
Although not a purely scientific work this new “Elementary Kiswaheli Grammar” denotes a gratifying development in the practical treatment of Kiswaheli. The authors have avoided describing the language after the style and according to the grammatical pattern of a European language, and aim rather at using the living language as a medium for introducing the European to the peculiarities of Swahili thinking. This object is admirably served by the contents and arrangement of the book, for the grammatical sketch, the exercises, the “introduction” to the features of everyday life and the extensive vocabulary are all directed to this end.

The actual lessons are preceded by the “Rules of Pronunciation”. These are defined somewhat concisely and are not always adapted to giving the student a true insight into the precise value of a sound. Thus in the rule that “most letters (the consonants especially), have to be pronounced as we know them from the English alphabet” the sound of *r* in English “river” is given for the pronunciation of Swahili *r*. This however, is incorrect, for the *r* in Kiswaheli is an alveolar trill (*r* or *r* of the Anthropos alphabet), while the English *r* is a guttural trill, and moreover is found only in Northern England; in the South it serves merely as an indication that the vowel sound must be lengthened.

Similarly the rule that the “vowels have to be pronounced as in Italian” will not be of much help to most students. Since Kiswaheli already has a literature of its own its orthography has now been fixed to a certain extent, but it would nevertheless have been of great advantage to the practical purposes of this book to adopt an accurate transcription.

The authors have done wisely to begin the grammatical sketch with the verb and to give in connection with it a good selection of verbal stems which are of frequent use in daily life. In certain instances we cannot always agree with their arrangement of the verbal forms into tenses and moods. It is doubtful, for instance, if the verbal form which by the inclusion of the particle *-ka* serves to indicate continuity of narrative can really be regarded as modal. But these problems have also not yet been finally solved in other Bantu languages, and it is rather to the credit of the authors that they have not introduced scientific discussions of controversial questions into a grammar designed for practical purposes.

Not much attention is paid to the derived forms of the verb, which by the addition of a suffix modify the significance of the radical element and make it relative, iterative, intransitive, intensive, causative, reciprocal, inverse, &c. It is true that Kiswaheli makes more use of prefixes in developing these forms, which are thus nearer the European conceptions of tense (cf. the prefixes *-j* and *-jo* which form the reflexive form and the “not-yet-tense”), but these derived forms have also significations of relativity (*ia*), causation (*ishe, esh, ya, &c*), reciprocity (*ana*), inversion (*ua, va*), &c. A more detailed treatment of these forms would have been well justified, especially as they are extremely suitable for giving the European an idea of the flexibility and variability of the Bantu verb.

Great stress is laid by the authors on conveying to the student the native conception of class prefixes and on impressing upon him their functional value. Their method of doing this can be heartily commended. All, who after once realising how well the prefixes lend themselves to accuracy of expression, and perceiving their resultant application to nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and pronouns, have then had to listen to the nonchalance with which the average European contemptuously brushes aside this “nigger rubbish”, will feel grateful to the authors for emphasising in this way the value of the prefixes. Indolence is pardonable in the tropics, but it is hardly necessary for European thoughtlessness to tone down also this peculiarity of the Bantu languages. For this is what is actually taking place, as the native when in the presence of the European is only too prone to put up with his faulty speech.

The locative seems to us to be inadequately dealt with, and the real Bantu conception
of Place and Time incorrectly indicated. The Coast Swaheli have indeed departed from it more and more, but among the inland tribes who speak Kiswaheli, ma-, pa- and ku-, still retain their full force as class prefixes, i.e. their combination with a substantive altogether suppresses the meaning of its true prefix and gives rise to a new substantive with locative colouring. In the Bantu languages therefore the locative is regarded substantively and not adverbially, and as such can also be the subject, a conception so foreign to the European that it must be specially brought home to him.

The vocabulary given and the exercises are well sorted and cleverly selected, so that right from the beginning the student is brought into contact with the normal speech of the native. The accompanying Reading Exercices are exemplary. "The Introduction into African Life", which begins in the fourth lesson, is of very great value and quickly makes the new-comer familiar with all the conditions of native life "from a practical point of view".

In this Introduction the authors have made a slip on p. 276, where mention is made of Muungu. They express the opinion that this monotheistic idea penetrated into Africa from Islam ("possibly this indefinite monotheistic idea was brought into Africa by Islamism"), but it would be difficult for them to produce any evidence for this. The word Muungu, Muunga, &c., is according to Johnston, used by more than sixty tribes, who live not only in East Africa but extend as far as Angola and southwards from there to the Herero. Among them there are several tribes which have been little influenced in culture. Also, according to Stuhlmann, the influence of Islam in East Africa cannot be regarded as earlier than the thirteenth century, and then it was chiefly of a commercial nature and confined to the coast. It is evident therefore that the idea of this supreme being is at least pre-Islamic. Recent researches indicate that the native East African conceptions of this supreme being are not at all "indeterminate"; on the contrary the native is fully aware of what he terms Muungu. What was uncertain and indefinite till now was merely the idea which European science, ignorant of the facts, has constructed for itself of the being termed Muungu, &c.

On the whole the authors have produced in their new grammar a work which will be of great benefit to European officials, traders, and missionaries. A. Reichart, who has already worked for eight years among the Waswaheli and returned to East Africa a few months ago, will have ample opportunity to test these small criticisms and take them into consideration for the second edition of the book.

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