

## FILLING INFORMATION GAP ON COVID-19 PANDEMIC USING PROVERBS AND FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE: LILAPHALAPHA FACEBOOK PAGE LESOTHO

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Article Info	Abstract
<b>Article History</b> Received: March 2023 Revised: March 2023 Published: April 2023	<i>The current study reports on ways in which Lilaphalapha page on Facebook used language to provide awareness on Corona virus pandemic. Corona Virus affected the whole universe in different ways. Like the rest of the world, to curb the spread of the virus, Lesotho declared a state of emergency and the government put different health protocols in place. To prevent the widespread of COVID-19, a wealth of knowledge was provided in Indo-European languages in many countries. Speakers of African languages such as Sesotho, a national language of Lesotho, had to be innovative and employ region specific methodologies to spread awareness about COVID-19 pandemic. In this qualitative research, data was collected from eight purposely selected episodes posted on Lilaphalapha page on Facebook in April 2020. The videos were analysed through inductive thematic analysis approach. The paper analysed how the use of proverbs and figurative language has helped in preserving Sesotho as a language and filled the gap in preventing language dearth particularly in the advent of COVID-19 pandemic. The findings indicated figurative language, humour and proverbs were used in spreading COVID-19 awareness to Basotho.</i>
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### INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is a major health crisis, which disrupted many aspects of human lives including linguistic aspects. In curbing the menace of COVID-19, scientists around the world needed to create awareness around this terrifying disease. Many governments relied on mass media to disseminate information about how to deal with COVID-19. Majority of these commutations were made in English, which is a language that ‘enlightened’ people will not have a problem to understanding. However, due to ignorance, and lack of strong linguistic competency in English, a significant portion of Lesotho nationals were not compliant with proposed health measures that were constantly disseminated in a language other than their primary language. This was discerning to Lesotho government as it needed to protect its citizens from a monster that had caused mayhem around the world. Lesotho nationals relied on prior knowledge of the world to reject the existence of this disease, and held perceptions that sought to undermine this novice disease. As such, people with limited command of English, who lack ‘enlightenment’ about COVID-19, were likely to fall prey to this novice disease. This state of affairs required the government to find appropriate way to communicate with its locals and the most effective way to communicate with people is by using their primary language(s). This paper seeks to determine how Lesotho’s government in collaboration with a comedian, Lilaphalapha, relied on pre-existing knowledge in the form of proverbs and figurative language

to close the gap that existed among Basotho about the Corona Virus, especially among the unschooled constituents of Lesotho.

Lesotho is a small country in southern Africa with a population of about two million people, of which 99.7 % of them are Basotho who speak Sesotho (Lekhetho, 2013). According to Cohen et al., (2009), more than half of Lesotho's people live below the poverty line and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is the second highest in the world. Against this background, Lesotho government's responsibility towards saving its people from the wrath of COVID-19 was inescapable. The government noted that COVID-19 would destabilise the whole nation's health system and create lasting social problems. During the advent of COVID-19 the government needed to act swiftly to ensure its citizens were protected from the virus.

Lesotho is surrounded by South Africa which recorded high numbers of infection and mortalities. The majority of Lesotho citizens are employed in South Africa, therefore this meant that if protocols were not consistently put in place by the government, the virus would then be transported into Lesotho. The consequence of this would really suffocate the nation's resources. Lesotho's levels of poverty and inequality remained extremely high during 1993-99 (Hassan & Ojo, 2002). The political tensions in the region have not allowed much-needed reform to happen in the nation. Its citizens continue to migrate, seeking employment opportunities in South Africa and other neighboring countries. Most communication in relation to the advent of COVID-19 was made available in a handful of dominant languages such as English language. In Lesotho, the majority of Basotho speak Sesotho, an official language of Lesotho, therefore, the government needed to communicate with its citizens in the language of the majority as opposed to multilingual nations that needed to rely on the dominant language during press conferences and many other gatherings.

It is worth noting that Lesotho recorded the first case of COVID-19 in May 2020. Makateng (2020, p. 172) concurs, "Lesotho remained corona free till the first case was recorded in May 2020 after more than 70 people were tested". Notwithstanding this, the ramification of the pandemic remained dire in the country due to existing political instability, poverty, inequality, and a culture of human rights violations (Shale, 2020). The Lesotho government had placed pre-cautionary measures in place to curb the spread of COVID-19 in the country even before the country recorded its first case. Makateng (2020, p. 172) further explains "Lesotho went into lockdown on March 29 to protect itself from a potential spread of the virus from South Africa." Makumane (2021, p. 2) further explicates "This decision was taken as a preventative measure as the neighbouring country, South Africa, which completely enclaves Lesotho, had a rapidly rising number of confirmed cases. After recording positive cases of the coronavirus, Lesotho opted for 'hard' lockdown, which saw the introduction of new stricter regulations, which were effective on the 20th of July 2020 to control the spread of the virus." Despite this notable effort, the effects of challenges brought about by the pandemic were felt throughout the country. During that period, a wealth of knowledge about COVID-19 was made available in English, a language which is not largely spoken in the country despite having official status..

As Chan et al., (2020, p. 1) note, "during the SARS epidemic, worldwide internet access was well established, and Lesotho was no exception to this." One of the imperative ways that Lesotho employed to create much needed awareness about COVID-19, the government collaborated with Lilaphalapha comedian and his team to produce a series of videos that sought to educate and caution its citizens about COVID-19 and how they could protect themselves from getting infected with the virus. This initiative was broadcasted on Lilaphalapha's Facebook page. The centrality of social media during this period cannot be overemphasised. Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram are among the most important networks used throughout during the pandemic (Shoaei & Dastani, 2020). Shoaei and Dastani (2020) allude that the use of social networks increased during the period when coronavirus was spreading around the world. During that period, social media experienced an influx of videos seeking to

provide a picture to the world about what other nations were experiencing. The undesired consequence of this resulted in unmanageable panic and fear within the public.

Social media alone during this pandemic could not be solely relied on as a mouthpiece that provided accurate data and images about Corona Virus. In the wave of panic, patriots expressed unmatched conspiracies about the origins of the virus and its target population. Within the borders of Lesotho, misinformation and myths around COVID-19 were rife. The prevalence of conspiracy theories among citizens resulted in confusion and outright fear. To manage panic within its borders, the government of Lesotho called out to broadcasting agencies such as radio and television to provide comment that is fair and honest. Moreover, Lesotho together with the United Nations Development Programme partnered with national stakeholders to experiment some of the solutions found within the communities for national response and resilience building (Wabunoha, 2020). According to Wabunoha (2020), implemented activities and solutions included design and development of messages against the pandemic, adoption of simple and digital technologies for strengthening community response.

The National Emergency Command Centre together with Lilaphalapha crew released a string of videos with the sole purpose of creating awareness in the primary language of native speakers while relieving them of fear by making them laugh during uncertain times.. The strategy to employ Facebook as a knowledge sharing platform was encouraged by the observation made by Shoaie and Dastani (2020). Individuals and governments started using information technology tools to raise awareness, educate and follow health related affairs.

In Lesotho, the publication of Lilaphalapha's videos on Facebook maximised the government's reach to the nation since a lot of people were glued to their cell phone screens due to movement restrictions which were imposed by the government. The government purposely created this initiative to educate people early about the virus because ill-knowledge could have strangled an already suffering health systems in the country. We argue that the use of indigenous language during this time was relevant, as this initiative strives for indigenous languages revitalization and reclamation (Chew et al., 2022). During this period, social media users exponentially resorted to social media platforms to share and acquire knowledge about this novel viral disease. The need for self-care and self-control to preclude the prevalence of this disease centred on many social media conversations or topics (Shoaie & Dastani, 2020). Although the number of COVID-19 cases and fatalities might still comparatively be low in Africa than in other world regions, the looming health shock of COVID-19 could have disastrous impact on the continent's already strained health system and could quickly turn into a social and economic emergency (OECD, 2020).

Against this backdrop, this paper investigates ways in which Lilaphalapha page on Facebook used language to provide awareness on COVID-19 pandemic. In what follows, the background to the study is discussed.

## **Background**

Key preventative measures towards COVID-19 include public awareness. Udoakang et al's (2022) study, which investigated the knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of Western African people about COVID-19, the knowledge about covid-19, varied across Western African countries and the different types of settlements influence this disparity of knowledge. Therefore, "the health and education authorities in various countries should tailor public health interventions towards enforcing preventative measures against this pandemic, with a special focus on the most impoverished communities, the rural and the suburban settings" (Udoakang et al. 2022). It is against this background that this study is undertaken to assess whether the communicative strategy employed by Lesotho's government was effective in managing the spread of corona virus. Language component is presenting considerable challenge in the efforts to curb and contain COVID-19. Effective communication strategies must be designed and employed in dealing with the public about information that is related to COVID.

## Research problem

Preventative information about corona virus have been offered in English, which is a language that is popular among literate individuals in Africa. The implication is that people who are literate enough to negotiate themselves using English would not fall prey to corona virus. This left individuals with limited or no command at all of English at risk of contracting and spreading the virus unknowingly. In this study, we seek to evaluate how the Lesotho government relied on a local language to mitigate the risk of contracting and spreading the virus among its citizens. The preceding section focuses on the theoretical framework of the study.

## Theoretical Framework

In this study, Indigenous Language Development Communication (Salawu, 2001) was used to investigate ways in which Lilaphalapha page on Facebook used language to provide awareness on corona virus pandemic. The researchers adopt Salawu's (2006) assertion that mass media, due to its general accessibility, is said to be a veritable tool in popularising the use and learning of African languages that are, presently, being threatened out of existence by the European languages foisted on the African peoples through the advent of colonialism. Therefore, we framed the study through these lenses as we advocate for the use of Sesotho in social media platforms. Our conviction is that the use of Sesotho in the videos of interest, promotes better access to information, it is socially relevant and socially sensitive, and the aim of awareness is communicated effectively to Basotho as the target population (Salawu, 2001). We stress that "the promotion and survival of African languages are in the hands of the African people themselves" (Salawu, 2006, p. 86).

Our affirmation is that people express themselves and their cultures better in the language of their own. As such "the language comes out in full array of its beauty and splendour and in various forms and cadences" (Salawu, 2006, p. 93). Thus, it is logical to say that using these videos, Basotho were able to relate as they "exude brilliance in language and a deep grasp of the lore and traditions of their peoples" (Salawu, 2006, p. 93). We firmly believe that the message was better understood and had more impact on behaviour change. Our interest on these videos was triggered by the fact that they are oral in nature, and we see them as pace setters to "break the barriers of illiteracy" (Salawu, 2006, p. 91). As far as we can ascertain, this is the first academic article on Lilaphalapha Social Page. As such, it is our way of appreciating our language as Salawu (2006, p. 93) maintains "indigenous languages can be better appreciated when spoken". Of interest is that the videos do not only reflect Basotho's culture and their belief systems, but they also help in promoting language development. Worth noting is that the source of information acts as an agent of change which disseminates information using "the language of the community for which the development programme is meant" (Salawu, 2006, p. 86). Applying this model to our study, the characters in the videos are agents of change as they send through the message of awareness to Basotho. The message is constructed in Sesotho, and Basotho fully understand and can relate as it is their language. The proverbs used are accessible to them and they interact with the message. The section that follows features research methodology.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This qualitative research study is anchored on interpretivist paradigm. Our interpretations of the transcripts from the selected videos formed the basis of data analysis. Interpretivist paradigm is subjective in nature. As such, we were guided by the social and cultural setting in which the videos under investigation were based (Mokala et al., 2021). As Wunseh and Charamba (2023) explain, qualitative research attempts to provide rich, meaningful, deep, and valid data. To attain this, in the current study we looked at the way language is used in the selected videos. It is important to point out that, "Due to their background in African Language Studies, all authors were particularly attuned to the use of

vernaculars” (Rudwick et al., 2021, p. 248). Therefore, videos posted on Lilaphalapha Facebook page about COVID-19 awareness caught our attention. Our interest was on the use of proverbs and figurative language to send out COVID-19 awareness to the community.

Qualitative research was deemed relevant for the study as we deliberately chose the phenomena under investigation since it is information rich and would comprehensively answer our research questions. Qualitative research is descriptive in nature and makes use of words to describe a phenomenon (Khetoa, 2019; Mokala, 2022). In the current study, we described words used to convey meaning and transcribed them to support the findings of the study. The justification for qualitative research is further premised on our interest to study the social setting of the phenomena under investigation. Therefore, our intention was to get in-depth understanding of the language used in the selected videos (Mokala & Chapole, 2020). Since qualitative research focuses on the how and why (Mokala et al., 2021), we looked at the way language is used to select the videos which were of interest us.

Data was extracted from 8 purposely selected episodes of Corona Virus awareness videos from Lilaphalapha Facebook page. Purposive sampling is “a non-random sampling method in which the researcher uses a wide range of methods to locate all possible cases of a highly specific and difficult-to-reach population” (Neuman, 2006, p. 222). The videos were then reviewed by the whole team. Following this review, we transcribed the conversations verbatim. We reviewed the transcriptions to obtain information about themes identified, figurative language(s) used, and proverbs as well as references to specific preventive measures to be taken. Researchers are advised to continue identifying the themes until they reach data saturation. We conducted content analysis in this study to examine the transcriptions of the selected videos. We listened to the videos several times. After listening to the videos, we summarised them according to the themes which emerged. In the next section, analysis of the selected videos posted on Lilaphalapha Facebook page on COVID-19 pandemic awareness is provided.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study. In the current study, Lilaphalapha, a well-known Mosotho comedian used his Facebook page to share lifesaving information about COVID-19 pandemic. In this section, ways in which Lilaphalapha page on Facebook uses figurative language to provide awareness on COVID-19 pandemic is explored together with proverbs as well as the specific preventive measures to be taken against the pandemic. A brief synopsis of the selected videos (Episode 1 to 8) posted on Lilaphalapha Facebook page on COVID-19 pandemic awareness is provided. The Lilaphalapha comic is presented by Lilaphalapha who represents a Mosotho villager who understands that COVID-19 rules and regulations should be followed. His wife is called Makhubelu, she symbolises a Mosotho village woman and seems not to be very knowledgeable about COVID-19. Her husband took it upon himself to educate his wife first prior to educating other villagers who seemed ignorant of the COVID-19 pandemic. Sir Matee is a village teacher. Mashoto or Shortie is a villager while Ntate Moruti is a preacher in the village who seem to be ignorant of fateful consequences of not complying by COVID-19 rules and regulations. From the eight episodes, Lilaphalapha crew is making people aware of corona virus pertaining to how it spreads, protective measures, language used, misconceptions, and education on how it can be prevented. In the context of Lesotho, the government had to deploy security forces to enforce lockdown rules which include detaining those who were found to be contravention of the lockdown rules. Moreover, the episodes reveal the benefits of staying at home during lockdown amidst COVID-19 pandemic. The section that follows discusses identified themes from the findings of the study which translates into, protective measures, language, misconceptions, and education.

***Protective measures: Social distancing, no sharing of some items, sanitation and staying at home***

The advent of COVID-19 brought about many changes in aspects of human life (El Refae, Kaba & Eletter, 2021). People were conscientised of the pandemic in every way possible, hence the introduction of Lilaphalapha comic as one of the intervention strategies used by the government of Lesotho to curb the spread of COVID-19. In the comedy, Lilaphalapha represents a villager who understands that COVID-19 rules and regulations should be followed. He is shown from the first episode listening to the radio to gain more knowledge about COVID-19. He shares the knowledge he gained about this pandemic with his wife Makhubelu that to prevent the spread of COVID-19, people should among others; practice social distancing, wash their hands with soap and running water regularly or sanitise, to observe COVID-19 rules and regulations during lockdown and stay at home, to avoid sharing things like alcoholic drinks and cigarettes. He encourages his visitors to keep social distance and sanitise their hands upon their arrival. In Episode 5, Ntate Moruti, wanted to sit next to Lilaphalapha as he would do prior to the pandemic. The pastor was quickly rebuked, told to keep social distance and have his hands sanitized. He is also warned that as he moves from house to house, he puts himself and other people at risk of contracting COVID-19. The pastor seemed offended by the precaution measures practiced by Lilaphalapha. No matter how much he tries to convince Lilaphalapha that he is doing his pastoral duties, Lilaphalapha eventually dismisses him, asking him to go and pray for people alone in his room. In episode 2, Sir Matee encourages Mashoto to wash his hands with soap and running water and to avoid visiting people at their homes as these precaution measures would curb the spread of the pandemic. Sir Matee goes further to warn people that sticking to COVID-19 protocols is an individual's responsibility not the police or soldiers' responsibility as some of the Basotho like Mashoto believes. The teaching about these protective measures is spread across all the episodes. By practising all these protective measures, World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020) stipulates that nations across the universe will therefore be able to curb the spread of COVID-19. Lilaphalapha crew was uttering these protective measures basing themselves with the lockdown rules and regulations by the government of Lesotho.

***Language***

The language used was purposefully chosen to convey COVID-19 awareness to the target group being the Basotho nation at that time. The comedians use figurative language to convey the message to the audience. For instance, Moruti uses sarcasm when talking to Mashoto. He says, "*feela uena u khots'e kea bona*", —meaning that Mashoto, or Shorts or Shortie, as he calls him, is big or well-fed. The same sentence is ambiguous, Moruti could mean that Mashoto is full due to eating a lot. The message conveyed here is that whether Mashoto has a big body structure or full from eating, the bottom line that is he is eating from ntate Lilaphalapha's place. Moruti also wants to benefit from Lilaphalapha. Lilaphalapha is not impressed by the way people are frequenting his place. He uses simile to express his unhappiness. He says, "*Banna, la ntlankella joaloka manong haka, bo-ntate molato ke'ng?*" [Men, why do you keep coming to me as though you are swallows?] indicating that he is troubled by his countrymen flocking his home like swallows. The use of simile *jwaloka*-just like, helps in giving the audience or listeners a mental picture of what the comedians are saying. Furthermore, simile is used by Sir Matee to reveal how lonely he is due to COVID-19 pandemic through the rules and regulations implemented by the government in trying to curb its spread. He says "*Banna! Motho oa lula o le mong banna, ekare banna! Joaloka ha eka o sekotlo sa ntjanyana, banna! Ebe ngoana'ka Mashoto o kae banna*"! [Men! One is seated alone, men, as though, men! As though you are a dog's dish, men!] These expressions depict that life has

changed due to COVID-19, people no longer socialise, and they are restricted to their compounds only.

We must highlight that the comedians used humour to make people learn and laugh simultaneously. Sir Matee does not seem to be used to staying home alone. In trying to distress, he checks on his friend Mashoto who tells him to stick to COVID-19 rules and stay at home. Sir Matee says that COVID-19 has changed things. He says, “*Hee! Ke Mashoto ea seng a ka dropa, banna! E nts'oere ka lioashene lockdown. Bophelo! Bophelo ke nikaboka, ea ntsanapa ntho!*” [Oh no! Is this Mashoto who drops my phone, men! Lockdown is man handling me. Life! Life is a three-quarter leg tight trousers, it has tightened me!] On the other instance, Lilaphalapha warns the pastor that his way of teaching is out-dated. He says “*Moruti! Moruti! Moruti! Nako ena ea lona ea ho felloa ke moya e felletsoe ke nako. Ee ea ho nna u nts'o re iiiiii E felile tu!*” [Pastor! Pastor! Pastor! Pastor! Your time of gasping for air while preaching has expired. This one of saying iiiiii, is completely over]. These instances convey a message that people should change how they do things, especially since the advent of COVID-19. According to Phafoli (2009), the use of figurative language is an indication of language creativity and the ability to convey a message using language full of techniques that are not used in everyday language. Although the comedians are making people to laugh, the message pertaining to COVID-19 is passed, people are gaining more knowledge about it.

The message was also conveyed through proverbs. Mieder (1993, p. 5) defines a proverb as a “short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorisable form and which is handed down from generation to generation.” From this definition, it can be deduced that proverbs convey a society’s way of life and “they contain the fundamental truths about life in general and human nature in particular, which people have observed. Various proverbs apply to different situations and are an embodiment of the distilled collective experience of the community in such situations” (Possa & Makgopa, 2010, p. 4). Finnegan (2012) observes that proverbs are a rich source of imagery. Furthermore, Possa (2014) explains that proverbs are another component of oral literature, poetic in nature, usually memorable and dynamic as they are used to fit various situations and purposes. Phafoli and Mokuku’s (2013) view is that proverbs teach a lot about oral literature, customs, beliefs, language, and other aspects.

Another language device used is metaphor. A metaphor is a “language device that is processed through thought and influenced by actions. It is a linguistic expression that presents one concept using another” (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008, p. 3). Metaphors convey abstract thoughts in a more vivid and comparative manner. As such, metaphors mirror our perception, experience and understanding of the world (Muhammad & Rashid, 2014). In African societies, animal metaphors are used to convey certain meanings related to human behaviour and cultural aspects specific to a certain society. Taking this argument further, Phafoli and Martins (2015, p. 468) assert, “The use of animal metaphor among the Basotho is very common and part of their culture.” It should also be noted that metaphors reflect societal perception and misconceptions. From the videos under analysis, Corona is called *bohomo* (blackjack), just like the way *bohomo* sticks to clothes, once one has contacted the virus, it is very difficult to get rid of. The use of this metaphor exemplifies the danger of the virus and how difficult it is for doctors and health practitioners to find its cure. The implication therefore is that people must stay at home to avoid coming in contact with infected people or even spreading the virus themselves. Lilaphalapha refers to people coming to his house as *manong* (swallows). The use of this metaphor signifies masses of people coming to his house. The use of bird metaphors signifies certain Basotho beliefs as many Africans have many strange beliefs regarding birds.

### **Misconceptions**

Misconceptions “originate from the way society perceives its way of life. ... The language and the words used in a text reflect the norms and values of [any given] society” (Mokala & Chapole, 2020, p. 65). With these videos, Lilaphalapha and the crew portray some of the misconceptions which people attach to COVID-19. First, Makhubelu warns her husband that he should not come any close to her at night in bed since he is encouraging people to practice social distancing to curb the spread of this pandemic. Second, some people take it for granted that lockdown rules and regulations are for the police officers and the soldiers as Sir Matee was rebuking Mashoto to stay at his place. Third, there are people who also thought that COVID-19 is a disease which attacks animals and not human beings, and that the disease would not attack the Basotho nation. Fourth, Makhubelu even went on to sanitise the whole yard trying to prevent COVID-19 which she was saying she suspects it is in the air after she was proposed by Sir Matee at the village well. Fifth, the village Pastor believes that COVID-19 would not attack him given that he is a child of God. As for Mashoto, he believes that COVID-19 can be spread by contacting each other on the cell phone, due to his limited command of English, Lastly, Mashoto believes that people can only be in contact through telephone or cell phone.

### **Education**

These episodes are educative in the sense that Basotho are made aware that during COVID-19 era, when the government of Lesotho instructs them to stay at home, they should follow the rules and regulations. The preventive measures were enforced by the government of Lesotho in the country even before cases of COVID-19 were reported. Lockdown that was introduced and implemented with immediate effect was an intervention strategy used in enforcing preventive measures against COVID-19 pandemic (Udoakang et al., 2022; Makumane, 2021; Shale, 2020). The nation was made aware that the more they allow people to visit them, the more they put themselves at risk of contracting this pandemic. Again, the government found itself compelled to go to the extent of instructing both police officers and the soldiers to help the Basotho to comply with COVID-19 protocols as stipulated by the government of Lesotho (2020). This is confirmed by the comedians; Sir Matee warns Mashoto to stay at home as per the lockdown rules and regulations. Lilaphalapha also made Ntate Moruti aware of the danger he is putting himself in by the house visits he is doing during corona virus era. He says, “*Jonnanaa wee! Ntate Moruti, na u bona koluo ea eo u e jalang? U nts'o potoloha ntlo le ntlo.*” [Oh noooo! Pastor, do you realise the danger you are sowing? You are going from one house to another].

He advises the preacher to close himself behind doors at his place and pray for the protection of the nation rather than doing house visits. He emphasises this by stressing the fact that the preacher must abide by the rules and regulations set by the government of Lesotho. Pastor should be at his place, hence Lilaphalapha tells him to never set his foot at his place again. Lilaphalapha expels the pastor using the language of the current times by saying, *Ka 'mila!* [Go away!], meaning the pastor should go and observe COVID-19 rules and regulations at his place. This section analysed how the use of language has helped in preserving Sesotho as a language in the advent of COVID-19 pandemic through social media platforms.

### **CONCLUSION**

Major developments around COVID-19 were made publicly available in a language that is popular among ‘knowledgeable’ members of society worldwide. This cohort meaningfully engaged positively with the public discourse around COVID-19, while citizens who have limited or no proficiency of English ignored government’s communication. This cohort is likely to fall prey to contracting and spreading the virus unknowingly due to inadequate knowledge around the virus. To supplement this deficit, Lesotho government collaborating with local comedians produced a series of comedy videos in a local language. The use of language in the

videos sought to capture an image that would resonate with the views. The intention was to use pre-existing cultural references to inform the public about corona virus and the ways in which it could be managed. This study is underpinned by indigenous language development communication theory wherein our contention is that indigenous languages have a functional value in promoting information sharing and are essential in transmitting valuable information across disciplines. We relied on a qualitative approach that is anchored on interpretivist paradigm.

The purpose of this study was to explore ways in which Lilaphalapha page on Facebook used language to provide awareness on COVID-19 pandemic. The study further investigated how language was used to explain preventive measures to be taken against the pandemic. The current paper analysed how the use of proverbs, as well as figurative language has helped in preserving Sesotho as a language and filled the gap in preventing language dearth particularly in the advent of COVID-19 pandemic. The key findings of the study revealed the ways in which COVID-19 may be spread out of ignorance, some misconceptions about corona virus, what to avoid during the pandemic's lockdown and some benefits of staying at home on due to lockdown during COVID-19 pandemic. These findings, therefore, depict that, people need to be aware and knowledgeable of COVID-19 to help to protect themselves from and curb the spread of COVID-19. With the regards to what transpired in the videos, the researchers recommend more robust research around topics of this nature to educate people of the current trends across the globe. Further, the researchers vouch for videos of this nature, since they educate almost everyone, using figurative language and humour.

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