

A NEW ẸDO-ENGLISH DICTIONARY

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When in 1986 the dictionary currently in use—An Ẹdo-English Dictionary, by Professor R. N. Agheḃyisi—was published, a yawning vacuum was filled to the enthusiastic admiration and acceptance of the public. About a decade later, it gradually dawned on many people that the dictionary was very small, both in content and scope, and a call for a bigger dictionary emerged. The need for a new dictionary became topical. In addition, some began to call for a monolingual dictionary. Despite this need, no individual or group instantly answered the clarion call for a new dictionary.

However, some efforts were being made all the while. One attempt was made by an officer of the Ẹdo Zonal Office, National Council for Arts and Culture, who initiated a group of three people to work on a monolingual dictionary. Although the group worked very hard, the proposed dictionary never saw the light of day. One reason for the failure was the group's very slow pace of work, which arose from the difficulty of finding appropriate Ẹdo words to explain the vocabulary in the lexicon. When a language has as small a volume of vocabulary as the Ẹdo language has, finding adequate words to facilitate description of words in that same language becomes problematic. This is because no language is bigger than its culture.

I served on the committee of three sponsored by the National Council for Arts and Culture and saw the problems firsthand. All the same, the urgent need to have an enlarged dictionary persistently obsessed my mind. Knowing the problems of a monolingual dictionary, I decided to embark on writing a bilingual

one, with Edo words explained in English. Still, the fear created by the experience I have described delayed my commencement of the work.

Apart from the problems associated with writing a monolingual dictionary, the level of readership in the language needs to be considered. Obviously, the readership who can maximally utilize a monolingual dictionary is negligible, and such a dictionary might therefore find usefulness only in the libraries. Therefore, this bilingual dictionary is intended to be useful to the general readership. It is designed to meet the need of those who are well grounded in the language, who will find the book to be a handy reference lexicon. Those interested in learning the language will find the book to be a compendium of Edo vocabulary. Its purpose is to fill the gap that resulted from the inadequacies of the older dictionaries. For example, the Melzian dictionary was written with phonetic symbols that make many people unable to use it. Agheyisi's dictionary, although simple enough to attract more readership, is obviously small in content.

I started writing this dictionary in Canada about a year ago because I have the time and an environment conducive to the work. Nonetheless, as a solitary author, I have no one to consult in the face of many problems. Be that as it may, I find Agheyisi's Edo-English Dictionary and Melzian's Concise Dictionary of the Bini Language of Southern Nigeria very handy. These two dictionaries have become my springboard in terms of vocabulary acquisition and grammatical references.

In regard to the dictionary, the issue of nomenclature needs to be clarified. For some decades now, Edo as a nomenclature has assumed several linguistic and political dimensions. In spite of this development, people from the Benin area of Edo State know nothing more than that they speak Edo and that they are Iviḃedo, Edo people. Their counterparts from outside this area of the state may agree that they are Edo people, but they do not speak Edo. This, in a nutshell, explains the scenario. For the former, Edo is a linguistic identification, but for the latter Edo is a political identity.

Therefore, Ẹdo as a label for the new dictionary is confined to its linguistic scope, as the target audience of the book are those who speak the language. The dictionary will, I believe, help native speakers of the language update and increase their Ẹdo vocabulary. This is in no way saying that the dictionary has no relevance to nonspeakers of the language. In fact, the dictionary's being bilingual makes it comprehensible to people interested in learning the Ẹdo language.

All things being equal, the book should go to press before the end of 2016. If it does, it will improve significantly on the existing dictionaries. For the first time, word entries are tone marked directly on the words for ease of pronunciation. Therefore, ambiguity arising from the absence of tone marks is resolved without strains. At about one thousand pages in length, the dictionary will feature many meaningful words that have long been abandoned for lack of use. My personal knowledge as both a native speaker of Ẹdo and a linguist facilitates the choice of entry words. A target of about thirty thousand entry words is anticipated. Most of the entry words have been gleaned from current usage. Many words, of course, also come from the old stock. For example, the names of all the Ogisos and Ọbas and their dates of reign are included. The names of heroes past, particularly those deified, are highlighted. Also, the names of important and useful trees and weeds, with their botanical labels in many cases, are featured in the lexicon.

For a long time, the problem of an acceptable orthography has been with us. However, with some few exceptions, the 1974 recommended orthography has come to be generally accepted. The orthography adopted for this dictionary is Agheyisi's version of 1974 text, with one exception having to do with the status of /mw/. In this dictionary /mw/ is accorded a full-fledged nasal status, as /m/ and /n/. The effect of this is that there is no /n/ after /mw/. To do the opposite is to assume that /vb/ and /mw/ have the same sound quality. For example, /ɔmwan/ in the existing dictionary is written as /ɔmwa/ in the new dictionary. This change allows the new dictionary to comply with the linguistic rule requiring every symbol used in writing a language to be specific. That is to say that a symbol must represent one and only one sound.

Most of the words in this lexicon are labelled according to their grammatical categories. Each word can be distinguished by the function it performs in the sentence. The nominals, or nouns, are very easy to recognise, as they all begin with vowels. In addition, they function in the sentence as subjects and objects of the verbs. Examples are as follows: (1) Owa na mose = 'this house is fine'; owa is the subject of the verb mose. (2) Ede de owa = 'Ede bought a house'; owa is the object of the verb de.

Two types of nouns are identifiable in the lexicon. The first group of nouns I call concrete nouns, and the second group I refer to as derived nouns. Concrete nouns are not derived from other categories of words. Examples are such words as obo = 'hand'; owa = 'house'; aga = 'chair'; ada = 'sceptre'; ege = 'time'. The second group of nouns are those derived from other grammatical categories of words.

One group of derived nouns is made of nouns derived from verbs. Examples are words such as (1) itota = 'sitting', derived from tota = 'to sit down', and (2) irriemwi = 'eating', derived from rriemwi = 'to eat'. Another group of derived nouns are formed from adjectives and adverbs. Examples are words such as (1) imose = 'beauty', derived from mose = 'beautiful', and (2) ikhoriḥon = 'ugliness', derived from khoriḥon = 'ugly'. A third category of nouns, which I refer to as phrasal nouns, are derived from phrases. Examples are (1) irriakon = 'grinding of teeth', derived from rriakon = 'to grind teeth', and (2) ibalegbe = 'a quick temper', derived from balegbe = 'to be quick tempered'. Adjectives can also be derived from verbs, for example, (1) nḡfuḡfua = 'white one', derived from fuḡfua = 'to be white', and (2) nekhui = 'black one', derived from khuikhui = 'to be black'.

Pronouns in the language are used in places of nouns. Like the nouns, they function as subjects and objects of verbs in the sentence. They also begin with vowels. Examples are iran = 'they'; ima = 'us'; uwa = 'you' (pl.); uwe = 'you' (sing.); ime = 'me'; and iren = 'him/her/it'. Pronouns can be single letters too. Examples are I = 'I'; u = 'you' (sing.); and o = 'he/she/it'.

The verbs in the language describe the action done by the nouns. Examples include the following: (1) Uwa rhule = 'Uwa is running'; rhule describes what Uwa is doing in the sentence. (2) Osaze gbe eboru = 'Osaze is playing a ball'; gbe says what Osaze is doing in the sentence. Adjectives in the language describe the nouns and pronouns, and adverbs describe the actions in the sentence. An example of an adjective is gẹdẹgbẹ in the sentence Owa mwe ye gẹdẹgbẹ = 'my house is big'; gẹdẹgbẹ = 'big', describing 'my house'. An example of an adverb is gbuu in Ode tu gbuu = 'Ode is crying loudly'; gbuu = 'loudly', describing the manner of crying.

Adjectives can also be derived from verbs, as follows: (1) nofua = 'white one', derived from fuofua = 'to be white', and (2) nekhui = 'black one', derived from khuikhui = 'to be black'. The verbs, adjectives, and adverbs are generally easy to identify in the lexicon because they do not begin with vowels. Most of the adjectives and adverbs are idiophones; that is, their sounds tend to suggest their meanings.

The most outstanding aspect of this new dictionary is that for the first time, the plural forms of nouns are indicated. Also, the past tense forms of verbs are prescribed, and in addition, where it applies, the plural forms of verbs are also given. The meanings of many words, particularly the verbs, are illustrated in sentences for ease of comprehension. A lot more will be discovered in the dictionary, God willing.

REFERENCES

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