

Exploring challenges of translating culturally vulgar words from English into Xitsonga

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Abstract

There is growing interest to teach and learn technical subjects in African languages, including Xitsonga. The predominant drawback for Xitsonga translators is lack of technical terminology in specialist subject fields such as Life Sciences, Physical Sciences and Mathematics. This paper explores the translatability of culturally-oriented terms on human reproduction, and illustrates how these factors impact the translation process from English into Xitsonga. It aims to advance a framework of translating linguistic items considered as culturally vulgar words in Xitsonga. The study employed a descriptive qualitative research method to explore the linguistic and extra-linguistic factors such as sociocultural allusions and connotations attached to Xitsonga culturally vulgar words, but absent in English. The data is limited to a sample of terminology on the male and female reproductive systems, and unique characteristics of some aspects of reproduction extracted from a Grade 12 Life Sciences textbook through content analysis. The data is cross-cultural in nature, and was analysed through diachronic and synchronic procedures. The study is underpinned by the linguistic theory of morphology, semantics and adoptive, to establish a convenient framework, and a translation procedure applicable to Xitsonga culturally vulgar words. The study concludes that, with careful consideration of social and linguistic sensitivity, a combination of transliteration and transcription can serve as a vocabulary builder of culturally vulgar words acceptable to the Xitsonga linguistic community.

Keywords: Adoptive; descriptive qualitative research; diachronic procedure; cross-culture, culturally vulgar words; synchronic procedure; loan-blend; transliteration; morphology; semantics; transcription; translation