

Review Articles

**Martini, Gianluigi. 2016. *Dizionario swahili-italiano italiano-swahili*. Milano: Hoepli, 854 p., ISBN 978-88-203-6318-5, Euro 39,90
by Sergio Baldi, Napoli**

Swahili in Italy has no long tradition of studies, because it was spoken outside the former colonies. For this reason the academically teaching of this language started in 1968 only at the Oriental Institute in Naples. As the first student and later as the first researcher for Bantu languages in Italy, I saw the growing interest in it not only among students, but also outside the academy. The publication of this dictionary is the result of sake of a larger public in Africa. Apart the Cavicchioni's work, dated and with no scientific value, the previous Swahili dictionaries published in Italy were those by a Consolata Father, Vittorio Merlo Pick, and by Dr Maddalena Toscano: the latter, a small pocket one, but structured as a really bilingual dictionary, having explained in a section the Italian grammar in Swahili and in the other one the Swahili grammar in Italian.

This dictionary is done by a pupil of Merlo Pick, who was a pioneer in Italy of this language and, *inter alia*, a member of the Inter-territorial Committee for the standardization of Swahili. The work is published in a collection of Oriental dictionaries and grammars, which show the interest by an old and famous publisher, as Hoepli is, to these languages not so popular in Italy up to now.

The dictionary consists of Swahili-Italian (pp. 3–274), Swahili Phonetic and Morphology (pp. 275–308), Proverbs, Riddles, Personal Names, Abbreviations and Acronyms, Geographical Names, Districts of Kenya, Regions of Tanzania, World Nations (pp. 309–341), Italian-Swahili (pp. 343–732), Italian Phonetic and Morphology (pp. 733–774), Proverbs, Personal Names, Abbreviations and Acronyms, Geographical Names, Districts of Kenya, Regions of Tanzania, World Nations (pp. 775–813), Appendixes (pp. 815–851), Bibliography (pp. 853–854).

We should be very grateful to the author who supplied the travellers, students and other people interested in Swahili with his work, but we cannot avoid stressing some points that stroked our attention.

A first mistake, very common to bilingual Swahili (and not only to them!) dictionaries, is consisting on the fact that both parts do not list the same words. Here a few examples of such discrepancy, quoted at random, are given:

frustare (p. 495b) *charaza viboko*, which you do not find under **charaza** (p. 28a) ‘to play; ... to hit hard’ or **kiboko** (88b) ‘whisk, whip’; **menarca** (p. 558a) *hedhi ya kwanza*, not present either under **hedhi** (p. 62a) ‘menses’ or under **kwanza** (p. 115a) ‘first, before’; **Pentecoste** (ebraica, p. 595a) *Sikukuu ya Mavuno*, not present either under **Sikukuu** (p. 208b) or **Mavuno** (p. 132b). For **zidio** (p. 271b) ‘aumento [increase], accrescimento [enhancement]’ the situation is more complicated because if the reader looks up under *aumento* (p. 382b) he will find *ongezeko*, but *accrescimento* is not registered!

The lack of using software to produce a dictionary creates another type of problem. Sometimes the headword is repeated under a different alphabetical order: **ng’aa** (p. 172b) 1 ‘to shimmer, shine’ 2 ‘to gleam, twinkle’ and **ng’aa** (p. 173a) ‘to shimmer, shine’!

In Swahili, non-letter symbols, i.e. apostrophes and sporadically spaces, frequently appear in headwords. Apostrophes can be found in headwords such as *ng’aa* ‘to shine’, *ng’amba* ‘turtle’. In all dictionaries with Swahili as the source language, apostrophes are classified to the LBL order, i.e. they are ignored. The following order, therefore, is used for the below headwords in this dictionary as well as the previous ones:

ng’aa (Johnson 1967: 334b; Merlo Pick 1964: 386b; Martini 2016: 172b)

ngabu

ngadu

.....

ng’amua (Johnson 1967: 335a; Merlo Pick 1964: 387a; Martini 2016: 173a)

.....

ngano (Johnson 1967: 335a; Merlo Pick 1964: 387b; Martini 2016: 173a)

This kind of inaccuracy is present in all other Swahili dictionaries, I consulted, i.e. those by Höftmann, Toscano, etc.

Another tradition of the Swahili dictionaries is the absence of ideophones, nevertheless the recent publication of an article by Baldi and Watimila in the *Festschrift* for Professor Eugeniusz Rzewuski has given a long list of them. Unfortunately ideophones are not considered by scholars of Swahili and even if sometimes they are mentioned in the preface of a dictionary with abbreviations it is hard to find any in its corpus (cf. Höftmann 1989; Rechenbach 1967)!

In this dictionary every Swahili noun is followed by the old fashion system, followed by all authors, to mark the Bantu classes, so: **mtalii** *wa-* [*a-/wa-*] (p. 158a) ‘tourist’; **muhtasari** *mi-* [*u-/i-*] (161b) ‘summary’; **majusi** *ma-* [*a-/wa-*] (p. 126a) ‘magician, astrologer’; **kibarua** *vi-* [*a-/wa-*] (p. 88a) ‘laborer’, etc. Why not to use the Meinhof’s system of numbers for indicating Bantu classes?

So **majusi** 5/6 [1/2], **kibarua** 7/8 [1/2], showing that for some words which are in different classes, their concordance should be done in the class of human beings. The use of Meinhof's system, unfortunately followed only by few scholars (Prins 1970), gives us the opportunity to compare the words with other Bantu languages.

As it concerns the translation of Swahili words sometimes the author could be more accurate: **kibarua** (p. 88a) 'laborer; day laborer' had also the meaning, during the *ujamaa* time, I had a personal experience being there, of 'stooge, puppet, Quisling', as one could read in some dictionaries: "Marionette, Handlanger" (Höftmann 1989: 111b).

In the Essential Bibliography given at the end of the dictionary we find some of the author's works quoted like *Kiswahili, una lingua per l'Africa di domani*, whose scientific value I doubt, whereas no mention to a valuable Swahili bibliography by Mioni, usefull for informing on what published on this topics or to *Dictionnaire des emprunts arabes dans les langues de l'Afrique de l'Ouest et en swahili* (Baldi 2008). Quoting this dictionary could be useful to give the idea of the influence of Arabic that is sometimes overestimated by the Muslim circles. This offers the opportunity to stress that as it concerns Swahili it does not exist yet an etymological dictionary for this language, but only articles and other works on Arabic, English, Portuguese and more general oriental loans.

At the end of this short review we can be grateful to the author for his effort and we can stress the utility of Appendixes, where through tables are given names of each part of a car, a human body and even all names of single parts of a railway station.

References

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Review of Zygmunt Frajzyngier & Paul Eguchi & Roger Prafé & Megan Schwabauer, Dictionary of Hdi. A Central Chadic Language of Cameroon, Köln: Köppe 2015, viii+188 pages, ISBN 978-3-89645-299-3, € 34.80 by Carsten Peust, Konstanz

After Z. Frajzyngier published a voluminous grammar of Hdi, a Central Chadic language spoken by approximately 10000–25000 people in the far north of Cameroon close to the Nigerian border, a couple of years ago (Frajzyngier 2002), a dictionary of this language has now followed which he compiled together with three co-authors.

The book starts with a grammatical introduction of 52 pages, which is in many respects an abridged version of Frajzyngier (2002), but also contains some modifications of analysis. The dictionary proper consists of about 1600 Hdi head entries together with a word class information as well as both English and French translations. The entries are frequently accompanied by phrases, which are helpful for defining the semantics more precisely. Not every entry, however, represents a lexeme on its own, since several of them are just morphological forms of verbs that are also listed in their turn. Furthermore, the dictionary contains some duplicates, since multiple sources were obviously used and lumped together in a somewhat mechanical way, such as *ǎvá* “love, like” ~ *ǎvǎ* “like, wish, love, accept” p. 66; *ghùzú* “wine, beer” ~ *ghùzú* “any alcoholic drink (local or bottled)” p. 74; *ghzlǎŋ* “bed” ~ *ghzlǎŋ* “bed made from the trunk of *Faidherbia (Acacia albida)*” p. 75; *xúlǎúá* “*Euphorbia kamerunica*” ~ *xúlǎúá* “unidentified plant” p. 120.

The authors did not make sure to systematically cover the most basic vocabulary. They obviously did not depart from an English or French word list trying to identify the Hdi equivalents, but rather from some corpus of Hdi phrases or texts, extracting those words that happened to occur therein. A considerable number of elementary terms are therefore missing. A researcher who, for example, would wish to assemble a Swadesh 100-item list will be disappointed to find that no less than 20 of them are absent: *ashes, bark (of tree), breast, claw, cold, feather, hair, man (male), many, moon, rain, root, seed, to sit, star, to swim, tail, tongue, tooth, warm*. Fortunately, all of these can be recovered in various ways. First of all, the numerous accompanying phrases as well as the