

**Hessel Visser.** *Naro Dictionary: Naro–English, English–Naro*. Fourth edition. 2001, viii + 240 pp. ISBN 99912-938-5-x. D'kar: Kuru Development Trust.

Although this dictionary was not published by a well-established publishing house, its quality and usefulness rival those of seasoned publishers in the field of Khoesan studies, such as the dictionaries by Dickens (1994), Traill (1994) and Haacke (2002). This fourth edition of Visser's *Naro Dictionary* is a medium-sized dictionary of 240 pages, including 16 pages of appendices. The work is the result of more than 10 years of lexical compilation which resulted in several editions of the dictionary, each of which was an expanded version of the earlier one. Thus, from a miniature version, it has grown into a sizeable high-quality work, in spite of the compiler's modest observation in his introduction that it is a mere "working document" and that it is still a "preliminary publication".

The dictionary begins with initial information for the users, such as the status of the present dictionary in relation to the earlier versions, the structure of the entire dictionary, the representation of the various sounds and the marking of the prosodic features such as tone, nasalization and vowel depression. According to the compiler, the work on the dictionary was part of a broader project, the Naro Language Project, which included the preparation of primers, literacy materials, magazines, a Bible translation and other linguistic documents.

The dictionary itself is divided into two main parts. The Naro–English part has about 5 500 entries, arranged in alphabetical order. Each entry begins with a headword in bold, followed by the corresponding phonetic transcription, in IPA symbols, in square brackets and the tone pattern in parentheses. The English equivalents are given either as single words or as paraphrases. In some cases, the variant forms, dialectal variation, corresponding part of speech, example phrases and idiomatic use of words are also given. In the case of fauna and flora, the equivalent scientific terms are often provided. Also in the case of loan-words, the language of origin is usually specified.

The second part of the dictionary consists of about 9 000 entries in which the English headwords, in bold and in alphabetical order, are followed by the equivalent Naro words or phrases in the conventional Naro orthography, the IPA transcription in square brackets, and the tone patterns in parentheses. No other information is provided. According to the compiler, there are more entries in this part than in the Naro–English part, because of the fact that many of the Naro words have several English equivalents. Thus it became necessary to establish more English headwords for the fewer Naro lexical items.

The 16-page appendices contain lists of specific lexical items referring to animals, birds, plants, pans and numerals as well as proper names used for men and women.

From the above, it is clear that this publication meets most of the requirements of a good reference dictionary, containing essential features such as head-

words arranged in alphabetical order, the pronunciation pattern of each word, the relevant meanings, and examples of word usage or idiomatic use. Moreover, the addition of the English–Naro part is highly appropriate as it allows those looking for Naro words, particularly local non-speakers and foreign learners and researchers, to benefit from the dictionary. Apart from these aspects, the dictionary could be said to be unique in the following ways:

First, it will be helpful to both local people and international scholars. Naro speakers and other local people who are now used to the roman-based orthographic convention (after very justifiably rejecting the use of the "sticks" in the IPA transcription of the clicks) are able to find the English equivalents for the Naro words. On the other hand, foreign linguists and other scholars will be able to search for Naro words and learn their pronunciation through the international phonetic convention, which is also provided in the dictionary. The strictly alphabetical order of the spelling system, rather than the pronunciation modes, will make the dictionary more practically useful.

Second, the dictionary is very user-friendly because of the many useful explanations in the introduction, the systematic organization and the use of simple and clear definitions, with occasional word-for-word or literal translations. In fact, the compiler succeeded to a very large extent in dealing with phenomena which involve intercultural conceptualizations such as *nqōó* "world" or *dqom̩* "worship".

Third, the compiler has made a commendable effort to be specific in defining problematic entries, such as fauna and flora. Where many other dictionaries would have been content just to mention "a kind of tree" or "a kind of bird", the compiler has taken the trouble to find the scientific name of the plant or animal or to give a detailed description of the object involved.

Fourth, the dictionary was prepared with considerable accuracy and thoroughness. It is clear that the compiler has taken much care in recording the relevant information for each of the entries. Moreover, his close contact and association with representative speakers of Naro enabled him to check each entry.

However, a work of this complexity can never be perfect, since there are always a number of unnoticed inconsistencies, oversights and other shortcomings which may only be detected by inquiring users. This dictionary is no exception. The following shortcomings are worth pointing out.

First, some of the orthographic conventions used to represent the sounds in Naro may be confusing to the dictionary users. For example, the sound spelt as *kg* is given the phonetic value [kx] (a voiceless velar affricate) in the phonetic transcription. However, this spelling is also used in Setswana, the lingua franca of Botswana, with the phonetic value of [q<sup>h</sup>] (aspirated voiceless uvular plosive). The dictionary users, who are used to the Setswana orthography would tend to pronounce it as in Setswana. Moreover, the sound spelt as *gh* is given the phonetic value of [g] (voiced velar plosive), while the sound spelt as *g* is given the phonetic value of [x] (voiceless velar fricative). Although this may

have been done to ensure that the respective sound is pronounced as in Setswana and Afrikaans (another major language in the region), the spelling of these two sounds would be highly confusing to those used to other conventions, particularly where graphemes like *gh* are expected to represent fricative sounds.

Second, as the compiler himself states, tones have been indicated in some cases but not in others. Moreover, tonal notation was "guessed" in several incidences. This reveals the compiler's modesty and frankness, but also indicates how some of the tonal representations in the dictionary may be inadequate or misleading. On the other hand, in some cases where tone is not marked, users would find it difficult to tell whether the absence of tone means mid-tone or uncertainty about the tone pattern. This is the case of *gataga* [xataxa] "like, likewise, ...".

Third, there is some inconsistency in the indication of the origin of loan-words. Although the origin of such words are given in most cases, there are cases where they are not. These include words such as *tshibi* "Sunday" (from Setswana *tshipi*) or *thebe* "one hundredth of a pula" (from Setswana *thebe*). Moreover, although the origin of most loan-words is indicated, the intermediate languages through which these words have entered Naro have not been given. This is the case with words such as *baebele* "Bible" and *buka* "book", which although originating from English have entered Naro through the intermediary of Setswana, where they are also spelt the same way.

Fourth, although the compiler provides a very helpful sketch of the marking system of person, gender and number in Naro on page 238, this information ought to have appeared as part of the introduction, as it is vital in orienting users to the basic morphology of the language. In fact, it should have been systematically and clearly written to indicate the processes of derivation, inflection and case marking in the language.

Fifth, although the parts of speech of the headwords have been indicated in most cases, they are absent in a number of the entries. Thus the definition of a word like *ábàgu-q'oo* "how someone is packing his goods" does not reveal whether the headword is an adverb, an ideophone or a noun. Moreover, since the parts of speech are not indicated in the English–Naro part, it is difficult to know whether the English headword "tame" (*kgóbó*) is used in its verbal or adjectival form, or the word "taste" (*xám*) in its verbal or nominal form, unless cross-checking with the Naro–English part.

Finally, since one of the primary aims of the dictionary is to assist the Naro-speaking community and the other people of Botswana to become familiar with Naro words, it would have been more helpful to have the equivalents in Setswana as well, since this is the lingua franca of the country and the language in which many Naro speakers have both spoken and written competence. Most Naro speakers do not speak English. A trilingual dictionary in which Setswana is one of the languages would have been ideal. Of course, one is aware of the technical intricacies in preparing a trilingual dictionary, but the trouble would be worth it. Perhaps this could be considered as a future project.

In spite of the above shortcomings, Visser's dictionary is an important contribution not only to the existing dictionaries of the Khoesan languages spoken in Botswana, but also to the number of books on the Naro language, whose orthography was only established several years ago. The dictionary will be useful not only to the speakers of Naro, the primary target users, but also to the general Botswana public as well as a good range of international scholars such as linguists, ethnographers, historians, missionaries, tourists and other language enthusiasts. In fact, the dictionary provides a wealth of information about the Naro people, their culture and their world view. For example, one is fascinated by the many terms denoting directions like west, east, north and south. This is presumably because of the importance of spatial directions and locations to the Khoesan communities. However, one is also surprised to learn that Naro speakers have terms for modern concepts such as "tourist" (*caate-kg'ao*), "zinc" (*nxam*) and "world" (*nqōō*). Most of all, one is astonished by the ingenuity of Naro speakers in creating terms for new concepts, such as "video" (*chōō-dxāwa*), which literally means "white person's devil".

Visser's dictionary is therefore of considerable value as a tool of reference. At the same time, it constitutes an important depository for a language which is classified as one of the endangered languages of the world.

### Bibliography

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