

CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In order to gain some perspective of the linguistic situation among the Ndebele people of South Africa it is necessary that something first be briefly said about the historical background of these people.

The Ndebele people of South Africa comprise two main groups known as the Southern Ndebele and the Northern Ndebele. These two Ndebele speaking groups must not be confused with another ethnic group bearing the name Ndebele, viz. the Ndebele of Zimbabwe (sometimes referred to by non-Nguni speakers as the “Matabele”). The members of the latter group are the descendants of Mzilikazi and have a different history from that of the Ndebele people of South Africa. Many scholars such as Van Warmelo (1930 op. cit.:9), Coetzee (1980:297-298), Van Vuuren (1983:13) and De Beer (1986:32) claim that the Ndebele people of South Africa are genealogically related by being the descendants of the same ancestral chief, known as Msi (Van Warmelo, op. cit.:8); or Musi (Van Vuuren, op.cit.:13; Skhosana, 1996:6). As a result of a succession struggle among Musi’s five sons that took place at the beginning of the 19th century the Ndebele people split into two main groups, which in turn split into a number of smaller groups. One of the main groups under the leadership of Musi’s son, Nzundza, left their original settlement area at KwaMnyamana near Pretoria and fled eastwards before finally settling in an area called KwaSimkhulu in Mpumalanga, not far from where the town of Belfast is today (Skhosana, op. cit.:18).

The second main group under the leadership of another of Musi’s sons, known as Mthombeni, also abandoned their traditional home at KwaMnyamana and, according to De Beer (op. cit.:32), first moved in the same direction as Nzundza and his people

before they decided to turn northwards eventually settling in the vicinity of the present day Mokopane (Potgietersrust). De Beer (op. cit.:33) maintains that a further split took place at this point that resulted in a number of Mthombeni's followers leaving the main group and moving eastwards to where the town of Phalaborwa is today. It is not known how long they stayed in this area before they once again continued with their trek, this time northwards to Zimbabwe from where they eventually returned home via Venda to their present location in the Mokopane area (Wilkes, 2001:311). According to some informants, the town of Sibasa in Venda is named after a well-known Northern Ndebele chief Sibasa of the Lidwaba clan (Ziervogel, op.cit.:22), and serves as further proof of the erstwhile presence of the Northern Ndebele people in that part of the country (Wilkes, personal communication). According to van Warmelo's (op. cit.:13) informants, Sibasa was the name of one of Musi's five sons.

Not much is known about the history of Musi's remaining three sons except that his son Dhlomo apparently went back to Natal while another son Manala and his following decided to remain in the Pretoria area (Van Warmelo, op. cit.: 9) where most of their descendents are still found today, notably in the Hammanskraal area as well as in certain areas to the west of Pretoria. Today the Manala people (bakwaManala) consider themselves as part of the Southern Ndebele group and speak a language that is similar to that spoken by their Ndundza counterparts.

While scholars are more or less in agreement as far as the history of the Southern Ndebele people is concerned this is not so in the case of the history of the Northern Ndebele. Ziervogel (op. cit.:5) and Jackson (1969:i-iv) have different views on this matter. Jackson maintains that the Northern Ndebele people ((op. cit.:i) to whom he refers as the so-called 'Black Ndebele' do not derive their origin from Musi's tribe. They are the people of Langa who trace their origin from the erstwhile Zululand just like their Southern Ndebele counterparts do. They are, however, the descendants of a different ancestral chief, called Langalibalele (Jackson, op. cit.:i). Furthermore, Jackson maintains that the emigration of the Northern and Southern Ndebele people to the former Transvaal

did not take place at the same time, in other words, they moved to their new settlement areas in the Transvaal not only in separate groups but also at different times in history. According to his speculation, however, Jackson concludes that the Langa people left Zululand around 1650 (Jackson, *op. cit.*:4). Today, the Langa people reside mainly in the Polokwane area and use Northern Sotho as their mother tongue.

Ziervogel (*op. cit.*:5) holds an entirely different view on the origin of the Northern Ndebele people. He maintains that these Ndebele people originated from Rhodesia (i.e. Zimbabwe) and not from Zululand as most scholars have thus far assumed. Wilkes (*op. cit.*:311) disputes Ziervogel's view by saying that it is historically unfounded and that Ziervogel's informants in all probability mistook the return of Mthombeni's followers from Zimbabwe as the emigration of the entire Northern Ndebele tribe from that country. As a result of historical factors, today there are two distinct groups of Ndebele people, that is the Northern Ndebele, situated mainly in Mokopane (Potgietersrust), Mashashane and Zebediela areas, and the Southern Ndebele, found in Mpumalanga, and in areas such as the former KwaNdebele, in Gauteng, Limpopo and the North West (cf. Chapter 2 for a detailed historical background of the two Ndebele main groups).

1.2 Rationale

Southern Ndebele was documented for the first time by Fourie (1921), and later by Van Warmelo (1930) and Potgieter (1945), and Northern Ndebele was documented by Ziervogel (1959). In each of these taxonomic grammars, the author first gives an outline of the phonological features of the language that is followed by a description of the morphological features of the various word classes. In his grammar, Ziervogel also includes notes on the syntax of some of the word categories as well as on the use of some of the formatives.

The linguistic relationship between Southern and Northern Ndebele has in the past always been an uncertain one in so far as linguists have differed in their opinion as to whether these two speech forms should be regarded as variant forms of the same

language as Doke (1954:23), for instance, argues or whether they should be recognized as two independent languages as Van Wyk (1966:36) and Ziervogel (1969:36) maintain.

This conflicting view on the linguistic status of these languages has hitherto never been extensively probed, mainly because linguists have been under the impression that the Northern Ndebele language had for all practical purposes ceased to exist. It was assumed that it is no longer spoken by the Northern Ndebele people who for some reason had rejected it in favour of Northern Sotho, the dominant language of the surrounding ethnic groups. This impression persisted among linguists in South Africa for many years until Wilkes (2001), in a fairly recent investigation among the Northern Ndebele people residing in and around the town of Mokopane in the Northern Province, discovered that this perception is entirely false and that the Northern Ndebele language is still widely spoken in the area. The extent to which Northern Ndebele differs from Southern Ndebele has hitherto not been the focus of the kind of in-depth investigation that this study has undertaken.

1.3 Problem Identification

The current dilemma that surrounds these two languages is that while they are regarded, in some linguistic circles, as separate languages, they are officially regarded as variants of the same language. Clear proof of how these languages are viewed officially is found in a booklet on the latest population census of South Africa published by Statistics South Africa (2004) in which no distinction is made between these two speech forms. Further proof of the non-recognition of Northern Ndebele is found in Section 6 (1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, which refers to isiNdebele. This clearly indicates that both these Ndebele speech forms are officially regarded as a single language. The fact that the speakers of both these languages are known by the name Ndebele and their languages as isiNdebele (South) and siNdebele or siNrebele (North), respectively, has no doubt also contributed to the official view that these speech forms are variants of the same language. Mashiyane (2002:67), for instance, regarding the linguistic relationship of these two Ndebele languages states that

‘The Ndebele have another variety referred to as Northern Ndebele. It is sometimes referred to as abakwaMgombhane or Mokopane. This is one dialect that differs so much from the Ndzundza and Manala that it warrants a more detailed comparison.’ (own emphasis)

The assumption that the Southern and Northern Ndebele people are the descendants of the same ancestral chief (Musi) could have been a mitigating factor prompting the authorities to regard these speech forms simply as variants.

However, the Northern Ndebele people themselves do not regard their language as being a variant form of Southern Ndebele. To them, Southern Ndebele is an entirely different language spoken by people with a distinct lineage to which many of them no longer regard themselves as being genealogically related (Wilkes, op. cit.:312). The fact that many language planners and decision-makers perceive these two Ndebele speech forms as variant forms of the same language may one day lead to a situation where these two languages are unwillingly forced upon each other, especially with regard to their further development. A good example of such a possibility occurred a few years ago when a high-ranking official from the Department of Arts and Culture requested the Southern Ndebele Dictionary Unit to include Northern Ndebele as part of their dictionary-making programme.

Another aspect that has thus far not yet been extensively researched is the question of how closely related these two Ndebele languages are, in other words, are they variants of the same language or are they two separate languages. Wilkes (op. cit.:310-322) thus far has been the only scholar to have investigated the linguistic relationship between these two Ndebele speech forms. His aim was to determine whether they are linguistically so closely related that they can be harmonized into a single unified language or whether they differ to such an extent that their harmonization is not feasible. He found that these languages differ so much that their harmonization cannot be regarded as an option.

Attempts to synthesize the two language forms will lead to the creation of an artificial speech form that the Ndebele people are bound to reject.

In his investigation of the compatibility of Southern and Northern Ndebele Wilkes compares only a limited number of features in these languages to show why their unification will not work. It was not his aim to make a comprehensive study of their linguistic affinity, thus underlining the rationale for the current research project.

1.4 Method of Research

The fact that this study aims to investigate the linguistic relationship between Southern and Northern Ndebele as they are spoken today means that this investigation has mainly been executed on a synchronic basis. However, in instances where the differences between these two speech forms cannot be synchronically explained diachronic methods have as far as possible been employed in order to determine to what extent these differences can be accounted for in terms of possible typological developments as formulated by Poulos (1985:17-23) and Prinsloo (1988:144-150) or whether they are the result of the diachronic developments. In this regard, Meinhof's notion of Ur-Bantu could play an important role.

In this investigation, a comprehensive study is made of all the distinctive features that occur between Southern and Northern Ndebele. For this purpose, these two speech forms are compared with one another on all linguistic levels including their vocabulary. Where differences occur, an attempt has been made to determine whether these are the result of internal factors such as typological development, or whether they can be attributed to external factors such as foreign interferences. This method of investigation attempts to expose the exact linguistic relationship between Southern and Northern Ndebele. Furthermore, the objective is to bring more clarity to the history of the Northern Ndebele people by indicating which of the different theories outlined above concerning the origin of these people is best substantiated by the linguistic facts. The results of this research have been interpreted by means of the guidelines proposed by scholars such as Antilla (1972), Trudgill (1983:127), Akmajian et al. (1987:287 and 352), Hock and Joseph

(1996:322), Heine and Nurse (2000:1) and Dalby (2002:128) so that the true linguistic status of these two Ndebele speech forms can be determined, that is, whether they qualify as dialectic variants of the same language or whether they must be regarded as two completely independent languages.

For the purpose of this study all published material on the two languages has been consulted as well as Professor Wilkes's field notes on Northern Ndebele that he recorded during his field trips to the Northern Ndebele speaking communities in and around Mokopane (Potgietersrust) during 1999 and 2000 and which he kindly agreed to put at this researcher's disposal. Where the information needs more clarity and confirmation personal interviews with the Northern Ndebele speakers have been conducted.

1.5 The significance of the study

The real significance of this study lies in the fact that this will have been the first time that an in-depth study has been made of the linguistic relationship between Southern and Northern Ndebele and in this regard it differs from the other comparative studies of these two speech forms undertaken by scholars such as Skhosana (1998), Wilkes (2001) and Mashiyane (2002).

1.6 Literature Review

In-depth linguistic comparative works in African languages, particularly in Nguni languages, have tended to be limited in the sense that linguists have been interested in the so-called major African languages such as isiZulu, isiXhosa and, to a lesser extent siSwati. It comes as no surprise that isiNdebele has recently been accorded official recognition as an autonomous language (i.e., 1985). Consequently, few comparative studies relevant to isiNdebele (i.e., Southern Ndebele) or Northern Ndebele have been conducted.

Lanham (1960), in his work entitled ‘The comparative Phonology of Nguni’, compares the four Nguni languages phonologically, viz. isiZulu, isiXhosa, Zimbabwean Ndebele and siSwati. Neither Southern nor Northern Ndebele features in this comparative work.

In 1962, Mzamane followed with his work entitled ‘A comparative Phonetic and Morphological Study of the dialects of Southern Nguni including the Lexical influences on the non-Bantu languages’, which focuses on phonetics, phonology, morphology and lexical items of isiXhosa: Mpondo, Thembu, Mpondomise, Hlubi, Bhaca and Nhangwini. In essence this study focuses principally on a comparative study of isiXhosa dialects.

In 1975, Posselt followed with his comparative study on Ur-Bantu phonemes with Nguni phonological system, as identified by Meinhof, entitled ‘*n vergelykende Studie van die Klanke van Oer-Bantoe met dié van Nguni*’. Unlike his two predecessors Lanham and Mzamane, Posselt includes Southern and Northern Ndebele in his comparative work. In this Master’s study, Posselt (1975:16-17) regards and treats Southern and Northern Ndebele as two distinct languages, (i.e., Southern Ndebele as Zunda Nguni and Northern Ndebele as Tekela Nguni languages).

Msimang’s doctoral study that he completed in 1989 entitled ‘Some Phonological Aspects of the Tekela Nguni dialects’ compares six Tekela Nguni dialects, viz. Swati, Bhaca, Lala, Nhangwini, Phuthi and Northern Ndebele, which he calls Sumayela as the speakers prefer to call it. Although Msimang only includes Northern Ndebele in his study obviously as one of the Tekela Nguni languages he regards Southern and Northern Ndebele as a members of one and the same language family (Msimang, 1989:68).

In 1996, P. M. Lubisi compared isiZulu and siSwati on the phonological, grammatical and lexical aspects in his Master’s dissertation entitled ‘Some Major Phonological, Grammatical, Lexical and Orthographical Differences between isiZulu and siSwati’.

The reason why the Southern and/or Northern Ndebele language(s) does/(do) not feature fairly in the above comparative studies is, most likely, because Southern Ndebele has hitherto not been recognized as an autonomous language and because Northern Ndebele has not yet been recognized as a school, regional or official language in South Africa.

There are a few linguistic studies conducted in Southern Ndebele. Fourie, in his doctoral thesis entitled *'AmaNdebele van Fene Mahlangu en hun Religieus'-sociaal leven'*, conducted his study on the social and religious beliefs of the Nzunza Ndebele sub-group in 1921. In 1930, Van Warmelo emerged with his ethnological publication entitled *'Transvaal Ndebele Texts'* that basically focuses on the ethnological aspects of the Transvaal Ndebele with a special focus on the Manala sub-group. As an ethnologist, Van Warmelo (1930:24-32) pays cursory and brief attention to some linguistic aspects of Southern Ndebele as spoken by the Manala sub-group, viz. orthography, phonology and grammar.

A detailed Master's study of Southern Ndebele linguistics came in 1945 by Potgieter entitled *'Inleiding tot die klank-en vormleer van isiNdzundza: 'n Dialek van Suid-Transvaalse Ngoenie-Ndebele, soos'gepraat in die distrikte van Rayton en Pretoria'*. In this study, Potgieter focuses on the linguistic structure of the Ndzundza sub-group of Southern Ndebele speaking people.

In 1997 Wilkes, in an article entitled *'Language Contact and Language Change-the case of Southern Ndebele'*, investigated and discussed the influence of non-Nguni languages on Southern Ndebele. In the article, Wilkes concentrates on some salient lexical, phonological and grammatical changes that Southern Ndebele exhibits as a result of the influence of the Sotho languages (i.e., Sepedi and Tswana). In a second article (2001) entitled: *'Northern and Southern Ndebele – Why harmonization will not work?'* Wilkes investigates and discusses some major linguistic differences between Southern and Northern Ndebele. In essence, this is a comparative article. Wilkes concludes that the two Ndebele languages differ to such an extent that they are two separate languages and, consequently, their harmonization is impracticable. Skhosana (1998) in Chapter 2 of his

Master's dissertation entitled 'Foreign Interferences in sound, grammatical and lexical system of Southern Ndebele', briefly highlights some prominent linguistic differences (viz. phonemic, morphological and the so-called "ndrondroza" phenomenon) between Southern and Northern Ndebele. However, the focus of that study is not on a comparison of the two Ndebele languages, but on foreign interferences in the sound, grammar and lexical system of Southern Ndebele.

Jiyane (1994) in his Master's dissertation entitled 'Aspects of isiNdebele grammar' deals with some grammatical aspects of Southern Ndebele, while Skosana (2002) in her Master's mini-dissertation entitled 'Aspects of the copulatives in Ndebele' focuses on the copulative aspects of Southern Ndebele. This study is concurrent with that of Mashiyane's Master's dissertation entitled 'Some sociolinguistic aspects of Southern Ndebele as spoken in South Africa', which maintains that Northern Ndebele is a dialect of Southern Ndebele (Mashiyane, 2002). Regarding the linguistic relationship between these two Ndebele languages, Mashiyane (op. cit.:67) states:

'The Ndebele have another variety referred to as Northern Ndebele. Sometimes it is referred to as abakwaMgombane or Mokopane. This is one dialect that differs so much from the Ndzundza and Manala that it warrants a more detailed comparison.'

However, the study focuses on the sociolinguistic aspect of Southern Ndebele and not necessarily on a comparison of the two languages.

While a few linguistic studies begin to emerge in the Southern Ndebele language, almost none are available in Northern Ndebele, except Ziervogel's only authoritative and reliable source entitled *A Grammar of Northern Transvaal Ndebele*, published in 1959. Ziervogel concentrates mainly on Northern Ndebele grammatical structure; he commences with an overview survey of the historical background of the Northern (Transvaal) Ndebele and in subsequent chapters discusses the following Northern Ndebele linguistic aspects –

- (i) the dialects and some distinguishable elements in the Northern Ndebele language, viz. Nguni, Sotho and unknown elements
- (ii) the phonemic and phonological system
- (iii) morphological aspects
- (vi) syntactical structure, and
- (v) some texts recorded from the informants.

From the above literature review, with the exception of two limited studies by Wilkes (2001), and an article of approximately twelve pages (Skhosana, 1998:15-28), it is evident that no in-depth comparative study has been undertaken to assess the linguistic affinity between the two Ndebele languages. Therefore, the question of ‘To what extent are these two Ndebele languages linguistically related or unrelated?’ still needed to be answered and that is what this investigation aims to respond to.

However, since this is a linguistic comparative study between the two main South African Ndebele languages (i.e., Southern and Northern Ndebele), it is important to begin by highlighting the distinction between a “language” and a “dialect” or “variant”.

1.7 A Language vs Dialect

The term “language” always implies the term “dialect” and vice versa to indicate that the two terms are very close to each other and thus difficult to define precisely. From a non-linguistic specialist’s point of view, it seems easy to define what a “language” is. It is ‘the most significant tool that a human being uses to communicate his or her thoughts and views in discourse’ (Potter, 1957:35). However, from a linguist’s point of view, the definition of a “language” is so much more complex and problematic that even linguists have not reached consensus regarding its clear-cut definition. For instance, Potter (1957:36) defines “language” as

‘... a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which human beings communicate with one another.’

Antilla (1972:12) concurs with Potter when he says:

‘A language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by which the members of a speech community (social group) cooperate and interact (communicate).’

Both definitions emphasize ‘vocal symbol’ and ‘communication’. However, they are truly not watertight. Hudson (1980:23-24) cautions that

‘If one thinks of “language” as a phenomenon including all the languages of the world, the term variety of language (or just variety for short) can be used to refer to different manifestations of it, in the same way as one might take music as a general phenomenon and then distinguish different varieties of music.’

According to Hudson, the term “language” cannot be adequately defined without reference to “variety or varieties”. Hudson is supported by Petyt (1980:27) in arguing that “language” comprises “dialects” and, in turn, dialects comprise “varieties”. This is appropriate in that both languages under investigation (i.e., Southern and Northern Ndebele) have dialects or varieties as is the case with any other living language such as English, Afrikaans, German, Spanish, and so on. However, the problem still remains as to whether one can determine a “language” on the basis of it having dialects or not. In answering this question, Heine and Nurse (2000:1) state that

‘A language is often defined by some combination of: having national status, being written, being the standard form of a range of varieties; not being intelligible to the speakers of other “languages”; and having a relatively large number of native speakers.’

New emphasis on ‘status’, ‘be written’, ‘be standardized’ and ‘not intelligible to the speakers of other languages’ is notable from Heine and Nurse’s definition of a “language”. However, the prerequisite of ‘not being intelligible to the speakers of the other languages’ poses a serious problem. For instance, Norwegian and Swedish are mutually quite intelligible, yet most people, including linguists, consider them as different languages (Hock & Joseph, 1996:325). In a South African linguistic context, the Nguni language group (i.e., isiZulu, isiXhosa, siSwati and isiNdebele) is, to a large extent, intelligible to one another but these are regarded as different languages.

Hock and Joseph (1996:322) state that

‘Language is prestigious, correct, standardized, and follows the rules of a grammar.’

Here, the term ‘prestigious’ is often used closely, if not confusedly, with ‘status’ and ‘function’ in language definition. To distinguish the exact meaning of the three concepts, Ulrich Ammon (1987:4) argues that

‘Basically the essential difference between prestige, function and status is the difference between past present and future. The prestige of a language depends on its record, or what people think its record to have been. The function of a language is what people actually do with it. The status of a language depends on what people can do with it, its potential. Status, therefore, is the sum total of what you can do with a language – legally, culturally, economically, politically and, of course, demographically.’

If one considers language as having ‘prestige, status and function’, one still confronts a serious problem when, for instance, one considers classical Latin as having a multiplicity of functions but little prestige, or Irish Gaelic that has official status but few exclusive functions. In an African linguistic context, Kiswahili has a lot of functions but little

prestige (Ammon, 1987:4), in spite of Julius Nyerere's attempt to make it the official language of Tanzania.

According to Trudgill (1983:127), a language can be one of the important defining characteristics of an ethnic group membership and, consequently, in many communities there is a strong link between ethnicity and language. This suggests that a "language", in addition, identifies people as an ethnic group or nation and, in turn, a nation of people can be defined by the language that those people speak (Dalby, 2002:128). However, linguists, generally agree that a "language" has to have a standard form of "dialects or varieties" as Petyt (1980:27) notes. Hock and Joseph (1996:324) also emphasise the point that a language comprises dialects and, in turn, dialects comprise varieties.

In defining what a "dialect" is, Akmajian et al. (1987:287) state:

'A dialect is simply a distinct form of a language, possibly associated with a recognizable region, social, or ethnic group, differentiated from other forms of a language by specific linguistic features (for example, pronunciation, or vocabulary, or grammar or any combination of these.'

Hock and Joseph (1996:322) go further to say:

"Dialects" lack prestige, are incorrect, substandard, and fail to obey the rules of grammar. They are a devaluation of what a language ought to be.'

From the above quotations, it becomes clear that what enables a language to be regarded or recognized as a language, (e.g., is standard, prestigious and functional, has status, is written, and is nationally recognized, etc.) is what a "dialect" lacks. Hock and Joseph (1996:322) concur with Akmajian et al. (1987:287) that a "dialect" is a form of a language that is regarded as substandard, incorrect, or corrupt and is without prestige.

Petyt (1980:13) further points out that, in particular, traditional dialectologists have applied the criterion of mutual intelligibility in testing whether a speech form is a dialect or language. They maintain that dialects of the same language are different but mutually intelligible forms of speech. However, the intelligibility criterion raises a problem in that some dialects of the same language may be mutually intelligible, while some not intelligible at all. For instance, Norwegian and Swedish have different standard dialects, but their speakers consider themselves different from each other which means, according to Hock and Joseph (1996:324), that cultural, social and political considerations overrule the mutual intelligibility test. However, any two neighbouring local dialects are obviously perfectly intelligible to each other (Hock & Joseph, 1996:324).

To sum up Akmajian et al. (1987:352) argue that

‘A group of languages is historically (or genetically) related if large groups of words can be found in each of the languages such that (a) they are made up of phonemes that can be shown to derive from the (hypothesized) phonemes of the parent language by the result of regular phonological rules that have applied at some point in the history of each of the languages, and (b) the words that are hypothesized to come from a common parent word are the same or are related in meaning.’

At the same time, Akmajian, et al. (1987:290) argue that

‘Historical and political factors can also give rise to the opposite situation, namely, where two mutually intelligible forms are not considered dialects of the same language, but rather two distinct languages.’

This view is supported by Dalby (2002:128) when arguing that a group speaking the same language is known as a nation and a nation ought to constitute a state. The eleven official languages of the Republic of South Africa are based on and recognized by the historical and political status of the nations speaking these languages long before the

dawn of the new dispensation in 1994. Akmajian et al. (op. cit.:290) cite an example of Papago and Pima that are mutually intelligible and extremely close phonologically and grammatically but, for historical and political reasons, their speakers consider their languages as distinct languages rather than as a dialectic variation of the same language.

1.8 Chapter Outline

The structure of this study is as follows –

Chapter 1

This is an introductory chapter, providing the rationale for the study, identifying its thrust and articulating the methodology chosen. As this is a comparative study between two languages which do not share the same linguistic status, terms such as “language” and “dialect” or “variant” are defined in this chapter. The chapter also incorporates a literature review as part of the essential background to this research project.

Chapter 2

The historical background of the amaNdebele people of the Republic of South Africa (i.e., Southern and Northern Ndebele), the prevailing views concerning their origin and their distribution in South Africa are the focus of this chapter. In addition, the origin and meaning of the name “Ndebele”, which refers to both the Southern and Northern Ndebele, is discussed.

Chapter 3

In this chapter the phonological system of Southern and Northern Ndebele is examined and all phonological differences between the two language groups are identified and discussed in order to determine the extent of their phonetic relationship. The nature and possible origin of these differences are also investigated.

Chapter 4

This chapter focuses on the morphophonological differences which these two Ndebele languages exhibit.

Chapter 5

Chapter Five focuses on the morphological differences between Southern and Northern Ndebele. Where necessary the possible reasons for their occurrence and origin are also investigated and discussed.

Chapter 6

The morphological differences in the qualificatives between Southern and Northern Ndebele are continued in this chapter.

Chapter 7

In this chapter, the morphological differences between Southern and Northern Ndebele are analysed in terms of two further word categories, namely, copulatives and adverbs.

Chapter 8

The morphological differences in mood, tenses, verbs, auxiliary verbs, conjunctives and ideophones are the focus of this chapter.

Chapter 9

The focus of this chapter is the spelling rules of these two Ndebele languages.

Chapter 10

This is a concluding chapter. All the linguistic features distinguishing the two Ndebele languages are summarized according to the main findings of the study. This chapter attempts to show whether these two Ndebele speech forms have enough in common to be regarded as variant forms of the same language or whether the extent and the nature of

their differences are such that they should be judged as two completely separate languages.

CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE NDEBELE PEOPLE OF SOUTH AFRICA

2.1 Introduction

There are divergent opinions regarding the history of the Ndebele speaking people. As this study is aimed at collating the linguistic structure of the two main Ndebele language groups that form so-called Transvaal Ndebele, namely, the Southern and Northern Ndebele, the historical background and the geographical distribution of these two Ndebele groups found within the borders of the Republic of South Africa are discussed in further detail in this chapter and are presented under the following headings:

- (i) The history of the Ndebele people of South Africa
- (ii) Their composition and geographical distribution
- (iii) The origin and the meaning of the generic name “Ndebele”.

2.2 The history of the Ndebele people of South Africa

The name “Ndebele” is commonly used to refer to two genealogically distinct Ndebele groups, namely the so-called Zimbabwean Ndebele who were the followers of Mzilikazi and are found in Zimbabwe as their name indicates and the so-called Transvaal Ndebele who reside within the borders of the Republic of South Africa and who currently comprise two main groups known as the Southern and Northern Ndebele, respectively, and are mainly found in four of the provinces of South Africa, namely, Mpumalanga, Limpopo, North West and Gauteng. The two Ndebele speaking groups of the Republic of South Africa have been studied by various anthropologists, ethnologists as well as linguists such as Fourie (1921), Van Warmelo (1930), Potgieter (1945), Ziervogel (1959), Bruwer (1963:17-18), Hammond-Tooke (1974:67), Van Vuuren (1983 and 1992), De Beer (1986) and others. There are numerous conflicting points of views regarding the origin and history of the Transvaal Ndebele, who are divided into Southern Ndebele and

Northern Ndebele. The initial point of view, as already mentioned, is the one propounded by scholars such as Fourie (1921), Van Warmelo (1930) and others that the Southern and Northern Ndebele people of South Africa constitute a single ethnic group as both these groups are the descendants of the same ancestral chief, called Musi. The second point of view, noted in Chapter One, is the one made by Ziervogel (1959) that the Southern and Northern Ndebele are two distinct ethnic groups that do not claim the same genealogical line of descent, meaning that the Northern Ndebele group do not claim descent from chief Musi but rather from an ancestral chief called Nungu. In the paragraph that follows the historical background of the Transvaal Ndebele is discussed.

2.3 The origin of the Ndebele people of the former Transvaal

The historical background of the Transvaal Ndebele, particularly before their emigration from KwaZulu-Natal into what was formerly known as the Transvaal, is hazy and incoherently presented in most available sources. According to the earliest scholars such as Fourie (1921) and Van Warmelo (1930), who paid more attention to the history of the Southern Ndebele, the Transvaal Ndebele are one of the Nguni groups that trace their origins to KwaZulu-Natal where they formed part of the main Hlubi tribe.

The view that the Transvaal Ndebele are the direct descendants of the main Hlubi tribe, that constituted the largest tribe within the eMbo Nguni group, is supported by authors such as Massie (1905), Fourie (1921), Van Warmelo (1930), Trümpelmann (1936), Jackson (1969), Peires (1981) and others. Van Warmelo (1930:7) goes further and mentions that some of the Transvaal Ndebele, if not all of them, emigrated from what was formerly called Natal and that their physique, language and customs are the best evidences that they are of Zulu stock. These people, who are currently divided into two main tribes and thereafter into several smaller tribes, migrated into the Transvaal and settled in the neighbourhood of Pretoria.

What is, however, unclear regarding the history of these people is their exact location whilst they were still in KwaZulu-Natal. There are four main basic claims that emerge regarding the exact place of origin of the Transvaal Ndebele in KwaZulu-Natal. The

earliest claim is the one by Massie (1905:33) followed by Trümpelmann (1936:38-41) both of whom claim that the Transvaal Ndebele are the descendants of a branch of the Hlubi tribe whose location was on the Natal Basutoland border. The second opinion is by Fourie (1921:31) who cites the Thugela River as the Transvaal Ndebele's place of origin. Van Warmelo (1930:9) presents Ondini (or Lundini) near the Drakensberg (Khahlamba) mountains as the exact place of origin of the Transvaal Ndebele whilst Myburgh and Prinsloo (1985:2) maintain that the first known home of the Transvaal Ndebele whilst they were still in KwaZulu-Natal was a place called uMndeni. Van Warmelo's view is supported by Msimang (1989:68) who maintains that the Transvaal Ndebele split from the Hlubi tribe who resided in Northern Zululand just below the Ondini (near the Drakensberg) mountain range. These opposing views regarding the place of origin of the Transvaal Ndebele people clearly indicate the uncertainty that exists regarding this part of the history of the Ndebele people.

2.4 The first settlement area of the Ndebele people in the former Transvaal

Just as is the case with the place of origin of the Transvaal Ndebele in KwaZulu-Natal, there are also two opposing views regarding their first settlement area in what was formerly known as the Transvaal after they separated from the rest of the Hlubi tribe in KwaZulu-Natal. The first view that the majority of sources agree on, is that the Transvaal Ndebele parted from the main Nguni body (i.e., as part of the Hlubi tribe) between the 16th and 17th century, if not earlier, and headed for the Transvaal where their first settlement area was KwaMnyamana, north of Pretoria, today known as Bon Accord (Fourie, 1921:33; Van Warmelo, 1930:12). Van Warmelo (1930:7) states the following in this regard:

‘Some if not all of the Transvaal Ndebele emigrated from Natal at least two hundred years ago, and probably earlier... Today they are divided into several tribes, most of which seem to be offshoots from one original tribe that long ago migrated into the Transvaal and settled in the neighbourhood of the present Pretoria.’

The second opinion regarding the Transvaal Ndebele's first settlement area in the Transvaal is that of Van Vuuren (1983) who claims that it was at a place called eMhlangeni not very far from where the town of Randfontein is today (i.e., west of Johannesburg). In this area they settled under the chieftainship of Mafana who was later succeeded by his elder son Mhlanga. Van Vuuren (1983:12) states that

‘Hierdie woonterrein was volgens informante in die omgewing van Randfontein aan die Wes Rand geleë. Die eerste twee bekende kapteins van die Transvaalse Ndebele was hier woonagtig. Die eerste was Mafana (Linghana). Sy seun Mhlanga (Lirudla) het hom opgevolg. Tydens die regeringstyd van Mhlanga het die stam na KwaMnyamana verhuis.’

According to Van Vuuren, the Transvaal Ndebele later on moved from eMhlangeni to KwaMnyamana, near Pretoria, where they settled under the chieftainship of Chief Musi (or Msi). According to Van Warmelo (1930:12-13), Musi had six sons, namely Manala, Nzunza, Mhwaduba, Dlomu, Sibasa and Mthombeni, whereas according to Fourie (1921:33) he had five sons, viz. Manala, Masombuka, Nzunza, Mthombeni and Dlomu.

After the death of Musi, a succession struggle between two of his sons ensued and resulted in the division of the Transvaal Ndebele people into two main groups, today known as the Northern Ndebele and the Southern Ndebele, respectively, as well as splintering into several smaller groups. Van Vuuren (1983:13) states that

‘Daar het mettertyd 'n opvolgingstwis tussen Manala en Nzunza ontstaan en die huis van Musi het verdeel.’

Potgieter (1945:9-10) also confirms this tribal split, stating:

‘Musi, wat gevoel dat sy tyd naby is, het toe vir Ndzungza aangeraak en aan hom die koningskap gegee. Daarna het die koning gesterf... Dadelik

het daar 'n stryd tussen die broers losgebrand. Ndzundza het die wyk geneem en na die ooste weggevlug. En so het die huis van Musi uitmekaar gebreek.'

A very shallow and limited historical background of Musi's other sons, namely Dlomu, Sibasa and Mhwaduba, is provided by scholars such as Van Warmelo (1930:11; 1944:23) and Van Vuuren (1983:13; 1992:75), whereas Ziervogel (1959), Coetzee (1980), De Beer (1986), and others make no mention of these other sons. However, after the split between Musi's sons, smaller groups took divergent paths. Dlomu presumably went back to Natal but later returned to join his brother, Nzunza, whereas Sibasa moved far north to Venda where he established himself as a new Venda tribe (Van Vuuren, 1983:13). Van Warmelo (1930:10) states that

'According to the geneological table... Musi had a sixth son M'Pafuli, who was the first chief of the Venda tribe of Mpafuli (Mphaphuli) Makwarela.'

The name 'M'Pafuli' is, most likely, another name of Sibasa who, according to Van Warmelo (1930:10), is one of Musi's sons who went further and settled in Vendaland. Van Vuuren (1983:13) also states that

'Indien Mphafuli en Sibasa op dieselfde skakeling dui, het hy Venda toe getrek waar daar vandag dan 'n splintergroep van die Ndebele woonagtig is wat verVenda het.'

Only Mhwaduba with his followers stayed behind around KwaMnyamana and later on joined and became assimilated into the Tswana people around Hammanskraal (i.e., Morete II) (Van Vuuren, 1983:13).

The common surname "Dhlomo" amongst the Zulu people, suggests Dhlomo's southward movement. Amongst the Nzunza people, however, the surname Dhlomo is today non-

existent. In the following paragraph, the historical background of the two main Southern Ndebele branches is outlined, that is, the group under the chieftainship of Makhosoke II and the group under the chieftainship of Mayitjha III. Thereafter, attention is given to the history of the Northern Ndebele people.

2.4.1 The Southern Ndebele

The followers of Manala, Nzunza and Mhwaduba constitute the Southern Ndebele group (Potgieter (1945), Skhosana (1996). De Beer (1986:31) states that

Die vernaamste Suid Ndebele groepe is die Manala, Ndzundza en Hwaduba. Die eersgenoemde twee stamme is in KwaNdebele en laasgenoemde stam is in die Moreletedistrikt van Bophuthatswana woonagtig.’

Historically, very little is said about the last group (namely the Hwaduba), and in this work not much will be said about them either. According to Van Warmelo (1944:24), the Hwaduba Ndebele are the direct descendants of a chief called Musi. They are Nguni folk who first settled at Makgophane (Mooiplaats) east of Pretoria at the source of the Moretele or Pienaars River. During the lifetime of Musi they moved to the banks of the Tshwane (i.e., Apies River), which was named after Tshwane who was the successor of one of Musi's sons (Van Warmelo, 1944:24). Subsequently, they moved and settled at Wonderboompoort near Pretoria, where Tshwane died. Under the chieftainship of Pete, who was the eighth chief at Wonderboompoort, and who had had suffered severely at the hands of Mzilikazi, they eventually moved to their old home, Khwadubeng (Hwadubeng) which is their present location, it is not far from Hammanskraal (Van Warmelo, 1930:11; 1944:25). With regard to their language and culture, their Ndebele origin is all but effaced. Van Warmelo (1944:23) remarks that

‘Although of Ndebele origin, these people long ago lost their original language, and now speak a Kgatla type of Tswana like their neighbours

the Ba Mosetlha. When the oldest informants were children say 1880-90, some of the people were still using Ndebele.’

Ziervogel (1959:4) also confirms that the Hwaduba tribe are today completely Sothoized and linguistically belong to the Kgatla tribes.

Many scholars such as Fourie (1921), Van Warmelo (1930), Landgraf (1974), Kuger (1978), Kuper (1978), Van Vuuren (1983), Kruger and Rainey (1988), Jonas (1989), De Beer (1986) and James (1990) have preferred to focus on the history of the two main Southern Ndebele branches, namely the Nzunza and the Manala groups, respectively.

Historical record has it that after the succession struggle, both the Nzunza and Manala groups abandoned their original settlement area at KwaMnyamana. Nzunza and his brother Mthombeni, together with their followers, moved eastwards before settling in an area called KwaSimkhulu not far from where the town of Belfast is situated today, whilst the Manala group occupied the land north east of Pretoria known as Wallmansthal (or KoMjekejeke in isiNdebele) (Van Vuuren, 1983:34). At KwaSimkhulu, Nzunza and his brother Mthombeni decided to part ways. Mthombeni and his followers subsequently moved northwards towards Zebediela where they eventually settled. Nzunza and his followers on the other hand, eventually settled in a place called KoNomtjherhelo not far from where the town of Roosenekal is today, where they established themselves as a strong Mabhoko Tribe with significant political and military power. According to Van Vuuren (1991:34-35), the two Southern Ndebele branches, that is Manala and Nzunza, lived far apart from each other until the late 1970s when, as a result of the so-called homeland system during the previous dispensation, the Manala and Nzunza groups were brought together as neighbours in the same geographically defined region, known as KwaNdebele. Van Vuuren (1991:35) remarks that

‘It was not until 1977 that the Ndebele of Manala and the Nzunza became neighbours in one and the same geographically defined region. This was not, however, on their own terms, but within the apartheid

constitutional framework and homeland (Bantustan) system. One could argue that they had no other option, since the one Manala section had to buy their own tribal portion some eighty kilometres north of Pretoria, and the Nzunza paramountcy were never allowed to reclaim their fatherland near Roosenekal (Mapochgronden 500 JS).’

Today, these two Southern Ndebele branches (i.e., Manala and Nzunza) fall under the reign of Mokhosoke II and Mayitjha III, respectively, and comprise the entire so-called Southern Ndebele ethnic group.

2.4.2 The Northern Ndebele

2.4.2.1 The subgroups comprising the Northern Ndebele people.

According to Ziervogel (1959) who conducted an in-depth study of the history and language of the Northern Ndebele, this Ndebele ethnic group is subdivided into three main subgroups, namely the Moledlhana, the Langa and the Lidwaba. Ziervogel (1959:4) states that each main subgroup is comprised of several smaller groups as follows –

- (i) Muledlhana subgroup comprises: BakwaSibidiela, BakwaGegana and BakwaMugombhane
- (ii) Langa subgroup comprises: Mapela and Bakenberg sections and
- (iii) Lidwaba subgroup comprises: BakwaMashashane, bema-Une (bemaWune), bakwaMaraba of Eland and bakwaMaraba of Ngidigidlana.

However, Ziervogel (1959:5) also mentions that the Gegana, Mugombhane and Lidwaba (Maraba) tribes are not of Natal origin, instead, they are said to have come from the north, that is, Zimbabwe.

De Beer (1986:31) recognizes four subgroups constituting the Northern Ndebele people namely the Gegana (or Mthombeni), Langa, Seleka and Lidwaba while Potgieter

(1945:13) distinguishes five subgroups, namely the Moletlane (Muledlhana), the Mokopane (Mugombane), the Laka (or Langa), the Maune and the Seleka.

What is notable is the fact that many of the subgroups recognized by De Beer and Potgieter form part of the three main subgroups recognized by Ziervogel. This means that the Gegana, Langa, Lidwaba, Mugombane, Moledlhana and Maune are included in the three main subgroups mentioned by Ziervogel. The Seleka subgroup recognized by both De Beer and Potgieter is the only subgroup not mentioned in Ziervogel's groupings and it, however, forms part of the Gegana subgroup. In the paragraph that follows the different theories regarding the origin of the Northern (Transvaal) Ndebele are briefly discussed and evaluated.

2.4.2.2 Theories regarding the history and origin of the Northern Ndebele people

There are four main contrasting views regarding the origin of the Northern Ndebele people which can be regarded as:

- (i) the popular view,
- (ii) Ziervogel's view,
- (iii) Jackson's view, and
- (iv) Wilkes's view.

According to the popular view, the Northern Ndebele people are the offshoots of the Southern Ndebele. According to Ziervogel, in contrast, the Northern Ndebele people do not share any relationship with their Southern Ndebele counterparts, whilst Jackson maintains that the Northern Ndebele people are not related to the Southern Ndebele group. However, the latter considers that they also originate in Zululand. In the following paragraphs, the historical background of the Northern Ndebele people is discussed according to the theories mentioned.

2.4.2.2.1 Popular view

The most popular view regarding the origin of the Northern Ndebele people is the one propounded by Fourie (1921), Van Warmelo (1930) and Van Vuuren (1983). According to these scholars, the Northern Ndebele people just like their southern counterparts (i.e., the so-called Southern (Transvaal) Ndebele), are the direct descendants of a common ancestral chief called Musi, as previously stated. According to this view, the Northern (Transvaal) Ndebele people are descendants of Gegana who was one of Musi's six sons and was originally known as Mthombeni.

As mentioned earlier (cf. par. 2.2), after the death of Musi, a succession struggle ensued between his six sons which resulted in the breaking up of the Ndebele people into two main groups (i.e., Southern and Northern Ndebele) as well as into a number of smaller groups. Fearing the wrath of their brother, Manala, the groups under the chieftainship of Nzunza and Mthombeni, respectively, abandon their ancestral home and together moved in an easterly direction towards where the town of Roossenekal is today. However, when they reached the Steelpoort River the two groups separated because, as history has it, one of Mthombeni's daughters had to undergo an initiation rite (*wathomba*) (De Beer, op. cit.:32). Coetzee (1980) concurs with De Beer on this point when he (Coetzee, 1980:297-298) says:

‘Nadat die Ndzungza en die mense van Yakalala oor die Steelpoortrivier (iNdubazi) getrek het, het een van die dogters van die mense van Yakalala puberteit bereik (*wathomba*) sodat die groep nie verder kon trek nie.’

Thereafter, Mthombeni and his followers decided to change direction and took a new route in a northerly direction that eventually lead him to Muledlhana (i.e., Zebediela) near Potgietersrus where he established himself as the Gegana (or Kekana) Ndebele tribe (Van Warmelo, 1930:11). Van Vuuren (1983:13) concurs with Van Warmelo's view in this regard. Nzunza and his followers remained in the vicinity of Roossenekal and later became known as Ndebele of Mapoch (De Beer, 1986:33).

According to De Beer, Mthombeni's group, after breaking away from the Nzunza group at the Steelpoort River, split further into two smaller groups. He (De Beer, 1986:33) states that

‘Na die verdeling tussen Nzunza and Mthombeni by die Steelpoortrevier **het 'n verdere groep van Mthombeni afgesplits** en hulle in die Phalaborwagebied gevestig. Hierna was hulle blykbaar ook 'n tydlank in Zimbabwe woonagtig. “Hierdie verband het hulle daarna blykbaar via Vendaland en sommige ook via Phalaborwa mettertyd in die huidige woongebied in Lebowa waarna reeds verwys is gevestig **waar hulle as die Letwaba stamme bekend geword het.**’ (*own emphasis*)

Msimang (1989:68), too, acknowledges the ethnic relationship between the Southern and Northern Ndebele when he says:

‘In fact at Potgietersrus we met an informant who vehemently disputed Ziervogel's version on Ndebele history. He is adamant that the different Ndebele groups are all descendants from the common ancestor Musi, son of Mhlanga. He accepts that they did venture into Zimbabwe but that was only after their departure from their common abode in Natal. He is aware of Nungu and his porcupine totem which was later abandoned by Malajana who adopted the elephant, a totem all the Sumayela Ndebele still embrace.’

2.4.2.2.2 Ziervogel 's view

The second view, regarding the origin of the Northern Ndebele people, is the one held by Ziervogel (1959) who maintains that the Northern (Transvaal) Ndebele proper do not claim their origin from their southern counterparts (i.e., the Southern Ndebele). He (Ziervogel, 1959:5) states that

‘The Northern Ndebele proper, viz. the Gegana, Mugombhane and Lidwaba (Maraba) tribes are not of Natal origin. Said to have come from the north, i.e., Rhodesia (i.e., Zimbabwe), ...not related to the latter.’

This view is supported by his informants that they (i.e., Northern Ndebele) originally came from the East, the country of Malaji and their ancestral chief was Nungu (Ziervogel, 1959:181). According to the historical background of this view, Nungu had two sons, Malaji (the elder) and Malajana (the younger). The two sons argued about the sun: Malaji said it rose up between the two *muganu* (i.e., marula or wild plum) trees, whilst his younger brother, Malajana, said it rose from the sea. Their argument resulted in the sons parting. In fear of his brother, Malaji, Malajana went to Swaziland and on the way devised two strategies that were to render him untraceable. First, he changed his totem, which was the porcupine (*inungu*) to an elephant '*indlovu*' and, secondly, he discarded his mother tongue by requesting the Swazi king to give him twelve boys and girls to teach his tribe Swazi, because they were unintelligible to the Swazi people. By the time those children had become adults, the Kalanga language that Malajana's tribe was speaking, which they most probably acquired when they were in Zimbabwe, was completely effaced and Swazi became their new adopted language. Ziervogel's informants (Ziervogel, 1959:183) confirmed this state of affairs by saying:

‘Malajana again called a meeting of his people. He said: “You see that I have discarded my totem on the road. I have discarded my speech, there no longer is a place where my brother could find me.’

Thereafter, the mother tongue of the Northern Ndebele was strongly influenced by Swazi (Ziervogel, 1959:5). In essence, the Northern Ndebele group that Ziervogel refers to, is most probably the Lidwaba group which, according to De Beer, separated from Mthombeni and first went to Phalaborwa and thereafter moved up to Zimbabwe and later on came back to Phalaborwa, via Venda. It is, however, important to note that Ziervogel's account of the Northern Ndebele people and, more particularly, of the Lidwaba section of

this ethnic group, to a large extent correlates with the history written by Vercuil (1966) on the tribe (or tribes) that he studied around Phalaborwa. Although, Vercuil makes no mention of the name “Ndebele” in his historical account of the tribe(s) he studied, he does make mention of the name of Chief Malatši, who could have been the same person that Ziervogel refers to in his account of the history of the Northern Ndebele people. Vercuil (1966:1) states as follows in this regard:

‘Volgens oorlewing het die Phalaborwa-stam vanuit die noorde gekom. Die presiese vertrekpunt en die trekroete is egter nie bekend nie. Op soek na beter verblyf-plek, het hulle na die suide getrek, onder die regering van hoofmanMmakao. Mmakao het sy broer Malatši aangestel as hoofman oor 'n gedeelte van die volk.’

2.4.2.2.3 Jackson's view

According to Jackson (1969), the Northern Ndebele people comprise the Langa section who are also known as the 'Black Ndebele' (or people of Mapela) in order to distinguish them from their Southern Ndebele counterparts. Even though Jackson recognizes the Langa subgroup as the major section representing the Northern Ndebele people, he does note that there are other tribes comprising the Northern Ndebele people. He (Jackson, 1969:i) states that

‘The Ndebele of Langa are classified by anthropologists as Northern Ndebele. This category includes a number of chiefdoms other than the Langa.’

Jackson maintains that the Northern Ndebele people trace their origin from KwaZulu-Natal, just as their Southern Ndebele counterparts do, but they are not related to the latter because of the fact that the former trace their origins from the ancestral chief Langalibalele whilst the latter trace their origins from the so-called chief, Musi. Moreover their movement into the then named Transvaal was not of the same period. Jackson (1969:i) states as follows–

‘The Transvaal Ndebele entered the Transvaal in atleast two different migratory streams, namely, the Ndebele of Langa, on the other hand, and those Ndebele who claim ties with an ancient chief called Musi...on the other. Some of the chiefdoms related to Musi, now form the Southern Transvaal Ndebele, whereas others are classified with the Langa as Northern Transvaal Ndebele.’

It is evident from the above quotation that Jackson, too, regards the Langa subsection to be the main representative of the Northern (Transvaal) Ndebele tribes. The other main tribes, namely, the Gegana and Lidwaba are, according to him, members of the Southern Ndebele group and do not form part of the Northern Ndebele people. Jackson (op.cit.:i) affirms this point of view when he says:

‘The Ndebele of Langa are classified by anthropologists as Northern Transvaal Ndebele. This category includes a number of chiefdoms other than the Langa. The Northern Ndebele, again form part of a broader category known to anthropologists as the Transvaal Ndebele. This category comprises the Northern and Southern Transvaal Ndebele.’

This point is further supported by Ziervogel when he (Ziervogel, 1959:5) states that

‘The Langa section, also called the Black Ndebele...are no relation of the other Ndebele tribes, and their language is said to have been more Nguni like than that of the Mugombhane and Maraba tribes. They are said to be of Zululand stock, who entered the country they now occupy from the North-East.’

The Mugombhane and Maraba tribes that Ziervogel (1959:5) make mention of, including other tribes, according to Jackson (1969) do not form part of the Northern Ndebele people. Instead, he regards them as related to their southern counterparts. Jackson

(1969:i) speaks of the 'Ndebele of Musi' and the 'Ndebele of Langa' when referring to the Southern and Northern Transvaal Ndebele, respectively. The latter claims its origin from chief Langalibalele, and their tribal name 'Langa Ndebele' is also derived from this while the former regard themselves as the descendants of chief Musi (or Msi). The departure date of the Langa Ndebele from Hlubi territory was around 1650 whilst they were under the leadership of the chief Masebe I. Their route took them through Swaziland to a place called Maferafera near Leydsdorp in the former North Eastern Transvaal, which was also their first stop (Jackson, 1969:4). De Beer (1986:32) states that

‘Vandaar (i.e Leydsdorp) het hulle na 'n kortstondige verblyf by Boyne, waar die Molepo nou woon, by Thaba Tshweu (Witkop), suidoos van Pietersburg, gevestig.’

Thaba Tshweu, according to Jackson, is the area in which the Langa tribe came into contact with the Gegana group. Jackson (1969:5) states as follows in this regard:

‘... when the Langa arrived at Thaba Tshweu, they recognized in the Gegana senior kinsmen from the original home.’

2.4.2.2.4 Wilkes's view

The last and most recent view regarding the origin of the Northern Ndebele is the one propounded by Wilkes (2001:3-4). In essence, Wilkes does not differ from the popular view that the Northern Ndebele and their southern counterparts are the descendants of the same ancestral chief called Musi. After the first split of the Ndebele people into two main sections at KwaMnyamana near Pretoria, Mthombeni and his followers moved northwards and settled in the vicinity of Potgietersrust (Wilkes, 2001:3). Subsequently, the same group split further, resulting into a number of Mthombeni's followers moving away and leaving the original group behind. The group that left, first, took an easterly direction to where Phalaborwa is today and later on followed a northward route that led them to Zimbabwe before turning back home to their present abode in the area around Potgietersrust. On their way back home from Zimbabwe, they stayed for some time in

Vendaland. The Venda sound and grammatical features found in the Northern Ndebele language is, according to Wilkes (2001:9), clear evidence of their earlier contact with the Venda people.

2.4.2.3 The clarification of the name Mthombeni vs Gegana and Yangalala

One of the popular tribes of the Northern Ndebele people is the so-called Gegana tribe which, according to scholars of the popular view, is related to the Southern Ndebele group, because they claim their origin from the same ancestral chief called Musi (cf. par. 2.4.2.1).

According to the earliest historical records of the former Transvaal Ndebele people, when they were still residing in the Pretoria area, Mthombeni was the name of one of Musi's sons (Massie, 1905:33), Fourie (1921:33-34) and Van Warmelo (1930:12-13). Massie goes further to mention Yangalala or Kekana as alias names for Mthombeni. In this regard he (Massie, 1905:33) states:

‘These sons of Musi, whose names were Nzunza, Manala, M'Hwaduba and Mthombeni, alias **Yangalala** or **Gegana**, quarrelled amongst themselves for the chieftainship....’ (*own emphasis*)

Van Warmelo concurs with Massie with regard to the other two names of Mthombeni when he (Van Warmelo, 1930:11) says that

‘Mthombeni, **Gegana** or **Yangalala** fought Manala for chieftainship of the tribe and was defeated, whereupon he withdrew to the North and settled at Moledlhane.’ (*own emphasis*).

What is notable from the three alternative names of Mthombeni, is the fact that none of the scholars provides an account of the meaning and origin of the two names, except for Van Warmelo (1944:14) in his *Ethnological Publications No.18*, when he notes that the

Nzunza people mocked them because of the *ukuthomba* 'attain puberty' incident (mentioned earlier) and called them the Mthombeni folk.

However, according to the above statement, Van Warmelo contradicts himself in that he implies the actual name of one of Musi's six sons was Yangalala or Gegana who at Steelpoort River, on his way to the north, inherited the third name "Mthombeni". In an earlier publication from 1930, he mentions Mthombeni as one of Musi's sons which obviously implies that the name Mthombeni was known before the six sons split and took divergent routes.

The second name, which is etymologically accounted for, is "Gegana". According to De Beer (1986:34) this name is derived from the strategic movement of Mthombeni and his followers as compared to the geographical situation of the area that led him to Muledlhana. De Beer (1986:34) states that

'Die naam Gegana is afgelei van die Noord-Ndebelewoord, kugega, wat beteken om saam met of parallel met iets te beweeg en verwys na die feit dat Mathombeni en sy volgelinge in hulle noordwaartse migrasie al langs die Olifantsrivier op beweeg het. Daarom word daar ook na hulle verwys as Gegana nomlambo-dit wil sê die Gegana wat met die rivier (mulambo) opgetrek het.'

In contrast to the above statement, De Beer goes on to quote Van Warmelo (1944) and states that

'Hieroor is hulle deur Nzunza se groep, Mthombeni se mense (van ukuthomba) genoem, 'n naam wat hulle tot vandag toe dra.' (De Beer, 1986:32).

Obviously, from the above quotations, the point as to who the founder of the Northern Ndebele people is further confused. First, De Beer implies that the name Mthombeni

came about after the split along the Steelpoort River, and, thereafter, as the group moved along the river northwards, they inherited the third name “Gegana”. If this is the point propounded by De Beer, the question is: What was the name of Musi's son during the chieftainship struggle at KwaMnyamana? Was it Mthombeni or Gegana or Yangalala? De Beer (1986:34) further states that

‘Die Kekana naam is blykbaar ontleen aan Mthombeni se seun, Gegana.’

However, the etymological account of the name 'Yangalala' is not entertained by any of the above scholars, except Ziervogel (1959:8) who maintains that the name Yangalala, as Massie concluded, is an alternative name for Mthombeni. According to Ziervogel (ibid.), the name Yangalala was also applied to either Madidzi or Lidwaba II who were both recent Northern Ndebele chiefs. This clearly indicates that the exact history of the Northern Ndebele, particularly the Gegana section, which is an offshoot of the Southern Ndebele group, has been incoherently and haphazardly traced and recorded.

2.4.2.4 Theories regarding the origin and meaning of the name “Ndebele”

The origin and meaning of the generic name “Ndebele” which is commonly used to refer to those Nguni speaking people who migrated from KwaZulu-Natal into the former Transvaal in the early 15th century as well as the Zimbabwean Ndebele who left Zululand later on, during the 19th century, is discussed by a number of scholars, viz. Fourie (1921:21), Bryant (1929:425), Van Warmelo (1935:87), Potgieter (1945:7) Coetzee (1980:205-207), Van Vuuren (1992:71-73) and others. According to these scholars, two main views exist regarding the origin and meaning of the name “Ndebele”.

2.4.2.4.1 Van Warmelo's Theory

The first view is that of Van Warmelo who maintains that the name “Ndebele” is basically a Sotho name that the Sotho people used to designate people from Nguni origin. The people generally known by the name “Ndebele” were fugitives from Natal fleeing Shaka’s wars. When these people, under the leadership of chief Mzilikazi, set foot in what was previously known as the Transvaal and came into contact with the Sotho

people, the latter used to refer to them as “maTebele”. This name was probably used to designate Nguni people who came to the Transvaal before Mzilakazi, namely, the Southern and Northern Transvaal Ndebele who were here long before Mzilikazi arrived. This name is also used by the Sotho speakers in Basotoland and in the Nqutu district in KwaZulu-Natal to refer to all the Nguni people from Natal living in Basotoland (Van Warmelo. 1935:87). However, Van Warmelo does not comment on the meaning of the name, but his view on the origin of the name “Ndebele” supports Bryant (1929:425) who states that

‘Small fugitive bands, too, arrived from time to time from Zululand throughout the Shakan period...This motley and fearsome crowd now became christened by the suffering Sutus with a new and a distinguishing appellation. They dubbed them maTebele, which is said to signify “those who disappear or sink down out of sight (Sotho 'Teba') behind their (to the Sutus) immense Zulu war-shields of stout cow hide”.’

According to Bryant (1929:425), the Nguni tradition of carrying war-shields and the artful skills of using them during war acted as the strong motivational reason for the designation of these Nguni speaking tribes with the name “Tebele”. Bryant's explanation of the meaning of the name in question certainly tallies with Coetzee's (1980), who also maintains that the source language from which the name “Ndebele” originates is no doubt a Sotho language. Coetzee (1980:206) states that

‘Die naam kon ook van die Suid-Sothowerkwoord *-ho tebela*, wat beteken om te verdryf, afgelei gewees het. Die Ngunie stamme, waaarmee die Sotho in aanraking gekom het, sou dus as “die verdrywers” bekendgestaan het.’

According to Matumo (1993) in his Setswana-English dictionary, the word “tebêla” means *'to strike or knock down with a fist,'* which is comparable to the Sepedi verb stem *'-tebela'* meaning *'strike in a sudden attack'*.

2.4.2.4.2 Fourie's Theory

The second view regarding the etymological explanation of the name “(ama)Ndebele” is the one propounded by Fourie (1921:26) who is one of the earliest scholars of the history of the Transvaal Ndebele, particularly the Nzunza group which forms part of the Southern Ndebele people. According to Van Vuuren (1992:72), Fourie's sources of information regarding the origin and meaning of the name “Ndebele” are the works of Shooter (1857), Fritsch (1872) and others. Some of these scholars were focussed on the Zimbabwean Ndebele (Van Vuuren, 1992:72). Fourie gives three possible etymological meanings of the name “(ama)Ndebele”. The first is that the name means *'people that scatter sorghum'*. Fourie (1921:26) states that

'Ilibele en het meervoudig amabele betekenen borst. Maar met een kleine verheffing van stem in die uitspraak van de laatste lettergreep, betekent hetzelfde woord: kafferkoren. Het werkwoord -anda beteken intransitief: toenemen; en transitief: vermenigvuldigen of verspreiden. De tweede a van het verbum kan in perfekt-vorm een e zijn. Zodat het mogelijk is, dat de naam beteken: zij die de amabele verspreid hebben.'

His second explanation is that the name can mean *'people with long breasts'*, whereby *ama-* (is a class 6 noun prefix) plus *-(n)de* (an adjectival stem) and *-bele* (the noun stem) meaning 'breast' (Van Vuuren, 1992:72).

Fourie's third explanation takes the common approach that is applied to some of the Nguni groups who named themselves after their first founder chiefs, such as Zulus who named themselves after an ancestral chief Zulu and Xhosas after Xhosa, respectively. In terms of this view, he opines that in the olden days there may have been a chief called Ndebele, after whom the amaNdebele people chose to name themselves.

However, Fourie's first and second etymological accounts of the name “(ama)Ndebele”, that it means *'people that scatter sorghum'* or *'people with long breasts'*, are doubtful and far-fetched conclusions. With regard to his second explanation, it is impossible that a paternally organized tribe such as the amaNdebele would ever use a physical feature of a woman as its tribal name (Mare, in Van Vuuren, 1992:72).

The fact that the same name is used to designate both Mzilikazi's people in Zimbabwe and the various Transvaal Ndebele tribes found in South Africa, has led people to suppose that there was some historical connection between them, especially as Mzilikazi's group initially lived in the former Transvaal for a while before moving to Zimbabwe. As already stated, the circumstances that caused these groups to have the same tribal name are not attributable to the genealogical or historical relationship between them (Van Warmelo.1944: 87). The provincial name “Transvaal” is used by most scholars such Van Warmelo (1944), Van Vuuren (1983 and 1992) and others, to distinguish the Ndebele tribes scattered around in the former Transvaal from those residing in Zimbabwe.

2.5 The numbers and distribution of the Transvaal Ndebele

2.5.1 The Southern Ndebele

As already stated, the Southern Ndebele who comprise the Manala and Nzunza sub-groups mainly reside in four of the nine provinces of the Republic of South Africa, namely Mpumalanga, Limpopo, Gauteng and the North West Province, respectively. (According to Statistics South Africa (2004:10), Ndebele people are found in all nine provinces of the Republic of South Africa.) In Mpumalanga, the Ndebele people are found in the former KwaNdebele homeland as well as in and around numerous towns in the Highveld region, such as Roosenekaal, Stoffberg, Lydenburg, Watervalboven, Belfast, Middelburg, Carolina, Hendrina, Ermelo, Bethal, Standerton, Leandra, Witbank, Groblersdal, Bronkhorstpruit, Delmas and Ogies. In Gauteng, they have settled in and around Pretoria in areas, such as Mamelodi, Soshanguve and Atteridgeville, as well as in

certain East Rand townships. In the North West Province, they can be found in the Hammanskraal, Motla, Kromkuil, Stinkwater, Winterveld, Makapanstad, Moeka Mmakaunyana and Klipgat areas. Only a limited number of Southern Ndebele people reside in the Northern Province, particularly in certain southern border areas of this province, such as Saaiplaas, Monsterlus and Motetema.

According to *Statistics South Africa* (2004), the Southern Ndebele speaking population stands at 711821 in total (See Table 2.1 next page). This number, however, does not distinguish between Southern and Northern Ndebele speakers as one would expect. As a result, it is difficult to say what the exact number of speakers is that belong to each of the two main Ndebele groups.

In Table 2.1, the statistical presentation of the distribution of Southern Ndebele speakers (most probably both Southern and Northern) is given in percentages as they are found in the nine provinces of the Republic of South Africa.

Table 2.1: The statistics of the Southern Ndebele speaking people

Province	Percentage %
Mpumalanga Province	12.1
Limpopo Province	1.5
Gauteng Province	1.9
North West Province	1.3
Western Cape	0.0
Northern Cape	0.1
Eastern Cape	0.1
Free State	0.4
KwaZulu-Natal	0.2
TOTAL	17.6

2.5.2 The Northern (Transvaal) Ndebele

The Northern (Transvaal) Ndebele people are concentrated mainly in two provinces of the Republic of South Africa, namely, Limpopo and in Gauteng. In the Limpopo province, they are found in the vicinity of Potgietersrus and surrounding areas such as Mashashane and Zebediela, whilst in the Gauteng Province, they are mainly found in Pretoria and its surrounding townships such as Mamelodi and Soshanguve. Their language is known as siNdebele and is classified as a Tekela Nguni language.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter the historical background of the Ndebele people of the Republic of South Africa has been investigated and discussed. The focus has mainly fallen on their historical background, geographical distribution and the origin of the generic name 'Ndebele'. The different views of the various scholars regarding the origin of the Ndebele people of the of the Republic of South Africa and the name 'Ndebele' have been investigated and analysed. The discussions have revealed that scholars advance different opinions regarding the Ndebele history and the etymology of the name 'Ndebele' that are still arguable and lack convincing support. However, in the discussions and analysis of the information from the various sources it has been noted that more research on the exact place of the Ndebele origin in Natal and the exact Sotho tribe that tagged these two groups 'Ndebele' still need further research.

The discussions have further revealed that politically the two Ndebele groups are statistically not regarded as one and the same ethnic group by the South African government yet linguistically are assumed to speak the same language. In the next chapter the focus falls on the phonological comparison between the Southern and Northern Ndebele, showing how different the two languages are.