

KAMUSI YA AWALI YA SAYANSI NA TEKINOLOJIA. COMPILED BY S.D. IRIRA. 1995. DAR ES SALAAM: BEN & COMPANY.

Kiswahili language has undergone a lot of changes in the last decades especially at the lexical level. Many lexical items have been coined, adapted, borrowed or modified to express concepts that were hitherto unknown or non-existent in the Swahili world view or cosmology. One area that has witnessed a lot of these changes has been the area of sciences, or better put science has been a prime causer of many neologisms in this language. This eventuality has gone a long way to disprove the naive assumptions that the language has not come of age to express scientific concepts.

However, in spite of the changes that the language has witnessed and the concomitant fast rate of word turnover, Swahili lexicographers have been somewhat slow in reflecting the changes. This has had the unfortunate eventuality of new words remaining in library archives, only known to a select few. Maybe this not the only noticeable flaw in Swahili lexicography. It will be expedient to note that one of the most frequently Swahili dictionary, *Kamusi ya Kiswahili Sanifu*, compiled way back in 1981 lacks some very common, indeed very basic, lexical items viz:

nyama	meat
burudani	entertainment
jumatatu	wednesday
jumanne	tuesday
hamkani	disorder
parachichi	avocado pear, e.t.c

It is fairly hard to comprehend such a reality much more so seen against a background of earlier bilingual dictionaries like *Swahili-Deutsch* by Hildegard Höftmann released earlier in 1979 and suchlike works which have such lexical items. One hopes that the revised version of the dictionary, already with publishers will redress the inadequacies.

It is against this background that most Swahilists will embrace the recent Swahili dictionaries in the market: *Primary Technical dictionary* (1987), *Kamusi ya Isimu na Lugha* (1990), *Kamusi ya Kemia, Fizikia na Biolojia* (1990), *Kamusi ya Maana na Matumizi* (1992). The dictionary under review is yet another commendable work and a further test of the resurgence and rejuvenation of Swahili lexicography. This is first dictionary that combines scientific and technological terms comprehensively. Rajmund Ohly's *Primary Technical dictionary* is a first attempt but he merely matches the English terms with their Swahili equivalents something which does not prove too helpful to a user who is not conversant with the English headwords.

Kamusi ya Awali ya Sayansi na Tekinolojia contains a large number of headwords most of which have not appeared in any other Swahili dictionary before. The Swahili headwords are explained in Swahili with their English equivalents in parentheses. This method will prove quite

useful and effective. Besides, the dictionary contains entries that reflect on the present technological advancement. These include.

tazi	computer byte
teleprinta	teleprinter
kilotazi	kilobates
vyeneo	windows (vyeneo 95!)

This dictionary helps the user in clarifying differences between certain meanings of words. Many Swahili speakers have always assumed *ipso facto* that the Swahili word *chura* is applicable to both the English *Toad* and *frog*. In this dictionary the compiler enters *chura* for toad and *ngole* for frog. This difference is not even captured in the recent *English Swahili dictionary* published Institute of Kiswahili Research in 1996.

The dictionary under review has made use of very explicit illustrations which help the user considering that some of the entries are fairly hard to grasp. The illustrations are more informing than the sparse and sometimes unclear ones one comes across in Salim Bakhressa's *Kamusi ya Maana na Matumizi*.

It is almost always said that a prevalence of synonyms is a mark of the richness of a particular language. If this is indeed the case, it is well attested to in the dictionary. However, a number of people may be of the opinion that such a quality like that is not applicable when dealing with terminologies. This dictionary gives the words *Nyanyu* and *lifti* for the English lift whose American equivalent is Elevator entered as as *Kiimuzi* or *Lifti* in Rajmund Ohly's dictionary. The *Kamusi ya Kiswahili Sanifu* gives an extra word for lift : *kambarau*. These words do not really constitute terminologies per se as do the following which are compared from three dictionaries.

	Ohly 1987	Irira 1995	ES ¹ 1996
incubator	kiatamizi (92)	tamikanza (301)	kitamizi/kiangulio/kitotoa (396)
binoculars	darubini (17)	darumbili (43)	darubini (62)
shell	kaka; kombe (170)	galili (67)	kaka; ganda, etc (697)
function	husisho (74)	ishitighala (90)	
cork	gome (43)	kiziboya (148)	koki, kizibo (159)
fur	manyoya (74)	ngoya (237)	
accumulator	kirundikio/ kiwekevu (2)	betrimzo (25)	kilimbikizi (5)

This data serves to attest a problem in Swahili scholarship nowadays, that of terminological density. There are so many terms that refer to the same thing. This is one of the hardest problems facing Swahili learners presently, sometimes attesting to the haphazardness endemic in terminologies 'coinage'. This is a case that does not seem to be confined to Swahili dictionaries but also appears in scholarly publications. A case in point is Hassan Marshad's *Kiswahili au Kiingereza* (nchini Kenya) (1993) in which he coins new Swahili linguistic terms instead of using the commonly used ones. For example

¹ ES is an initial for English-Swahili dictionary Kamusi ya Kiingereza Kiswahili published by the Institute of Kiswahili Research, University of Dar es Salaam, 1996 pg 883

maani for semantiki (semantics)
 ulughai for isimu (linguistics)

This is a reality that is bound to confuse a learner of this language. Infact, a good number of Swahilists maintain that they can no longer keep up to date with the frequent and sometimes unnecessary rate of terminological turnover.

Another noticeable flaw in this particular dictionary is what can be said as cases of definitions that do little, if any, defining. Such definitions, though this is certainly a misnomer, confuse the user instead of helping him or her. A case in point is the word *uzi* whose definition appears as synonyms (?) *waya* or *kamba*. It is axiomatic that a string is neither a wire nor is it a rope. Other cases of such non defining definitions are:

uroboti	(robotics)	robotikia (p. 339)
gusa	(touch)	kuwa tanjiti (p. 75)
sopacha	(asymmetrical)	iso pacha (p. 293)
monovalensia	(monovalent)	enye valensi moja (p. 202)
mkono	(arm)	moja ya magendeo [limbs] ya mwili (p. 196)

In other cases the definitions tend to be unnecessarily complicated. This makes the user to search for nearly every single word appearing in the definition in order to understand it. In the dictionary, *Mikrowevu* (microwave) is defined thus (p. 193):

Mnunurisho sumakuumeme katika lukoka ya luhudi ya mita 0.3-0.01, hutumiwa kwenye rada, kupika n.k
 Electro-magnetic radiation in the wavelength of the range 0.3-0.01 degrese used in radar, cookin e t.c.

In spite of the above mentioned flaws, this is definitely a worthwhile and commendable effort that lays an important background for future similar works. It is a dictionary that ought to be in the shelves of all those that embrace and enthuse at the development of this increasingly important language.

Kyallo Wadi Wamitila