of euphemisms, many of them have resulted from either metaphorical or idiomatic processes (Sontag, 1989; Batibo and Kopi, forthcoming). These processes have given rise to

not only a new semantic orientation of these items, but also a literary or decorative dimension. This would explain why euphemisms tend to display a pleasant flavor.

Setswana language has generated many lexical items to refer to this phenomenon. The most common sources have been extension of meaning, borrowing, compounding and derivation. The less used sources have been coinage, acronymy and back-formation. Many of these terms are used in restricted circles and therefore have slang character. The most frequent users are the younger generations who are also the most sexually active people.

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