

KARSTEN LEGÈRE: "WORTERBUCH DEUTSCH-SWAHILI"

VEB Verlag Enzyklopädie Leipzig, 1990, 267 pag., hardcover, 54,20 DM.

The Karl-Marx University at Leipzig has a longstanding reputation in the field of African studies, and has been notably active in producing high-quality Swahili materials. This most recent German-Swahili dictionary is yet another fine product. It is well edited and beautifully produced by the VEB Verlag, and contains about 15.000 German entries.

One of the major qualities of this dictionary is its sociolinguistic clarity. Whereas earlier dictionaries, such as the works by Sacleux and Johnson, suffered from a sometimes disturbing lack of differentiation between various dialects of Swahili, Legère has radically opted for the contemporary, official Sanifu variant. Within this variant, a broad complex of lexical fields are covered, though sometimes in a rather concise way. The specialized user will therefore have some difficulties finding what he needs. On the other hand, I consider the booklet highly useful for undergraduate students, and a good companion to many a practical guide or Swahili textbook.

All Swahili terms are rendered in their standard Tanzanian orthography. The plural prefix is given for nouns, as well as an indicator of the verb-type (e.g. transitive) for verbs. Adjectives are given in their primary form, i.e. without a nominal prefix. In cases where the entered Swahili term has not yet been approved by the official Swahili institutions, the regional or dialect origin of the term is mentioned.

The simplicity of the transcription system (as opposed to e.g. Sacleux), the linguistic and sociolinguistic perspicuity, the wideness of scope and the handy pocket format in which the book is produced make Legère's dictionary a nice and useful instrument for practical Swahili study. From this perspective of practical usefulness, the lack of background information (e.g. ethnographical data) as well as the lack of depth of the dictionary are but minor shortcomings.

Review by :

Jan Blommaert
Seminar of Swahili
Rozier 44
B-9000 Gent

Every issue of AFRICA FOCUS provides in the AFRICA REVIEW a survey of one or two African Countries. The choice is related, if possible, to articles published in the issue.

The survey of the following countries has already been published :

ANGOLA in Vol. 4, 1988, nr. 3-4

BENIN in Vol. 5, 1989, nr. 1-2

BOTSWANA in Vol. 6, 1990, nr. 2

KENYA in Vol. 7, 1991, nr. 1

LIBERIA in Vol. 4, 1988, nr. 1-2

LIBYA in Vol. 4, 1988, nr. 3-4

MADAGASCAR in Vol. 6, 1990, nr. 1

MALI in Vol. 5, 1989, nr. 3-4

MOROCCO in Vol. 6, 1990, nr. 2

NIGERIA in Vol. 5, 1989, nr. 3-4

RWANDA in Vol. 6, 1990, nr. 1

SOUTH-AFRICA in Vol. 5, 1989, nr. 1-2

TANZANIA in Vol. 7, 1991, nr. 1

TOGO in Vol. 4, 1988, nr. 1-2

ZAIRE in Vol. 4, 1988, nr. 1-2

ZIMBABWE in Vol. 6, 1990, nr. 3-4