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Benchmarking a Setswana language learning course against international standards

Abstract

This paper argues that it is necessary for the intellectualisation of African languages to establish a way of benchmarking language learning courses against international theory and best practice. This benchmarking exercise also forms part of the reiterative interaction between course design and course evaluation. We discuss basic language learning within the BICS/ CALP distinction and the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFRL). We argue that both BICS/CALP and CEFRL are too broad for a Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) course, but that a basic learning course is necessary as the foundation for an LSP course in the target language. We illustrate that the CEFRL level descriptors and the BICS/CALP distinction can be used to benchmark a well-functioning, basic language learning course in Setswana against international standards, but that certain language specific differences between European and African languages need to be taken into account. For this, an adapted framework is presented, based on the CEFRL level descriptors. The article cannot yet indicate if such benchmarking can be extended to an LSP course in general or to an LSP course for African Languages still in need of LSP development.

Keywords: Setswana; language learning; benchmarking; Language for Specific Purposes; beginner language; Common European Frame of Reference; BICS; CALP; Course design; course evaluation.

Introduction

This article attempts to give guidelines for the benchmarking of Setswana learning courses. It provides an adapted framework for the design and evaluation of a beginner course for Setswana learners which would serve as the foundation for later Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) course in Setswana yet to be developed. To do so, we briefly contextualise the origin and need for the new course(s). We then concisely discuss the common guidelines, models and theories related to course design while cognizant that most existing guidelines were created with European languages as target. There exists no evaluation guideline for courses in Bantu languages and also no guideline for the evaluation of learning materials (blended or otherwise) for the Bantu languages. The contribution made by this article lies in the explication of the outcomes of learning courses on a basic level for Setswana. The purpose of this article is to focus on the evaluation of level 1 materials only. Although Aucamp (2019) recently compared two available Computer assisted language learning (CALL) courses for Setswana learning for beginners, the aim of that study was not with a view of utilizing the basic course as foundation for later LSP purposes. This article accepts Aucamp's findings that Tsenang! is effective and then builds on it by proposing criteria for the evaluation of beginner courses for Setswana which takes into account the various models for course design, and attempting to justify and explain the criteria in terms of international best practice.

Background

The language debate at university and language requirements in the workplace is an unresolved question in South African higher education. See for example Mkhize and Balfour (2017) on policy and Bornman and Potgieter (2015) and Rudwick (2018) on language and identity. This has convinced management at the North-West University (NWU) to take steps to show renewed commitment to promoting multilingualism and to the development of previously marginalized languages. This step is in keeping with what Khumalo (2016) identified as the "intellectualization" of African languages currently in vogue in SA higher education. Khumalo (2016) also identified multilingualism as a "resource" – a resource which currently is under-utilized in both academic and workplace settings. His aim is twofold: awareness raising regarding African languages, but also academic development of the African languages.

For these purposes, new courses in the learning of regional languages, including African Languages, are to be implemented. In general, language learning courses are structured according to incremental difficulty and proficiency levels. In the current context, however, the aim of the courses is not to produce users who are proficient in general terms, but users who are able to use the newly acquired language in very specific situations. For example, courses currently in development are aimed at pharmacy students and law students with the intention that they will be able to communicate at a basic level with future clients in specific situations upon completion of the courses. In the context of language learning, university management at the NWU makes mention of level 1, 2 and 3 courses for the languages spoken in our region viz. Setswana, Sesotho and

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Afrikaans. But what exactly do these levels refer to, how are the levels benchmarked against international standards and what are the influences thereof on course design, especially if an LSP component is added? To answer these questions, a brief overview of course design theory is necessary.

In order to discuss course design, it is important to define the term, *course*. Graves (2000:3) refers to it as the selection and organisation of material and content to be used for instructional purposes. A course is a program of study designed for a specific group and selected for a specific period of time. While the term *course* refers to the elements indicated above, syllabus refers more to the units (content) of a course and Nunan (1988:27) distinguishes between product and process syllabuses. The focus of a product syllabus is on the result of the instruction which learners should gain from knowledge and skills acquired in the course while a process syllabus focuses on the learning experiences. It is important to note the differences between these two syllabus types in order to plan the syllabus characteristics of a new course as it influences the success of the course. In addition, there are many design types, for example, product-oriented, grammatical, functional-notional, or process-oriented (Richards and Rodgers, 2014). For reasons explained below, we work mostly with the process-oriented design, in a task-based and communicative approach.

Even though the terminology may differ, more or less the same components are present in any discussion on course design. According to Dippenaar (2004:54) these components "…include setting goals and objectives to determine the planned outcomes of the course, designing a syllabus, selecting content, selecting materials…" and the identification of student needs. It also entails deciding on the teaching methods to be used and the selection of ways to evaluate learners and the course.

Furthermore, Long and Crookes (1992:30) indicate that course design is often based on some sort of choice of unit around which teaching materials and lessons are organised. These units can be topics or situations, notions, functions, structures, or they can be of a more analytical nature and include a spectrum of task-based designs (Long & Crookes, 1992:27).

Course design is also described as a "grounded process" by Graves (2000:15) in the sense that a course is usually designed with set parameters: a definite group of people, in a particular setting, for a specific amount of time and in a detailed context. Dippenaar (2004:45) adds to this as she points out that before a course designer can develop a language proficiency course for a specific group of learners, it has to be determined who the learners are, what their current level of proficiency is, what their communicative needs are, and in what context they will be using the language in question. Only when these questions have been answered, can course objectives be determined and choices made about course content, methods and teaching materials (Richard & Rodgers, 2014:156). In reality though, not all of these questions can be answered in advance and this leads to the situation in which course design (planning) needs to be evaluated in practice and then adapted. Therefore, course design is intrinsically linked to course evaluation in a continuously evolving process with both evaluation and design activated

during the opposite process, like Yin and Yang – a circular, dynamic, iterative, repetitive process of improvement.
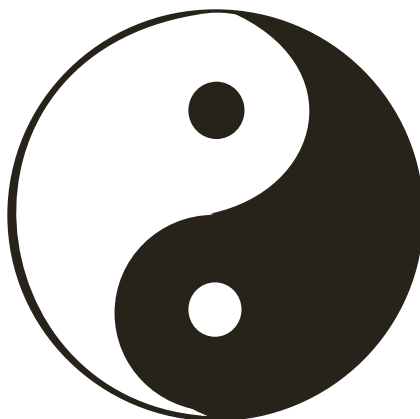

Figure 1: Course design and course evaluation is a Yin-Yang process

The need for a new course stems from either a formal or informal evaluation of the effectiveness and appropriateness of an existing course or activity for a specific context or, in some instances like the present, a request for a new course initiated by a new or changing context. Benchmarking is a contributing activity in an evaluation process. These evaluations inform the selection of elements in the improvement of a course. While using the new course, shortcomings are identified, once again through either formal or informal evaluation, which leads to adaptations. This is a normal cycle in any pedagogical situation. In instances where blended learning or computer-assisted language learning (CALL) forms part of the course, the situation becomes more complex, necessitating even more detailed planning, since, while it is possible to adapt face-to-face teaching materials as the circumstances require, it is more difficult and expensive to adapt digitised content. It is also more difficult to notice areas which need improvement due to less face-to-face interaction with students. For this reason, it is important that more thorough analyses be exercised as part of the initial design process and therefore a detailed framework is necessary for design and evaluation.

Research question and aim

The research question in this article is how the content of a course for the learning of beginner Setswana can be benchmarked against international standards?

The article therefore aims to benchmark the content of the existing beginner course,

Tsenang!, against internationally accepted standards by explicitly stating and measuring the contents against internationally recognised levels indicated for language learning.

Theories and guidelines for language learning

We will attempt to justify a framework by proposing a synergy between the well-known Common European Frame of Reference for Languages (CEFRL) guidelines for language learning (Council of Europe, 2001), the Basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS)/ Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) distinction by Cummins (1979), the concept of Language for Specific Purposes (LSP), and the practical pedagogical realities and differences present when learning an African language (refer to 4.1). In addition, the context in which we work is relatively unique to other language learning situations in that learners enter as novices, but are expected to be able to function at CALP level or CEFRL A2 level or higher in a very limited context of conversation, when exiting the modules. To explain this, we first provide a brief overview of the BICS/CALP distinction, then we illustrate how the CEFRL criteria and level descriptors apply to such a situation.

BICS/CALP, LSP and CEFRL

BICS/CALP and LSP

Although the distinction Cummins (1979) made between BICS and CALP (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills versus Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) has seen some criticism over the years, (e.g. Edesky, 1990, Edelsky et al, 1983 and Martin-Jones and Romaine, 1986) it is still a convenient and virtually self-explanatory theory with which to distinguish between a basic proficiency in the learning of a new language (being able to interact in the four language competencies in the language), and academic competence in using a new language. It should be noted that Cummins originally intended the distinction to refer to language learning *in the classroom*, for "ESL" or "mainstream" classes (Cummins, 1999), distinguishing between what he later called "conversational language" compared to "academic language", i.e. the ability to communicate regarding *content* in a classroom. Also, Cummins worked mostly with immigrant children when first proposing the BICS/CALP distinction, but Cummins (2006) claims that later work by Biber (1986) seems to justify the usability of the distinction in other contexts as well.

Cummins and Roessingh (2006) utilize the "iceberg metaphor" where the "above-the-surface" language proficiency is miniscule compared to "the vastness of the underlying proficiency which is possible in a language, *below the surface*" (Roessingh, 2006 :92). (Note: in this article (figure 1 below) we have created an upside down iceberg in the sense that we place BICS and CEFRL A1 as a foundation of a continuum growing higher and wider towards CEFRL C2 and CALP with no fixed boundaries between BICS/CALP

and the CEFRL levels. The original iceberg metaphor on the other hand, was simply intended to illustrate that a basic user only uses a small part of the available language resources).
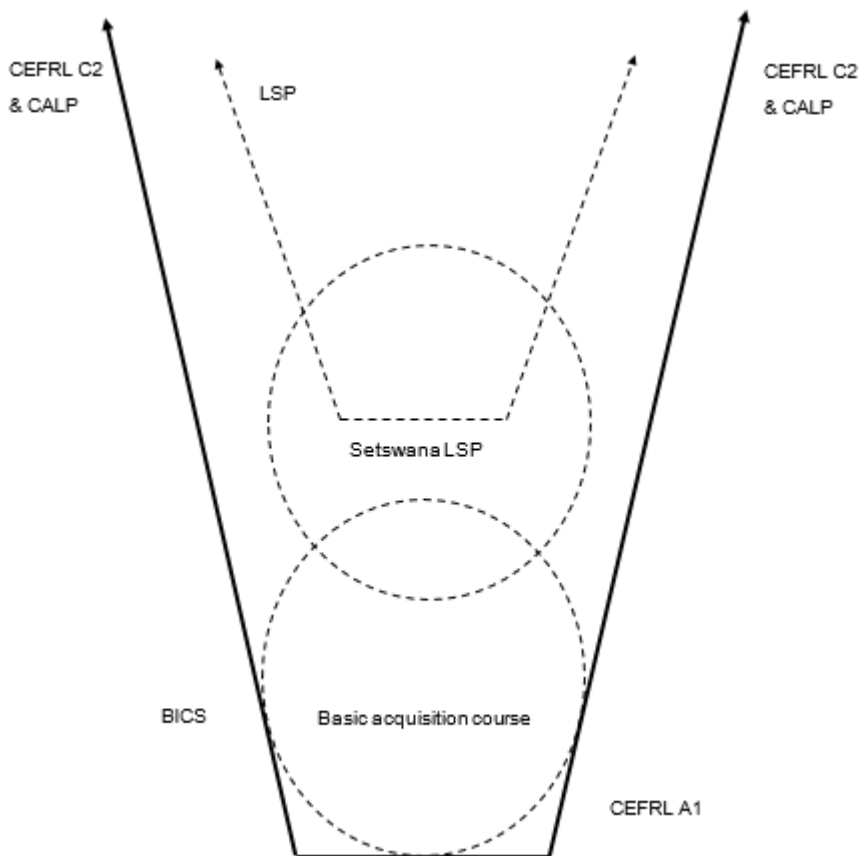

Figure 1: Interaction between BICS, CALP, LSP and CEFRL levels

In a situation where a language course is aimed at professionals within a very clearly defined work context outside the safety of a classroom, the focus on technical conversational ability necessitates a further distinction – the ability to discuss work-related content in a clearly defined (limited) work environment, in other words, a move towards *Language for Specific Purposes*. A language course aimed at beginners, but with the intention to equip them for a work environment (vocational language proficiency), therefore would start at BICS, and then may move on rapidly to CALP but with a narrow focus (LSP)

which aims to enable the learner to converse regarding work-related matters, in much the same way that Fanakalo[1] has been used in the mining industry in South Africa – a limited, but purposeful and focused utility language proficiency. An additional example from an international perspective, is English for Aviation purposes as prescribed by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO, 2010).

Cummins (1999) also mentions what he terms the "common underlying proficiency" which is the interdependence between L1 and L2 CALP. In essence, it seems as if a strong CALP in the first language will positively influence the learning of CALP in the second language, which is exactly what one would hope for in an LSP context.

One of the distinctions between BICS and CALP is that CALP is seen as being used in an environment devoid of context or non-verbal cues, whereas in BICS there are many non-verbal and situational clues. In this sense a vocational language proficiency overlaps more with BICS, since it is used in a very clearly defined vocational context which presupposes a rich, albeit limited context. However, the work context places it closer to CALP (academic ability) and LSP, while still being dependent upon a basic language command, or BICS. A course aiming at language acquisition for work-place related use, therefore contains elements of both BICS and CALP and the user should theoretically be able to switch seamlessly between both. In an example situation such as a pharmacist speaking to a client, the pharmacist may greet and exchange small-talk pleasantries with a client (BICS), then ask and receive answers about symptoms (CALP), make recommendations about applicable medicine and explain its use (CALP) and end the conversation with a greeting (BICS).

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL)

Another practical attempt at distinguishing between proficiency levels, is the CEFRL. As mentioned before, CEFRL is a frequently used reference when determining the required capabilities of learners of foreign languages. This framework is relevant for learning, teaching and assessment and is abbreviated in English as CEFRL (or CEFRL or CEF). It was proposed by the Council of Europe as the main part of the project "Language Learning for European Citizenship" between 1989 and 1996. It is used across Europe and is increasingly used in other countries. In November 2001, a European Union Council Resolution recommended using the CEFRL to set up systems of validation of language ability. The six reference levels (Figure 2) are increasingly being accepted as the European standard for grading an individual's language proficiency in an additional language.

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1 Fanakalo/Fanagalo is a hybrid language used in the mining industry which enables people with a variety of language backgrounds to communicate regarding work-related matters. Ravynse (2018) deals with it in detail.
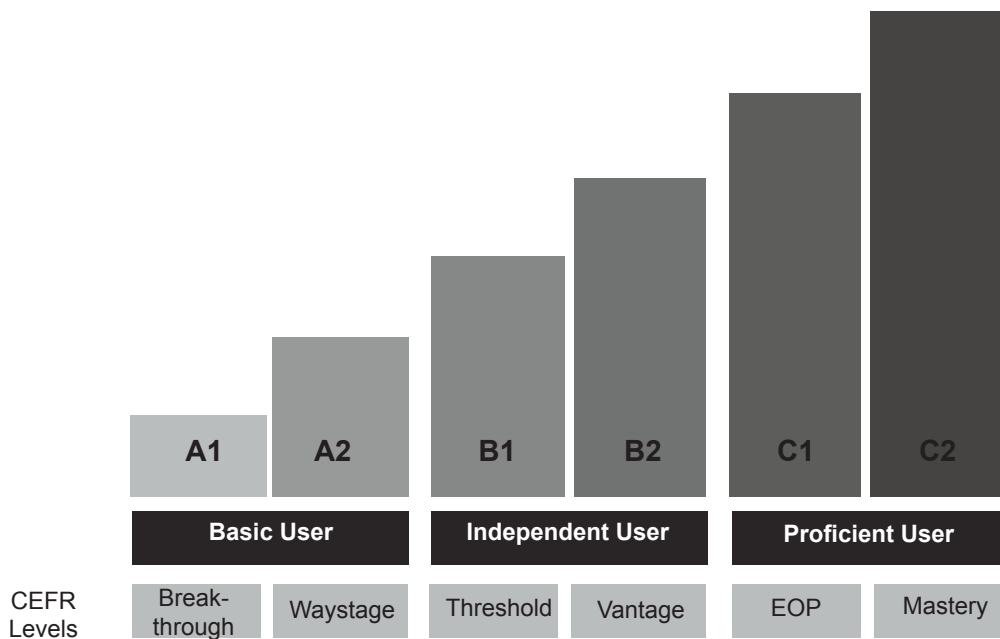
CEFR Levels	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
	Basic User		Independent User		Proficient User	
	Break-through	Waystage	Threshold	Vantage	EOP	Mastery

Figure 2: CEFRL levels for determining and stating an individual's language proficiency (UCLES, 2011)

Table 1 below indicates the level group, level, and description of capabilities as defined by the CEFRL. In reality it is obvious that the level descriptors cannot function as independent units or clear hierarchical steps and a language learner may move between categories due to various reasons. For example, a user still basic in conversational language, may be well adept in flight terminology if he or she is a pilot. Cummins (1999:3) refers to a comment by Garcia that there are "situations in which CALP is achieved before BICS", for example scientists reading texts in languages which they cannot speak. The same principle is applicable to the CEFRL. What makes the courses for pharmaceutical students an interesting case in point, is that the context and nature of their needs will require basic conversational skills at A1-A2 level, while discussing symptoms and treatments with patients (technical, subject specific language) falls within categories B1/B2 of the CEFRL (see descriptors 7, 9 and 11 for example).

In essence, what we attempt to illustrate, is that Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) is a subcategory of CALP which allows the user to bypass some of the requirements for BICS due to the closed nature of a specific work context in that the specificity of the context and tasks allows for easier learning (Bloor and Bloor, 1986)[2]. Chambers (1996) also provides an insightful discussion on how English for Specific Purposes is relevant to LSP and similarly to Bloor and Bloor mentions that context plays a major role in language learning. Long (2017:4) also mentions the student-centred nature of LSP where the focus is on finding methodologies that engage students due to their relevance.

Table 1: CEFRL level descriptors

Level group	Level	DESCRIPTION (Numbers are added for ease of reference and do not denote a sequence)
A **Basic user**	**A1** **Breakthrough or beginner**	1. Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. 2. Can introduce themselves and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where they live, people they know and things they have. 3. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.
	A2 **Waystage or elementary**	4. Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). 5. Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. 6. Can describe in simple terms aspects of their background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.

2 One reviewer questioned if there is not more information available on the relation between LSP and the CEFRL. Although there are numerous articles dealing with the CEFRL and ESP, none seem to mention CALP. A full discussion on the relation between the CEFRL and LSP is also outside the scope of the current article and will be more relevant in a follow-up study when we move beyond the introductory course. It is relevant to mention that the article by Androulla *et.al.* (2016:1) specifically mentioned that there is a need for a tool that "would facilitate the description of ESP competences levels corresponding to the" CEFRL.

B **Independent user**	**B1** **Threshold or intermediate**	7. Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. 8. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. 9. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. 10. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
	B2 **Vantage or upper intermediate**	11. Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in their field of specialization. 12. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. 13. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
C **Proficient user**	**C1** **Effective operational proficiency or advanced**	14. Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer clauses, and recognize implicit meaning. 15. Can express ideas fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. 16. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. 17. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
	C2 **Mastery or proficiency**	18. Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. 19. Can summarize information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. 20. Can express themselves spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in the most complex situations.

CEFRL Guidelines

The CEFRL provides a "descriptive Scheme" (Council of Europe, 2001:21), which contains examples, categories and definitions which could be used by educators to identify, understand and communicate aims and objectives. It does not contain lists of

specific features and is not a curriculum in itself, nor a list of "learning points" (UCLES, 2011:6). It will always need to be adapted to a specific context. As the *Cambridge Guide to Using the CEFRL* (Cambridge, 2011) states,

> "One of the most important ways of adapting the CEFRL is the production of language-specific Reference Level Descriptions (RLDs). These are frameworks for specific languages where the levels and descriptors in the CEFRL have been mapped against the actual linguistic material (i.e. grammar, words) needed to implement the stated competences" (Cambridge, 2011:6).

In this article we use the Tsenang! program as a preliminary reference to produce language specific RLDs' for Setswana at a basic level (see addendum 1).

The CEFRL indicates awareness and sensitivity towards the reality that especially LSP is very context and goal oriented and proposes what they call the "action oriented approach", described as follows:

> Language use, embracing language learning, comprises the actions performed by persons who as individuals and as social agents develop a range of **competences**, both **general** and in particular **communicative language competences**. They draw on the competences at their disposal in **various contexts** under **various conditions** and under **various constraints** to engage in **language activities** involving **language processes** to produce and/or receive texts in relation to **themes in specific domain**s, **activating** those **strategies** which seem most **appropriate** for carrying out the **tasks** to be accomplished. The monitoring of these actions by the participants leads to the reinforcement or modification of their competences. (Council of Europe, 2001:9)

Due to space constraints and our specific focus, the whole CEFRL model cannot be discussed here, but what should be clear from the above discussion, is the great awareness to the role of specific **tasks** in specific **contexts** and the adaptation of **strategies** for the **purpose**. This is also called "target language use situations" (TLU) which refers to the kind of situation in which language will be used. There are four very broad TLU domains - personal, public, occupational and educational (Council of Europe, 2001:45). Any specific context may activate one or all of these domains and "Situations occurring within one or more of these domains can be described by variables such as the people involved, the things they do in the situation, and objects and texts found in the situation." (CEFRL 2001a:45). The greater the awareness of the course designer towards the TLU, the more accurate tasks and communicative functions may be attended to in the course design.

The route taken to reach the required competency level in Setswana

In this article we focus only on a course to reach the CEFRL A1 (BICS) criteria of proficiency for Setswana. We provided the bigger picture (CEFRL B1-2, LSP and CALP) to illustrate the future trajectory of the course. The same criteria for course evaluation should broadly apply to a course for A2 and possibly higher levels and will be the focus of later research.

For CEFRL A1, we make use of parts of an existing CALL program called Tsenang! as the basic language learning course. Tsenang! is discussed in detail in Pretorius and Berg (2003) and it falls outside the scope of this article to discuss the program in detail. Suffice to say that although the computer technology is outdated, the contents of the course has been proven effective in research as recent as Aucamp (2019). We need to evaluate the contents of Tsenang! as effective and functional for beginner language learning. We also need to take into account that the target language has unique features which influence learning the language. This section first indicates the unique features of Setswana influencing language learning in our context, where after the working of Tsenang! is shown to fit in with the above-mentioned overlapping framework of BICS/ CALP and CEFRL.

Typological features of Setswana found to impact the learning of the language

Setswana follows an SVO (Subject - Verb - Object) sentence structure like English and Afrikaans. However, experiences from teaching basic Setswana language learning courses has led to the observation that there are several factors related to the typological structure of the language, apart from the acquisition of lexical items, that challenge non-speakers of Setswana (who have Afrikaans or English - Indo-European languages as first/home language or second language) when they attempt to acquire the language. They are:

1)   Nouns in Setswana are divided into groups generally referred to as class-es / noun classes. Nouns in each of these classes start with a noun class prefix (typically two letters). These prefixes tend to be grouped into pairs where one indicates singular and the other plural such as in the mo- and ba- class where a noun such as *motho* (person) would indicate singular and *batho* (people) would indicate plural.

2)   Setswana has a system of agreement which is based on the prefixes of these classes regarding morphemes that appear in verbs, pronouns, adjectives and certain particles.

3)   Setswana is also an agglutinative language where several morphemes may appear in a single word each contributing a different semantic unit.

This influences the communication of the basic learners as they have to employ the right morphemes in the right order to convey their message.

4) Setswana is a pro-drop language where some verbal morphemes may have pronominal value when translated.

5) Setswana phrases are head initial and modifiers follow these heads - for example an English phrase such as *all the books* will be translated as - *dibuka tsotlhe* - *"books all"*

6) Setswana does not have the determiners *the* and *a* as in English. The Setswana noun *bana* may be translated as *the children*, and the noun *ngwana* as *the child* or *a child*.

These features are not necessarily related to CEFRL A1 or even BICS, but have consistently been proven useful and necessary for easier learning and are therefore included in Tsenang!.

The working of Tsenang! and how its content fits into the CEFRL framework

Tsenang! is a CALL programme for learning Beginner Setswana. It is situated squarely at the level of CEFRL A1-2 and BICS, but since experience has indicated that some grammatical explanations in the Bantu languages aid[3] in language learning, it does contain some grammar explanations which fall closer to the B1-2 levels in CEFRL and the definition of CALP, as indicated above. The programme consists of four chapters which are divided into lessons. Specific functions, grammar, skills and lexical items are linked to each lesson. The programme also includes exercises for the assessment of the functions, grammar, skills and lexical items. The selection, order and systematic presentation of the lessons, functions, grammar, skills and lexical items as well as the exercises play an important role in the learning of Setswana in this programme. The learning process in Tsenang! (see figure below) is based on interaction and active participation which refers to the processes of learning through exploring new material, consulting related items, consolidating new knowledge and assessment (Pretorius & Berg 2003).

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3   Taljard (2012:389) stresses the inadequacy of pedagogical material in the teaching of Northern Sotho stating that it is taught with "little attention being paid to aspects such as frequency of use, real language usage and the communicative value of grammatical structures" She proposes the use of corpora to aid and enhance the teaching of Northern Sotho as second additional language.
The tools developed for Setswana at CTEXT are also available and handy for use in teaching Setswana at that level. Available at: https://repo.sadilar.org/handle/20.500.12185/7
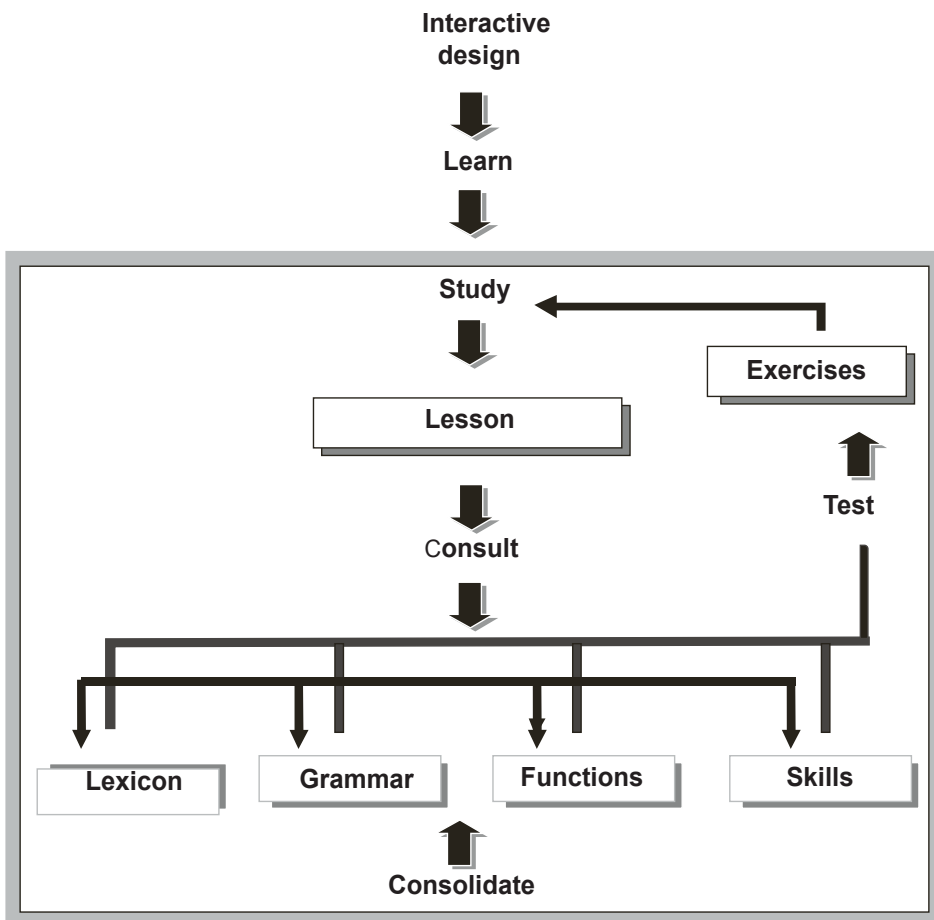
Figure 2: The working of Tsenang!

The contents of the different components in the program should to a large extent determine the competences acquired after completing the course; we mention some of them here while the full spectrum is available in the addendum.

Communicative functions in Tsenang! include among others: greeting, saying goodbye, saying yes or no, offering help, requesting help, saying thank you, introducing people, asking directions, expressing delight, etc. Knowledge of these functions gives insight into the tradition and customs of the Batswana. Each function is linked to the lesson where it has been applied.

The **grammar component** includes a short explanation of selected grammatical items deemed relevant for the learning of Setswana on a basic level. Grammar items are presented in a graded manner and act as an introduction to the morphology and syntax

of Setswana. Items such as the basic structure of the noun, noun classes, class prefixes, the basic structure of the sentence, the basic structure of the verb, the subject and object agreement morphemes, absolute pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, possessive constructions, the future tense, instrument (with), locality, commands etc are included.

Listening, reading, speaking and writing skills are usually included in language learning programs, where the sound system of the language is paramount. Apart from this, various cultural aspects of the Batswana are also introduced in Tsenang. These include items such as personal space, religion, lobola, gender, personal names, pregnancy, child education, eye contact, respect, family structures etc.

Tsenang! includes around 1300 **lexical items[4] (words)** which are available in a dictionary with translations, morphological indications, a semantic meaning and translated content examples.

The functions, grammar and skills presented in the lessons of chapter 1 are set out below (Table 2) as an example to illustrate how the approach of selection, order and systematic presentation was interpreted in Tsenang!. Content items are accompanied by competences and the CEFRL level to which they comply.

Table 2: Reference level descriptors for chapter 1, lesson 1

Chapter	Language learning section.	Item	Reference level descriptor (RLD) / Can do statement / Specific competence	Level of competence
Chapter 1: At the shop				
Lesson 1: Hallo my friend	**Functions**	Greeting (acquaintances)	Can greet an acquaintance in Setswana.	BICS and CEFR A1
		Inquiring about well-being (acquaintances)	Can enquire about the well-being of an acquaintance in Setswana.	BICS and CEFR A1
		Terms to address groups of well-known people	Can use the correct basic customary terms to address groups of well-known people	BICS and CEFR A1
	Skills	Listening properly to distinguish between sounds	Can listen attentively to distinguish between sounds that are not well-known in order to increase vocabulary which will in turn improve proficiency	BICS and CEFR A1
		Syllables and pronunciation	Can identify the syllable structure of Setswana words and use the syllable structure to improve pronunciation.	BICS and CEFR A1
		Setswana vowels	Can pronounce vowels correctly according to selected examples	BICS and CEFR A1

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4   Vocabulary was based on the topics chosen. Topics were chosen where non-speakers would most probably be able to use/practice Setswana.

Chapter	Language learning section.	Item	Reference level descriptor (RLD) / Can do statement / Specific competence	Level of competence
Lesson 1: Hallo my friend	Grammar	Setswana and the Sotho language family	Is acquainted with basic information about the Sotho language family of which Setswana is a member	BICS and CEFR A1
		Words for people and objects	Can distinguish between basic notions of word types and categories	BICS and CEFR A1
		Noun: basic structure	Can recognise the prefix and root in selected nouns	BICS and CEFR A1

Note that table 2 is only an extract of the complete table, which is available as addendum 1.

Tsenang! benchmarked against the CEFRL framework

The CEFRL states that it is aimed not at prescriptions, nor at answering questions, but raising questions instead. As such, using a question-based model for course evaluation fits well with the CEFRL principle. The model proposed by Aucamp (2019) for the design and evaluation of basic Setswana language learning courses asks evaluative questions which rely on the practical experience of the pedagogue to determine the value of a set of criteria and applications. Aucamp's model includes three stages; a planning stage, an action stage and a report-back stage. According to Alderson and Beretta (1992:274) the planning stage is the most important and subsequently takes the longest. Part of the planning stage is taking into account the stakeholders in order to determine who the intended audience is, what the purpose of the course evaluation is and who will be affected by the outcome of the evaluation. Secondly, the background and history of the course influences the clarity of goals and concepts. A third aspect of evaluation is determining the exact aims, while in the fourth place, specific elements of the course which will be evaluated, should be identified (Dippenaar, 2004:83). Aucamp (2019) lists a variety of elements to be included in an evaluation, but they fall outside the scope of discussion of this article. The final part of the planning stage is to determine the evaluation methodology.

The second stage is the action stage (Aucamp, 2019) in which data is collected, described and analysed to enable the evaluator to draw conclusions from it. Thereafter the third stage (report-back) can commence and adaptations could be made, restarting the Yin-Yang process of course design/evaluation.

With this model in mind, we can rephrase the research question at the start of this paper to: "How can we establish whether the contents of Tsenang! comply with the set international standard for best practice in basic language learning?" To answer this, we used a conglomeration of applicable theories – BICS/CALP, LSP and CEFRL. This leads to the use of the CEFRL RLDs. As the table in Addendum 1 illustrates, most of the RLDs are present in Tsenang! which shows that in theory at least, Tsenang! complies with international criteria in order to benchmark it at the level of a basic language learning course.

In addition, the study by Aucamp (2019) established the effectiveness of Tsenang! as a standalone language learning course even before the criteria proposed above were explicated. However, Tsenang! is yet to be evaluated as a university module in a situation where it serves as **groundwork** for an LSP course. The effectiveness of the course in this context will thus only be determined once the LSP course following it has been presented and evaluated. At that stage the evaluation should be able to determine whether the BICS course (Tsenang!) prepared the students for the LSP course. The Yin-Yang principle that was relevant for the interaction between course design and course evaluation thus seems to be relevant in this situation as well for the interaction between BICS and LSP and will lead to further improvements and adaptations to both the basic language learning course and the LSP course.

To summarise, we attempt to illustrate in this article that Tsenang is at the required level according to the CEFRL. The study by Aucamp (2019) illustrated convincingly that Tsenang is effective as language learning course. We can therefore confirm that Tsenang is effective as well as at the correct level.

Conclusion

Against the background of the South African drive for developing indigenous languages in both the sense of awareness and intellectualisation, more offerings of second language learning courses in African languages will appear, some of which will be very context specific – language for a specific purpose. While there are well-documented differences between African and European languages, we argue in this paper that it is possible to employ the Common European Frame of Reference for Language Levels to the context of a beginner learning course for an African language. We illustrated how the stalwart concepts of second language learning - BICS and CALP, are in keeping with the CEFRL guidelines. In this specific context, the aim of the basic learning course will be to develop into the foundation of an LSP course (intellectualised African language course). For this, we argue that LSP can be seen as a very focused and specialised form of language learning which does not entail full language competence as described in either CEFRL descriptors or in the BICS/CALP distinction.

With this restriction taken into account, we illustrated that the CEFRL guidelines are still useful for describing the contents of the existing proven basic learning course (Tsenang!) and that the BICS/CALP distinction is nonetheless applicable. The availability of such a framework for designing, evaluating and benchmarking a language learning course has numerous advantages in that it helps companies and prospective learners to obtain a clear idea of the level of competency they can expect to obtain from a course while it simultaneously enables designers and presenters to benchmark their course. In order to achieve the various levels, one needs to take into account that language learning is the acquisition of a skill requiring repetition and practice and therefore course participants continuously have to engage with their study material as well as with speakers of the language. The framework may serve as reminder to the learners that it remains their responsibility to keep their skills at the required level.

What remains to be seen is the extent to which these guidelines will enable learners with a basic acquisition in the language, to extend their learning of the target language in an LSP context. In other words, to what extent does the task-based and communicative approach of the CEFRL extend to a very specific LSP context? This question can only be answered once the new acquisition courses are implemented and evaluated, effectively restarting the Yin-Yang of course evaluation and development.

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ADDENDUM: Profile of Tsenang! Contents

Chapter	Langauge learning section.	Item	Reference level descriptor (RLD) / Can do statement / Specific competence	Level of competence
Chapter 1: *At the shop*	Functions	Greeting (acquaintances)	Can greet an acquaintance in Setswana	BICS and CEFR A1
Lesson 1		Inquiring about wellbeing (acquaintances)	Can inquiring about the wellbeing of an acquaintance	BICS and CEFR A1
Hello my friend.		Terms to address groups of well-known people	Can use the correct basic customary terms to address groups well-known people.	BICS and CEFR A1
	Skills	Setswana and the Sotho language family;	Be acquainted with basic information about the Sotho language family of which Setswana is a member	BICS and CEFR A1
		Listening properly to distinguish between sounds	Can listen attentive to distinguish between sounds that are not well known in order to increase vocabulary which will in turn improve proficiency.	BICS and CEFR A1
		Syllables and pronunciation	Can identify the syllable structure of Setswana words and use the syllable structure to improve pronunciation	BICS and CEFR A1
		Setswana vowels	Can pronounce vowels according to selected examples.	BICS and CEFR A1
	Grammar	Words for people and objects;	Can distinguish between basic notions of word types or categories.	BICS and CEFR A1
		Noun: basic structure	Can recognise the prefix and root in selected nouns.	BICS and CEFR A1
Lesson 2	Functions	Greeting (strangers);	Can greet an unknown person	BICS and CEFR A1
Good day sir		Greeting between groups of unknown people	Can understand the vocab and phrases used when groups of people who are unknown to each other greet one another	BICS and CEFR A1
		Asking for someone's name and answering it.	Can ask someone's name and can reply when my name is asked.	BICS and CEFR A1
		Asking for someone's surname and answering it.	Can ask someone's surname and can reply when my surname is asked.	BICS and CEFR A1

Chapter	Langauge learning section.	Item	Reference level descriptor (RLD) / Can do statement / Specific competence	Level of competence
		Offering help;	Can use the phrase "How can I help you?"	BICS and CEFR A1
		Asking for an item	Can use the phrase "I am looking for - - " in selected instances	BICS and CEFR A1
		Who?	Can use the interrogative who to inquire about one person or a group of people in selected criteria and generic examples	BICS and CEFR A1
	Skills	Shaking hands;	Be familiar with popular customs about shaking hands	BICS and CEFR A1
		The ei and j sounds	Can use the sounds ei and j in selected words and phrases	BICS and CEFR A1
	Grammar	Noun classes	Can understand the notion that nouns are categorised in different classes based on their prefixes and meaning	BICS and CEFR A1
Lesson 3	Functions	Please help me!	Can ask for help.	BICS and CEFR A1
Do you have - ?		Do you have - -	Can ask for an item in certain situations	BICS and CEFR A1
		Asking for an item;	Can ask for an item using the phrase: Please give me - -	BICS and CEFR A1
		I have - -, I don't have -	Can use the phrases "I have - -, and I don't have - -" in selected generic examples	BICS and CEFR A1
		Yes or No	Can confirm or deny selected generic declarative sentences	BICS and CEFR A1
	Skills	Personal space;		BICS and CEFR A1
		The s- and š- sound	Can differentiate between and use these sounds in selected examples	BICS and CEFR A1
		The w sound	Can use this sound in selected examples	BICS and CEFR A1
		The y sound	Can use this sound in selected examples	BICS and CEFR A1
	Grammar	Noun class prefix	Understands the basic notion that nouns have prefixes and that the prefix is important for agreement and number	BICS and CEFR A1

Chapter	Langauge learning section.	Item	Reference level descriptor (RLD) / Can do statement / Specific competence	Level of competence
Lesson 4	Functions	Questions in Setswana;	Can identify the usual structure of interrogative phrases	BICS and CEFR A1
How much is it?		Asking the price;	Can use the phrase "How much is - - - ?"	BICS and CEFR A1
		Thank you;	Can express gratitude by saying thank you	BICS and CEFR A1
		Saying goodbye	Can greet at departure	BICS and CEFR A1
		How much is it?	Can ask for an item's price	BICS and CEFR A1
		How much is everything?	Can ask for the price of combined goods	BICS and CEFR A1
		Interrogatives	Can use the interrogatives bokae (how much - -), eng (what), jang (how), kae (where), leng (when) and mang (who) in selected examples	BICS and CEFR A1
	Skills	Expression of gratitude;	Can recognise the body language when indicating gratitude	BICS and CEFR A1
		The g-, kg- and ny- sounds	Can differentiate between and use these sounds in selected examples	BICS and CEFR A1
	Grammar	Noun class mo-ba-;	Can understand and use selected nouns in this class	BICS and CEFR A1
		Noun class le-ma-	Can understand and use selected nouns in this class	BICS and CEFR A1
Lesson 5	Functions	How are you? (respectful)	Can show respect when inquiring about wellbeing	BICS and CEFR A1
Hello grandmother	Skills	Orthography	Has basic knowledge of the manner of writing the parts of Setswana verbs;	BICS and CEFR A1
		ng; u;	Can differentiate between and use these sounds in selected examples	BICS and CEFR A1
	Grammar	Words indicating action;	Can comprehend the basic notion associated with verbs.	BICS and CEFR A1
		Sentence: basic structure	Can recognise a subject and predicate as part of a basic sentence in designated examples.	BICS and CEFR A1

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Chapter	Langauge learning section.	Item	Reference level descriptor (RLD) / Can do statement / Specific competence	Level of competence
Lesson 6	Functions	I and We	Can use the personal pronouns for the first person in limited scenarios	BICS and CEFR A1
Invitation		It is...; It is not...	Can use the identifying copulative verb in the positive and negative in basic sentences	BICS and CEFR A1
	Skills	Spiritual life;	Has basic knowledge of the cultural understanding and events when somebody passes away	BICS and CEFR A1
		Lobola;	Has basic knowledge of marriage customs	BICS and CEFR A1
		th; tlh; tsh	Can differentiate between and use these sounds in selected examples	BICS and CEFR A1
	Grammar	Verb: basic structure	Has basic knowledge of the present tense morpheme and subject agreement morpheme that precede the verb.	BICS and CEFR B1

Chapter 2 *My new job*				
Lesson 1	Functions	Names	Has basic knowledge of the customs around naming and the meaning of personal names.	BICS and CEFR A1
Job application		Where do you work?	Can use this phrase to acquire information	BICS and CEFR A1
		I work at - -	Can use this phrase to supply/ give information	BICS and CEFR A1
		Where do you live?	Can use this phrase to acquire information	BICS and CEFR A1
		Phone number	Can ask for somebody's phone number	BICS and CEFR A1
	Skills	Using a Setswana dictionary	Be acquainted with the working of a Setswana dictionary	BICS and CEFR A1
	Grammar	Subject concord	Can use the subject agreement morpheme in selected basic examples	BICS and CEFR A1

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Chapter	Langauge learning section.	Item	Reference level descriptor (RLD) / Can do statement / Specific competence	Level of competence
Lesson 2				
Talking on the phone.	Functions	It's good / It's fine	Can say that something is good/fine or not fine/good.	BICS and CEFR A2
		I am happy	Can indicate happiness	BICS and CEFR A1
		When	Can use the interrogative "leng" in basic sentences	BICS and CEFR A1
				BICS and CEFR A1
	Skills	Gender	Has basic information on the indication of gender in Setswana.	BICS and CEFR A1
		Friendliness	Can recognise customs around greeting and friendliness	BICS and CEFR A1
	Grammar	Subject concord: mo- ba- class	Can deduce and use the subject concord of nouns in this class in selected examples.	BICS and CEFR A1
		Subject concord: le- ma- class	Can deduce and use the subject concord of nouns in this class in selected examples.	BICS and CEFR A1
Lesson 3				
I got the job.	Functions	I don't know	Can indicate that you do not know something	BICS and CEFR A1
		What do you want to do?	Can use the interrogative "eng" in this regard to obtain information	BICS and CEFR A1
		What?	Can use the interrogative "eng" in particular generic examples	BICS and CEFR A1
	Skills	Beliefs about supernatural beings	Has basic knowledge of cultural beliefs around supernatural beings.	BICS and CEFR A1
		Sorcery	Has basic knowledge of cultural beliefs around witchcraft / wizardry.	BICS and CEFR A1
		Invitation	Can invite somebody in a very basic manner.	BICS and CEFR A1
	Grammar	Noun class se- di-	Can identify and use selected nouns in this class	BICS and CEFR A1
		Noun class ne- di-	Can identify and use selected nouns in this class	BICS and CEFR A1

Chapter	Langauge learning section.	Item	Reference level descriptor (RLD) / Can do statement / Specific competence	Level of competence
Lesson 4				
Giving directions	Functions	Directions	Can use the phrases "Stop, turn left, turn right, straight ahead" to give directions.	BICS and CEFR A1
		Where	Can use the interrogative "kae" in selected generic examples to obtain information.	BICS and CEFR A1
	Skills	God	Has basic knowledge of customary beliefs around the notion of God.	BICS and CEFR A1
		Personal names	Knows the meaning of selected personal names that are common.	BICS and CEFR A1
	Grammar	Subject concord: se- di- class	Can deduce and use the subject concord of nouns in this class in selected examples.	BICS and CEFR A1
		Subject concord: ne- di- class	Can deduce and use the subject concord of nouns in this class in selected examples.	BICS and CEFR A1
Chapter 3: *Our family*				
Lesson 1:	Functions	Please	Can use the word please when asking for something.	
We are having breakfast		Where are you going?	Can use this phrase to obtain information	BICS and CEFR A1
		I am going to - -	Can use this phrase to indicate where you are going	BICS and CEFR A1
	Skills	Pregnancy	Has basic knowledge about customs around pregnancy.	BICS and CEFR A1
		Raising children	Has basic knowledge about customs around raising children.	BICS and CEFR A1
	Grammar	Words that refer to other words	Can use pronouns to refer to nouns in selected examples.	BICS and CEFR B1
		Absolute pronoun	Can use absolute pronouns in selected examples.	BICS and CEFR B1
Lesson 2:	Functions	It is nice	Can use this phrase in selected examples.	BICS and CEFR A1
At school		Yes it is nice / no it is not nice	Can use the subject concord "go" in selected cases (Positive: Go monate. Negative: Ga go monate.)	BICS and CEFR A1
		What are you doing?	Can use the interrogative "eng" in this manner.	BICS and CEFR A1

Chapter	Langauge learning section.	Item	Reference level descriptor (RLD) / Can do statement / Specific competence	Level of competence
	Skills			
	Grammar	Absolute pronoun mo- ba- class	Can use absolute pronouns of the mo- ba- class to refer to people.	BICS and CEFR A2
		Absolute pronoun le- ma- class	Can use absolute pronouns of the le- ma- class in selected examples.	BICS and CEFR A2
Lesson 3	Functions	Paying cash or by card	Can ask and offer a method of payment in basic manner.	BICS and CEFR A1
At the bicycle shop	Skills	Carrying items or children	Knows selected customs about carrying items and children.	BICS and CEFR A1
	Grammar	Absolute pronoun se- di- class	Can use absolute pronouns of the se- di- class in selected examples.	BICS and CEFR A2
		Absolute pronoun ne- di- class	Can use absolute pronouns of the ne- di- class in selected examples.	BICS and CEFR A2
Lesson 4	Functions	Putting in fuel, water, oil	Can use the phrase "Tshela" put in, in selected requests at the filling station.	BICS and CEFR A1
At the petrol station		Checking the fuel, water, oil	Can use the phrase "Tlhola" check, in selected requests at the filling station.	BICS and CEFR A1
		The oil/water is still fine	Can indicate that the level of oil or water in a vehicle is fine.	BICS and CEFR A1
		Oil / water is short	Can indicate that the vehicle needs oil or water.	BICS and CEFR A1
		Checking tyre pressure	Can request that the tyre pressure be checked.	BICS and CEFR A1
		Inflating tyres	Can request that tyres be inflated to a specific level.	BICS and CEFR A1
		Clean the windscreen	Can request that the windscreen be cleaned.	BICS and CEFR A1
	Skills	Loanwords / adoptives	Has basic knowledge about selected adoptives that are commonly used.	BICS and CEFR A1
	Grammar	Demonstrative pronoun	Can use demonstrative pronouns in selected examples.	BICS and CEFR B1

Chapter	Langauge learning section.	Item	Reference level descriptor (RLD) / Can do statement / Specific competence	Level of competence
Chapter 4: *At the office*				
Lesson 1:	Functions	Yesterday, today, tomorrow	Can use the terms yesterday, today and tomorrow as descriptives in selected sentences.	BICS and CEFR A1
I am starting today		Days of the week	Can recognise use the correct terms for the days of the week	BICS and CEFR A1
	Skills	Eye contact	Basic knowledge of the customary beliefs regarding eye contact.	BICS and CEFR A1
		Who enters first	Basic knowledge of the customary beliefs regarding entrance through a doorway.	BICS and CEFR A1
	Grammar	Possessive construction	Can use the possessive construction for the different noun classes in selected examples	BICS and CEFR B1
Lesson 2:	Functions	Pleased to meet you	Can say that "I am pleased to meet you / make your acquaintance"	BICS and CEFR A1
General information		Complete the form	Can request somebody to complete a form	BICS and CEFR A1
		Please sign	Can request somebody to sign a form	BICS and CEFR A1
		You (singular and plural)	Can use the correct terms to indicate the second person singular and plural	BICS and CEFR A1
	Skills	Showing respect	Know basic customs to show respect to somebody	BICS and CEFR A1
	Grammar	Shall/Will (future tense)	Be able to use the future tense in selected positive examples	BICS and CEFR A2
Lesson 3:	Functions	ID number	Can request somebody's ID number.	BICS and CEFR A1
Completing forms		Age	Can ask "How old are you?"	BICS and CEFR A1
		Address	Can ask for somebody's address	BICS and CEFR A1
		Medical aid	Can ask whether you have a medical aid	BICS and CEFR A1

Chapter	Langauge learning section.	Item	Reference level descriptor (RLD) / Can do statement / Specific competence	Level of competence
		It is - - - -	Can use the identifying copulative phrase "It is - - -" in declarative phrases	BICS and CEFR A1
		Numerals	Can use selected numerals in basic sentences	BICS and CEFR A1
	Skills	Death	Has basic knowledge about Batswana customs about death	BICS and CEFR A1
	Grammar	with...		BICS and CEFR A1
Lesson 4:	Functions	I am thirsty	Can indicate that you are thirsty	BICS and CEFR A1
In the tearoom		I am hungry	Can indicate that you are hungry	BICS and CEFR A1
		Marital status	Can ask about and respond to questions about marital status in customary language.	BICS and CEFR A2
	Skills	Idiomatic expressions regarding thirst, hunger and discomfort/illness	Can use the idiomatic expressions "Ke tshwerwe ke - - - and Ke bolaiwa ke - - " to indicate thirst, hunger or discomfort / disease	BICS and CEFR A1
	Grammar	Indication of place	Can indicate locality in selected examples. Use locative nouns and locative class nouns with locative particles.	BICS and CEFR A2
Lesson 5:	Functions	Asking for a translation	English / Afrikaans translation of terms	BICS and CEFR A1
Making photocopies		Please repeat	Can request somebody to please repeat something	BICS and CEFR A1
	Skills	Volume of voice	Has basic knowledge about speaking loudly.	BICS and CEFR A1
	Grammar	Commands in Setswana	Can use the imperative to give commands in selected examples.	BICS and CEFR A1

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