

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Forms of Address in Letters between Batswana Chiefs and British Administrators

Mompoloki M. Bagwasi

Introduction

In the late 1800s Bechuanaland, now Botswana, and other neighbouring countries were in danger of being annexed into South Africa by the powerful Boers. Bechuanaland asked for protection from the British government and in 1885 it was declared a British protectorate (Campbell 1979). Before British rule the country was ruled by chiefs who had a lot of power over the people and the land. The chiefs were responsible for land allocation and the issuing of mine prospecting permits. The advent of the British in 1885 called for the redefinition and regulation of the powers of the chiefs, a step that naturally bred misunderstanding and strains in the relationship between the local chiefs and British administrators. Brown and Gilman (1960:255) point out that power is a relationship between at least two persons, and that it is non-reciprocal in the sense that both cannot have power in the same area of behavior (in Mesthrie et al 2000). This non-reciprocal relationship is evident when the British administrators used signatures such as 'your obedient servant' when addressing each other and the address term 'friend' when addressing Batswana chiefs. *Friend* is associated with solidarity and *obedient servant* is associated with an absence of solidarity and differential power relations.

Objective and Methodology

Using a corpus of about 200 letters written by and to the British administra-

tors on one hand, and letters written to and by Batswana local chiefs on the other hand, this paper aims to explore the type of relationship that existed between British administrators and Batswana chiefs during the protectorate period (1885-1966). This paper is about language and power. It examines the relationship between language use and the unequal relations of power between Batswana chiefs and British administrators. The paper adopts a critical discourse analysis approach where written texts are seen as a form of social practice in which social structure and social practices are constructed. This approach requires attention to be paid to the form, structure and organization of the text. The paper illustrates the significance of language in the production, maintenance or change of social relations of power.

Fairclough (1995:19) rightly points out that critical discourse analysts sometimes fail to historicize their data or specify the historical conditions within which their data is generated, and to indicate how these conditions contribute to the meaning and form of the data. Indeed, Wodak and Meyer (2002) claim that every discourse is historically produced and interpreted. The historical perspective that this paper provides is important in foregrounding the social context in which the letters were generated as well as 'legitimizing' some viewpoints and ideologies that are expressed in the letters. The letters demonstrate the kind of negotiation for social identity and position that British administrators and Batswana chiefs were engaged in as they found themselves having to define their power relations. The letters serve an illustration of the way discourse is sometimes used to create and sustain inequalities in society. Fairclough (1995) is a strong advocate for an approach that links analysis of samples of language with the understanding of conflict in society.

In this paper the relationship between Batswana chiefs and British administrators is assessed by examining the type of address forms used in the salutations and signatures of the letters. Mesthrie et al (2000:319) contend that titles, names, pronouns and address forms are clear and well defined subsystems of language that reveal inequalities of power or solidarity between individuals and the institutions they may represent. Differences of power are likely to determine the choice of one address form over another. Further, Brown and Levinson (1987) define solidarity in terms of personal relationships and degree of friendliness between speakers and addressees.

The letters are divided into two broad categories. The first category consists of letters written by the British administrators who mostly worked as officials in the British administration as High Commissioners, Deputy High Commissioners, Resident Commissioners, Governors, Magistrates, etc. Though the missionaries were not necessarily part of the British administration or native speakers of English, their letters are analyzed in this category. This category is divided into two parts: letters written by the British administrators to other British administrators and letters written by British administrators to Batswana chiefs. The second category is that of letters written by Batswana chiefs. This category too has two parts: letters written by Batswana to the British administrators and those written by Batswana to other Batswana.

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

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis according to Phillips and Jorgensen (2002:61) provides theories and methods for the empirical study of relations between discourse and social and cultural developments in different social domains. Fairclough (1989, 1992a, 1992b, 1995) uses the term critical discourse to describe an approach that he has developed which is a broader movement within discourse analysis. Fairclough (1992b) advocates for a critical interpretation of texts in order to recover the social meanings that are expressed in discourse. This is achievable by analyzing the linguistic structures in discursive texts in the light of their interactional and wider social contexts. Fairclough believes that the analytic method that he proposes may be used by people who may not be specialists in linguistics but in other fields such as history.

Fairclough proposes to regard discourse as a form of social practice, rather than a purely individual activity or a reflex of situational variables. He believes that discourse is determined by socially constituted orders of discourse or sets of conventions that are associated with social institutions.

He argues that discourse has an effect upon social structures as well as being determined by them. Fairclough (1992b:63) asserts that 'discourse is shaped and constrained by social structure, by class and other social relations at societal level and by relations specific to particular institutions'. Fairclough further argues that critical discourse analysis views discourse as a domain in which social struggles take place, where the effects of discourse upon social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and beliefs are shown to be shaped by relations of power and ideologies. Indeed, language is a social practice that is determined by social structure and the changes in discourse often reflect a dimension of wider and social and cultural change. This view is shared by Gee (1990:23) who argues that discourses are inherently ideological because they involve a set of values and viewpoints about the relationships between people and the distribution of social goods. Gee asserts that 'one must speak and act in terms of these values and viewpoints while being in the discourse'.

This does not mean that people are often aware of the ideological dimensions of their discursive practices because ideologies that are built into conventions of a particular group's speech may become so naturalized that people may find it difficult to accept that their normal practices could have specific ideological investments. However, even where discourse participants may not be aware of the ideological import of their language, aspects of their style are often ideologically significant. For instance individuals or public bodies such as government ministries often produce personal and public information about their schemes and activities in a style that is partly based on the image they want to construct for themselves.

Fairclough (1989:2) argues that ideologies are linked to power because the nature of the ideological assumptions in particular conventions and the nature of the conventions themselves depend on power relations which underlie them. He says ideologies are a means of legitimizing existing social relations and differences of power through recurrence of ordinary familiar ways of behaving which take these relations for granted. Hodge and Kress (1993:203) believe that

a text (a record of language in use) is always the product of socially situated participants operating with relative degrees of choice in situations where discursive behavior is constrained to different

degrees by specific structurings of power and domination ranging from equality (dimension of solidarity) to inequality (dimension of power).

Wodak and Meyer (2002:11) too believe that 'texts are sites of struggle in that they show traces of differing discourses and ideologies contending and struggling for dominance'. Different users of language in discourse or a text have different orientations to degrees of access to a given set of meanings in a language and the selections they make are determined and based on the social circumstances and positions of the speakers in the social structure. Discourse thus assigns 'subject positions' which may be accepted or rejected.

Language is always at the core of social relations and social processes given that power relations are often expressed implicitly or explicitly through language. Power relations involve struggles in which those who have and those who do not have power are constantly engaged in a struggle to exercise, maintain, or defend their position. Fairclough (1995:76) sees this struggle in which there is leadership as well as domination across economic, political, cultural and ideological domains as hegemony. He argues that 'hegemony is about constructing alliances and integrating rather than simply dominating subordinate classes. This may be done through concessions and ideological means to win consent, but it is never achieved more than partially and temporarily, that is it is, at best, an 'unstable equilibrium.'" In this way discursive practice is a struggle that contributes in varying degrees to the reproduction or transformation of the existing order of discourse and through existing social and power relations.

When it comes to critically analyzing discourse Fairclough (1992a:10) proposes that every discursive instance has to be looked at from three dimensions. First there is the spoken or written language or text and its description. Second, there is interpretation of the interactional process between how texts are produced and interpreted and social action. Finally, there is the social action or social context on which the text and its interpretation are dependant. The explanation of the nature of the text and its interpretation depend on the social context or social action in which it is embedded. Thus the relationship between social action/context and text is mediated by interaction.

Using a critical discourse analysis approach the relationship between Batswana chiefs and British administrators is investigated by analyzing address terms found in the letters that they wrote to each other. The address terms are interpreted on the basis of the history and social context in which the letters were generated. The address forms that are investigated are seen as linguistic realizations or traces of discourse.

Letters by British Administrators to other British Administrators

Salutations and Openings

Of the forty-five letters written by a British administrator to another, 43 (or 95%) of them employ a formal salutation such as: *dear sir, sir, your honour*, the addressee's name or official title. It is only in two cases that elaborate praise or greetings such as "*May it please your excellency*" is used in the salutation. This suggests that the relationship between the addressee and the reader is formal and professional, allowing very little intimacy. The following examples illustrate the kind of salutations and opening sentences of letters from one British administrator to another.

Excerpt 1

My dear Colonel,

It appears Bathoen became infatuated with a local girl who is no class and she seems to get control of him.

(Signature of letter not legible, To Colonel Sir Carrington, 6 February, 1929 S 5/5)

Excerpt 2

Sir,

I have the honour to inform you in reply to yours of 15 inst. with reference to the inquiry as to whether we intend charging 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)

The letters written by British administrators to other British administrators do not only have formal salutations but they also have direct opening sentences that immediately present the issue that the author wants to present. Merkestein (1998) remarks that British letter writing style is more direct because the norms of British English dictate that expositions must be rational. Since reason and emotion are felt to be diametrically opposed, the overt expression of feelings, attitudes and emotions must be avoided as much as possible.

Signatures and Endings

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 (or 45%). This signature seems to convey reverence and respect for the high status of the addressee and is therefore mostly used by a low status person writing to a high status person. It is also formulaic, used by most of the writers and sometimes not even written in full but abbreviated to "*I am your etc*". The rest of the letters, 23 out of 45 (or 51%) use other formal signatures such as "*yours sincerely, yours truly or with kind regards I remain*". Once again, the formal and formulaic endings and signatures in these letters suggest a formal, professional and faceless type of relationship in which colloquial and intimate language do not have a place between the British administrators. The letters have one function: to convey official business. The following examples illustrate the type of endings and signatures found in the letters of the British administrators writing to other British administrators.

Excerpt 3

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 magnitude of the 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

(From John Mackenzie to Sir Henry Berkly, 2 May 1876 HC 48/1/2)

Excerpt 4

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 the honour to be etc.

J. Vosthurgen

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

Letters by the British Administrators to Batswana Chiefs

It is through these letters that we get insights into the power struggles between the British administrators and Batswana chiefs. It should be noted that between 1800 and 1900 when these letters were written, white people were considered to be superior to black people, so the relationship that existed between the British administrators and Batswana chiefs had its roots in the relationship that existed between Blacks and Whites. Although Bechuanaland did not have a White government in the way that South Africa and Rhodesia did, it was a British protectorate and the British administered and oversaw the country by means of a small white administration based in Mafeking (sic), South Africa. The terms of the protectorate were that the British protect Batswana country from annexation to South Africa but leave the governance of the country to the local chiefs. However, that situation could not be maintained, and the British ended up assuming more power than the chiefs had anticipated (Tlou and Campbell 1984). This caused overlaps and conflicts in the duties and powers of the British administrators and Batswana chiefs, who before the advent of the British administration, were the sole rulers of the land and people. The address forms found in the correspondence between the British administrators and Batswana chiefs offer insights into the relationships that existed between these two groups.

Salutations and Openings

The address forms in the salutations of letters written by the British administrators to the Batswana chiefs reflect a less formal type of relationship. The letters mostly employ an informal and intimate address form *my friend*. Of the 23 letters written by the British administrators to Batswana chiefs, 18 of them (or 78%) employ the salutation *my friend*. This

finding is significant and interesting since it is rare in British administrator to British administrator correspondence. The use of such an informal and intimate address form shows that although the British administrators were very formal in their correspondence with other British administrators they did not need to be formal in their correspondence and interaction with the Batswana chiefs.

At this stage we can argue that the use of the salutation *my friend* establishes solidarity and a closer relationship between the British and the local chiefs and bridges the gap of subordinate and boss between the two groups. *My friend* is a neutral address form which connotes solidarity, equality, intimacy and informality and it seems that, in this case, it was deliberately adopted by the British administrators to mask the power strife and the gap between them and the local chiefs as well as a cover up for British dominance. It is only in a few instances that formal salutations such as *dear sir* or title of addressee or their name is used. The following exemplify the kind of salutations and openings found in letters from British administrators to Batswana chiefs.

Excerpt 5

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.

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

Excerpt 6

Chief,

Herewith I give you notice and forbid you absolutely from trespassing on Transval 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, Mafeking to Chief Ikaning 7 March 1887 HC 12/18)

The opening sentences of these letters are also for the most part direct, immediately stating the issue at hand. Though I have earlier suggested that the address form “*my friend*” connotes solidarity, equality, and intimacy, this is contradicted in some of the letters where the authors use ‘bald on record’ statements that signify their authority and power over the addressee. For example in Excerpt 6 (above) and Excerpt 7 (below) the writers issue reprimands or commands that clearly indicate their authority and superiority over the chiefs.

The use of the address term *friend* and the issuing of reprimands and orders suggest that the British administrators did not regard Batswana chiefs as their equals despite the use of the address term *friend*. The use of this address term merely masks the nature of the power relations and conceals the extent of the power disparity between the British and Batswana chiefs.

Potter and Wetherell (1987:109) argue that the use of a particular discourse which contains a particular organization not only justifies and warrants one’s actions but also maintains power relations and patterns of domination and subordination. The above discourse clearly illustrates a hegemonic struggle in which the British administrators attempt to establish their power by restructuring and re-shaping the existing order of discourse. The restructuring of the discourse also restructures the social structure and social relationships between them and the chiefs.

Signatures and Endings

In the analysis of letters from British administrators to other British administrators it was noted that 48% of the letters employed the formulaic signature *your obedient servant*. However, it is interesting to note that this signature is found in only 3 out of 23 letters written to Batswana chiefs by British administrators. This finding is significant because it suggests that though the *your obedient servant* signature might seem formulaic or routine between native speakers or British administrators it is hardly used in letters to the local chiefs. The near absence of the signature in these letters is a comment on how the British administrators perceived their status in relation to the chiefs. It suggests that though the *your obedient servant* signature was popular in that era it did not apply or was not appropriate in a situation where a Briton was writing to a local chief because it could suggest that a Briton could be of a lower status or a servant of a local black chief. This

finding clearly shows that letter-writing conventions are institutional and that their ideological import is tied to the political institution that they serve.

The endings and signatures of letters written by the British to Batswana chiefs are relatively less formal when compared to those found in letters to other British administrators. The most popular signature found in letters from the British to the local chiefs is *your friend* and the endings of these letters mostly convey greetings and best wishes. Of the 23 letters written by British administrators to Batswana chiefs 20 of them (86%) employ the signature *your friend* and only 14% of the letters employ such signatures as *with best wishes*, *pula*, *I remain*. The following excerpts illustrate the kind of signatures and endings found in letters from British administrators to Batswana chiefs.

Excerpt 7

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.

Resident Commissioner, Mafeking.

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

Excerpt 8

With regard to a line between you and Khama, I know no such line yet and I don't see how any line could justly be made without your knowledge and consent.

With hearty greetings, I remain always your friend.

(Letter from S.G.A. Shippard to Chief Lobengula, 29 April, 1887 HC 122).

Letters written by the British administrators to Batswana chiefs can generally be characterized as formal and yet friendly. The formality of the letters is demonstrated by a direct presentation of the subject matter without using informal openings such as elaborate greetings. At the same time the

letters have a friendly and informal tone achieved through use of informal and intimate salutations and signatures such as “*my friend, let it rain, with greetings*” .

The letters by British administrators demonstrate an institutional practice which embody assumptions which legitimize existing power relations from which people, without thinking, draw. When writing to each other the British administrators routinely sign their letters ‘your obedient servant’ but when they write to Batswana chiefs they become conscious of the implications of such a signature and refrain from using it.

Letters Written by Batswana to British Administrators

Salutations and Openings

The majority of letters, 70 out of 130 (or 54%) from Batswana to British administrators employ formal salutations such as “*dear sir, your excellency, your honour*” or the addressee’s title or name. This is in contrast to letters from the British to Batswana where the majority preferred the less formal address form of *my friend*. The high percentage of formal salutations in these letters is probably indicative of the formality with which Batswana chiefs perceived their relationship with the British administrators: formal, distant and professional. The less formal salutation, *dear friend*, is also used in a significant number of letters 42 out of 130 (or 32%). It has already been argued that this address form is a marker of solidarity and equality though it has also been demonstrated that the use of this address term does not connote equality because the British administrators and Batswana chiefs rarely participated as equals in their interaction. For instance, despite the use of the address form *my friend* the British displayed their authority by use of reprimands and commands and Batswana authors on the other hand used a lot of self-degradation strategies in their letters to the British administrators. This contrast serves to highlight the power disparity in their relationship.

Since the addressee (British administrator) in all these cases is someone whom it is believed could bring about an adjustment in that disparity, the use of self-degradation is designed to invoke compassion and pity. Batswana writers use the strategy of down grading themselves in order to attract attention and compassion from their readers. In Setswana speech interaction expressions such as “*I have nothing to say*” or “*I have a little*

question" make the speaker's opinion or idea seem modest and therefore not imposing upon the listener. At the same time such expressions appeal to the addressee's compassion and generosity to listen to those with a small voice. Excerpt 9 below exemplifies common Setswana strategies of down playing one's opinion and ideas in front of a superior by using such expressions as "*I have nothing to say*" or "*I have a little question.*" In this example the chiefs construct themselves as unequal to the British administrators through a discourse of negative self-construction. This finding supports the observation of Mills (2002:15) that discourses can structure both our sense of reality and our notions of identity. It enables the consideration of the ways in which subjects may not be able to identify the ways in which they have been constructed and subjected but are able to map for themselves new terrains in which they can construct themselves in more liberating and different ways.

The use of the plural marker "*our*" in the salutation of the next excerpt is an expression of respect for a person of higher status in the writer's dialect:

Excerpt 9

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 only 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)

Sometimes the address form *chief* is also used to refer to British administrators such as resident magistrates, magistrates etc. as exemplified in excerpt 10 below. This address form is found in 4 out of 130 letters and its use suggests a much broader meaning than a leader of an ethnic community. That is, besides being used to refer to a leader of an ethnic community, *chief* was also used as a term of respect to refer to an individual in a position of authority as exemplified in the next excerpt.

Excerpt 10

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)

The following excerpts illustrate the kind of salutations and openings found in letters written by Batswana chiefs to the British administrators.

Excerpt 11

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 the necessity to visit our town and see us.

(Letter from Sechele paramount chief of the Bakwena to His Honour the Resident Commissioner, 8 September, 1911 S 42/3).

Excerpt 12

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 tell you when I need the corn.

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

It is worth noting that while the letters written by the British mostly opened by going straight into the issue, letters written by Batswana tend to open with a greeting or making a reference to the welfare of the reader before presenting the subject matter of the letter. In the best traditions of Setswana hospitality the speaker has to ask about the welfare of the hearer and sometimes that of his family at the beginning of a conversation. An examination of the data shows that of the 130 letters written by Batswana to the British administrators, 29 of them (or 22%) open with a greeting or

inquiry about the health of the recipient or his family thereby employing the Setswana practice of using greetings as conversation openers.

Greetings are not only used as conversation openers in Setswana speech interaction, but they are also an important strategy by which a speaker attempts to please and win the social approval of the listener. In addition, Batswana writers enquired about the recipient's health or welfare and that of their family because Batswana society generally places great value on relatives and family. Consequently, space is often devoted in the letter to greetings and asking about the welfare of the family and thereby forcing the conventions of letter writing in Setswana to require greetings and have longer introductions than in English.

Signatures and Endings

Although Batswana chiefs seem to have accepted the superiority of the British as evidenced by the use of down graders, honorific titles such as *chief*, it is interesting to note that a low percentage of about 15% (or 20 letters) of the letters from Batswana to British administrators were signed *your obedient servant*. The low frequency of this signature indicates that although the Batswana chiefs acknowledged and accepted the superiority of the British administrators they could not readily accept the position of obedient servant. Mesthrie et al (2000:333) point out that some studies of interactive spoken norms make it clear that the language of the powerful is not fully accepted by the less powerful. They argue that wherever there is power there is resistance as well. Batswana writers demonstrated their resistance by preferring less formal endings such as *greetings, your friend, that is all*. Of the 130 letters written to the British 54 of them (or 41.5%) end with a greeting, 34 (26%) are signed *your friend*, 13 (10%) employ the Setswana conversation ending *that is all* or the Botswana peace slogan '*pula*' thus making the percentage of informal signatures 78%. The rest of the letters employ formal signatures such as *yours sincerely, yours faithfully or yours truly*. The following examples illustrate the endings and signatures of letters by Batswana to British administrators.

Excerpt 13

With regard to this matter we can only inform the government, only the government will know what to do, we have no other will but that

of the government. **This is all, Greetings chief, I shall say no more. I am your friend, Baruti.**

(Letter from Baruti Kgosi dintsu to J. Ellenberger 17 July 1901 RC 5/12)

Excerpt 14

His people are doing what they wish, they are not waiting for the decision, with regard to my people I have told them not to do nothing as you said. I am waiting for the decision. **With kind greetings to yourself and to Mrs Surmon and family.**

I am etc. Sebele.

(letter from Sebele chief of Bakwena to Mr Surmon 25 September, 1894 RC 5/12)

The letters written by the Batswana to the British suggest a formal and yet friendly relationship. Batswana writers tend to address the British formally and yet in accordance with their culture they have to greet them and ask about their welfare and the welfare of their family. Letters written by the Batswana thus have longer introductions and longer signatures that involve greetings and best wishes. While the British used the signature *your obedient servant* in letters from subordinate to superior this type of signature was not preferred by the majority of Batswana writers even though they accepted and acknowledged the superiority of the British administrators.

This observation suggests that British administrators are the dominant group which exercises its power over the Batswana chiefs by winning their consent, integrating them by calling them *friends*. However this power and domination is challenged and mitigated by Batswana chiefs who also call British administrators *friends* and use the *your obedient servant* signature sparingly. The observation also supports the claim by Wodak and Meyer (2002) that critical discourse analysis makes it possible to analyze the pressures from above and the possibilities of resistance to unequal power relationships that appear as societal conventions. This approach enables one to see how dominant groups try to stabilize conventions, obscuring the effects of power and ideology in the meanings of some forms so that these forms are seen as natural forms with a 'given' meaning. It also enables one to see the resistance that challenges and breaks the conventions.

Letters from Batswana to other Batswana

Current data contains a few correspondences between Batswana chiefs because there was not much written communication between Batswana chiefs in the early years. They mostly communicated by word of mouth. Current data only has 32 letters written by Batswana to others.

Salutations and Beginnings

The majority of letters written by Batswana to other Batswana use formal types of salutations, for example 15 letters (or 47%) employ such salutations as *dear sir, your honour*, while in 10 of the letters (or 31%) the title of the addressee or *chief* is used, making the use of formal salutations 25 out of 32 (or 78%). However what sets the salutations of the letters from Batswana to other Batswana apart is the use of kinship terms and totems as salutations, as exemplified in the excerpts 15, 16, and 18 below. The use of kinship terms does not necessarily connote a biological relationship between the author and reader. The kinship terms are honorific forms meant to show respect and solidarity with the addressee. These terms are found in 7 (or 22%) of the letters.

Excerpt 15

Dear chief Keaboka,

Phuti ke a dumedisa. (*Duiker, I greet you*). **Chief** I learn that you have 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 ears and eyes.

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

Excerpt 16

Dear father,

When a man is rotten all the things which belong to him smell bad too. I speak these words for the sake of the dispute and color bar and persecution of employers of the workers who are recruited in the

South African mines in the republic of South Africa.
(Letter from Khumo Keitumetse to the Office of the President 31 July, 1971 OP 18/2/1).

Though the majority of the letters have a formal type of salutation a significant number of them open with a greeting. For example 12 out of 32 (38%) use greetings as openers in accordance with the Setswana practice of greeting at the beginning of a conversation. Totems are also used as a way of expressing solidarity. Setswana conversation openers such as *I have no news*, or *I have nothing to say* are also used as a modest way of presenting one's opinions or down grading one's view.

Signatures and Endings

Most of the letters in this category end with a greeting. 17 out of 32 (or 53%) end with a greeting and 4 out of 32 (or 12.5%) employ conversation endings such as *that is all* or '*pula*'. Eleven of the letters (or 34%) employ formal signatures such as *yours truly* or *yours sincerely*. The following exemplify the type of signatures found in letters from Batswana to other Batswana.

Excerpt 17

Mr Lampard told me that he will inform the chief that I should get away from here. He says that even when I meet him I do not take off my hat. This European comes from Mashonaland. I am well chief. There is no news. **Greetings to the family.**

Yours B.K. Motheo

(Letter from B.K. Motheo to Bangwato Deputy Chief 25 January, 1940 DCF 7/2)

Excerpt 18

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. Raditladi 4 January, 1937 S 485/1/1)

Batswana writers mostly used formal signatures and salutations when writing to other Batswana. Letters to the British administrators on the other

hand tended to have more informal signatures. This is interesting since we would expect letters to the British administrators to have more formal signatures and salutations. However, this is not surprising since the British writers also employed more informal salutations and signatures when writing to Batswana than when writing to other British administrators. The informality between these two groups is arguably an expression of solidarity as well as an strategy for avoiding dealing with the power strife between the British administrators and Batswana chiefs during the period of the protectorate. 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 that relationship. The letters by the Batswana illustrate a freer register in which there is a place for the explicit maintenance of relationships, because as Merkestein (1998:182) points out, the expression of relationships is central to the social reality of Batswana. On the other hand letters by British administrators are more formal, they have no place for maintenance of relationships but are focused on expressing the message of the writer.

Conclusion

Current data tends to suggest that both the British administrators and Batswana chiefs were aware of the power strife between them. They both sought linguistic means of dealing with this strife such as the use or failure to use certain address forms when writing to each other. For example, the address form *my friend*, which connotes equality and solidarity, is only found in letters written to Batswana chiefs by British administrators and in letters written to British administrators by Batswana chiefs, but rarely used by Batswana chiefs or British administrators when writing to fellow British administrators or fellow Batswana chiefs respectively. The use of this address term masks the power strife that existed between the two camps. The failure to use the signature *your obedient servant* by British administrators when writing to Batswana chiefs also suggests that the British did not perceive themselves as being subordinate to Batswana chiefs. The superiority of the British administrators is demonstrated in these letters by the issuing of commands and reprimands. The inferiority of the Batswana chiefs is demonstrated by the use of down graders and the repeated use of

honorific titles when writing to British administrators. In the discourses of the British administrators and the Batswana chiefs authoritarian elements such as the issuing of commands and reprimands and the use of expressions such as *your obedient servant* co-exist with solidarity and egalitarian terms such as calling each other *my friend*.

The findings of this study support the view of Fairclough (1992b:64) that discourse is a practice not just of representing the world but of signifying the world; constituting and constructing the world in meaning. Discourse constructs social relationships, positions and identities. The Batswana chiefs and British administrators establish, negotiate and defend their social identities and power positions by changing or restructuring existing discourse orders. By changing discourse orders they also re-structure and re-construct new social and power relations because discourse shapes and is shaped by power.

Department of English
University of Botswana

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