

## A Comparative Study of the Structure of Sesotho and siSwati Forms Used in Whatsapp Chats

Motjope, T

Department of African Languages and Literature, University of Eswatini

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### ABSTRACT

Social media platforms like WhatsApp have introduced new communication styles, including the use of informal abbreviations and shortened phrases. This study investigated how this trend has affected Sesotho and siSwati languages. Specifically, the paper explored the types of short forms used by Sesotho and siSwati speakers in WhatsApp, as well as whether such platforms could influence the structural aspects of the two languages. Using text analysis as a research instrument, the study analysed short forms used in WhatsApp messages from two demographics in each language: 20-34-year-old young adults and 35-60-year-old adults. The sample for this study was constituted by the selected university student groups with younger demographics, and that of the adults represented by church and local residents' groups. For a gender variable, each group included both males and females. Based on the communicative approach, the analysis revealed that Sesotho and siSwati speakers used short, single-word, phrasal and sentential forms in their chats of the social media. Interestingly, both languages shared certain characteristics, while others were unique to each language. Shared forms included consonant clusters, letter and number combinations and prefix omissions, with the youth, more frequently than adults, reportedly using such shortcuts. The study would, therefore, conclude that WhatsApp communication styles likely influence Sesotho and siSwati, potentially leading to the integration of some short forms into the orthographic systems of the two languages.

**KEYWORDS:** *WhatsApp forms, chats, Sesotho, siSwati, words, phrases, structure*

### INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms, including WhatsApp have become the fastest and most preferred means of communication and information sharing in different societies. According to Al-Saleem (2011), social media is a major means of global communication. Using social media platforms has become part of users' daily lives due to their efficiency. However, social media platforms have significantly changed the nature of communication in various areas as in politics, merchandising and religion (Ekwueme and Ebiere, 2019). Some changes, especially in such social media platforms as WhatsApp, have also influenced writing styles across languages. This influence is particularly evident among the youth, who often adopt informal writing conventions within WhatsApp chats (Malatji and Lesame, 2019). The conventions can deviate from standardised orthographies. Although changes in writing styles seem common in youth's WhatsApp conversations, the practice has had audience even among the adults as

observed from group chats of some adults in African indigenous languages like Sesotho and siSwati. The words Sesotho and siSwati are restricted to the languages spoken in Lesotho and Eswatini (formerly, Swaziland) in this study respectively. Like any other speakers of English, Sesotho and siSwati native speakers use different WhatsApp writing forms in their conversation with other members of the community, including family and friends. However, not documented is the way such forms could have influenced the structure of words and/or phrases in Sesotho and siSwati. This study therefore intends to explore the types of Sesotho and siSwati short forms used in WhatsApp messages of selected groups of youth, 20- to 34-year olds and adults, ranging from 35- to 60-year olds.

According to Motjope-Mokhali et al. (2023), Sesotho is spoken in Lesotho, Free State and some parts of urban areas of South Africa whereas siSwati is spoken in Eswatini, Mpumalanga and some urban areas of South Africa. Sesotho and siSwati are part of the Bantu languages that belong to the South Eastern Zone of

Bantu languages based on Doke’s classification (Miti, 2006). However, Sesotho and siSwati belong to different groups within the Bantu group of languages with Sesotho being part of the Sotho-Tswana group while siSwati is part of the Nguni group. The Sotho-Tswana group consists of Sesotho, Setswana, Sepedi (Northern-Sotho), Silozi, Kgalagadi, Lovedu and Phalaborwa while the Nguni group comprises siSwati, isiZulu, isiXhosa and isiNdebele (Miti, 2006). Therefore, certain features

are shared by the two languages, with some differences due to some linguistic and cultural variations. For instance, the two languages make use of prefixes that are attached to noun stems and verb stems when forming nouns and verbs; Sesotho has monosyllabic prefixes while siSwati consists of both monosyllabic and disyllabic prefixes for nouns as indicated in Table 1 below. The following Table 1 presents Sesotho and siSwati nominal prefixes.

*Table 1. The structure of the Sesotho and siSwati nominal prefixes*

Sesotho Nominal Prefixes		SiSwati Nominal Prefixes	
1.	mo-	1.	umu-
2.	ba-	2.	(e)ba-
3.	mo-	3.	umu-
4.	me-	4.	imi-
5.	le-	5.	li-
6.	ma-	6.	ema-
7.	se-	7.	si-
8.	li-	8.	ti-
9.	n-	9.	iN-
10.	li-	10.	tiN-
14.	bo-	11.	lu-
15.	ho-	14.	bu-
	(Hlalele, 2005:v)	15.	ku-
			Miti (2006:118)

Based on information in Table 1 above, while having structural differences, the two languages have nominal prefixes.

Also, Sesotho uses disjunctive writing, comprised of stand-alone in a sentence, while siSwati uses conjunctive writing, with some words fused in a sentence.

The following sentences in the simple present tense illustrate:

<b>Sesotho:</b>	<i>Kea leboha</i>	Ke	+ a	leboha
	Thank you	I	+ [simple presmarker]	thank [stem]
<b>SiSwati:</b>	<i>Ngiyabonga</i>	Ngi	ya	bonga
	Thank you	I	[simple pres marker]	thank [stem]

Noted in the above sentences is that this sentence is made up of two words in Sesotho, whereas it appears as one word in siSwati. According to Prinsloo and De Schryver (2002), the Nguni languages group can be written conjunctively, while those from the Sotho-Tswana, along with Tshivenda and Xitsonga group, follow a disjunctive writing system. This means that even languages that are somehow related may still have differences. Ekwueme and Ebiere (2019) posit that each language has a system of rules that enables speakers to integrate sound structures and meanings in order to communicate easily. They further state that “for people to have precise and effective communication, the language used must be understood by each player in the communication circles” (2019:85). It follows that Sesotho and siSwati youth and adults can create WhatsApp forms in their chats that may be understood by other mother tongue speakers in their languages.

**SOCIAL MEDIA AND AFRICAN LANGUAGES**

With a focus on promoting African indigenous languages in social media, such scholars as Sunday et al. (2018), Ligidima and Makananise (2020) and Malatji (2019) investigated if youth use African indigenous languages in social media.

Further, Sunday et al. (2018) studied use of indigenous languages among the youth interacting in social media, the prospects and challenges for sustaining local cultures and traditions in Nigeria. For determining possibility of integrating social media into indigenous languages, the study analysed online conversations of selected undergraduate students, some of whom were found to use indigenous languages when communicating with fellow Nigerian peers, though English language was still dominant. Noting the declining use of local languages in recent years, the study highlighted their value thereby

concluding that it was high time the government understood the culture of the social media users in relation to using indigenous languages, seen here as a tool for promoting their acceptance in the Nigerian society.

Ligidima and Makananise (2020) explored how social media can be used to promote African indigenous languages in South Africa. The study sought to establish the perceptions, opinions and views of a selected group of young students based at one rural university in South Africa. The focus was on the use of WhatsApp as a communicative platform to promote indigenous African languages such as Tshivenda, Sepedi and Xitsonga. The study revealed the majority of students as preferring to use English language as a language for communication in WhatsApp platform for various reasons. From the findings the youth reportedly had difficulty shortening words in indigenous languages while texting. The indigenous African languages were also found to be rarely used in the students’ online communication, that is, WhatsApp messenger with their friends.

Like Ligidima and Makananise (2020), Malatji (2019) investigated the role played by youth in Limpopo Province to use social media to promote and conserve African languages for example, Sepedi, Tshivenda and Xitsonga. Malatji (2019) studied youth language-usage patterns in social media platforms, noting the majority of them as preferring English and avoiding the African languages in such a platform. The study further discovered that chats on both Facebook and Twitter are dominated by English, which the youth chose over Sepedi, Tshivenda, and Xitsonga. However, youth prefer using the indigenous languages on WhatsApp because their contacts frequently code-switch in social media. The study recommended creation of the African languages-based social media sites so as to motivate usage in such platforms.

Ekwueme and Ebiere (2019) explored a public opinion on the influence of social media platforms on indigenous languages in Bayelsa, Nigeria. Having the sample of the various age groups of the public, the study reported many participants as considering social media as a means of communication which posed challenges for native languages. In this view, the public indigenous languages were noted for facing extinction should the public and government not do anything urgently about the situation.

As such, the literature suggests that scholars are interested in promoting African indigenous languages.

*Table 2. Sesotho words and their WhatsApp forms*

Sesotho Words	WhatsApp form	Users	Translation
Motho	Mo2; mothoo	Mo2 (Y) Mothoo (A)	Person
Ntate	Ntt; ntte	A/Y	Father
Abuti	Ati	A/Y	Elder brother

However, there appears to be less literature on how social media writing style used in WhatsApp has been affecting the structure of words and phrases of such African languages. Nor have the previous studies shed any light on the contribution of adults to WhatsApp writing styles. Therefore, with such a gap, this study intends to explore the types of Sesotho and siSwati WhatsApp forms used in youth and adult group chats. The following section presents the research methodology followed in the study.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Based on the qualitative and descriptive approach, this study explored the types of Sesotho and siSwati WhatsApp forms used in selected youth and adults group chats. Therefore, the study compared short forms used in WhatsApp group messages from two demographics in each language: young adults with the age ranging from 20 to 34 years, and adults from 35 to 60 years. The target university student groups represented the younger demographics, while the church and local residents’ groups represented adults. Each group included both males and females. The data were collected from eight WhatsApp groups, four in Sesotho, and the other four in siSwati. One language group had two groups comprised of conversations among the adults, while the other two included conversations among the youth. From the conversations using the two indigenous languages, the short forms were randomly selected in order to establish the extent of using WhatsApp forms in these languages by the youth and adults. Although some conversations were in English, the chosen chats were limited to those using the focal languages. The analysis focused on the written content within these WhatsApp groups, examining how Sesotho and siSwati words and phrases are structured in the focal chats. Drawing on the communicative theory that prioritises the target audience’s understanding and responses, the study determined whether and how the message could resonate across the focal texts (Newmark, 1988). The next section presents the findings of the study.

**FINDINGS**

This section presents the writing styles found in the conversations of both the Sesotho and siSwati mother-tongue speaking youth and adults targeted in this study. Specifically, the focus has been on the chats made using the two indigenous languages. Any sections with code-switching, particularly in the chats among the youth have been excluded.

## A Comparative Study of the Structure of Sesotho and siSwati Forms Used in Whatsapp Chats

Bo-‘m’e	Bo mme	A/Y	Mothers
‘M’e	Mme	A/Y	Mother
‘Na	Nna	A/Y	I, me, myself
Feela	Fl; fla	Y	But, only; without reason
Ngoaneso	Nneso, ‘neso; ‘nesu	A (F)	One’s sibling
Molula-setulo	Molula-stulo; mula-stulo	Molula-stulo (A); mula-stulo (Y)	Chairperson
Moratuo	Ratuo	A (F)	Lover
Monate	Mnate; mnats	Y	Nice/delicious
Joang?	Jng?	Y	How?
Khele!	Khelek	A/Y	(Interjective) Of astonishment
Hele!	helek; heleek; heleee	A	(Interjective) Of astonishment
Khili!	Khilik; Khiliiiik	A	(Interjective) Of astonishment
Hmm!	Hmk	A	(Interjective) Of surprise
Aebo!	Haaiiboo; haebo	Y	Of surprise
Phephing	Phephyn	Y	Sorry (to a family/many people)
Mohaisane	haizoo; haizi	A	Neighbour
Utloa	Utl	Y	To hear; to understand
Eena	Ena	A/Y	He, she; him, her
Jo!	Joo	A	Of sorrow
Kannete	Kannete	Y	That is true, honestly
Sethunya	Sthunya	A/Y	Gun
Setopong	Stopong; Stopon	Stopong (A) Stopon (Y)	At a bus/tax stop/rank
Sepetlele	Spetlele; spetlel	Spetlele (A) Spetlel (Y)	Hospital
Maseru	MSU; MSR	MSU (A/Y) MSR (Y)	Maseru (Lesotho’s capital city)
Bothabotho Teyateyaneng	BB; B <sup>2</sup> TY	BB (A/Y) B <sup>2</sup> (Y) TY (A/Y)	Name of the district Name of a town
Tla	Tl	Y	Will; to come
Li	D	Y	Concord for classes 8 & 10
Leboha	Lbha	Y	To thank
Sefapano	Sfapano	A/Y	Swearing
Hore	Hr	Y	That; in order that
Masepala	Maspala	A/Y	Municipality
<b>Phrases/Sentences</b>			
Ra se keraja; Se keoabuajoalo	Ra skeraja; skabuajoal	A Y	We ate a lot; Do not talk like that
AusiTankiso	SiTankiso; STa; Asi, Aus	A/Y	Sister Tankiso
‘M’eoaka	Mmeaka; MeaK; Mmaka	A/Y (F & young males)	My mother
‘M’eMats’epo	Mmeats’epo	A/Y (F & young males)	Mother of Ts’epo
Mosalioaka	Msaliaka	A (M)	My wife
Keho re	Kore; ko re	Y	That is
Ha honabothata	Haonabthat	Y	There is no problem
Se ke	Ske; ska	A/Y	Do not
Ausioaka	Suaka	A/Y	My elder sister

The WhatsApp forms presented in Table 1 above were from the students’ and adults’ group conversations. That is, in all the four groups (two belonging to youth and two for adults), short forms were seen on the chats. These appeared in various spelling forms as indicated in the above Table. The spelling variations can be classified into 11 types. The first forms consist of alphabetical letters and a number as is *mo2* for (*motho*) referring to ‘person’ and *B<sup>2</sup>* for *Botha-Bothe*, one of the districts in Lesotho. This form is rare and was used by the youth, with the adults using the words with long

vowel sounds in the last syllable, as in *mothoo*. Other instances with long vowel sounds are *heleee*, *khiliii*, and *haaiiboo*, with the first and last syllables, lengthened. As noted, all these are ‘interjections, suggesting surprise. The extended form was mostly used by both the males and female adults. The third one is made up of consonant clusters only, marked by *fl* for *feel a* meaning ‘but, only or for no reason’; *ntt* for *ntate* referring to ‘father’; *jng?* for *joang?* translated as ‘how?’ just to mention a few. The fourth form omits the medial syllable /bu/ as in *ati* for *abuti* meaning ‘elder brother’

and /u/ in *asi* for *ausi* which means ‘elder sister’. The bold parts show syllables that were omitted. The fifth one omits the first syllable which, in some cases, is the prefix as in *ratuoa* for *moratuoa* (**mo** - prefix) meaning ‘lover’. This word which is not restricted to a lover, can also be used to denote ‘my love’ in friendly and/or family relations and *nneso* for *ngoaneso* (**ngoa** - syllable) meaning ‘one’s sibling’. In the chats *ratuoa* and *nneso* were used largely by female adults. The sixth form deletes the first vowel of the first syllable in a word like *mnate* for *monate* meaning ‘nice/delicious’, *sthunya* for *sethunya* ‘gun’, *stopong* for *setopong* ‘at the taxi/bus rank’ and *spetlele* for *sepetelele* meaning ‘hospital’. Here, the vowels in bold were left out in the chats. The seventh form also leaves out the last letter of a word as in *spetlele-* for *sepetelele* ‘hospital’ and *stopon-* for *setopong* meaning ‘at the taxi/bus rank’. Here, the last [e] in *sepetelele* and the last [g] in *setopong* were omitted. The eighth form consists of abbreviations such as *MSU* or *MSR* for *Maseru*, the capital city; *BB* for *Botha-Bothe* and *TY* for *Teyateyaneng*, all place names. Some of these abbreviations, particularly *MSU*, *BB* and *TY*, are not the result of social media as they have been used by the public transport operators long before social media came into existence.

In addition, the ninth has new forms such as *haizoo/haizi* for *mohaisane*, which means ‘neighbour’ and *phephyn* for *phephing* referring to empathy or ‘sorrow’. The tenth

*Table 3: SiSwati words and their WhatsApp forms*

SiSwati Words	Informal forms	Users	Translation
Yebo	Yeb; yb; yep; ya	Yeb; yb; yep (Y) Ya (A)	Yes
wota	Wta	Y	Come
kucala	Kcal	Y	Before
Ncesi	Nces; ncec	A / Y	Sorry
Manzini	Manz; MZN/MZ	Manz (A) MZN (Y) MZ (Y)	Manzini (town, city)
Ezulwini	Ezu; Zulwin/Zulwini	Ezu; Zulwin/Zulwini (A/Y) A/Y	Place/township
Nhlangano	NHO		Place
kusasa	Ksasa; sasa	Ksasa (A) Kasa (Y)	Tomorrow
imali	Imal	A / Y	Money
Bafowethu	Ba4; b4; bafo	Ba4; b4 (Y) [M] Bafo (A) [M]	Brothers
Mnakethu	Mnake2; m4w2	Mnake2 (A/Y) [M] m4w2 (Y) [M]	My brother
thula	2la	Y	Shut up
sisi	Cc; sis	A/Y	Sister
Dzadzewetfu	Dzadzew2; dzadze	Dzadzew2 (A/Y) Dzadze (A)	My sister
sikolwa	Skolwa; skol	Skolwa (A) Skol (Y)	School
sibali	Cbl; cbal	Cbl (Y) Cbal (A)	Brother-in-law
umzala	Zala; mzi; mzee	Zala (Y) mzi; mzee (A/Y)	Cousin

usage indicates the original forms of the Sesotho words in question such as *mme* for ‘m’e meaning ‘mother’ and *nna* for ‘na which means ‘I/me/myself’. The eleventh one omits any letter or letters that the speaker may want to leave out. This was noted in single words and phrases. Examples: *mula-stulo* for *molula-setulo* meaning ‘chairperson’ where [ol] from the first and second syllables of the word *molula* were left out and [e] of the first syllable of the second word that formed compound word was omitted; *ena* for *eena* meaning ‘she, he or him, her’ where the second [e] was deleted; *spetlele* for *sepetelele* ‘hospital’ where the vowel of the first and last syllables were omitted; *lbha* for *leboha* meaning ‘to thank’ where vowels of the first and second syllables were left out; *meak* for ‘m’eoaka meaning ‘one’s mother’. Such forms have been more salient in women’s chats, referring to the second women in conversation – in ‘m’eoaka the vowels in bold were omitted and in *mmeats’epo* for ‘m’e Matšepo [m] of *Matšepo* is deleted. The same pattern obtains in the phrases: *kore* for *ke ho re* meaning ‘that is’; *haona bthat* for *ha ho na bothata* meaning ‘there is no problem’ and *ske* for *se ke* meaning ‘do not’. In all the phrases, the bolded letters were not in the new WhatsApp forms used by the Basotho youth and some adults. The following section presents siSwati forms used in WhatsApp messages by youth and adults.

## A Comparative Study of the Structure of Sesotho and siSwati Forms Used in Whatsapp Chats

pheka	Phek	Y	Cook
Kuphela	Kphel	Y	Only
Leni?	Len?	A/Y	Why?
Bani?	Ban?	A/Y	Who?
letsa	Lets	Y	Bring
chake	Cha	A/Y	No
langatelela	Ingtelel	Y	Longing
vala	Val	A/Y	Close
makoti	Koti	A	Daughter-in-law
Kanjani?	Knjn?	A/Y	How?
umtsimba	Umtba	Y	Traditional wedding
natsa	Nats	A/Y	To drink
sikhatsi	Ckhats	A/Y	Time
<b>Phrases/Sentences</b>			
Unjani?	Njn?	A/Y	How are you?
Ngiyaphila	P.la	Y	I am fine
Uhlalakuphi?	Hlap?	Y	Where do you stay?
Sawubona	Swbn; sawbon	Swbn (Y) Sawbn (A)	Hello/good day
ngiyafuna	Fun	Y	I want
angifuni	Fun	Y	I do not want
kukhumbula	Khumbul		To miss
Ngiyakukhumbula; ngiyakhumbula	Khumbul	Y	I miss you; I remember
uyagula	Yagul	Y	You are sick
ngiyagula	Yagul	Y	I am sick
Titsini?	Ttsn?	Y [M]	How is it?

Looking at Table 3 above, it could be noted that siSwati native speakers, just like Sesotho speakers, use their language in their WhatsApp communication with other Swazis. Also noted are different forms. For instance, eight types of forms were identified with the first being a combination of alphabetical letters and a number. This was observed in words such as *asba4/b4* for *bafowethu* meaning ‘one’s brothers’, *mnake2* for *mnakethu* referring to ‘one’s brother’, *2la* for *thula* meaning ‘shut up’ and *dzadzew2* for *dzadzewetfu* that means ‘one’s sister’. The second comprises consonant forms only, as in *yb* for *yebo* meaning ‘yes’, *cc* for *sisi* meaning ‘sister’, *cbl* for *sibali* meaning ‘brother-in-law’, *knjn?* for *kanjani?* Meaning ‘how?’ and sentences such as *Swbn* for *Sawubona* meaning ‘hello/ good day’ and *Ttsn?* for *Titsini?* meaning ‘how is it?’ to mention a few. The third type involves an omitted prefix in words such as *Zulwini* for *Ezulwini* which is a place, *sasa* for *kusasa* meaning ‘tomorrow’, *koti* for *makoti* meaning ‘daughter-in-law’, *zala* for *umzala* meaning ‘cousin’. Here, the items in bold represent prefixes. The fourth type deletes both the vowel of the prefix (or of the first syllable) and that of the last syllable as in *kphel-* for *kuphela* meaning ‘only’, *kcal-* for *kucala* which means ‘before’. The fifth leaves either the last syllable or last two syllables as in *cha* for *chake* meaning ‘no’, *bafo* for *bafowethu* meaning ‘one’s brothers’ and *Ezu* for *Ezulwini* which is a name of a place. The sixth one leaves out the vowel of the last syllable as seen in forms like *val-* for *vala* meaning ‘close’, *phek-* for *pheka* meaning ‘cook’, *lets-* for *letsa* which means ‘bring’; *len-*

? for *leni?* meaning ‘why?’; and *imal-* for *imali* meaning ‘money’. The seventh type has abbreviations used, unlike in Sesotho, where their existence does not necessarily result from the social media in siSwati; such have recently been in use due to social media. These include the following abbreviations: *MBN/MBBN* for *Mbabane* which is the capital city of Eswatini, *MPK* for the place Mpaka, *MZ/MANZ/MZN*, for the town called *Manzini*. The eighth one involves derived forms from words as seen in *yep* for *yebo* meaning ‘yes’, *p.la* for *ngiyaphila* meaning ‘I am fine’, *mzi/mzee* for *umzala* meaning ‘cousin’ and *cbal* for *sibali* referring to ‘brother-in-law’.

### DISCUSSION

WhatsApp is a platform for information sharing. The platform has attracted attention of many people of different age groups, with almost all conversations currently carried out through its use. According to (Xu et al. 2015), the social media has become so popular not only to the youth, but also to many people of different backgrounds, ages and levels, and of course, of different disciplines. This mode has thus affected how people relate to one another; how they form words and meanings in their everyday lives. As noted earlier, speakers of African indigenous languages such as Sesotho and siSwati are no exception. The findings of the study show various short forms emerging from the use of mother tongue in WhatsApp messages. With the data from both the adults and youth, the latter were noted for preferring English, with many of whom

however, using the mother tongue only when facing challenges of expressing themselves in English language, the feature which was also established by Ligidima and Makananise (2020).

It was further observed that the majority of adults preferred the indigenous languages. Some of the short forms used in WhatsApp messages emerged from various groups in society that might include: slang, youth language, regiolect, translanguaging and social media, for example (Motjope-Mokhali, 2023), as shown in both Tables 2 and 3 above. For example, *SiTankiso* for *ausi Tankiso*, meaning Sister Tankiso, in Sesotho, is a regiolect mostly used in such districts as Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek, in Lesotho. On the other hand, the siSwati *bafo*, for *bafowethu*, meaning 'brothers', is a sociolect used by and for males. Other examples, as stated above, include abbreviations used for place names. In Sesotho, the abbreviations MSU, for Maseru, BB for Botha-Bothe and TY for Teyateyaneng have been used by public transport operators. They used to put on the boards the abbreviations, instead of full names, to show transport destinations or terminals, while MSR and B<sup>2</sup> featured the social media. In Eswatini, on the other hand, abbreviations for places like Manzini (Manz/MZ/MNZ), Mbabane (MBN/MBBN), Mpaka (MPK) and Nhlangano (NHO) emerged from the social media. With some of these forms being restricted to specific groups other than social media, they have increasingly become popular in social media platforms. As Motjope-Mokhali (2023) highlighted, as a diverse mode, social media has since incorporated both spoken and written forms from other social groups. These different ways of speaking and writing are seen in the WhatsApp group messages of both Sesotho- and siSwati-speaking adults and youth. Some forms in both languages have similar structures, while others are language-specific. In what follows are the forms with identical characteristics.

### Structural Similarities in Sesotho and siSwati WhatsApp Forms

As stated earlier, it seemed that both adults and youth in the two languages use various spellings. Included are forms made up of alphabetical letters and a number. This was observed in Sesotho forms *mo2* for *motho* referring to 'person' and *B<sup>2</sup>* for *Botha-Bothe* which is a place. A similar feature has been observed in siSwati, involving forms such as *ba4/b4* for *bafowethu* meaning one's brothers, *mnake2* for *mnakethu* referring to 'one's brother', *2la* for *thula* meaning 'shut up' and *dzadzew2* for *dzadzewetfu* that means 'one's sister'. Based on these forms, it is realised that when one utters words *motho* in Sesotho and the siSwati *mnakethu*, *thula* and *dzadzewetfu* one hears the sound of the number 2. Likewise, the bold part of the siSwati word *bafowethu* sounds like an Arabic numeral 4. It could thus be concluded that the speakers of the two languages were

influenced by the forms used in English as reported by Motjope-Mokhali (2023). The researcher observed such WhatsApp forms as *2day* for 'today' and *gr8* 'great', derived from the sounds of the words by the target university students.

In addition, forms that consist of consonants only were used in both languages. This is evident in the following Sesotho forms *fl* for *feela* meaning 'but, only or for no reason'; *ntt* for *ntate* referring to 'father'; *jng?* for *joang?* translated as 'how?' The same characteristic has been recorded for the siSwati forms *yb* for *yebo* meaning 'yes', *cc* for *sisi* meaning 'sister', *cbl* for *sibali* meaning 'brother-in-law', *Swbn* for *Sawubona* meaning 'good day' and *Ttsn?* for *Titsini?* Meaning 'how is it?' This type is also assumed to have been imported from the English language as it also consists of forms like *b* for 'be', *wl* for 'will' and *ppl* for 'people'.

Also noticeable is the omission of the prefixes elsewhere in the two languages. Nouns in Bantu languages, including Sesotho and siSwati, as mentioned earlier, are classified according to the nominal class system which have prefixes. This means that each noun has a specific prefix, depending on the class to which it belongs (Miti, 2006). As a result, prefixes are attached to noun stems all the time. However, adults and youth of Sesotho and siSwati tend to leave out prefixes when writing nouns in WhatsApp chats as seen in the following forms: the Basotho groups, especially women, would write *ratuoa* for *moratuoa*, 'lover' and/or 'my love', leaving out the prefix (**mo**-). Equally notable is that siSwati speakers appeared to miss prefixes in such forms as *Zulwini* for *Ezulwini* which is a place, *sasa* for *kusasa* meaning 'tomorrow', *koti* for *makoti* meaning 'daughter-in-law', *zala* for *umzala* meaning 'cousin'. Here, the bolded items represent prefixes, omitted by speakers of Sesotho and siSwati in their new writing style, something probably influenced by spoken language.

Further worth mentioning are vowels of the prefix which are omitted in a new writing style. Typical instances are Sesotho forms such as *mnate*, for *monate*, meaning 'nice; delicious', *sthunya* for *sethunya* 'gun', *stopong* for *setopong* 'at a taxi/bus rank' and *spetlele* for *sepetlele* meaning 'hospital'. The patterns as in *kphel* for *kuphela* meaning 'only', *kcal* for *kucala* which means 'before' have been revealed in siSwati. Considering these forms and related omissions by Sesotho and siSwati users, it is worth noting that this style is used by both adults and youth in Sesotho, while it seems peculiar to the youth in siSwati.

Other salient instances involve derived forms from existing words. In Sesotho, forms *shai/haizoo/haizi* for *mohaisane* which means 'neighbour' and *phephyn* for *phephing* referring to 'sorry to many people' have been derived while in siSwati there are forms like *yep* for *yebo* meaning 'yes', *p.la* for *ngiyaphila* meaning 'I am fine',

*mzi/mzee* for *umzala* meaning ‘cousin’ and *cbal* for *sibali* referring to ‘brother-in-law’. Here, the Sesotho forms made use of sounds [z] and [y] which are not in the Sesotho orthography and in the form *phephyn* there is a sequence of consonant clusters (**phyn**) which is also unknown in the language. Noted here is that *haizoo/haizi* in Sesotho is used by female adults while *phephyn* is common to this target youth. In siSwati, *p.lais* used by youth, *mzi/mzee* by both adults and youth whereas *cbal* by adults. The siSwati form *p.la* is the shortest derived form of *ngiyaphila*, which could be considered a single word. Having sketched the similarities above, the following section examines differences between the two languages.

### Structural differences in Sesotho and siSwati WhatsApp forms

Although there are common structural forms used in Sesotho and siSwati, there are also differences. For instance, the Basotho youth delete the last alphabetical letter of words such as *spetlel-* for *sepetlele* referring to ‘hospital’ and *stopon-* for *setopong* meaning ‘at the taxi/bus rank’. In this case, the last vowel (e) of *sepetlele* and the letter (g) from *setopong* are left out. In morphological terms (g) cannot be separated from (n) in this context because [ng] is phonetically transcribed as [ŋ], which in this case, a nasalised vowel sound, marked by the present participial suffix [ng] which denotes location in Sesotho. This form has been noted among the target youth, while the adults seemingly omitted the vowel of the prefix, leaving out the rest of the word as demonstrated in Table 2, with the following: *stopong* and *spetlele*. SiSwati, on the other hand, leaves out the vowel of the last syllable as seen in forms like *val-* for *vala* meaning ‘close’, *phek-* for *pheka* meaning ‘cook’, *lets-* for *letsa* which means ‘bring’; *len-?* for *leni?* meaning ‘why?’; and *imal-* for *imali* meaning ‘money’. Unlike Sesotho that omits any letter, siSwati omits only vowels. The forms *phek-* and *lets-* have been observed among the youth while *len-?* and *imal-* among both the adults and youth.

Sesotho also omits the medial syllable /bu/ in *abuti* meaning ‘elder brother’, realised as *ati* and *asi* for *ausi* which means ‘elder sister’. This form type could have been influenced by spoken language by women and children in uttering shortened words. However, the type was rarely used in written languages before the emergence of social media. Unlike Sesotho that deletes the medial syllable, siSwati omits the last and/or the last two syllables as in *cha* for *chake* meaning ‘no’, *bafu* for *bafowethu* meaning ‘one’s brothers’ and *Ezu* for *Ezulwini* which is a place name. In *cha* the last syllable is omitted while in *bafowethu* and *Ezulwini* the last two syllables were left out.

Furthermore, Sesotho seems to lengthen certain letters, that is final vowel sounds in some syllables as in *mothoo*

for *motho* meaning ‘person’ and *heleee*, *khiliiii*, and *haaiiboo*, where all vowel sounds were prolonged. All these as observed above, are ‘interjections, used for expressing strong feelings or emotions of astonishment’. This feature has been found to be rare in siSwati, mainly occurring in the form *mzee* for *umzala* referring to ‘cousin’. In this case, the last vowel (e) is elongated. In Sesotho, the prolonged form is mostly used by adults: both males and females, whereas in siSwati it is used by youth.

Another unique discovery deals with the use of original Sesotho forms. The words *mme* meaning ‘mother’ and *nna* referring to ‘I’, ‘me’, ‘myself’, currently used in WhatsApp forms are the actual original Sesotho words for mother and I/me/myself. The spelling forms were changed during the Conference on Sesuto Orthography held at Morija, Lesotho in 1906. The Conference suggested that double (m) and (n) ought to be written as (’m) and (’n), respectively, when occurring word-initially (*Orthographical Rules for Sesuto*, 1906). Based on the WhatsApp forms of these words, it seems that speakers prefer the original forms which are also used in Sesotho used in South Africa. The researcher assumes two possible reasons why the Basotho cannot searching for the diacritic marks (’). One is that they feel like wasting time or that when articulating the words, one would produce two letters (mm) as in *mme*, and the other two (nn) as in *nna*. With the second reason being considered true, speakers could be viewed as being interested in individual speech sounds in spoken language (phonetics). This may confirm what Motjope-Mokhali (2023:39) revealed in English WhatsApp forms, stating that “online communities seem to pay more attention to how words are pronounced than how they are written. This is noted in such words as ‘my’ which has been changed to *mai...* ‘are’ (a) /a:r/...and ‘verb’ (veb) /vɜ:b/ which indicate the actual phonetic transcription of the word[s]...” The same view can be true for the forms such as Sesotho *mo2* for *motho* meaning ‘person’ and siSwati *ba4/b4* for *bafowethu* meaning ‘one’s brothers’, *mnake2* for *mnakethu* referring to ‘one’s brother’, *2la* for *thula* meaning ‘shut up’ and *dzadzew2* for *dzadzewetfu* referring to ‘one’s sister’. Based on the spellings of these new WhatsApp forms, one may conclude that their writing styles resemble spelling pronunciations.

In addition, Sesotho speakers, though with individual speaker’s stylistic variation, tend to arbitrarily omit any letter or letters in their conversation. Typical examples include single words and phrases as in *mula-stulo* and *molula-stulo* for *molula-setulo* meaning ‘chairperson’ where [ol] of the first and second syllable of the word is deletes and [e] of the first syllable of the word *setulo* is omitted; *lbha* for *leboha* meaning ‘to thank’ where vowels of the first and second syllables are omitted. Other forms are *Mmeaka*; *meak*; and *mmaka*, with



different spellings of *'m'eoaka* meaning my mother (though used in women's chats to refer to the second woman in conversation, as mentioned earlier). In each case, alphabetical letters, bolded, are omitted *mmeoaka*; in other instances *mmeoaka* while in others *mmeoaka*. Further, the word *eena* meaning 'she, he or him, her', is shortened to *ena* and in this case, *ena* means 'this'. Here, the use of some short forms changes the meaning of a word. That is, words ended up totally changing intended meanings, thus causing misunderstandings or confusion. In this way, different responses could arise thereby violating a communicative approach that prioritises the target audience in a given conversation. Besides, Sesotho speakers tend to shorten phrases as seen in: *kore* for *keho re* meaning 'that is'; *haona bthat* for *ha ho na bothata* meaning 'there is no problem' and *ske* for *se ke* meaning 'do not'. All these short forms omit certain letters in words or phrases, all of which are just arbitrarily deleted as, as mentioned earlier.

The data also revealed the phrases and sentences shortened in siSwati, without necessarily showing certain parts of a phrase or sentence affected in siSwati as a language with a conjunctive writing system. Nonetheless, the study established that both youth and adults could shorten phrases and sentences in siSwati, as exemplified by *Sawubona*, shorted to *Swbn* by the youth and *Sawbon*, by the adults, meaning 'Hello/Good day'. Forms like *Unjani?* change into *Njn?*, meaning 'how are you?' by both groups. Also seemingly unique to the youth is *Ngiyaphila*, shortened to *pl.a*, meaning 'I am fine' and *Uhlalakuphi?*, for *Hlap?*, meaning 'Where do you live?' This finding contrasts with Ligidima and Makanani's (2020) finding where most students ascertained that "sentences and words of indigenous African languages are too long, and they cannot be shortened. In this view, such forms, unlike English words and sentences, cannot be shortened, nor written as quickly as possible". Whereas the youth could shorten full sentences, they can produce meaningless or complicated sentences in some situations. For example, when looking at Table 3 above, one could highlight the phrase and sentences *Ngiyafuna*, meaning 'I want' and *Angifuni*, meaning 'I do not want', as having the same form *fun*. Such usages become ambiguous, with the word *fun*, because of the same, form suggesting either positive or negative. The same applies to *uyagula* meaning 'you are sick' and *ngiyagula* meaning 'I am sick' also have the short form *yagul*. In these cases, communication breakdown is likely to occur, with resultant misunderstanding. The above data reveal adults in Eswatini as rarely shortening sentences and thus using full forms for the most part. In Sesotho, sentences cannot be shortened in the same way except for omitting one or two alphabetical letters.

Although WhatsApp forms are found in conversations of both adults and young in the two Bantu languages, they

were more common in youth than in adults' chats. Adults in Sesotho and siSwati **often** wrote full forms of words and sentences, particularly, those that belonged to church groups as compared to local residents' groups. It is assumed that church-related chats are more formal than those of the local residents' groups. The adults also tended to use formal language for clarifying messages. It was also noted that chats among local residents varied in style based on the relationships between the participants at the time. For example, highly respected members, with authority would receive written messages with full forms, while casual chats between close friends were basically informal, with contractions. In other words, the local residents' groups communication reflected their mutual relationships. In the case of youth, communication was the same throughout, apparently paying no attention to their relative ages.

### CONCLUSION

The study intended to establish the types of WhatsApp short forms used by Sesotho and siSwati, mother tongue youth aged from 20 to 34 years, and mother tongue adults, from 35 to 60 years. Specifically, the study investigated the chats in Sesotho and siSwati, excluding those used in English. The study revealed that Sesotho and siSwati adults and youth have created various WhatsApp forms to communicate using their own indigenous languages. However, the findings indicated many youth as preferring using English and using indigenous languages only when facing problems with self-expression in English. The study findings also showed comparable features between the target languages, with some salient patterns of long vowel sounds in the final syllable and sporadic deletion in both first and final syllables of certain words. Certain forms made up of alphabetical letters and a number have been observed in both Sesotho and siSwati, as noted above. Further comparisons include siSwati shortened sentences, with Sesotho speakers largely omitting one or two alphabetical letters in sentences. Sesotho- and siSwati- speaking adults, especially church groups and local residents' groups, have been recorded for frequently using full forms of words and sentences. Even more intriguing is the varied style among the local residents, depending on the social and/or formal relationships meriting their chats. In face of such social media communication, some shortened forms have been found to be somewhat ambiguous, thereby conveying totally different meanings in both languages, something which probably needs further research on the phenomenon.

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### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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