

J.J. Viljoen, P. Amakali and M. Namuandi. *Oshindonga / English. English / Oshindonga. Embwiitya. Dictionary*, 1st edition 1984, 109 pp. ISBN 0 86848 182 3. Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan. Price R27,82.

1. Introduction

Oshindonga is a language used by the majority of Oshiwambo speaking people and is taught at the University of Namibia. *Oshiwambo* is a generic term which refers to all "languages" used by the Wambo people. There is mutual intelligibility among the speakers of Oshiwambo.

This bilingual dictionary is of great importance to non-speakers of Oshiwambo who need information on the syntactic structure of Oshindonga. It also helps the speakers of Oshiwambo to learn English for communication purposes.

The dictionary consists of two sections, namely *Oshindonga / English* and *English / Oshindonga*. This clearly proves that the dictionary is meant for the speakers and non-speakers of Oshiwambo.

However, it has to be noted that the dictionary has grave shortcomings which need to be addressed in an attempt to strike an acceptable balance with regard to the target users. In this review, the deficiencies of the dictionary will be highlighted and this will be accompanied by some critical suggestions.

2. Deficiencies in the *Oshindonga / English Dictionary*

The following shortcomings are observable in the dictionary:

2.1 Arrangement of lexical items

The dictionary does not cater for the needs of people without any linguistic background because the lexical items are arranged according to their stems. This would make it difficult for a "learner" to look up a word. "It is an obvious desideratum for any dictionary that the information wanted should be quick to find. The most straightforward way to achieve this is to arrange catchwords in strict alphabetical order rather than in articles" (Haacke, forthcoming).

According to Haas (1975: 49) a dictionary of a language which has a multiplicity of prefixes and infixes should be arranged in terms of stems only. She added that expansions containing prefixes and / or infixes must be searched for under the appropriate stem. But this requires considerably more grammatical sophistication on the part of the user than is ever required, for example, on the part of the user of the ordinary English or French dictionary. Words found in actual texts would have to be analyzed before they could be looked up.

Although the compilers of the *Oshindonga / English Dictionary* have opted for the method mentioned above, it is, however, very difficult for learners to cope with this method when consulting this dictionary. Therefore it is advisable to arrange the words in simple alphabetical order, even if it means the compilation of two separate dictionaries.

2.2 Word formation

Swanson (1975: 66) recommends the formation of words by zero-change, i.e. new formation by shift of a word from one class to another, with or without other changes, including ablaut.

landitha	= (sell)
landakanitha	= (barter)
omulandithi	= (seller)
iilandithomwa	= (merchandise)

"In a bilingual dictionary there should be a fairly detailed essay ... on word-formational habits of the target language" (Swanson 1975: 66). Swanson's statement is appropriate not only for the grammar but also for the expansion of one's vocabulary.

The other device which accelerates word formation in Oshindonga is verbal extension. Oshindonga has a very convenient way of extending the root of a verb, e.g. of *longa*:

longitha	(causative extension)
longele	(applied extension)
longathana	(reciprocal extension)
longeka	(neutro-active extension)
longulula	(reversive extension)

Indeed, it is hard to accommodate all word-formational devices, such as mutual influence of sounds, reduplication, etc., as this might complicate the task of the lexicographer, and that of the users.

2.3 Semantic information

Most of the lexical items in the *Oshindonga / English Dictionary* are not contextualized. The compilers have simply given a glossary. "The difference between a glossary and a dictionary is that a glossary is a mere wordlist with renderings in a target language, while a dictionary provides more information than just the renderings, viz. morphological, syntactic and phonological information"

(Haacke, forthcoming). But this is not the case in this bilingual dictionary because most of the words in this dictionary are not accompanied by sentences, let alone their phonological structures. It is generally well-known that many *Oshindonga* words shift their meaning according to their context, e.g. *enditha* (Viljoen et al. 1992: 4). The aforementioned word is not explained fully in the dictionary because the context is not taken into account in explaining it. According to this dictionary this word means "to carry or to transport", but if used in sentences it might also mean "to guide, to direct or to make walk", e.g.

- (a) Oshike she ku *enditha*? (What has made you come here?)
- (b) Omuwa ote ke tu *enditha* (The Lord will guide us)
- (c) Ye ote *enditha* okanona (lit. He is making a child walk, i.e. He is teaching a child to walk)

From the above examples it is evident that the meaning of a word becomes quite clear if some of the possible meanings are considered. "We may, of course, choose to consider some of the possible meanings as impractical for our dictionary on the grounds that they are archaic, slangy or otherwise of little use" (Swanson 1975: 68).

2.4 The need for visual aids

A bilingual dictionary must include illustrations to picture items unfamiliar to speakers of the target language (Haas 1975: 46). The *Oshindonga / English Dictionary* contains no illustrations at all but it contains some words which need illustrations to ease the understanding of non-Oshiwambo speakers, e.g.

oshigandhi (grain basket)
 oshigegeti (magic potion)

These words can easily be internalized by the speakers of the target language if accompanied by illustrations. The same can be said of the following words: okambudju, ombu, okamita, oshimpako (Viljoen et al. 1992: 26 ff.).

2.5 Phonetic information

"The ideal bilingual dictionary would ... include all the information needed to instruct the user in the proper way to pronounce each word so as to be indetectable from the pronunciation of a native speaker" (Haas 1975: 45). The items in the *Oshindonga / English Dictionary* should have been followed by the phonetic transcription of each item in order to teach the user how to pronounce

each item. The *Oshindonga / English Dictionary* has no phonetic transcriptions at all, e.g. oshaadhi [ɔʃa:ði].

The above example is an indication of a good bilingual dictionary which assists the user in pronouncing a word.

2.6 Grammatical information

This field is treated quite well in this dictionary because information provided in the "preamble" gives a full explanation of the usage of subject concords in present, past and future tense according to all noun classes.

Usage of pronouns with subject concords is treated by way of examples in the leading section of the dictionary.

2.7 Cultural items

In the *Oshindonga / English Dictionary* cultural items are not accompanied by a cultural note, e.g. oshigegeti (magic potion). This should also be done in cases where there is no ready equivalent in the target language. Swanson (1975: 70) is explicit on the issue of cultural notes: "A culture ... is not aware that its facets are different, peculiar, or even characteristic, unless so informed by an outsider or unless suddenly confronted by another culture. A part of the business of a bilingual dictionary is to recognize lexical items reflecting these differences and to treat them accordingly, that is not to minimize them by seeking an exact (often artificial) equivalent in the other language. Thus *king* will translate ancient Greek *basileús* only if accompanied by a cultural note explaining the differences in connotation".

3. Conclusion

Throughout this review I have pointed out the shortcomings in the *Oshindonga / English Dictionary*. However, it must be acknowledged that this is the first *Oshindonga / English dictionary* which has paved the way for the compilation of the subsequent bilingual dictionaries of this same kind in these two languages.

Most important, however, is the fact that the input by the compilers deserves recognition as they have made a valuable pioneering contribution to this field, i.e. lexicography.

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"The difference between a glossary and a dictionary is that a glossary is a mere wordlist with renderings in a target language, while a dictionary provides more information than just the renderings, viz. morphological, syntactic and phonological information, next to examples of syntactic and idiomatic / figurative usage, or possibly even etymological and cultural information." (Haacke, forthcoming)

According to this distinction, the first Otjiherero glossary was published by H. Hahn in 1849. The additional specialized glossaries that should be mentioned here are the *Herero-Taalkunde. Terminologielys* (1976) and *Herero-Rekenkunde. Terminologielys*.

As far as dictionaries are concerned, the only dictionaries available in Otjiherero are the *English-Herero Dictionary* (1883) by F.W. Kolbe, the *Herero-German dictionary (Wörterbuch und kurzgefasste Grammatik des Otjiherero)*, 1886) by H. Brincker and a *German-Herero dictionary (Deutsch-Herero Wörterbuch)*, 1917) by J. Irle.

In addition to the above mentioned older dictionaries, Rev. and Mrs R. Gestwicki in the seventies compiled a short bilingual glossary (English-Herero)