Glossary of Setswana Terms

Note on Pronunciation

Setswana is pronounced much as it is written, with a few key exceptions (Matumo 1993):

‘e’ may be pronounced either as ey in the English they, e.g. malome; or as e in then, e.g. akere
‘g’ is pronounced like ch in loch, e.g. gae
‘i’ is pronounced ee as in deep, e.g. masimo
‘kg’ is pronounced as a guttural k, e.g. kgotla; dikgang is therefore di-KHang
‘ng’ is pronounced like ng in sing, e.g. ngaka
‘o’ is pronounced like oa in boat, e.g. motse
‘th’ is pronounced as an aspirated t as in take, e.g. motha

Glossary

( go) aga to build
akere right?; isn’t it?
Ao! expression of surprise (interjection)
bagolo elders
batwapeng family (lit. people of the courtyard)
bana ba bomnaboipelego children of the social worker (often used for orphans)
bana ba motho siblings (lit. children of a person)
banyana girls
batsadi see motsadi
Batswana Tswana people
bogadi bridewealth (see also lobola)
botho personhood; connotes dignity, respectfulness, and humane behaviour
dikgang see kgang

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ee  yes
gae  home or home village
gareitse (gakeitse)  we don’t know (I don’t know)
he! / haish! / heela!  hey!; expressions of surprise, insistence, or fatigue (interjections)
ija! / ijo!  expressions of surprise, annoyance, or sympathy (interjections)
isong  fireplace, hearth, or outdoor kitchen
(go) itirela  to make or do for oneself; to make oneself as a social person
kagisanyo  harmony
kagiso  peace
kana  actually, as it happens (interjection)
kgang (pl. dikgang)  issue or problem; topic of discussion, argument, or earnest debate; a disputed question or contention; also news
kgaoganya  to share out, separate, or resolve
kgokgontsho ya bana  child abuse
kgosi  chief
kgosikgolo  paramount chief
kgotla  customary court or tribal administration
ko gae  at home (referring to one’s natal home or home village)
ko lwapeng  in the courtyard or at home (i.e. the yard one stays in)
kwa ga …  at the place of
lefufa  jealousy
lelwapa (pl. malwapa)  courtyard; house; family
lobola  bridewealth (see also bogadi)
lorato  love
malome (pl. bomalome)  uncle (specifically, mother’s brother)
makwapa  see lelwapa
masimo  farmlands
medumo (sing. modumo)  noise; disturbances
mmago/mmagwe  mother of
mma malome  uncle’s wife; female uncle
monna  man or husband
monna wa me  my man or my husband
mophato (pl. mephato)  age regiment
morafe (pl. merafe)  tribal polity; nation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setswana Term</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>moraka</td>
<td>cattle post</td>
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<tr>
<td>mosadi (pl. basadi)</td>
<td>woman</td>
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<tr>
<td>motsadi (pl. batsadi)</td>
<td>parent</td>
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<tr>
<td>motse</td>
<td>village</td>
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<tr>
<td>motsetse</td>
<td>confinement</td>
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<tr>
<td>motshelo (pl. metshelo)</td>
<td>savings group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motswana</td>
<td>Tswana person (singular)</td>
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<tr>
<td>mpona!</td>
<td>look at me!</td>
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<tr>
<td>mxm!</td>
<td>expression of annoyance, frustration, or</td>
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<td></td>
<td>derision (interjection)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ngaka</td>
<td>traditional doctor</td>
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<tr>
<td>ngwana</td>
<td>child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nkuku</td>
<td>grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nna</td>
<td>me or I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>myaa</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>puo</td>
<td>conversation or discussion (of difficult</td>
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<td></td>
<td>matters); a case to be tried</td>
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<tr>
<td>rrago/rragwe</td>
<td>father of</td>
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<tr>
<td>seabe</td>
<td>a portion given; a share</td>
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<tr>
<td>segotlo</td>
<td>backyard</td>
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<tr>
<td>seswaa</td>
<td>stewed and shredded meat, common at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>weddings and funerals</td>
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<tr>
<td>sotlega</td>
<td>scorn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tirisanyo mmogo</td>
<td>cooperation; working together</td>
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<tr>
<td>tlkwano</td>
<td>come here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tlhokomelo</td>
<td>care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(go) tsamaya</td>
<td>to go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wena</td>
<td>you</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Setswana

the language and culture of the Tswana

sjambok

a rubberised whip (Afrikaans)

sotlega

scorn

tirisanyo mmogo

cooperation; working together

tlkwano

come here

tlhokomelo

care

(go) tsamaya

to go

wena

you
Figure 12 Tswana kin terms.
Kin Terms

Kin terms in Setswana are complex, fluid, and sometimes interchangeable, and they do not translate readily into English. They distinguish on the basis of relative age and relative sex, and there are different terms used to identify relationships in the third (his/her), second (your), and first (my) person. Here, I have distinguished them by generation for ease of reference, although roles and terms frequently move between and across generations (Figure 12).