

A. Neil Skinner, *Hausa Lexical Expansion Since 1930: A Supplement to Bargery's Dictionary*. Madison: African Studies Program, University of Wisconsin, 1985, 54 pp. \$7.00.

Reviewed by Paul Newman and Ismail Junaidu

Anyone who has ever worked on a dictionary is aware of the enormous difficulties involved. The work is never ending and pitfalls lurk at every corner. A scholar who undertakes such a thankless task certainly deserves our gratitude. At the same time, since a dictionary is a basic reference work on which others will rely for years to come, a lexicographer has a heavy responsibility to see to it that his work is accurate to the highest degree possible. Thus, while Skinner is entitled to full credit for the contribution his *Supplement* makes to Hausa linguistic scholarship, he also has to be held accountable for its shortcomings.

In 1934, G.P. Bargery published his monumental *Hausa-English Dictionary*, a meticulous work of some 1150 tightly packed pages (plus a concise 75 page English-Hausa index), which qualifies as one of the finest African language dictionaries ever produced. For a number of years Skinner tried to get Bargery reprinted, during which time he worked on the preparation of a comprehensive supplement that would bring Bargery up to date. With prospects for a Bargery reprinting as bleak as ever, Skinner sensibly decided to make the materials he had amassed generally available by publishing the *Supplement* as a separate volume. Despite the main title of the work under review, which suggests that this is a lexicographical study that could stand on its own, the work can only be treated as an addendum to Bargery, nothing more, nothing less. The phonological omissions, cross references, partial entries, etc. employed by Skinner all presuppose that the user of the *Supplement* will have a copy of Bargery at hand.

The *Supplement* contains something over 1500 main entries. (Considering that 50 years have passed since the publication of Bargery and that in the interim Nigeria, the main Hausa-speaking country, has experienced a World War, Independence, a Civil War, numerous political upheavals, greatly increased education, and even more greatly expanded mass communication (with radio at the forefront), it is surprising that the *Supplement* is not larger than it is.¹) About 25% of the entries are English loanwords, 20% French loanwords, and 7% Arabic loanwords. For anyone interested in the history of Hausa lexical development, it is unfortunate that Skinner did not note the presence or absence of these loanwords in Abraham's important dictionary published some fifteen years after Bargery.² In the introduction to the *Supplement*, Skinner claims that Abraham added very few words to those already in Bargery, but it is not

so clear that this is so. A quick check of the letter F in the *Supplement*, for example, reveals that 1/3 of the forty-five English loanwords listed there are also found in Abraham. Under the circumstances, a simple coding of the words found in Abraham could have made it simple to determine how many and which words date from the 15 year period after Bargery and which are more recent introductions.

About 18% of the entries are words in Bargery that now have a modified or added meaning. Unlike the case of new loanwords, all of which are intended to be included, Skinner asserts a policy of selectivity with regard to new meanings of old words, specifically omitting semantic nuances, lexical collocations, and figurative/metaphorical meanings added by Abraham. It is hard to see on what theoretical lexicographic principle such a distinction between new "words" and new "meanings" can be justified.

Some 16% of the entries are words missing from Bargery that are not identifiable as loanwords. Included here are specialized vocabulary – primarily names of fish and embroidery patterns – ideophones, and words from non-standard dialects. About 7% of the entries are forms that phonologically differ (generally in a minor way) from the same words as presented in Bargery. Some 5% are derivative forms such as abstract nouns or agentials and the rest are compound expressions and phrases, the occasional loanword from Fulani or Yoruba, and other miscellaneous items.

Turning now to the specifics of Skinner's entries, there are three matters that require comment: the particular words included or excluded, the adequacy of the definitions, and the reliability of the phonological transcriptions. In the case of a language such as Hausa that is in the midst of rapid lexical change, it is not an easy task to decide what new words to cite. On the whole, Skinner has taken a prudent approach, namely including loanwords (and semantic extensions) that are widespread and appear to be integrated in the language, while leaving out recent technical coinages and other neologisms whose acceptance in the language is still uncertain. There are just a few words in the *Supplement* whose inclusion could be challenged on the grounds that they are really English citations rather than English loanwords, e.g. *akita* 'architect', *aranji* 'orange', *fenta* 'painter', *kanuri* 'Kanuri person or language'. The inadvertent omissions, i.e. new words and meanings missed by Skinner that should have been included, are more numerous. The following are some of the more common items that were missed:³ *à-kòori-kuuraa* 'a small delivery van'; *àlkiilàa* 'direction, goal'; *arcèe* 'run off'; *bakin-mái* 'engine oil'; *bíllii* 'a swelling or bubble as at the weak spot on an inner tube'; *baroo-bàròò* 'clear as can be'; *cooci* 'church'; *dan giyàa* 'an alcoholic' (now contrasting with *mashàayii* 'someone who drinks alcoholic beverages'); *fankèekè* 'face powder'; *gàraabaasàa* 'a real bargain'; *hùular kwaanòò* 'a hard helmet,

such as used by motorcycle riders'; *jeefii-jeefii* 'here and there'; *kalalii* 'joy, excitement'; *maayèn karfèe* 'magnet'; *táyaa-ni-tantádoó* 'high heel shoes'; *úrya* 'an Afro-comb'; *wata-wata* 'hesitation'; *àshàasha* (B. 'a grass mat') now 'sack cloth used for carrying/covering kola nuts'; *jìiniyàa* (B. 'a steam hooter') now 'any siren'; *kyankèenee* (B. 'look after officiously') now, usually, 'monopolize'; *kyàstuu* (B. 'the steel used in striking fire') now simply 'a cigarette lighter'.

As an experienced lexicographer and translator, Skinner usually provides precise, well-phrased definitions. There are cases, however, where the definitions provided are surprisingly inexact or incomplete, e.g. *aajóò* not = *àdàashii* ('mutual financial aid') but 'entertainment'; *alàkakài* not 'utter frustration', but (as listed in B. under *àlka-kài*) 'something unwanted that you're stuck with'; *arwanka* (in B. under *alwanka*) not 'midwife', but 'woman who administers ablutions to a bride or who washes corpses'; *boolàa* not only 'incinerator', but also 'refuse dump'; *filàafilii* not 'sail', but 'action of flapping'; *geejii* not only 'gauge', but also used in the phrase *yi geejii* 'be filled'; *gwaarancii* not just 'Hausa spoken by a Gwari', but 1. 'Hausa as spoken by a non-Hausa' or 2. 'baby-talk'; *handasàa* not 'architecture', but 'engineering'; *kalkal* not just 'emphasizing whiteness of teeth', but also 'emphasizing cleanly shaven or cleanly washed'; *leedàa* not just 'a plastic bag', but 'plastic material'; *na-dàkamà* not 'very deaf', but (as described fully by Abraham under *dàkamà*) 'a reference to a deaf person used in a fixed epithet'; *rattàbaa* not only 'organize', but also, when used with *hannuu*, 'sign a document'.

The one area where this otherwise valuable *Supplement* really falls short is at the phonological level. To put it bluntly, the *Supplement* contains so many mistakes in the marking of tone and vowel length that it cannot be relied upon. Whether the mistakes are due to transcription errors by Skinner or whether they represent typographical slips – one is just as much the compiler's responsibility as the other – the result is the same: a phonological presentation that is seriously flawed. It is particularly disappointing to see careless work of this sort in the context of a *Supplement* intended as a tribute to Bargery when what is so incredible about Bargery's huge dictionary is how few errors of whatever sort are found in it.⁴

The key to understanding the uneven quality of the *Supplement* is provided implicitly by the format of the work. Unlike most other books, the body of the *Supplement* (i.e. the Hausa-English section as opposed to the introduction and English-Hausa index) has blank pages facing each page of entries. The *Supplement* should thus be viewed not as a finished product ready to be bound in the back of Bargery,⁵ but as an interim report of work in progress, to which other scholars are expected to make annotations in the space provided. Through published reviews

and personal communications, the annotations of other scholars should in time make their way back to Skinner so that he can attend to the mistakes and lacunae in the *Supplement* as it now stands and prepare a revised, carefully-checked version. One can only hope that by then a publisher will finally come along willing to reprint Bargery with the new *Supplement* in fulfillment of Skinner's long-standing aspiration.

NOTES

* Preparation of this review was aided by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, International Research and Studies Program, no. G0085-40637, Roxana Ma Newman principal investigator.

1. If one considers that the 300 French loanwords cited in effect duplicate corresponding English loanwords, one really has only "expanded" the language by some 1200 items.
2. The first edition of Abraham's Dictionary (with Mai Kano listed as co-author) appears to have been published in 1949, even though the copyright page of the second edition (published in 1962 with Abraham listed as sole author), states "First Edition 1946".
3. Some of these items are found in Newman (1977), though some were missed there also.
4. For a detailed critique of Bargery (and Abraham) with specific attention to certain "systematic errors", see Gouffé (1965). A useful survey of Hausa dictionaries is provided by Newman (1974).
5. An annoying aspect of the *Supplement's* format is its size (about 25 x 21 cm), just enough larger than Bargery to preclude their standing together conveniently on the same shelf.

REFERENCES

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