

Pragmatics of letter writing in Setswana

Mompoloki M. Bagwasi

University of Botswana, English Department, Private Bag 00703, UB Post Office, Gaborone, Botswana

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Abstract

Using a corpus of about 200 letters written during the time that Botswana was a British protectorate (1885–1966) by and to the British administrators on one hand, and letters written to and by Batswana (natives of Botswana) on the other hand, this paper explores the main differences and similarities between letter writing by Batswana and by the British. The study found that in the letters written by the British there is directness in presenting the point, very little stylistic ornamentation, and emphasis on information or content of the letters. The letters are more formal with shorter salutations and signatures. Letters written by Batswana on the other hand reveal that the conventions of letter writing in Setswana require greetings and an employment of address forms that convey respect and politeness in the Setswana culture. Letters written by Batswana thus have longer introductions and salutations which involve greetings and best wishes.

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1. Aims and objectives

In the late 1800s Bechuanaland (now Botswana) and other less powerful nations neighboring South Africa were in danger of being annexed into South Africa by the powerful Boers who ruled it. Bechuanaland asked for protection from the British and in 1885 it was declared a British protectorate. The British administered and oversaw the country by means of a small white administration based in Mafeking (sic), South Africa. Such an arrangement led to a frequent exchange of letters between the British administrators in Mafeking, South Africa and Batswana chiefs in Botswana.

Using a corpus of about 200 letters written during the protectorate period (1885–1966) by and to the British administrators on the one hand, and letters written to and by Batswana local chiefs on the other hand, this paper aims to explore the main differences and similarities between letter

writing by Batswana and by the British administrators. The paper aims to answer the following questions: What are the main linguistic and extra-linguistic features which characterize letter writing by Batswana and by the British administrators? What are the main differences and similarities between the two types of authors? In addition, the paper also wants to find out if Batswana letter writing style in anyway influenced British style.

2. Review of some current studies of letter writing

Being one of the earliest forms of writing, a letter is currently wide spread across a wide range of uses and cultures. However, despite its prevalence there has been little research of a letter as a genre as compared to poetry and novel (Barton and Hall, 2000). Barton and Hall (2000) argue that a letter, as an object of literary practice is “not static but peculiarly flexible, versatile and diverse”. This is because letter writing is embedded in particular social practices, cultural beliefs and values from which it draws its meaning.

Furthermore, Sridhar (1982) Swales (1990), and Valentine (1991) point out that there are important cross cultural differences in the way that the same speech act such as making requests, apologies, writing letters, resumé and applications are performed in different languages. Swales (1990:58) has observed that a genre such as a letter or resumé comprises of a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. Members of a discourse community agree upon the acceptable features that define a specific genre. The cultural differences in writing letters are reflected in Barton and Hamilton (1998) study in which letters written by the white working class community were written by one person to another, composed privately and read privately. In the Muslim communities the letters were written by one family to another, composed collaboratively and received and read publicly within the family. This finding by Barton and Hamilton supports Hall et al. (2000) assertion that letter writing is a socially negotiated practice.

The social context sets structural conditions on the different parts of a letter such as its beginning, body and ending. Different speech communities have different ways of organizing information or ideas in writing which reflect their cultural thought patterns. Kaplan (1987) maintains that language and writing are a cultural phenomenon and as a direct consequence each language has rhetorical conventions unique to it. In order to understand, how language is used, how it is structured and how it is interpreted, linguists have to look at how it is embedded in the cultural context of the local environment: what meanings and world views are shared by the speaker–hearer or writer–reader. Further, Kaplan asserts that the linguistic and rhetorical conventions of the first language often interfere with writing in the second language.

The above arguments suggest that letter writing in English and letter writing in Setswana will have different ways in which they present and organize their ideas and thoughts that are guarded or influenced by their different cultures and thought patterns. Indeed, Kachru (1982) states that letters, either personal or not so personal, are an excellent medium through which we can study the cultural norms in personal interactions. In English the written mode, even in personal interaction, has several rhetorical prerequisites; these include directness in presenting the point, very little stylistic ornamentation, and emphasis on the content of the letter. On the other hand, a typical letter from South Asia, the far East, or Africa will have an extremely deferential lexical spread based on the politeness hierarchy of the first language. A letter in Setswana would thus have certain features that might even be seen as inappropriate in letter writing in English.

3. Method and data

In this study, a letter is simply defined as a document that identifies the addressee in the salutation, the writer in the signature and the time of writing in the date. Considering that most of the letters (especially by Batswana writers) in the current data were written at a time when the format or conventions for a formal and personal letter were not strictly adhered to, the formality or informality of these letters is mainly determined by the content of the letter and the relationship between the writer and reader. Personal letters are those written to friends and relatives about informal and personal topics and the language used is colloquial or informal. Formal letters are those written to individuals in their official capacities about some official business and contain formal language.

The letters are divided into two categories. The first category consists of letters written by the British who mostly worked as officials in the British administration as high commissioners, deputy commissioners, administrators, native commissioners, resident commissioners, acting resident commissioners, governors, state secretaries, resident commissioners. In this category letters by missionaries who were mostly English speaking are included. The second category is that of letters written by Batswana who mostly comprised of chiefs and a few Batswana individuals. Pery-Woodley (1990:143) supports comparative studies of this nature and argues that it is the contrastive light which shows a particular practice as being specific to a group or having been derived from another group. Contrastive studies are also said to help avoid stereotypes which come as a result of failing to recognize that preferences in writing styles are culturally informed.

The paper analyzes the types of salutations, openings, endings, signatures and discourse devices used by each group of authors. It argues that the conventions used to express these are significant social devices that reflect cultural requirements about the politeness strategies, address forms and discourse patterns employed by the two groups of authors. Barton and Hall (2000:1) agree that "the most revealing way of investigating letters is to view them as a social practice; examining the participants, the text and activities in the social context".

The letters used in the study are authentic, they were obtained from Botswana National Archives in Gaborone, Botswana between August 2000 and May 2001. No effort on the part of the researcher was made to revise or make any corrections to the texts in terms of language or grammar unless for features that hinder intelligibility. Otherwise the letters are presented for the most part as they are written by their authors.

4. Letters written by British administrators to other British administrators

Using a corpus of 45 letters from British administrators to other British administrators, this study seeks to identify characteristics of British letter writing between 1885 and 1966. The analysis focuses on the types of address forms, beginnings and endings, as well as directness/indirectness in presenting the subject matter in these letters. The corpus indicates that almost all (43 out of 45 letters, (or 95%)) of the letters in this category employ formal salutations such as 'Dear Sir,' 'Your Honor,' the addressee's name or his official title. The salutation 'Dear Sir' is the most common, appearing in 71% (or 32 out of 45) of the letters. In very limited cases (2 cases) elaborate praise or greetings are used in the salutation. Examples of salutations and openings of these letters are illustrated in extracts 1, 2, and 3 below:

Extract 1

Sir,

I have the honor to inform you in reply to yours of 15 inst. with reference to the inquiry as to whether we intend changing a commission on sums of money transferred to the credit of the deputy commissioner in Bechuanaland at Kimberly that we have much pleasure in making the said transfers at par.

(Letter from Imperial secretary (signature not legible) to High Commissioner 25 April 1884). HC 65/14

Extract 2

My dear Sir Sidney,

The annual festival is nearly over. Tomorrow most of the warriors disperse to their kraals and in a day or two I hope to resume communication with the chief on official matters which have been put aside for about three weeks.

(Letter from J Moffat to Sir Sidney Shippard, February 3 1888) HC 123

Extract 3

May it please your excellency,

I beg to draw your attention to the condition of certain parts of the interior from my own point of view as a missionary and as a devoted subject of Her Majesty the Queen.

(Letter from John Mackenzie to Sir Henry Berkly, High Commissioner for the Zulu in South Africa 2 May 1876). HC 48/1/2

The letters written by the British administrators to other British administrators do not only have formal salutations but they also have direct opening sentences which immediately state the subject that the writer wants to presents. In cases where the author does not immediately present his topic the opening is a reference to the last letter or contact between the addressee and the reader. Merkestein (1998:177) remarks that British letter writing is more direct because the "norms of British English fellowship dictates that expositions must be rational and since reason and emotion are felt to be diametrically opposed, the overt expression of feelings, attitude and emotions must be avoided as much as possible".

The signatures of these letters are also simple, formal, and formulaic. In the current data the most popular signature is "your obedient servant" which is employed in 22 out of 45 letters (49%). The signature is formulaic, used by most of the letter writers and sometimes not even written in full, but abbreviated to 'I am your etc.' The rest of the letters, (23 letters (or 51%)) use other formal signatures such as 'yours sincerely, yours truly or with kind regards I remain.' The following extracts illustrate the endings and signatures found in the letters of British administrators to other British administrators.

Extract 4

It occurs to me that perhaps some of the sentences in this communication may appear at a distance to be too strongly expressed. My apology, it could be due to my sense of the magnitude of imminence of the question, which alone could have induced me to write at all.

With every expression of respect, I remain,

Your Excellency's humble servant,

John Mackenzie.

(Letter from John Mackenzie to Sir Henry Berkly, High Commissioner for the Zulu in South Africa 2 May 1876) HC 48/1/2

Extract 5

I asked him if he is satisfied, he said “no” and then again he said if you are only riding past it is all right, but you must do nothing.

I have etc.

J. Vosthurgen.

(Letter from J Vosthurgen to High Commissioner, 19 February, 1889) HC 25/42

Extract 6

But they are anxious that the present uncomfortable or even dangerous state of things should come to an end.

I remain, yours faithfully,

A.J Wookey.

(Letter from A.J Wookey to H. Surmon Esq. Resident Commissioner for the Protectorate, May 3rd 1901). RC 5/12

The formal language, salutations, signatures, beginnings and endings, in these letters suggest a formal, rigid, professional and faceless type of relationship in which colloquial and intimate language could not be used between the British administrators. This finding suggests that the relationship between the addressee and the reader for a British administrator writing to another one is formal and professional, allowing very little intimacy. The letters have one function: to convey official business.

5. Letters written by Batswana

In this category 130 letters written by Batswana to British administrators and 25 letters written by Batswana to other Batswana are analyzed. Except for a few differences (that will be pointed out later) Batswana did not vary their writing style much when they were writing to the British administrators and when they were writing to each other. The majority (70 out of 130 or 54%) of Batswana writers used formal salutations such as ‘Dear Sir, Your Excellency, Your honour’ or the addressee’s title or name when writing to the British administrators. However, 42 letters (or 32%) used an informal address term ‘my friend,’ to address the British administrators. Extracts 7–9 exemplify the beginnings of letters by Batswana chiefs to British administrators.

Extract 7

Your Honour,

I greet you and the Bakwena also greet you. I together with the headmen and all of the Bakwena are very much pleased that His Honour found an opportunity and necessity to visit our town and see us.

(Letter from Sechele paramount chief of Bakwena to His Honour the Resident Commissioner 8 September, 1911) S 43/2

Extract 8

My dear friend,

Sir, I write to greet you and Mrs. Wright. Now I send you these few lines to let you know that you will be so kind enough, please sir, to wait until I send to tell you when I need the corn.

(Letter from Chief Montsioa to W.J. Wright, 25 September, 1884) HC 193

Extract 9

Mr Ellenberger,

Greetings chief, to you, your wife and your children. I am writing to inform you that on his return from Gaberones, the boy who had taken our letters to you said that he told him it was well with regard to the letter which I had written to you.

(Letter from Kgabo to Ellenberger 2 May, 1901) RC 5/12

Bagwasi (2004:3) argues that both Batswana chiefs and British administrators deliberately adopted a less formal address term 'my friend' to address each other in order to mask the power strife that existed between British administrators and local Batswana chiefs during the protectorate rule. The address term was a way to establish solidarity and equality between the two as a way of creating a friendly working relationship.

On the whole, letters by Batswana display many characteristics that are not found in British letter writing. For example, while the letters written by the British mostly opened by going straight into the subject matter, letters written by Batswana as illustrated in excerpts 7–9 above tend to open by a greeting or making a reference to the welfare of the reader before presenting the subject matter of the letter. An examination of the data shows that of the 130 letters written by Batswana to the British administrators 29 of them opened with a greeting or an inquiry about the health of the recipient or his family thereby employing the local Setswana practice of using greetings as conversation openers. In the best traditions of Setswana hospitality the speaker has to ask for the welfare of the hearer and perhaps that of his family at the beginning of a conversation.

Greetings are not only used as conversation openers in Setswana speech interaction but they are also an important strategy by which a speaker/writer attempts to please and win the social approval of the other. Batswana authors inquire about the recipient's health or welfare and that of their family because Batswana society generally places great value on relatives or family. Consequently, space is often devoted in the letter for greetings and asking about the health of the family.

Letters by Batswana are also characterized by the use of discourse markers and address forms such as kinship terms and totems. The use of such features exhibit certain structures and features that are reflective of Setswana culture and discourse patterns. In 7 out of 25 (or 28%) letters by Batswana to other Batswana totems or kinship terms are used to address each other in accordance with Setswana custom of showing respect and endearment. Note that the kinship terms used in these letters do not necessarily connote a biological relationship between author and reader. The totems and kinship terms are mostly honorific forms meant to show respect and solidarity to the addressee. In the first extract below the author addresses the addressee with his totem (**phuti**, *duiker*, which is a totem for the Bangwato ethnic group) as a way of expressing solidarity with him. And in the second extract a kinship term is used.

Extract 10

Dear chief Keaboka,

Phuti ke a dumedisa (*duiker, I greet you*). Chief, I learn that you paid us a visit a few days ago in connection with some school trouble we are having. Chief, we are only sorry that when you were here you did not even see one of the teachers. Chief we here feel that we are your eyes and ears.

(Letter from John Malome to Chief Keaboka 24 March, 1952) BT Admin 1/22

Extract 11

We found out that the huts had been entered and searched for fictitious evidence for which the girls were to get dresses. *Father*, there is not much to say. I will stop here.

The writer is your **child**.

(*Unsigned letter to D. Radiladi 4 January, 1937*) S 485/1/1

In both letters written to British administrators and to other Batswana the Setswana culture of using down grading expressions as a politeness strategy is evident. It is very common in the Setswana culture for a speaker of a low status to use down degrading strategies when addressing a person of a high status. Examples of down degradation include such expressions as 'I have nothing to say' or 'I have a little question,' or 'I have no news.' In Setswana speech interaction such expressions make the speaker's opinion or idea seem modest and therefore not pressurizing the addressee to respond. At the same time, such expressions appeal to the addressee's compassion and generosity to listen to those with a small voice. The use of down grading strategies is illustrated in extracts 12–14 below.

Extract 12

To our senior magistrate,

My best greetings, Sir, **I have nothing to say** sir, **I only ask** about the health of my relative who is there. **I ask one little question chief**. I hear that my wife says that when I beat her I had her held down, one person holding her by one foot, another by another foot, and another by her hand. I say I hear her words, but if they are hers they are lies.

(*Letter from Chief Sekgoma Letsholathebe to Magistrate 13 November, 1905*) RC 5/13

Extract 13

Dear Sir John K. Mswazi,

I say receive mine herewith Ntombo (*Ntombo is subgroup of the Bakalaka ethnic group in Botswana whose totem is a hare*). I ask how are you. We arrived al right without any fault. **There is nothing that I can talk of** except to inquire about your health. Since leaving you we have not heard of anything really. Of course what I can tell you is that your children still say what you know of.

(*Letter from Mbo Mswazi to John Mswazi 15 October, 1931*) S 261/2

Extract 14

Ratshosa Ratswetla,

I am writing to tell you that there is no news. What **I** told the chief the other day is correct. The Bakwena and the bakgatla have met and **have** agreed about the country of Bangwato.

(*Letter from Tshwene Mosinyi to Ratshosa Motsweila 8 May (no year)*) AC 2/2/1

The above examples support Merkestein (1998:178)'s view that in the context of Botswana, individuals derive their being from the community. In order to do this they must make their relationship with other individuals in the community explicit. Merkestein argues that "in this society power essentially resides in the individual as opposed to the institution, though only by the consent of the group. Consequently, power only has meaning when endorsed by others in a positive relational sense". This means that power in discourse must explicitly be expressed by an individual regardless of the text type because in this cultural setting, face has to be maintained, even in highly authoritarian text type such as formal letters. Since the explicit maintenance of

relationships is traditionally done orally, it seems a natural step to accommodate the registral features necessary to express relationships in the social reality of the speaker in writing.

Proverbs are also considered an effective, intelligent and eloquent way of expressing ideas in Setswana speech interaction. They are used mostly in formal and oral situations dealing with serious matters and they often come as topic openers, summaries and reiterations of points. In the current data, a few letters (8 out of 175 letters) written to both British administrators and others Batswana use proverbs as conversation or topic openers in accordance with the Setswana practice of opening a difficult or serious topic with a proverb. A proverb used as topic or conversation opener helps consolidate or summarize the point the speaker is going to present and helps the listener project the speaker's line of thought even before he/she presents his/her view. In the following extracts the writers' views are skillfully consolidated in Setswana proverbs that are used as the opening of the letter.

Extract 15

Honoured Chief,

There is a saying among the Bechuana that the name of a spy is not given. Certain chiefs were recently gathered here at Serowe, having been called by Tshekedi, they had come in connection with very important and difficult matters.

(Unsigned letter to Lieutenant Colonel Ellenberger July, 1927) S 6/1

Extract 16

The resident magistrate,

There is a native proverb "once the chief starts to walk lame all his servants must follow."

The government and everyone who has lived in this country must surely be aware of this common proverb and that consequently no Mongwato could be expected to give evidence as to what he actually knows to be in my favour. He would be bound to follow whatever was dictated to him by the chief who is his lord and master.

(Letter from Oratile Sekgoma to Resident Magistrate Serowe 23 January, 1928) DCS 7/3

The use of greetings, proverbs, down grading strategies, kinship terms and totems give the letters written by Batswana a spoken tone. In fact, in Setswana letter writing the writer addresses the reader as in person. For example, as respect or politeness a writer may repeat the reader's address form several times, as in person, in order to show a kind of solidarity between writer and reader as illustrated in extract 17 below.

Extract 17

Chief Ellenberger,

I have received your letter of 22nd March and I was very much pleased with **chief** to hear you speak of the trees saying that I should look after them, which I will do. And I wish you to help me also **chief** if you see anyone cutting down trees prevent him from doing so. Say to him 'Sebele says that the trees must not be cut down, that he has forbidden it. Please inform the people **chief**. I also ask **chief**, that the government help me protect them.

Greetings **chief**, to you and your children.

I am Sebele, chief of Bakwena.

(Letter from Sebele chief of Bakwena to Ellenberger 7 May 1897) HC 125/ 1-2

In cases such as the one above Grice (1975)'s maxim of quantity is infringed because the letters often include a lot of redundancy as the writers, in accordance with the politeness

strategies of their culture, feel that they have to repeat address forms and by so doing become repetitive and more informative than is required. It can thus be argued that nativization of letter writing in Setswana has resulted in a systematic violation of Grice's maxim of quantity because writers add details such as repeating address forms, using down grading strategies or inquiring about the health of the addressee or his family that are not relevant to the topic. Letters written by Batswana are orientated towards the relationship between the reader and the writer and the format, content and style of the letters help establish or maintain this relationship.

The present data also found evidence that in their letter writing, some Batswana writers, employ discourse markers to open, change, and close their topic or letter. This overt use of discourse markers for such a purpose gives letters by Batswana writers a kind of organization and layout which is characterized by clearly defined or expressed beginnings and endings not found in British writers. For instance, while English writers in this data tend to organize their ideas in paragraphs Batswana authors on the other hand express their openings, endings or change of topic by such discourse markers as 'I commence by', 'first of all', 'I say, 'or 'that is all.' In the current data 9 letters by Batswana begin with an explicit topic or conversation opener "I commence by" and 13 letters end with an explicit closing 'that is all'. These organizational strategies are illustrated in extracts 18–21.

Extract 18

Chief

I commence my letter by telling you of those things I myself know and have seen. I began to know this tribe when they were driven from the Transvaal by the Boers.

(Letter from Chief Bathoen to Sir Sidney Shippard May 19 1890) HC 139/4

Extract 19

Sir,

I must commence my letter by thanking you most sincerely for your kind promptitude in advising me to write to the government through you about my money four hundred pounds.

(Letter from Rawe Sekoko to the Assistant Commissioner Francistown 26 May 1906) AC 5/3

Extract 20

With regards to Lophephe, I myself blamed him because he knows there is a boundary between us and the Bamangwato and I say keep on helping him with good words of the laws of the government by making the laws clear to him. He is a man who forgets very much.

That is all.

Greetings chief, I am your friend Kgosidintsi

(Letter from Kgosidintsi to W.H Surmon 1 June 1899) HC 115

Extract 21

We parted long ago and I do not know why Mathiba is after me.

That is all, Sir. I finish with greetings.

I am Motshabi Letsholathebe

(Letter from Motshabi Letsholathebe to The resident Magistrate undated) S 601/3

The above examples illustrate that in Setswana, a letter is treated like a conversational unit whose beginning and ending have to be clearly expressed. The use of the discourse markers function to connect the different units of the letter and to achieve unity. The use of the discourse

markers in the letters also perform such social functions as establishing, maintaining and negotiating a turn or relationship with the reader. The meanings and use of these discourse markers are a result of transferring Setswana spoken forms to written forms. Meshrie and West (1995:107) agree that in many respects letters written by people with little education are closer to speech than those of people who have received more training in formal written English.

6. Letters written by the British administrators to Batswana chiefs

In this section I revisit letters written by the British in order to answer the question of whether the British modified and adapted their style when writing to Batswana. There is evidence that British authors adapted to Batswana writing style by employing the informal and intimate salutation and signature 'My friend' when writing to Batswana chiefs even in cases where the content of the letters is serious and official. In addition, some of their letters to Batswana chiefs ended with a greeting or a Setswana slogan '*pula*.' Of the 25 letters written by British administration to Batswana chiefs 18 (78%) of them employ the salutation 'My friend,' and 5 letters (or 22%) use formal salutations such as; Sir, title of the addressee, or name of the addressee. However, the opening sentences of these letters are still for the most part direct, immediately stating the subject matter of the letter. Extracts 22–23 demonstrate the beginnings of letters by British administrators to Batswana chiefs.

Extract 22

My friend Sechele,

When I visited Molepolole last month an address of welcome was presented to me by you and your people and I told you in reply to certain points therein that I was unable to say anything relative thereto without first consulting Mr. Barry May whom you had discussed those matters when he had visited you in his capacity as acting resident commissioner.

(Letter from assistant commissioner to the chief Sechele, 24 February, 1912) S 43/2

Extract 23

Chief,

Herewith I give you notice and forbid you absolutely from trespassing on Transvaal ground as is already done by your people and warn you in the name of the South African Republic not to lay your hands upon the crops sown by your people in the boundary of the South African Republic.

(Letter from Native Commissioner to Chief Ikaning 7 March 1887) HC 12/18

The endings and signatures of letters written by the British administrators to Batswana chiefs are relatively less formal when compared to those written to other British administrators. The endings of these letters mostly convey greetings and best wishes. Of the 23 letters written by the British officials to Batswana chiefs 20 of them (or 86%) employ an informal signature 'Your friend,' and others include greetings or best wishes as illustrated in excerpts 24–25 below:

Extract 24

I propose to be at Gaberones on Friday next and request you to be present there to meet me and give me an explanation of why you held the meeting and the reason for making use of the words which you are said to have used. Until, we meet I shall not discuss the matter with you.

Let it rain.

(Letter from Resident Commissioner to chief Sebele 9 June, 1899) HC 115

Extract 25

Now I am writing to tell you that in the event of all the cattle not being removed, you must not interfere with them yourself in any way or allow your people to do so. The matter is one between the government and the chief Khama and not between you and chief Khama.

I hope that you will have good rains and that you and your people are well.

With greetings,

Yours etc.

Barry May

(Letter from Barry May to Sekgoma Khama 3 December, 1888) AC 5/10

Note the use of the Botswana slogan '*Pula*' (*meaning rain*) in extract 24 and 25 in the closings of British letters. Botswana is a semi-arid country with unreliable seasonal rainfalls. Thus water or rain in Botswana is scarce and considered a valuable commodity. Rain is also associated with prosperity and peace. Batswana are therefore constantly wishing and praying for rain and hence their slogan '*Pula*' which means 'let there be rain.' This slogan is often used during formal speeches, public greetings and as best wishes. The use of the slogan '*pula or rain*' by the British authors in their letters to Batswana in extract 24 and 25 is evidence of these authors adapting to Batswana's linguistic and social patterns.

7. Conclusion

This paper set out to answer the following questions: what are the main differences and similarities between letter writing by Batswana and by the British administrators? What are the main linguistic and extra-linguistic features which characterize each type? Since the British and Batswana were exchanging letters the study also attempted to determine if there was any influence on the writing style of one group by the other. The study found that in the British written mode there is directness in presenting the point, very little stylistic ornamentation, and emphasis on the content of the letter.

On the other hand, the study found that the conventions of letter writing in Setswana require greetings and an employment of address forms that convey respect and politeness in Setswana culture. Letters written by Batswana thus have longer introductions and salutations that involve greetings and best wishes. The letters written by Batswana also tend to have more features of repetition, spoken and colloquial forms, down grading as well as discourse markers that express the openings and endings of conversations. This suggests that Batswana writers do not only transfer local lexical and syntactic patterns but also transfer cultural strategies for address, organization and politeness.

Some of the letters written by the British administrators indicate influence from the local culture as illustrated by the use of Setswana slogan '*Pula or rain*' used as a greeting or best wish in the British letters. This fact indicates that though the British were the norm providers their style and language was also affected by the local linguistic and cultural environment in which they operated. The high percentage of informal address forms by the Batswana writers indicates that though the British were the norm providers Batswana writers style is based on their sociolinguistic and cultural background. The current study argues that letter writing is a social practice in which attention should be paid to the relationship between the writer and the reader and the correct use of social salutations and signatures. This confirms Barton and Hall (2000:7)'s observation that people assert their identities in the letters that they write.

It should however be emphasized that this paper focused on letters written between 1885 and 1966 and therefore the findings of this study may not be applicable to letter writing in Setswana today. Genres are not static and stylistically homogenous texts, they constantly change their structure along side with changes in education, technology and changes in other genres related to them, consequently, letter writing in Setswana must have changed since the time of the British rule.¹

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Mompoloki Mmangaka Bagwasi is a lecturer in the English Department at the University of Botswana. She did her masters at the university of Leeds (UK) in 1993 and her doctorate at Indiana University, Bloomington in 2002. Her research interests are in the areas of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis. Her recent publications include "A critical discourse analysis of forms of address in letters between Batswana chiefs and British Administrators" In: *Alternation* 2004; 11 (2), 365–385 and "The functional distribution of Setswana and English in Botswana" In: *Language, Culture and Curriculum* 2003; 16 (2), 212–217.

