

THE ROLE OF CONTEXT IN THE INTERPRETATION OF SOUTHERN SOTHO  
DISCOURSE

by

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# THE ROLE OF CONTEXT IN THE INTERPRETATION OF SOUTHERN SOTHO DISCOURSE.

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## DECLARATION

I declare that **THE ROLE OF CONTEXT IN THE INTERPRETATION OF SOUTHERN SOTHO DISCOURSE** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

*By Mokoetsi*  
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## SUMMARY

Utterances normally mean more than they actually say on the surface, and this extra information is either contained in or inferrable from the context in which such utterances are made. The context of utterances is in the first place linguistic. This means that the complete and accurate interpretation of the utterance depends on what has already been said and/or what has still to be said. This linguistic context can either be explicit, as in **REFERENCE** and **DEIXIS** or implicit as in **PRESUPPOSITION** and **IMPLICATURE**, where its meaning has to be inferred.

In the second place, the context of utterance is situational, meaning that utterances are made and should thus be interpreted in their situations of utterance. Even the linguistic context therefore occurs within the situational context. Situational context is normally the extralinguistic environment in which an utterance is made and also/or the social and cultural context of utterance.

DEDICATION

For my loving mother  
Elizabeth D. Lebakeng, née Nhlane  
from whom I have learnt that  
inexhaustible perseverance  
bears enjoyable fruit

## INTRODUCTION

It happens ever so often that a speaker cannot be understood, or is at least misinterpreted by listeners who purport to have knowledge of, and understand the language he speaks. Some of the reasons could be that the speaker is not linguistically proficient; or that he cannot communicate his message competently enough for various other reasons; or that the listeners do not share enough knowledge of the language and cultural background of the speaker; or that they cannot link the speaker's utterance to the topic under discussion. A competent communicator should be able to adjust the style, complexity and other related characteristics of his utterance according to, inter alia the linguistic ability, cognitive level and status of his listener. The foregoing contentions have been endorsed as follows:

"The hallmark of the competent communicator is behavioral flexibility, i.e. the ability to adapt messages appropriately to interaction contexts in order to achieve goals" (Hazleton, Cupach and Canary 1987 : 57).

Such adjustments have indeed shown to be reasonable communicative strategies which ultimately enhance effectiveness.

The concept of "competence" rather than alternative terms like "efficiency", "capacity", "proficiency", "ability", etc., became a term of reference in linguistics due to Chomsky's influence. It should be noted though that Chomsky applied the term quite differently from its everyday use. For him competence was the underlying knowledge of grammar and not an ability to do anything, like to compose or comprehend sentences. It was rather a "deep-seated mental state below the level of language" (Widdowson 1989 : 129), which could well exist without necessarily being accessible. This is hardly unexpected because Chomsky was never concerned with the process of communication per se, but rather focussed on the structure of language as a formal system, organised by rules at different levels: The phonological rules determine what sounds can be used in a particular language, and how

these sounds can be combined into a lexicon. The syntactic rules, which are given special prominence because of their concern with grammaticality, i.e. conformity to the rules defined by a specific grammar of a language, help the speaker to organise the words into sentential structures. The semantic rules help him to interpret sentences as meaningful messages (cf Chomsky 1965 : 140ff; Katz 1966 : 110 - 111).

Chomsky and his followers further restricted themselves to sentence-length utterances and to the rules used to generate such sentences and their variations, e.g. tense, active-passive voice, etc. They did not consider the pragmatic implications of such sentences in discourse. In their research activities they studied single sentences in isolation. Their main assessment of these isolated sentences was in terms of grammaticality. Speakers had to produce grammatical sentences, irrespective of the fact that such sentences did not fit into the ongoing conversation, or were inappropriate to the situation. Katz and Fodor (1964), in justifying this analysis of sentences in isolation from their occurrence in a discourse, claimed that a fluent speaker is able to construct and recognise syntactically well-formed sentences without recourse to information about context; he can use and understand any of the sentences of his language; he can perceive ambiguous ones and reject malformed ones. They added that "discourse analysis may constitute an important element in any theory of language, but it is not relevant to the grammar of the language" (Katz and Fodor 1964 : 353).

Householder (1959), in discrediting discourse grammar, asserted that it was "uninteresting because properly grammatical restrictions on combinations of sentences in sequence are so few, and the possible combinations so many that the same result can be more easily attained by adding to the sentence grammar a few transformational rules dealing with cross-reference and linkage between sentences of the same text" (Householder 1959 :232).

These arguments simply reflect the viewpoint that will be shown in

this study to be inadequate. This viewpoint is that language is not structured above the level of the sentence, and that higher structural levels do not interact with or affect syntactic structures. The approach of the above-mentioned scholars implies that the sole constraint on the production and interpretation of discourse is grammaticality. It is assumed by these scholars that hearers are able to assign a meaning to a sentence on the basis of the sentence alone. It is therefore not surprising that context was denied its legitimate role in the production of utterances, and also in the process of interpretation and comprehension thereof.

Chomsky's definition and treatment of linguistic competence as the object of investigation, left a major loophole in disregarding the issue of appropriacy, i.e. the knowledge, not only that a sentence is well formed, but also that it is appropriately used in a specific context. In recent years, the mere thought that a sentence can be fully analysed and be understood out of context, is almost out of question. Contemporary linguists agree that a decontextualized approach to language and meaning is inadequate to account for language use. This study does not deny that language is an abstract system structured by rules at a variety of levels, but then, the argument remains that these rules fail to explain how language is used to produce and to comprehend discourses. There are many phenomena, even within a single sentence, which cannot be accounted for, if the analysis remains at the level of the sentence, e.g. pronominalization, anaphora, ellipsis, etc. (Anaphora and pronominalization will be shown to be understandable only through the study of reference, and ellipsis through inference). In the words of Gleason (1961:220)

"In every language there are formal, structural features operating at a higher level than that of the sentence... features which are not a matter of logic alone... since they differ from language to language".

Kintsch (1977), Mandler and Johnson (1977) and Van Dijk (1977),

amongst a host of other linguists, concur that there is a structural level above that of the sentence. These linguists do acknowledge the contributions of Chomsky and his followers on the one hand, while asserting their limitations on the other.

Sanders (1970) argues that judgements of grammaticality frequently require knowledge of the sequential relationship between sentences. For instance C's utterance in the following sequence would be marked as ungrammatical by Sanders:

1. A : Boradipolotiki ka nnete ha ba tshepahale.  
(Politicians are indeed untrustworthy).
- B : Sa bona ke ho buela ruri. Diketsahalo tsona ha di yo.  
(Theirs is just rhetoric, and no action).
- C : Basadi, na le hlokometse hore "perm" ena e ntlafaditse moriri wa ka jwang?  
(Ladies, have you noticed how this "perm" has improved my hair?)

Whether we agree with Sanders or not on the status of C's utterance as "ungrammatical", we would probably agree that C's utterance is inappropriate. Where A and B discuss politicians and their unbecoming behaviour, C comes in with an unrelated utterance about her hair and a "perm"; because of this, Sanders (1970) would regard C's utterance as ungrammatical.

Such developments in linguistic theory seem to have prompted Hymes to propose the rival notion of communicative competence, which he claimed to be "the capabilities of a person" and to be "dependent upon both knowledge and use..." (Hymes 1972 : 282). According to Widdowson (1989:130) Hymes extends the Chomskyan concept of competence in two ways:

"He includes knowledge of aspects of language other than grammar – of what is feasible, appropriate, actually performed. And he includes ability for use".

However, this study will show that when one relates competence to ability, or to what people can actually do with their language, much has to be taken into consideration, e.g. tasks, attitudes, individual differences, varying circumstances, etc. Hymes (1972:282) himself admits that

"the specification of ability for use as part of competence allows for the role of non-cognitive factors, such as motivation, as partly determining competence".

According to Stalnaker (1989:182)

"communicative competence is that part of our language knowledge which enables us ... to connect the goals and contexts of the situation with the structures which we have available in our linguistic repertoire through functional choices at the pragmatic level".

Gumperz (1982:209) defines communicative competence in interactional terms as:

"...the knowledge of linguistic and related communicative conventions that speakers must have to create and sustain conversational cooperation, and thus involves both grammar and contextualization".

This definition provides another dimension, which is supported in this study, namely that communicative competence seems to be more of a relational construction than an individual characteristic. A speaker will most likely be regarded communicatively competent when his listeners can follow what he says, than when he is known to have been a bright student at medical school.

In a later paper, Hymes (1977 : 4) adds that

"...facets of the cultural values and beliefs, social institutions and forms, roles and personalities, history and ecology of a community, may have to be examined in their bearing on communicative events and patterns" (as cited by Holmes 1989 : 194).

What will be shown in this dissertation is that context plays an all important role not only in the production of discourses but also in the interpretation and disambiguation thereof. Concentration will be on spoken discourses in day to day speech events and not in ritualised situations like sermons, initiation, etc. Context will be regarded broadly as those parts that are adjacent to, near, or around a particular utterance under study, and that can fix the meaning thereof. Firstly, linguistic context will be discussed, and then situational context will be considered.

It appears that initial efforts to incorporate context in linguistic descriptions focussed on linguistic context only. This is hardly surprising because sentence-level grammars proved inadequate. When a speaker produces an utterance, the utterance is normally related either to what has already been said or what is to follow. The speaker normally responds to the need of making his discourse coherent, and thus understandable. His intention is normally to convey some information. The utterance will thus have a meaning if the speaker's meaning intention can be attributed to it.

Hearers on the other hand are actively involved in the comprehension process. They rely on two sources of information, viz. the information provided by the incoming stimulus as they listen to what is being said, together with all other forms of contextual knowledge.

✓ Section A will present a discussion of linguistic context which will be shown to be indispensable in the interpretation of discourse. For the purpose of this study linguistic context will be regarded as the verbal surround of the utterance under study. The section is divided into two chapters in which Reference and Inference are treated as the

two broad structural mechanisms underlying linguistic context. Chapter one, on Reference, will show that speakers normally select information regarding objects, facts and concepts they wish to talk about. Parts of words, words or expressions are used to introduce items into the discourse. Such new entries are called antecedents (Crystal 1985 : 17). Speakers then use other parts of words, words or expressions to refer to the "known" antecedents. Such referring items are called anaphors if they refer back to what has already been said, or cataphors, by analogy, where they refer to entities that are still to come (Crystal 1985 : 43). A relationship of co-reference (Brown and Yule 1983 : 192) exists between an antecedent and its anaphor or cataphor where the two share a common referent. Inter-reference (Janssen, 1979 :67ff) is where an anaphor does not quite refer to its antecedent, but can only be associated with it in such a way that they have a part-whole relation. This chapter will also show how reference is achieved by deixis (Bühler, 1934 in Weissenborn and Klein, 1982), a mode of referring by pointing to the referent in relation to the identity of the speaker, the intended audience, his location at the time of utterance, the time of utterance, and the times before and after the time of utterance.

One feature which might cause problems in the interpretation of discourse is that a lot of information is normally implicit. Speakers are inclined to leave unsaid certain information which they assume to be shared background with the listener. They will say only that which they consider to be new or otherwise necessary to enable the listener to infer the implicit information. Through the process of Inference, the listener will then bridge the gaps and link up the elliptical message to arrive at a coherent piece of discourse. Chapter 2 aims to show that discourse is inherently a cooperative enterprise in which speakers and hearers jointly negotiate their utterances so as to arrive at their intended interpretation. The components of Inference, namely Implicature and Presupposition will be discussed in chapter 2.

As linguists and other researchers like sociologists, ethnographers,

psychologists and anthropologists turned to the study of naturally occurring conversations, they had to rely not only on linguistic context, but also on many other factors which lie outside in the extralinguistic context, so as to account for the production and interpretation of discourses. Section B of this study will investigate situational context. The first part of chapter 3 will give a historical perspective of the concept of Situation and how this concept found its way into the study of language use. Situation will then be analysed and features relevant to the study of language use will be identified. In chapter 4, discourses occurring naturally both in the concrete situation immediately surrounding the interlocutors and also in the social and cultural contexts will be analysed to show how the features of situation identified in chapter 3 influence their interpretation. Here, it will be shown that the devices which normally monitor and make conversation possible, break down when speakers of different ethnic backgrounds, educational levels and age interact.

For the purpose of Chapter 4, participant observation in unplanned and unstructured, everyday conversations, as well as participant interviewing, were used as techniques for data collection. Most communication behaviours were recorded. The different speech events were collected at various observation sites, like homes, in the streets, the school, etc. Such techniques appeared to be the only appropriate means for collecting data for a study of speech behaviour in different situations. Personal knowledge of Basotho societal behaviour was then used in constructing descriptions and also in verifying hypotheses. This use of personal experience is considered essential in the complete analysis of ethnographic data, Gumperz (1972:25) actually claims that "the most successful investigators are those who can utilize their own background knowledge of the culture in elicitation".

## SECTION A

## ASPECTS OF LINGUISTIC CONTEXT

## CHAPTER 1

## REFERENCE

## 1.1. ABOUT REFERENCE

Linguists obviously have differing viewpoints on what actually constitutes reference. The following piece of discourse and the explanations that follow it will illustrate this point:

(A dialogue between Pontsho and Nthoto, two ladies from Qwaqwa who came to visit Unisa for the first time):

2. Pontsho : Athe tulo ena e boholo bo bokaale?

(Is this place so big?)

Nthoto : E. Seipati o ne a le mona bekeng e fetileng. O re dikantoro tsa barupedi di ka ba dikete tse supileng.

(Yes. Seithati was here last week. She says the lecturers' offices could be seven thousand).

Pontsho : Le ho tsebana ke a kgolwa ha ba tsebane.

(I guess they don't even know one another).

Hurford and Heasley (1983 : 25) regard reference as a means whereby "a speaker indicates which things in the world (including persons) are being talked about", "... reference is a relationship between parts of a language and things outside the language (in the world)" (p. 26).

In the given dialogue, Hurford and Heasley would therefore regard the

following as referring expressions:

**ena** (this), a demonstrative pronoun referring to the building, Unisa. Although Unisa has not been mentioned anywhere in the dialogue, it does exist in the spatio-temporal situation of Pontsho and Nthoto.

**Seithati** is a proper noun used by Nthoto to refer to a person by that name, whom she says visited Unisa the previous week.

**Mona** (here), also a demonstrative pronoun, refers to Unisa, as well.

**O-** (she), the subject concord, and part of the verb **o re** (she says), refers to **Seithati**, mentioned in the previous sentence. A phenomenon of reference called co-reference exists between the subject concord **o-** and **Seithati**. Co-reference is a relationship between the referring items which share a common referent in the same way as **o-** and **Seithati** both refer to the person who bears the name **Seithati**.

**Dikantoro tsa barupedi** (the lecturers' offices) already forms part of Pontsho's knowledge, not by direct mention, but by inference from what has already been referred to, and that is Unisa. The relationship that exists between **dikantoro tsa barupedi** and Unisa, is that of inter-reference, where the anaphor refers indirectly to its antecedent, (Quirk et al., 1972 : 267). Hawkins (1978 : 123) refers to this type of referring item as the "associative anaphor".

Therefore **dikantoro tsa barupedi** (the lecturers' offices), **ena** (this) and **mona** (here), all refer to the building, Unisa, "outside the language, in the world".

(Ha) **ba** (tsebane), (they), is a subject concord referring to a group of people referred to as **barupedi** (lecturers), and has a co-referential relationship with **barupedi** (lecturers) mentioned earlier

Some of the referring expressions mentioned above, viz. **ena** (this) and **mona** (here) are deictic terms which help the hearer to identify their

referent through their spatio-temporal relationship with the situation of utterance. (Deictic terms will be dealt with in broader detail in forthcoming paragraphs of this chapter).

Ogden and Richards (1923), as cited by Lyons (1977a : 175) share Hurford and Heasley's interpretation of reference.

"They employed the term referent for any object or state of affairs in the external world that is identified by means of a word or expression, and reference for the concept which mediates between the word or expression and the referent". (Lyons, *ibid.*)

For the purpose of this study, morphemes will be included in the list of "parts of a language" (Hurford and Heasley, 1983:26) or "means" (Ogden and Richards, *ibid*) whereby objects or states of affairs can be identified in the external world. Such morphemes, viz. concords, do show this referential potential in Sesotho, as can be seen from the examples above, o (re) (she says); (ha) ba (tsebane) (they don't know one another). Hurford and Heasley, Ogden and Richards and a host of other such linguists were oblivious of agglutinating languages like Southern Sotho with their disjunctive manner of writing words when they neglected to include concords in their list of referring expressions.

Brown and Yule (1983 : 204) state that

"the traditional semantic view of reference is one in which the relationship of reference is taken to hold between expressions in the text and entities in the world".

Crystal (1985 : 259) also shares the view that

"a referent is a term used for the entity (object, state of affairs, etc.) in the external world, to which a linguistic expression refers".

He regards the referent of the word "table" for instance, as the object commonly used in homes and offices, "table", and which can be described in a particular way.

From the definitions quoted above, a referent is obviously an object or a person or any state of affairs outside of the linguistic situation but in the external world. This is one way that linguists look at reference, i.e. in terms of the outside world.

It is important at this stage to make a distinction between what is actually in the world on the one hand, and what is represented in a person's mind as what is in the world, i.e. "an individual's representation, or model of the world" (Brown and Yule 1983 : 206) on the other hand. The study of human languages suggests that speakers and hearers negotiate the scope of the particular world they talk about and also establish the identities of individuals, objects and states of affairs they intend to take for granted as existing within that world. In many instances one finds that this contingent "external world" resembles, or coincides, or overlaps with the "real world". But then again, in an individual's representation, there may be fictitious entities like Kgodumodumo, the folklore monster which suddenly appeared from nowhere and swallowed all living things except for a pregnant woman who escaped miraculously. In the words of Brown and Yule (ibid):

"... in paying attention to a particular piece of discourse, as a sample of experience in the world, [an] individual may build a specific representation of this particular experience of the world which, of course, will be integrated to a degree within his more general representation of the world. This specific representation, or model, arising from a particular discourse, we can characterise as the individual's discourse representation".

To capture a similar concept, Givón uses the expression "universe of

discourse" (1984 : 388)

"... reference relations are not a mapping of propositions or terms in a language onto "The Real World", but rather a mapping from the language to some universe of discourse. This universe of discourse is constructed or negotiated between speaker and hearer and communication then refers to states, events or individuals within that constructed world".

Webber (1981 : 203) prefers the expression "discourse model" for the same concept, and says about it that

"[it is] a structured collection of entities, organised by the roles [the speaker and hearer] fill with respect to one another, the relation they participate in, and so on... [these] discourse entities may have the properties of individuals, sets, events, actions, states, facts, beliefs, hypotheses, properties, generic classes, typical set members, stuff, specific quantities of stuff, etc".

What actually happens then, is that a speaker utters a piece of discourse which is based on his individual representation of a particular state of affairs, a model he has of some situation. When he does this, he will typically hope that the hearer will make out what he is talking about because of features like the context of the utterance and shared knowledge and experience of the world. The hearer will then try to build his own model of the state of affairs from the discourse communicated by the speaker. He will try to synthesise a model similar to the one the speaker has. However, the likelihood of a mismatch between the speaker's and the hearer's representations, cannot be ruled out. Nevertheless, "once a universe of discourse has been set up, reference proceeds in the same fashion regardless of whether nothing in that universe ever existed in The Real World, everything in it existed in The Real World, or of any other degree of overlap existing between the two" (Givon, 1984 : 389). In other words the speaker and the hearer will thus share the context of their

discourse. Later, paragraph 2.2.3.3. will show how Grice summed up this behaviour in his popular "Cooperative Principle".

Another school of thought regards reference as "an utterance-dependent notion" (Lyons 1977a : 180). Crystal (1985 : 260) concurs thus:

"In grammatical analysis the term reference is often used to state a relationship of identity which exists between grammatical units, e.g. a pronoun "refers" to a noun or a noun phrase. When reference is to an earlier part of the discourse, it may be called "back reference" or anaphora; correspondingly, reference to a later part of the discourse may be called "forward reference" or cataphora".

check  
Use

According to Aziz (1988 : 149)

"Reference has a semantic basis; it functions as a proform which identifies anaphorically or cataphorically a person or a thing stated somewhere in the text [or said somewhere in the discourse]".

It is clear that these linguists use the term reference for relationships that exist within a linguistic context. This school of thought will therefore regard the following underlined subject concords o- (she) and ba- (they) as referring expressions which refer anaphorically to Seithati and barupedi respectively:

3. Nthoto : Seithati o ne a le mona bekeng e fetileng. O re dikantoro tsa barupedi di ka ba dikete tse supileng.

(Seithati was here last week. She says the lecturers' offices could be seven thousand).

Pontsho: Le ho tsebana ke a kgolwa ha ba tsebane.

(I guess they don't even know one another).

Against this background, the concept of reference will now be

formulated in clearer terms. The two opinions discussed above will rather be brought together and be treated as equally important forms of a much broader notion of reference. Reference will therefore be used here for the relationship that exists between grammatical units in the linguistic context, as well as for relationships between linguistic expressions and entities in the universe of discourse. Referentiality will be viewed as a feature of discourse, where anaphors and cataphors are used to refer to their antecedents and consequents, respectively, in the discourse, beyond the sentence. On the other hand, the agreement between a concord or pronoun and its antecedent within a sentence will be considered as grammatical concord. Of importance should rather be the fact that the linguistic expression thus used by the speaker to refer, should enable the addressee to infer correctly what he is talking about. This can be illustrated with an extract from an earlier discourse quoted here as (4):

- 4 Pontsho : Athe tu<sup>o</sup> ena e boholo bo bokaale?  
 (Is this place so big?)  
 Nthoto : E. Seithati o ne a le mona bekeng e fetileng.  
Q re dikantoro tsa barupedi di ka ba dikete  
 tse supileng.  
 (Yes. Seithati was here last week. She says  
 the lecturers' offices could be seven  
 thousand).

The demonstrative ena (this) is a referring expression which has as its referent the building of Unisa which exists in the external world. The subject concord o- (she) is also a referring expression, referring to Seithati, a proper noun mentioned earlier in the text. The relationship between o- (she) and Seithati is that of co-reference (Brown and Yule's term 1983 : 192) because both expressions refer to the same referent, viz. a person who answers to the name Seithati, known to both discourse participants, Nthoto and Pontsho.

The term reference has been vaguely defined by some linguists, e.g.

Lyons (1968 : 404 and 424; 1977a : 177-178; 1981 : 168). He views the term reference as having to do with the relationship which holds between what an expression stands for on particular occasions of its utterance.

In terms of this viewpoint, "an expression" can be anything that can function as a referring expression, be it a pronoun, a concord, a noun phrase, etc., and "what that expression stands for on a particular occasion of its utterance" can be interpreted as being either within the discourse itself, or in the extralinguistic context. Therefore this definition of Lyons', albeit rather vague, may safely be used to support the strong claim that reference is context-bound, linguistically and situationally.

Crystal (1985 : 114) employs the term exophora or exophoric reference to refer to "the process or result of a linguistic unit referring directly (i.e. deictically) to the extralinguistic situation accompanying an utterance".

In example (4) therefore, the interpretation of ena (this) and mona (here) depends on the spatio-temporal situation of the discourse participants. The referent of these pronouns, viz. the building of Unisa, is outside the discourse, in the context of situation. Therefore a relationship of exophoric reference exists between ena (this) and mona (here) on the one hand, and their referent Unisa on the other.

Crystal (ibid) claims further that

"exophoric reference is usually contrasted with endophoric reference, subclassified into anaphoric and cataphoric reference".

By analogy then, endophora is the process or result of a linguistic

unit referring directly to the linguistic situation accompanying an utterance. The following example will illustrate this point:

5 Nthoto : Seithati o ne a le mona bekeng e fetileng. O  
re le ho tsebana ha ba tsebane.  
(Seithati was here last week. She says they  
don't even know one another).

Pontsho : Haeba a bolela barupedi ba Unisa teng, o  
opile kgomo lenaka.  
(If she means the lecturers of Unisa, then  
she is telling the truth).

The underlined subject concords a- and o- (she) refer anaphorically to the proper noun Seithati; whereas ba- (they) refers cataphorically to barupedi (lecturers), and the two are endophoric referring expressions. Crystal's motivation for the distinction between exophoric and endophoric reference, supports the claim made by this study, i.e. that reference is a much more broader notion dependent on both linguistic and situational contexts.

## 1.2. REFERRING EXPRESSIONS

Referring expressions are used in discourse to identify the speaker's intended referent. Such referent may be specific or nonspecific and may either be in the linguistic context or in the context of situation. When a speaker uses an expression to refer to an entity, he will naturally take into consideration those features of his hearer's developing discourse representation - "... the assumption of a similar general experience of the world, sociocultural conventions, awareness of context and communicative conventions" (Brown and Yule 1983 : 207) - which he can depend on to enable the hearer, in the context of the utterance, to pick out the intended referent from a class of potential referents. If he fails to be sensitive to the hearer's assumed knowledge and the shared situation of utterance, communication may break down.

Linguists seem to divide referring expressions into two broad categories, namely, definite referring expressions and indefinite referring expressions. Indefinite referring expressions are generally used to introduce something into a discourse. Once the so introduced item has been established, a definite referring expression may then be used to refer to it (Hurford and Heasley, 1983; Reed, 1982; Sengani, 1988; Brown and Yule, 1983; Lyons, 1977a; Hawkins, 1978; etc).

Proper names have been found to be the "prototypical way of referring to things that are mutually known [by discourse participants]" (Clark and Marshall, 1981 : 44); and linguists seem to be agreed that the use of proper names as referring expressions is "a less controversial issue" (Brown and Yule, 1983 :210). A proper name is regarded to be "a rigid designator that does not change from one conversation to the next" (Clark and Marshall, *ibid*). However, it should always be borne in mind that their referentiality depends on the context in which such proper names are used. Thus, Rosemary may have different referents in differing contexts of utterance.

In the following dialogue, conversation flows freely because the proper names used are those of people and places known by the participants:

6. Nthoto : Seipati o re ho bonolo ho ithuta Sesotho le Unisa.

(Seipati says it is easy to learn Sesotho through Unisa).

Pontsho: Ekaba Profesa Lenake o ntse a le teng moo?

(Could Professor Lenake still be there?)

Nthoto : Ha ba ne ba ka etsang ntle le yena?

(What could they do without him?)

Pontsho: Le jwale. Ke yena tshia ya fapha leo.

Quite true. He is the pillar of that department).

According to Searle (1969 : 172), as quoted by Sengani (1988 : 90),

"...The uniqueness and immense pragmatic convenience of proper names... lies precisely in the fact that they enable us to refer publicly to objects without being forced to raise issues and come to an agreement as to which descriptive characteristics exactly constitute the identity of the object".

Proper names can thus be viewed as one of the basic forms of definite reference in particular contexts.

The following discourse will illustrate the claim that in the most simple form of discourse, speakers typically use indefinite expressions to introduce referents and then refer to these referents by means of definite expressions:

7. "Ho na le monna ya atisang ho tla mona bosiu. Ha re mo tsebe kaofela. Re qala ho mmona monna enwa. Feela ke a o bolella ke re motho o a re makatsa e le ka nnete enwa. Mahlo a mafubedu tlere! Sefuba se sepharaphara. Diphaka tsona di a nyarosa. Sephankga sena ha se fihla ha se kokote. Se bula feela, se kene, se qamake, se nto itsamaela.

(There is a man who usually comes here in the evenings. We all don't know him. We are seeing this man for the first time. But I tell you this person truly surprises us. The eyes are blood red! The chest very broad, and the arms just scary. When this man arrives, he does not knock. He just opens, comes in, looks around and then goes!).

Monna (a man) in the first sentence is an indefinite referring expression which refers to a specific referent. It is used by the speaker to introduce a referent that he has in mind. According to Brown and Yule (1983 : 208)

"It does not seem to be a necessary condition of this type of

introductory reference that the hearer should be able to identify uniquely ... the individual referred to".

mo- (him) an object concord, is a definite anaphoric expression referring to first-mentioned monna (a man). Brown and Yule (1983 : 211) say about definite referring expressions that

"[their] paradigm uses are in subsequent reference to an entity which has already been mentioned in an earlier part of the discourse or to salient objects in the physical context".

With monna (enwa) [(this) man], a lexically identical expression has been used to refer to the first-mentioned monna (a man).

The listener has no difficulty however, in understanding that the definite expression motho ... enwa (this person) refers back to monna (a man) because his knowledge of the language tells him that there is a "class inclusion relationship" (Hawkins 1978 : 107) between the hyponyms motho (person) and monna (a man).

Sephankga sena [(this) big man] is a definite descriptive noun phrase which refers to the indefinite expression monna (a man) by way of qualifying it. According to Chafe (1975 : 39) as cited by Sengani (1988 : 78) it is the function of a definite expression to "categorise the referent, i.e. to individualise, particularise or specify it".

The expressions mahlo (the eyes), sefuba (the chest) and diphaka (the arms) have been "presented as being within the semantic field of [the] previously mentioned lexical unit" (Brown and Yule, 1983 : 171), monna (a man). These expressions are in fact significant parts of the larger item, monna (a man), and this relationship renders them definite referring expressions in the context of the antecedent monna. However, the relationship is not one-to-one, and thus not co-referential like in the case of monna on the one hand, and o- \ yena (he) on the other, where their referent in the extralinguistic context is one person. It is a part-whole relationship found in instances of inter-

reference, where the referents are "non-identical, but closely related" (Janssen 1979 : 67). Hawkins (1978 : 125) refers to *monna* as the trigger, and to *mahlo* (the eyes), *sefuba* (the chest) and *diphaka* (the arms) as associates. If reference has to succeed, speaker and hearer should share knowledge of the relationship between trigger and associate(s). Christopherson (1939) as cited by Hawkins (1978 : 99) terms this knowledge "mutual familiarity with the referent". These associates, because of their position in the discourse vis-a-vis their trigger, *monna*, obviously have a backward referential relationship with *monna* - some type of anaphoric relationship - which Hawkins terms "associative anaphora" (1978 : 123). This type of anaphoric relationship has been investigated also by, for example, Maratsos (1971 and 1976), Karttunen (1968) and Winkelmann (1978 : 111 - 118) in Janssen (1979).

Lyons C.G.(1979 : 84) cites the following as other instances where context has been found to elicit definite reference. His classification is based largely on Christopherson's (1939) taxonomy, as extended by Hawkins (1978). (Relevant features of the situational context will be tabled and discussed in more detail in chapter 3.2).

- The visible setting.

A definite NP is used to refer to a referent visible to both speaker and hearer.

8. *Nneheletse tswekere* (Pass me the sugar).

uttered on table at breakfast where the sugar is visible to both speaker and hearer. The hearer will obviously oblige by passing the sugar on the table and not any other sugar in the house.

- The immediate situation.

Hawkins (1978 : 111) distinguishes between the visible situation and the immediate situation, where the referent is not necessarily visible

to both speaker and hearer, but can be inferred from the situation.

9. Etlo ka kwano ntate a se ka o bona.

(Come this side so that Dad should not see you).

This utterance implies that *ntate* (Dad) is there somewhere in the "immediate situation". The speaker may or may not know exactly where *ntate* is, but he certainly knows that if the listener can come to a particular place, *ntate*, wherever he may be, will not see him (the listener).

■ The larger situation.

In the following example

10. Letsatsi le a tjhesa (The sun is hot),

the listener, by virtue of being a co-inhabitant of this earth, will infer, without any ambiguity, the intended specific referent referred to by the use of *letsatsi*.

■ General knowledge.

The following utterance by a parent on his first visit to a particular school,

11. Ekaba ntate porinsipala o teng? (Is the principal in?)

will refer successfully to the person who is at the head of that school, at utterance time, even if the speaker has no specific knowledge of the principal of that school. At least the speaker has the general knowledge that schools have principals.

In conclusion, much as it has been repeatedly said by different linguists that reference is a "semantic feature associated with those

English noun phrases which bear definite or strong determiners like *the*, *both*, *all the*, *every*, *each*, etc, [or] to indefinite or weak determiners like *a*, *some*, *few*, *no*, etc (Reed, 1982 : 2), this is not necessarily the case in Southern Sotho and related languages. Definite and indefinite reference is a feature of the context - linguistic and situational. Southern Sotho does not have definite and indefinite determiners like *the* and *a*, for instance. Instead, it demands that expressions be placed in some context for their interpretation, where features like the identity of speaker and hearer, cooperation between them, their previous conversations, shared knowledge, the situation of utterance, prosodic features like stress and intonation, paralinguistic features, etc, will play their legitimate roles.

However, Louwrens (1991 : 81-82) makes an important observation that the notions of grammatical agreement and word-order are phonemata in Northern Sotho [and other African Languages] that fulfill the functions of these definite and indefinite articles. For instance, it is the syntactic structure of the interrogative **Ho tsamaya bana bafe?** (Which children are going?) that brings about indefinite reference (cf the use of the indefinite subject concord **ho**). The passive structure can also be used to show indefinite reference: **Ho a binwa ka ntle** (There is singing coming from outside) where the subject is unknown.

### 1.3. DEIXIS

Reference comes in various kinds, and the previous paragraphs have shown how definite reference can be achieved by means of proper names and endophora (in particular, anaphora). This section will discuss what Clark and Marshall (1981 : 42) regard as one of the basic types of reference, viz. deixis.

#### 1.3.1. WHAT IS DEIXIS?

Deixis comes from a Greek word meaning "pointing" or "indicating". It is not surprising then to learn that what is today called the demonstrative pronoun, was referred to as the deictic article in

earlier Greek traditional studies" (cf. Lyons, 1977b : 636). The term serves to "describe the function of demonstratives, i.e. to refer to referents in extra-linguistic situations" (Lyons, *ibid*). Hartmann and Stork (1972 : 60) refer to a deictic word as "a word the function of which is to point out or specify an individual, person or idea". With the development of linguistics, the definition of deixis has been broadened to include discourse participants as well as the time and place of the utterance.

Crystal (1985 : 86) defines deixis thus:

"[It] is a term used in linguistic theory to subsume those features of language which refer directly to the personal, temporal or locational characteristics of the situation within which an utterance takes place, whose meaning is thus relative to the situation".

According to Fillmore (1966 : 220)

"Deixis is the name given to those aspects of language whose interpretation is relative to the occasion of utterance: to the time of utterance, and to times before and after the time of utterance; to the location of the speaker at the time of utterance; and to the identity of the speaker and the intended audience".

Lyons (1977b : 636) concurs thus:

"The term deixis is used in linguistics to refer to the function of ... a variety of ... grammatical and lexical features which relate utterances to the spatio-temporal co-ordinates of the act of utterance".

It is evident from the definitions above that there is no controversy as such as to what actually constitutes deixis.

If we look at a typical situation of the utterance, we find at least one person, the speaker. He usually addresses himself to at least somebody else, the hearer. He could talk alone though, when using

interjections or in a soliloquy. The utterance could be about a third person, who can either be present or absent. It can also be about any other type of referent in the linguistic situation or outside in the universe of discourse. The utterance is made in a particular place and at a particular time. Natural languages are therefore designed primarily for use in face-to-face interactions.

A telephone conversation is one example that confirms the claim made above. By nature, a telephone conversation is not "natural" in the sense that the hearer does not share the spatial and sometimes even the temporal context of the speaker. This may present limitations to the extent to which such conversations can flow unhindered. For instance, the speaker and hearer may not know each other; they may not be aware of each other's immediate environment, like the presence of other persons who may impede the free flow of their conversation; also, they may talk to each other at times that are not necessarily convenient to both, as in the case where, at 14:00 in Vancouver, Canada, a person calls another in Johannesburg, South Africa who will receive the call at 23:00 because, for geographical reasons, he is about 9 hours ahead of his caller in Vancouver.

The following example illustrates the fact that the consideration of the features of the context is imperative in the analysis of natural conversations.

12. Wena tloha mona o ye mane hona jwale, nna ke tla tla moo hosane.

(You move from here and go there now, I will come there tomorrow).

As decontextualised as it is, this sentence does not provide much information. It is underdetermined in the sense that its meaning is not fully explicable on sentence internal grounds alone. All we can tell from the example is that someone says the addressee should move from where s\he (addressee) is, and go to some place further away, at the time of utterance. The speaker will come to the same place the

next day. What we do not know is who the referents of *wena* (you), *nna* (I) and *ke-* (I) are; and what the referential interpretations of *mona* (here), *mane* (there), *jwale* (now) and *hosane* (tomorrow) are. All we can say at this stage is that the referent of *nna* (I) and *ke-*(I) is whoever is uttering the statement. If Thabo Tseka utters sentence example (12), *nna* and *ke* refer to Thabo Tseka. If Mpho Tau utters it, then *nna* and *ke-* refer to Mpho Tau. *Wena* (you) refers to whoever is being spoken to. The referential interpretations of *mona* (here), *mane* (there) and *moo* (there) are determined by where the utterance takes place; and those of *jwale* (now) and *hosane* (tomorrow) by the time of the utterance.

*Nna*, *ke-*, *wena*, *mona*, *mane*, *moo*, *jwale* and *hosane* are examples of deictic expressions. They are words that take some element of their meaning from the situation of the utterance in which they are used (Hurford and Heasley, 1983 : 63). Their interpretation, according to Huddleston (1984 : 282)

"... is determined in relation to certain features of the utterance-act: the identity of those participating as speaker and addressee, together with the time and place at which [they occur]".

According to Hurford and Heasley (1983 : 68)

"Deictic expressions bring home very clearly that when we consider individual sentences from the point of view of their truth, we cannot in many cases consider them purely abstractly, i.e. simply as strings of words made available by the language system".

It is the purpose of this study to show that linguistic expressions and utterances will only be interpreted unambiguously when considered in relation to their context of utterance; and the notion of deixis pertains to ways in which the interpretation of utterances depends on the analysis of that context. It concerns the way in which languages "grammaticalize features of the context of utterance or speech event ... [It] concerns the encoding of many different aspects of the

circumstances surrounding the utterance, within the utterance itself" (Levinson, 1983 : 55). The essential property of deixis, as observed by Lyons (1981 : 170), is that

" ... it determines the structure and interpretation of utterances in relation to the time and place of their occurrence, the identity of the speaker and addressee, and objects and events in the actual situation of utterance".

One other characteristic feature of deixis is its egocentric nature. Bühler (1934) as cited by Weissenborn and Klein (1982 : 2) maintains that

" ... deictic expressions refer to an indexical field whose zero - the 'origo' - is fixed by the person who speaks (the I); by the place of utterance (the Here); and by the time of utterance (the Now)".

The implication here is that the speaker, by virtue of being the speaker, is always at the centre of the situation of utterance. He casts himself in the role of ego. Everything he says, he relates to his point of view. The central time is the time at which he produces his utterance; the central place, his location at utterance time. In other words he is at the zero-point of the spatio-temporal co-ordinates of the deictic context (cf Lyons 1977b : 638).

The spatio-temporal zero-point of the deictic system is not stable. It switches from one participant to the other as the role of the speaker is transferred from participant to participant and from place to place, as the interlocutors may move around during conversation.

In the following conversation Mohapi was sitting with friends in a room when Thabo suddenly appeared at the door:

13. Thabo : Ke rata ho buisana le wena, Mohapi.  
(I'd like to talk to you, Mohapi).

- Mohapi : Kgele, ke nna eo e leng kgale ke rata ho  
buisana le wena, weso.  
(It's me who has always wanted to talk to you, my  
brother).
- Thabo : Tloo kwano he re bue.  
(Come here then and let us talk).
- Mohapi : Tjhee bo, ha e be wena ya tlang kwano.  
(No, you should come here).

The deictic centre obviously shifts between Thabo and Mohapi. Thabo is at the zero-point when he speaks. The subject concord *ke-* (I) and the locative adverb *kwano* (here) that he utters, respectively refer to him and to the place where he is at utterance time. The personal pronoun *wena* (you), refers to Mohapi, the addressee. The centre then switches to Mohapi as he takes his turn. Similarly, the pronoun *nna* (I) and the locative adverb *kwano* (here), uttered by Mohapi, refer to him, Mohapi, and the place where he is, respectively. The pronoun *wena* (you) in Mohapi's utterance, refers to Thabo who has now acquired the role of addressee.

This example illustrates how deictic expressions function differently as the discourse participants change roles in their conversation.

The following examples will be used at this juncture to distinguish between deictic and non-deictic terms:

Part of the sentence quoted earlier as (12)

- (14) Wena tloha mona o ye mane hona jwale ...  
(You move from here and go there right now).
- (15) Pata mose ona hara dijeresi tseo, ka hodima e putswa.  
(Hide this dress between those jerseys, above the  
grey one).

The indicated terms in (14) are deictic in the sense that they are

controlled by the interactional situation in which the utterance is produced. The identities of the speaker and addressee, their locations and orientations in space, the indexing act performed by the speaker, and the time at which the utterance is produced, all work together towards the comprehension of such deictic expressions and subsequently (14). In other words, there is no other way in which (14) can be understood, except for considering these details. In (15), on the other hand, the indicated expressions are non-deictic terms whose positional relation is not with respect to the speaker at the time of speaking, but with respect to the objects named by the substantives 'dress, jerseys and the grey one'. These words are in construction with, and at the time indicated by, the sentence in which they occur (cf. Fillmore, 1966).

From the examples discussed thus far, the following appear to be among those lexical items that can be used as deictic elements:

- Personal pronouns : nna (I), wena (you), rona (we), etc.,
- their possessive counterparts : -ka (mine), -hao, (yours),
- concords : ke- (I), o- (you), etc.,
- demonstratives : ena (this), eno (that), yane (that yonder),
- locatives : mona (here), mono (there), mane (yonder),
- temporal expressions : jwale (now), kajeno (today), etc.,
- certain verbs : etlo (come), tliisa (bring),

(These verbs contain an inherent notion of 'towards the speaker'. They presuppose the establishment of a location away from the speaker, where an action begins and then continues towards, and ends at the speaker, or where he is).

- their directional opposites : -ya (go), -isa (take ... to) imply 'away from the speaker'. Levinson (1983 :83) says about such verbs that they have an "in-built deictic component" (cf also Weinreich 1980 : 50).

This brings us to a discussion of what Levinson (1983 : 62) refers to as the traditional categories of deixis, viz. person, place and time.

### 1.3.2. PERSON DEIXIS

According to Fillmore (1966 : 220) person deixis involves the category of 'Participant' (i.e. in the communication act), the two subcategories of which are 'Speaker' and 'Hearer'. The speaker uses first person to refer to himself as subject of the discourse, and the hearer takes the second person. The two are necessarily present in the situation of utterance. The third person on the other hand, may not be present, and may in fact be left unidentified because he does not correspond to any specific participant-role in the speech event.

Person deixis in Sesotho is expressed by inter alia pronouns of the first, second and third person. First and second person pronouns refer to human beings, of necessity. They can also identify animals in narrative contexts, if human personality is attributed to such animals. Pronouns of the third person on the other hand, may refer to human beings, to animals and to things.

Sesotho uses personal pronouns and kinship expressions not only to refer to the role of the participants in the situation of utterance, but also to refer to their relative status or degree of intimacy:

16. Thabang : Na ntate o se a qetile ho ja?

(Has Dad finished to eat?)

Ntate : Tjhe bo, o tatetse kae na ntjhanyana?

(Oh no, why the hurry my boy?)

Thabang : Ruri lona ha le re le a ja hle Monghadi, ha se le ho iketla!

(When you eat, sir, you really take your time)

Ntate : Ke tla etsa jwang na haele moo le meno a fedile?

(What is there for me to do because I have no teeth?)



- as vocatives in second place usage:

18 Hela, tlisa bana bao kwano! Moloi towe o batlang mona? Ka mehla ha o le mona wena Dirontsho, bana ba ka le ho ntjheba ha ba ntjhebe ke dipompong tseba tseo o ba tlelang tsona.

(Hey, bring those children here! You witch, just what do you want here? Every time you come here, you Dirontsho, my children don't even look at me because of all these sweets that you bring them).

Vocatives are NPs that refer to the addressee, but are not syntactically or semantically incorporated as the argument of the predicate. They are rather set apart from the body of a sentence that may accompany them (cf Levinson, 1983 : 71).

19 Thabo, banana ba a o rata ngwaneso.

(Thabo, girls like you my brother).

20 Thabo o a tseba hore banana ba a mo rata.

(Thabo knows that girls like him).

Thabo in (19) is a vocative NP and it necessarily refers to the addressee; whereas the Thabo in (20) is a mere referential NP which may so refer, but does not necessarily do so.

Schegloff (1968) and Zwicky (1974) divide vocatives into calls or summonses, and addresses. Calls are designed to catch the attention of the addressee, as does Hela (Hey) and Moloi towe (You witch) in (18). Edmondson (1981) concurs that summonses (or calls) are "attention-getting" (p. 34) and that they are a "subcategory of the interruptor" which is itself a "request for a hearing" (pp 150 - 151). Because of this function, calls occur at the beginning of an utterance, as does Hela (Hey) and Moloi towe (You witch) in (18). Calls do occur within sentences however, and this happens when they signal the interruption of one discourse by another (Zwicky, 1974 : 797). Wena Dirontsho (you Dirontsho) in (18) demonstrates this fact.

Addresses on the other hand serve to maintain or emphasise the contact between speaker and addressee (Zwicky, 1974 : 787). **Wena Dirontsho** (you Dirontsho) in (18) is an example of an address form. Addresses are typically parenthetical in nature, and according to Zwicky (1974 : 797) they have a much wider occurrence:

- after what he calls "introductory elements" like

21. **Bona \ bona mona \ mamela \ hela wena Dirontsho, bana  
ba ka le ho ntjheba ha ba sa ntjheba.**  
(Look \ look here \ listen \ hey you Dirontsho, my  
children don't even look at me).

- after greetings,

22. **Dumela \ Helele \ Sala hantle wena Dirontsho, o nahana  
hore o bohlae.**  
(Hi \ Hello \ Good morning \ Bye, you Dirontsho, you  
think you are clever).

- after exclamations,

23. **Halala \ Basadi \ Ka Morena, wena Dirontsho o na le  
mehlolo!**  
(Oh boy \ Wow \ Dammit, you Dirontsho, you really are  
a strange person).

It is interesting to note that all address forms have been found to be usable as summonses. **Wena Dirontsho** (you Dirontsho) can occur at the beginning of an utterance in the place of **Hela!** (Hey!) and **Moloi towé** (You witch!). Nevertheless, not all summons forms can be used as addresses. In (18), **Hela** (Hey) cannot be used as an address form in the place of **wena Dirontsho** (you Dirontsho), whereas **Moloi towé!** (you witch!) can.

One other point to mention in connection with person deixis is that Sesotho, and perhaps other languages as well, tends to adopt a form of

self-introduction where speakers cannot see each other. Thus, whereas in a face-to-face meeting a speaker can say

24. *Kè Thabo Tseka* (I am Thabo Tseka),

in other contexts, like on the other side of a closed door, he will say

25. *Ko ko, bu!a h!e, ké Thabo Tseka*  
(Knock knock, please open, this is Thabo Tseka);

and on the telephone:

26. *Dumela Monghadi, o bua le Thabo Tseka mona,*  
(Good morning Sir, you are talking to Thabo Tseka here)

where the speaker adopts third person position.

In conclusion, from the foregoing discussion on person deixis, it is evident that an utterance situation is not resultant solely from the acts of the two main participants, speaker and hearer. Overhearers, or any other attending, but not participating parties influence their utterances. A common example is found in Sesotho and several other African languages where an entirely alternative vocabulary is used by a married woman in the presence of her in-laws, whether or not they are participant. This phenomenon is called *Hlonipha*:

The following is a conversation between Moiponi and Jwalane, her mother-in-law. Moiponi's father-in-law is Katse. In her speech, Moiponi may not utter any sound that is similar to the sounds that occur in her in-laws' names. Note then how she uses a completely different word for Katse in her first turn: *Mohlwathupa* (*Hlonipha* for *katse*, a cat), and for *jwala* (liquor) in her second turn: *tedu tsa banna* (*Hlonipha* for liquor, because *jwala* is very similar to her mother-in-law's name, *Jwalane*).

27. Moiponi : Hela mmannyeo, o re Mohlwathupa ke mo pote  
kae ka taba ena?

(Hey Lady, how do I approach Mohlwathupa  
about this matter?)

Jwalane : Katse ke ntate, ke mo tseba hantle. Mo pote  
ka nkgong.

(Katse is my husband, I know him well. Just  
give him liquor).

Moiponi : Na o hlile o bolela tedu tsa banna?

(Do you really mean liquor?)

### 1.3.3. PLACE DEIXIS

Place deixis is that part of spatial semantics in which the physical bodies of the participants in a communication act are relevant, and are taken as significant reference points for spatial specification. It is that aspect of deixis which involves referring to the locations in space of communication act participants (Fillmore, 1982 : 37). It concerns the specification of locations relative to anchorage points in the speech event (Levinson, 1983 : 79).

Objects may be located, or referred to in apparently two basic ways:

- a. directly by pointing or locating
- b. indirectly by naming or describing (Batori, 1982 : 155;  
Levinson, 1983 : 79).

Bühler (1934) distinguishes three modes of pointing (Ehrich, 1982 : 43; Batori, 1982 : 156):

- a. "*Demonstratio ad oculos*", which involves direct pointing by means of gestures or demonstratives to perceptually given items in the speaker's extralinguistic environment. Here, the reference space is roughly identical to the perceptual field of speaker and listener:

28. Wena dula mona, wena mane.  
(You sit here, and you there).

- b. Syntactic pointing. It is basically anaphoric because reference is made to linguistic entities introduced by previous expressions or discourse:

29. Le kgetheha mehla ena Lesotho. Ruri baka sena se a bata mariha.  
(It snows a lot in Lesotho. This place is indeed cold in winter)

✓ In the given example, baka sena (se a bata) (this place is cold) is both referential and deictic, if speaker and hearer share location at utterance time, whereas sebaka (se a bata) (the place is cold) may only be referential.

- c. "Deixis ad phantasma" is imaginative pointing to abstract places or objects; to entities which exist in the speaker's imagination. The most common example here is where a speaker "points" to a place that he remembers. For instance, Lebusa and Tsotetsi were conversing, and "Lesotho High School" came up in their conversation. The two men know Lesotho well, but Tsotetsi somehow cannot remember exactly where Lesotho High School is. He knows that it is in Maseru, and along the main road to Lebusa's home. He says he can actually "see" the post office where Lebusa's wife works. Just then, Lebusa utters the following and actually demonstrates with his finger, the proximity of Lesotho High School to the post office.

30. Eke, Lesotho High School e hona mona he, haufi le posong.  
(That's right, Lesotho High School is just here then, next to the post office).

Fillmore (1966 : 220) observes that place deixis seems to differ from

language to language only in having two or three categories. English has two, viz. proximal, i.e. near the speaker at utterance time (here, this), and distal, away from the speaker at the time of speaking (there, that). Local deixis in Sesotho, on the other hand, differentiates between three spatial regions:

- First position -na : It refers to an entity somewhere near the speaker, (proximal) :

31. Buka ena (this book);

or to the place physically covered by the speaker :

32. Etlo ho nna mona (come to me here, i.e. where I am).

- Second position -no : It refers to an entity or place at a medial distance from the speaker, and proximal to addressee, at reception time:

33. Dulang mono (sit there);

34. Bitsang bana bano (call those children).

- Third position -ne \ -la : It refers to an entity or to a place which is neither near the speaker nor the addressee. In other words, these expressions are negatively defined with respect to both the speaker and the addressee's place or region of proximity.

35. Ke bomang batho bane? (Who are those people?)

36. Mola ho hotala ho feta mona (It is greener there than here).

The subject of spatial deixis seems to have three natural subtopics in Sesotho :

1. Systems of demonstratives in as much as they are structured with the locations and gestures of the communicating participants:

37. Gestures: batho bana (these people), bano (those)  
bane \ bale (those yonder).
38. Location: dula mona (sit here), mono (there), mane \  
mola (yonder).
2. Prefixal, suffixal and other devices for constructing locating expressions in which the current location of a communicating participant can become an explicit landmark:
39. Ke ya ho malome (prefix) (I'm going to my uncle).
40. Ke dula motseng ona (suffix) (I live in this village).
41. O eme morao \ thoko \ pele (nouns as locative adverbs).  
(He is standing at the back \ on the side \ in front).
3. System of motion verbs for whose interpretation reference must be made to the current or expected location of a communicating participant:
42. Etlo (kwano) (Come here). It requires movement towards the speaker.
43. Eya (koo) (Go there), requires movement away from the speaker.

Spatial deictic expressions seem to fulfill the following functions in Sesotho:

- to inform, i.e. where the speaker lets the hearer know that a particular 'figure' (Fillmore's term) is to be found at a particular place:

44. Thabo o dula mona (Thabo lives here)

with mona implying either the place where the speaker is, or the place

at which the speaker is pointing at utterance time.

- to identify. The speaker lets the hearer know which one of several possible objects or places is being mentioned:

45. Bala buka ena, le ena, e seng ena.

(Read this book, and this one, and not this one).

In conclusion, place deixis seems to be organised according to:

- distance from the first and \ or second person:

46. Tloha ho nna mona o yo llela mane

(Move away from me here and go and cry there).

- visibility, i.e. the space of visual perception

47. Ntlo ya ka ke ena (This \ here is my house, i.e. the one I see).

- accessibility, also direction, usually in relation to first person:

48. Se kene ka mono, dintja di tla o loma

(Don't go in there, the dogs will bite you).

49. Nna ke lebelo ka pela ntlo, wena eya ka morao.

(I'll watch in front of the house, you go to the back).

- the space that is constituted in our memory by our geographical knowledge:

50. Ha ho tjhesa tjena Kgauteng mona, Venda teng ho a tuka.

(If it is this hot here in Johannesburg, then it must be burning in Venda).

The deictic space of speakers and hearers need not be the same for communication to be successful, it is enough if the speaker and hearer are fairly close to each other.

#### 1.3.4. TIME DEIXIS

Like all other aspects of deixis, time deixis makes ultimate reference to participant role (Levinson, 1983 : 73). When temporal expressions are used, one needs to know when the utterance was made in order to understand what specific times are referred to.

51. Thabang : Ebe o se o tsamaya na monna?  
(Are you already on your way?)
- Motlatsi : Le jwale, ke tsamaya hona jwale.  
(Indeed, I'm going right now).
- Thabang : Feela o ne o itse o tla tsamaya ka Moqabelo.  
(But you had said you would leave on Saturday).
- Motlatsi : Ke tsoha ke fetohile. Ke tihakile, ke thabile, mme ke a tsamaya.  
(I'm a different person this morning. I have visited you, I'm happy, and I'm going).

Time deixis seems to be expressed in two ways in Sesotho, by means of:

- a. Verb tenses.

Levinson (1983 : 77) maintains that

" ... tense is one of the factors ensuring that nearly all sentences when uttered, are deictically anchored to a context of utterance".

- ✓ Sesotho seems to display two systems of temporal deictic specification

by tense marking, viz

- (i) a simple tense system marked by direct suffixation to the verb stem, as in (51) *ke fetohile* (I have changed); *ke tjhakile* (I have visited).
  - (ii) a compound tense system involving auxiliary verbs or the tense marking aspect, as in (51) *o se o tsamaya?* (are you already going?) (auxiliary).
- b. Temporal location nouns : *jwale* (now) and *ka Moqebelo* (on Saturday), with *jwale* (now) glossed as the time at which the speaker is producing the utterance containing *jwale*.

Time deixis is therefore expressed by signs which modify either the verb or the sentence as a whole.

### 1.3.5. DISCOURSE DEIXIS

Discourse deixis has been defined by Levinson (1983) as concerning

"the use of expressions within some utterance to refer to some portion of the discourse that contains an utterance (including the utterance itself)" (p. 85)

✓ "... the encoding of reference to portions of the unfolding discourse in which the utterance is located" (p. 62).

In this example, which serves to exemplify the definition above: *Le fihlile Maseru mme le tsebe ho a bata mona* (You have arrived in Maseru and you must know it is cold here), *mona* (here) is both anaphoric as well as discourse deictic in that it refers back to Maseru mentioned earlier, on the one hand, and also "points at" this cold place where the addressees are said to have arrived, on the other. It is important also to note that in the case of discourse deixis, the phenomenon of coreferentiality does not prevail because the portion of the discourse in question, i.e. *mona* (here) in this case, is itself the required

referent (cf. Ehlich, 1982 : 179).

The following example demonstrates another way in which discourse deixis occurs:

52. Lentswe la ho qetela polelong ena ke lebitso.  
(The last word in this sentence is a noun).

The demonstrative *ena* (this), refers to both the linguistic entity *polelo* (sentence) and the utterance (52) itself in which the demonstrative pronoun occurs. Hauenschild (1982 : 179) calls this phenomenon "self-reference":

"By the notion of self-reference we understand not only reference to the sentence in which the demonstrative pronoun occurs ... but also reference to any portion of the uttered text, including that sentence".

Self-reference is a feature of discourse deixis, a term coined by Fillmore (Hauenschild, *ibid*), which concerns the use of expressions within an utterance to refer to some portion of the discourse that contains that utterance, including the utterance itself (Levinson, 1983 : 85). Discourse deixis concerns ways in which an utterance signals its relationship to the surrounding discourse. Crystal (1985 : 86) maintains that the term is also used for words that refer backwards and forwards in discourse.

Southern Sotho uses time deictic words to refer to previous discourse as well as to discourse that is to follow:

53. Kgao long e fetileng re hlalositse tjena ... feela ke a tseba hore le tla utlwisisa hantle seratswaneng se latelang.

(In the previous chapter we explained thus ... but I know that you will understand better in the next paragraph).

Place deictic words also, especially *ena* (this) and *eo \ eno* (that), are used here to express discourse deixis. These words may be used deictically to refer not only to objects and persons in the situation and to different linguistic entities in the text, but also to refer to events that have already taken place, or are going to take place in the future. It is interesting to note that these place deictic terms take a temporal signification here:

A group of boys are telling jokes in turns, in what one can call a competition, as one joke turns out to be funnier than the other:

54. Thabo : Ona wona ha le so o utlwe, methaka.  
(I bet you haven't heard this one, guys).

Note that *ona* (this) which is normally place deictic, refers in this case to a point in time, to a forthcoming joke by Thabo. *Ona* is thus cataphoric to a forthcoming piece of discourse.

The boys in unison : *Bua monna re a tjha*  
(Speak man we are impatient).

[And then Thabo tells what was later accepted by all listening to be the funniest of all jokes].

Motlatsi : Ono he ke motlae wa metlae ka nnete  
(That was indeed a joke amongst jokes)

*Ono* (that) which normally refers to place, refers in this case to a preceding portion of the boys' discourse, which is the joke told by Thabo. *Ono* is therefore a definite referring expression, anaphoric to the joke told by Thabo.

Discourse deixis includes a number of other ways in which an utterance signals its relation to the surrounding discourse. Most conjunctions may also be used to indicate the relationship between an utterance and the prior discourse because of their inherent potential to link

discourses:

55. Pontsho : Ke tsona tseo he  
(That's that, then).
- Nthoto : Empa ha ke dumellane le seo o se buang  
(But I don't agree with what you say).
- Pontsho : Ha o na boikgethelo ngwaneso hobane ditaba  
di jwalo.  
(You have no choice my sister, because  
that's the way it is).
- Nthoto : Ka hoo he ke tla sitwa ho ya moo.  
(Therefore I won't be able to go there).
- Pontsho : Ke tsa hao tseo.  
(It's up to you).
- Nthoto : Ntle le moo, ke ne ke ntse ke itse ha ke no  
ya.  
(Besides, I had meant not to go).

Such expressions like empa (but), ka hoo (therefore), and ntle le moo (besides) indicate how utterances that contain them are responses to, or a continuation of some portion of the prior discourse (cf. Levinson, 1983 : 87). They therefore do have deictic status.

### 1.3.6. SOCIAL DEIXIS

Linguistic items occur now and then in everyday discourse, which unequivocally and indeterminately mark the identity of participants in that interaction; e.g. the underlined words and expressions in the following:

56. Thabo : Ntate o tla nneha neng tjhelete ya ka?  
(When will Dad give me my money?)
- Ntate : Ha kgwedi e feela ngwana ka.  
(Month-end, my child).
- Thabo : Feela titjhere Poo yena o se a ntefile  
(But Mr. Poo has already paid me).

Ntate : Nna wa batho we! Bolella nnao a o nehe he ka  
moo, nke ke tswe melatong.

(Poor me! Tell your mother to give you there  
and let me be rid of debts).

- ✓ Such linguistic items are said to encode social deixis and they therefore refer to the social properties of the speech event. This notion will be clarified further in Chapter 3.2 which identifies and discusses "features of the situation". Here, discourse participants, identified as the first of such features, are defined as all the people present during the utterance of a discourse, namely, speaker, addressee and the audience. Their physical and psychological properties, together with their social roles are all important factors that play a role in the production and interpretation of discourses. Social deixis concerns, according to Levinson (1983 : 89),

"Those aspects of language structure that encode the social identities of participants ... or the social relationships between them, or between one of them and persons and entities referred to".

It refers to those linguistic aspects that

"reflect or establish or are determined by certain realities of the social situation in which the speech act occurs" (Fillmore, 1975 : 76).

Brown and Levinson (1979 : 311) and Levinson (1983 : 90) distinguish two types of socially deictic information that seem to be encoded in language in general, viz. relational and absolute deictic information; and they claim that most aspects of social deixis are relational, rather than absolute. Typical relationships in everyday conversations are those between

- speaker and referent

✓ 57. Lona le tsamaile jwang, ntatemoholo?

(How did you fare, grandpa?)

The plural pronoun *lona* is used here for the singular addressee, *ntatemoholo* (grandpa) to show respect. Respect is conveyed in this case by referring directly to "the target of the respect" which is *ntatemoholo*.

■ speaker and addressee

A common example is where one person says to the other, especially of a different age and \ or different sex, something like:

58. *Ke sa ya ntlwaneng,*  
(I'm going to the toilet),

without specifying what he is going to do there. This linguistic alternate *-ya ntlwaneng* (go to the toilet), encodes respect to the addressee without actually referring to him.

■ speaker and bystander

This is where speakers use, say, *Hlonipha*, an alternative vocabulary used by a bride in most African cultures, in the presence of her "taboo relatives", her in-laws. (cf. example cited earlier as 27).

According to Comrie (1976), as cited by Levinson (1983 :90); and Brown and Levinson (1978 : 180) the relationships above are all honorific, in the sense that they show relative rank and \ or respect; and Fillmore (1975) suggests that honorifics are properly considered part of the deictic system of a language.

Finally, a relationship occurs between speaker and setting. Social roles assumed by speakers and listeners are often influenced by the setting and also the type of activity speakers are engaged in. A teacher for instance will be formal and technical in delivering a lesson, depending on the subject matter, whereas in conversing with friends outside the classroom, he will use a different and more informal register.

The second main type of social indicators of the identity of discourse participants, are "absolute" (Brown and Levinson's term). Certain forms are restricted to particular users termed "authorised speakers" by Levinson (1983 : 91), and Brown and Levinson (1979 : 312). For instance, a situation once prevailed in South Africa where the white population, in despising the Africans, called them Kaffirs.

In the same way, there are also forms reserved for "authorised recipients". Members of a particular clan, and nobody else, qualify to be addressed in their clan name:

59. O tsohile jwang kajeno Mohlakwana?

(How are you today, member of the Hlakwana clan?)

#### 1.4 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there are many features in the structure of language that can only be explained on the assumption that languages were meant to be used in context; that languages have developed for communication in face-to-face interaction. Levinson (1983 : 54) emphasises at this stage that deixis is "the single most obvious way in which the relationship between language and context is reflected in the structure of the languages themselves".

Fillmore (1971) refers to the gestural usage of deictic terms, where demonstratives for instance, are used for the purpose of selecting:

60. Ena e monate, empa ena yona e bosula.

(This one is nice, but this one is tasteless).

According to Levinson (1983 : 65), terms used in a gestural deictic way can only be interpreted with reference to an audio-visual-tactile monitoring of the speech event.

Deictic terms can also have a symbolic use (cf. Fillmore, 1971) and for their interpretation, symbolic usages of deictic terms require only knowledge of the spatio-temporal parameters of the speech event.

Thus, in order to know which day is being referred to in

61. Ke tla o bona hosane

(I will see you tomorrow),

it is essential to know when the interaction took place.

## CHAPTER 2

### INFERENCE

#### 2.1. ON UNDERSTANDING DISCOURSES

In ordinary conversation, especially between parties who know one another well and share common interests and knowledge in the topic being discussed, the speaker tends to assume that much is already known to the hearer, and he normally does not feel compelled to supply more than just a minimum of information. Consequently, everyday conversation is typically elliptical and shorthand, but nevertheless contiguous and connected. The following sequence explains this point:

62. Seithati : Yaba ho senyeha kae he mosadi?  
 (And then, what went wrong, lady?)  
 Morongwe : Ke re motho a ntsoetsa moferefere.  
 (I tell you, that person just started trouble).  
 Seithati : Ka phuthehonyana feela ya basadi?  
 (About a mere women's meeting?)  
 Morongwe : Ho boulela hona ho tla mmolaya.  
 (This jealousy will kill him).  
 Seithati : La qetella le entse jwang he?  
 (What did you do then?)  
 Morongwe : Motho a nkisa Mike's Kitchen.  
 (He took me to Mike's Kitchen).

As it stands, this sequence makes very little, if any sense at all, and most of it will obviously be unclear to a person who is not already a party to this conversation or who is unfamiliar with the participants and their life histories and experiences and with the general context of this exchange. Seithati and Morongwe are friends. Their women's club held a meeting recently, which Morongwe could not attend because her jealous husband chose to take her out to the Mike's

Kitchen restaurant for lunch. Such a conversation can only be interpreted by considering how well what is said contributes to achieving the presumed goal of communication, and also with respect to the relation between what is said and the hearer's ability to infer missing information from shared background knowledge. There is no doubt that we do rely on the lexical items and the syntactic structure of a sentence to arrive at an interpretation, but there is no way we can operate optimally only with this literal input to our understanding. It is thus a generally accepted fact in linguistic theory that most of the work of accounting for discourse disambiguation and comprehension is to be done by "a general theory of common-sense inference", (Green and Morgan, 1981 : 167) together with other types of language-related knowledge.

The notion of inference has been discussed by many linguists, especially pragmatists, as an integral part of the process of comprehension. Brown and Yule (1983) regard inference as

"... a process that the hearer of a discourse, because he has no direct access to a speaker's intended meaning in producing an utterance, often has to rely on, to arrive at an interpretation for utterances or for the connections between utterances" (p. 33). " ... the hearer goes through this process of inferencing to get from the literal meaning of what is ... said, to what the speaker intended to convey" (p. 256).

"[It is] the adding of one's own knowledge to bring a textual world together" (De Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981 : 6).

Inference is a process where various forms of knowledge are used "to generate, evaluate, and incorporate information which is not explicitly represented in a written text, but which is nevertheless essential to understanding the text", (Holbrook et al, 1988 : 401).

In an exchange like:

63. Thuso : Ke sa ya ha rakgadi.

(I'm going to my aunt's place).

Palesa : Koloí ha e na mafura.

(There's no petrol in the car).

Palesa's utterance seems unrelated to Thuso's and is apparently conversationally inadequate. However Thuso will normally assume that Palesa is talking topically and is in fact expecting him to 'repair' her 'insufficient' utterance by inferring her intended meaning that there is no way that he can go to his aunt's place. Thuso will therefore cooperate by making his own contribution to the literal meaning of Palesa's utterance and thus support its coherence. Unless discourse participants are able to make such calculations, both in production and in interpretation, communication cannot be possible. This process of inference is afterall "... an interactive mechanism through which speaker and listener jointly negotiate and arrive at interpretations" (Gumperz, 1982 : 19). De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981 : 200) add that the process of inference has been studied as a "mechanism which expands, updates, develops or complements the content expressed in a text".

Another important role of inference is to relate what is said to what has gone before and to what is to come in a discourse. It appears to be normal to assume that when a speaker says something, his utterance will be occasioned by what has already been said or by what will be said. Normally, when a person says something that is obviously unrelated to what has been said, our initial response will be to assume that he will develop a context that will connect it to what has already been said, or otherwise develop a completely new context. Listeners do not typically dismiss as irrelevant an unclear or ambiguous utterance. In most cases they will assume that if it is not clear now, it will be clear as the speaker proceeds - afterall discourse is an accomplishment brought about through the cooperative efforts of both speaker and hearer.

One other feature of inference as noted by Holbrook et al., (1988 : 401) amongst others, is that at any point in a discourse where an

inference can be generated, there is usually more than one inference possible; Brown and Yule (1983 : 34) observe that listeners will rather prefer to make inferences which have some likelihood of being justified, to all the other competing inferences and, if some subsequent information does not fit in with this inference, they abandon it and form another.

64. **Ha ke fihla Thabo o ne a ile kerekeng.**  
(When I arrived Thabo had gone to church).

Most of the subjects interviewed inferred from this utterance that the speaker arrived at the said place on a Sunday morning. But they readily changed their minds and formed other inferences when, in the same discourse, this utterance was followed by:

65. **O ne a ilo lata moruti hore ba ise Molefi sekolong.**  
(He had gone to fetch the priest so that they could take Molefi to school).

People's inferential abilities have been found to vary, for obvious reasons such as the fact that people have different knowledge of the world based on their stage of life, experience, status, and the like; they may speak different languages and have different cultural backgrounds. Sperber and Wilson (1986 : 38) insist that even if people can share "the same narrow physical environment, their cognitive environments would still differ". These differences surely have a bearing on the construction and comprehension of discourses. Our estimate of the hearer's ability to make inferences and to comprehend utterances, determines the level of the explicitness of our utterances. If we assume that our hearers have limited background knowledge, like in the case of a child, the more we point out by means of physical gestures, simple examples, etc., and the less we rely on his ability to infer. However speakers have to guard against underestimating their hearer's knowledge and their ability to infer, and avoid to continue on and on with oversimplified illustrations long after it is clear that the hearer has understood them. Almost as

reprehensible is to overestimate your listener's knowledge. Can one perhaps imagine a more impolite form of behaviour than to discuss, ad nauseam, a topic of which the listener is ignorant and has no interest in?

The purpose of the discussion above was to demonstrate that we often understand more than we hear, and intend more than we say. It is through the process of inference, inter alia that the 'gaps' and 'missing links' are bridged and discourses are better understood. This process of inference is nothing but a component of meaning. Levinson (1983 : 13 - 14) lists seven examples of such inferential relations of an utterance, and acknowledges though that the list is subject to revision : truth conditions or entailments, conventional implicatures, presuppositions, felicity conditions, generalised conversational implicatures, particularised conversational implicatures and inferences based on conversational structure. These forms of inference overlap to a great extent and they play a significant role in the production and interpretation of discourses.

However the discussion of entailment and felicity conditions will not benefit this dissertation, because entailment deals more with the relationship between a pair of sentences such that the truth of the second sentence necessarily follows from the truth of the first, as in *Ke tsamaya le mme. Ke tsamaya le motho*, (I'm going with my mother. I'm going with a person). Felicity conditions on the other hand, are just criteria in the speech act theory which must be satisfied if the speech act is to achieve its purpose; for example, sincerity conditions relate to whether the speech act is performed sincerely. They concern themselves more with the production rather than the interpretation of discourses.

This dissertation aims to investigate the broader path that the hearer pursues in interpreting discourses, i.e. to get from the literal meaning of what is said to what the speaker actually intended to convey. **Presuppositions** and **Implicatures** are therefore the more relevant sub-categories of the general notion of inference whereby

NB

this goal can be achieved. Under implicatures will be discussed conventional implicatures, generalised and particularised conversational implicatures, and inferences based on conversational structure.

## 2.2 IMPLICATURES

In the following exchange, cited earlier as (64):

Thuso : Ke sa ya ha rakgadi.  
 (I'm still going to my aunt's place).  
 Palesa : Koloï ha e na mafura.  
 (There's no petrol in the car).

Palesa's utterance explicitly expresses the thought that there is no petrol in the car, but on the other hand it implies that Thuso cannot possibly go to his aunt's place. It is this kind of implication on the part of the speaker, Palesa in this case, that Grice claims led him to 'concoct' the notion of implicature and then introduce it into the philosophy of language in his famous William James lectures in 1967 (Grice, 1975).

Gazdar (1977 :49) understands an implicature to be

"... a proposition that is implied by the utterance of a sentence in a context even though that proposition is not a part of, nor an entailment of what was actually said".

According to Brown and Yule (1983 : 31) the notion of implicature is used by Grice

" ... to account for what a speaker can imply, suggest or mean, as distinct from what the speaker literally says".

Levinson (1983 : 97) sees implicature as a notion

" ... that provides some explicit account of how it is possible to mean (in some general sense), more than what is actually 'said' (i.e. more than what is literally expressed by the conventional sense of the linguistic expression uttered)".

The notion clearly "rests upon a distinction between what is actually said and what is implied in saying what is said" (Lyons, 1977b : 592).

"It allows one to claim that natural language expressions do tend to have simple, stable and unitary senses (in many cases anyway), but that this stable semantic core often has an unstable, context-specific pragmatic overlay - namely a set of implicatures. (Levinson 1983 : 99).

An implicature therefore, is a pragmatic aspect of meaning, a contextual assumption or implication which necessarily lies outside what the speaker has literally said, and which the hearer is expected to deduce so as to understand what has been said as relevant. Grice distinguishes two main types of this implicit content or implicature that an utterance can convey: conventional implicatures and conversational implicatures (Grice, 1975 : 50).

### 2.2.1. CONVENTIONAL IMPLICATURES

*Words*

Conventional implicatures arise solely from the conventional meanings of words and grammatical constructs that occur in the sentence. They are "determined by particular lexical items or linguistic constructions occurring in the utterance" (Wilson and Sperber, 1986 : 46). They are associated with lexical items and constructions "which contribute to the interpretation of sentences in a purely linguistic, rule-governed way" (Kempson, 1986 : 77); and they are "not truth-functional" (Kempson, 1975 : 145; 1986 : 77; Levinson, 1983 : 127).

*Meaning*

"[Conventional implicatures] are non-truth conditional inferences that are not derived from superordinate pragmatic principles ... but are simply attached by convention to particular lexical items or expressions" (Levinson, 1983 : 127).

Grice discussed one example only, i.e. the implicature of causality associated with the word therefore (Grice, 1975 : 44):

e.g. He is an Englishman, he is therefore brave.

He claimed that the use of therefore in this example, does not indicate that his being brave has been caused by his being an Englishman, in the same way that because for instance, asserts that his being an Englishman has caused his being brave in

He is brave because he is an Englishman.

He argues that He is an Englishman; he is therefore brave indicates that the fact that he is an Englishman is a reason for believing that he is brave. In other words, his being brave is implicated by the fact of his being an Englishman. Thus, therefore signals what Blakemore (1988 : 246) terms an "inferential connection" between the two propositions, viz. He is an Englishman and He is brave. However, much as the use of therefore is a consequence of his being an Englishman, the utterance He is an Englishman; he is therefore brave, will not be false should the consequence in question fail to hold, i.e. should the subject fail to be brave, according to the definition of a conventional implicature. To take another example:

Examples (66) and (67) will be used alongside each other, with the conjunctions ebile (and) in (66) and feela (but) in (67) occurring in the same linguistic environment. The aim is to show that but carries a conventional implicature of contrastiveness, and therefore, the use of this conjunction in an example like (67) produces an odd sentence.

66. Thabo o tlohetse sekolo, ebile ntatae o swabile.

(Thabo has left school, and his father is disappointed).

67. Thabo o tlohetse sekolo, feela ntatae o swabile.

(Thabo has left school, but his father is disappointed).

If we assume that *feela* (but) in (67) carries an implicature, then examples (66) and (67) would have the same truth conditions and differ only in that (67) conventionally implicates a proposition involving something like a contrast, oddity, unexpectedness, and so on. This implicature cannot be explained in any terms of conversational rules; even the dictionary entry of the word *feela* (but) will not have any pragmatic component that would specify the word's implicature potential. The implicature only arises as a result of the particular non-truth conditional properties inherent in the word *feela* (but). Conjunctions in general, seem to display this potential of carrying conventional implicatures, for instance *ha* (if) implies a condition, *hobane* (because) a reason, etc.

In conclusion, the conventional implicature of a lexical item or linguistic expression, seems to be specific and can therefore not be cancelled (Green, 1987 : 94; Kempson, 1975 : 145; Karttunen and Peters, 1979 : 12; etc). This means that a speaker cannot deny that he meant the conventional implicature, unless he wishes to involve himself in a contradiction. This feature of cancellability of implicatures will be discussed in more detail under the sub-heading "Characteristics of Conversational Implicatures".

Of more interest to the discourse analyst, is what Grice terms conversational implicature which is derived from general principles of conversation in conjunction with the peculiarities of the context of utterance. The following discussion will occasionally refer back to conventional implicatures so as to show how the two types differ from each other.

### 2.2.3. CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES

Let us consider the following exchange:

68. Kgotso : Ho jwang ka leqanyana moo, mmannyeo?  
 (How about a piece of meat, lady)  
 Puleng : Thabiso ha a eso reke mashala le jwale.  
 (Thabiso has not yet bought coal).

Grice claims that when he came up with the notion of conversational implicature, he was particularly concerned with the kind of implication which is found in everyday exchanges like the one above, where, for example, Kgotso asks for a piece of meat, and the addressee, Puleng, replies that Thabiso has not yet bought coal. This response might appear to be irrelevant, but then, the speaker might be understood to imply that for the fact that Thabiso has not yet bought coal, she has not yet made fire, and has thus no means of cooking the meat.

It is clear then that on the theory of conversational implicature, the conventional meaning of a sentence, and what is said on a particular occasion of utterance, are only part of the total linguistic force. Grice argues that

" ... there are aspects of what a speaker intends to communicate by a sentence, that are conversationally implied by the sentence, but are not part of the logical structure of the sentence" (Cole 1974 : 104),

and these phenomena are the conversational implicatures.

Conversational implicatures are therefore more pragmatically, rather than semantically determined. They are part of what the utterance communicates, but they are not conventionally determined by the conceptual or logical meaning of the sentence. They allow speakers to use sentences to communicate information which is not specified by the

meaning of the sentence in question. They are "propositions that [are] not [themselves] actually said, but conveyed by the saying of what is said" (Burton-Roberts, 1984 : 186).

Grice distinguishes two types of conversational implicatures, viz. particularized conversational implicatures, which linguists feel, have a rather marginal general relevance to linguistic interests; and generalised conversational implicatures which occur more often in language use.

#### 2.2.2.1. PARTICULARIZED CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES

From the short discussion of particularised conversational implicatures by Grice (1981 : 185), one gathers that they are the type that depends greatly on the context of utterance. They arise because of some special factor inherent in the context, and they are not normally carried by the sentence used. In the following dialogue:

69. Thuso : Ba lilelang bana bana?  
 (Why are these children crying?)  
 Palesa : Thuso ngwaneso, ke kgathetse jwale ke  
 Thabo. Letsoho lena la hae le batla ho  
 kgaolwa.  
 (Thuso, my brother, I have now had enough  
 of Thabo. His hand just needs to be  
 severed).

Palesa's utterance carries a particularised conversational implicature to the effect that the children have been beaten by Thabo, (whose hand should thus be severed). On other occasions of use

70. Thuso : Tjhelete ya ka e ne e le mona, jwale e kae?  
 (My money was here, where is it now?)  
 Palesa : Eke! O a hopola ke tjho hore letsoho lena la  
 Thabo le batla ho kgaolwa?  
 (Aha! You remember I once told you that

Thabo's hand needs to be severed?)

where Thuso's money has disappeared, Palesa's utterance will carry another implicature that Thabo has stolen the money. (His hand should thus be severed because 'it steals'). Severing the hand in (69) would have the consequent of stopping the beating of the children, whereas in (70) it would imply stopping to steal.

#### 2.2.2.2. GENERALIZED CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES

This type of implicature arises when "one can say that the use of a certain form of words in an utterance would normally (in the absence of special circumstances) carry such-and-such an implicature" (Grice, 1968 in Gazdar, 1977:51). An utterance of the type

71. Ke kopane le ngwanana e motlemotle hoseng hona  
(I met a very beautiful girl this morning).

will always carry the implicature that the girl was unknown to the speaker when he met her, because of the indefinite referring expression a very beautiful girl which serves to introduce new information in this discourse. The underlined definite referring item in the following sentence (72) on the other hand, will refer to what is known already, namely a very beautiful girl, as is the nature of definite referring expressions, by definition. This definite referring expression mo (her), therefore carries a different implicature from that of the indefinite a very beautiful girl, i.e. it will always refer to old information:

72. Ke kopane le ngwanana e motlemotle, yaba ke leka ho  
mo tshwaratshwara.  
(I met a very beautiful girl, and then I tried to  
fondle her).

Such implicatures are called generalised conversational implicatures. They do not need any particular contexts for them to arise. They do

not "depend on characteristics peculiar only to certain contexts of utterance" (Karttunen and Peters, 1979 : 3). "No special scenario" is necessary for them to arise (Levinson, 1983 : 126). They are therefore consistent, despite any change in the context.

Grice warns though that "it is all too easy to treat a generalised conversational implicature as if it were a conventional implicature" (Gazdar, 1977 : 51). This will be shown to be avoidable in the following discussion on characteristics of conversational implicature. Every feature that applies to conversational implicatures will be shown to be inapplicable to conventional implicatures.

#### 2.2.2.3. GRICE'S COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE

Grice makes an important observation that language use is a form of purposive, rational action, which comprises a succession of connected utterances, instead of random, unrelated remarks. Participants tend to display a tacit agreement to cooperate so as to achieve the common purpose of their conversation. Their conduct of conversation is directed by what Levinson (1983 : 101) regards as "guidelines for the efficient, effective use of language ... to further co-operative ends". Grice therefore formulates what he regards as a general principle which participants will be expected to observe, all things being equal:

"... make your conversational contribution such as is required at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice, 1975 : 45).

He calls this the Cooperative Principle.

Sperber and Wilson (1986 : 162) note though that the degree of cooperation described by Grice is not automatically expected of communicators, but then

" ... people who don't give us all the information we wish they would, and don't answer our questions as well as they could, are no doubt much to blame, but not for violating principles of communication".

It is common course that successful communication demands adherence, to a greater extent, to these principles.

Under the general umbrella of the Cooperative Principle Grice distinguishes four specific maxims and their submaxims (1975 : 45 - 46):

### QUANTITY

This category is in relation to the quantity of information to be provided and is made up of the following maxims :

- Make your contribution as informative as is required.
- Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

73. Puleng : Ntate o kopa hore Thabiso a tlo mo remela patsi.

(Father would like Thabiso to come and chop wood for him).

74. Morongwe: Ha a yo.

(He is not here).

or

75. Morongwe: Thabiso o sa ile Kgauteng, o tla kgutla ka Moqebelo.

(Thabiso has gone to Johannesburg, he will be back on Saturday).

Morongwe's response in (74) is well formed and informative though not helpful enough. In (75) Morongwe has given 'required information' and has thus fulfilled the first part of this maxim of Quantity. (Father will therefore not have to wait and hope that Thabiso will come and

help him out on this day of utterance, which is, say, a Tuesday).

The second part of this maxim, "Do not make your contribution more informative than is required", is regarded by Grice as either unnecessary because "it is not a violation of the Cooperative Principle to say too much, merely a waste of time", (p. 46); or it is covered by the maxim of relation (to be discussed presently) because "if you give more information than is required, this additional information will of necessity be irrelevant" (p.46).

### QUALITY

The supermaxim in this category is:

- Try to make your contribution one that is true.

The following are the more specific maxims:

- Do not say what you believe to be false;
- Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Just as statements have to be uttered sincerely

76. Ke qetile mosebetsi wa ka,  
(I have completed my assignment),

said by a student who has indeed completed his assignment, so should questions and imperatives be uttered with a sincere intent to receive a required response.

77. Na o qetile mosebetsi wa hao?  
(Have you completed your assignment?)

78. Qeta mosebetsi wa hao!  
(Finish your assignment!)

In addition, this maxim must apply to the implicatures of an utterance as well as to what is actually said. If you say Ke qetile mosebetsi wa ka you must have finished your work and you

must expect your hearer to understand you as such, and not to construe from your utterance that you have stopped working because you are tired and would rather listen to music.

## RELATION

This maxim expects speakers to be relevant. It also applies to all types of utterances, and it is viewed by many linguists (Kempson, 1975; Brown and Yule, 1983; Sperber and Wilson, 1986; Levinson, 1983; ect) as largely responsible for "the Cooperative Principle's enormous power of application" (Kempson, 1975 : 159). These linguists observe that Grice's maxims can actually be replaced by a single principle of relevance "which, when suitably elaborated, can handle the full range of data that Grice's maxims were designed to explain" (Wilson and Sperber, 1986 : 53).

Levinson (1983) cites as an example that imperatives are normally interpreted as relevant to the present interaction; i.e. they compel the hearer to implement some action at the present time:

79. **Dulang fatshe!**  
(Sit down!)

implies that the addressee should sit down at that time of receiving the information.

Lakoff, as cited by Kempson (1975 : 159), relates relevance to the concept of common topic. Although her argument is based primarily on conjoined sentences, the positive relationship between relevance and common topic goes beyond the sentence into discourse:

80. **Puleng : Na Thuso o se a kgutlile mosebetsing?**  
(Has Thuso come back from work?)  
**Kgotso : Baki ya hae ha e yo mona.**  
(His jacket is not here).

In such an exchange, for us to understand Kgotso's response as an appropriate answer to Puleng's question, we have to assume that the two participants are talking on the same topic, and that Kgotso's utterance is meant to cooperatively answer Puleng's question. Puleng may therefore infer from Kgotso's answer that Thuso normally wears his jacket to work, and takes it off when he comes back and puts it at this particular place where Kgotso cannot see it at the time of conversation. The implication is therefore that Thuso is not back yet.

However, Grice himself admits that however terse this maxim is, his formulation conceals a number of problems. Quite so because it doesn't seem to offer any leverage on what an expression is required to be relevant to. It also does not make allowance for a possible change of topic where certain utterances will no longer be relevant to the new topic.

#### **MANNER**

This category does not relate to what is said, but to how what is said should be said. The supermaxim here is

'Be perspicuous', and the other specific maxims are

- Avoid obscurity of expression
- Avoid ambiguity
- Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)
- Be orderly

As can be realised, several kinds of inference arise from observing the maxim of Manner. According to Gazdar (1977 : 56) "avoid obscurity of expression" amounts to instructing discourse participants "to use, and to interpret each other as using the same language or to use the intersection of their respective languages or idiolects" so as to be able to communicate successfully. To "avoid ambiguity" will be to instruct interlocutors "(a) not to use ambiguous expressions, and (b) if they hear or use an ambiguous expression, then to assign to it one and only one reading and not treat it as simultaneously having several readings" (Gazdar, *ibid.*). The third submaxim suggests that simpler

expressions be preferred to more complex paraphrases which convey the same message:

81. Ako mphe metsi a batang hle.  
(Please give me cold water).

will be more preferable to

82. Ako nke kgalase ka rakeng o ye pompong, o bulele  
metsi haholo ho fihlela ho tswa a batang po, o kge, o  
tlatse kgalase, mme o ntlisetse.  
(Please get a glass from the cupboard, go to the tap,  
let it run until ice-cold water comes out, fill the  
glass and bring it to me).

"Be orderly" means "present your materials in the order in which they are required" (Grice's personal communication to Robert de Beaugrande : De Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981 : 122). In other words, events should be recounted in the order in which they occurred, in terms of time and situation for instance. In

83. Thabo o kokotile, yaba o a kena,  
(Thabo knocked, and then entered),

the first action is in the perfect tense and the second in the consecutive; i.e. the actions took place one after the other : first the knocking and then the entering. Reordering the sequence of these utterances without adjusting their tenses appropriately will change the actual state of affairs and will in fact present an unusual practice :

84. Thabo o kene yaba o a kokota.  
(Thabo entered and then knocked).

All of these maxims have as a general purpose, the promotion of efficient communication in everyday conversation.

✓ Grice (1975) acknowledges though that this list is by no means exhaustive, as there can be various other types of maxims "aesthetic, social and moral in character" (p.47) that are also normally observed by discourse participants. Chapter 4, which discusses discourses in situations will show how Sesotho does not adhere to some of Grice's maxims, mainly on cultural grounds.

Brown and Levinson (1978 : 61) make the assumption that all competent members of a society have 'face', i.e. the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself. This being the case, speakers would normally strive to maintain and enhance their face and that of their listeners, rather than lose it in embarrassments and humiliations. People can thus be expected to defend their faces when threatened, and this could be done by defying Grice's maxims : e.g. by being impolite when angered, by being uncooperative in interrogations, by being indirect in requests and by blatantly lying.

Lyons (1977b : 593) concurs that politeness and consideration for the feelings of one's addressee may impose requirements that are in conflict with any or all of Grice's maxims. Grice does note also that the principles may overlap and for that matter even conflict; but nevertheless, they should be used as effectively applying in "any cooperative venture, linguistic or not ... [as] participation in talk exchange will be fruitful only if the exchange conforms to the maxims" (Grandy et al., 1989 : 517). Another feature is that these maxims do not carry the same weight; some are more important than others in certain contexts, and the observance of some is a matter of less urgency than is the observance of other. It is interesting to note also that these "rules", unlike linguistic rules in general, are often broken, as in the case of a person who deliberately tells a lie.

85. Thuso : Ba lilelang bana bana?

(Why are these children crying?)

Palesa : Letsoho lena la Thabo le batla ho kgaolwa.

(Thabo's hand needs to be severed).

At the superficial, literal level of talk, Palesa's utterance appears to violate at least the maxim of Relevance. Yet when the listener interprets the utterance at some deeper level, it becomes clear that Palesa has not failed at all to cooperate. Her apparently irrelevant utterance actually implies that Thabo uses his hand to inflict pain on the children. The hand must thus be severed.

Grice's point, according to Levinson (1983 : 102), is that we do not necessarily adhere to these maxims on a superficial level, but rather that "wherever possible, people will interpret what we say as conforming to the maxims on at least some level". For Grice, conversational implicatures are not "arbitrarily stipulated conventions", (Wilson and Sperber, 1986 : 46; Levinson, 1983 : 103), they describe rational means for conducting cooperative conversations and they should be recoverable by a reasoning process.

Each step in a conversational exchange can be analysed in terms of whether it conforms to the maxims or not. In the most straightforward case, all maxims are obeyed:

86. Thuso : Morongwe o ile kae?

(Where has Morongwe gone to?)

Palesa : O ile ha malome Bereng, Kgauteng.

(She has gone to her uncle Bereng's place in Johannesburg).

If Palesa has observed the Cooperative Principle, then her answer is truthful, informative, relevant and clear.

In other devious talk exchanges, a maxim may be disobeyed in any of the following ways:

- A participant may "unostentatiously violate" a maxim by being deliberately uncooperative:

87. Thuso : Morongwe o dula kae na?

(Where does Morongwe live?)

Palesa : Ha ke bue le batho bao ke sa ba tsebeng.  
(I don't talk to strangers).

- A different case is where a participant overtly "opts out" of a conversation:

88. Thuso : Ebe ke nnete hore Bereng o telekile mosadi?  
(Is it true that Bereng has chased his wife away?)

Palesa : A re tlohele taba tsa batho ngwaneso.  
(Let us keep out of other people's affairs my brother).

- There could be a "conflict" or a "clash" of maxims, in which case a participant can understandably fail to fulfill one or the other maxim.

89. Thuso : Ba rekile ka bokae?  
(For how much have they bought?)

Palesa : Ha ke sa hopola.  
(I no longer remember).

Much as Palesa's response violates the maxim of Quantity, (Be as informative as is required), it fulfills the maxim of Quality, (Have adequate evidence for what you say).

- A maxim may be "flouted". A participant may blatantly fail to fulfill a maxim, but then in such a way that the hearer understands that the speaker is saying one thing when he in fact implies another:

90. Thuso : Ke ba rata hampe baithuti ba sa qeteng mosebetsi wa bona.  
(I like students who do not complete their assignments; I like them very much).

The utterance above may be said ironically to students who have handed in incomplete assignments. It is the maxim of Quality that has been flouted here. Thuso's statement is not true, in fact it is the opposite thereof that is true. It can safely be claimed that this flouting, or exploitation of the maxims is responsible for the existence of many of the traditional "figures of speech".

Conversational implicatures arise from such situations then, where a speaker says one thing which apparently violates Grice's maxims, but at the same time observes the overall Cooperative Principle. Consequently, Grice concludes that there are three elements within the total signification of an utterance, viz. what is said, what is conventionally implicated, and also what is conversationally implicated.

#### 2.2.2.4. CHARACTERISTICS OF CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES

A conversational implicature must be capable of being worked out. It must be replaceable with an argument and Grice suggests the following formula (1975 : 47):

- The hearer must understand the conventional meaning of the words used. He must also be able to identify the referents referred to.
- He must have enough reason to assume that the Cooperative Principle and its maxims have been adhered to.
- He must know the context, linguistic or otherwise, of the utterance.
- He must be aware of the other items of background knowledge.
- He must share this knowledge, (the four points above), with the speaker, and the speaker must assume this to be the case.

e.g. To repeat an example which was cited earlier

Thuso : Ba lilelang bana bana?

(Why are these children crying?)

Palesa : Letsoho lena la Thabo le batla ho kgaolwa.

(Thabo's hand needs to be severed).

The conversational implicature carried by Palesa's response is that Thabo has beaten the children, and this is how Thuso can work it out, according to the formula suggested by Grice (1975 : 47):

The sentence used by Palesa in her utterance conventionally means that Thabo's hand needs to be severed; there is no reason to believe that Palesa is not observing the Cooperative Principle and its maxims, in the given context, (Thabo is aggressive and violent), and with our shared background knowledge (To sever a violent person's hand is to stop him from hitting others). Palesa would not utter her statement unless she believed that Thabo has beaten the children. She knows, and knows that Thuso knows that she knows, that Thuso can see that the supposition that Thabo has beaten the children is required; she has done nothing to stop Thuso from thinking that Thabo has beaten the children; and so she has implicated that Thabo has beaten the children.

Grice (1975) insists that no implicature can finally be established as conversational unless the explanation of its presence has been given:

" ... even if it can in fact be intuitively grasped, unless the intuition is replaceable by an argument, the implicature (if present at all) will not count as a conversational implicature" (p. 50).

and this is an important difference between this kind of implicature and conventional implicatures, which are on the other hand arbitrarily stated. Grice regards this calculability requirement as fundamental:

"The final test for the presence of a conversational implicature had to be as far as I could see, a derivation of it. One has to produce an account of how it could have arisen and why it is there. And I am very much opposed to any kind of sloppy use of this philosophical tool in which this condition is not fulfilled" (Grice, 1981 : 187).

The next characteristic feature of conversational implicatures is that they are cancellable (Levinson, 1983 : 114, prefers the term 'defeasible'. He argues that the notion of 'defeasibility' is "crucial in pragmatics, as most pragmatic inferences exhibit this property". He defines a defeasible inference as the one that can be cancelled by adding some additional premises to the original one). Grandy et al. (1989 : 520) consider this feature of cancellability as the most diagnostically useful:

"Since the demonstration of the implicature depends on several premises, by denying one of those premises, either overtly or indirectly, the path to the implicature can be blocked".

Consider the following exchange:

91. Puso : O tsamaile jwang tekong ya Poo?  
 (How did you fare in Poo's test?)  
 Sebueng: Ke ne ke itokiseditse yena hantle.  
 (I was well prepared for him).

Under normal circumstances Puso would reasonably infer from Sebueng's response that she has fared very well in the test, *ceteris paribus*. But this implicature can be explicitly cancelled if Sebueng can add the following clause:

92. " ... feela ka opuwa ke hloho ya mehlolo ha ke re ke  
 a qala".  
 ( ... but then I suffered a very severe headache  
 just when I meant to start).

On the contrary, conventional implicatures have been shown to be specific and thus not cancellable. It is contradictory for a speaker to deny something that is conventionally implicated by the sentence he has uttered, unless he wishes to engage in a contradiction:

\*Ke ngotse teko ya Poo, feela ha ke a e ngoia.

(\*I have written Poo's test, but I have not written it).

NB: The asterisk is used here to indicate an anomalous sentence.

Conversational implicatures are non-detachable. As is known, a conversational implicature is not attached to the linguistic form of what is said, but rather to its semantic content. Thus, it can never be possible to substitute some lexical item or expression in a sentence and still end up with exactly the same implicature. Let us compare the behaviours of ke lekile (I tried) and ke kgonne (I managed) in the following conversation.

93. Thabo : O entse jwang he maobane moreso?

(How did you fare yesterday, my brother?)

1. Pule : Ke lekile ho tsamaya e sa le hoseng.

(I tried to leave in the morning).

Thabo : Wa ba fumana ba le teng ?

(Were they there?)

Pule : Ebile ba so ntebelle.

(They were not even expecting me yet).

2.Thabo : O hlile o tsamaile e sa le hoseng.

(You really did leave early in the morning).

3. Pule : Ke kgonne ka nnete.

(Indeed I managed)

94. Thabo : O entse jwang he maobane moreso?

1.Pule : Ke lekile ho tsamaya e sa le hoseng.

2.Thabo : Wena ya hlolwang ke ho tsoha, o tsamaile e sa le hoseng? O kgonne?

(You who can't get up early, left in the morning? Did you manage?)

3.Pule : Jwalo ka ha o utlwa ke re ke lekile monna, feela ha ke a kgonna ho tsamaya ka nako.

(As you hear that I tried man, but

I could not manage to leave on time).

In (93) (1) seems to be semantically and truth-conditionally equivalent to (2); In (94) also, if Pule can answer Thabo's (2) in the affirmative. In (93), (1) and (2) pragmatically imply (3), whereas, in (94) (2) does not just lack inference to (3), it is actually negated by (3).

In the words of Levinson (1983 : 116)

"Conversational implicatures cannot be detached from an utterance simply by changing the words of the utterance for synonyms".

Conventional implicatures on the other hand are detachable. This is illustrated by the common switch from the singular to the plural 'politeness' pronouns, where meaning remains the same.

95. O tla e thabela na tee, mme?  
 Le tla e thabela na tee, mme?  
 (Will you have tea, Mum?)

Another feature of conversational implicatures is that, much as they are partially derived from the literal meaning of an utterance, they do not form part of the conventional meaning of that linguistic utterance : after all one needs to know the conventional meaning of a sentence before one can calculate its implicatures in a given context, which makes it impossible for the implicatures to be part of that literal meaning.

To use the same example again:

96. Thuso : Ba lilelang bana bana?  
 (Why are these children crying?)  
 Palesa : Letsoho lena la Thabo le batla ho kgaolwa.  
 (Thabo's hand needs to be severed).

Palesa's response conventionally means that Thabo's hand needs to be severed. After calculation as discussed above - Thuso arrives at the

implicated meaning that Thabo has beaten the children, which is in fact not what Palesa has said.

The last characteristic feature of conversational implicatures, as discussed by Grice (1975 : 58), is that they are indeterminate. For the fact that an implicature is produced in a specific context which is shared by both speaker and hearer, there can be various possible implicatures depending on different contexts in which an utterance can be made. Mention should be made here that it is the particularized conversational implicature that shows this potential.

In the context where Thuso is frantically looking for his money which has mysteriously disappeared:

97. Thuso : Thusang banna, tjhelete ya ka e ne e le mona.  
(Please help, my money was here.)

Palesa's response:

98. Letsoho lena la Thabo le batla ho kgaolwa  
(Thabo's hand needs to be severed)

will carry the implicature that Thabo has stolen the money.

In another context, where Morongwe is giggling like someone who is really enjoying herself, Thuso may ask:

99. Helang basadi, Morongwe o jewa ke eng hakaale?  
(Ladies tell me, what could be tickling Morongwe so much?)

Palesa's response

100. Letsoho lena la Thabo le batla ho kgaolwa,  
(Thabo's hand needs to be severed),  
will implicate that Thabo is tickling her.

To the number of characteristics of conversational implicatures discussed by Grice, Sadock (1981 : 263) adds a convincing argument that conversational implicatures are reinforceable. Levinson (1983) confirms it: "...they can be made explicit without producing redundancy". To use the example cited earlier :

101. Thuso : Thusang banna, tjelete ya ka e ne e le mona.

(Please help, my money was here).

Palesa : Thabo o letsoho. Letsoho lena la hae le batla ho kgaolwa.

(Thabo has a long, big hand. This hand of his needs to be severed).

It has already been shown that Palesa's utterance Thabo's hand needs to be severed carries the conversational implicature that Thabo has stolen the money, in this context. Now, Thabo o letsoho literally means that Thabo has got a long, big hand; and in this context, this utterance carries the conversational implicature that Thabo has stolen the money, (the long, big hand is troublesome). The two similar implicatures have been juxtaposed here to bring about , not pleonasm, but emphasis.

Another feature of conversational implicatures, as noted by Burton-Roberts (1984 : 181), is that they are irreflexive; thereby meaning that it is not possible for a sentence to conversationally implicate itself or another sentence expressing the same proposition. After all a conversational implicature is by definition a proposition that is not itself actually said, but conveyed or implied by the saying of what is said.

One other interesting point to mention about this theory of conversational implicature, is that it applies just as well to aspects of non-linguistic behaviour. Wright (1975 : 367ff) cites the following examples to confirm this claim:

"... the head of St. John being presented to Salome" implied that St. John had been beheaded.

"... the photograph that shows Mrs X being familiar with Mrs Y's husband" implies that she is conducting an illicit love affair.

"... the policeman raising his open palm in front of an oncoming car" implies that he is stopping it.

"Spots that show that a patient has measles".

One last situation worth considering is where a teacher is standing in front of his class, about to deliver his lesson:

His student will violate the maxim of Quality if, when asked to take out his Geography book, he knowingly takes out his Biology book. Likewise he will violate the maxim of Quantity if he takes out all his books. If he postpones to take out his Geography book to 45 minutes later, he will have violated the maxim of Relation. If he stands up and sings loud and just behaves in an odd manner while taking out his Geography book, he shall have violated the maxim of Manner.

This confirms that the maxims do derive from general considerations of being reasonable and rational in conducting all kinds of cooperative exchanges.

#### 2.2.4. LIMITATIONS OF GRICE'S THEORY OF CONVERSATIONAL MAXIMS

The literature studied on this theory of implicature suggests that the theory is undoubtedly mostly accepted as a worthwhile contribution to the philosophy of language. However, it has its own shortfalls:

If conversation was a special case of purposive, rational behaviour, as Grice would like to see it, and the maxims are derivable from considerations of this rational cooperation, one would expect them to be universal in application. But then Keenan's study (1974, as cited by Gazdar, 1977 :69; and by Brown and Levinson, 1978 : 288) of a speech community in Malagasy has shown this language community does not obey some of these maxims, even though they are reasonable,

rational, etc. According to Keenan, this community make their conversational contribution, [if one may call it contribution at all], as uninformative as they can:

"For example, if they are asked where someone is, they may typically reply with a disjunction even though they know, and are known to know, which disjunct is true. Likewise they normally use syntactic constructions which delete the agent in order to conceal the identity of the person responsible for the action described. Also, they use indefinites or common nouns (someone, a girl, etc) even to refer to close relatives" (ibid).

A related situation exists in Sesotho and in many other African cultures in South Africa and beyond her borders. The phenomenon is called Hlonipha (already discussed). Hlonipha entails both linguistic and extra-linguistic behaviour expected of a bride in her new home of her in-laws. According to this practice, she learns and uses a completely different language when speaking to and about her in-laws, whether or not they are there. The main reason for this practice is said to be to protect her and the male members of her new family from one another, by limiting both linguistic and in fact any other form of communication to the absolutely essential. This is seen as a means of maintaining respect and discipline, even though it violates most of the Gricean maxims. However, members of the family always do understand the somewhat vague and apparently meaningless expressions, and can identify their intended referents with ease. They do so on the assumption that the speaker is being cooperative, but only limited by politeness constraints.

Chapter 4 of this dissertation will support Keenan's finding, together with the consideration of the notion of Hlonipha, by giving more instances that show that Grice's maxim's cannot be defended as universal principles of conversation, as they are only 'reasonable', 'rational' etc. in certain cultures, communities, or states of affairs.

Kasher (in Grandy et al., 1989 : 521), observes that there are certain kinds of conversation which do not have a common goal. He likens them to poker games in which it is rational for each player to play with the expectation of winning, even if they know that they cannot both win. Such conversations do not satisfy the cooperative principle. The most typical type of such conversations seem to be situations of bargaining, where participants engage in a mutual trading of offers. For instance a case where A wants to buy B's second hand car for R8 000, where B sells it for R10 000. The ensuing conversation can hardly be deemed as cooperative, much as both parties would like it to continue. A would not talk to B if she did not think that she could not achieve her goal; and similarly for B. Kasher thus observes that rational discourse participants may not necessarily share a fully specified goal, as long as their goals interact with their situations so that each has an expectation of benefitting from the conversation.

Another criticism, as observed by Kroch, in Kempson (1975 : 152) is that the conversational maxims are vague and general and they allow too many implicatures. The theory is further unfalsifiable, vacuous, and of no explanatory value. He bases his argument on the time adverbs before and until and points out with examples that sometimes they are interpreted as synonymms, sometimes not. He argues that since they have the same basic meaning at times, they should have the same conversational implicatures at those times. But then this argument cannot be held by this study because it has already been shown that conversational implicatures are not detachable. It is not possible to substitute a word or expression with a synonymm in an utterance and still end up with the same conversational implicature of the original utterance.

The objection that 'the account allows too many implicatures' was somehow anticipated by Grice and he required that the implicature be non-trivial. For example, in an utterance like

102. Palesa o lekile ho ngola teko ya Poo,  
(Palesa tried to write Poo's test),

particular implicatures like Palesa is a human being; the test was not oral, are normally ruled out as mutual knowledge or general information. Even if Grice does not qualify this triviality, he clearly envisions at least excluding schematically predictable candidates for conversational implicature.

In conclusion, conversational implicatures are inferences based on both the content of what has been said, together with pragmatic features like the context of utterance - both linguistic and situational. They are assumptions that follow from the speaker's saying what he says, together with the presumption that he is observing the maxims of conversation. What happens is that listeners make specific assumptions that speakers are cooperative in their verbal interaction and that their talk is employed with the primary aim to serve a purpose. Grice observes that a speaker who is irrelevant and ambiguous, embarrasses himself and not his listeners.

The second category of inference to be discussed is presupposition.

### 2.3. PRESUPPOSITIONS

#### 2.3.1. BACKGROUND:

The notion of presupposition is the brainchild of the logician and philosopher, Frege (1952) who, according to Katz and Langendoen (1976 : 1) "was primarily interested in developing an account of the logical form of sentences in which meaningfulness was not a sufficient condition for statementhood". His arguments were in response to the debates that prevailed then about the nature of reference and referring expressions. He claimed that referring expressions presuppose that they do in fact refer.

"If anything is asserted, there is always an obvious presupposition that the simple or compound proper names used have a reference. If one therefore asserts "Kepler died in misery"

there is a presupposition that the name "Kepler" designates something".

According to him, the fact that "Kepler designates something" does not form part of the meaning of "Kepler died in misery" nor of "Kepler did not die in misery"; instead it lays a condition that declarative sentences will be seen as making a statement, only if each of their referring expressions succeeds in referring to an appropriate referent. In his own words :

"That the name "Kepler" designates something is just as much a presupposition of the assertion "Kepler died in misery" as for the contrary [i.e. negative] assertion" (ibid).

It was Frege's view that the content of such presuppositions depended on the grammatical structure of sentences.

Russell (1905) refuted Frege's views. He argued that sentences that lacked proper referents could not be meaningful. In his view :

" ... whereas [definite expressions] occurred in natural languages as subjects, in logical form they are not logical subjects at all but correspond instead to conjunctions of propositions" (Levinson, 1983 : 171).

So, instead of analysing his famous sentence "The King of France is wise" into the simple subject and predicate, he claimed that it consisted of the following three assertions:

- There is a King of France.
- There is not more than one King of France.
- Whoever is the King of France is wise.

He then concluded that the sentence is false because it asserts the existence of a non-existent referent. He takes the position that the mere meaningfulness of a sentence is necessary and sufficient for it

to make a statement, i.e. for it to be true or false.

Strawson (1950) came with a completely different argument from that of Russell's. He argued that it is only false to say that "The King of France is wise" if he is not wise. If such a person does not exist, then it is neither true nor false to say that he is not wise. In fact the question should not even arise whether he is wise or not. Conversely, "The King of France is not wise" is only true if there is such a man.

Strawson distinguished sentences from statements, (Levinson, 1983 : 172). Sentences are just structural units, theoretical units defined by a grammar. Statements on the other hand are physical units used in speech production to convey information by means of sentences. Therefore sentences can never be true nor false, whereas statements do have this potential. For instance "The King of France is wise" is a significant and meaningful sentence, but as a statement it is not sensible because such a person does not exist. However, Strawson realised a special relationship between

- (a) The King of France is wise;
- and
- (b) There is a King of France.

He claimed that for (a) to be possible, then (b) should prevail. (b) therefore appeared to act as a precondition for (a) being judgeable as either true or false. He called this relationship 'presupposition' and claimed (1950, 1952, 1964, as cited by Kempson, 1975 : 47) that "The King of France is wise" is logically made up of a presupposition (in the background) that there is a King of France, and a foreground assertion that he is wise.

Thus:

"A statement A presupposes a statement B if, and only if B is a precondition of the truth or falsity of A".

(Strawson, 1952 : 175 in Levinson, 1983 : 172).

### 2.3.2. APPROACHES TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF PRESUPPOSITIONS

In the literature on presuppositions, two main approaches are distinguished (Van Fraassen, 1968; Wilson 1975; Katz and Langendoen, 1976; Dahlgren, 1974; Lyons, 1977b; Brown and Yule, 1983; Crystal, 1985; Levinson, 1983; etc)

- The logical notion. This is the traditional definition by philosophers and linguists which views presupposition to be a relationship between two sentences.
- The pragmatic notion incorporates the beliefs of the speaker and features of the context of the speech act into the set of things presupposed by a speaker.

It may be appropriate at this stage to consider briefly the natural sense i.e. the pre-theoretic meaning of the word 'presuppose'.

Presupposition may be regarded as an assumption about something. To assume is to take for granted, to take as true, to accept as probable. The ordinary language notion of presupposition "describes any kind of background assumption against which an action, theory, expression or utterance makes sense or is rational" (Levinson, 1983 : 168). Lyons (1977 : 600) feels that 'presuppose' in its pre-theoretic sense, "would seem to be primarily a verb of propositional attitude: it seems to be more like assume (or believe) than entail".

#### 2.3.2.1. LOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

Keenan's formulation (1972 : 415) has been found to be representative of the logical notion of presupposition (Brown and Yule, 1983; Dahlgren, 1974 : 1; Katz and Langendoen, 1976 : 1; Wilson, 1972 : 405; Wilson, 1975 : 95; Stalnaker, 1973 : 447; Levinson, 1983 : 199). This is his formal description:

"A sentence S logically presupposes a sentence S1 just in case S logically implies S1 and the negation of S, -S, also logically implies S1".

The following example will clarify this definition :

103. (a) **Ntate o rata kgoho.**  
 (My father likes chicken.)  
 (b) **Ntate ha a rate kgoho.**  
 (My father does not like chicken).  
 (c) **Ke na le ntate.**  
 (I have a father).

Keenan's argument is that (a) logically presupposes (c) because the negative of (a), which is (b), also presupposes (c). He goes on to list several grammatical categories and constructions which he claims to be capable of generating presuppositions. Several other linguists (Karttunen, 1971; 1973; Kiparsky and Kiparsky, 1971; Fillmore, 1971 ; Heinämäki, 1972; Wilson and Sperber, 1979; Levinson, 1983; Lyons, 1977a; etc) concurred by drawing up their own lists of what Levinson (1983 : 179) terms presupposition triggers. Karttunen's list for example, comprised thirty-one kinds of such presupposition triggers (Karttunen, 1971 ; Levinson, 1983 : 181).

The following are some of the common types of such presupposition triggers. Examples (b) provide the negative versions of examples (a), and examples (c) are the presuppositions.

- Determiners \ Definite descriptions.

104. (a) **Ke buile le rakgadia Thabo.**  
 (I have spoken to Thabo's aunt)  
 (b) **Ha ke a bua le rakgadia Thabo.**  
 (I have not spoken to Thabo's aunt).  
 (c) **Ho na le motho eo e leng rakgadia Thabo.**  
 (Thabo's aunt exists).

- Factive predicates.

105. (a) Thabo o mohau ha a nyetse Matlakala.  
 (Thabo regrets that he has married Matlakala.)  
 (b) Thabo ha a mohau ha a nyetse Matlakala.  
 (Thabo does not regret that he has married Matlakala)  
 (c) Thabo o nyetse Matlakala.  
 (Thabo has married Matlakala).

- Iteratives.

106. (a) Pula e nele hape maobane.  
 (It rained again yesterday).  
 (b) Pula ha e a na hape maobane.  
 (It did not rain again yesterday).  
 (c) Pula e se e kile ya na.  
 (It has rained before).

- Temporal clauses.

- 107 (a) Ntate le ntatao ba tsebana pele re eba teng.  
 (My father and yours knew each other before we were born).  
 (b) Ntate le ntatao ha ba a tsebana pele re eba teng.  
 (My father and yours did not know each other before we were born).  
 (c) Re bile teng.  
 (We have been born).

Note how the content of this presupposition is determined by the grammatical structure of the sentence type used. Presupposition in this approach is at the level of the sentence and is explained solely in terms of the meaning of the sentence, irrespective of the context of utterance. (This dissertation does not align itself with this narrow interpretation, and this will be evident in the following

discussion of "pragmatic presupposition"). Another noteworthy point regarding this approach is the fact that the presupposed sentence should be true to the presupposing sentence. It is for this reason perhaps that Wilson (1975 : 95) concluded that this type of presuppositional analysis "lies within the scope of truth-conditional semantics". Katz and Langendoen (1976 : 1) also advance a related reason why presupposition was incorporated into semantic theory :

"Those who first developed a semantic theory within the theory of TG-grammar characterised the level of semantic representation as consisting of formal structures from which the semantic properties and relations of sentences can be determined. Thus the optimal semantic representation of a sentence in a grammar, is whatever formal structure provides the simplest basis for predicting whether it is meaningful, ambiguous, analytic, synonymous with such-and-such other sentences"

Dahlgren (1974 : 8) has observed that logical presupposition cannot handle non-declaratives, because its definition depends on the logical implication of a sentence which in turn depends on the sentence having a truth value. But then questions and commands for instance have no truth value. The command Sit down! is neither true nor false; it is just grammatical and understandable, and needs a response. Likewise is the question Did she sit down?

#### 2.3.2.2. PRAGMATIC PRESUPPOSITIONS

The notion of presupposition that makes a lot more sense in the analysis of discourse, and which gives a richer account of the same data the logical notion describes, and on which this study will concentrate, is pragmatic presupposition.

When we engage in everyday discourse we usually do not go out of our way and explain the particular context or state of affairs in which our utterances are to be interpreted as appropriate. Instead, we take it for granted that our hearers will be able to supply the correct

background. Part of this background is the context of presupposition - that state of affairs we assume to be relevant to what we say and hear. If a speaker utters the following :

108. Ke thabile haholo ho bona Thabo mona kajeno,  
(I'm very happy to see Thabo here today),

then we can be reasonably sure that (1) Thabo is here today, and the speaker assumes the addressee does have this knowledge; and that (2) it is a pleasure to have him here. The sentence contains two levels of information : firstly, a statement that presupposes that Thabo is here today; secondly, an attitude toward the statement, an attitude that asserts that what is presupposed is most welcome.

Lyons (1977b : 604) claims that "most of the definitions of presupposition to be found in the recent literature take the presuppositions of an utterance to be a set of propositions" that we believe is appropriate background for an utterance.

Givon (1979 : 50) says about pragmatic presuppositions that

"[they are] defined in terms of assumptions the speaker makes about what the hearer is likely to accept without challenge".

Stalnaker (1978 : 321) concurs thus :

"Pragmatic presuppositions are what is taken by the speaker to be the common ground of the participants in the conversation".

According to Van der Auwera (1979 : 254),

"Pragmatic presupposition will be the name of the speaker's act of relying on shared beliefs ... that make speaking easier. [This] reliance on shared beliefs also facilitate understanding".

Dahlgren (1974 : 4) gives a more comprehensive definition of this notion:

"Pragmatic presupposition is a relation between a sentence and the beliefs a speaker must ostensibly have in order to use the sentence appropriately. These beliefs refer not only to the sentences (propositions) which are the logical presuppositional requirements of the sentence, but to the hearer's beliefs, the social and physical contexts and the discourse context".

The following conversation between Molefi and his wife Morongwe will clarify the aspects of pragmatic presupposition :

109 .

1. Morongwe : Maonesa a nkile Thabo hoseng.  
(The police took Thabo in the morning).
2. Molefi : A mo fumana kae?  
(Where did they find him?)
3. Morongwe : A dutse le bo-Moiketsi tlasa sefate sane.  
(He was sitting under that tree with Moiketsi and them).
4. Molefi : Jwale o jweditse mang hape he kgaitsemi?  
(Now, who else did you tell, Sister?)
5. Morongwe : Ke jwetsa wena hore o ikgule metswalleng ena ya hao e sebetsang bosiu.  
(I'm telling you so that you should cut these friends of yours who work at night).
6. Molefi : Ako ntlele metsi a batang ka moo hle.  
(Please bring me cold water).
7. Morongwe : Ha ke ngwana hao. Feela ke a o jwetsa hore Sun City teng ho monate.  
(I'm not your child; but I tell you, it is very enjoyable at Sun City).
8. Molefi : Oho mosadi wa ka ya ratehang, ke a o kopa hle Motaung e motle. O tseba hantle hore ha ke

rate ho nna ke ntse ke o roma tjena, feela ha  
o ka mpa wa ntlela metsi bo mme ra tlohela  
taba ena.

(Oh my beloved wife, I beg of you my beautiful  
Motaung. You know very well that I don't want  
to send you around like this. If only you  
could just bring me water, my dear, and let  
us drop this subject).

With the definite expressions Thabo in (1) and bo-Moiketsi in (3), Morongwe, the speaker, believes that Molefi will identify the one and only Thabo and bo-Moiketsi to whom she respectively refers. In other words, both Molefi and Morongwe should share the belief that the referents referred to by Morongwe will be identified successfully by Molefi. Thus Molefi's assumed background knowledge of who Thabo and bo-Moiketsi are, is viewed here as part of the speaker's beliefs which are antecedent to her use of the mentioned referring expressions.

The use of the verb a nkile (have taken) in (1) presupposes that location is established away from which Thabo has been moved, and that both Morongwe and Molefi share this knowledge.

...tlasa sefate sane (under that tree) in (3) is a deictic expression used here also to presuppose certain aspects of the physical context that can be viewed by the hearer, viz. under that tree.

The iterative hape (again) in (4) presupposes that Morongwe has already told at least somebody else before she could tell Molefi about this incident. On the other hand Molefi could be indicating his fear that Morongwe could already have spoken about this issue; or he could be warning her not to say a word about it to anybody else. Presupposition is evidently a relative notion where the same sentence may have different presuppositions, depending on the context in which it is uttered; depending also on the cooperativeness of the participants in the conversation.

Utterance 5 asserts that Molefi should part ways with some of his friends and it presupposes that he has friends who work at night. This figurative *Metswalle ... e sebetsang bosiu* (friends who work at night), presupposes that they are engaged in clandestine activities which are either immoral or criminal, but which will surely bring unpleasant repercussions at the break of dawn. The utterance further presupposes that such friends are undesirable to Morongwe.

Molefi's 6 is in fact a matter of conversational implicature. It is essentially grammatically unrelated to Morongwe's previous utterance. In the given context it is nevertheless appropriate. Molefi is obviously uncomfortable with, and in fact embarrassed by the topic and would rather bring it to an end. For one reason or another, he does not say to Morongwe "Shut up, you monkey!" He sends her for a glass of water instead, and thereby believes that Morongwe will work out the intended implicature that the subject under discussion be changed. It has been pointed out that listeners normally understand far more than what has actually been said. Morongwe therefore grasps the intended meaning and her response thus confirms the conversational implicature contained in Molefi's utterance.

Morongwe's response with *Ha ke ngwana hao* (I'm not your child), is reasonable under certain presuppositions, but one might be that she understood Molefi's request of *Ako ntlele metsi hle* (please bring me water) as an assertion of dominance - to get someone to fetch and carry for you is one of the chief expressions of a dominant \ subordinate relationship. Though it is reasonable that Morongwe should respond by using the NP *ngwana hao* (your child) denoting the paragon of submission to authority, and maybe arbitrary authority for that matter, Morongwe's response is as a matter of fact not a response to *Ako ntlele metsi hle* (please bring me water), per se, but rather a response to her presupposition that Molefi's saying *Ako ntlele metsi hle* was tantamount to saying "I'm the boss here and you are not going to embarrass me by hammering on my mistakes". Molefi can therefore not escape by pretending to be surprised by Morongwe's utterance because the presupposition thereof is clear and appropriate.

Morongwe continues : *Feela ke a o jwetsa hore Sun City teng ho monate* (But I tell you, it is very enjoyable at Sun City). The features of the NP Sun City have been altered here by the discourse context, from the original meaning of the popular hotel and casino in Bophuthatswana to the well-known prison in Diepkloof, Soweto; and Morongwe believes that her presupposition is successful, taking into account Molefi's assumed shared knowledge.

... *ho monate* (it is enjoyable) is appropriately sarcastic.

In 8 Molefi asserts that Morongwe should rather bring him water and close the topic under discussion. This assertion is disguised and wrapped in kind words like 'beloved' 'beautiful' and so on. The listener's attention, diverted by such kind words, is therefore drawn to Molefi's attitude toward her, rather than to what he actually asserts. The fact remains though that Morongwe should drop the topic, despite the manner in which the message has been communicated.

In addition to providing the context or background of interpretation for a piece of discourse, presuppositions show that they can be used to gild the pill - to disguise or obscure what is being asserted - by shifting the hearer's attention from the said to the presupposed. The meaning of a discourse may consequently be found by attending to its presuppositions rather than to its assertions.

### 2.3.3 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, reference will be made to some of the main properties of pragmatic presuppositions:

When the presupposing statement is negated, the presupposition relation has been observed to hold. It appears that "some necessary implications of positive sentences are also necessary implications of their negative congeners" (Kempson, 1975 : 145). In other words both the positive and the negative sentences are said to contain the same implication, and therefore "it should be impossible and contradictory in each case both to assert the sentence (whether positive or negative), and simultaneously to deny the implication in question" (Kempson, *ibid*).

110.

- (1) Ntate o swabile hoba Thabo a hlolehile.  
(Father is disappointed because Thabo has failed).
- (2) Ntate ha a swaba hoba Thabo a hlolehile.  
(Father is not disappointed because Thabo has failed).
- (3) Thabo o hlolehile.  
(Thabo has failed).

The presupposition (3) remains invariant under denial (2). Linguists agree that this negation test is a useful criterion for presupposition (Kempson, 1975; Leech, 1974; Stalnaker, 1974; etc).

Leech (1974 : 285) says about presupposition that it is a "logical transitive relation",

i.e. If X presupposes Y and Y presupposes Z,  
then X presupposes Z.

111. X : Mme wa bana bana ba tshehang o ba reketse dimpho.  
(The mother of these children who are laughing has bought them gifts).
- Y : Bana bana ba tshehang ba na le mme.  
(These children who are laughing have a mother).
- Z : Ho na le bana ba tshehang.  
(There are children who are laughing).

Levinson (1983 : 186) refers to presuppositions as being defeasible, i.e. cancellable by adding some additional premises to the original ones (Levinson, 1983 : 114, also Gazdar, 1977 and Karttunen, 1973). These linguists claim that presuppositions tend to disappear in certain contexts, or where contrary assumptions are made. A common example is where the factive verb stem -tseba (know) is used. Where -tseba (know) is used in the negative with a second or third person subject, the complement is presupposed to be true, e.g. (112) below. But where the subject is first person and the verb is negative, as in (113), the presupposition fails, cf (114):

112. **Ntate ha a tsebe ha Thabo a hlolehile.**  
(Father does not know that Thabo has failed).
113. **Haeba wena o a tseba, nna ha ke tsebe ha Thabo a hlolehile.**  
(If you do know, then I don't know that Thabo has failed).
114. **Thabo o hlolehile.**  
(Thabo has failed).

Note that the presupposition (114) fails because it is denied by (113) which is supposed to presuppose it.

This section has given a brief background to the notion of presupposition. Presupposition is a notion that originates from philosophy, and that has been incorporated into linguistics because of its relevance to conversation. Presuppositions of an utterance are the conditions that the utterance must satisfy if it is to be interpreted appropriately in the context in which it occurs. The speaker normally takes it for granted that there is a suitable non-verbal (sometimes also verbal) context of which he is a part, so that the object to which he refers can be identified in relation to this context without further information. The quality of this context need not be specified. The speaker believes that the hearer knows 'the object' of reference. What this common set of background assumptions contains, depends on aspects of the communicative situation and perhaps also what has been said previously.

Satisfaction of presuppositions is therefore not only what the facts really are, but also what the conversation context is. This implies that the two approaches in the study of presupposition are better brought together and be treated as one complementing the other.

In conclusion, figure 1 may be used to represent the fact that discourses can never be accurately and appropriately produced and

interpreted without any consideration of their linguistic context, i.e. where this linguistic context is available.

To use the example quoted earlier as (70), this discourse will carry its intended conversational implicature that Thabo has stolen the money if, and only if it is interpreted in its linguistic context of utterance.

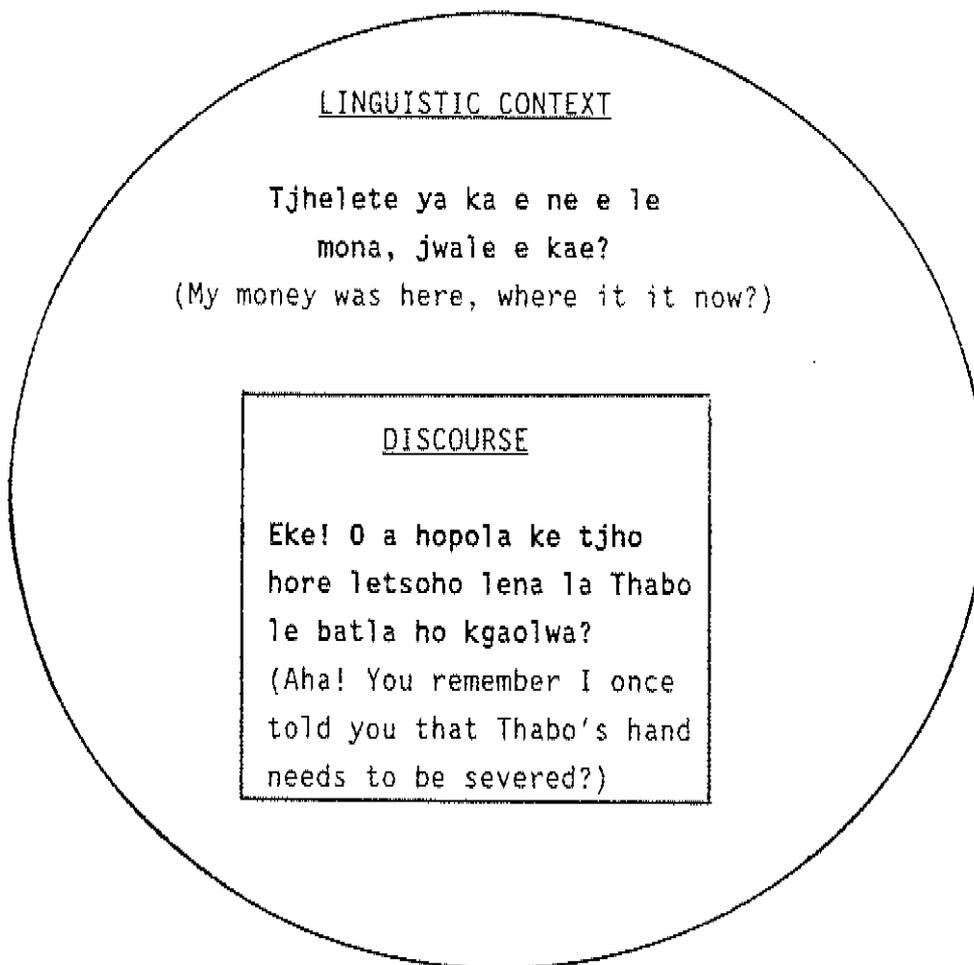


Fig. 1

This linguistic context can be represented thus, by figure 2.

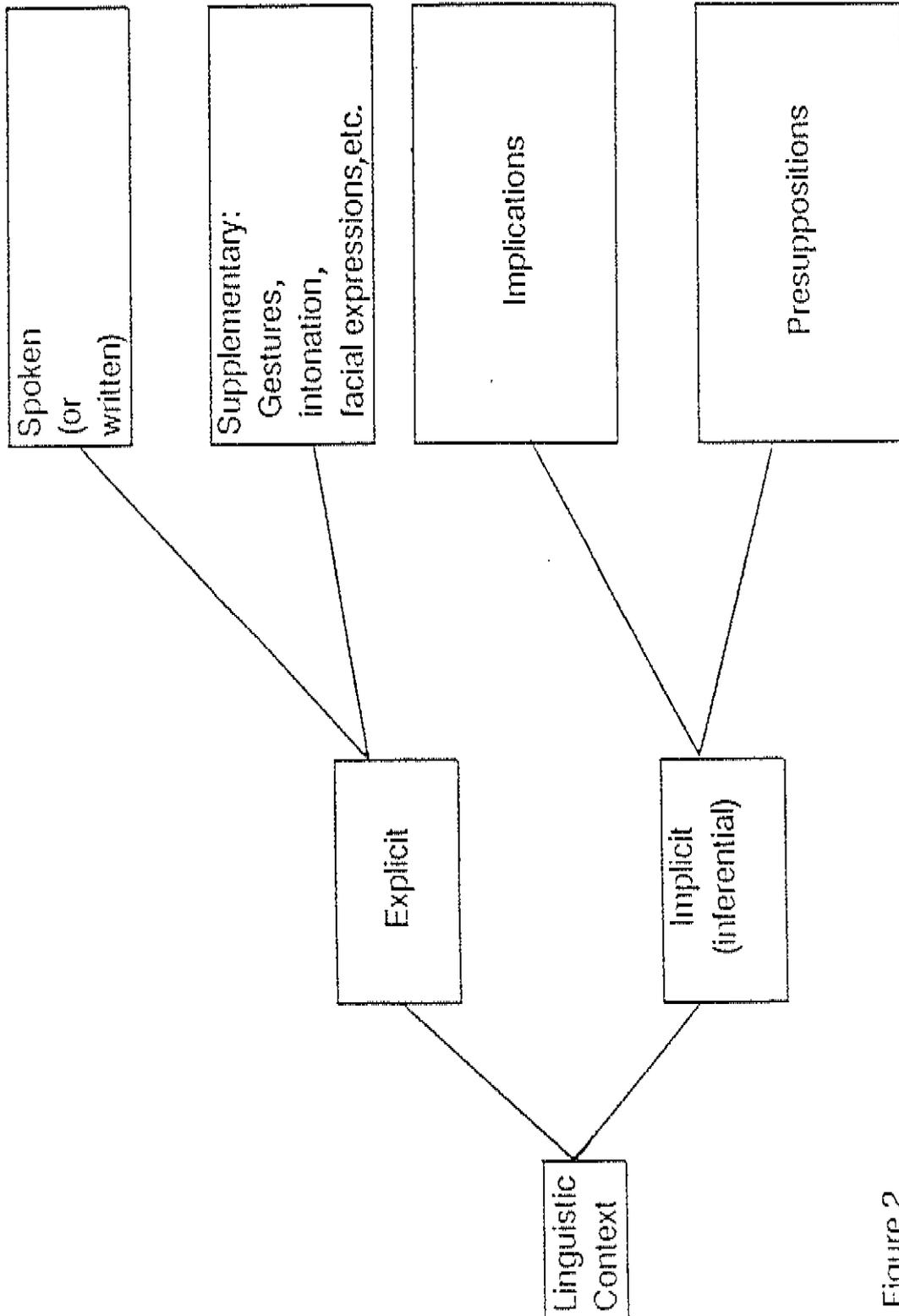


Figure 2

**SECTION B**

## SECTION B

### SITUATIONAL CONTEXT.

#### CHAPTER 3

### THE CONCEPT OF SITUATION IN INTERPRETING DISCOURSES

#### 3.1. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.

According to Crystal (1985 : 281) the term "situation(al)" is generally used in linguistics to

"refer to the extra-linguistic setting in which an utterance takes place - referring to such notions as number of participants, level of formality, [and] nature of the ongoing activities".

History has it that the word "situation" in the context of language studies was used for the first time in 1875 by W. D. Whitney in his "Life and Growth of Language", (cf Wallace, 1979 : 2). In 1885 P. Wegener attempted to formulate a theory of situation (Situationstheorie) in which he distinguished between three types of situation, viz. situation of representation, of memory, and of consciousness. Wegener is said to have considered situation as the setting or environment in which things occur and, consequently, in which linguistic communication occurs. He claimed that situation consisted of all the relationships between individuals, objects and events that definitely determine meaning (Wallace, 1979 : 117). Wegener is regarded therefore, as the first theorist to really use the concept of situation in linguistics (Wallace, 1979 : 3).

This chapter will quote some of the scholars who have made noteworthy contributions towards the study of the notion of situation, in relation to discourse utterance and interpretation. Their differing viewpoints will be put against one another and then be summarized at the end so as to reach a theory of situational context that will be used to analyse the discourses in chapter 4.

Malinowski, the renowned anthropologist, is said to have loaned the term "situation" from Wegener, and then associated it with the word "context" to form the expression "context of situation" (situational context, Firth, 1964 : 174) in 1923, now used widely in the fields of Sociolinguistics and Discourse Analysis. Malinowski's argument is based on the shortfalls he experienced in his attempts to translate what he terms "primitive" languages, such as those he encountered in New Guinea and Melanesia. Such languages are radically different both in structure and in culture from English (Wolf, 1989 : 259).

Malinowski's point of departure was that the attempt at word for word translation of such languages is not only doomed but is indicative of a mistaken concept of meaning and how words have meaning (Malinowski, 1947 : 300 - 301).

"... the meaning of any simple word is to a very high degree dependent on its context" (Malinowski, 1947 : 306).

Wolf (1989 : 259) understands Malinowski thus :

"... we cannot tell how to translate a word, until essentially, we understand the entire culture of the people whose statements we are attempting to translate".

Malinowski thus explicated the notion of context of situation thus :

"... [context of situation] if I may be allowed to coin an expression which indicates on the one hand that the conception

of context has to be broadened, and on the other that the situation in which words are uttered can never be passed over as irrelevant to the linguistic expression. We see how the conception of context must be substantially widened, if it is to furnish us with its full utility. In fact it must burst the bonds of mere linguistics and be carried over into the analysis of the general conditions under which language is spoken. Thus, starting from the wider idea of context, we arrive once more at the results ... that the study of any language, spoken by a people who live under conditions different from our own and possess a different culture, must be carried out in conjunction with the study of their culture and of their environment" (Malinowski, 1947 : 306).

A simple example will illustrate Malinowski's explication. A statement like

115. Morongwe o robilwe leoto,  
(Morongwe has had her leg broken),

would mean nothing to a listener who does not share the culture of the Basotho, but what it conventionally implies i.e. that Morongwe has had her leg broken; whereas a Mosotho will immediately understand that Morongwe has fallen pregnant, and out of wedlock for that matter, possibly to give birth to an illegitimate child. Chapter 4 will give more examples of discourses and their analyses and will also show the important role played by cultural context in their interpretation.

Malinowski makes two important observations, firstly that the context of situation is indispensable for the utterance and understanding of linguistic expressions. It clarifies the difference between the linguistics of dead and living languages. He claims that the study of dead languages, "i.e. languages whose forms have been torn out of their cultural context", has fostered the "false and futile" conception of meaning as something contained strictly in an utterance (p. 307).

Secondly, Malinowski observes that even though the utterance and situation are inextricably bound up with each other, the context of situation is not in itself the linguistic code. He then divides this level of extralinguistic knowledge into two essential levels:

- (a) the environment in which utterances are produced and without which even a general idea of the meaning of a text or utterance seems impossible.
- (b) a more specifically cultural level consisting of all the participants' ethnographic knowledge which enables them to determine the meaning of utterances more precisely.

According to this division, discourse takes place in two distinct forms of the extralinguistic context, viz. a particular "environment" like at school, or in the evening, or among friends; and also in a specific cultural context as where *lobola* has to be paid for a bride, or where a bride addresses her in-laws, or where one neighbour asks for salt from another after dusk, etc.

Firth, who was influenced by Malinowski's "London School of Linguistics" took over the concept of the context of situation and modified it. He asserted that

"... a context of situation for linguistic work brings into relation the following categories:

A. The relevant features of participants : person, personalities:

- (i) The verbal action of the participants,
- (ii) The nonverbal action of the participants.

B. The relevant objects

C. The effect of the verbal action" (Firth, 1957 : 181).

To these categories Peng (1975 : 8; 1986 : 95) has added

D. "The effect of the non-verbal action".

The following example clarifies this classification :

116. Ke tla nkela ngwanaka ena.  
(I'll take this one for my child).

Firth would possibly ask the following questions in order to understand the above utterance fully : How many participants are there at least? What is their relationship? Where might it be? Where is the child? What is the relevant object? What is the effect of the utterance? etc.

Firth's elaboration does not explicitly include cultural information, but it constitutes a vital improvement on the definition of situation. He maintains that the context of situation should be interpreted as a representation, albeit abstract, of the environment, in terms of certain general categories relevant to the discourse. In this way the context of situation can be grouped and classified; and Palmer (1976 : 54) asserts that this is essential if [situational context] is to be part of linguistic analysis of a language".

Firth also considers the effect of utterances on addressees and bystanders. Peng adds another dimension of whether or not correct implicatures can be inferred from what has actually not been said but communicated by means of nonverbal actions. (This has been shown to be possible in chapter 2.2.2.4. p. 76-77, of examples by Wright, 1975 : 367 ff).

It is important to note that Firth saw context of situation as one part of the linguist's apparatus, or rather "as one of the techniques of description" (Palmer, 1976:54) in producing and interpreting

utterances.

Halliday (1975 : 25) explains Firth's viewpoint as follows:

"... the context of situation was not to be interpreted in concrete terms as a sort of audio-visual of the surrounding "props". ... This context of situation may be totally remote from what is going on round about during the act of speaking or of writing".

Firth argued that it is "this complex relation of the various component terms of the context of situation" that elucidate linguistic expressions (Firth, 1964 - 66 : 110).

"In common conversation about people and things present to the senses, the most important "modifiers" and "qualifiers" of the speech sounds made and heard, are not words at all, but the perceived context of situation" (p.111).

Halliday, himself an ardent follower of Firth, elaborated the concept with further modifications and left it even more abstract. He chooses to conceive of the context of situation not as a situation, but as what he calls a situation "type", which he claims to have essentially a "semiotic structure" (1975 : 25 - 26). He represents this semiotic structure of a situation type as a complex of three dimensions, viz. field, tenor and mode. The field, he says, is the nature of the ongoing social activity. It is the field of social action in which the text or discourse is embedded. The tenor is the set of social statuses and role relationships among the discourse participants. The mode is the channel through which communication takes place; and this is essentially the function of language (Halliday, 1975 : 25 - 26).

Halliday's three-dimensional semiotic structure of the situational context can be exemplified by means of a class-room situation where a lecture constitutes the nature of activity engaged in, i.e. "the field"; the lecturer and students, their different statuses and role

relations, the "tenor" and the channel through which the lecture is presented, i.e. orally, by means of teaching aids, etc. the "mode".

Like his predecessors, Halliday excludes the linguistic code from his concept of the context of situation. He defines the context of situation as "the environment in which the text comes to life" (ibid).

Another scholar worth mentioning is Bréal (1964) who is said to be the first person to use the word "situation" in French, and possibly the third, after Whitney and Wegener to use it in linguistics in general (Wallace, 1979 : 120). His argument is that an expression uttered by the speaker adapts itself to its referent "in the given circumstances, place, moment and the intention of the discourse" (Bréal ibid : 106). At the same time the hearer does not concentrate on the literal bearing of the expression, his attention "goes straight to the thought behind the word... and so restricts or extends it according to the intention of the speaker" (ibid.). He claims that the word reaches the hearer already prepared by what surrounds it, interpreted by the time and place, and determined by the characters who are on the stage" (p. 287), in such a way that ambiguities can be avoided. If the word or expression or utterance has only one meaning for both the speaker and the hearer, it is because "the hearer is in the same situation [with the speaker]; his thought follows, accompanies, or precedes the speaker's" (pp. 141 - 142).

Bréal's emphasis differs markedly from that of his predecessors because he deals with the concept of situational context from the point of view of the listener; he highlights the importance of situation in interpreting rather than in producing discourses.

The foregoing discussion serves to demonstrate the different attempts at characterising what the context of situation is. What stands out clearly is the concern of the scholars to state meaning in terms of the situation in which language is used, and their emphasis on the fact that situation is indispensable in the production and interpretation of discourse. Kinneavy (1983) puts it as follows in his

explanation that effective communication takes place only in situational context:

"There are seventy years of research which demonstrate overwhelmingly that the isolated teaching of grammatical skills has little or no transfer to use in actual composition" (p.120).

Parallel studies in other fields also, for example, library science (Brievik, 1975 : 45 - 55) and mathematics (Carry and Weaver, 1969 : 167ff) have yielded the same results that skills taught in isolation have failed to transfer to real situations.

In the light of the given background, the following is considered as the nature of situational context. Situational context is not in itself the linguistic code. It is rather a representation of the environment which is said to bring the discourse into life. This environment must be broadened to a great extent if it is to render us its utmost utility. It can therefore be the time and place of the utterance, the intention of the discourse, the culture, beliefs and social statuses of the participants, and virtually everything that surrounds the spoken word, and modifies and qualifies it, and in fact prepares it in every possible way for unambiguous interpretation. This situation is a dynamic concept which "cannot be construed as a static physical setting" (Parret, 1985 : 168). In a general and universal way, situational context, as the source of our knowledge of the world, defines our understanding of all forms of reference, even of those references which might signify different things to different people.

The following paragraph, 3.2, will venture to delineate the features of the context of situation and then show how each influences the interpretation of discourses.

### 3.2. FEATURES OF SITUATION

Ever since Malinowski (1947) drew attention to the importance of context of situation as another context within which linguistic

interaction occurs, there has been recognition that as far as human communication is concerned, socio-cultural factors are inseparable from the physical world. This recognition that language use is regulated by our knowledge of the situation, gained more ground with the emergence of Sociolinguistics as an independent field of study.

This section of the dissertation seeks to account for the interdependence of discourse and situational context. An attempt will thus be made to enumerate the various variables of situation, as identified by different scholars. It will be evident from the following discussion that systematic analyses of situation have been far from easy. Nevertheless, shared views of what characteristics can be used to define a situation appear to be prevalent.

Hymes (1967; 1972) approached the study of language in its social setting in a way that he termed "the ethnography of speaking", which approach was very similar to Firth's in the way in which situation was divided and grouped into distinct categories. He reworked and extended Malinowski's concept. He conceived of the ethnography of speaking as primarily concerned with the patterns and functions that organise the use of language in social life and the study of situations that regulate speaking. His analysis of situation, as summarized by means of his famous mnemonic "SPEAKING"(+T), appears to be the most comprehensive: Setting, Participants, Ends, Acts, Key, Instrumentality, Norms, Genre and Topic.

"Setting" refers in general to the physical circumstances in which discourses take place, i.e. the time and place. In a court-room for instance, during court proceedings, the discourse consists mainly of questions and answers, the language is formal and matter-of-fact, the mood is serious, etc. Whereas in a different setting, like a football field during a match, the mood will be jovial for the winners, conversations loud and informal and humorous, etc.

"Participants" are the people present during the utterance of a discourse, viz. speaker, addressee and the audience. Of importance is

their role relationships, (e.g. adult vs child; adult vs adult; employer vs employee) which include age, sex, status and the like.

"Ends" relates to the purpose of the discourse, e.g. a lecture aims at educating, a political speech at indoctrinating, etc.

The notion of "Acts" refers to specific forms of language preferred so as to achieve particular ends. In a church service we preach, teach, explain, pray, etc., we normally do not insult or gossip.

"Key" relates to the tone, manner or spirit in which an act is performed, i.e. a conversation between friends may be respectful, friendly, humorous, informal, etc.

"Instrumentality" refers to the medium and the channel used by discourse participants to get their message across. A message can be conveyed orally, face-to-face or telephonically or on radio; it can also be written.

"Norms" refer to general expectations in language behaviour, that speakers should not scream at each other unnecessarily, or be too soft as to be inaudible; they should not randomly interrupt each other or speak all together at the same time as to produce confused and incoherent discourses.

In Hymes' own words, "Genre" refers to

"... categories such as poem, myth, tale, proverb, riddle, curse, prayer, oration, lecture, commercial, form letter, editorial etc. ... The notion of genre implies the possibility of identifying formal characteristics traditionally recognised" (1972 : 65).

The last category is "Topic" which is what is being spoken about.

The first three categories of Hymes' classification clearly deal with the situation, whereas the rest are much more concerned with the nature of the message in communication. One weakness is discernable from Hymes' situational taxonomy and it is the implicit assumption that language behaviour is directly determined by objective situational characteristics. In other words, according to him, similar objective situational features would yield similar language behaviours across a wide range of possible encounters. Leodolter and Leodolter (1976) warn that language choices are more likely to depend on the perceived, rather than on the actual situation (a point also brought up by Firth 1964-1966 : 111):

"People act under the impact of a situation which they themselves perceive ... the social world is broken down into situational experiences" (p. 362).

Nonetheless, Hymes' characterisation of situation became quite influential, and led to more descriptive classifications by linguists like Brown and Fraser (1979). They thought of situations as composed of the scene (including the setting, and the purpose of the interaction) and the participants. They then elaborated on the individual features of the participants and the relationships between them. They use the following sketch (fig. 3) to sum up the various components of the situation.

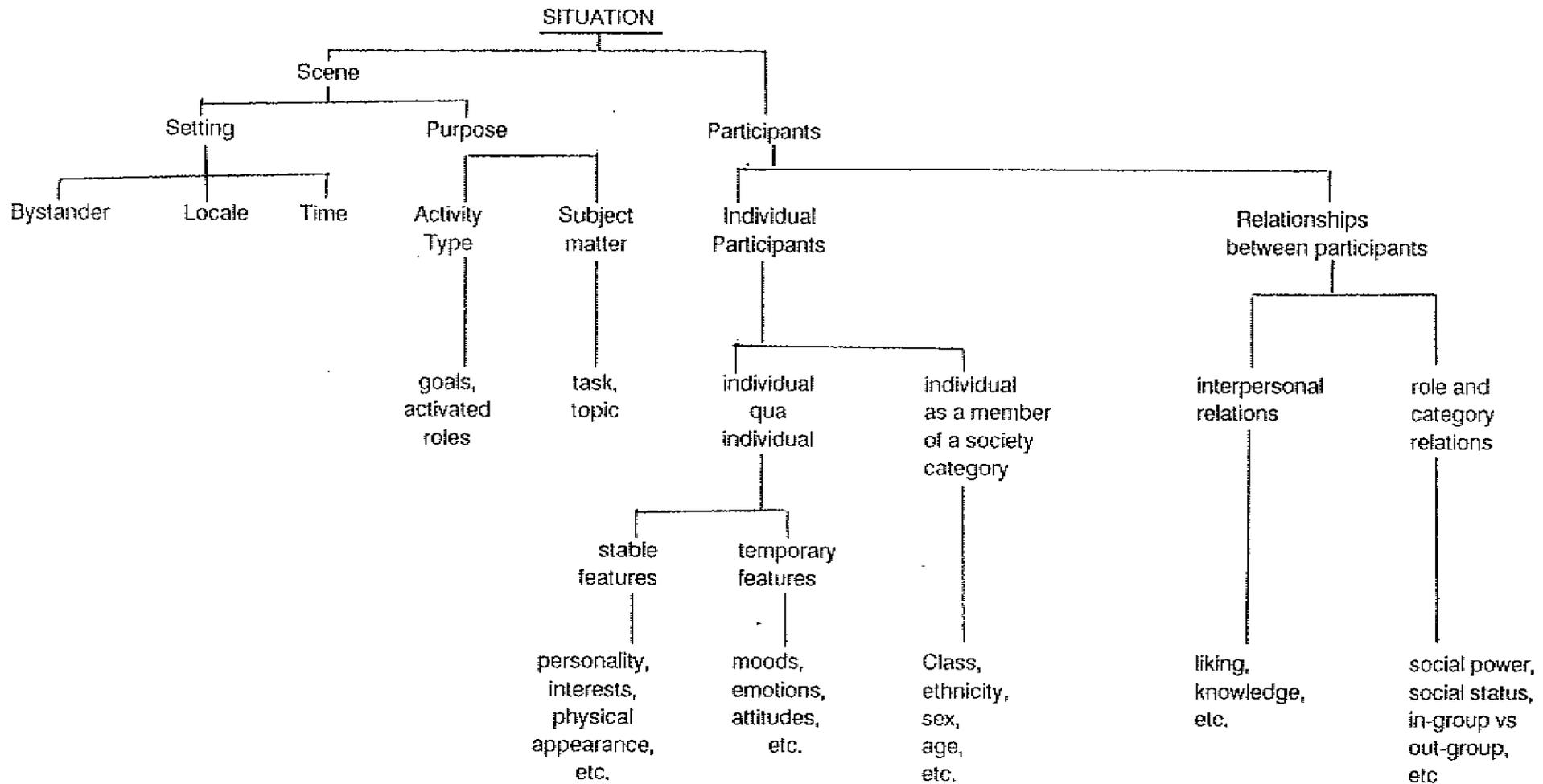


Fig 3: Components of situation

It is worth noting that Brown and Fraser's features of "setting", "purpose" and "participants" are similar to Hymes' first three. Fraser (1978) humorously notes that Hymes' "ends" would have been "purpose" if "SPEAKING" were spelt with two p's. According to Forgas (1985: 3-4) almost identical features (i.e. setting and the relationship between the partners) were found to be important by social psychologists interested in situation perception, (cf also Forgas, 1979; Wish, 1975; Argyle et al., 1981).

Some of the components appear in Brown and Fraser's classification under different names, e.g. Hymes, "norms" can be subsumed under their "role relations", and Hymes' "genre" under their "subject matter". However, Brown and Fraser's taxonomy has the following advantages over Hymes': it implicitly emphasises characteristics of participants and their social roles, and thereby makes the important acknowledgement of the view held in this study that it is subjective representations of situations that ultimately influence language behaviour. They suggest also that the choice of language code both determines and is determined by the situation. Hymes, on the other hand, "dwells more on differentiations of the vehicle of communication" (Kreckel, 1981 17), viz. form and content of message, key, channel.

Lewis (1972) with his "co-ordinates of the index" (p.174) distinguishes between what he calls "the possible-world co-ordinates, contextual co-ordinates and the assignment co-ordinates". He admits though, that the world co-ordinate itself might be regarded as a feature of context because "different possible utterances of a sentence are located in different possible worlds" (ibid). About contextual co-ordinates, he says they "correspond to familiar sorts of dependence on features of context" (ibid), and he lists the following as contextual co-ordinates: time, place, speaker, audience, indicated objects, previous discourse.

Lewis' classification is also similar to that of Hymes' in the way that it refers to the speaker and the hearer. According to Brown and Yule (1983: 38) this reference to speaker and hearer is made "in

order to assign values to the deictic categories of speaker and audience realised in the first and second person pronoun". Lewis uses the explicit and distinct co-ordinates of "time" and "place" in the same way as Brown and Fraser (1979) do, to expand Hymes' category of "setting". Furthermore, he distributes Hymes' generalised feature of "topic" among the co-ordinates of indicated object, previous discourse and assignment. Previous discourse specifically enables the hearer to interpret what is said in the light of what has already been said. (This belongs also to the notions of discourse deixis and time deixis discussed earlier in 1.3.5. and 1.3.4. resp.).

Bloomfield (1933 : 140) asserted in his description of the context of situation that it consisted of features, some of which were "non-distinctive" and others "semantic, i.e. common to several situations". Because of these non-distinctive features "no two situations are ever alike" (ibid). This view is the same as that held by Brown and Fraser (1979) in the sense that it emphasises the subjective element inherent in the characterisation of situations.

Hattori (1956) developed Bloomfield's concept and distinguished between "individual semantic features" and "recurrent social features" and demonstrated that "even if we see the things which the world denotes, we do not know which features of them the natives are used to pay attention to" (p.210). The element of subjectivity is apparent even here.

Fishman (1972) in his definition of a situation, refers to a "co-occurrence of two or more interlocutors related to each other in a particular way, communicating about a particular topic, in a particular setting" (p.48). The situational variables that he mentions, viz. interlocutors, topic and setting all appear in Hymes' taxonomy.

Tyler (1978) gave the following report subsequent to his study of the use of kinship terminology in the Indian Koya people:

"The appropriate use of Koya kin terms cannot be predicted

solely on the basis of a formal analysis ... of genealogical reckoning. There are many other contextual factors, ... among them the social setting, audience composition, sex, age, linguistic repertoires, and - most of all - speaker's intention" (p. 268).

His examples of situational variables are also found in Hymes' (1972), although Tyler does not make explicit reference to the speaker per se. His "linguistic repertoires" could be Hymes' "acts" or Brown and Fraser's "subject matter"; and his "speaker's intention", Hymes' "ends".

Chesanow (1978) lists the following situational variables in his study to characterise descriptive discourse in its context. Such variables have all been identified by Hymes and Brown and Fraser. They are the participants, their age, number, sex, and role relations; physical setting, channel, key, formality, message form, and content, (pp. 106 - 110).

Werth (1984 : 45) conceives of situation as "the conceptual background of a discourse". He claims that this background may be considered to consist of "conceptual objects (concrete and abstract, simple and complex), actions, processes, states and relationships" (p.46). He also quotes Sinclair and Coulthard's definition of situation (1975 : 28):

"Situation is said to include all relevant factors in the environment, social conventions and the shared experience of the participants" (Werth, 1984 : 38).

Werth's concept of "objects" and "actions" were first identified by Firth (1957 : 181), and then quoted by Hymes. Firth actually distinguished verbal from non-verbal actions. Werth's "process" has been clarified by Steiner (1988 : 224) as "what the agent is doing". "Processes" may thus be subsumed under Hymes' "acts" or Brown and Fraser's "task". Sinclair and Coulthard's "social conventions" are

Hymes' "norms".

Steiner's (ibid) set of categories used to describe a situation, is as follows: agent and his needs, objects and goals; processes; materials; instruments; product; time and place of action. "Materials" has been identified by Firth as "objects"; and "product" as "the effect of the verbal [and non-verbal (Peng, 1975 : 8)] action". Otherwise everything else is contained in Hymes (1972).

It is usually when we ask others to do something for us that we become acutely aware of situational influences on our behaviour. In his study of requests in conversation, Gibb jr (1985) claimed that people's knowledge of social situations affect the production, comprehension and remembering of the relevant discourses:

"People need to know additional information about the social setting, the particular roles that speakers and hearers play ... the interaction of speakers' and hearers' beliefs and their presuppositions about each other's plans and goals in different discourse situations. This pragmatic information constitutes the shared or mutual knowledge that allows speakers and hearers to achieve successful communication" (p. 97).

Like Brown and Fraser, Gibb jr (1985) emphasises features of the participants and their social relationships.

Giles and Hewstone (1982) also took a more social psychological orientation, and suggested the following as other crucial features of situation: formality, involvement, perceived tension, and cooperation. Forgas (1985) claims that classifications like Gibb's and Gile and Hewstone's clearly point to "the necessity of studying interaction situations psychologically" (p.4) i.e., in terms of the social actor's perception of them.

Blum-Kulka et al. (1985) also emphasise the nature of the participants. They regard the following as

"... the three major parameters that affect the speaker's and hearer's assessment of a threatening situation : relative social distance between speaker and hearer; relative power of the speaker vis-a-vis the hearer; the degree of imposition involved in performing the act" (p. 115).

Brown and Levinson (1978 : 85) admit that the above parameters need not be the only relevant factors that affect assessment of threat, yet they claim that these three factors "subsume all others that have a principal effect on such assessment".

Herrman (1982) in his explication of the "pars pro toto principle" (a logical principle with the central idea that in any verbal utterance, only a small part of the total mental data is communicated, but in such a way that the part-message carries the whole meaning of the original representation) asserts that

"... the selection of those components of propositional structures which - pars pro toto - are verbalised, is probably determined by two major factors, (a) information (for the partner) and (b) instrumentality (for the achievement of the goal intended by the transfer of communication" (p. 130).

These features have been identified by Hymes; and Kreckel (1981 : 17) claims that Hymes has "actually dwelt" on them.

According to Herrman (1982), the listener is enabled to understand the immediate content of the utterance and also to reconstruct the propositional base *totum ex parte*, (in its totality) of which the speaker has uttered only a part. This will only be possible though if the speaker and hearer share the knowledge of their discourse situation.

Buttny's (1985) account becomes relevant at this stage. He emphasises the importance of "the listener's interpretive process" (p.61). He argues that if the listener's contribution in the interpretation of

discourses is disregarded then the tendency prevails to "reify" situations, and to treat them as kinds of "containers" in which interactions occur, (ibid). He refers also to another variable which he terms "life script" (p. 67). This comprises "a person's concept of self which creates expectations, wants, and goals..." (ibid), and can be related to Brown and Fraser's emphasis on the nature and relations of participants. Another feature mentioned by Buttny is "cultural patterns, i.e. broad patterns of the people's way of thinking, believing and evaluating the world" (p. 67). This aspect of culture was introduced by Malinowski himself, and has only been implicitly discussed by most sociolinguists and social psychologists discussed in this study so far.

In their study of the importance of situation schemata in the way listeners evaluate paralinguistic cues like accent, Gallois and Callan (1985 : 159) discuss what they regard as two major types of situational variables, viz. macrolevel variables and microlevel variables.

"Macrolevel variables involve the general social relationships between members of two groups such as hostility over time, the dominance of one group over the other, and the cultural or linguistic similarity between the groups. Microlevel variables on the other hand, have to do with the immediate encounter and include equality or inequality of status and power, formality of the context and rules for appropriate behaviour" (p. 160).

Hymes' classification would generally belong to their "micro level" because it deals with more immediate and sort of temporary issues of the situation which are external to the speaker but exist in the interaction. The variables of "norm" and "genre" would nevertheless be classified under their "macro level" because they tend to have a more deep-rooted and permanent nature.

### 3.3 CONCLUSION

From the opinions discussed on what actually constitutes the context of situation, this study draws at least one conclusion, that situation is made up of all those aspects of a discourse encounter that influence production, help to disambiguate the discourse and to ensure the intended interpretation. However, these aspects can be altered as situations change, but without changing the essential characteristics of the interlocutors. They are therefore summed up as follows:

- the discourse participants themselves, and all their physical and psychological properties, together with their social roles.
- the physical and non-physical setting, comprising place (private or public), time and bystanders.
- purpose, involving topic and medium \ key used, the task engaged in and the objects used.

In the next chapter a closer look will be taken at the nature of these features in relation to their roles in uttering, disambiguating and interpreting discourses in situations.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCOURSES IN SITUATIONS

#### 4.1 ANALYSIS OF SOUTHERN SOTHO DISCOURSES

In this chapter, naturally occurring, everyday discourses will be analysed so as to show the influence that the situational variables identified in Chapter 3 have on the production, interpretation and disambiguation of such discourses. For this purpose, speeches of children, males and females of differing ages, educational levels, social statuses and ethnic backgrounds will be investigated as they are used with different interlocutors, in different settings and for differing purposes.

This chapter may be said to be largely empirical because it deals with real language usage recorded in, and analysed in terms of, actual social and cultural contexts. These contexts vary from particular public places (urban streets) or institutions (the school, the hospital), to private and protected places (the home). The chapter adopts an ethnographic approach as well, in the sense that it relates to the relation between the ground rules and assumptions of language usage and the immediate, social and cultural contexts of speech events.

A case in point is that of a 13-month old infant, Thato, whose utterance of the word "Nana" in different situations was meant to convey different messages. "Nana" is a simple form of *Ngwana* (child) normally used by children who cannot as yet vocalize the sound [ŋw]. In this case Thato used "Nana" to refer to her doll. On one occasion, on seeing her doll next to her, she said with excitement "Nana", as if to say "This is my doll". On another occasion, while her sister of four was playing with the doll, she cried "Nana!" as if to say "I want my doll, give it to me!" On yet another occasion while she was playing with her doll, she accidentally hurt her eye. She threw the doll against the wall, rubbed her eye, pointed at the doll and complained "Nana", meaning that it was the doll that was responsible for her sore

eye. On another day while playing with the doll in her cot, it fell onto the floor, out of her reach. She leaned over, pointed at the doll and yelled "Nana!" as if to say "Help! I've dropped my doll and I cannot reach it".

The examples above show how the single word "Nana" used by the 13-month old Thato to stand for an entire sentence could be interpreted in four different ways as the situation of utterance kept on changing. The word was used to name an object; to serve as an imperative - an unmitigated imperative at that; to express an emotional state; and to make a request.

Bloom (1970) in her analysis of children's language, also showed how the interpretation of a single utterance depends on what she calls the "situated context". She concentrated on what the child said in a given situation and also on the behaviour that co-occurred with the utterance. Her findings are illustrated in the now famous example "Mommy sock", an utterance said to have been produced by a child on two different occasions. On each occasion the utterance was interpreted differently. On the one occasion the mother was putting on the baby's sock, while on the other the child was holding the mother's sock. The two utterances can possibly be expanded thus :

"Mummy is putting on my sock" and  
 "This is Mummy's sock".

Another example of baby talk could be found where an older child or person communicates with a younger one. Here, a 4-year old Dibuseng had to look after her younger sister of 26-months whilst their mother was engaged in other household chores. Dibuseng was apparently tired of this work which she had to do every time their mother cooked or did something else in the house. Dibuseng probably wanted to go outside to her friends, but she had to see to it that little Ntholeng sat still and behaved in her absence. This is what she said to her before she left:

117. "Dula fatshe nana ... (Sit down my child)

Dula ne? (Sit, you hear?)

(And then she forces her down with her hands).

O dule o a utlwa? (You must, sit you hear?)

(She shows with her hands).

Sisi o a tla ... (Your sister will be back)

Ke a tla nana ... (I'm coming, my child)

O se tlohe moo ne? (Don't move from there, you  
here?)

She points at the place that Ntholeng should not  
leave.

Ke tla o tlela disewitse... (I'll bring you sweets)

Ke o fumane moo ne? (I must find you there, you  
hear)

She points again with her finger.

Nana yena o motle ne? (My child is beautiful, is she  
not?)

O a mamela ne? (And she is obedient, isn't  
she?)

Dibuseng has obviously adjusted the structural aspects of her speech, as well as her interactive style, so as to be able to communicate competently with her little sister. Her speech is slow and deliberate, and she uses more demonstrations - a non-verbal strategy - than she would have if she would have to speak to a person whose cognitive and linguistic abilities were not as limited. Her speech is also characterised by pauses, by means of which she gives Ntholeng enough time to understand her. The speech consists virtually of directives. The utterances are short and syntactically less complex, and thus easier to comprehend. Redundancy is obvious as Dibuseng repeats again and again the instruction that Ntholeng should sit down and behave until she comes back to her. The word "ne" is in fact Afrikaans for "you hear?" or "isn't it?". Much as it is used colloquially in Sesotho, it however serves as an effective attentional device. At the end Dibuseng uses sweet-talk and blandishments to get Ntholeng to

carry out her directives.

All these factors i.e. the fact that Dibuseng is older, friendly, understandable in speech, etc. elicit the required response from Ntholeng who then obliges to do as requested. The physical setting also, Ntholeng's home, is a place of safety where Ntholeng feels secure to be left, afterall Mummy is somewhere in the house.

In their investigation of communicative interactions of non-handicapped 3- and 4-year-old children, as well as a group of 4-year-old mildly developmentally delayed children, Guralnick and Paul-Brown (1989) also discovered that the non-handicapped older children did adjust their speech in terms of the chronological age and developmental status of their listeners. Levin and Snow (1985 : 56 - 57) concur that

"Speakers can adapt the formal characteristics even of such highly specific registers as baby talk, to suit the requirements of a particular situation. ... The situational influences on the baby talk register ... are thus entirely consistent with the accumulating evidence for the role that situations play in regulating discourse throughout our lives".

Two friends, Dipuo and Dirontsho, Basotho women of about 30, met in the street and the following exchange ensued :

118. Dipuo : Dirontsho Mmannyeo, dumela.

(Hi Dirontsho).

Dirontsho : Helang basadi, motho enwa ke wena Dipuo, dumela.

(My goodness, is it you Dipuo? Hi).

Dipuo : O phela jwang ngwaneso, haesale re bonana ka Moqebelo.

(How are you, my sister, ever since we saw each other on Saturday?)

Dirontsho : Ke a phela, haese lehlaba lena sefubeng, le nqetang. Le tla nkisa lebitleng ke a o

jwetsa. Ha ntata Thabo a ka kgaotsa  
 ho tsamaya bosiu hona ha hae, a ka a  
 nqeneheia, hobane le ntIhasela tjena ke ho  
 touta hona. Lona le ntse le phela jwang?  
 (I'm well, if it was not for this severe  
 chest pain which is sure going to kill me.  
 If only Thabo's father could be more  
 sympathetic and stop roaming about at  
 night, because this pain is aggravated by  
 my brooding. Otherwise, how are you?)

Dipuo : Re a phela le ha e le ka polane. Re  
 ithusetswa ke yona tjheletenyana yane eo  
 Naledi a e fumaneng tlhodisanong...)  
 (We are well, even though it is just so  
 so. That money that Naledi won in a  
 competition, saves us from starvation).

The purpose of this dialogue is simply to greet. It happens spontaneously between two middle-aged women who accidentally meet in the street, but take time off to chat. Where in the Western culture it would possibly have been "Hi. How are you? Fine," the Basotho are apt to be elaborate. Dipuo starts by using the proper name "Dirontsho" as a vocative to get the attention of her listener. This is followed by "Mmannyeo" which literally means Mrs So and So". This extension of the vocative is indicative of some level of intimacy between the interlocutors. It is an informal form whereby respect is shown to the addressee who may be a married woman, a mother, or any female by virtue of her potential for motherhood. Dirontsho's response is an acknowledgement of the pleasure she feels in meeting Dipuo. In return, Dipuo enquires about Dirontsho's health. She addresses her by means of the kinship term **Ngwaneso** (My sister), again to show familiarity, and in fact intimacy, and then discloses that they had seen each other only on Saturday. One gets the impression that these women are real close and they care for each other. Dirontsho feels free to complain of a severe chest pain which she claims is caused by her husband's night-prowling. In response, Dipuo also discloses that her life is

also far from easy. They confide in each other because of the apparent mutual trust and closeness of their relationship.

The discourse above is a typical example of a greeting in Sesotho. Participants discuss not only their health, but also their family circumstances : hardships and successes. This can be misinterpreted as a violation of Grice's maxim of Quality, that the greeting is more informative than need be, but then this is how Southern Sotho speakers, as well as many other African cultures do it : They enquire about your family, and their argument is that your family's welfare has a direct bearing on your being well. This confirms the claim made earlier that Grice's maxims do not necessarily apply to other cultures like Sesotho.

Sefako, a middle-aged Mosotho, meets an old friend Lenepa, along one of the main streets of Johannesburg. The two men greet, and then engage in the following conversation :

119. Sefako : Kgomo tseo le manamane a tsona!  
(Hello!)
- Lenepa : Hela wa Leribe, motho eo ke wena?  
(Hi, The one from Leribe, is it you?)
- Sefako : Moshana, ke nna monna.  
(Old boy, yes it's me.)
- Lenepa : Hela monna, di reng tsa Malan?  
(What is the latest news from Malan?)
- Sefako : Ha ke esoreke kuranta monna, le  
maobane ha ke a fumana sebaka sa ho  
sheba thelebishene. Wena o utlwile  
dife?  
(I have not yet bought a newspaper, and even  
yesterday, I could not find time to watch TV. What  
have you heard?)
- Lenepa : Le nna monna ke tshwana le wena, feela  
ke utlwile ka bofuufu ba re di tla tla  
ka theko. Ha re qhelele tseo ka thoko,

ke tsa beng ba tsona. Hela monna, o utlwile? Ho thwe ka mona ka Morula Sun letlotlo le wele makgwabane.

(I'm in the same position, but I've heard some rumours that things are gradually changing. Anyway, let's leave that, it's not our business. Hey, have you heard this one? It is said that riches are abundant in Morula Sun).

Sefako : He monna o reng? O re letlotlo le wele makgwabane?

(What do you mean? Do you really mean that riches abound?)

Lenepa : Moshanyana yane wa Mapoteng, eo re hotseng le yena, o kgutlile a sekame maobane ka phirimana.

(That fellow from Mapoteng, the one we grew up with, came back loaded last night).

Sefako : O reng na wa mphato, kgele!

(What do you tell me, friend?)

Lenepa : Ke re a mararo mashome a dikete tsa diranta, o tlile a kibakiba ka wona ...

(I say he came home carrying R30 000).

This discourse is intended to inform sefako that Monei ("That fellow from Mapoteng ...") has won R30 000 from Morula Sun. This, Lenepa does in many words. However, indirectness of speaking is a normal speech pattern in Southern Sotho. Blum-Kulka (1985 : 134) actually concurs by asserting that "directness is not a norm that prevails in all social interaction". This discourse is a normal speech encounter in which the interlocutors begin with salutations. Sefako's opening turn, which literally means "Those cattle together with their calves", is a popular expression for greeting used by Basotho men. It derives from the idiomatic expression *Re boka dikgomo* which implies "we are grateful to the cattle for our subsistence". For the Basotho nation,

cattle symbolize wealth, peace, harmony, good health, happiness, and the like; that is why the Basotho refer to a cow as a god : *Modimo o nko e metsi* (a god with a wet nose). Sefako's use of this expression could be seen as out of place by listeners who do not quite understand Sesotho. They will look around for those cattle and their calves on Eloff Street, Johannesburg, whereas the expression is used here to convey the pleasure of meeting Lenepa, a fellow Mosotho. In his response, Lenepa shows off that he has known Sefako from long, (the two men actually grew up together in Leribe). Note how the salutation is loaded with repetitions and fine words of familiarity and friendship, which may be misinterpreted in Western standards as superfluous. Before he comes up with "the news", Lenepa checks as to whether Sefako has not heard it already with his *Hela monna, di reng tsa Malan?* The meaning of Malan shifts from that of Dr DF Malan - former Prime Minister of the Republic of South Africa who made the news by i.a. introducing the notorious "reference book", which move had far-reaching consequences in this country, e.g. "the Sharpeville Massacre", to that of the news traditionally made available by the white man in the newspaper.

The conversation then progresses quite slowly, but deliberately because the two men want to prolong their time together. Questions and answers, exclamations, repetitions, calculated pauses, etc. are usually used as effective devices to achieve such prolongation of a conversation.

This dialogue consists of considerable stylistic ornamentation and does not emphasise the information content, at least, almost up to the end. It appears to violate Grice's maxim of Relation which demands that interlocutors be relevant and to the point. Nevertheless, indirectness of speaking is the order of the day in Southern Sotho discourses.

The following is a dialogue between two women neighbours. It takes place in the evening in Mmanthatuwe's home, where Mmatsetlane, her neighbour has just come in.

120. Mmatšelane : Mmanthatuwe nnake, ka nnete ke se ke kopa tshwarelo hle. Ke ne ke sa ikemisetsa ho o kgathatsa tsatsing lena, ka ha ke moo ha o na bophelo; feela ngwaneso ka nnete ke tsietsing. Ako nthuse hle ke a o rapela.  
(Mmanthatuwe my sister, please pardon me. My intention is not to bother you today, seeing that you are not well; but oh my sister, I'm in real trouble. Please help me I beg you).
- Mmanthatuwe : Mmatšelane ako lese ho potoloha hle. O a mpona hore ke a ikulela. Bua taba ya hao re utlwe.  
(Mmatšelane please stop circumventing. You are aware that I'm not well; so just say your say and let me hear).
- Mmatšelane : Ke ka baka leo ke simollang ka ho ikopela tshwarelo. Ke etswa ke ho bona ka moo o tshwarehileng ka teng. Mahlaba ke a a tseba ha a tshwere motho hore o ba jwang.  
(That is why I start by apologising. I'm aware that you are not well at all and I know what it is like to be ill).
- Mmanthatuwe : Ke se ke itse o tle ka kopo ya hao ngwaneso.  
(I've already asked you to come up with your request).
- Mmatšelane : ke a thaba nnake ha o ntumella ho hlahisa kopo ya ka. Ke phehile morohonyana ka mane, mme ha ke re ke a noka, letswai la re: "O ne o mpeile kae?"  
(I'm indeed glad that you allow me to state my request. I've cooked spinach at home and I have just realised that I don't have salt).

The purpose of this dialogue is to request salt from Mmanthatuwe. Mmatšelane does it in the most circumlocutory way one could imagine. However this is quite acceptable, afterall indirectness has already

been shown to be the name of the game in Sesotho discourse.

Mmatseane's strategy is to be apologetic. She apologises for the sake of politeness. She apologises to signal her awareness of having to infringe on Mmanthatuwe's peace, and also of restricting her freedom in some way or another. She acknowledges her poor timing, at this moment when Mmanthatuwe is not well. She explains though that she has no alternative. Social factors come into play here. The fact that the two women are neighbours who can come unannounced to the other's home, tells of social closeness between them. This closeness allows either of the two women to ask for salt from the other; or for that matter to make any other sensible request. Her humble approach in performing this act of requesting, tells of her weaker position vis-a-vis the power her listener has over her because she has what Mmatseane needs.

The main reason for her beating about the bush is found in the cultural practices of the Basotho. One does not give out salt at night. A common belief prevailed that evil spirits and various forms of witchcraft could be warded off by planting certain types of magic pegs at strategic points inside and outside your house and also at the gates. If you gave out salt at night, you neutralised, or rather weakened the power of such magic, and thus exposed your household to all sorts of dangers, the main danger being the notorious "thokolosi".

Both interlocutors share knowledge of this particular cultural situation, and it is this knowledge that regulates Mmatseane's choice of words, and Mmanthatuwe's comprehension of Mmatseane's overreaching herself in what could otherwise have been a simple task of asking for salt. Note how she starts by softening Mmanthatuwe by means of sweet-talk, before she hints, very mildly, the actual information content of her discourse : "... when I meant to add salt, there was none".

This underscores the argument of this study, that the competent use of the language lies in knowing to use words to get your listeners to make the right inferences about what you mean. Your listener will only make such correct inferences if he shares i.a. your cultural

background.

The strategy used by Mmatsetlane is one of the three universally manifested forms of requesting identified by Blum-Kulka et al. (1985 : 119)

- (i) the most direct, explicit level ... realised by requests syntactically marked as such" such as the imperative

121. Mphe letswai! [Give me (the) salt].

- (ii) the conventionally indirect level [which] includes requests that realise the act by reference to contextual preconditions necessary for its performance ... [indirect speech acts (Searle, 1975)]" such as

122. Na o tla kgona ho mpha letswai? (Will you be able to give me salt?)

- (iii) the non-conditional indirect level [which] includes ... hints that realise the act by either partial reference to an object ... or by reliance on contextual clues" as in the conversation above :

123. Ke phehile morohonyana ka mane, mme ha ke re ke a noka letswai la re : "O ne o mpeile kae?"  
(I've cooked spinach that side, and only when I meant to add salt did I realise that there was none).

Every society has its own system for perceiving and organising phenomena such as kinship type. The following conversation will show that Southern Sotho draws a clear line between maternal and paternal relatives:

124. Katleho : Dumela malome.  
(Good morning, uncle).
- Ralejwe : Hei moshanyana towe, na o ntseba hantle tjee? O mpitsa malomao? Ha o ntadimile tjee ke tshwana le kgaitsemi ya mmao? Nna ke na le batjhana ba ka, bao e leng bana ba kgaitsemi ya ka hantle.  
(Hey you silly boy, do you know me? Did you call me your uncle? Do I resemble your mother's brother? I have my own nephews and nieces who are my sister's children).
- Katleho : Tshwarelo hle ntate. Rona re tlwaetse ho bitsa batho ba baholo ka tsela ena, ho bontsha tlhompho.  
(Please pardon me sir. We are used to addressing adults in this manner, to show respect).
- Ralejwe : Ke tlwaelo e mpe eo hobane ha le sa tla e tseba puo. Sesothong rangwane le malome ke batho ba babedi ba fapaneng. Nna ke rangwanao hobane ke le monyane wa ntatao.  
Malome yena ke kgaitsemi ya mmao.  
Monyane wa mmao yena ke mmangwane, mme kgaitsemi ya ntatao ke rakgadi. Malome le mmangwane ba bitsana kgaitsemi. Bana ba bona ba bitsana motswala. Ho feta mona, moholwane wa ntatao ke ntatemoholo mme wa mmao yena ke nkgono. Sekgoweng batho bana e ntse e le malome le mmangwane ...  
(That is a bad habit because you will never know the language. In Sesotho a paternal uncle and a maternal uncle are two different people. I am your paternal uncle because I am your father's younger brother. A maternal uncle is your mother's brother. Your mother's younger sister is your maternal aunt and your father's sister is your paternal aunt. Your maternal uncle and maternal aunt refer to each other as brother and

sister and their children are cousins. Furthermore, your father's elder brother is your grandfather and your mother's elder sister is your grandmother. In English these people are still your uncle and aunt respectively).

Southern Sotho distinguishes for instance between mother's brother, father's younger brother and father's elder brother, whereas in English these relatives are all your uncles. The main reason for this distinction concerns marriage. In Sesotho, certain blood relatives may not even entertain hopes of marrying each other. For example, one may not marry one's paternal uncle's child, nor may one marry one's maternal aunt's child. These relatives are regarded as one's own sisters or brothers, whatever the case may be. So that the use of the kinship terms for maternal uncle, paternal uncle, paternal aunt and maternal aunt, helps, amongst other things, to distinguish between those relatives one may marry and those one may not marry.

A language is indeed part and parcel of that culture; and it is only that language that will most accurately reflect culturally relevant and in fact salient categories. In the words of Fishman (1988 : 469)

"The distinctive artifacts, conventions, concerns, values and beliefs of any culture, are more fully, easily and naturally expressed by its associated language than by others".

Polomé (1985 : 460) in his study of the relationship between language and culture argues that the intimate connection between linguistic interpretation and the analysis of the culture to which the language belongs, "is particularly evident in translation, where one is concerned with finding an adequate language-to-language correspondence".

English could be regarded as an accomplished and elaborate language, but when the Southern Sotho discourse on kinship terms had to be translated into English, for instance with *malome*, *rangwane* and

ntatemoholo all meaning uncle and mangwane, rakgadi and nkgono meaning aunt, English suddenly became inelegant, imprecise and unnatural, simply because it was put to the unfair task of expressing the nuances of the Southern Sotho culture, with which it has not been intimately identified. In the same vein, Sesotho has shown considerable inadequacy so far as colour names are concerned. It uses loan words and \ or borrowings for colours like orange : lamunu, (from Afrikaans "lemoen"); pink : pinki; purple : perese, (from Afrikaans "pers"). Alternatively Sesotho lumps together shades of a colour into one category, e.g. crimson, ruby, rose, maroon and burgundy for instance, will all be -kgubedu (red). Colours of a particular segment or adjacent segments in the colour spectrum will be given one name; e.g. -tala is used for the English 'blue of the sky' as well as for 'green of grass'. An interesting similarity was detected by Howell and Vetter (1976 : 361) where the Japanese labelled aoi what the English described as 'blue' or as 'green'. Does that mean that the speakers 'see' the colours as they label them? This discussion simply confirms that vocabularies reflect culturally relevant categories; because the same Southern Sotho suddenly becomes very rich in the vocabulary that regards animal colour names:

- kwebu and -kotswana (male and female roan animals);
- phatshwa, -phatshwana (male and female black and white);
- putswa, -pudutswana (male and female grey);
- kgwadi, -kgwadipana (male and female black with small white spots);
- thokwa, -thokwana (male and female fawn or khaki);
- kgunong, kgunwana (male and female reddish, or light brown);
- tshumo, -tshwinyana (male and female with white face);
- kgwaba, -kgwabana (male and female with a white streak on the back);
- nala, -nalana (male and female white and red).

The argument therefore stands that the interpretation of discourses depends on the context of utterance.

The following conversation took place between two married women, Mmaleemisa, a Mosotho and Mahlodi, a Northern Sotho speaker who is fluent in Southern Sotho.

125. Mmaleemisa : Ke kgathetse ... Ke kgathetse ... Taba ena ya Motshwane ... ho fihla moo nkekeng ka e emela ho ya kae ... Ke a tsamaya.

(I'm tired ... I'm tired ... I've come to a stage where I cannot tolerate what Motshwane does I'm quitting).

Mahlodi : Ao Mmaleemisa motswalle, na ka nnete o ka tlohela monna wa sehwa, ya kang Motshwane. Ako ipone hona jwale tjee. O tla re o hlokang. O a o apesa. O a o fepa. O o rekela dikoloi. O sa batlang?

(Mmaleemisa my friend, can you really leave such a hardworking man like Motshwane? Just look at yourself. What do you need? This man buys you clothes. He feeds you. He buys you cars. What else do you want?)

Mmaleemisa : Ke se ke itse nna ke tlwaetse ho shapuwa ka molamu. Monna ha ke tla re ke monna, a ntjhape. Ho seng jwalo nna ke a itsamaela.

(I've already said that I'm used to being assaulted with a big stick. A man is a man only when he can assault me. Otherwise I'm going).

Mahlodi : Ha ke kgolwe. Thupa e le bohloko hakaale, wena wa llela ho shapuwa, le teng ka molamu, e seng ka thupa.

(I don't believe it. To be assaulted is obviously painful, but you say that is what you want, and moreover with a big rod, and not a little cudgel).

Mmaleemisa : Ke se ke itse nna ke tlwaetse ho shapuwa ka molamu ...

(I repeat that I'm used to being assaulted with a big stick ...)

The topic that Mmaleemisa wishes to discuss with Mahlodi is sex - one of the subjects that are regarded as taboo in the Southern Sotho culture and are rather not discussed freely. She therefore adapts her choice of words from the usual and literal to the figurative. She complains to Mahlodi that she needs her husband, Motshwane, to "assault her with a big stick". On the surface, this is a ludicrous complaint coming from a woman who is known by all around her to be well cared for by her husband. How on earth does a normal person yearn for being molested; and then threaten to walk out on her husband if this does not happen? On another level Mmaleemisa's complaint is that her husband does not satisfy her sexually; and unfortunately Mahlodi failed completely to infer the correct implicature carried by Mmaleemisa's "I need to be assaulted with a big stick" despite the fact that she is fluent in Southern Sotho and that all the vocabulary used by Mmaleemisa is familiar to her. In the words of Gibb jr. (1985 : 97):

"Simply knowing the meanings of individual words, along with the rules for concatenating them into grammatical sentences, is not sufficient to ensure the proper understanding of speaker's message".

People still need to share both the social and cultural backgrounds, and to belong to the same speech community, for them to be able to interact at the same level. Mmaleemisa's and Mahlodi's communication broke down for the reason that they belonged to different language groups and also came from different regions.

Setjhaba is a matric pupil who has his mother worried by the company he keeps and the kind of music that he plays. She then discusses her concern with Mr Pakiso, one of Setjhaba's teachers.

126. Mmasetjhaba : Ekaba Setjhaba o ntse a ithuta hantle  
tjee ntate titjhere Pakiso, hobane  
hae kwana ho duletswe marata a mmmino  
ona wa bona wa batho ba buang?

(I wonder whether Setjhaba still does his school work accordingly Mr Pakiso, because at home he does nothing but listen to loud "rap" music.

**Titjhere Pakiso :** Wena mme, ke bona ekare o shebile hore ngwana ka nako tsohle a be a ntse a le dibukeng. O a lebala hore ngwana o tshwanetse hore a be le nako ya ho bapala, le ya ho phomola.

(It appears to me that you expect a child to be studying at all times. You forget that a child must play and rest sometimes).

**Mmasetjhaba :** Moo ke a dumela ntate, feela nna ke nyatsa mmimo ona wa bona.

(I agree with you there sir, but what about this type of music?)

**Titjhere Pakiso :** Mmino oo he ke e nngwe ya ditsela tsa boikgathollo. Rona ka tsebo ya rona ya saekholoji, re thabela ngwana ya jwalo. Ngwana ya sa bapaleng, kapa hona ho mamela mmimo o a kula. O entse hantle o tle ho nna ka taba ena.

(That music, is one of the means to relax. Our knowledge of psychology makes us prefer such a child. A child who neither plays nor appreciates music, is not well. You did well by coming to me in this regard).

**Mmasetjhaba :** Eya ntate titjhere. Akere rona ka lebaka la ho sa ruteha, re tlankella feela. Ke ka baka leo ke

tlileng ho wena, mme o mpeile  
leseding.

(Yes sir, the problem is, we are  
inclined to do things haphazardly  
and all because of our ignorance.  
That is why I've come to you; and  
now I know better).

This exchange shows that listeners will only be able to interpret correctly the discourses they hear if they consider the social roles played by their speakers. People normally play a number of various roles in the different linguistic situations they enter. In one situation a man can play the role of a medical practitioner, in another, that of a husband, and in yet another, that of a father. Here, Mmasetjhaba plays several roles in this single discourse encounter. Firstly her role as a parent is determined by the functions that are appropriate to this particular period of her life. She enquires about her son's school work and Mr Pakiso, the teacher, understands the concern of a parent interested in her child's well-being. Secondly, she assumes the role of an adult, which role is connected with her growth and development. She approaches the teacher in a cultured, mature, courteous and appropriate manner which befits an adult. In response, Mr Pakiso provides the necessary information with similar deference. Thirdly, she assumes what one may consider a subordinate role to that of the teacher, who in this case has better knowledge about Setjhaba's behaviour at school, is more educated and has a higher social status. In return Mr Pakiso displays his knowledge with authority, confidence and pride.

Müllerová (1987 : 180), in her investigation of how social roles of discourse participants influenced interpersonal verbal communication in a Czech community asserts that this type of role relationship between superior and inferior "the antithetical social roles", tends to "manifest itself most conspicuously". Compare the relationship between master and servant, parent and child, doctor and patient, etc. However, these antitheses sometimes get neutralised where a child for

instance is better informed than the parent about a particular topic and he attains superiority over the parent in the discussion of such a topic.

Another role assumed by Mmasetjhaba, maybe obscured at first sight, could be that of a female vis-a-vis a male. This role is assumed involuntarily because of biological factors. In this case, Mmasetjhaba's role could be said to be influenced by traditional practices where males have been duly or unduly bestowed with superior status. She addresses Mr Pakiso as Mr teacher Pakiso, which form could be viewed as an exaggeration of politeness. She neither argues nor refutes Mr Pakiso's viewpoint, instead she acknowledges her ignorance.

In an address to the Georgetown University Round Table in 1972, Hymes is quoted to have commented that women are "communicatively second-class citizens" (Holmes 1989 : 195) because of the restrictions on what they may say, when, where and to whom. Much as much has changed between 1972 and today, the stereotype still remains in the Southern Sotho culture where females still assume a subordinate status to males, to a larger extent.

The next example is an experience related by a friend, Mmaphutheho. She and her son were admitted to the Ga-Rankua hospital when the baby was just five days old. She was in one ward with eleven other mothers and her son was in an adjacent ward with thirty-five other babies, each in his own cot. It was around 02:00 of the next morning when she was woken up by his crying. She got up and went to check on him. One of the nursing sisters saw her enter the children's ward. She came up to Mmaphutheho, stared into her eyes, and with a sigh, held her hands firmly on her hips in utter astonishment. Mmaphutheho then responded :

127. "La ka le na le lentswe le letenya".  
(Mine has a thick voice).

This was in answer to the nursing sister's unasked, yet contextually implied question of how Mmaphutheho knew that the crying baby was

hers, and how she could already recognise her baby's voice in just five days. It was the physical setting that helped the ladies to communicate successfully : the time of the morning and their location, i.e. where they could both hear and possibly see the crying baby. The utterance was brief and to the point. Mmaphutheho did not need to describe or to explain in broad detail. In the given physical situation, she was understood to mean that she had a baby in that ward, the baby was crying, and she could, in fact did, identify his voice. This utterance consists of what Quirk et al. (1972 : 266) refer to as "situational reference" where the reference of features like the possessive 'La ka' (mine) derives from the situational context.

In the study of radio drama for instance, the playwright, in order to be understood by his listeners, has to identify objects and situations by means of lengthy explanations and detailed descriptions which could be sufficiently informative, but tend to be unnatural, and this is only because his listeners do not share his spatio-temporal context (cf Moeketsi, 1991).

The following is a possible portrayal of a very angry radio-character who is about to confront the source of her anger:

128. Yaba o a kena, o a mo nyokgolotsa, o swenya dinko, o a di famola, o petlekisa melomo, o bidikanya mahlo a diqhomotsa, o a hwantaka, o a qheshelaka, o itshwara thekeng, mme o phahamisa mese jwalo ka motho ya itokisetsang ho lwana.

(And then she came in, she looked at her askance, pulled her nose defiantly, pulled her lips scornfully, rolled her big, ugly, scaring eyes, paced up and down menacingly, held her hips firmly and then lifted her dress slightly like a person preparing for a fight).

Another interesting example is that where the physical situation has shown to help to determine the meaning of indirect utterances as well. Moiketsi, a two-year-old, had to eat pap and cabbage which she obviously did not enjoy from how slowly she ate it. Her mother

explained to Moiketsi's father:

129. Rona khabetjhe ha re e utlwisise. Nama yona re e geta ka nako le motsotso.

(We don't understand why we should eat cabbage. If it were meat, we would have finished it in no time).

With the plural pronoun rona (we) and the concomitant concord -re (we) Moiketsi's mother refers indirectly to Moiketsi, and her husband understands her clearly in this situation where it is Moiketsi who is having cabbage, and not meat.

In the study of the role of situational context in the determination of indirect utterance meaning, Sag (1981 : 275) quotes the following:

The ham sandwich is getting restless.

This statement does not make sense until interpreted in its actual situation of utterance. It was uttered by one waitress to another in a restaurant. The subject NP of the utterance can be assumed to denote not a ham sandwich because it lacks the human potential of showing restlessness, but a contextually determined individual who is in a certain relation to a ham sandwich, say a person who has ordered a ham sandwich, or one who has had a ham sandwich and is waiting to settle the bill.

Another phenomenon observed, and worth mentioning is that situational context influences not only the interpretation of discourses made by normal speakers, but also that of discourses made by handicapped speakers. A case in point is that of Sengani, a middle-aged man with a serious speech defect of stuttering. It was exciting to see how his family, i.e. wife and three teenage children, coped with this problem. They filled in the gaps and completed those parts of his utterances with which he struggled. They could anticipate forthcoming sections of his speeches and thus understand his discourses *totum ex parte*.

Communication in this family was as normal as it would have been between speakers with normal speech. Sengani's family had realised that his stuttering occurred mostly when he was too anxious to get something said, like when he had to utter an emotionally loaded communicational content, and also when there were other people who did not belong to his immediate household.

Bergman and Forgas (1985) investigated the influence that features of social situations could have on various forms of speech "dysfluencies" (A term used by the authors to refer to the result of interruptions or disturbances which hamper the smooth and easy flow of speech). One conclusion they came to was that such situational features are apt to generate communicative anxiety which tends to aggravate the incidence of stuttering, in particular. They found that stuttering was strongly dependent on a range of social and cultural factors. The more competitive a particular society was, the more the stuttering in such speakers. They quote Bloodstein (1975) as observing that stuttering as a disorder seems to be "a significant comment on the culture that produces it. To say that there are many stutterers in a given society is apparently to say that it is a rather competitive society" (p. 97); and later "The probability that stuttering is related to environmental pressures for achievement and conformity of some kind, appears to represent one of the fundamental pieces of information we have gained about its causation" (p. 103).

Another case is that of Mmome, a mentally deranged middle-aged woman whose confused, incoherent and perplexing speech could be deciphered by members of her family:

130. O batla ho mpolaya hape? Ha o tloha mona maobane ba itse ke wena ya mpolaileng. O batla ho sala o palama twing-twing ya ka e ntjha? Ha o no e fumana. Nna le Mandela le Modimo re tla ba lokisa batho ba sa lefeng rente. Tsamaya ka vuum ya hao. Nako e ntshiile...

(Do you want to kill me again? When you left here yesterday they told me I was killed by you. You want to remain riding my

new twing-twing? You won't get it. Mandela, God and I will fix these people who don't pay rent. Go, with your vuum. I am late...)

Members of her family understood for instance that twing-twing stood for bicycle and vuum for a car. They knew also that Mmome did not like the addressee; she always thought that the addressee was an evil person who was capable of killing others.

Social psychologists talk about 'double bind' communication in the families of schizophrenics, proposing that real-life communication can often be paradoxical, like when a speaker contradicts himself, and that even psychotic utterances make sense if considered in the context of familial communication patterns (cf Bateson, Jackson, Haley and Weakland, 1956).

#### 4.2 CONCLUSION

It has been shown that successful communication is a matter of negotiation between interlocutors. Discourse participants are normally cooperative; speakers intend to be understood and listeners strive to interpret correctly what they hear. Grice's Cooperative Principle thus appears to make a positive statement about man's inherent benevolence and cooperativeness, in spite of the fact that his maxims are just guidelines which have proved to be too restrictive and can thus be used to a limited extent only in the discourses of Southern Sotho. This study has shown that the norms and values which guide Southern Sotho speakers as to what is appropriate to say to whom and in what situations, differ considerably from those of other speakers.

Another point observed is that members of different cultural groups interacting in the same language, may well find themselves being unable to understand the speeches of their culturally different interlocutors, even though they speak their speaker's language fluently.

This study suggests that speakers should realise that it is normal for cultures to differ in respect of issues like the rules of speaking, and they should therefore refrain from approaching communication with different "frames" [Van Dijk's (1972) term for organizational patterns of discourse, and De Beaugrande (1980) uses "scripts"], lest they wish to produce inaccurate interpretations and thus end up in a communication dead-lock. When speakers coming from different levels and backgrounds interact, they should guard against judging each other's speech behaviour according to their own value systems. They should rather strive to know about the backgrounds of their fellow interlocutors. This knowledge will help them realise that being different, has nothing to do with being better or worse, it is a mere case of being different.

## **CONCLUSION**

This dissertation has shown that speakers do not always produce complete and grammatical sentences that one would normally find in written texts. They tend to rely on the supposed potential of their listeners to infer from what has been said, the intended message which often includes parts that have been left unsaid. More often than not, listeners are able to close such gaps and thus complete such elliptic utterances, and communication therefore succeeds. However, this is only possible where speaker and hearer share the context of their discourse. This context normally comprises the linguistic forms surrounding the utterance, the purpose and functions which that utterance is designed to serve in human affairs, knowledge already known to be shared by speaker and hearer, the physical and social environment, as well as the cultural backgrounds of the interlocutors. Unless speakers and hearers rely on this context, false and unwanted implicatures will always be generated, and communication will be impossible.

However, it is clear that of the two types of context, viz. linguistic and situational, situational context is always required for the

production and interpretation of speech, whereas linguistic context may not even be necessary in the interpretation of some discourses. To quote an example cited earlier as 116

Ke tla nkela ngwanaka ena  
(I'll take this one for my child)

this, and many other such utterances do not require any linguistic context to boost their interpretation. A listener who shares for instance the speaker's spatiotemporal situation, will interpret the above example accurately.

Figure 4 illustrates this relationship between discourse, linguistic context and situational context.

SITUATIONAL CONTEXT

- Discourse Participants: client (speaker) and shop assistant (addressee)
- Physical Setting: public place (shop)
- Purpose: client wants to buy an object

LINGUISTIC CONTEXT

- Not available
- Not necessary

DISCOURSE

"Ke tla nkela  
ngwanaka ena"  
(I'll take this  
one for my child)

Figure 4

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