

**B. Kirsch, S. Skorge and N. Matsiliza.** *An English–Xhosa Companion for Health-Care Professionals.* 1996, xix + 537 pp. ISBN 0-7021-3452-X. Kenwyn: Juta. Price R99,00.

## Introduction

This review is an evaluation of one of the first phrase books of its kind to be used in the teaching and learning of Xhosa as a second language. The medical or health-care field needs the most effective means of communication in order to realise its mission. African languages have for a long time been neglected as a means of communication. Afrikaans and English have instead been the languages mostly used. This book is therefore assessed to establish whether it can facilitate communication between a non-Xhosa-speaking professional and the patient who speaks only Xhosa. Each chapter or section is scrutinised for its merits and demerits. Commentary on each one of these is then given. Finally the worth of the book is established.

The author's extensive experience of teaching Xhosa as both a second and a first language at various levels and for different professions informs this review.

## Evaluation

As stated in the preface (p. iv) this English–Xhosa companion, compiled in close consultation with a range of health-care professionals, is much more than just a phrase book. It covers introductory exchanges such as greetings, getting acquainted, putting patients at ease and expressions for regret at one's inability to speak Xhosa. In consecutive chapters extensive vocabulary is provided for (1) obtaining patient details, (2) taking a patient's history, (3) physical examination, instructions and explanations, (4) special investigations and procedures, (5) obstetrics, (6) communicating with hospitalised and clinic patients, and (7) health education.

The preface presents the reader with an outline of the contents of the publication. This part can also be referred to as the user's guide to the companion. In this section the reader is provided with such information as the use of contrasting typefaces to highlight the different constituents of Xhosa words. There is also information about charts on pronunciation of Xhosa sounds. Readers' attention is also drawn to the presence of a reference section, an alphabetical vocabulary list and an index of medical terms and illnesses.

Acknowledgement of contributions by various individuals towards the publishing of the companion is made. Sisters Michele Rolfe and Marie McKewon showed interest in the work and thus encouraged the authors to embark on the project. Dr. Nosisa Matsiliza, Miss Theresa Soci and Dr. Bongani Mayosi are the speakers of Xhosa who provided the Xhosa equivalents for the English. Prof. Ralph Kirsch seems to have been the main force of influence behind the writing of this companion. From the acknowledgements it is clear that the work

is a product of a team of specialists. This view echoes the commentary made by Prof. Daniel J. Ncayiyana in the foreword (p. iii).

The poem "Kusa Kusihlwa" (pp. vi-ix) by E. Jobodwana from *Uncuthu maZangwa* translated into English by Sindiwe Magona is a very appropriate ice-breaker to this work. It is therefore clear that the work is targeted at intermediate learners of Xhosa. Beginners will definitely be scared away by this poem. Its translator is highly commended for being so innovative in providing English equivalents.

The supplements "Some key words and phrases", "A working guide to Xhosa pronunciation" and "The clicks" on the front and back cover flaps are well placed. It is extremely important for a non-Xhosa speaker to be equipped with basic expressions in Xhosa before attempting to learn the language. Pronunciation is absolutely essential for learning the sound system of Xhosa as it is totally different from that of the European languages. The guide provided should therefore serve a very useful purpose to the learners in this regard.

The authors persuade the learners to try and memorise the key words and phrases on the front flap. One would have reservations about any hint of memorisation as it suggests bad learning habits. As these are basic phrases of Xhosa, the learners ought to be persuaded rather to try and remember applying them as they are useful icebreakers in a situation requiring communication in Xhosa.

The guide to Xhosa pronunciation provided on both the front and back flaps is very user-friendly. The authors show a lot of experience in the teaching of Xhosa as a foreign language. They know all the problems of pronunciation experienced by non-Xhosa speakers. The guide on the pronunciation of clicks is placed separately on the back flap. This is very strategic indeed as the three basic clicks are often regarded as a terror by most non-Xhosa speakers. The placing of these sounds at the end of the pronunciation guide ought to reduce the difficulty of learning them. For English speakers the explanations with examples of similar sounds in English definitely eliminates the fear of these sounds.

However, on the front page flap the use of a technical term like "coalescence" is not recommended as the health-care professionals, being the target readership, are less likely to be grammatically sophisticated. The use of less technical terms seems to have been a consideration though as the authors opted for "group" when dealing with the noun classes. This is another wise decision on the part of the compilers.

A learner who is a highly analytic, critical reader, will be well served by the section entitled "Introduction to Xhosa sentence construction". It provides extensive explanations of the grammar of Xhosa. The inclusion of ideophones and tone is another indication of the authors' awareness of the problem areas in the learning of Xhosa. Ideophones and tone are always problematic to learners.

The difficulty of providing English equivalents for Xhosa ideophones can be a nightmare to learners of this language. Clear explanations of these ideophones are given in the companion. It requires a lot of imagination to be able to come up with explanations of ideophones like "twatse = snugly" and "tyokololo

= limp" (p. 47). The English equivalents provided for these ideophones are quite apt.

Very little information is given on tone (p. 51). As regards accuracy of tone, the authors state: "Learners of Xhosa should not let concern regarding the use of the correct tone inhibit their efforts to speak. Context will help to impart the intended meaning." Whilst this ought to relieve the learners from the fear of employing incorrect intonation, one feels that more examples with tone markings would be of immense help. An explanation of the tone markings would also be necessary.

That this manual is intended to improve on relations and forge that special bond between the health-care professionals and the patients becomes clear in the section "Getting acquainted" (pp. 56-63). This section begins with the professionals courteously introducing themselves to the patient rather than asking the patient "What is your name?" — the "interrogative" approach which was used in the works of most authors, revealing a domineering attitude towards the Xhosa speakers. The authors of this work are highly commended for shifting away from this position.

Terms for professions like radiographer, dietician, etc. are too technical for a non-Xhosa speaker to try in Xhosa. Why not "ndiyi-radiographer" or "ndiyireyidografa"? This ought to facilitate communication better. It is preferable to move away from too formal constructions that are likely to impede communication. When enquiring about religious affiliation, for instance, asking "Leliphi ihlelo lakho lenkonzo?" (p. 68) is too formal for an ordinary Xhosa speaker. A more frequently used form is "Ungena kuyiphi icawe?" The same applies to such requests as "Nceda, khulula" (Please undress) (p. 161). It would be more effective if one says "Khawukhulule" or "Ungakhulula" (Please undress or You may undress). It is best to opt for more commonly used forms than too formal ones.

The exclamation "Heke!" (Good!) is essential for the health-care professional to know and use. This is given in the section "General examination" (pp. 160-163). It is however a pity that the companion does not incorporate more or additional exclamations made by the patients to express various other emotions. Knowing the various exclamations would help the health professional in gauging, for instance, the intensity of pain or even relief from pain where appropriate.

The sections "Parts of the body and anatomical terms" and "Amalungu omzimba" (pp. 376-391) can be regarded as being central to this work for health professionals. It seems quite logical for these professionals to want to learn Xhosa words for the different parts of the body. One would even be inclined to suggest that such lists be placed quite early in or at the beginning of a text like this companion. This is nevertheless a highly valuable section with useful and usable vocabulary. The English-Xhosa section is even more user-friendly than its Xhosa-English counterpart. Although the explanation of the locative construction is given in the English-Xhosa section, the lack of such information in the Xhosa-English list is likely to be confusing to non-Xhosa-speaking learners. It would be better to list all the nouns under the headings of the locative form

in both the English and Xhosa sections.

The vocabulary lists provided on pp. 394-499 constitute an inventory of all the words used in the companion. The translations provided, determined according to the context in which they are applied, are very helpful. The authors add a caution by stating that there might be other meanings which these words acquire in other contexts. This is necessary as most Xhosa words often change meaning according to context. Tone is another factor that changes the sense of a word in Xhosa.

Most learners of Xhosa as a second language are often thrilled when they come across such lexical entries as "imajarini" (margarini), "ifestile" (venster), "ibhulukhwe" (broek) etc. To them these words seem to give the assurance that it is not at all impossible to learn Xhosa. The authors are therefore commended for including lists of adoptives from English and Afrikaans. In the same section (pp. 498-499) they have also included lists of Xhosa words that have an Anglicised version e.g. "umandlalo"/"ibhedi" (bed).

The section "Euphemisms for some medical terms and bodily functions" (pp. 502-503) is quite informative, as it is, but it would have been complete had some Xhosa cultural explanations been provided, perhaps some elaboration on A.C. Jordan's articles in the 1961 *Cape Argus*. Some other sources could also have been consulted as regards this aspect. Its misplaced inclusion in the alphabetic index should be corrected in subsequent editions.

The alphabetic index (pp. 504-535) serves a very useful purpose. It ought to enhance the user-friendliness of this work. A health-care professional who is at the intermediate level of learning Xhosa, will definitely carry this companion in his/her coat pocket (p. iii) all the time. With the help of this index, it should be easy to search for whatever information one is looking for.

A bibliography, listing medical books and dictionaries, is to be found on pages 536-537. These references should help the learners of Xhosa to trace more useful sources of information. It is however not clear why A.C. Jordan's contribution is not included in the list.

## Conclusion

This companion is a valuable contribution towards the learning of Xhosa as a second language. A lot of hard work was put into its compilation. A publication of this stature ought to stimulate a lot of interest in writing more quality works within the same area for second language learners of Xhosa.

M.W. Jadezweni  
Department of African Languages  
University of Stellenbosch  
South Africa