

Book Review

Robert Botne and Adrien Pouille. 2016. *A Saafi-Saafi (Sébikotane variety) English // French Dictionary*. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag. 122 pp., ISBN 978-3-89645-509-3 EUR 29.80

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The dictionary under review is “intended to serve as a basic resource both for linguists and for those interested in Saafi-Saafi”. It should certainly be able to serve both groups. People who want to learn Saafi-Saafi (sav), a Cangin language of the Atlantic branch of Niger-Congo, spoken in Senegal will find it a useful book, and it would be worthwhile investigating how that (small) market could be reached. As the introduction says, it gives much of the basic vocabulary, and with glosses and reverse indexes in both French and English, as well as some basic grammar, it should be able to serve most expatriate and Senegalese learners. Saafi speakers do not single out a “prestigious” or “most correct” dialect, so if some words and expressions are recognisably *Sébiois*, that should not be a problem.

Linguists should also be able to use it, but they should be aware of a few problems in the areas of spelling, grammar and culture.

Spelling

The book is not strong on consistent spelling. E.g. the word **baah**, in its 3rd sense ‘share’, is also given as a sub-entry of **baah** ‘be good’. Also, sometimes words in example sentences do not agree with their entries in the list. In the example sentence for the same word **baah** ‘share’, the word for ‘father’ is transcribed as **Ɔap**, which normally means ‘nurse at the breast’ - it is in fact given that meaning in its own entry. The regular Saafi word for ‘father’ is **baab** - and indeed it is found in the lexicon with that form.

These inconsistencies are probably unproblematic for comparative lexical studies, but one should not jump to conclusions in the area of morphophonological processes. The word **aarra** ‘did quickly’ we find in the example sentence for **artuk** ‘hurry’ has not undergone a meaningful process of vowel lengthening for example. There is just some fluctuation and dialectal variation in the vowel length of this word.

Likewise, the word **baahid** ‘well’ we find in the example sentence for **baahi** ‘well’ has not received an extra suffix “-**d**”; it has in fact the same suffix, written orthographically as “-id”, but which for the dialect or idelect in question apparently fluctuates between [-i], [-ii] and [-id]. I was at first inclined to suspect transcription errors in these forms, but the example sentence for the word “**ñamid**” (1) convinced me that the speaker indeed has no “d” at the end of these words:

- (1) **A ñaamdisii so’ komaak ci.**
A **ñam-d-is-ii = so’** **komaak = c-i**
 3SG.NOM eat-BEN-REP-PRF = 1SG.ACC child = CLASS.PL-DEF.PROX.
 ‘She fed the children for me again.’ (interlinear glosses added)

If the word was really “**ñamdisid**”, (the orthographical form), the 1st person singular pronoun would have been = **to** in partial assimilation to the final **d**, rather than = **so**, which is the form following a vowel.

Grammar

The claim in Appendix C, that the **-a** article primarily indicates indefinite specificity surprised me and started me on a search, for I had always considered it as a definite, combined with not-here-now deixis. Discussing Botne’s specific example (2) with my Saafi colleagues, they said this was limited to participant introduction in folk tales. A search through my data seemed to confirm this.

- (2) **Kubka nikee nga, a teekuusa Kumba.**
kubu-k-a **nikee** **nga, a** **teek-uu-sa**
 child-CLASS.SG-DET be-IPFV there, 3SG.NOM call-PASS-IPFV
Kumba
 Kumba.
 ‘A/the child was there, she was named Kumba’. (interlinear glosses added)

More regular usages would be as in (3) and (4):

- (3) **Booba mood jam e?**
bo’-b-a **mood** **jam** **e**
 Person-CLASS.PL-DET have.peace peace Q
 ‘Are the people OK?’

This is almost a standard greeting, except that the speaker here uses the rather generic word “people” because he doesn’t know his conversation partner well enough to be specific.

(4) **N kadang kahna.**

ŋ kad-ang kahan-Ø-a

1SG go-PROG house-CLASS.SG-DEF.DIST

‘I am going home (litt. to the house).’

The house is definite, far deixis is imposed by the locomotion verb **kad** ‘go’.

So yes, this article has a limited discourse usage as indefinite specificity, but that is not its primary function.

Culture

In Appendix A, kinship terms are presented together, which is a good idea, because it allows the system to stand out more clearly. The terms given are correct, but note: The terms “payuum” ‘sibling’s spouse’ and “paayum” for ‘in-law’ are the same word, member of a class of words which fluctuate between Long-Short and Short-Long vowel patterns.

However, the appendix misses the opportunity to present the system from a truly Saafi viewpoint in two areas: The matrilineal system and polygamy.

Words like **yaay** ‘mother’, **taanum**, ‘matrilineal uncle’ and **tadmuhun**, ‘matrilineal nephew’ are understood in the matrilineal system:

Every woman in one’s mother’s matrilineal line and of her generation is **yaay**.

Other women in one’s parents’ generation then require different words, like **bajjen** ‘father’s sister’ and **yumpaŋ** ‘parent’s brother’s wife’.

Every man in one’s mother’s maternal line and of her generation or earlier is **taanum**

Everyone who calls one **taanum** is one’s **tadmuhun**.

The **taanum-tadmuhun** relationship is of particular importance: Traditionally (before Islam introduced a patrilineal system one or two generations ago), inheritance went from **taanum** to **tadmuhun**, and even today, one’s **taanum** has authority over one in many areas.

Though the word **hundis** for ‘co-wife’ is given, it does not appear in the diagram (presumably because EGO is male), and no further consequences of polygamy are indicated in the presentation. In actual fact, the high frequency of polygamy influences the meaning of a word like **taambdoh** ‘sibling’. The diagram suggests that EGO’s **taambdoh** has the same parents as EGO, while in

actual fact **taambdoh**-s only need to share one parent, and the fact of sharing two parents is often added as extra information with **Bad baah yaay na baab**. ‘They have mother and father in common’. The lexicon does have a sentence like that as an example of **baah** ‘share’, it just didn’t make it to this overview.

Polygamy also introduces an exception to the matrilineal system above, where one’s mother’s co-wife is also called **yaay**, whether she belongs to the same matrilineal line or not.

To conclude, this dictionary and its appendixes will certainly help learners of Saafi-Saafi. Linguists should not pass on its claims without further verification, but can certainly use them as a starting point for further research.

List of abbreviations

1	First person
3	Third person
ACC	Accusative
BEN	Benefactive
CLASS	Noun class marker
DET	Determiner
IPFV	Imperfective
NOM	Nominative
PASS	Passive
PL	Plural
PRF	Perfect
PROG	Progressive
PROX	Proximal
Q	Question particle
REP	Repetitive
SG	Singular