

NEWMAN, PAUL. 2007. *A Hausa-English dictionary*. New Haven: Yale University Press. xxii + 243 pp., including 7 pages of appendices. ISBN: 978-0-300-12246-6. US\$65.00, Cloth.

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Earlier this year Yale University Press published Paul Newman's new, compact but comprehensive *A Hausa-English dictionary (HED)*, a companion to Roxana Ma Newman's *An English-Hausa dictionary (EHD)*, Yale University Press, 1990. The new volume, like its English-to-Hausa counterpart, will likely find users among English speakers learning Hausa and among Hausa speakers learning English. A pleasant surprise is how much it offers for the serious Hausa scholar, since there are over 10,000 entries—well beyond the needs of the student. The entries, as the book claims, are based on a large corpus (the introduction doesn't say how large), with definitions, examples, and so on, all checked by Hausa linguists.

The entries in *HED*'s 235 pages actually number well over 10,000 if we count the variety of forms listed in the entry for each verb. Also included is a 14-page user's guide to the dictionary explaining the basics of Hausa grammar as well as the organization of the entries, a page of abbreviations, and seven pages of appendices with the different pronoun sets, common derivational classes, and the names for the days of the week and months of the year—the latter for both the Western and the Muslim calendars.

Newman, the dean of Hausa language studies, has written dozens of highly influential articles and a large proportion of the standard references on Hausa and the Chadic group, including *The Hausa language: An encyclopedic reference grammar* (Yale University Press, 2000) and *Hausa and the Chadic language family: A bibliography*. (Koepppe, 1996). He brings his knowledge and love of the language to bear in the individual entries in this dictionary and in his choices about how to organize it. The format maximizes the amount of useful information while keeping the volume down to a more usable, more affordable size. Surprisingly, what may look like a convenient, comprehensive dictionary for students promises in fact to be a reliable, indispensable source of information for Hausa scholars at every level.

The definitions are typically brief and to the point. *Littāfi* has a single gloss, 'book'; *sòyayyà* has two, 'love, mutual affection'. Some glosses are a bit longer, e.g., *dāmā*, normally glossed as 'chance, opportunity,' is assigned four definitions for the noun alone, plus extra ones for *dāmā* in several common expressions whose meaning could not be predicted from the literal glosses. The two main glosses for *dāmā* are illustrated with example sentences, as is one of the extra expressions containing *dāmā*. *Kàzā* receives its basic definition, 'hen, chicken'. The entry also includes two expressions containing this word, *kàzār dūtsè* 'stone partridge' and *kàzār ruwā* 'grebe'. Definitions, concise as they are, also include nuance when called for. An example is the definition for *kařantař* (*dà*): "teach (usu. a school subject, as opposed to the more general 'teach' verb *kōyāř*)."

*HED* is rich in multi-word expressions along the lines of *kàzār dūtsè* and *kàzār ruwā*. There are also many idioms, such as *dātsā wà kàrè cìyāwā* 'be in a difficult situation or be deadlocked', and *kīfin rījīyā* 'someone who always stays close to home and doesn't like to travel; one who knows little about the world.'

To save space and repetition, *HED* attempts to group related verb forms into a single entry. It achieves this by using an abstract representation, given in capital letters, to head the entry. Within the entry are listed different related verb forms that occur independently as words. The list is kept short by omitting forms whose content and meaning are predictable, given the description of the grammar of verbs in the introduction to the book.

An advantage to this format, aside from economy, is that it is easy to see which verb forms are related to which, since all are grouped together under the same headword. Furthermore, generous cross-referencing helps to make it possible to locate forms that someone not knowledgeable about Hausa may not be able to identify with a given root. For the entry headed by *BĀ*- ‘give’, related forms like the causative *bāshē* and the form *bai*, which occurs before the indirect object marker *wà*, have entries where they would appear in alphabetical order, but their entry refers us back to the root *BĀ*-, where these related forms are described in full. Thus we don’t need to know that *bāshē* is a form of the verb ‘give’ in order to look it up. Merely looking it up under *bāshē* will send us to the right place. There are a few verb forms that for some reason are not listed separately as headwords and cross-referenced, such as the irregular *bâi*, a contraction of *bai* plus *wà*, but this should not create many problems in practice.

*HED* even illuminates some relationships among the verb entries it lists separately. For example, the root *GAY*- ‘tell’ includes a reference to the entry for *GAIS*- ‘exchange greetings’, and vice-versa. This will be very helpful for some and will not complicate things too much for others—though it does appear to have confused the author momentarily, since the entry *gaishē* refers us to the nonexistent headword *GAYS*- when it should have referred us to *GAY*-. Or possibly it is the author of this review who is confused. In either case, it seems that Newman’s ambitious cross-referencing can lead to problems.

But woe to the student unfamiliar with Hausa grammar. Regular verbal nouns like *bugāwā* ‘beating’ and *māntāwā* ‘forgetting’ are not listed at all. Since they correspond to regular verbs, only the corresponding verb forms are given. Furthermore, not all forms of a verb are listed as separate headwords, even when their meaning is not predictable from the basic meaning of the verb they arise from. If the user wants to look up the verb *fāru* ‘happen’, the closest entry in alphabetical order will be *fārū* ‘a resinous tree’. For the correct entry, it’s necessary to go to *FĀR*- ‘begin’, where *fārū* receives a gloss and an example.

As mentioned above, this format is likely at times to be very frustrating for users unfamiliar with Hausa grammar. From the introduction, here are the first few sentences of the description of regular verbal nouns (p. xvii):

- (i) Category 1 (-*wā* “weak verbal nouns). These verbal nouns, which are typically associated with verbs belonging to grades 1, 4, 5, 6, and 7—see the next section for an explanation of the grade system—end in -*wā* with L-H tone. If the verb ends in L tone, the initial L tone of the suffix is absorbed. If the verb ends in H tone, the H and L combine to produce a falling tone, ...

This quotation represents about a tenth of the section on verbal nouns. For its brevity, the description is amazingly comprehensive and accurate, but some users’ reaction is bound to be “TMI”: “too much information.” The detail, as helpful as it may turn out to be in other

situations, serves to obscure the fact that when wishing to look up forms in *-wa* it's often helpful simply to subtract the *-wa*, and look for a verb headword matching the remainder.

Plain (nonverbal) nouns and adjectives present their own complications. The feminine form *sābuwā* 'new, novice' does not receive a separate listing, since its form is predictable from the masculine *sābō*. And indeed under *sābō* we find a reference to the feminine ending *-uwā* (not to be confused with the verbal noun ending *-wā*). Feminine forms of nouns derived from verbs, such as *mañubūciyā* 'writer', get a slightly different treatment. They do not receive separate headwords, nor is the feminine ending mentioned in the entry for the masculine form. Because their form is totally predictable from the masculine (as described both in the introduction and in the appendix), they are not listed at all. The problem is that a user wishing to look up *mañubūciyā* and not finding it listed needs to know where in the introduction or appendix to look for this information if they haven't already mastered it.

What we find for feminine forms also applies to plurals of nouns and adjectives. Plurals forming regular patterns do not receive separate listings, but the endings are included in the entries for the corresponding singulars—except for adjective and noun forms derived from verbs and described in the introduction and the appendices, whose plurals are not given at all in the entries. If there is something irregular about the plural—for example the *n* that unpredictably shows up in *kañnukā* and *kāñnai*, both of them plurals of *kārē* 'dog'—each plural appears as a headword and refers to the entry for *kārē*, where again each plural is listed. Similarly, the somewhat unpredictable plural *kūrākūrai* of *kuskurē* 'mistake, error' receives its own listing, which refers to the singular entry, which again lists the plural form as well.

Sometimes *HED* is too compact even for someone who has spent a lot of time with the language. This reviewer could not find any sign that corresponding to the verb *yini* 'spend a day' is a masculine noun *yinī* used in the common greeting, *inā yinī?* 'how is/was your day?'

How useful is *HED* for the advanced user? To get a basic idea, one has only to scan random pages to form an impression of how many words it contains that go beyond the level of a typical student of the language. Better yet, one can try out the dictionary on some authentic Hausa sources, traditional and modern. From a few quick checks,<sup>1</sup> I found the depth of coverage of the language truly surprising: Here are a few sample headwords and definitions that I found, based on my reading: *ingancī* 'durability'; *adābī* 'literature'; *gwagwārmāyā* 'struggling'; *kūbutā* 'slip away, escape'; *tazāfā* 'some distance away'; *fākō* 'ambush'; *tātsītsī* 'tiny'.

The only forms I encountered in reading that did not turn up in the dictionary were *àssālām*, a common variant of *sālāmū* in the greeting *sālāmū àlaikūm* (the dictionary does give *sālāmū*) and some dialectal variants, such as the Northern pronominal form *nāshī*

<sup>1</sup> The three sources are the most recent edition of *Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo* on the Web (<http://www.newnigeriannews.com/gaskiya/tsokaci1.htm>), a Web-based forum with many comments in Hausa (<http://abubakarimam.com/od/upload/index.php>), and an excerpt from a traditional folk tale in volume 1 of the collection *Magana Jari Ce* (<http://gumel.com/hausa/littattafai/magana-jari/littafina-daya.htm>).

corresponding to the standard form *nāsà* ‘of his’. *HED* lists some dialectal forms, such as *mishì* ‘to him’, but not others.

The size and cover design of *HED* match its companion, Roxana Ma Newman’s *EHD*, inviting comparisons. Was there behind-the-scenes spousal collusion in choosing entries or in constructing definitions? With this question in mind I checked enough entries to satisfy myself that the new work is quite independent of the older one—not to imply that *EHD* is anything but remarkable in its coverage and accuracy. There is fortunately a lot of overlap, but there are also differences. Where *HED* gives *gyārē* ‘cicada,’ *EHD* gives *cricket* ‘gyārē (large)’. *HED* includes the ideophone *tsam*, which he notes usually occurs in the phrase *tāshì tsam*, which means ‘stand up and leave without saying a word to anyone’, and the ideophone *tsâm*, glossed as ‘indicates body being numb or having goosebumps from fear’. In *EHD*, I found neither, looking under English entries like *silent*, *quiet*, *stand*, and *numb*. On the other hand, *EHD* lists two expressions for *buxom*, ‘mài nōnō and ‘tantsā-tantsā’. while *HED* lists none. The two books do seem roughly equivalent in coverage, however. I found the font in *HED* more readable than the one in *EHD*.

I also took a quick look at two Hausa-English and English-Hausa dictionaries published in the 1990s, Nicholas Awde’s *Hausa-English/English-Hausa practical dictionary* (New York: Hippocrene Books, Inc., 1996), and Joseph McIntyre and Hilke Meyer-Bahlburg’s *Hausa in the media: A lexical guide* (Hamburg: Helmut Buske, 1991). The former has 454 pages, and the pages are small enough to be pocket-sized, even if the book itself is too thick to fit into all but an *alhaji*’s pockets. The definitions are very brief, and no sample sentences are given, but it contained, with some small differences, all of the vocabulary I had collected from authentic texts and found in Newman’s book (*ingancī*, *adābī*, *gwagwārmāyā*, *kūbutā*, *tazārā*, *fākō*, *tātsītsī*). Beginning students who don’t want to bother with learning Hausa grammar in order to use a dictionary might actually prefer this one.

McIntyre and Meyer-Bahlburg’s dictionary, prepared with the assistance of Ahmed Tijani Lawal, gives both English and German glosses for Hausa words, and has substantial English-to-Hausa and German-to-Hausa sections as well. Of the seven words I mentioned finding in the Newman and Awde books, all but *fākō* ‘ambush’ appear in this book as well.

The Awde and McIntyre/Meyer-Bahlburg books both define the word *bibbiyu* as it appears in the context *kārbi dà hannū bibbiyu*, where it means ‘to receive well’. Newman, on the other hand, defines *bibbiyu* first as ‘two each’ and refers to the source word *biyu* ‘two’. He then gives the same example *kārbi dà hannū bibbiyu*. (He also provides the alternative pronunciation *bībiyu* not mentioned in the other works.) This illustrates the value of *HED* to the serious learner. By relating *bibbiyu* to the number two, Newman’s dictionary helps the reader understand why the word means what it does.

Anyone hoping to find a CD in this book will be disappointed—as is still too often the case with dictionaries. A CD of the book would have, among other things, made computerized searches possible and thus would have significantly increased its usefulness to scholars and to more casual users. Fortunately, *HED* is available and searchable through [books.google.com](http://books.google.com). (*HED* doesn’t mention this; *EHD* is not currently available from this source.) The URL I used for online access is: <http://books.google.com/books?id=6C4YapLagbMC&printsec=frontcover&dq=haus+english+dictionary&sig=U09xJPXrt2WrtXZkStqEvldmEOc/>.

Google's search function is useful, if limited and sometimes irritating. Searching for "far" brings up fifteen instances of this three-letter sequence, most of them of the English adjective *far*, and two of them saying, "Sorry, this page's content is restricted." (The pages with restricted content are 141 and 217, and from looking at the book, it is hard to tell why these pages in particular should have been restricted.)

But surprisingly, and very helpfully, "far" also brings up the main Hausa entry *FĀR*- 'begin.' Searching for "fara" (and again typing in no diacritics) pulls up three instances, from pages 17, 49, and 59. The instance cited on p. 59 is a bit odd in several respects. It reads "2. farm dangō Destructive young locusts. **fara**'ā/Cheerful disposition. ..." This is actually for the entry for *fārā* LH 'locust, grasshopper,' which happens to be the entry after the one for *FĀR*-, so in a sense it is pure coincidence that the search manages to direct us to the verb.

Using google.books.com I also searched *HED* for ideophones. Since ideophones are identified in the book with the abbreviation *id*, I searched by typing "id" into the search box. This returned thirty entries, a substantial and fascinating list, though hardly a complete one. Included in the dictionary itself but not among the search results are *mākil* 'very full (of people, water)', *shar* 'emphasizes greenness, freshness (esp. of plants)', and it is hard to say how many others.

Another limitation of this kind of search is the amount of work it takes to extract the desired data. Here are a few examples from the Google Books search to illustrate:

Page 24

... **id** Emphasizes being big, plump, and round. *bunga*/*-una*> Mound of sand made in the middle of two rows of young millet or sorghum when hoeing. ...

Page 30

Small opening into a rodent hole. 2. Used in Magaña tā yī ~. The secret's out. *guk* **id** Close tightly with a stopper. ...

Page 36

A wrestling game involving holding the big toe of the left foot with the right hand. 2. Cheating at cards. *coge m* Men's high-heel platform shoes. **coi id** ...

Fortunately, searching for the sequence "id" does *not* return definitions in which the letters are contained inside a word, like *bride* or *hid*. (We might speculate that if the Newman dictionary included the Hausa equivalent for the Freudian *Id*, the books.google.com search would turn it up.)

It is also convenient that the complete results of the search can be selected and copied into another document. There are typographic annoyances like the falling tone on *ā* in the word *fara*'ā 'cheerful disposition' that is returned in the search for "far" mentioned a few paragraphs ago—certainly not the fault of the Newman dictionary and something we must continue to live with until optical scanners improve.

The beginning English-speaking student will struggle with the need to learn the basics of Hausa grammar in order to make full use of the dictionary. But the more advanced student and the Hausa scholar will take delight in what is there. If only a CD had been included, the possibilities that this book affords for research would have been multiplied many times over.

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