



A Book Review of Motlatsi Thabane's Book, Moshoeshoe in His Own Word

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Book Review

Moshoeshoe in His own Words is a very important scholarly contribution that provides insights about King Moshoeshoe based on his words and on the texts produced by those who have studied the character and attributes of Moshoeshoe or had a chance to reflect on these issues. The book is a collection of a variety of texts that reflect that thinking and character of King Moshoeshoe. The texts can be divided into three categories. One group is that of documents that describes the belief systems of people who had influence on Moshoeshoe and the influence of such personalities on Moshoeshoe. Then, there are texts produced by Moshoeshoe's contemporaries. These texts provide readers with the understanding of Moshoeshoe's actions, decisions and the thoughts and ideas that influenced those decisions. The third group of texts contains those attributed to Moshoeshoe, including excerpts from written documents such as letters.

Despite its aim, of presenting the ideas of and ideas of a King whose first language was Sesotho, *Moshoeshoe in His Own Words* presents all the content in Sesotho. This includes texts that were originally composed in Lesotho, such as some of the texts produced by Moshoeshoe. In what could be regarded as a limitation, the book does not provide the original Sesotho texts alongside their translations, with only the English translations available in the book. A positive element regarding this is that, in rendering the original texts into English, the book employs a literal translation approach that keeps the structure and idiom of the source text intact.

The book does not offer any interpretive commentary. The text

is presented without any discussion and no context or background information is provided. It is left to the reader to find out the contextual information surrounding the quotations provided in the book. The absence of explanatory framing enables scholars, whether they be linguists, historians, cultural scholars, or students of African leadership, to engage with the texts through their own disciplinary lenses. This approach shows an understanding of the importance of scholarly openness, with different scholars granted the freedom to analyse the texts without the prescription, influence and limitations of one particular theoretical framework.

A major strength of the book is a voluminous collection of primary material. While some of the texts are often featured in discussions about Moshoeshoe, some are not well-known. The inclusion of these expressions is quite important as it provides more information about the Basotho king. Also, the texts about Moshoeshoe come from diverse sources, which is quite important for a book that attempts to enhance understanding of a personality of a strong leader. The literal translation of Moshoeshoe's words is important as it enables the reader to meet them without that much of a filter despite the use of English as a media. The use of English in presenting these texts can actually be perceived in a positive light since it enables a large audience to get access to the thoughts and ideas of Moshoeshoe.

Although leaving the words in isolation has an advantage of allowing diverse forms of interpretation and analysis, it also has some drawbacks. A major drawback is that lack of context can make it difficult for a reader who is not familiar with Moshoeshoe's and

his life to make a meaningful analysis of the texts. This is likely to be the case with short quotations and culture bound excerpts that need a deep backgrounding on what the texts meant, especially in the cultural context. Another issue that can be highlighted is the absence of original texts alongside their translations. The original texts can be useful for those who speak Sesotho to compare the source texts with the target texts, and to fill in the gaps where, as it will always inevitably happen, there is a discrepancy between the two, especially with regards to the transmission of culture-based concepts.

Despite some of the highlighted limitations, *Moshoeshoe in His Own Words*, serves as a significant contribution to scholarship on African history and to the field of linguistics. The book provides important insights about one of the major figures in the history of Southern Africa and allows diverse scholars, such as linguists and historians, a chance to analyse and make sense of the linguistic data that talks about and provides an understanding of King

Moshoeshoe. The open, atheoretical approach that does not include contextual information allows for multiple readings and makes the book a useful tool for scholars of a range of fields. The book can be of interest to many scholars including scholars of Southern African history, linguistics, translators and those interested in indigenous leadership in Africa.

All in all, *Moshoeshoe in His Own Words* is a compelling volume and a must-read for any one that seeks to understand the worldview of one of Southern Africa's most influential figures. The book's main strength lies in its approach, which allows everyone access to the primary data.

Declaration of Interest

None

Acknowledgement

None