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Kamusi Awali ya Sayansi na Teknolojia

Ben & Company Limited. Dar-es-Salaam 1995. 420 pp.

Reviewed by

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It is confusing that in a time when we are still waiting for the standard Swahili dictionaries (English-Swahili and Swahili-English) to appear, to complement the old 1939 editions, at least three dictionaries have appeared on new technical or scientific terms. First R. Ohly published a dictionary entitled *Primary Technical Dictionary: English-Swahili* (1987), based on the work of BAKITA (Barasa la Kiswahili la Tanzania, the National Swahili Council). Then the Institute of Kiswahili Research (Univ. of Dar-es-Salaam) published a dictionary of scientific terms entitled *Kamusi Sanifu ya Biolojia, Fizikia na Kemia* (1990). Now we have again a new book, the purpose of which is unclear. If it is meant to be an elementary dictionary of science and technology, as the name indicates, it is too voluminous (in terms of paper mass) and expensive for such a purpose.

It is difficult to understand why Ben & Company should publish such a book, for which the bulk of material has apparently been accumulated by researchers of the University of Dar-es-Salaam. One would have expected at least that it would be a co-publication with one of the institutes of the University of Dar-es-Salaam concerned with Swahili, or with BAKITA. However, there is no indication of it, although there are members of the university staff among the consultants. The only acknowledgement given is the one to CorelDraw!, a computer program designed for creating images, which does not deserve any thanks, because it has already taken its share by selling the program together with images!

The outlay of the book is absolutely too spacious for a dictionary. It has taken 362 pages of B5 size for defining about 5000 dictionary entries. There are no examples of usage, although one would expect it from such a voluminous dictionary. The key-words are in Swahili, and there are English glosses after each entry in parentheses, but no further explanations in English. There is an empty line between each entry, which increases the number of pages required.

There are a number of pictures for illustrating the key-word. For me at least, some of them are so self-evident that no illustration would be needed. Moreover, the use of space in illustrations is very uneconomical. Pictures are too big and sometimes there is plenty of empty space around the picture. The idea itself of using pictures is good.

As can be expected, the large majority of words are nouns, adapted from other usages of Swahili, borrowed from other languages or coined purposefully. It is hard

to understand the flabbiness in giving even the most basic information on these terms. There is no indication of the noun classes. No plural forms are given, or an indication of whether a noun has a plural or not. There are also a number of nouns given in plural only, although they would have also a singular form. This would not be so disastrous in languages which inflect from the end of words. In Swahili nouns inflect from the beginning, which means that the word may be in a totally different part of the dictionary, depending on whether it is given in singular or plural. The majority of these new words are apparently classified into the class 9/10, where singular and plural are identical, although this does not become in any way clear from the dictionary. But some of these nouns may have plural of the class 6, with a class marker *ma-*, and this should be indicated. There are so many examples of ungrounded plural entries of all relevant noun classes in the dictionary that it is impossible to list them here. Carelessness in such matters is inexcusable.

In addition to single-word entries the dictionary contains also about 1,600 multi-word entries. There are border cases where it is hard to decide whether compounds actually form one word or whether there are separate words. The English gloss seems to have guided - and misguided - the compilers in orthography. For example, if *fuwele halisi* (ideal crystal) and *fuwele owevu* (liquid crystal) are compounds, why should *fuweleduchu* (microcrystalline) and *fuwelefichu* (cryptocrystalline) be written as single words? Or why should there be such monsters as *ghalambegupacha* (dicotyledon), three words written together, while Swahili does not normally use compounded words?

Except for the clear print, it is hard to find something really positive from the dictionary. There is a need for a dictionary of this kind, since it is almost impossible to find any glue to a number of new Swahili words in existing dictionaries. That there are just those 5,000 words leaves open the question of choice. These cover only a small part of words in the fields concerned. The adequacy of the dictionary should be tested with a sufficient mass of scientific texts of various fields.

Finally a small note on the systematics of a dictionary. As it is with *Kamusi ya Kiswahili Sanifu*, it is also here that there are words in the introductory part of the book for which there are no entries in the dictionary itself, or in any other existing dictionary. What is the difference between *waelekezi* and *waelekezaji*, both being used for some sort of advisors or consultants in the process of compiling the dictionary?

When are we going to get a comprehensive modern Swahili dictionary, which covers the written Standard Swahili? Dictionaries of special fields are also needed, but the basic general dictionary is what people most badly need right now.

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