

A Review of the Oxford Chichewa-English/English-Chichewa Dictionary by Steven Paas

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ABSTRACT

This article reviews the Oxford Chichewa-English/English-Chichewa Dictionary compiled by Steven Paas, published in 2016 by Oxford University Press in Cape Town. Upon a review of the dictionary, a number of issues arise. The dictionary's significance rests in its use as reference material for language learners, its semantic precision and the relevance with which translation and other disciplines treat it. Regardless of its wide coverage of the Chichewa and English lexicons, the dictionary has a number of flaws which are misleading and confusing for the dictionary's users. Such errors include ambiguity over dictionary type, inclusion of proper nouns as lexical entries, lack of detailed grammatical information and silence on morphological typology among others. This paper, therefore, concludes that the dictionary leaves a lot to be desired and recommends that the next edition of the dictionary take into account the highlighted issues.

KEYWORDS

Bilingual Dictionary, Entries, Grammatical Information, Lexicon, Malawi, Noun Class, Phonetic Transcription, Translation

INTRODUCTION

Chichewa is a Bantu language widely spoken in Malawi, Zambia and parts of Mozambique. In Malawi, it is the national language. In Zambia, its rendition is Chinyanja, a term that was the initial rendition of the Chichewa in Malawi in colonial times and the early years of independence.

English on the other hand, though native to an insignificant minority of descendants of colonial administrators and other British, Australian and American immigrants, is extremely important because of its status as an official language. It is the language of education, administration and communication. Knowledge of the two languages is therefore very significant for daily communication as well as effective execution of professional duties in various disciplines.

Such importance has led to attempts at Chichewa/English bilingual dictionaries by various interested stakeholders. The most notable of these attempts has been the creation of the *Oxford Chichewa-English/English-Chichewa Dictionary*. According to Paas (2016), the words and explanations in the dictionary were compiled in 1997. The dictionary contains about 45 000 entries.

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