

A DICTIONARY OF NIGERIAN ARABIC [English-Arabic] [Volume 1, Bibliotheca Afroasiatica, Malibu, CA: UNDNA Publications, 1982, xvi + 92 pp. and NIGERIAN ARABIC-ENGLISH DICTIONARY [Volume 2, Bibliotheca Afroasiatica], Malibu, CA: UNDNA Publications, 1985, vii + 92 pp. Compiled by Alan S. Kaye

*Reviewed by Ernest McCarus
University of Michigan*

The greatest need in Arabic studies today is dialect studies, the area with the greatest potential for reconstructing the history of the Arabic language and the cultural history of its speakers. Increasing attention is now being devoted to the major dialect areas of Egypt, North Africa, the Levant and the Gulf States, but studies of fringe area dialects, which are uniquely valuable since they tend to retain archaic features that have died out elsewhere, have traditionally been neglected. The Nigerian Arabic dictionaries under review deal with such a neglected area and are an important contribution to Arabic studies, not to mention their practical value for those traveling there. Of interest to Arabic historical linguistics, for example, is the retention of the third person masculine singular suffix *-a* on the perfect tense forms of doubled root verbs, such as *sadda* 'he closed' and *antarra* 'he moved away', while the pronoun *anīna* 'we' supports my reconstruction of Proto-Semitic **anahnu* 'we'. Nigerian Arabic (NA) also preserves verbs that are usually considered to be strictly literary, such as the verb *rā'a – birā'i* 'to look at' alongside of *šaf – bišif* 'to see' and the verb *ragad – burgud* as well as *nām – binām* 'to sleep', although these verbs are also found in other out-of-the-way dialects as well.

Nigerian Arabic is basically a bedouin (as opposed to sedentary) type dialect, showing *g* as the typical reflex of original **q* (*gāl* 'he said'), **j* realized as the affricate *ʃ* and the velar fricative **g̃* merging entirely with the uvular stop *q* as in *qāb – biqīb* 'to disappear' (a feature found in Mesopotamian bedouin Arabic); low vowel insertion in clusters containing back consonants, such as *baxadam* 'he works' from **baxdam* and *axadar* 'green' from **axdar*; the fusing of the definite article *al-* on to many words, e.g. *ladab* 'etiquette' (<**al-'adab*) and *alme* 'water' (<*al-mā*) as compared with *al-alme* 'the water'; and the use of *kān* primarily as a conditional particle 'if' and only rarely as the past tense verb "was" (in which case it is invariable, e.g. *ana kān farhān* 'I was happy'); as a main verb *kān – bukūn* means

“to happen”). Features apparently peculiar to NA include the substitution of *-l-* for the reflexive morpheme *-t-* in derived verb Forms V and VI, as exemplified by *alfakkar* – *bilfakkar* ‘to think’ and *alxālaf* – *bilxālaf* ‘to disagree, quarrel’ and the acquisition of the non-Arabic phonemes *č* (presumably a voiceless alveopalatal affricate)¹ as in *čakram* ‘lock’ and *ñ* (presumably a palatal nasal) as in *ñāwa* ‘cat’. Other phonemic changes are loss of original *‘ayn*, which is replaced by glottal stop or by zero, and the merger of pharyngeal *h* with glottal *h*.

The two dictionaries, English – Nigerian Arabic and Nigerian Arabic – English, are based on field work in 1973 – 1974 in northern Nigeria where Professor Kaye filled four large notebooks and made hundreds of hours of tape recordings of folklore, stories, legends, poems and autobiographical sketches. The English – Arabic *A Dictionary of Nigerian Arabic* contains 6,000 lexemes with grammatical, sociolinguistic and additional semantic information as well as some illustrative sentences. To illustrate, in addition to two general words for “grass” twelve specialized ones are given, such as for “new grass,” “kind of grass for burning,” “kind of grass with sharp thorns,” etc.

The second volume, *Nigerian Arabic-English Dictionary* (NE) contains the same material as EN but in Arabic-English order. In the Preface to NE the author discusses his decision to alphabetize phrases and sentences by the initial word, so treating them as single lexical units. Thus, the sentence *ana ramdān* ‘My eyes hurt me’ (II 9)² is listed under *ana* ‘I’ but not under *ramdān*. The advantage is that “it is possible to investigate a great number of sentence types such as equational sentences or the use of pre-verbs such as *garrab* in *addūd garrab bumūt* ‘The lion nearly died’.” (II, ii). Unfortunately this conceals from the user the various levels of structure of the language, not to mention the meanings of individual words. The sentence above, *ana ramdān*, is entered under *ana* but not under *ramdān*; indeed, *ramdān* is not entered in the book at all, and the reader is obliged to extrapolate the meaning for himself. Another example is *in zēn* ‘You will see the consequences!’ (II 39) which is entered as a unit in the “I” section; *in* is not translated although *zēn* is translated elsewhere (II 88) as “good (thing), nice. . . .” Nowhere is *in* listed as a word or identified semantically, lexically or morphologically. Another unfortunate decision was to list nouns with the prefixed article *al-* under “A” separately from the same noun without the article. Thus *haxx* ‘right (n)’ is listed under “H” (II 37) but *alhaxx fōgak* ‘It’s your fault’ is under “A” (II 4). This arrangement separates lexemes from their illustrative examples which are necessary fully to understand actual usage.

Not only are phrases and sentences arranged alphabetically but morphologically related words are generally listed separately in alphabetical order. Thus *nagas* – *bungus* ‘to reduce (a price)’ is listed on page II 58 but the imperative *angus ley* ‘Reduce it (the price) for me!’ is entered on page II 9. Collecting all

morphologically related words under one entry would give a more comprehensive understanding of morphological, syntactic and semantic usage in Nigerian Arabic.

It would be most helpful to use hyphens to separate clitics from words in order to avoid ambiguities. *wal* ~ *walad* 'boy' (II 8) is made definite by prefixing the article thus, *alwal* or *alwalad* 'the boy'. There is also the listing *alwal* 'a boy, some boy or other' (II 6) which presumably has a fused article. Hyphenation would remove all ambiguity: *al-wal* 'the boy' vs. *alwal* 'a boy'. Also *alwalda* 'this boy' (II 8) would be written *al-wal-da* so indentifying the postpositive demonstrative.

The author discusses the problems of formulating stress placement rules in his General Observations (I xv). Stress is obviously phonemic; there is much unpredictability, and there is also much free variation. Long vowels attract stress, which provides a good deal of predictability: *husūl* 'event, happening' is stressed on the ultima and need not be marked. When stress is indicated in these two volumes it is usually on a word-final short vowel as in *namilā* 'ant'. There remain many problematic areas such as verb forms like *anhana* – *binhani* 'to bend down, crouch' and the noun *angusi* 'a kind of gown' where, on the basis of comparable dialects one could reasonably assume either a penultimate or an antepenultimate stress. The best solution here is to give general rules for stress placement and then rigorously mark the accent on all exceptions. Here again the hyphen would help predict stress placement: *lešinu* 'why?' is obviously composed of *le* 'for' and *šinu* 'what?' As written it should be stressed on the *e*: *lēšinu*. If, on the other hand, *i* is properly stressed, hyphenation will guide the reader to the correct pronunciation: *le-šinu*.

These two volumes constitute a valuable resource for Nigerian Arabic in particular and Arabic and Semitic studies in general; they present a wealth of data embellished with sociolinguistic material and provide a good glimpse at the language. The observations made above are by way of constructive suggestions; in the meantime we look forward eagerly to the publication of the recorded texts and accompanying reference grammar.

NOTES

1. It would have been useful to provide a list of the consonant and vowel phonemes of Nigerian Arabic with phonetic descriptions.
2. With citations upper case roman numerals refer to volume numbers, lower case roman numerals refer to pages in the introductory pages, and Arabic numerals refer to page numbers.