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Review

GERTRUD SCHNEIDER-BLUM (ed.), *máakut(i) t'awá shuultáa – Proverbs
Finish the Problems: Sayings of the Alaaba (Ethiopia)*

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Reviews

began transferring suspects to Italy and hunting rebels as early as 1887. The resistance of Abärä Kassa in 1892 and Bahta Hagos in 1894 indicate that the alleged Italian victory of 1889–90 was not a permanent achievement. The numerous prisoners of Nakhura were members of resistance of the subsequent century. Those who fled to Ethiopia in the first three decades of the 20th century, also resented the Italian domination of Eritrea and hoped to drive the Italians out with the help of that country.

The book is otherwise rich in information, objective in analysis, well readable in style. Nina von Nolting has made an excellent contribution to Eritrean studies for which we should all be thankful.

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GERTRUD SCHNEIDER-BLUM (ed.), *máakut(i) t'awá shuultáa – Proverbs Finish the Problems: Sayings of the Alaaba (Ethiopia)* = Verbal Art and Documentary Literature in African Languages 28, Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2009. 102 pp., Paperback. Price: € 19.80. ISBN: 978-3-89645-284-9.

The description of a language with little knowledge about is increasingly based on the analysis of empirical data collected by the describer. Today's grammarians inductively elaborate analytic solution from the observation of rich repertoires of predominantly textual material. In order to record that largest possible variety of linguistic structures, these texts are varied in genres and topics. The result is that the descriptivist collects an amount of data that are not of exclusive linguistic interest, but contain extensive information of the speech community, their knowledge and their oral arts.

This is the case of Gertrud Schneider-Blum's research activities among the Alaaba of South Ethiopia. She conducted several weeks of fieldwork for the redaction of *A Grammar of Alaaba*,² and she ended up possessing a fair amount of proverbs in this Highland East Cushitic language. Apparently, the greater effort of the author was to understand their meaning rather than to collect. In the introduction she states that most of the sayings were collected by the local authority Shunkalla Mohammed, who also helped to interpret them.

The 418 proverbs presented in the book are enough to reflect fairly well Alaabas' culture and wisdom, furthermore study their social values, rhetoric

² GERTRUD SCHNEIDER-BLUM 2007, *A Grammar of Alaaba. A Highland East Cushitic Language of Ethiopia* = Cushitic Language Studies 25, Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, reviewed by the author in *Aethiopica* 13 (2010), pp. 300–302.

and poetic art, get comparative data to detect areal difference and similitude with the same genres among neighbouring populations, and have additional linguistic samples to verify the description presented in Schneider-Blum (2007).

Each proverb is rigorously transcribed, glossed, translated and a further explanation in English is added in brackets. Following the solution adopted in Schneider-Blum (2007), there are two transcriptions, a phonemic one and a morpho-phonemic. The morphemes shown by the latter are aligned with the glosses. The characters used in the transcription are described in the introduction on page vii. On page v the reader is invited to consult Schneider-Blum (2007) to become familiar with the rules applied to the marking of the accent and the use of brackets to indicate final voiceless vowels (one of which is included in one of the words of the title). The glosses are described under “Abbreviations” on pages xi and xii.

The introduction also contains some notes on the use and contents of the proverbs. These, however, are not taken as reference to classify them because the same proverb can be used and has different meanings depending on the context. Formal properties, such as a structure with one or two parts, were not taken as a key for clustering either. The choice was to simply sort the proverbs associating each one with a number. Even if this solution is practical one would prefer, to be guided a bit in the search of some salient features for clustering the proverbs. An idea could have been to refer to broad features described in the introduction itself, such as the family and the roles of father, mother and children, and good/bad behaviour (“not being too extreme in one’s actions” or “speak frankly”). This broad kind of classification could have just been shown in a final index, while each proverb could have kept its own index number.

These few critiques do not change the extremely positive judgement of this book. It is another fundamental piece of knowledge about Alaabas’ language and culture created by the world’s specialist on this domain. It should also be taken as an example for those linguists who want to contribute to the advancement of non-linguistic studies on the speech community they formerly worked or currently work with.

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