

**Concise Amharic Dictionary. Leslau Wolf, Berkeley:
University of California Press, 1996.
pp. Ilus: XIV + 533+547.
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Amharic lexicography is now three hundred years old. Probably the first bidirectional Amharic dictionary, this work of a foreign language speaker of Amharic should be a welcome contribution to this growing field. This abridgment and revision has two unequal parts: English Amharic and Amharic English, the latter being smaller. There is no mention of the lexical density of either or both sections to be useful for an easy comparative appraisal of the coverage of Amharic lexicon. Also in both sections compound words seem to be altogether excluded.

The system of alphabetization in the English section is naturally consistently alphabetical, but the Amharic section is generally alphabetized by consonant. In the Amharic section phonological information is presented through the respelling of entry words and idioms in alphabetic characters with diacritical marks. In the English section this is given appreciably doubly in English as well as Amharic alphabets.

In view of the considerable lexical development and refinement of Amharic over the last two decades, the dictionary unfortunately looks behind the times in some certain respects. Four important drawbacks seem to be particularly noticeable.

To start with, incomplete and misleading transitional equivalents appear to be a common occurrence. It will be noted that many of these are homographs of other Amharic equivalents which should have been

sufficiently made clear through cross-referencing. The following are a few instances.

| | |
|------------|-------|
| research | ምርመራ |
| youngest | የመጨረሻ |
| edit | አዘጋጅ |
| poorly | መካኒ |
| prescribe | አዘዘ |
| transitory | ኃላፊ |

Some translations may sound quite strange to the present generation of Amharic dictionary users. These mistranslations may also misteach students of Amharic as a Foreign Language.

| | |
|---------------|--------------------|
| revolutionary | ደመነውጠኛ |
| supreme court | ጠቅላይ ንጉሠ ነገሥት ፍ/ቤት |
| settlement | ቅኝ ግዛት |
| Russian | መስኮብኛ |

A few translations' happen to be quite circumlocutionary or misleadingly inaccurate against their more defined and more precise present day equivalents.

| | |
|-------------|------------------------|
| resignation | ከስልጣን ለመሰናበት ያቀረበው ጥያቄ |
| delinquent | ዱርዱ |
| review | አቃቂር |
| semester | ወቅት |
| short story | አጭር ታሪክ |
| unique | ተወዳዳሪ የማይገኝለት |

The high frequency of such transitional inaccuracies may be attributed to failure to effect revision against ongoing changes, to lack of native

intuition and/or native assistance. Admittedly, lexicography is not at best a solo performance, especially when one is working on a foreign tongue. The complexity of lexicography recommends teamwork of some kind. It appears that the lexicographer was throughout on his own which has impacted on the quality of the work. In contrast it seems that Amsalu Aklilu's bilingual Amharic dictionary has a clear advantage owing to both native knowledge and the assistance received from professional Amharic speaking applied linguists which have expectedly resulted in far fewer inaccuracies. Viewed in terms of accuracy, Mulugeta Gudeta and Girma Alemayehu's Amharic bilingual exhibits even fewer inaccuracies.

Like many translating dictionaries, it may be said that this dictionary would be more useful for receptive than productive purposes. The frequent lack of good equivalence may lead to communication breakdown or miscommunication both in speech and writing. Also the absence of collocations, information on the grammar, contextual appropriate of words and their syntactic behavior will definitely impact on the usefulness of the dictionary as a language authority.

An equally important deficiency is the persuasiveness of sexism which is all the more noticeable. Verbs are entered in the third person masculine assumed to be generic which it is not. Some translations of idioms and words altogether exclude the fair sex. The following exemplify the ubiquitous sex-bias.

| | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| How old are you? | እድሜህ ስንት ነው. |
| Proceeds | ያገኘው ገንዘብ |
| self-confidence | በራሱ ላይ ያለው እምነት |

The prevalence of sexism becomes a serious problem in view of dictionaries' presumed legislative authority, their power to bolster

sexist thoughts and usage. Although it cannot be gainsaid that dictionaries often have to reflect sociolinguistic or sociocultural realities, they can possibly shape gender-fair usage.

The taint of sexism which permeates the dictionary also generates sexism-induced transitional inaccuracies and tense inequivalence. The equivalence would become structurally and semantically acceptable if the lexicographer were to correct his errant verb entries such as 'bake' ኃገረ and 'clean' አፀዳ into 'bake' መኃገር and 'clean' ማፅዳት by providing systematic information about the grammatical behavior of the Amharic verb in the prefatory pages or alternatively by providing gender - fair grammatical equivalence for each verb.

As well as being lexically denser and translationally more accurate, Amsalu's bilingual is a far cheaper alternative considering the exorbitant price of the dictionary which seems particularly intended for the American market although it would significantly be important to Ethiopian dictionary users studying English as a Foreign Language.

Lexicography entails enterprise, courage and conscientiousness, and is well-known as being no easy of accomplishment. On this account, the lexicographer certainly deserves accolades, (he has come up with the first bi-directional Amharic dictionary) but an accurate, complete and modern Amharic-English dictionary is still wanting.