Amongst the immense diversity of the languages of Africa one finds the Bantu languages which number close to a thousand including dialects. Within the South-eastern zone of the Bantu language family, sub-groups such as the Sotho and Nguni groups, Tsonga and Venda are distinguished, ***Northern Sotho*** belongs to the Sotho group together with Tswana and Southern Sotho. Geographically speakers of Northern Sotho are mostly concentrated in the Northern and North-eastern parts of the Transvaal. There are about 3,5 million mother-tongue speakers.

Typologically Northern Sotho is an agglutinative language. It is characterised by a system of noun classes and concordial agreement. Concordance is established by means of prefixal elements. Tone plays an important role in distinguishing the lexical meaning of words, but is also used to determine the grammatical character of words.

The present volume presents among others, interesting sociolinguistic data, salient phonemic and orthographic facts, an outline of the nominal and verbal morphology, syntactic and discourse related phenomena, as well as sample texts with interlinear transcription and translation.

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NORTHERN SOTHO DIALECTS AND PHONOLOGY

Northern Sotho is the first language of just under 10% of South Africa's estimated population of 39 million people. The majority of its users live in the Northern Transvaal and Eastern Transvaal provinces which came into being after the April 1994 elections, although it is also spoken by many people in the northern parts of the PWV province. Prior to these elections, Lebowa was the homeland of the Northern Sotho speaking people. This previous homeland today falls within the new Northern Transvaal and Eastern Transvaal provinces mentioned above.

Northern Sotho, also referred to as Sepedi or Pedi by many people, is a member of the Sotho language group and belongs to the South-Eastern zone of Bantu languages. Actually the term "Northern Sotho" is a geographical term denoting the area where a specific variety of Sotho dialects is spoken. It is therefore debatable whether a geographical term is suitable for designating the name of a language. Other well-known members of the Sotho group are Sesotho (also known as Southern Sotho), Tswana (or Western Sotho), and Rotse. The reasons for subdividing the Sotho language group into the mentioned languages are mainly rooted in history and geography. The closeness of Tswana and Northern Sotho, for instance, is demonstrated by the fact that members of certain Northern Sotho dialects can converse more easily with speakers of certain Tswana dialects than with speakers of some Northern Sotho dialects.

The boundary of the Northern Sotho area is an imaginary line stretching from Pretoria through Middelburg, Groblersdal and Lydenburg to Sabie. From Sabie the line runs along the Sabie River and then north through the Bushbuckridge and Klaserie areas, across the Olifants River, then westwards as far as Louis Trichardt, and northwards again as far as Messina. From there it stretches westwards to the Botswana border and then southwards through the Potgietersrus district, through Warmbaths and back to Pretoria.

The area just described is known for its dialectal diversity. Some of the dialects are so

different from others that speakers would only be able to communicate with considerable difficulty at the first encounter. Different attempts have in the past been made to classify the different Sotho groups along linguistic lines, of which that of Van Wyk (1969) is still regarded by many as the most satisfactory. It has to be noted, though, that detailed linguistic information about quite a number of Northern Sotho dialects is to this day still lacking, and for that reason Van Wyk's classification of the Northern Sotho dialects into clusters cannot be regarded as ideal or final.

Van Wyk distinguishes six Northern Sotho dialect clusters, of which only the main dialects are named below:

(i) The Central cluster which includes the Pedi, Kone and Mmamabolo dialects

(ii) The East-Central cluster which includes Kutswe and Pulana

(iii) The Northern Sotho cluster in which the two main dialects are Tlokwa and Hananwa

(iv) Eastern Sotho which has only the Pai dialect

(v) The North-Eastern Sotho cluster which has three dialects, namely Lobedu, Phalaborwa and Mahlo

(vi) The North-Western Sotho cluster, which includes the Birwa and Dzwabo dialects

Northern Sotho, including its dialects, is subject to influences from various quarters.

The dialects of the North-Eastern cluster border on the Venda speaking area which extends to the north. These dialects, as well as some dialects of the Northern Sotho cluster, are clearly influenced by Venda. These influences are visible in the sound systems of the dialects in question, as well as in their vocabulary, and to a lesser extent in their morphology and syntax. The North-Eastern dialect cluster is also situated adjacent to the Tsonga speaking area which lies more eastwards, but traces of influences from that source are few and far between. The East-Central and Eastern clusters actually share some territory with Tsonga speaking peoples, and in the dialects in question there is ample impression of Tsonga. These dialects, but especially Pai, are also influenced by Swazi, which is spoken more towards the east than Tsonga.

Some of the dialects which have been mentioned above seem to be doomed to extinction due to the influence of the media which use only standard Northern Sotho. Actually, extinction

seems to be the eventual fate of all forms of dialectal variation as informants who speak the purer/older dialectal varieties are mainly elderly people. What makes matters worse is that systematic studies in most of the endangered dialects have not yet been undertaken. One dialect which has already become extinct in South Africa is Birwa. A group of people who call themselves Babirwa has been traced in the Potgietersrus area, but a dialect study which was subsequently conducted proved that the language spoken by these people is actually Hananwa. It is known that there are still Babirwa in Botswana, but it can be assumed that the language of these people has already been influenced by Tswana. Some dialects of the Central cluster, of which Pedi is one, are spoken next to the Ndebele speaking area of the Eastern Transvaal province. As far as is known, there is very little influence from that source, however.

Apart from influences from other Bantu languages, Northern Sotho speakers are also exposed to influences from Afrikaans and English, especially in the cities. The extent of these influences still has to be accurately evaluated. Pretoria Sotho, a koine variety, is spoken by most blacks in and around Pretoria, regardless of what their first language is.

The standardization of Northern Sotho took a few decades to complete and the final product includes influences from primarily the Pedi dialect of Sekhukhuneland, but also from Kopa, and dialects of the Northern Sotho cluster.

The political situation in the provinces in which Northern Sotho is spoken is at present stable. There are no indications of political decisions that could endanger the survival of Northern Sotho, although, as indicated earlier, its dialects as they exist today are indeed in danger of becoming extinct. South Africa's new constitution makes provision for eleven official languages at national level, instead of Afrikaans and English only, which were the official languages before the April 1994 elections. This means that amongst others, Northern Sotho has been elevated from being an unofficial language to being an official language. One of the major implications of this is that Northern Sotho may even become a provincial official language in the provinces where it is spoken, if these provinces by a two-thirds majority choose to do so. Such a step implies that Northern Sotho can become an additional provincial official language with English and Afrikaans for these provinces or parts thereof. In the

territory previously known as Lebowa, Northern Sotho remains an official language in any case. It thus seems that as far as its survival is concerned, Northern Sotho is, at least in theory, better off than before the 1994 elections, although it has to be pointed out that as a language, it never faced serious threats.

SOUND SYSTEM

Vowel phonemes

Northern Sotho is characterised by a symmetric seven vowel system. There are three front and three back vowels, as well as a low central vowel. The symmetry prevailing between the vowels not only pertains to frontness and backness, but to height as well: there are two each high, mid-high and mid-low vowels, one in each instance being a front vowel, and the other being a back vowel. The vowel phonemes are /i, e, ɛ, a, ɔ, o, u/, written as **i, e, ê, a, ô, o, u** respectively in the practical orthography. Some of these vowels coincide with cardinal vowels, viz. /i/ with CV 1, /ɛ/ with CV 3, /ɔ/ with CV 6, and /u/ with CV 8. The remaining vowels approximate cardinal vowels: /e/ lies just above CV 2, /a/ halfway between CV 4 and CV 5, and /o/ is positioned just above CV 7. It has to be pointed out, though, that the placing of all Sotho vowels, and in some instances even the existence of certain vowels, have to be reviewed in the light of acoustic evidence which challenge the traditional views.

The four mid-vowels each have raised, phonologically conditioned variants which can be seen as products of assimilation (vowel harmony), because the process generally takes place when a mid-vowel is followed in the next syllable by a higher vowel than itself, or by its own raised counterpart. Thus in an infinitive verb **go lema** /ɣo lema/ 'to plough', the vowel [e] is regarded as a basic mid-high front vowel. A noun can however be derived from the verb stem **-lema** 'plough' through a morphological process by affixing a nominal class prefix **mo-**, and by replacing the verbal ending **-a** with a deverbative ending **-i**. The resultant deverbative noun **molemi** 'farmer' is derived in this way. The ending **-i** creates an environment within which the preceding mid-high vowel is subjected to vowel raising. The end result may be phonetically transcribed as [molẹmi]. Some scholars suspect that certain consonants also lead to vowel raising, but this has yet to be thoroughly investigated.

Apart from the abovementioned raised mid-vowels, all vowel phonemes can in normal speech realise as devoiced vowels. Devoiced vowels are contextual variants to the extent that they realise between non-voiced consonants word-initially or word-finally. Their occurrence is however by far not predictable in the normal phonological sense because it is also dependent on, amongst others, the speech tempo. Thus, given the correct environment, whispered vowels will only realise if the speech tempo is relatively rapid and words are not accentuated.

Suprasegmental features

Syllable structure

Most syllables in Northern Sotho have a CV structure, although V, C and CCV structures are also found. As Northern Sotho is a tone language, it is a prerequisite that every syllable must have a core or nucleus which is a tone bearing unit. It goes without saying then, that the consonant functioning as the core in C-syllables, is always a resonant or the trill /r/. In CCV syllables the second consonant is always the glide /w/.

Tonology

Like most Bantu languages, Northern Sotho is a register tone language. Up to date very little has been written about Northern Sotho tone and the most prominent source of information in this regard remains the doctoral thesis of Lombard (1976) from which the tonal facts presented below have been taken.

As tone plays such a vital grammatical role in tone languages, reference has to be made to at least some nominal and verbal tone features. Mention of the underlying tone of nouns and verbal stems is made below. Regarding nouns, the underlying tone is determined by pronouncing the word in isolation, while the underlying tonal pattern of verb stems is determined by using the stem in the positive conjugation in the infinitive.

Nominal tonal features

Nominal class prefixes are underlying low, while nominal stems are classified into different groups according to the principles laid out in (i) and (ii) below. In order to make the identification of class prefixes and stems simple, they have been separated by means of an apostrophe. (The apostrophe is absent in cases where there is no class prefix).

(i) Monosyllabic stems belong either to the H- or the L-group. Compare

mà-bú	'soil'	(H-group)
sè-kgwà	'thicket'	(L-group)

(ii) Bisyllabic stems belong to either the LL-, LH- or HL-group. Compare

ngàkà	'doctor'	(LL-group)
lè-tšàtší	'sun/day'	(LH-group)
phírì	'hyena'	(HL-group)

An interesting feature of nominal tone is the functioning of a tone rule called *Tone assimilation* (TA). This rule is activated when the diminutive suffixes **-ana/-nyana** or the locative suffix **-ng** are affixed. The rule alters the tone pattern of certain nominal stems of the HL-group of nouns, and determines that the high tone is repeated, resulting in the low tone which follows it to change to high as well. The HL-group nouns affected by this rule are called +TA-type nouns, while those that are not affected are called -TA-type nouns. Compare

*phírì+ànà → phíšánà 'small hyena'

The *Tone assimilation* rule also operates in nouns belonging to most of the other mentioned tonal groups, but due to spatial restrictions details cannot be given here. The discussion of nominal tone was restricted to mono- and bisyllabic nominal stems for the same reason.

Verbal tonal features

When their underlying tone is considered, verbal stems can be classified into two tonological classes, depending on the tone of the first stem syllable. There being only high and low tones in Northern Sotho, the two classes of verb stems are termed H- and L-class stems respectively. The stem patterns of 1- to 4-syllabic stems are briefly looked into.

Stems belonging to the L-class only have low toned syllables, viz.

1s	-lwà as in the infinitive	gò lwà	'to fight'
2s	-hlàbà as in the infinitive	gò hlàbà	'to stab'
3s	-bàpàlà as in the infinitive	gò bàpàlà	'to play'
4s	-hlàgòlèlà as in the infinitive	gò hlàgòlèlà	'to weed'

Stems of the H-class, on the other hand, also have a distinct pattern in that the first stem syllable is always high, and the final syllable low. In polysyllabic stems the first two syllables are high, and the remaining syllable(s) low, viz.

1s	-fá as in the infinitive	gò fá	'to give to'
2s	-rátà as in the infinitive	gò rátà	'to love'
3s	-bóláyà as in the infinitive	gò bóláyà	'to kill'
4s	-kólóbètšà as in the infinitive	gò kólóbètšà	'to baptise'

A variety of tone rules operate in verbs, and are activated by amongst others, the conjugation of the verb, and the presence of an object concord. A few examples are quoted, illustrating the effect of tone rules on L-class verb stems as caused by the object concord and the negative of the infinitive:

(i) The object concord

This concord is underlying high, and repeats itself onto the first stem syllable, e.g. *gò mó hlàbà → gò mó hlábà 'to stab him/her' The object morpheme **mó** alters the syllable **hlà** to **hlá**. The *Tone repetition* rule effects this change.

(ii) Infinitive negative

*gò sè dùmèdìšè	'not to greet'
→*gò sè dùmédìšè	**mè** is altered to **mé** by the *High second syllable* rule
→gò sè dùmédíšè	**dì** is altered to **dí** by the *Tone repetition* rule

Length

Length entails extending the duration of the core of the penultimate syllable of a sentence or

clause. A distinction can be made between half length and full length. The latter occurs when a word is pronounced in isolation, and at the end of a sentence. When a word does not occur in the final sentential position, its penultimate syllable is still lengthened, but not to the same degree, i.e. half length is observed. In general, length occurs in:

(i) Factual statements, e.g.

Ke rata thu:tô 'I like the lesson'

Ke rata thu:tô, ka baka lêo ke e bala ga:pê 'I like the lesson, for that reason I read it again'

(ii) Interrogative sentences with interrogative words in the final sentential position, e.g.

Lena le tsogile bja:ng? 'How are you today?'

(iii) Commands, e.g.

Batamê:la! 'Come closer!'

There are a number of exceptions to the conditions for the realisation of length, as set out above, but these have still to be researched. Length is, for instance, not observed on the penultimate syllable at all when the final word in a sentence is a monosyllabic demonstrative pronoun, e.g.

Ke tseba monna yô 'I know this man'

Consonant phonemes

Northern Sotho is known for having a rich variety of consonant phonemes. Five main places of articulation are utilized, and there are a number of consonants with double articulation. As in most languages, the majority of consonants in Northern Sotho are produced by a pulmonic egressive airstream. The laryngeal airstream mechanism is however also used in the articulation of plosives and unaspirated affricatives. In standard Northern Sotho there are no voiced plosives. The picture is quite different when its dialects are investigated, though. In especially the Northern Sotho and Northeastern dialect clusters, only the pulmonic airstream mechanism is used, and the counterparts of the ejectives of the standard language are either voiced, or partially voiced.

The consonant phonemes together with the symbols used in the practical orthography are

listed below. Where applicable, contextual variants are also quoted. Labialized variants are not included in the list because it can be taken for granted that they arise from the influence of /w/ following a non-labial consonant. A basic articulatory description of each consonant is given.

Fricatives

/β/	**b**	Bilabial, voiced, medial
/βʒ/	**bj**	Labio-prepalatal, voiced, medial
/f/	**f**	Labio-dental, voiceless, medial
/fs/	**fs**	Labio-alveolar, voiceless, medial
/fʃ/	**fš**	Labio-prepalatal, voiceless, medial
/s/	**s**	Apico-alveolar, voiceless, medial
/ɬ/	**hl**	Apico-alveolar, voiceless, lateral
/ʃ/	**š**	Lamino-prepalatal, voiceless, medial
/ʒ/	**j**	Lamino-prepalatal, voiced, medial
/h/	**h**	Dorso-postpalatal, voiceless, medial
/ɣ/	**g**	Dorso-velar, voiced, medial
/ɦ/	**h**	Glottal, breathy voiced, medial

Plosives

/p/	**p**	Bilabial, ejected, medial
/pʰ/	**ph**	Bilabial, aspirated, medial
/t/	**t**	Apico-alveolar, ejected, medial
/tʰ/	**th**	Apico-alveolar, aspirated, medial
/tl/	**tl**	Apico-alveolar, ejected, lateral
/tlʰ/	**tlh**	Apico-alveolar, aspirated, lateral
/k/	**k**	Dorso-velar, ejected, medial
/kʰ/	**kh**	Dorso-velar, aspirated, medial

Affricatives

/pʃ/	**pš**	Labio-prepalatal, ejected, medial
/pʃʰ/	**pšh**	Labio-prepalatal, aspirated, medial
/ps/	**ps**	Labio-alveolar, ejected, medial
/psʰ/	**psh**	Labio-alveolar, aspirated, medial
/ts/	**ts**	Apico-alveolar, ejected, medial
/tsʰ/	**tsh**	Apico-alveolar, aspirated, medial
/tʃ/	**tš**	Lamino-prepalatal, ejected, medial
/tʃʰ/	**tšh**	Lamino-prepalatal, aspirated, medial
/kxʰ/	**kg**	Dorso-velar, aspirated, medial

Resonants

/l/	**l**	Apico-alveolar, voiced, lateral
	[ɾ] **d**	Palato-alveolar, voiced, medial, flap. This variant realises when /l/ is followed by a high vowel, viz. /-βala/ 'read' realises as [-βaɾilɛ] 'has read' when the perfect extension {-ilɛ} is affixed.
/m/	**m**	Bilabial, voiced, nasal
/n/	**n**	Apico-alveolar, voiced, nasal
/ɲ/	**ny**	Medio-palatal, voiced, nasal
/ŋ/	**ng**	Dorso-velar, voiced, nasal

/N/ Nasal archiphoneme which realises homorganically in nasal compounds. These compounds consist of a nasal and another consonant. The members of such compounds do not belong to the same syllable, as the nasal constitutes a syllable core on its own, and the other consonant belongs to the next syllable together with the vowel which follows it. The realizations of /N/ constitute examples of what Lass (1989:46) calls 'multiple neutralization'. The realizations of /N/ are:

[m̩]	**m**	Bilabial, voiced, nasal, as in /-Nβɔna/ → [-m̩pʾɔna] 'see me'
[n̩]	**n**	Apico-alveolar, voiced, nasal, as in /-Ntʰuʃa/ → [-n̩tʰuʃa] 'help me'
[ɲ̩]	**n**	Medio-palatal, voiced, nasal, as in /-Nɲaka/ → [-ɲ̩ɲakʾa] 'search for me'

[ŋ]	**n**	Dorso-velar, voiced, nasal, as in /-Nkxʰama/ → [-ŋkxʰama] 'strangle me'

Trill

/r/	**r**	Apico-alveolar, voiced, medial

Glides

/w/	**w**	Labio-velar, voiced, medial
/j/	**y**	Medio-palatal, voiced, medial

Morphophonology

As a consequence of the multitude of morphological processes which is typical of an agglutinating language like Northern Sotho, it often happens that phonemes which do not tolerate one another are juxtaposed. This results in the frequent occurrence of morphophonological processes. Three such processes will receive some attention here, although there are numerous types of processes. One process which affects quite a number of phonemes in Northern Sotho, is *plosivation* (also known as "sound strengthening", "occlusivation", "nasalization" in local publications). Labial dissimilation, i.e. the tendency to dissimilate juxtaposed labial consonants, is the driving force behind two morphophonological processes, namely *palatalization* (although other phonological environments also give rise to this process), and *velarization*. Apart from these processes *nasal formation* (complete progressive assimilation) is also briefly investigated in order to give a glimpse of the degree to which morphophonological alternations are found in Northern Sotho. Other process which will not be addressed are, for instance, *homorganic nasal realization*, *alveolarization*, *deletion*, *glide formation* (also known by such terms as "desyllabification" and "consonantalization") and *vowel coalescence*.

Labial dissimilation

Palatalization in Northern Sotho can be divided into two types when the cause of the process is considered. Naturally, there are examples which are caused by a front vowel or /j/, but in many cases palatalization arises as a result of labial dissimilation. The normal scenario which leads to this type of palatalization is the juxtapositioning of /f/, /β/, /p/ or /pʰ/ and /w/. /w/ is often the result of any one of the back vowels undergoing glide formation. Thus it should be apparent that morphophonological processes often occur in combinations. The phonemes involved in this process are

/f/ → /fʃ/, eg. */-lefwa/ → /-lefʃa/ 'be paid' (**-w-** is a passive extension)

/β/ → /βʒ/, eg. */koβɔana/ → */koβwana/
→ /koβʒana/ [1]'small blanket' (**-ana** is a diminutive suffix)

/p/ → /pʃ/, eg. */-ɣapwa/ → /-ɣapʃa/ 'be driven' (**-w-** is a passive extension)

/pʰ/ → /pʃʰ/, eg. */-pʰapʰwa/ → /-pʰapʃʰa/ 'be chopped' (**-w-** is a passive extension)

Another morphophonological process resulting from labial dissimilation is velarization. In this process the phoneme /m/ becomes /ŋ/ when /m/ is followed by /w/. As in the case of palatalization, the glide /w/ can be the result of glide formation. Compare

*/moana/ → */mwana/ → /ŋwana/ 'child' (**mo-** is a class prefix; **-ana** is a nominal root)

*/-lomwa/ → /-loŋwa/ 'be bitten' (**-w-** is a passive extension)

*/kxʰɔmoana/ → */kxʰɔmwana/ → /kxʰɔŋwana/ 'calf' (**-ana** is a diminutive suffix)

Plosivation

Plosivation affects a large number of consonants in Northern Sotho. During this process all continuant consonants except nasals and glides become stops because the result is always a plosive or an affricate. The activator (phoneme initiating the process) is a nasal preceding the subservient phoneme, although it will be shown that the reflexive morpheme **i-** has the same

[1]In a number of Northern Sotho dialects this would actually be /goβjana/, where the articulation of /βj/ varies between [βʲ], [βj] and [βˢ]. This makes the postulation of how /βw/ developed into /βʒ/ rather interesting, and different points of view exist on this issue.

effect as a nasal in this respect. The nasal acting as activator is either the class prefixes of class 9 **N-** or 10 **diN-**, or the object concord **N-** of the first person singular. After plosivation has occurred, the nasal is often deleted. The conditions under which the retention or deletion of the nasal takes place are not treated here. Notice should also be taken of the fact that the nasal always realizes homorganically with the consonant to which it is juxtaposed. To demonstrate the extent of the influence of plosivation, all phonemes affected by it are listed, but one example only accompanies each pair of phonemes.

/β/ → /p/	*/-Nβɔna/ → /-mpɔna/ 'see me'	(**N-** is the object concord of the first person singular)
/f/ → /pʰ/	*/-ifɛpa/ → /-ipʰɛpa/ 'feed oneself'	(**i-** is the reflexive morpheme)
/βʒ/ → /pʃ/	*/Nβʒalɔ/ → /pʃalɔ/ 'cultivation'	(**N-**, the class prefix of noun class 9 is elided after plosivation has occurred)
/fs/ → /psʰ/	*/-Nfsa/ → /-mpsʰa/ 'new'	(**N-**, the class prefix of noun class 9 is not elided because it is attached to a monosyllabic adjectival root **-fsa**)
/fʃ/ → /pʃʰ/	*/-Nfʃɛɣiʃa/ → /-mpʃʰɛɣiʃa/ 'frighten me'	(**N-** is the object concord of the first person singular)
/s/ → /tsʰ/	*/-isɔla/ → /-itsʰɔla/ 'reproach oneself'	(**i-** is the reflexive morpheme)
/r/ → /tʰ/	*/Nratɔ/ → /tʰatɔ/ 'will'	(The noun class prefix **N-** is elided after plosivation has occurred)
/ɬ/ → /tlʰ/	*/-iɬaβa/ → /-itlʰaβa/ 'stab oneself'	(**i-** is the reflexive morpheme)
/l/ → /t/	*/Nlirɔ/ → /tirɔ/ 'deed'	(The noun class prefix **N-** is elided after plosivation has occurred)
/ʃ/ → /tʃʰ/	*/-Nʃupa/ → /-ɲtʃʰupa/ 'point me out'	(**N-** is the object concord of the first person singular)
/ʒ/ → /tʃ/	*/Nʒɛlɔ/ → /tʃɛlɔ/ 'crop of bird'	(The noun class prefix **N-** is

elided after plosivation has occurred)

/ɣ/ → /kx^h/ */-iɣɛla/ → /-ikx^{h}ɛla/ 'draw (water) for oneself' (i- is the reflexive morpheme)

/ɦ/ → /k^h/ */-Nhumiʃa/ → /-ŋk^{h}umiʃa/ 'enrich oneself' (N- is the object concord of the first person singular)

/ɱ/ → /k^h/ */Nɱɛmiʃɔ/ → /k^{h}ɛmiʃɔ/ 'artificial respiration' (The noun class prefix N- is elided after plosivation has occurred)

Nasal formation

Nasal formation entails the changing of /β/ to /m/ in the environment /moβ/, or the changing of /l/ to /m/. Attention is given to the former instance only here. The change occurs as a result of complete progressive assimilation. In all cases where nasal formation occurs the sequence /mo/ is either the nominal class prefix of class 1 or class 3, or the objectival concord of class 1. During the process the vowel /o/ is elided. Compare the following examples:

*/moβali/ → /mmali/ 'reader' /mo-/ is the class prefix of class 1

*/moβutla/ → /mmutla/ 'hare' /mo-/ is the class prefix of class 3

*/-moβɔna/ → /-mmɔna/ 'see him/her' /mo-/ is the objectival concord of class 1

Fieldwork

Dialect research has taken somewhat of a backseat in recent years, and only a few researchers are active in the field. In the majority of Northern Sotho's dialects, the phonological differences between standard and dialect can be readily observed, but there are numerous morphological and morphosyntactical differences as well. Due to spatial restrictions a few striking differences have been selected as examples.

Phonological differences

There is a tendency for the standard ejected consonants to be articulated as voiced or semi-

voiced stops, especially in the dialects of the North-Western and North-Eastern dialect clusters, e.g.

Standard	Dialect	
[-rɛk'a]	[-rɛga]	'buy'
[-rat'a]	[-raɖa]	'love'
[-rip'a]	[-riba]	'cut'
[-βitʃ'a]	[-βidʒa]	'call'
[-ts'eβa]	[-dzeβa]	'know'

In the North-Western and North-Eastern clusters the plosive apical consonant phonemes of standard Northern Sotho realise as retroflexive consonants. Due to the lenis nature of the articulations in these dialects, plosive segments are often released with friction, e.g

Standard	Dialect	
[-rɛt'a]	[-rɛɖa]/[-rɛɖ^{z}a]	'praise'
[mot^{h}o]	[mo[t^h]o]/[mo[t^{sh}]o]	'person'

The dialectal counterparts of the standard lateral consonant phonemes vary between dental consonants in the North-Western and North-Eastern dialect clusters, and velar laterals in the Eastern and East-Central dialect clusters, e.g.

Standard	N/W & N/E dialect	Eastern dialect	East-Central dialect	
[-ɬaβa]	[-t̪^{h}aβa]	[-kl^{h}aβa]	[-kl'aβa]	'stab'
[-tl'a]	[-d̪a]	.....	[-kl'a]	'come'
[maatl'a]	[maad̪a]	[maakl'a]	.....	'strength'
[ntl^{h}a]	[nt̪^{h}a]	.....	.....	'point'

Morphosyntactic differences

The structure of situative verbs (imperfect tense positive) in Northern Sotho is {subject concord + verb stem}, e.g. Ke tlô ba botša gê **ba boa** (**-ba** being the subject concord; **-boa** being the verb stem) 'I will tell them when they return'. In most dialects of the North-Eastern cluster, the counterparts of the situative verb just quoted, include what is regarded as a situative morpheme. This morpheme, which occurs between the subject concord and the verb

stem, is either **-khe-** or **-ṯhe-**, depending on the dialect, although it is suspected that they are derived from the same proto form. Compare the following examples in which only the situative counterpart of the sentence above is quoted:

Lobedu: ba khe boya 'when they return'

Khaga: ba ṯhe boya 'when they return'

Different scholars have pointed out the close links between situative and relative verbs in some of the Bantu languages of South Africa. Their viewpoints have been based on semantic as well as morphological evidence. The situative morpheme, about which nothing has been published yet, provides especially interesting evidence to support the idea of a link between these moods, because it has also been found to occur in certain relative verbs in the Ṯhabine and Dzwabo dialects of the North-Eastern and North-Western clusters respectively. Compare the occurrence of **-khe-** in the following bracketed relative verb:

Dzwabo: Letšatši lê {le khe sego} wa ṯhaba 'The sun which did not rise'

MORPHOLOGY

Abbreviations used in this section:

adj.	adjective/adjectival
caus.ext.	causative extension
cl.	class
conj.	conjunction
CP	class prefix
dem.	demonstrative
dev.	deverbative
neg.	negative
OAG	object agreement marker
qual.	qualificative
QP	qualificative particle
recipr.	reciprocal
rel.	relative

SAG	subject agreement marker
Tense	imperfect tense morpheme

Introduction

Structurally Northern Sotho is a typical Bantu language, characterised by an overridingly agglutinative nature. It has a very rich and productive morphology. Word categories are usually concatenations of morphemes, which can be distinguished with relative ease. However, instances of inflection also occur, where formatives undergo phonological changes or merge together in various degrees. Within the scope of the present study, only the most prominent morphological features of Northern Sotho will be highlighted.

The classification and sub-classification of word categories is the topic of an ongoing debate. Possibly because of the disjunctive writing system, authorities differ in interpretation as to what should be regarded as words and what should be regarded as parts of words. Basically two proposals have emerged: The first one (cf. Proposal A below) is based on the rigid application of the word tests of isolatability and mobility; the second one (cf. Proposal B) is based on more functional considerations, where word tests are only applied in a limited way.

PROPOSAL A	**PROPOSAL B**	
1. Nouns	1. Nouns	
2. Pronouns	2. Pronouns	Absolute
		Quantitative
3. Verbs	3. Demonstratives	
4. Dem.-copulatives	4. Qualificatives	Adjective
5. Adverbs		Possessive
6. Particles		Relative
7. Conjunctions		Enumerative
8. Ideophones	5. Verbs	
9. Interjections	6. Copulatives	Identifying
		Descriptive

Associative

Locational

7. Adverbs
8. Ideophones
9. Interjections
10. Conjunctions
11. Interrogatives

Nominals and verbals are the two main word categories that can be identified on structural grounds.

NOMINAL MORPHOLOGY

Grammatical gender

Nouns form part of an elaborate class system, which is based on different considerations as compared to the gender systems encountered in many European languages. Instead of the traditional groups labeled "masculine", "feminine" and "neuter", objects fall into a variety of classes in accordance with the form of their prefixes. The prefixes are responsible for generating concordial agreement between the noun and one or more other words or constituents of phrases and sentences, e.g.

Mosadi yô mongwê o apea bogôbê	'Another woman cooks porridge'
Sesotho sa Leboa se rutwa sekôlông	'Northern Sesotho is taught at school'

It is assumed that noun class prefixes were originally semantically significant, since nouns in some of the classes still share some semantic features. Many of the noun classes, however, contain miscellaneous objects. According to the internationally accepted numbering of Bantu noun classes, linguists generally recognise the following noun classes in Northern Sotho:

Class number	*Class prefix*	*General content*
Class 1	**mo-**	persons, human beings e.g. **motswadi** 'parent'
Class 2	**ba-**	plural of class 1 e.g. **batswadi** 'parents'
Class 1(a)	**ø**	variety of objects, also kinship terms, proper names, personified animals e.g. **malome** 'uncle'
Class 2(a)	**bô-**	plural of class 2, associative plural, honorific form (when addressing singular or plural) e.g. **bômalome** 'uncles/uncle and company'
Class 3	**mo-**	impersonal objects, plants, natural phenomena, animals and insects, parts of the body e.g. **mollô** 'fire'
Class 4	**me-**	plural of class 3 e.g. **mellô** 'fires'
Class 5	**le-**	body parts, natural phenomena, fruit and vegetables, nationalities, abstracts, birds and animals, collective concepts e.g. **leoto** 'foot'
Class 6	**ma-**	plural of class 5, e.g. **maoto** 'feet' plural of some class 14 nouns, e.g. **magôbê** 'portions of porridge' collective plural for class 9 nouns, e.g. **manku** 'large flock of sheep' mass nouns, e.g. **meetse** 'water', **makhura** 'fat, oil' times and seasons, e.g. **marêga** 'winter'
Class 7	**se-**	languages, cultures, body parts, animals and insects, plants, instruments, experts, character traits, e.g. **Sesotho** 'Sotho language and culture', **selêpê** 'axe', **sebolêdi** 'outstanding speaker'
Class 8	**di-**	plural of class 7
Class 9	**N-**	animals, miscellaneous objects,

		e.g. **nku** 'sheep', **kgôši** 'chief'
Class 10	**diN-**	plural of class 9
Class 9(a)	**ø**	loan words with no recognisable prefix (a later development), e.g. **galase** 'glass'
Class 10(a)	**di-**	plural of class 9(a), e.g. **digalase** 'glasses'
Class 14	**bo-**	some concrete objects, but mainly abstract nouns, e.g. **bohumi** 'wealth'
Class 15	**go-**	infinitives, e.g. **go ruta** 'to teach, the teaching'
Class 16	**fa-**	locative, e.g. **fase** 'below, at the bottom'
Class 17	**go-**	locative, e.g. **godimo** 'above, on top'
Class 18	**mo-**	locative, e.g. **morago** 'behind, at the back'

Apart from the norm variants indicated above, the following allomorphs are displayed by some of the class prefixes:

Class 1:	**m-**:	e.g. **mmini** 'dancer'
	ngw-:	e.g. **ngwana** 'child'
Class 2:	**b-**:	e.g. **bêng** 'guests'
Class 3:	**m-**:	e.g. **mphagô** 'provisions'
	ngw-:	e.g. **ngwakô** 'house'
Class 4:	**nyw-**:	e.g. **nywakô** 'houses'
or	**mengw-** (compounded):	**mengwakô** 'houses'
Class 5:	**ø**:	e.g. **gae** 'home'
Class 6:	**m-**:	e.g. **mênô** (<***ma-inô**) 'teeth'
Class 9:	**N-**: may be realized phonetically as [n-], [m-], [ɲ-] or [ŋ-] before monosyllabic stems as in e.g. **ntlô** 'hut', **mpša** 'dog', **ntšhi** 'fly' and **nkwê** 'leopard' respectively, or have a zero realization before polysyllabic stems, e.g. **øpudi** 'goat'	
Class 10:	**diN-**: [ɲin-], [ɲim-], [ɲiŋ-], [ɲiŋ-] before monosyllabic stems, as in e.g. **dintlô** 'huts', **dimpša** 'dogs', **dintšhi** 'flies' and **dinkwê** 'leopards' respectively, or **di-** before polysyllabic stems, e.g. **dipudi** 'goats'	
Class 14:	**bj-**:	e.g. **bjang** 'grass'

	b-:	e.g. **bupi** 'flour'
Class 16:	**f-**:	e.g. **felô** 'place'

Although the class prefixes are usually associated with number, i.e. singular or plural, some nouns are not countable, e.g. mass nouns which appear in the "plural class 6", but which do not distinguish number, abstract nouns in class 14 which are unmarked for number or the infinitive words of class 15.

Morphological structure

Ideally the noun in Northern Sotho consists of a class prefix followed by a primitive (underived) stem or a stem derived from another word category, compare:

mo-tswadi: prefix + primitive stem 'parent'

mo-rati: prefix + derived stem 'lover'

Nouns can be derived from a number of other word categories, which on their part may have a polymorphemic structure:

Nouns derived from verbs (deverbatives) are characterised by three productive suffixes, viz. **-i**, **-ô** and **-a**. Other deverbative suffixes which also occur, but which are not productive, are **-u** and **-e**:

Structure: class prefix (CP) + root + (extensions) + deverbative suffix (dev.suffix), e.g.

mo	**-**	**ag**	**-**	**ô**				'building'
CP		root		dev.suffix				
m	**-**	**mop**	**-**	**a**				'clay'
CP		root		dev.suffix				
mo	**-**	**ag**	**-**	**iš**	**-**	**an**	**-**	**i** 'neighbour'
CP		root		caus.ext.		recipr.ext.		dev.suffix

In the case of impersonal deverbatives, the suffix **-ô** (cf. **moagô** above), sometimes **-a** (cf. **mmopa**), while **-i** is used when the deverbative refers to a person (cf. **moagišani**). It is interesting to note that personal deverbatives which include the passive morpheme take the suffix **-a**, e.g.

mo	-	**rat**	-	**iw**	-	**a**	'beloved'
CP		root		passive		dev.suffix	

Nouns derived from adjectival stems:
Structure: CP + adj. stem
e.g. **se - be** 'sin'

Nouns derived from ideophones:
Structure: CP + ideophonic stem
e.g. **se - thuthuthu** 'motorbike'

Nouns derived from pronouns:
Structure: CP + pronoun
e.g. **bo - yêna** 'himself'

Diminutive formation

Unlike some Bantu languages which employ a diminutive prefix, with or without a concomitant suffix, Northern Sotho forms diminutives by means of a diminutive suffix only, viz. **-ana** (or its variant **-ane**) or **-nyana** (or its variant **-nyane**), e.g.

mmutla 'hare' > **mmutlana** 'little hare'

Evidence exists that the suffix is a later development, since some archaic forms may be encountered in which a prefix was used in conjunction with the suffix, e.g. **kgabutlana** 'little hare'. In the course of time, the prefix was discarded and today Northern Sotho does not use

a class prefix productively to form diminutives of nouns. The suffix **-nyana** does not activate phonological processes, but the suffix **-ana** often does, compare:

pudi + -nyana > **pudinyana** 'a small goat'
but: **pudi + -ana** > **putšana**

In some nouns it seems as if the diminutive suffix has become fossilised to the stem, e.g. **mošemane** 'boy' and **mosetsana** 'girl'.

Locative formation

It has become practice among Northern Sotho linguists to make a distinction between locative nouns (with inherent locative meaning) on the one hand, and locativised nouns (nouns modified by the affixation of locative pre- and suffixes) on the other. Examples of the former consist of the normal structure for the noun classes, i.e. CP + root/stem, e.g.
locative nouns:
e.g. cl.16: **fase** 'under(side)'
cl.17: **godimo** 'upper(side)'

Locativised nouns are characterised by the addition of a locative suffix **-ng** to the root/stem,
e.g. cl.9: **ntlô** > **bana ba bapala ntlông**
'the children are playing in the vicinity of the hut'

Nouns affixed by the locative suffix **-ng** express vague locality. Specified locality can be expressed by prefixing one of the locative formatives before the locativised noun,
e.g. **bana ba bapala ka ntlông**
'the children are playing **in** the hut'

Pronouns and nouns referring to persons which belong to classes 1(a) and 2(a) are never locativised by the suffix **-ng**, but instead take formatives such as **go** or **ga**:
e.g. **go tatê** 'to/in the presence of father' (**go** in the sense of 'in the personal presence of')
ga rangwane 'at uncle's place' (**ga** in the sense of 'at the home/place of')

Nouns indicating persons, but which do not belong to classes 1(a) and 2(a) may be locativised as above, but may also be suffixed by **-ng** as an alternative, e.g. **bathong** 'among people'.

The affixation of the locative suffix does not cause phonological changes, except in the following instances:

- when the noun ends on **-a**, the final vowel changes to **-ê**, e.g.
  thaba > **thabêng** 'at the mountain'
- when the word ends on **-ng**, the nasal changes to palatal **-ny-**, e.g.
  bjang > **bjanyêng** 'in the grass'

Augmentatives

In Northern Sotho the suffix **-gadi** is not a very productive suffix. It occurs in limited instances to indicate "largeness" of an object, e.g. **letlapagadi** 'a big stone', but it is mostly used in the sense of "female largeness", e.g. **kgômogadi** 'large, important cow', or simply to indicate "femininity", e.g. **morutišigadi** 'female teacher'. In some words **-gadi** or one of its variants is only recognised as a fossilised suffix, e.g. **mosadi** 'woman', **mohlologadi** 'widower'.

Reduplication

Reduplication (whether total or in part) of nouns has the purpose of expressing certain semantic nuances, such as intensification, variety, etc., e.g. **sebinibini** 'a master dancer', **mehutahuta** 'various types'. (In verbs frequency or diminution is conveyed through reduplication, e.g. **-ragaraga** 'kick over and over again', **-sepelasepela** 'walk a little, walk aimlessly about').

Nominal cases

Initially linguists, schooled in the old models for Latin and Greek, tried to identify the nouns of Northern Sotho in terms of nominal cases. This proved to be impractical, since most of the Bantu languages do not inflect their nouns for case, but rather make use of the syntactic position of nouns and agreement morphemes to express various syntagmatic relationships

between sentence constituents. The genetive, i.e. possessive, for example, such as 'the man's wife' is constructed on the order of 'wife of man', compare:

mosadi	**wa**	**monna**
possession	possessive formative	possessor

As in all cases of concordial relationship the noun (possession) dictates the specific agreement morpheme to be used.

Anaphoric nominals

Anaphoric nominals are characterised by concordial morphemes which refer to the noun classes. These include the so-called absolute pronouns, possessive pronouns, demonstrative pronouns and quantitative pronouns.

Structure: Concordial morpheme + root/stem

Specific pronouns are used for the first and second persons, singular and plural, but the third person encompasses the noun classes and can therefore appear in a number of forms.

Absolute pronoun

Structure: Concordial morpheme + pronominal root **-ô-** + suffix **-na**

This applies to most of the forms of the third person, e.g. cl.2 **bôna** 'they', cl.5 **lôna** 'he/she/it', except cl.1 **yêna** 'he/she/it', which can only be reconstructed on a diachronic basis.

The forms for the 1st and 2nd persons, singular and plural are as follows:

1.p.s.	**nna** 'I'	1.p.p.	**rena** 'we'
2.p.s.	**wêna** 'you'	2.p.p.	**lena** 'you'

No distinction is made between sexes in the pronouns. The same forms are used to refer to

masculine, feminine and neuter.

Demonstrative pronouns

Demonstrative pronouns are marked structurally to indicate relative distances or positions. In earlier descriptions of demonstratives in Northern Sotho only two reference points were considered in the sub-classification of the different demonstrative pronouns, i.e. the object and the speaker. However, more recent research has revealed that the choice of a specific demonstrative also takes the relative position of the addressee into consideration.

The following forms and implications are distinguished for the demonstrative pronouns in Northern Sotho (taking cl.7 as an example):

Position 1

Position 1(a) Structure: Concordial morpheme + root: **sê**
Implication: 'this one here' (e.g. **selêpê** 'axe')
The speaker and the addressee are relatively close to each other as well as to the object referred to.

Position 1(b) Structure: Concordial morpheme + root + suffix **-no** or **-khwi**: **sêno, sêkhwi**
Implication: 'this one right here'
The speaker and the addressee are relatively far from each other, while the object is next to or close to the speaker.

Position 2

Position 2(a) Structure: Concordial morpheme + root + suffix **-o**: **sêo**
Implication: 'that one'
The speaker and the addressee are at a distance from each other, while the object is nearer to the addressee than to the speaker.

Position 2(b) Structure: Concordial morpheme + root + suffix **-uwê**: **sêuwê**
Implication: 'that one'
As in the case of Position 2(a), the speaker and the addressee are once again relatively far from each other, but the object in this case is directly next to or near to the addressee.

Position 3 Structure: Concordial morpheme + root + suffix **-la** (or **-lê** in classes 2, 6 and

16): **sêla**
Implication: 'that one yonder/over there'
The speaker and the addressee are close to one another, while the object is far away from both of them.

Quantitative pronouns

Structure: Concordial morpheme as the prefix + root **-ôhlê** 'the whole of/all'
Example: cl.2 **(batho) bôhlê** 'all (the people)'

The first and second persons do not have their own quantitative pronouns, but make use of those of classes 1 and 2 respectively.

Possessive pronouns

Possessive pronouns resemble the absolute pronouns, except in the case of the first and second person singular and class 1, i.e.

1.p.s.	**ka**	'my'
2.p.s.	**gago**	'your'
cl.1	**gagwê**	'his'

Alternative forms which denote communal possession are distinguished for the first and second person plural and class 2, i.e.

1.p.p.	**gêšo**	'our family's ...'
2.p.p.	**gêno**	'your family's ...'
cl.2	**gabô**	'their family's ...'

Qualificative nouns

Relative and adjectival nouns are recognised as sub-classes of nouns which are used to qualify other nouns. They are distinguished from each other on the grounds of their manner of congruence with the noun which they qualify (head noun), compare:

Relative nouns:

Structure: head noun + so-called qualificative particle (QP) of the head noun + relative noun which mainly belongs to class 6 or 14, e.g.

monna	**yô**	**bohlale**
head noun cl.1 +	QP cl.1 +	noun cl.14
'a clever man'		

Adjectival nouns:

Structure: head noun + so-called qualificative particle of the head noun + adjectival noun of which the prefix is copied from the class of the head noun, e.g.

monna	**yô**		**mo** -	**têlêlê**
head noun cl.1 +	QP cl.1	+	CP cl.1 +	adj. stem
'a tall man'				

Degrees of comparison are not expressed by the inflection of words, but by various other means such as e.g. the use of a locative expression with **go**:

mosetsana ke yô monyane go mošemane

'the girl is smaller than the boy'

Also see degrees of comparison under **adverbs**.

Numerals

Cardinal numbers from 1 to 10 are concordially linked to the noun they refer to, but may be grouped into four groups according to their structure, i.e.

(a) 1 **monna o tee** 'one man'

The enumerative root **-tee** 'one' is one of four roots which are linked to the head noun by means of a concord which is identical to the subject concord (the other roots being **-fe?** 'which one?', **-šele** 'strange' and **-šoro** 'vicious'). Enumeratives are also referred to in some sources as radical pronouns or they are classified under qualificatives.

(b) 2 - 5 **banna ba babêdi** 'two men'
metse yê meraro 'three villages'
mahlo a manê 'four eyes'
bômalome ba bahlano 'five uncles'

The structure follows the pattern of the qualificative nouns described in the preceding section.

(c) 6 - 7 **dilêpê tšê di selêlago** 'six axes'
maotwana a a šupago 'seven wheels'

See verbal relative under verbal morphology.

(d) 8 - 10 **bakgalabjê ba seswai** 'eight old men'
matšatši a senyane 'nine days'
dipudi tšê lesome 'ten goats'

These numerals agree in structure with that of the relative nouns described earlier on.

Ordinal numbers may be formed e.g. in class 14, cf. **bobêdi** 'second', **boraro** 'third', **bonê** 'fourth', etc.

Particles

Northern Sotho linguists have not been using the term 'particle' in a uniform way, and still there is no consensus as to whether and to what extent the term can or should be applied. Once again this can be attributed to the inconsistent way in which word tests are applied with the view to identifying word categories. Be that as it may, the following are some of the "particles", regarded as prefixes by some and as words by others, which have generally been identified:

(a) The qualificative particle:
mosadi yô motêlêlê 'a tall woman'

(b) The connective particle:
o bolêla le bôna/ o bolêla nabô 'he/she is talking to them'

(c) The possessive particle:

ngwana wa kgôši 'the child of the chief'

(d) The instrumental particle:

moithuti o araba ka bohlale 'the student answers wisely'

(e) Copulative particles:

monna ke kgôši 'the man is a chief'

banna ga se basepedi 'the men are not travellers'

(f) Agentive particle:

mmutla o bonwa ke mpša 'the hare is seen by the dog'

VERBAL MORPHOLOGY

Essentially the verb consists of a SAG and a verb stem. Other prefixes which may be included in the verb are the OAG, the imperfect tense morpheme, reflexive prefix **i-**, markers of aspect, tense and negation. The basic verb stem is morphologically bipartite, i.e. consisting of a verbal root plus a vowel ending as a suffix, although some exceptions do occur (e.g. **-ɪe** 'say', **-le** 'be'). The verb stem can be extended by numerous extensions which are inserted between the root and the final vowel, whereby a large number of semantic nuances of the basic meaning of the root may be achieved. The affixation of these pre- and suffixes does in certain cases result in phonological changes, which cannot be dealt with in the scope of this sketch. Verbal extensions (only norm variants will be indicated) include the following:

Verbal extensions

The applied: **-êl-**

-ag-a 'build' > **-agêla** 'build for'

The causative: **-iš-**

-ɪêk-a 'buy' > **-ɪêkiša** 'cause to buy' i.e. 'sell'

The reciprocal: **-an-**

-bôn-a 'see' > **-bônana** 'see one another'

The passive: **-iw-/-w-**

-ɪut-a 'teach' > **-ɪutwa** 'be taught'

The perfect: **-ilê**

-bop-a 'create' > **-bopilê** 'created'

This suffix differs from the others in that it takes the place of the final suffix **-a**.

The neutral extensions:

Neutro-active: **-al-**

-bôn-a 'see' > **-bônala** 'be seen'

Neutro-passive: **-êg-**

> **-bônêga** 'be visible'

Intensive-neutro-active: **-agal-**

> **-bônagala** 'be clearly seen'

The reversive extensions:

Transitive reversive: **-oll-**, **(-olol-**, or **-ol-)**

-bôf-a 'tie' > **-bôfolla** 'loosen'

Intransitive reversive: **-og-** or **-olog-**

> **-bôfologa** 'become untied'

The iterative: **-ak-**

-hlab-a'stab' > **-hlabaka** 'stab repeatedly'

The contactive: **-aɪ-**

***-sw-a** > **-swaɪa** 'catch'

The positional: **-am-**

-hlôm-a 'plant, put in'

> **-hlômama** 'firmly planted, stand straight'

The dispersive: **-alal-**

***-ɪap-a** > **-ɪapalala** 'lie stretched out'

The associative: **-agan-** (or **-akan-**)

-bôf-a 'tie' > **-bôfagana** 'bind to each other'

Denominative extensions: **-f-** and **-fal-**

-nate 'tasty' (nominal root) > **-natefa** 'be tasty'

Various combinations (mostly following predetermined sequences) and reduplications of the above extensions are possible. Reduplications often result in intensification of meaning, cf.

causative: **-iš-iš-**

-nyak-a 'look for' > **-nyakišiša** 'search thoroughly'

Some of the above extensions have resulted in fossilised forms, the original root from which they were derived not being recognised anymore, e.g.

***-sw-a**: contactive extension **-ar-** > **-swara** 'catch'

***-ap-a**: transitive reversive extension **-ol-** > **-apola** 'undress'

Mood

There is an ongoing debate among Northern Sotho grammarians regarding the matter of moods, but traditionally the following eight moods are distinguished according to the morphological idiosyncrasy of the verb: the indicative, situative (also called the participial), relative, consecutive, subjunctive, habitual, infinitive and imperative. In the first three moods the verb may be marked for tense, e.g. by the prefixal elements **-tla-** or **-tlô-** for the future tense, or by the suffix **-ilê** (and its variants) for the past tense. Various negative markers are employed, depending on the mood of the verb, e.g. **ga-** is used in the present and past tense of indicative verbs, **-sa-** occurs in the participial and relative moods, while **-se-** is encountered in the remaining moods. Due to limited space only the indicative form of the verb will be discussed in more detail, while the salient morphological characteristics of the other moods will be pointed out to make identification possible.

Indicative:

The subject agreement marker of class 1 is **o-** in the positive (compared to **a-** in the other moods). The indicative verb makes use of the negative morpheme **ga-** and employs the so-called imperfect tense morpheme **-a-** under certain conditions (see section on Syntax), e.g.
Present tense, positive:

morutiši	**o**	**a**	**ruta**
subject	SAG	Tense	verb stem

'The teacher teaches'

morutiši	**o**	**ruta**	**bana**
subject	SAG	verb stem	object

'The teacher teaches children'

In the negative the form of the verb is the same for both examples given above, cf.
Present tense, negative:

morutiši	**ga**	**a**	**rute (bana)**
subject	neg.morpheme	SAG	verb stem (object)

The imperfect tense **-a-** is deleted in the negative form, while the final vowel of the verb stem is replaced by **-e**.

Past tense, positive:

The verb is marked by the suffix **-ilê**, but phonological changes are required in certain environments, resulting in fused forms and variants such as, for example, **-itšê**, **-nê**, **-mê**, **-e**. Compare the regular form

-ruta 'teach': **morutiši o rutilê bana**
'the teacher taught the children'

with a fused form such as:

-šala 'stay behind':
batswadi ba šêtšê morago
'the parents stayed behind'

and a variant, e.g.

-thuša 'help': **lesogana le thušitšê mokgêkolo**
'the young man helped the old woman'

Past tense, negative:

The past tense of the indicative can be negated in one of several ways, one being by means of the negative formatives **ga se** followed by the verb in the consecutive, e.g.

ngwana ga se a homola 'the child did not keep quiet'

Future tense, positive:

The future tense morpheme **-tla-** or **-tlô-** occurs between the subject agreement marker and the verb stem, e.g.

mosadi o tlô gotša mollô 'the woman will kindle a fire'

Future tense, negative:

The subject agreement marker is followed by the negative marker **ka se**, while the verbal stem takes the ending **-ê**, e.g.

mosadi a ka se gotšê mollô 'the woman will not kindle a fire'

The subject agreement marker of the 1.p.s. in the negative of the future tense form, is **n-** instead of **ke-**, cf.

nka se lebalê 'I will not forget'

Situative:

The SAG of class 1 is **a-** in the positive and negative. In the case of monosyllabic verb stems the stabilizer **e-** is used before the stem in the positive form of the present tense, e.g.

gê	**monna**	**a**	**e-**	**ja...**	**(o tlô fôla)**
conj.	subject	SAG	stabilizer	verb stem	

'if the man eats...(he will recover)'

In the negative the negative marker **-sa-** is used, while the verb stem ends on **-e**, e.g.

gê	**monna**	**a**	**sa**	**je**...
conj.	subject	SAG	neg.marker	verb stem

Relative:

The verb in the relative is marked by a qualificative particle (or relativiser), followed by a relative concord (i.e. the SAG which is **a-** for cl.1) and the verb stem suffixed by the morpheme **-go** (or alternatively **-ng**), e.g.

letšatši	**lê**	**le**	**fiša** -	**go**
subject	qual.particle	rel. concord	verb stem	rel.suffix

'the sun which is burning, i.e. a hot day'

The negative form of the relative verb is characterised by the marker **-sa-**, while the vowel morpheme preceding the final suffix **-go** is **-e-**, e.g.

letšatši lê le sa fišego

Consecutive:

The consecutive form of the verb is characterised by the consecutive marker **-a** which merges with the SAG, e.g.

Mpša e swere mmutla,	**ya**	**bogola**
	SAG	verb stem

'The dog caught a hare, and then barked'

In the negative the marker **-se-** is used after the SAG, while the terminative vowel of the verb stem is **-ê**, e.g.

Mpša e swere mmutla, ya se bogolê

Subjunctive:

This form of the verb is marked by the SAG (which is **a-** for cl.1) and the verbal suffix **-ê** in the positive and negative, e.g.

Bana ba ithuta dithutô gore **ba** **phêthê** **tlhahlobô**
SAG verb stem object
'The children learn the lessons in order to pass the examination'

The negative marker **-se-** marks the subjunctive verb as follows:

Bana ba ithuta dithutô gore ba se nyamišê morutiši
'The children learn the lessons in order not to disappoint the teacher'

The subjunctive may be used to express commands. Where the command is directed to more than one person, the verb stem is marked by the suffix **-ng**, e.g.

Le sepelêng!
SAG verb stem
'You (plural) must go!'

Habitual:

Once again the SAG of cl.1 is **a-**. The verb stem ends on the suffix **-e**, e.g.

Dimpša di swara mebutla **di** **bogole**
SAG verb stem
'The dogs catch hares and usually bark'

In the negative the SAG is followed by the negative marker **-se-**, while the verb stem ends on **-e**, e.g.

Dimpša di swara mebutla di se bogole

Infinitive:

The infinitive has nominal as well as verbal characteristics. Its affinity with the noun classes stems from its having a class prefix **go-** (cf. cl.15) and being able to take nominal suffixes such as the diminutive and locative. Its verbal features include the fact that the infinitive may appear in the negative and that it may include an object concord and verbal extensions. In the positive form the verb ends on **-a**, while the negative is marked by the verbal prefix **-se-**

and the final vowel **-ê**, e.g.

go apea 'to cook'
go se apeê 'not to cook'

Imperative:

This form of the verb is used to express commands. It is characterised by the absence of a SAG. The verb stem ends on **-a** when one person is addressed, while the suffix **-ng** is added in the case of more than one addressee.

Bolêla! 'Speak!' (you, singular)
Bolêlang! 'Speak!' (you, plural)

The marker **-se-** and the vowel ending **-ê** mark the negative form:

Se bolêlê!
Se bolêlêng!

MORPHOLOGICALLY HETEROGENEOUS CATEGORIES

Adverbs, ideophones, interjections, conjunctions and interrogatives do not share characteristic morphological features by which these categories can be uniquely identified. Some sources, for example, do not assign a separate word category status to adverbs, conjunctions and interrogatives and rather classify them under one of the other word categories. Only a few comments will be made regarding adverbs, conjunctions and interrogatives:

Adverbs

Adverbs are morphologically heterogeneous and belong to a number of word categories. Basic adverbs are limited (e.g. **kudu** 'very/much', **ruri** 'really', etc.) and are supplemented by nouns from the noun classes which are employed as adverbs, e.g. **maabane** 'yesterday' - noun cl.6. Words derived from other word categories may also be marked formally, e.g. by means of the locative suffix **-ng**, e.g.

motse 'village' (noun cl.3)

> **motseng** adverb of place, i.e. 'at/in the village'

or by means of the prefix **ga-**:

-nyane 'small', (adj.stem)

> **ganyane** adverb of manner, i.e. 'somewhat, a little'

Degrees of comparison of adverbs are not formally marked in the form of the word, but rather by means of a verb 'to surpass', cf.

mmutla o kitima go feta mpša ya ka 'the hare runs faster than my dog'

or: **mmutla o feta mpša ya ka ka lebelô** 'the hare surpasses my dog in speed'

Conjunctions

There are hardly any 'basic' conjunctions (cf. **gê** 'if'), most conjunctions having been derived from other word categories such as the verb, e.g. **gore** 'so that', **fêla** 'but', etc.

Interrogatives

Interrogatives have also been classified into different word categories, e.g. **mang?** 'who?' - noun class 1a, **eng?** 'what?' - noun class 9, **afa?**, **na?** (question marker) - particles, **neng?** 'when?' - adverb, etc.

SYNTAX

The following abbreviations are used in this section:

Abs.pro.	Absolute pronoun	Inf.	Infinitive
Adj.CC.	Adjective concord	Imp.	Imperative mood
AG	Agreement marker	OAG	Object agreement marker
AG.PR.	Agentive prefix	Particip.	Participial mood
Aux.	Auxiliary verb stem	Past.	Past tense

Conj.	Conjunction	Pres.	Present tense
CP	Class prefix	Progr.	Progressive
Consec.	Consecutive mood	SAG	Subject agreement marker
Future	Future tense	Tense	Imperfect tense morpheme
Hab.	Habitual mood		
Indic.	Indicative mood		

WORD ORDER

The sentence

The basic or dominant word-order in sentences with a neutral word-order pattern is SVO, e.g.

Mpša	**e - lomilê**	**ngwana**
S	**V**	**O**
Dog	SAG bit	child

'The dog bit a/the child'

Concordial agreement between subject NP's and the verb is compulsory (see SAG above), whereas agreement between object NP's and verbs is determined by the context of discourse (see below). Compare, with regard to subject agreement, the following:

Mpša	**e**	-	**lomilê**	**ngwana**
Dog	SAG		bit	child
Dimpša	**di**	-	**lomilê**	**ngwana**
Dogs	SAG		bit	child
Monang	**o**	-	**lomilê**	**ngwana**
Mosquito	SAG		bit	child

Subjects which agree with verbs are always *definite*, i.e. they refer to known or given discourse information. Such information is normally also *topical*, and can therefore logically not be subjected to questioning, e.g.

***Mpša**	**efe**	**e-lomilê**	**ngwana?**
Dog	which	SAG-bit	girl

'Which dog has bitten the girl?'

***Dimpša**	**dife**	**di-lomilê**	**ngwana?**
Dogs	which	SAG-bit	girl

'Which dogs have bitten the girl?'

Northern Sotho lacks articles such as *a dog* (indefinite) and *the dog* (definite). Consequently, the language reverts to other strategies, namely *word order* and *agreement*, to mark this distinction. In this regard, the following applies with regard to the syntactic positions in which information units are allowed to appear: *The preverbal position is exclusively reserved for definite NP's, whereas the postverbal position can accommodate either definite or indefinite NP's.*

In an example such as

Mpša	**e-lomilê**	**ngwana**
Dog	SAG-bit	child

'The dog bit a child'

the object noun **ngwana** can be questioned, since, in this context, it can be interpreted as having an *indefinite* reading. Hence

Mpša	**e-lomilê**	**ngwana**	**ofe?**
Dog	SAG-bit	child	which

'Which child did the dog bite?'

That *definiteness* is marked by agreement cum word order is evident from the fact that when an object noun such as **ngwana** 'child' is allowed to agree with the verb by means of the object agreement marker (OAG), it is no longer possible to question this noun:

***Mpša**	**e-mo-lomilê**	**ngwana**	**ofe**
Dog	SAG-OAG-bit	child	which

The role played by word order cum agreement in the marking of the *definite* v. *indefinite* distinction becomes clear when it is observed that object nouns which are moved from the postverbal to the preverbal position also cannot be subjected to questioning. In an example such as

Ngwana,	**mpša**	**e-mo-lomilê**
Child	dog	SAG-OAG-bit

'As for the child, the dog has bitten him/her'

the object noun **ngwana** has been subjected to *topicalisation* by leftward movement, and an agreement rule becomes operative according to which object NP's which have been moved to the preverbal position must always show agreement with the verb. Hence the occurrence of the OAG **-mo-** in **e-mo-lomilê**. The reason why object agreement becomes compulsory in instances such as these, is because the argument roles of *subject* and *object* can become confused when NP's are presented in non-basic positions, i.e. in positions which are different from those in basic SVO-sentences. Due to a well developed system of grammatical agreement, confusion of this nature can be avoided by explicitly marking the syntactic roles of NP's in verbs by means of agreement morphemes. Due to the role played by agreement in this regard, the syntactic position which NP's occupy becomes of secondary importance and the word order pattern followed in the sentence doesn't really matter, e.g.:

Basic SVO: **Mpša**	**e-lomilê**	**ngwana**
Dog	SAG-bit	child

'The dog bit the child'

Non-basic

OSV: **Ngwana mpša e-mo-lomilê**
Child dog SAG-OAG-bit
'As for the child, the dog bit him/her'

SOV: **Mpša ngwana e-mo-lomilê**
Dog child SAG-OAG-bit
'As for the dog, it bit the child'

OVS: **Ngwana e-mo-lomilê mpša**
Child SAG-OAG-bit dog
'As for the child, it bit him/her, the dog that is'

The noun phrase

Like in other languages of the Bantu family, each noun in Northern Sotho is assigned to a particular noun class in accordance with the form of the prefix (CP) which occurs in the noun. In the majority of cases, a singular noun and its corresponding plural counterpart can be grouped in a class pair, e.g:

Class	*Prefix*	*Nominal root*	*Noun*	
1	**mo-**	**-tho**	**motho**	'person'
2	**ba-**	**-tho**	**batho**	'people'
3	**mo-**	**-tse**	**motse**	'village'
4	**me-**	**-tse**	**metse**	'villages', etc.

All words that enter into a syntactic relationship with a noun in a sentence must agree with that noun by means of an agreement marker. Consequently, verbs and nominal qualificatives such as adjectives, demonstratives, relatives, etc. *always* show compulsory agreement with their nominal heads. So, for example, the adjectival root **-raro** 'three' occurs as follows with nouns from different noun classes:

Class 2 (prefix ba-): **Batho ba bararo**
People Adj.CC. CP-three
'Three people'

Class 4 (prefix me-): **Metse yê meraro**
Villages Adj.CC. CP-three
'Three villages'

Compare also a slightly different structure formed with the enumerative root **-tee** 'one' in which only one agreement marker (AG) is used:

Class 5 (prefix le-): **Letlakala le tee**
Page AG one
'One page'

Class 7 (prefix se-): **Selêpê se tee**
Axe AG one
'One axe'

The relationship between a head noun and its qualifiers is therefore always an *anaphoric* one, and once the head noun is deleted for discourse-pragmatic reasons, the qualificative acquires a *pronominal* character in the sense that it denotes exactly the same referent as the deleted head noun. Compare:

Batho ba bararo ba-tlilê
People Adj.CC CP-three SAG-came
'Three people came'

***Deletion of head noun* batho:**

Ø ba bararo ba-tlilê
Adj.CC CP-three SAG - came
'Three came' (i.e. people)

An important observation that can therefore be made with regard to Northern Sotho (and possibly all other Bantu languages with well developed systems of grammatical agreement), is that pronominalisation results from the *deletion* of the head noun, and not from the *substitution* of the head noun with a pronoun. A further implication of this interpretation of the data is that forms which are used with a pronominal function are not fully fledged pronouns in the traditional sense of the word. Such forms fulfil other primary functions in the language, such as, for example, that of qualificatives, and their pronominal usage is only *secondary* in nature.

If the pronominalisation of NP's is viewed in this way, it follows that the deletion of subject NP's' in continuous discourse will always result in pronominalisation due to such NPs' compulsory agreement with verbs by means of a concordial morpheme, e.g.:

Monna	**o-tlilê**
Man	SAG-came

'The man came'

Deletion of subject NP:

Ø	**o-tlilê**
	SAG-came

'He came'

The position of object NP's is slightly different in this respect, since agreement between object NP's which occur in the basic object position (i.e. VO) and verbs is not compulsory. In a sentence such as the following, the object noun **selêpê** 'axe' shows no agreement with the verb **o-rôbilê** 'he broke':

Monna	**o-rôbilê**	**selêpê**
Man	SAG-broke	axe

'The man broke the/an axe'

Whether a definite or indefinite reading is assigned to such object NP's depends solely on the

context of discourse in which the sentence occurs. It is possible, though, to explicitly mark the status of the object NP as definite, by allowing **selêpê** to agree with the verb. Hence:

Monna	**o-se-rôbilê**	**selêpê**
Man	SAG-OAG-broke	axe

'The man broke *it*, the axe that is'

Definite object NP's such as **selêpê** can be deleted in continuous discourse, which will result in the object agreement morpheme **-se-** acquiring pronominal characteristics:

Monna	**o-se-rôbilê**
Man	SAG-OAG-broke
Man	he-it-broke

'The man broke *it*'

The verb phrase

Mood

Traditionally, eight moods are recognised in Northern Sotho, i.e. *indicative* and *imperative* which are independent or autonomous, and *participial, relative, subjunctive, consecutive, habitual* and *infinitive* which are regarded as dependent since verbs in these moods always occur in subordinate clauses.

Following recent research into mood, modality, tense and aspect, serious questions are being raised regarding the modal paradigm as proposed by traditionalists for Northern Sotho. So, for example, the reputed modal status of the *relative*, *infinitive*, *consecutive* and *habitual* has been questioned, but this debate cannot be perused in the limited space available. Therefore, the focus will mainly be on the most salient morphological and syntactico-semantic characteristics of traditionally recognised modal categories excluding the relative:

Indicative

Indicative verbs express *assertives*, i.e. statements of fact, and are therefore associated with *epistemic modality*, e.g.:

Mosadi	**o-boilê**
Woman	SAG-returned

'The woman has returned'

When the indicative verb occurs in the present tense, the prefixal morpheme **-a-** must appear between the subject agreement marker and the verb stem when either one of the following conditions apply: (a) if the verb is the last word in the sentence; or (b) when the object NP is definite, and agrees with the verb by means of the object agreement marker. Due to the fact that the occurrence of the prefix **-a-** is restricted to the present tense, it has become customary to refer to it as the *imperfect/present tense marker -a-*. Other scholars are however of the opinion that this **-a-** is not a tense marker but rather a discourse device which marks a pragmatic distinction between old and new discourse information in respect of that which follows the verb. It is argued that the presence of **-a-** signals that the information which follows the verb is old/known and therefore 'parenthetic' in nature in the sense that it need not be decoded. The absence of **-a-**, on the other hand, indicates that the information following the verb is new and should therefore, of necessity, be decoded. In the examples below the prefix **-a-** is glossed TENSE for convenience sake:

The verb as the last word in the sentence:

Mosadi	**o-a-boa**
Woman	SAG-TENSE-return

The verb followed by a definite object NP which agrees with it:

Mosadi	**o-a-bo-apea,**	**bogôbê**
Woman	SAG-TENSE-OAG-cook	porridge

'The woman cooks it, the porridge that is'

The verb followed by an indefinite object NP:

Mosadi	**o-apea**	**bogôbê**
Woman	SAG-cook	porridge

'The woman cooks porridge'

But not

***Mosadi**	**o-a-apea**	**bogôbê**
Woman	SAG-TENSE-cook	porridge

Since the status of the object **bogôbê** 'porridge' is not overtly marked as old/known in the last two examples above, the occurrence of the prefix **-a-** in the verb is blocked.

Imperative

Imperatives are used to express directives/commands, and are therefore associated with *deontic modality*. A characteristic morphological feature of imperative verbs is that they lack a subject agreement morpheme. A possible explanation for the absence of a SAG is that imperatives are always directed to the second person who act(s) as the logical or implied subject of the action. A morphological distinction is drawn between a single addressee and more than one addressee by the utilisation of a suffixal morpheme **-ng**. Commands directed to an individual are *unmarked* (or zero i.e. **ø**), whereas those which are directed to more than one addressee are marked by **-ng**, e.g.

Tloga(ø)!	'Go away!' (You, singular)
Tlogang!	'Go away!' (You, plural)

Like the *indicative*, the *imperative* is an independent mood as can be seen from the examples above. Hence, *imperatives* often occur as the main clause in complex sentences, whereas verbs in the subordinate clause(s) occur in a dependent mood such as the subjunctive. (See below.)

The remainder of the moods are *dependent* on either an *indicative* or an *imperative* main clause, and the choice of a particular mood in the subordinate clause is determined by semantic factors such as the following:

Subjunctive

When incorporated into *indicative* main clauses, *subjunctive* subordinate clauses express *purpose* or *reason*, and consequently always follow the conjunction **gore** 'so that'/'in order that':

Mosadi	**o-gôtša**	**mollô**	**gore**	**a-apeê**
	(INDICATIVE)			(SUBJUNCTIVE)
Woman	SAG-kindles	fire	so-that	SAG-cook

'The woman kindles the fire so that she can cook'

A very common application of the subjunctive is in series of commands where the first command is rendered in the imperative, whereas the following and subsequent commands are expressed by the subjunctive verb:

Kitima	**o-mo-nyakê**	**o-mo-kgopêlê**
(IMP.)	(SUBJUNCTIVE)	(SUBJUNCTIVE)
Run	SAG-OAG-look-for	SAG-OAG-ask

'Run, look for him and ask him'

Consecutive

Consecutive verbs always follow on indicative verbs in the past tense, and are used to express series of actions which follow one another chronologically:

Mosadi	**o-rêkilê**	**nama,**	**a-gôtša**	**mollô,**	**a-apea**
	(INDIC.PAST)		(CONSEC.)		(CONSEC.)
Woman	SAG-bought	meat	SAG-kindle	fire	SAG-cook

'The woman bought meat, (then) kindled a fire and (then) cooked'

Habitual

Verbs in this mood follow on indicative verbs in the present tense and express series of successive actions which are carried out as a habit:

Mosadi	**o-rêka**	**nama,**	**a-gôtše**	**mollô,**	**a-apee**
	(INDIC.PRES.)		(HAB.)		(HAB.)
Woman	SAG-buy	meat	SAG-kindle	fire	SAG-cook

'The woman buys meat, and (habitually) kindles a fire and (habitually) cooks'

Participial

Participial verbs preceded by the conjunction **gê** express condition, and convey the meaning *if*, *provided that*, *on the condition that*, etc. Depending on the context, the participial verb may occur in either the present or past tense, whereas the main verb usually occurs in the indicative:

Mosadi	**o-gôtša**	**mollô**	**gê**	**a-rêkilê**	**nama**
	(INDIC.)		(CONJ.)	(PARTICIP.)	
Woman	SAG-kindle	fire	if	SAG-bought	meat

'The woman kindles a fire if she has bought meat'

Without the conjunction **gê**, the participial verb expresses an action which is carried out simultaneously with the action which is expressed by the main (indicative) verb:

Mosadi	**o-gotša**	**mollô**	**a-apea**	**nama**
	(INDIC.)		(PARTICIP.)	
Woman	SAG-kindle	fire	SAG-cook	meat

'The woman kindles the fire while she is cooking meat'

Although participial verbs such as **a-apea** 'while she is cooking' in this instance have exactly the same morphological shape as that of verbs in the consecutive mood, participial and consecutive verbs are characterised by different tonal patterns.

Infinitive

The infinitive consists of the infinitive prefix **go-** and a verb stem (e.g. **-apea** 'cook') below. The categorial status of infinitive verbs is characterised in grammars as *nomino-verbal*, since infinitive verbs exhibit features of both verbs and nouns. So, for example, infinitive verbs can be negated which is a typical verbal characteristic, e.g.:

Positive:	**go-apea**	'to cook'
Negative:	**go-se-apeê**	'not to cook' (where **-se-** is the negative formative)

However, like all other nouns, the infinitive exhibits a class prefix, e.g. **go-** which is labelled as the prefix of class 15 in traditional grammars. Infinitives can also occur as the subject or object of a sentence, as in the following example where the infinitive **go-apea** 'to cook' functions as the grammatical subject of the verb **go-a-lapiša** 'is tiresome':

Go-apea	**go-a-lapiša**
(INF.)	(INDICATIVE)
To-cook	SAG-TENSE-is-tiresome

'To cook is tiresome'

Tense

Absolute tenses

Three absolute tenses are distinguished, i.e. *present*, *past* and *future*. The present and past tenses (which are also commonly called the *imperfect* and *perfect tense*, respectively) are marked in the final vowel of the verb, whereas the future tense is marked by the prefix **-tlô-** which has a free variant **-tla-**. The latter prefix has developed historically from the verb stem **-tla** 'come' which still occurs as a verb stem with the same meaning in modern Northern Sotho. Tense distinctions occur only in indicative and participial verbs, whereas verbs in other moods are neutral with regard to tense. In the following examples tense distinctions are illustrated with regard to indicative verbs:

Present:	**Mosadi**	**o-rêk-a**	**nama**
	Woman	SAG-buy-PRES.	meat

'The woman buys meat'

Past:	**Mosadi**	**o-rêk-ilê**	**nama**
	Woman	SAG-buy-PAST	meat

'The woman bought meat'

Future:	**Mosadi**	**o-tlô/tla-rêka**	**nama**
	Woman	SAG-FUTURE-buy	meat

'The woman shall buy meat'

Although the norm variant of the past tense marker is **-ilê**, a variety of allomorphs occur, the forms of which are determined by the phonetic shape of the final syllable of the verb. Hence, whereas **-rêka** 'buy' becomes **-rêkilê** 'bought', forms such as the following are encountered in past tense verbs: **-tloša** 'remove' : **-tlošitšê** 'removed'; **-senya** 'damage' : **-sentšê** 'damaged'; **-gana** 'refuse' : **-ganne** 'refused', and several others.

Relative tenses

Relative tenses are expressed by the auxiliary verb stem **-bê** which occurs in relative past tense forms, and which has the variant **-ba** in relative future tense forms.

Relative past tense

In the relative past tense, the complementary verb may either occur in the present tense (with ending **-a**), in the past tense (with ending **-ilê** or one of its variant forms) or in the future tense (with the prefix **-tlô** or its variant **-tla**):

Mosadi	**o-bê**	**a-rêka**	**nama**
Woman	SAG-AUX.	SAG-buy	meat

'The woman was buying meat'

Mosadi	**o-bê**	**a-rêkilê**	**nama**
Woman	SAG-AUX.	SAG-bought	meat

'The woman had bought meat'

Mosadi	**o-bê**	**a-tlô/tla-rêka**	**nama**
Woman	SAG-AUX.	SAG-FUTURE-buy	meat

'The woman would have bought meat'

Relative future tense

In this tense form, the auxiliary verb occurs in the future tense and therefore changes from **-bê** to **-ba**, whereas the complement may appear in either the present (with final vowel **-a**) or past (with final **-ilê**) tense:

Mosadi	**o-tlô/tla-ba**	**a-rêka**	**nama**
Woman	SAG-FUTURE-AUX.	SAG-buy	meat

'The woman will be buying meat'

Mosadi	**o-tlô/tla-ba**	**a-rêkilê**	**nama**
Woman	SAG-FUTURE-AUX.	SAG-bought	meat

'The woman will have bought meat'

Aspect

Northern Sotho does not have a well developed system of aspectual marking, the only instance of overtly marked aspect being the progressive which is characterised by the prefix **-sa-**, e.g.:

Mosadi	**o-rêka**	**nama**
Woman	SAG-buy	meat

'The woman buys meat'

Mosadi	**o-sa-rêka**	**nama**
Woman	SAG-PROGR.-buy	meat

'The woman is still buying meat'

Although the distinction between perfective and imperfective aspect is not otherwise overtly marked, verbs in the present tense are normally associated with imperfective aspect, whereas those in the past tense are generally viewed as expressing perfective aspect, e.g. present (with verb ending **-a**): **o-rêka nama** 'he/she buys meat' and past (with ending **-ilê**): **o-rêkilê nama** 'he/she bought meat'. In the case of the relative past tenses with the auxiliary **-bê**, the structure as a whole can however express either imperfective or perfective past tense actions, depending on the tense in which the complementary verb occurs, e.g.:

Past tense with imperfective aspect:

Mosadi	**o-bê**	**a-rêka**	**nama**
Woman	SAG-AUX.	SAG-buy	meat

'The woman was buying meat'

Past tense with perfective aspect:

Mosadi	**o-bê**	**a-rêkilê**	**nama**
Woman	SAG-AUX.	SAG-buy	meat

'The woman had bought meat'

Certain verbs have a stative meaning when used with the past tense suffix **-ilê** or one of its variants, e.g.:

-lapa 'become tired': **Mosadi o-lapilê** 'The woman is tired'
-gola 'grow up': **Mosadi o-godilê** 'The woman is grown up' (i.e. 'she is old')

Grammarians are not in agreement as to the aspectual status of such verbs. Whereas some associate such examples with perfectivity, there are those who regard them as instances representing imperfectivity. The major argument which is usually presented in support of the latter view is that the progressive prefix **-sa-** which is one of the most salient markers of imperfectivity in Northern Sotho, can occur in such verbs, e.g.:

Mosadi	**o-sa-lapilê**
Woman	SAG-PROGR.-be-tired

'The woman is still tired'

The latter group of linguists therefore maintain that, although the state of being tired emanates from a set of circumstances which reached a state of completion, the verbs **o-lapilê** 'she is tired' or **o-sa-lapilê** 'she is still tired' as such communicate a state which is in progress (i.e. which is incomplete) at the moment of communication.

Transitivity

Unextended verbs, i.e. verbs without verbal suffixes, may be either intransitive, single transitive and double transitive:

Intransitive:

Mosadi	**o-a-lwala**
Woman	SAG-TENSE-be-ill

'The woman is ill'

Single transitive:

Mosadi	**o-apea**	**bogôbê**
Woman	SAG-cook	porridge

'The woman cooks porridge'

Double transitive:

Mosadi	**o-fa**	**bana**	**bogôbê**
Woman	SAG-give	children	porridge

'The woman gives porridge to the children'

The indirect or secondary object (e.g. **bana** 'children') always precedes the direct or primary object (e.g. **bogôbê** 'porridge') in sentences with bi-transitive verbs.

Certain verbal extensions have a direct influence on transitivity, since they may either reduce the degree of transitivity (cf. the reciprocal **-an-**), or they may increase the degree of transitivity (cf. the applied **-êl-** and the causative **-iš-**) below:

The reciprocal -an-:

Double transitive reduced to single transitive

Mosadi	**o-fa**	**bana**	**bogôbê**
Woman	SAG-give	children	porridge

Mosadi	**le**	**bana**	**ba-fana**	**bogôbê**
Woman	and	children	SAG-give-one-another	porridge

Single transitive reduced to intransitive:

Mosadi	**o-bôna**	**bana**
Woman	SAG-see	children

Mosadi	**le**	**bana**	**ba-a-bônana**
Woman	and	children	SAG-TENSE-see-one-another

The applied -êl-:

Intransitivity increased to single transitivity

Mosadi	**o-a-thaba**
Woman	SAG-TENSE-become-full-of-joy

Mosadi	**o-thabêla**	**baêng**
Woman	SAG-rejoices-due-to	visitors

Single transitivity increased to double transitivity

Mosadi	**o-apea**	**bogôbê**
Woman	SAG-cooks	porridge

Mosadi	**o-apêla**	**bana**	**bogôbê**
Woman	SAG-cooks-for	children	porridge

The causative -iš-:

Intransitivity increased to single transitivity

Setimêla	**se-a-êma**
Train	SAG-TENSE-coming-to-standstill

Moôtlêdi	**o-êmiša**	**setimêla**
Driver	SAG-cause-to-stop	train

'The driver stops the train'

Single transitivity increased to double transitivity

Mosadi	**o-roka**	**diaparô**
Woman	SAG-sew	clothes

Mosadi	**o-rokêla**	**bana**	**diaparô**
Woman	SAG-sew-for	children	clothes

No instances occur where double transitive verbs become tri-transitive due to the influence of verbal extensions. Furthermore, only one object at a time can be pronominalised by means of the object agreement morpheme, i.e. two object agreement morphemes are not allowed to occur simultaneously in the same verb:

Pronominalisation of both objects (*ungrammatical)

***Mosadi**	**o-a-ba-di-rokêla**
Woman	SAG-TENSE-OAG-OAG-sew-for

'The woman sews for them (**-ba-**) them (**-di-**)'

Pronominalisation of direct object

Mosadi	**o-di-rokêla**	**bana**
Woman	SAG-OAG-sew-for	children

'The woman sews them (clothes) for the children'

Pronominalisation of indirect object

Mosadi	**o-ba-ɾokêla**	**diaparô**
Woman	SAG-OAG-sew-for	clothes

'The woman sews for them clothes'

When the context requires the pronominalisation of both objects, one is pronominalised by means of the object agreement morpheme which occurs as a prefix within the verb, whereas the other is pronominalised by means of the absolute pronoun which appears as a separate word after the verb. The choice of the agreement morpheme *vis-à-vis* the absolute pronoun for a specific one of the two objects is determined by context:

Mosadi	**o-ba-ɾokêla**	**tšôna**
Woman	SAG-OAG-sew-for	ABS.PRO.

'The woman sews for them (children) them (clothes)'

Mosadi	**o-di-ɾokêla**	**bôna**
Woman	SAG-OAG-sew-for	ABS.PRO.

'The woman sews them (clothes) for them (children)'

Combinations of extensions such as the applied, the causative and reciprocal may occur in the same verb, and this happens according to strict principles of linear ordering. So, for example, when both the applied (**-êl-**) and the reciprocal (**-an-**) occur in the same verb, the reciprocal always follows the applied, e.g.:

-ngwala	'write'
-ngwal-êl-a	'write for'
-ngwal-êl-an-a	'write for one another'
***-ngwal-an-êl-a**	(ungrammatical)

Where both the causative (**-iš-**) and the reciprocal (**-an-**) are used, the reciprocal must follow the causative. (In the examples below the final consonant of the verb root, i.e. **l** changes to

d under the influence of the following high vowel **i**):

-ngwala	'write'
-ngwad-iš-a	'cause to write/assist someone in writing'
-ngwad-iš-an-a	'assist one another in writing'
***-ngwal-an-iš-a**	(ungrammatical)

When all three suffixes are used, the causative **-iš-** occurs first, then the applied **-êl-**, followed by the reciprocal **-an-**. (In phonological environments such as these, the applied extension changes from **-êl-** to **-êtš-**):

-ɾêka	'buy'
-ɾêk-iš-a	'cause to buy, i.e. sell'
-ɾêk-iš-êtš-a	'cause to buy for, i.e. sell to someone'
-ɾêk-iš-êtš-an-a	'cause to buy for one another, i.e. sell to one another'

Any other linear arrangement leads to ungrammaticality.

Passive

Verbs can be passivized by means of either the extension **-iw-** or the extension **-w-**. The discussion of the passive will be illustrated with examples with the extension **-w-** only.

When an active sentence is passivized, (a) the passive extension is inserted between the verb root and the final vowel, (b) the logical subject and logical object switch positions; and (c) the prefix **ke** (which is commonly referred to as the agentive prefix) is introduced after the verb to mark the logical subject, e.g.:

Mosadi	**o-bôna**	**nôga**
Woman	SAG-see	snake

'The woman sees the/a snake'

Nôga	**e-bônwa**	**ke**	**mosadi**
Snake	SAG-be-seen	AG.PR.	woman

'The snake is being seen by a/the woman'

In the active sentence, the logical subject also acts as grammatical subject, since it agrees with the verb by means of the subject agreement morpheme. In the passive counterpart, the logical object occurs in the basic subject position, i.e. to the left of the verb, and hence triggers subject agreement by means of the subject agreement morpheme. Nouns such as **nôga** in the passive sentence above are therefore said to be logical objects, but grammatical subjects.

Since Northern Sotho does not have articles to mark the difference between definite and indefinite noun phrases, the position following the agentive prefix **ke.....** in passive sentences is very often one which accommodates *indefinite* noun phrases. This happens because indefinite noun phrases are, firstly, not allowed to occur in the preverbal position, and, secondly, they are not allowed to agree with the verb. The syntactic position following **ke....** complies with these requirements, since **ke** always occurs postverbally, and nouns following **ke** can never trigger verbal agreement. This, however, does not imply that noun phrases which follow **ke** are always indefinite. Definite noun phrases are also allowed to occur in this position, depending on discourse-pragmatic requirements. A noun such as **mosadi** 'woman' in the passive sentence above can therefore either be definite or indefinite, depending on the context in which the sentence occurs. What is never allowed, though, is the occurrence of *indefinite* noun phrases in the preverbal position.

TEXT WITH INTERLINEAR TRANSCRIPTION

The following is an extract from the 1965-version of the Northern Sotho Bible, *Genesis 1:1-10*. The practical orthography was slightly adapted to bring it in line with currently accepted orthographic principles. The English translation was taken from the Revised Standard Version of The Holy Bible, 1952 and 1971.

Mathômông Modimo o na a hlola legodimo le lefase. Gomme lefase le bê le
[matʰɔ̣mɔ̣ŋ mo̱limo o na a ɬola leɣo̱limo le lefa:se// ɣomme lefase le βɛ le
In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was

gobêlane le se na selô; gomme leswiswi le bê le le godimo ga bodiba; gomme
ɣoβɛla·ne le se na sɛ:lɔ/ ɣomme leɣsʷwisʷwi le βɛ le le ɣo̱limo ɣa βo̱li:βa/ ɣomme
without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and

Moya wa Modimo o bê o ôka godimo ga mêêtse. Gomme Modimo a re: A seêtša se bê
moja wa mo̱limo o βɛ o ɔk'a ɣo̱limo ɣa mɛ̣ɛ̣:ts'e// ɣomme mo̱limo a· re/ a seɛtʃ'a se βɛ
the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let

gôna! Gomme seêtša sa ba gôna. Gomme Modimo a bôna seêtša e le sê sebotse;
ɣɔ:na// ɣomme seɛtʃ'a sa βa ɣɔ:na// ɣomme mo̱limo a βɔna seɛtʃ'a e le sɛ seβo:ts'e/
there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good;

gomme Modimo a aroganya seêtša le leswiswi. Gomme Modimo a bitša seêtša a re
ɣomme mo̱limo a aroɣaɲa seɛtʃ'a le leɣsʷwi:sʷwi// ɣomme mo̱limo a βitʃ'a seɛtʃ'a a re
and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day,

ke mosegare, gomme a bitša leswiswi a re ke bošego. Gomme ya ba mantšiboa ya
ke moseɣa:re/ ɣomme a βitʃ'a leɣsʷwisʷwi a re k'e βoʃe:ɣo// ɣomme ja βa maɲtʃ'iβoa ja
and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was

ba ka moswana, e lego letšatši la pele. Gomme Modimo a re: A kanêgo e bê gôna
βa k'a mosʷwa:na/ e leɣo letʃ'atʃ'i la p'e:le// ɣomme mo̱limo a· re/ a kanɛɣɔ e βɛ ɣɔna
morning, one day. And God said, "Let there be a firmament in the

gare ga mêêtse, gomme e aroganyê mêêtse le mêêtse. Gomme Modimo a dira kanêgo, ɣare
ɣa mɛ̣ɛ̣:ts'e/ ɣomme e aroɣaɲɛ mɛ̣ɛ̣ts'e le mɛ̣ɛ̣:ts'e// ɣomme mo̱limo·a Jira k'anɛ:ɣɔ/
midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." And God

gomme a aroganya mêêtse a lego ka tlase ga kanêgo le mêêtse a lego ka godimo
ɣomme a aroɣaɲa mɐ̨ɐ̨ts'e a leɣo k'a tl'ase ɣa k'anɛɣɔ le mɐ̨ɐ̨ts'e a leɣo k'a ɣo̱li:mo
made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament

ga kanêgo. Gomme gwa na gwa ba bjalo. Gomme Modimo a bitša kanêgo a re ke
ɣa k'anɛ:ɣɔ// ɣomme ɣʷwa na ɣʷwa βa βʒa:lo// ɣomme mo̱limo a βitʃ'a k'anɛɣɔ a re k'e
from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. And God called

legodimo. Gomme ya ba mantšiboa ya ba ka moswana, e lego letšatši la bobêdi.
leɣo̱li:mo// ɣomme ja βa maɲtʃ'iβoa ja βa k'a mosʷwa:na/ e leɣo letʃ'atʃ'i la βoβɐ̨:li//
the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second

Gomme Modimo a re: A mêêtse a lego ka tlase ga legodimo a phuthêgêlê felô
ɣomme mo̱limo a· re/ a mɐ̨ɐ̨ts'e a leɣo k'a tl'ase ɣa leɣo̱limo a pʰutʰɛɣɛlɛ felɔ
day. And God said: "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into

gotee, gore mô go ômilêgo go bônalê. Gomme gwa na gwa ba bjalo. Gomme
ɣot'e:e/ ɣore mɔ̱ ɣo o̱mile̱ɣo ɣo βɔna:lɛ// ɣomme ɣʷwa na ɣʷwa βa βʒa:lo// ɣomme
one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry

Modimo a bitša mô go ômilêgo a re ke lefase, gomme mêêtse a phuthêgilêgo a re ke
mo̱limo a βitʃ'a mɔ̱ ɣo o̱mile̱ɣo a re k'e lefa:sɛ/ ɣomme mɐ̨ɐ̨ts'e a pʰutʰɐ̨ɣile̱ɣo a re k'e
land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called

lewatlê. Gomme Modimo a bôna e le mô gobotse.
lewa:tl'ɛ// ɣomme mo̱limo a βɔna e le mɔ̱ ɣoβo:ts'e//]
Seas. And God saw that it was good.

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