

GEOGRAPHY OF MEANING, TOPOGRAPHY OF STRUGGLE IN A KINYARWANDA DICTIONARY

André Coupez, Thomas Kamanzi, Simon Bizimana, et al. *Inkoranya y'iki-nyarwaanda mu kinyarwaanda nó mu gifaraansá; Dictionnaire Rwanda-Rwanda et Rwanda-Français.* 3 vols. Butare, Rwanda: Institut de recherche scientifique et technologique; Tervuren: Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale, 2005. xxix + 2895 pp. €75.00. Paper. €75.00. CD-ROM with Adobe Reader.

In 1959 Thomas Kamanzi began to collaborate with André Coupez in compiling a comprehensive dictionary of Kinyarwanda. They were joined a little later by Simon Bizimana. Still later on, Father Augustin Musada came into the working group. By 1965, with a team of twenty-six Rwandan researchers, the project had taken on a systematic and formal shape. Along the way to 2005, the project attracted a large number of contributors and editors, Yvonne Bastin, Claire Grégoire, Baudoin Janssens, Charles Ntazinda, Gaspard Rwabukumba, and Gabriel Sematema, prominent among them. Grégoire's and Janssens's selfless efforts saw the dictionary through to publication in time for the late André Coupez (d. 2006) to see the final product. No other group of scholars and public intellectuals has come together in the medium of an African language to produce such a dictionary. It is, quite simply, without peer on the continent.¹

A rich source for linguists and lexicographers, the *Inkoranya* should interest readers in other disciplines as well. Using Adobe Acrobat in the CD-ROM version, historians and anthropologists can hunt for regional variations in vocabulary which work against a standardized Kinyarwanda. They may find in these variations hints of a far greater diversity of linguistic culture than might be deduced from the singular term "Kinyarwanda." For example, they will find distinctive versions of conceptual arrangements (such as notions of bravery, 644) and of consumption (such as evaluative terminologies that rate beer by its quality, 627), among many other examples—all of which illustrate the depth of Kinyarwanda as a spoken terrain. Literary scholars will find much to examine in the consistent citation of numerous proverbs, riddles, and passages from popular stories, dynastic poetry (*ibisigo*), poetry of herders (*amazina y'inká*) and military poetry (*ibyúvugo*), and stories and histories told at court (*littérature du cour*), which are packed into many definitions. However, this reader could not discern a similarly systematic effort to tap the vast resources of historical tales (*ibitékerezo*)—with a provenance beyond the court—or the scholarship that has worked with them.² These matters hint at the *Inkoranya's* partialities of emphasis and omission.

Still, this monumental work reveals the benefits of long-term funding for basic research. Rwanda barely eclipses metropolitan Los Angeles in size and population, but the literary, ethnographic, and oral corpuses from Rwanda are astonishing; such oral genres include poetries, many types of royal and popular traditions, ritual associated with monarchy, and proverbs

and riddles.³ Coupez, Kamanzi, Bizimana, Musada, and their colleagues had the better part of a lifetime to sift through these materials—some of which they themselves produced—for evidence of meaning and usage. The result is a vast array of information on syntactic, substantive, adjectival, and modal valences (circumstantials, for example), synonymy, antonymy, archaisms, borrowings (with special attention paid to terms with origins in Christian and Islamic life and thought), and the shape of a host of semantic fields.⁴ Scholars interested in the subtleties, variations, and contextual specificities of meaning in Kinyarwanda will find a great deal here. For this is far more than a mere listing of words, their definitions, and different senses. For many of the fields, the work identifies and explores the central idea at the core of the field. Indeed, the *Inkoranya* forms a detailed and systematic geography of meaning that pushes to the limits what lexicography can achieve in striving to depict the life of language.

Like any dictionary, users gain access to the *Inkoranya's* riches by means of entries. Each entry includes a rubric and a body, and many (though not all) include a “tail.” A rubric includes the word root and its noun class prefix, or for an infinitive its simple present suffix and an indication of its transitivity or intransitivity.⁵ The body of the entry contains a definition of the word in Kinyarwanda and French, followed by an illustrative Kinyarwanda sentence followed, in turn, by a French translation. Many semantically distinctive illocutions also appear here. The body also contains synonyms and antonyms and other terms from the same semantic field; in other words, polysemy. In the “tail” the *Inkoranya* helps readers place the lexeme in the grammatical structure of Kinyarwanda. Most readers will need a proper grammar at hand in order to make sense of these details, but they are a gold mine for linguists and linguistically inclined readers. The details often reveal where (syntactically) and when (discursively) a word can carry idiosyncratic or irregular meanings. The “tail” also includes osculant forms—forms that seem somehow to be connected because they carry the same or similar meanings even though their phonological shapes do not correspond perfectly.⁶ While the historical relationships that perhaps underlay these similarities await further research, the “tail” states the semantic links between meanings. In contrast to the way in which most dictionaries are read, this one should be studied, and readers should take their time pursuing the many leads into related semantic territory that each entry offers.

For example, many readers are likely to search the *Inkoranya* for glosses on the terms *Tutsi*, *Hutu*, and *Twa*, which together tend to comprise a three-part ethnic “universe” of Rwanda. The entry (2658–59) for “Úmutwá (singular); Ábatwá (plural)” mentions the other two groups and distinguishes two “types” of Batwa, largely by comportment, speech, occupation, residential location, and ambiguous relations to the politically powerful.⁷ “Stories” are reported that claim Batwa descent from Gatwa, a son of Imana, the Rwandan creator figure, and that Gatwa was the elder brother of Gahutu and Gatutsi. Additional senses, such as “indiscreet; a type of spirit (in the

ukubaándwa complex) which possesses *Ábatwá*” reveal more along these lines. Two synonyms are offered: *umubúumbyi* (potter) and *umuúngaanda* (which has *umukaanda* as a synonym), “member of the Twa group.”⁸ The gloss for *Ábahutú* (967) places it together with the other two, distinguishing it by reported “stories” about descent from Gahutu, a son of Imana. Gahutu, the entry reports, was the younger brother of Gatwa and the elder brother of Gatutsi. Additional senses include “client in a cattle contract” and “son,” both of which elaborate claims about the location of Bahutu in a hierarchy based on wealth and seniority.⁹ A list of three terms constitutes the semantic field that includes *Hutu*. One of these terms, *umunyoró*, refers to “a spirit of the Ryangombe cult incarnated by the Hutu” (1715). This term derives from the Ugandan ethnonym *Nyoro* and echoes the notion, also expressed in one of the senses of *Úmutwá* mentioned above, that ethnicity and spirit possession are connected. The entry for *Ábatuutsi* (2654) mentions Hutu and Twa as social groups “between which the population of Rwanda is divided” and reports “stories” about Batutsi descending from Gatutsi, a son of Imana, youngest brother of Gatwa and Gahutu.

The “birth” order of Gatwa, Gahutu, and Gatutsi expressed in these stories repeats a widespread feature of making claims in a political culture in which idioms surrounding first-comers and newcomers are not static models of primacy but are shifting, disputed modes for establishing and coopting seniority (see Packard 1987; Schoenbrun 1998:98, 150–51, 154–57, 178–83, 199–203). But this descent-based model of a tripartite ethnic “world” emerged for ideological reasons near and dear to the Rwandan court, its colonial collaborators, and many of their usurper-successors (such as postindependence political parties). However, perhaps reflecting the 1960s and 1970s, the period in which its contents took shape (iv), the *Inkoranya* does not present and sustain a distinction between the realities of a political ideology of descent-based ethnicity and a historical record that reveals the court and colonial interests in such a structure of ethnic thought.

What is more, it takes some hard work in the *Inkoranya* to ascertain the existence of ethnically defined groups (*ubwooko* or *ingeri*) other than Twa, Tutsi, and Hutu in Rwanda. The list of abbreviations and symbols (vii–ix) distinguishes between something called a “mixed name of an ordinary ethnic type” and a “mixed name of a restricted ethnic type.” The entries for such groups employ a terminology of geographical locus (*Abagowe*, 626) and population (*Abagoti*, 657; *Abagoyi*, 659), sometimes folding distinctiveness into a notion of a polity that enjoyed autonomy from the Rwandan court (*Umuréera*, 1914).¹⁰ In these cases, descent-based talk disappears. These subtleties more fairly represent the diversity of thought underpinning social and ethnic labels used by Kinyarwanda-speakers.¹¹ But, because they are not cross-referenced in the entries for *Tutsi*, *Twa*, and *Hutu*, a reader must already know of their existence in order to benefit from engaging the glosses given to them in the *Inkoranya*. Thus the compilers missed the chance to subvert the hegemony of both descent-based ethnic thought and

of a tripartite Rwandan ethnic world.

By contrast, one of the great strengths of the *Inkoranya* lies in its efforts to trace semantic webs in a hunt for the meaning of words. But no dictionary can pin down the intersections of political weight and shifting historical values that charge terms such as *Hutu*, *Twa*, and *Tutsi* with force. Despite the authority over meaning implied by a dictionary's order, its apparent comprehensiveness, and its confidence in providing definitions, the supple quarry of meaning lies, in large measure, in the contending aims of specific persons communicating in specific political and historical circumstances. This is particularly true of the "stories" reported as part of each of the three entries just discussed. In this case the *Inkoranya's* compilers drew on both a court-centered, statist vision and on a more diffuse language of ethnic thought in complex and contradictory ways. The *Inkoranya's* entry in Kinyarwanda (obviously directed at first-language Kinyarwanda-speakers) subsumes the categories Tutsi, Twa, and Hutu inside an abstract concept of groupness—*ingeri* (590: "sort, category, type, genre, defined by a trait chosen for the circumstance"; synonym for *ubwooko*, which is glossed [1740] as "group defined by common traits, species, genre, type, sort; human or animal race; social group ['In Rwanda, there are three social groups: Hutu, Tutsi, and the Twa']; clan, group of clans, sub-clan; industrial mark, brand name"). *Ingeri* is the term used in the glosses in two of the three entries (the entry for Hutu merely glosses them as *abantu*, "people"; the entries for all three groups include *ubwooko* as a cross-reference).¹² These terms appear together with the claims in the "stories" for the centrality of descent as an organizing principle of ethnicity. Thus the gloss for each "ethnic group" juxtaposes contradictory modes of thinking about ethnicity—exclusive, lineal descent, and context-sensitive group formation—without any explicit notation of their clashing. As they stand, the terms and the glosses leave unanswered how people have struggled and struggle now over the principles constituting identity.

The point is not a small one. These silences and emphases reveal the limits any dictionary must face when depicting the hurly-burly of the social life of meaning. And they point to the particular biases of this team of compilers toward statist perspectives on social life, which dominated the political scene during the decades in which the compilers were most active. Language is complicit in social life, but its lexicographic form—even when leavened with rich illustrations of sense and semantic connections—cannot be the sole guide to the topographies of struggle over those categories. At the very least, readers must keep in mind the sheer coexistence of other social and ethnic categories—such as *Abagowe* or *Abaréera*—not spoken about in the idiom of descent. The territories of ethnicity glossed in the *Inkoranya* and through which important dimensions of the life of the Rwandan state have flowed or congealed were created by that state to serve historically specific political interests of various leading groups. The *Inkoranya* maps this to some degree, but the reader will need already to know the prominent to-

ponyms beyond the Big Three in order to recognize the alternative routes to social belonging available to Banyarwanda. Like all maps, even the most detailed ones contain their makers' perspectives and purposes, shaped by the horizons of meaning in play when they worked. In the case of ethnic thought and the *Inkoranya*, because such horizons are not clearly defined, the glosses relating to ethnicity sustain politically powerful ideologies of descent whose historical reality is far more complex.

In keeping with Coupez's intellectual style, one can see the eclectic curiosities of both Coupez and his colleagues running systematically but with subtlety throughout the *Inkoranya*. Coupez was taken by the importance of complex behavioral practices and modes of speech that marked the fraught interactions between in-laws and the more general predisposition for tense social contact in a small country where one hardly moves beyond the homestead without experiencing the gaze of others. Two semantic fields—*ukúubaha* (glossed on 2674) and *ugutsúnda* (glossed on 2601)—related to courtesies or displays of respect toward social superiors by their social inferiors and avoidances among in-laws, respectively, turn up over and over again in the *Inkoranya*. They point to something central to the intersection of language and social life in Rwanda—most often explored in the arenas of political, economic, and ethnic hierarchy. The generic qualities of social life to which these verbs refer transmit the ubiquity of hierarchic thresholds in daily life with an intimacy and banality that is striking.

Users with access to a computer will be grateful for the availability of this 2895-page book on CD-ROM in Adobe Acrobat. However, the absence of page numbers corresponding to the hardcopy version will hamper comparative researchers. The *Inkoranya's* high cost and great heft preclude its more general availability, though an abridged edition is planned. Together with the extraordinary lexicographic resources for Kirundi, Kinyarwanda's closest linguistic relative in a group that includes Kiviza and the dialects of Kiha, the *Inkoranya* places scholars in an enviable position to carry out comparative and historical linguistic work in the Highlands west of Lake Victoria. As with any dictionary—but especially here, in the shadow of the *Inkoranya's* bulk—its peculiar emphases and silences in the field of ethnic, social, and physical geographies underline how important it is that scholars account for the historical context and political interests at work in the partialities of meaning.

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Notes

1. A few other extraordinary efforts come to mind, chief among them Fowler (2000) and Hulstaert (1952, 1957, 1987), which together amount to 2877 pages. Other dictionaries with comparable breadth and depth of coverage include Sacleux (1939–1941, 1949), as well as Gutt and Mohammed (1997); Dray (1998, 2001); Seydou (1998); and Echeruo (1998).

2. Among others, see Schumacher (1958); Newbury (1994:191-217); Newbury (2001:276–68, 289–311); Vansina (1958–1962, 2000, 2001).
3. The heft of the published record along these lines comes across physically when lugging around the two volumes of d’Hertefeldt and de Lame (1987).
4. As befits a language whose speech community is largely Catholic, the *Inkoranya* recognizes separate semantic fields for Catholic religion and the Catholic Church. Separate fields are depicted for Protestant denominations, Islam, divination (*ukuragura*), and Ryangombe practice (*ukubaandwa*).
5. Bantu noun-class prefixes often contain what is called an “augment” or a “pre-prefix” or an “initial vowel” (though it is not always only a vowel; see Katamba 2003:107–8). In particular circumstances, the augment modifies a verb’s or noun’s meaning in context-sensitive ways. For example, the augment may behave like a determiner to lend specificity and focus. But the augment also comes into play for syntactic reasons, often in main clauses with an affirmative verb. In the dictionary’s title, the form of the word *Kinyarwanda* varies according to both of these conditions. The augment in the form *ikinyarwaanda* specifies the language which is the focus of the work in a main clause. The form *kinyarwaanda* occurs in a subordinate clause. Terms that serve as titular forms, such as *Mutwá*, given below, may also lack an augment. For these, and other technical reasons, the nominal form of Kinyarwanda words varies in this review essay. Sometimes, when words from Bantu languages are translated or transferred into other languages lacking augments or tone, these features are dropped.
6. See Bostoen (2001).
7. A pattern immediately recognizable in Klieman’s “Pygmy Paradigm” (2003).
8. Both of the terms *umuúngaanda* and *umukaanda* belong to a widespread distribution of *-gandá*, meaning something like “group” or, in Vansina’s terminology, “House”; see Vansina (1990:268–69); Schoenbrun (1997:77–81).
9. The *Inkoranya* reports a synonym, *úmushobá*, for Muhutu. It is derived from a verb, *ugushóba*, “to inspire apprehension.” The derivation implies the noun is a slur, invented by anxious (or cocky) non-Bahutu. Along similar lines, the verb *kwúhutuura* appears as a member of the semantic field that includes “Tutsi.” The verb is used when “speaking of Hutu” to note their “living like a Tutsi” (1021).
10. See Packard 1987; Schoenbrun (1998:98, 150–51, 154–57, 178–83, 199–203).
11. In the case of the *Abareenge* (1906), lineage is evoked and the group is consigned to antiquity, despite the fact that this ethnonym figured prominently in the nativist politics that marked the decline and fall of Mobutu’s Zaïre in the aftermath of the vast internal dislocations created by the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Clans (as, for example, *Bagesera* [593]) are also glossed using *ubwooko* as the qualifier, thus avoiding explicitly descent-based idioms.
12. This reader could not find mention in the *Inkoranya* of some well-known group names from Rwanda, such as Banyango.

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