

A Sociolinguistic Study of the Euphemistic and Idiomatic Expressions Used in HIV/AIDS Speech in Setswana

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Abstract

Given that HIV/AIDS is a new phenomenon in the Setswana culture and way of life, and in view of its complex social and psychological impact on the people, the people of Botswana, through their social interactions, have formed or adopted new terms to capture the various concepts. The study reveals that many neologisms have emerged to refer to the new concepts relating to HIV/AIDS and related phenomena. Most of these neologisms are either euphemistic or idiomatic. Moreover, the study is able to determine the nature of attitudes, which have been formed by the speakers, and how such attitudes have had a bearing on their sexual behaviour and their reaction to the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Introduction

Botswana is one of the countries in Africa, which have been hard hit by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.¹ According to the 2000 HIV Sentinel Survey data, about 300,000 people in the country have been infected with the deadly disease, out of the current population of 1.7 million. It is currently estimated that 14% of the total population, or 25% of the sexually active and economically productive adults, have been infected with HIV/AIDS, and about 10,000 deaths have been attributed to this pandemic (Tlou, 2003). Of course, there are many more deaths which have occurred without being officially recorded.

As a result of the HIV/AIDS impact in the social and economic life of the country, the people have shown their concern not only in their relationships and sexual behaviour but also in their speech and

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communicative modes, particularly in connection with the discourse on the pandemic or sexual matters. There have been an increase of discussions, debates, speeches and dialogues relating to HIV/AIDS and related issues like sex, sexual behaviour, sex precautions, gender relations, STD infections and so on. As a result of the expanded discourse relating to these issues, new concepts and ideas have emerged which have triggered the creation of new terms and expressions. A rapid expansion in the repertoire of the new terms and expressions has therefore occurred in the language. Many of the neologisms are a result of the most common processes of word formation, namely compounding, borrowing, derivation and extension of meaning of existing terms. Moreover, some words have been combined metaphorically to form idioms, while some expressions have been created as euphemisms. In the absence of an authoritative, and actively involved institution for Setswana language planning and development, most of the new terms and expressions have been created by the speakers themselves in their various communities. Afterwards these neologisms have spread out countrywide.

The Euphemistic and Idiomatic Nature of the New Terms and Expressions

Although some of the questions in the interviews referred to the speakers' attitudes towards these neologisms, the responses were not always consistent or unanimous. Given the sensitive and complex nature of the disease and the socio-psychological effects it has created on most communities, most of the neologisms are of euphemistic and idiomatic nature, that is, they tend to make indirect reference to the concepts or phenomena that they denote. A euphemism is an indirect word or phrase that people often use to refer to something embarrassing or unpleasant, sometimes to make it seem more acceptable than it really is, such as the word 'bathroom' instead of the more direct word 'toilet' or the phrase 'pass away' instead of the usual word 'die' (Hornby, 1994:395). While an idiom is a group of words whose meaning is different from the meanings of the individual words such as in 'pull one's leg' (Hornby,

1994:593). In fact, idioms could also involve the processes of compounding and derivation, as in ‘backbite’ ‘greenlight’, ‘glasses’ (spectacles) or ‘cheeky’. Euphemisms and idiomatic expressions have certain features in common. First, both of them provide indirect meanings, as what they refer to is not expressed directly by the words, or parts of words, which are used. Secondly, when they appear in word combinations, they tend to be semantically and even syntactically restricted, so that they function as a single unit. Thirdly, both expressions tend to relate to the cultural experiences of the speakers. The two expressions differ however, in that while euphemisms are used in avoidance situations, so as to make speech more appropriate, idioms are mainly used for stylistic reasons, to make speech more attractive and flowery to the listeners. However, both expressions are usually meant to make communication more palatable and tend to have enormous communicative impact on the listeners or audience. Very often euphemisms and idioms emerge as colloquial expressions, and even as slang, but may gradually expand in use and be accepted by the entire community as normal words or expressions.

Since the emergence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic many terms and expressions have been created in the various groups and communities in the country.² While some have remained largely localized in use, others have diffused in many parts of the country and have even ceased to be considered as colloquialisms or slang. The use of these neologisms, like other new words or expressions in a language, has been associated with social or individual emotional feelings and attitudes. In a way, therefore, the neologisms on HIV/AIDS are assumed to have a role in moulding Setswana speakers’ attitudes towards the pandemic and therefore indirectly play a part in determining people’s behaviour.

² In most cases, the respondents were not sure when exactly a term came into use or whether it existed before or after the emergence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. For that reason, no attempt was made to distinguish between the pre- or post-HIV/AIDS expressions.

A Study of the Euphemisms and Idioms Used in Gaborone

The assumption that the euphemisms and idiomatic expressions used to refer to HIV/AIDS and related phenomena had a role in the creation of positive or negative attitudes towards sex-related behaviour prompted a field study based on Gaborone, the capital and cosmopolitan city of the country. The aim of the study was to find out what neologisms in terms of euphemisms and idioms have been developed in Setswana to denote the HIV/AIDS and related phenomena, and the attitudes associated with these expressions in the various communities. The major question that this research wanted to address was the extent to which the use of such expressions influenced people's sex-related behaviour.

A sociolinguistic survey was therefore carried out in several communities of Gaborone, focusing mainly on groups where such expressions were likely to emerge. Such groups included institutions such as the University and senior secondary schools, special quarters and confined areas, such as police residences, army barracks and prisons, and popular residential areas or low cost settlements. Three main categories of people were therefore investigated, namely educational institutions, confined locations and low-income areas. Structured questionnaires were used, which were intended to elicit specific type of responses from the respondents.³ The terms and expressions to be collected related to HIV/AIDS, sexual behaviour, gender relations, and STD and sex precautions.

Research Methodology

Given the informal and, to a large extent, colloquial nature of these expressions, it was decided that young people be used to collect the

³ The questionnaires consisted of simple questions on current expressions referring to a specific concept or object. Sometimes a sample of the object would be displayed. For example, in referring to 'condom', a sample would be shown to the respondents, and they would be asked to give the various terms used to refer to it. Then for each item, specific questions would be asked about the term's literal meaning, origin, and the respondents' attitudes towards it.

data.⁴ Hence, four university students were recruited as research assistants, two males and two females. In order to make it easy for the respondents in eliciting the intended data, the two male students interviewed male respondents and the two female students interviewed female respondents. Rather than conduct the interviews in formal settings, such as offices or classrooms, it was decided that the research assistants should carry out the interviews in informal settings, outside the classroom or office. Also it was found more productive if the interviews were conducted on groups of respondents rather than individuals. The group interviews were found to be most resourceful as the respondents would be able to discuss the various expressions, their exact meanings and uses as well as their origins. The research assistants were therefore instructed to convene small groups of 3 to 5 people for each interview session.⁵

a) *The Educational Institutions*

Three educational institutions were selected, namely the University of Botswana, Gaborone Senior Secondary School and Ledumang Senior Secondary School.⁶ The University was selected because of its great dynamism in creating slang and also because of the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS on campus.⁷ On the other hand, the two senior secondary schools were chosen because of their heavy involvement in city life. Gaborone Secondary School is located near the center of the city and Ledumang Secondary School is located in the heart of a residential area. The research assistants were able to collect information from four

⁴ It was thought that it would be easier for them to be accepted by the relevant communities than it would be for grown-ups, who are considered respectable in society.

⁵ Although the questionnaires were in English, the research assistants used Setswana to present each question to the selected groups. This was, again, meant to make the interviews as informal and as accessible to the respondents as possible. In some instances, particularly with the students, there were many cases of code-switching and code-mixing, which are common practices in Botswana among the educated. The discussions were mainly carried out in Setswana.

⁶ Junior secondary schools were left out of the study because most students in these type of schools are minors.

⁷ According to the current estimates, about 40% of the students are HIV positive.

groups (two male and two female) at the University and two groups in each of the secondary schools (one male and one female in each case).

b) The Confined Location

The confined locations included one of the Gaborone police quarters and one of the army barracks near the city. Unfortunately, due to logistic problems, it was not possible to have access to the prisoners at the Gaborone prison. Our investigation of the confined locations was, therefore, limited to one police quarters and one army barracks. Two groups were interviewed in each case (one male and one female).

c) The Low Income Areas

Two low-income areas were selected namely, Old Naledi and Bontleg. Both settlements are located in the suburbs of the city. In these areas many people are also unemployed. Hooliganism, drunkenness and prostitution are common forms of behaviour. HIV/AIDS prevalence is also very high in the two areas. Four interviews were conducted in each of these locations, two involving male respondents and two female respondents.

All together, therefore, 20 groups were interviewed (involving a total of 78 people), 10 composed of male respondents and another 10 involving female respondents. The group distribution between the places of interview and the number of the elicited items are given in Table 1.

Table 1: The Distribution of Groups and the Number of Elicited Items from Each Category of Respondents

	Origin of respondents	Number of groups	Number of elicited items
1	Educational institutions	8	159
2	Confined locations	4	57
3	Low-income residential areas	8	98
	Total	20	314

All together there were 314 items, which were collected in the survey. When the results were analysed the following was noticed:

- i) Many of the elicited items were found in all the three categories of respondents. Only a few were specific to a given category. Thus, out of the 314 elicited items, the actual distinct items were only 239.
- ii) There was no any significant difference in type of the elicited items between the male and the female group responses, only that male respondents were more elaborate in expressions involving male body parts, behaviour or activities. The same was true for the female respondents.
- iii) There was no significant difference in the type of information given by the three categories of respondents, namely the educational institutions, the confined locations and the low-income areas. There were certain items which tended to be confined to a certain category because of the peculiarities of the category, such as the term *CD* ‘music disc’ or *overall* ‘special working attire’ (both referring to ‘condom’), which were found only among the University students. On the other hand, there were expressions like *legodu* ‘thief’ (referring to ‘semen’) and *morekisi* ‘seller’ (referring to ‘prostitute’), which were more commonly used in the low-income areas. Lastly, terms like *lerumo* ‘bullet’ (referring to ‘semen’) were only found in the barracks.
- iv) The age and educational level factors did not seem to make much difference, as most of the respondents were relatively young (below 40) and only used these terms in specific social contexts.

In view of the above, it was decided not to include these variables in the presentation of the findings. The most conspicuous features were the creativity of the communities involved in the various strategies of creating these metaphorical expressions.

The Findings of the Study

The study made substantial revelations regarding the expressions used to refer to HIV/AIDS and sex-related domains in Setswana. The main discoveries were as follows:

a) *The Strategies Used in the Creation of Euphemisms*

The strategies used in the creation of euphemisms relating to the pandemic have largely followed the usual processes of word creation in human languages (Yule 1993:51). The most common processes are the ones used also in other Bantu languages, namely extension of meaning, compounding and borrowing (Batibo, 1992; Chiwome, 1992; Matsela, 1992).

The process of extension of meaning has been very effective in creating euphemisms which refer to fearful or embarrassing phenomena, such as HIV/AIDS, sex and prostitution. The words whose meanings have been extended usually have non-offensive connotation in their original uses. These terms include the following:

<i>(I) Item</i>	<i>Original meaning</i>	<i>Euphemistic use</i>
(i) <i>sekausu</i>	sock	condom
(ii) <i>sekoa</i>	frequently sick person	child born of an aids sufferer
(iii) <i>mopakwana</i>	malnourished child or half-wit	child born of an aids sufferer
(iv) <i>mohi</i>	provider	prostitute
(v) <i>legodu</i>	thief	Semen*
(vi) <i>morekisi</i>	seller	prostitute
(vii) <i>dithotana</i>	small hills	female breasts
(viii) <i>lekgela</i>	unripe fruit	virgin
(ix) <i>setlankana</i>	certificate	male condom
(x) <i>letamo</i>	dam	female condom
(xi) <i>mmapatsi</i>	merchant/trader	Prostitute

(xii) <i>mmabatho</i>	queen; woman of the people	prostitute
(xiii) <i>mogwana</i>	giant raisin bush with edible berries	male sexual organ

* Some cases were so opaque that it was difficult to see the relationship. This is one of these cases, as there is no apparent relationship between ‘thief’ and ‘semen’ even with the most liberal imagination. In fact, even the respondents failed to give convincing explanations.

In some cases, the original words may be loan-words or acronyms, as shown in (2) below:

(2) <i>Item</i>	<i>Original Meaning</i>	<i>Euphemistic Use</i>
(i) <i>overall</i>	work garment	male condom
(ii) <i>raincoat</i>	overcoat worn against rain	male condom
(iii) <i>di-sweetsi</i>	candies	male condom
(iv) <i>ballon</i>	large bag filled with air or gas	male condom
(v) <i>emere</i>	bucket	female condom
(vi) <i>C.D.</i>	music disk	male condom
(vii) <i>dibolo</i>	balls	testicles
(viii) <i>dairy</i>	milk storage	female breasts
(ix) <i>pipe</i>	long narrow tube	male sexual organ

As can be seen from (2) above, many of these terms are not completely nativised in Setswana as they have kept their original foreign structure and sometimes the pronunciation. The degree to which they are nativised will normally depend on the situation, education levels of the speakers and the stylistic nature of the discourse. The most popular source of loan words is English. However, other sources, including Afrikaans and Tsotsitaal, have contributed to the new creations.

The other strategy, which has been used to create euphemisms in Setswana, is through compounding. In this process, two or more words have been combined to form a new word denoting something which is usually unpleasant. The individual words themselves are normally not

offensive. Some examples are given in (3) below.

<i>(3) Item</i>	<i>Literal Meaning</i>	<i>Euphemistic Use</i>
(i) <i>mmaleeto</i>	woman of the road	Prostitute
(ii) <i>mmabatho</i>	woman of the people	prostitute
(iii) <i>phamokate</i>	snatch or take away suddenly and bury quickly	AIDS
(iv) <i>mohititseleng</i>	passerby	child born of an AIDS sufferer
(v) <i>meleloyabadimo</i>	sores inflicted on someone by ancestors	boils that are first signs of AIDS
(vi) <i>mmapelotshweu</i>	woman of a white heart	Prostitute
(vii) <i>kgomo ya mashi</i>	dairy cow	female breasts
(viii) <i>me – nice</i>	I am nice	prostitute
(ix) <i>moroto wa maoto</i>	urine coming from between the legs	Semen
(x) <i>seaba dikausu</i>	person/object that distributes condoms	condom dispenser

In fact, compared to other languages in the region Setswana has a high tendency of creating compounds to represent new concepts in the language.

(b) *The Strategies Used in the Creation of Idioms*

The strategies used in the creation of idioms relating to the pandemic have largely followed the usual methods of combined words or parts of words. This method has been used very extensively in Setswana to create idiomatic expressions. Some of these combinations are highly ingenious, as they require the highest level imagination or special mental gymnastics to see the relationship with the literal meanings. The following are among the most commonly used idioms.

<i>(4) Expression</i>	<i>Literal Meaning</i>	<i>Idiomatic Meaning</i>
(i) <i>go ja e sa phuthelwa</i>	to unwrap something (edible)	to have sex without a condom

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	before eating it	
(ii) <i>go ja "dry"</i>	to eat something in a dry state	to have sex without a condom
(iii) <i>go robalana fela</i>	to have sex only	to have sex without a condom
(iv) <i>go latlhegelwa ke nama</i>	to lose meat	to lose weight as a result of AIDS
(v) <i>go fetswa ke AIDS</i>	to be finished by AIDS	to lose weight or wear out as a result of AIDS
(vi) <i>go ja lerole</i>	to eat dust	to have sex with an HIV/AIDS sufferer
(vii) <i>go tlhoka mogare</i>	to be virus free (i.e. virus of any disease)	to test negative
(viii) <i>go nna "sharp"</i>	to be just alright (i.e. without problems)	to test negative
(ix) <i>go ikenta</i>	to infect oneself	to have sex with an HIV/AIDS sufferer
(x) <i>go palama pitse e sena disale</i>	to ride on a horse without a saddle	to have sex without a condom

As can be seen in (4) above, the idiomatic meaning, which refers to embarrassing, unacceptable or unpleasant phenomena, is contained in sequences of words whose individual meanings are not community sensitive. The use of idiomatic expressions, therefore, tones down the sensitivity of the referents and, in some ways, makes the expression stylistically attractive.

Like in most other languages, some of the idioms are compounds or derived forms in which the meaning does not correspond to the sum total of the individual parts. Usually the idiomatic meaning refers to repugnant phenomenon relating to HIV/AIDS or sexual behaviour. Some examples are given in (5) below:

<i>(5) Expression</i>	<i>Literal Meaning</i>	<i>Idiomatic Meaning</i>
(i) <i>senior-stop</i>	a popular or major stop	prostitute

(ii) <i>mmaleeto</i>	woman of the road	prostitute
(iii) <i>mmabatho</i>	woman of the people	prostitute
(iv) <i>phamokate</i>	to snatch/or take away suddenly and bury quickly	AIDS
(v) <i>mohiti-tseleng</i>	a passerby	a child born of an AIDS sufferer
(vi) <i>melelo ya badimo</i>	fires of ancestors	boils that are first signs of AIDS
(vii) <i>mmapelotshweu</i>	woman of a white heart	prostitute
(viii) <i>me-nice</i>	I am nice	prostitute

The non-transparency of the compounds in (5) above makes them be typical idiomatic expressions. Some of these compounds contain foreign words, which are not yet fully nativised in the language. Moreover, as it can be seen, some of the idioms are also euphemisms, as they make indirect reference to embarrassing or unpleasant phenomena.

Attitudes Towards the Expressions

An attitude could be defined as a feeling, reaction or emotional disposition towards an idea, concept or phenomena. According to Baker (1992:12), there are three components of an attitude: the cognitive, involving thought and beliefs, the affective, concerned with feelings and emotions, and the conative, evoking readiness to act. When looking at Setswana speakers' attitudes towards these neologisms, it is difficult to determine their exact mental disposition, emotional feeling or reaction towards them⁸. However, in our study the following methods were used to determine the people's attitudes towards the expressions that they have created:

⁸ Although some of the questions in the interviews referred to the speakers' attitudes towards these neologisms, the responses were not always consistent or unanimous.

(a) *The Number of Expressions for a Given Concept*

Usually where there are many creations for the same concept, it is an indication that the concept or phenomenon is very central or preoccupying in the users' lives. Typical examples are the cases of the many names of snow in the Eskimo environment and the many terms used for the different kinds of fauna and flora in the Khoesan environment. It was found out that with regards to HIV/AIDS prevention or awareness, some concepts had many expressions, while others had very few. The figures are shown in table (2) below:

Table 2: The Number of Expressions Relating to HIV/AIDS Risks, Prevention and Awareness

	<i>Concept</i>	<i>Number of Expressions</i>
1	Have sex without condom	15
2	Condom	11
3	Masturbation	10
4	Safe sex	9
5	girl with many partners	8
6	Abstain from sex	7
7	STD	6
8	Condom distributor	6
9	Female condom	5
10	Friendship without sex	5
11	To die of AIDS	5
12	One who does not want sex	4
13	Resisting to have sex	4
14	Oral sex	3
15	Use of condoms when having sex	3
16	AIDS pandemic	3
17	AIDS sufferer	3
18	Losing weight because of AIDS	3
19	Have sex with one suffering from AIDS	3
20	Child born of an AIDS sufferer	3
21	Negative HIV test	3
22	Positive HIV test	2

23	Test for HIV/AIDS	2
24	Female condom	2

If we go by the assumption that the more the expressions a language has for a concept, the more the people are preoccupied by that concept in their lives, we would make the following observations regarding table 2 above.

First, most of the Setswana speakers have become aware of the risks of having sex without protection, hence the high figures of ‘sex without condom’. However, in our survey, most of the expressions referring to this practice came from the educational centers and the army barracks. There were much fewer expressions in the low-income areas. On the other hand, supplementary interviews showed that the residents in these areas were generally aware of the risks of having sex without proper precautions. Hence, the paucity of expressions did not necessarily mean lack of knowledge about the issues concerned.

Second, most Setswana speakers have become aware of the various methods of HIV/AIDS prevention, namely the use of condom, abstinence (including masturbation) and being friends without sex. However, such knowledge, which is manifested by the many expressions found in most of the communities, may not be indicative of people’s change of behaviour or taking of the necessary precautions.

Third, the results show that there are still cases of people who have many partners. As expected, girls become more conspicuous if they happen to have many partners. But from the nature of the expressions, the society is frowning at such behaviour.

Lastly, the lack of many terms for HIV/AIDS testing could be an indicator that HIV/AIDS testing is not yet a common practice. However, it could also mean that it is not an activity which would attract special expressions.

The figures in Table 2 also indicate the repugnant nature of some of the concepts that have resulted in the creation of many euphemisms; many of them are in the forms of slang. Since the mention of ‘sex without condom’, ‘condom’, ‘masturbation’ or ‘STD’ is considered unpleasant in public, euphemisms forms have been created as indirect expressions. A number of factors may have played in determining the

number and type of these expressions in each case.

On the other hand, it was found that, with regard to sexual behaviour, some concepts had many expressions, while other had very few. The figures are shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3: The Number of Terms or Expressions for each Concept

	<i>Concept</i>	<i>Number of Expressions</i>
1	To play sex	14
2	Prostitute	12
3	Ejaculate	12
4	To penetrate sexually	11
5	Men obsessed by sex	6
6	To kiss	5
7	Homosexual	4
8	Virgin	4
9	Oral sex	3

Again, if we go by the assumption that the higher figures of the number of expressions for a given concept are indicative of the central role that the concept plays in the speakers' lives, we would make the following observations regarding Table 3 above.

First, given that sexual relationship is central in the people's lives, many expressions have been created to denote such behaviour. However, the fact that more than half of these expressions are fairly recent would mean that the impact of HIV/AIDS has brought more sensitivity to the problem of sexuality as well as new societal outlook to this phenomenon.

Second, prostitution is a widespread practice. However, as most of the recent expressions (such as *mmaleeto* ‘woman of the road’) denote, it is a practice, which has come to be frowned upon at this time of the AIDS pandemic. In the olden times, prostitution was considered highly positively, hence the existence of expressions like *mmapelotsheu* ‘woman of white heart’.

Third, traditionally, sexual acts are not accomplished without full penetration and ejaculation, as these notions have high occurrence of expressions. Hence external sex play is not a common practice, even at this time of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The data did not manifest any emergence of new expressions for external sex practices.

Fourth, the existence of few terms denoting kissing, oral sex and homosexual practices could be indicative of the uncommonness of such practices in Botswana. But it could also mean that such behaviour is not easily talked about, as, in some ways, it is considered taboo. Practices such as homosexual acts are only mentioned in relation to places such as prisons, where heterosexual practices are restricted.

Fifth, virginity does not seem to be a commonly talked about phenomenon, as very few new creations have occurred to denote this concept. This may be because of the non-revelation of persons who are still virgins, or the fact that virginity has become a rare phenomenon in present Botswana, where many young girls become mothers at a tender age so as to prove their fertility. On the other hand the few terms denoting female condom could be explained by the fact that such a device has just been introduced in the country.

Lastly, one may wish to observe that the occurrence of the many euphemistic and idiomatic expressions for ‘playing sex’, ‘prostitute’, ‘ejaculate’ and ‘penetrate sexually’ could be, in part, motivated by the need to use euphemisms because of the embarrassing or unpleasant nature of using such expressions in public, and not just the centrality of these concepts in peoples lives.

b) The Inner Content of the Expressions

From the inner meanings of the expressions it was possible to

determine the speakers' attitudes towards them. The most conspicuous tendencies were as follows:

First, in terms of the sexual state of girls and women, many of the expressions tend to look negatively at the unbecoming behaviour of girls or women. Hence, a prostitute or woman with many partners is known as *mmaleeto* 'a woman of the road', *moithekisi* 'a seller of oneself' or *mmabatho* 'a woman of the people'. This has tended to discourage prostitution. However, there are also other terms, particularly those which have been in existence for a long time or some of those used in the low-income areas which give positive connotations, such as *mmapelotshweu* 'woman of white heart' or *mohi* 'provider'.

Second, as for the men with many partners, although in the past, men with many partners were considered heroes in society, this is no longer the case. A number of expressions have arisen which tend to consider such a practice as unbecoming. These include *lebelele* 'misfit' (for male prostitute) and *seaka* 'lost item' (again, for male prostitute). The term *poo* 'bull', which used to have a positive connotation in the olden times, is now seen as a negative word.

Third, as for the state of virginity, although in the past virginity was considered sacred and highly valued, in modern times it has tended to be considered as inexperience or backwardness. Thus, although in the past (and still is in the rural areas), it was seen as a state of being 'pure', it is now being regarded as a state of being 'unripe' or 'wrapped up', particularly in the urban centres. In fact, the concept of virginity has been affected not only by the modern values, but also by the belief that a girl must have a child at an early age in order to prove her fertility. Thus, many girls tend to have children before the age of 21. The common terms to denote virgins are given in example (6) below.

- (6) (i) *lekgela* 'unripe fruit, wrapped up'
- (ii) *moroba* 'an inexperienced girl at puberty'
- (iii) *letsopa* 'clay, raw material, intact'

Fourth, in terms of the centrality of sex, in spite of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, sexual relationship has remained an important practice. This is mainly due to the social and psychological role it plays in human life.

In many cases, it is mystified as a super pleasant experience likened to nice food or extreme sweetness, as demonstrated in example (7) below.

(7) *go ja* ‘to eat’ (to penetrate sexually)

monatenate ‘extremely nice/sweetness’ (state of ecstasy after orgasm)

Lastly, as for the change of behaviour, most people seem to be aware of the risks of HIV/AIDS and the ways to prevent infections. However, the attitudes towards sex and sex precautions do not seem to have changed much as it can be inferred from the current expressions.

Conclusion

As Sontag (1977) states, usually illness metaphors are associated with dreadful diseases. In the past, the dreadful diseases included incurable illnesses such as cancer; contagious diseases such as smallpox, TB and Syphilis; and body deforming diseases like polio. The emergence of AIDS has become even more dreadful, as it has combined all the three types of illnesses, as AIDS is not only incurable, but also spreads fast and deforms a person before he/she becomes its victim. This multiple fear of the AIDS scourge has motivated the creation of many metaphors referring to the disease itself and the way it spreads (Sontag 1989). Such circumstances would also explain why Setswana has created so many metaphorical forms in the form of euphemisms and idioms.

The incidence of HIV/AIDS as a new phenomenon in the Setswana culture and way of life has given rise to the emergence of these expressions. It has been demonstrated in this study that, because of the complex nature and social impact, of the disease, not only many expressions have been created for the various concepts but also many of these expressions are euphemistic and idiomatic, because of the need to tone down the unpleasant or embarrassing nature of many of the concepts.

This study has revealed that Setswana has created many neologisms to capture the new concepts relating to HIV/AIDS and related phenomena. The occurrence of many expressions for the same concept was attributed either to the centrality of the concept or the euphemistic

needs due to the nature of the referent. Although many of these terms may have been in existence before the impact of the pandemic, the emergence of the scourge has reinforced the use of the old terms, brought new ones and even, in many cases, changed people's perspectives. For example, *poo* "bull" (a man with many lovers) is no longer the envy of the village, but a person to pity. Although the study has, to a certain extent, managed to determine the nature of attitudes, which have been formed by the speakers and how such attitudes have had a bearing on their sexual behaviour and their reaction to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, more systematic studies on people's attitudes need to be carried out so as to find out the extent to which behavioural changes have actually taken place.

It is important to mention that since this study was strictly sociolinguistic, no attempt was made to contextualize the items in specific discourse. As mentioned above, the aim of the study was to make an inventory of the euphemistic and idiomatic expressions. Evidently, the results could have provided further insights in some of the areas, if both social and stylistic contexts of use were considered. Such a study would have revealed the levels of formality, the domains of use, and even provided information about the social variables, such as gender, age, profession and social position, in relation to the use of the expressions. For example, words for 'condom' are more abundant among students and professionals than among the low-income people. On the other hand, the terms for prostitute are more numerous in the low-income groups than among the students and the professionals. Such an undertaking, which would involve both discourse and usage considerations is intended in the future. Moreover, it would be more revealing if other parts of Botswana, including some of the rural areas could be studied as well.

Lastly, it is hoped that this study has provided a model that could be used in similar studies. Up to now it has been assumed that research on HIV/AIDS was a domain of scientists and social anthropologists. However, linguists can also contribute in looking into this alarming problem by investigating the emergence and use of terms relating to the

scourge and how people's attitudes can be reflected in such metaphorical expressions.

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