

LEARN SETSWANA /ITHUTE SETSWANA: BY NALEDI N KGOLO-LOTSHWAO

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and

ITHUTE KGOMO: BY NALEDI N KGOLO-LOTSHWAO

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Two recent books by Naledi Naomi Kgolo-Lotshwao are the focus of this multiple book review. Both texts are markedly different from each other yet point towards an acquisition and appreciation of Setswana. This review is comparative and shows how both texts complement one another and are best acquired as a set. *Learn Setswana/Ithute Setswana* is presented in a manner that is contemporary and one that makes language acquisition less didactic and more practical. This review will use the block method by first starting with *Learn Setswana/ Ithute Setswana* (2021) followed by *Ithute Kgomo* (2022).

At first glance *Learn Setswana/Ithute Setswana* (2021) seems like a prescriptive piece of writing yet surprisingly this is far from the truth. The text can be read as a tourist guidebook to learning basic Setswana. Thus, the target audience is visitors on a short stay who need to find their way around the country. A lot of the examples that the author uses create contexts that a tourist or traveller is likely to find themselves in. For instance, there is a substantial section on ‘Greetings and courtesies.’ Yet the book goes beyond mundane descriptions and what sets it apart from the classroom environment is its provision of contextual nuggets. For instance, there is a note on greetings where the author states, ‘where you greet elders or superior people you are expected to bow a little at the knee, or if engaged in a handshake, to support your right elbow with your left hand. This is taken as a sign of respect’ (Kgolo-Lotshwao, 2021, p.7). The book’s main strength is that it goes beyond the didactic to provide cultural nuances that ensure the completeness of the utterance. Everybody can greet with the right lessons, but it takes a little extra to infuse the greeting with normative cultural behaviour.

A second aspect to note is the section on slang. The text strives to be contemporary, and it does so without being overbearing or condescending. This is a section from which learners of Setswana will draw much amusement. Though short it covers most of the slang words that are in vogue. Given that most of the slang words do not go beyond three syllables, they should not be too much of a problem for learners. For instance, words like *makhola* (policeman) and *skwatta* (soldier/military) (Kgolo-Lotshwao, 2021, p. 32) are some of the popular slang words. However, it would have been better if the author had provided a word (of caution) on the (in)appropriateness of these words in certain contexts. For example, police officers may not take too kindly to being addressed as *makhola* while on duty.

A good language book strives to cover as much ground as possible without overwhelming the learner. It needs to cover different scenarios that it assumes the learner will encounter. Does *Learn Setswana/Ithute Setswana* (2021) achieve this? Yes. If there is an area that learners would have surely benefited from, it is the area of tone in pronunciation. The author touches on low and high tones in the early part of the book, under Setswana Speech Sounds. Further examples of such are provided on page 5. However, in large parts of the book tonal markers are not provided when examples are given. This may affect correct pronunciation and by extension, communication between speakers. Despite this handicap, one cannot really fault the book. It is pocket sized dynamite and has something for everyone. Native speakers for instance, should find the brief section on cattle colours extremely helpful.

Ithute Kgomo (2022) is a specialised text that seems to dwarf *Learn Setswana/Ithute Setswana* (2021) literally and figuratively. This is also a gem of a picture book, and you will be hard pressed to find a Setswana educational text at par with this offering in the market. It is best seen as a picture book because it carries illustrations on every page, supported by a text or caption that echoes or reinforces the picture.

Batswana are a people who venerate cattle and oral tradition, as evidenced through proverbs, illustrates this well. In fact, at the beginning of the book a proverb, ‘*Modimo o o nko e metsi*’ (Kgolo-Lotshwao, 2022, p.4) exemplifies the somewhat godlike status Batswana bestow upon their cattle.

This is a well-structured text with a foreword (*ketapele*) that doubles as a justification for the publication. In the foreword the author writes, ‘*Thuo ya kgomo ke bontlha bongwe jwa popota jwa go nna Motswana*’ (Kgolo-Lotshwao, 2022, p.6) which can be loosely translated to mean that cattle farming is one important aspect to being a Motswana. The book is meant for native speakers as there is none of the translation or dual language presentation found in *Learn Setswana/Ithute Setswana* (2021). It should therefore be seen as an introductory book for the young given its pictorial approach. Picture books can enable children to understand a story or concept from multiple perspectives (Oktarina, Hari & Ambarwati, 2020). *Ithute Kgomo* (2022) works well in capturing one’s attention and this helps in memory retention. It also has an exercise section at the back which includes a tracing exercise. The book no doubt makes learning about cattle fun and engaging. The quality of the book is such that it can also be used at a coffee table for leisurely reading by young adults. Despite its target market, the book is quite informative. If there is a small gripe that one might have, it is the lack of adequate coverage on cattle colours. There is only one example in the book, ‘*Kgomo e e naana, e tonanyana e e tshwanang le yone go a twe e nala*’ (Kgolo-Lotshwao, 2022, p. 35), which can be translated to “this female cow is said to be *naana* while the male one that is similar to it [in colour] is said to be *nala*. Among the Batswana, cattle may have the same colours, but they are named differently according to their sex. Given that almost every page has cows of various colours, this would have been a great opportunity for subtle identification of the cattle by colour. Adults would have found this helpful as well. Perhaps in future one could provide a quiz at the end of the book for readers to practise matching cows with their colour names.

Both texts serve their purpose well. *Learn Setswana/Ithute Setswana* (2021) targets a foreign audience whereas *Ithute Kgomo* (2022) is suitable for young children. The dedication, 'Go barui ba kamoso' (Kgolo-Lotshwao, 2022, p. 5) illustrates this. The two texts complement each other well. For instance, where *Learn Setswana/Ithute Setswana* (2021) is devoid of illustrations, it makes up for this in attention to detail that is easy to follow. The book also uses examples which employ sentences that are in everyday use. It may not have pictures of cattle, but it offers as an alternative comprehensive description of such colours. Readers will be pleasantly surprised at the 'Cheat Sheet' on page iv which is akin to a crash course summarising what one needs to know. Similarly, *Ithute Kgomo* (2022) focuses on one subject, but it does so in a style that is not tedious or overly didactic. The layout of the book is such that the eye moves from the picture to the caption. In this manner it is engaging from the very beginning. The two texts are best bought as a set and schools will do well to acquire them for student populations which are diverse in ethnicity and race. Each book is effective in Setswana language acquisition and retention. I found the two gems enjoyable, informative, and not the least bit pretentious in their mandate. They are highly recommended.

Reference

Oktarina, P.S., Sri Hari, L.P., & Ambarwati, W.N. (2020). The effectiveness of using picture books to motivate students, especially young learners in reading. *Journal of English Language Education*, 3(1),72-79.