

Doris A. Bartholomew and Louise C. Schoenhals. **Bilingual Dictionaries for Indigenous Languages**. Mexico: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1983. xvii + 370 pp. \$US20.00

*Reviewed by Tom Dutton,
The Australian National University.*

This is a book about how to prepare bilingual dictionaries for speakers of indigenous languages. It was designed for members of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (hereafter SIL) working in Mexico although the general principles discussed can be applied (with some creativity as the authors admit) to other languages. As such it is a revision of a similar manual prepared by Dow Robinson of the same institution some time earlier but never published.

The book is divided into eight sections each containing a number of chapters.

Section 1 is introductory and deals with lexical meaning and general aspects of the dictionary and its entries.

Section 2 is about choosing citation forms for stems, derived words, compounds and idiomatic phrases.

Section 3 covers such things as glossing, choosing illustrative sentences, deciding on sense discriminations, adding qualifying comments and making decisions about local variants and different pronunciations.

Section 4 focusses on national language aspects of the dictionary - how to get Spanish equivalents, making a Spanish index and what to do about loan words.

Section 5 comes back to linguistic aspects, in particular writing a grammar sketch (using the traditional school grammar model unless the structure of the language dictates otherwise), cross referencing and subentries.

Section 6 discusses the dictionary as a book, how to go about writing the introductory sections explaining the alphabet used, the ordering of entries and their structure, abbreviations etc. and how to decide about using illustrations and what to put in appendices, if anything.

Section 7 is about getting the dictionary ready for publication and covers such aspects as using the computer as an aid in organizing the dictionary, evaluating entries and checking them with a consultant.

Section 8 is a single chapter about what dictionaries get used for and their value as aids in raising the prestige of a language, in education and in language standardization not to mention their use as a record of aspects of culture.

The book closes with five appendices called supplements. Supplement A discusses the psychological awareness of some lexicographic concepts in indigenous languages of Mexico while Supplement B gives an historical overview of bilingual dictionaries that have been published in the various indigenous languages of Spanish North America. In Supplement C the authors list what they think is a good basic vocabulary of Mexican rural Spanish to begin building a dictionary from. Supplements D and E are bibliographies - the first of reference material and the second of bilingual dictionaries in Spanish North America.

The final two sections of the book are indexes - an index of topics and terms and an index of languages, proper names and publications.

The good points about this book are that it is oriented towards the fieldworker who, as often as not, has not had much, if any, training in lexicography. Consequently it is very practical and there is not much that is involved in dictionary making from the very beginning of the process to the publication of the final product that is left to the imagination of the user. Its chapters are instructional units generally written in the imperative) of what to do and what not to do that guide the reader through the many decisions that have to be made. And there are very many. As the authors point out early on in the book dictionary making is more than just collecting an impressive list of words. There are so many decisions to be made in compiling a dictionary that it is in fact a very time consuming and demanding, if not somewhat daunting task. This is advice that not only beginning fieldworkers should take to heart but also many potential and actual contributors to publishers like **Pacific Linguistics**. Other good points about this book are that there are very few typos in it (the worst would probably be on p.138 in the 7th last line where 'which' is typed for 'with' and a verb agreement is wrong) and it is cheap.

The main weaknesses of the book on the other hand are:

1. that it was designed, mainly for SIL workers in Central America and although the authors are fully aware of this and make some concessions towards broadening its use for other possible users (by translating the Spanish examples into English,

for example) anyone using it in the Pacific would have to make, as the authors themselves admit, "necessary adaptations and develop creative solutions for their own unique problems" (p.xv). But this is not always so easy to do. Some of the specific problems that workers in the Pacific have to face which require such "necessary adaptations" are what to do with clitics, serial verbs, zero and suppletive verb roots, and inalienably possessed nouns for example;

2. that although the section on making a Spanish index makes the necessary point that it is the purpose of an index to make it "easy for the user to find the information s/he seeks and to grasp the content of entries as quickly as possible" (p.115) and that the compiler should check for completeness before publication it does not make the equally important point that producing a Spanish (or English for Pacific workers) index is not simply a matter of reversing entries in the indigenous-Spanish/English part. While modern computer technology makes reversals easy to accomplish it will not automatically and without human intervention produce a good index, one that will enable the Spanish/English reader to find what s/he is looking for in the indigenous language. For example, Pacific languages do not have a verb 'to have' in their lexicon - they express the concept in other ways - but I will bet peanuts to pumpkins that this is probably one of the first words that the casual English reader will want to look up. But 'have' will most likely not show up in an index that is simply a reversal of the indigenous entries. A reversal is only a first step. The compiler has to go through it and check that it serves its purpose of helping the reader find what s/he wants to know. Poor indexes are probably the weakest points of manuscripts submitted to **Pacific Linguistics** for publication;

3. that it does not mention scientific glossing, that is, the correct way to gloss flora and fauna, even though one of the authors is an expert in this area. This glossing is not very difficult but it is one of the regularly recurring faults of manuscripts submitted to **Pacific Linguistics**. Briefly the problem is that compilers confuse the casual use of the scientific word 'species' with the scientific use. In scientific terms species is the taxonomic level below genus and it is scientific convention to list the species name after the genus one and to italicize both and capitalize the genus name e.g., *Eucalyptus alba*. When the species name is not known or is not regarded as important to the discussion at the time it is abbreviated to 'sp.' or 'spp.'

e.g., *Eucalyptus sp.*. In indigenous language dictionaries 'sp' (or 'spp.') is often used as an abbreviation for 'kind of, type of, variety of' with common names like 'tree, banana, bird' e.g., 'tree sp.', 'banana sp.', 'bird sp.'. This is an incorrect usage because it mixes scientific usage with casual usage. Such glosses should be changed to 'type of/kind of/variety of tree/banana/bird';

4. that in suggesting beginning dictionary compilers use the basic word list supplied in Supplement C (and ignoring the Spanish aspect of this for Pacific workers) as a first step in the preparation of a bilingual dictionary the authors fly in the face of many of their own teachings in the rest of the book, e.g., their emphasis on cultural relevance, on working from the indigenous language to Spanish, on their insistence that dictionary making is more than just collecting an impressive list of words. This approach is, I think, quite dangerous, especially for the novice, because it suggests that there is a one-to-one correspondence between words in different languages and that all one needs to do to make a dictionary is to get a word list in Spanish (or English for the Pacific) and fill it in and heh presto! you have a dictionary of the indigenous language. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is not even true for a language like Tok Pisin where the majority of the vocabulary comes from English, even though a casual acquaintance with the language may suggest otherwise;

5. that Supplements D and E are very confusing, the former containing general references and the latter a listing of bilingual dictionaries of Spanish North America. In reading the book I was constantly turning to the wrong supplement looking for the references given elsewhere. This problem could have been avoided if the information given in Supplement E had been divided up and incorporated in Supplement B as part of the historical sketch of each language.

Notwithstanding these weaknesses, however, this is still a very useful book and one I would certainly recommend to anyone thinking of making a dictionary or even some who are actually already involved in doing so. It is clear and easy to read (except for a few slips of the kind to be expected in a work of this size) and has been designed for the beginner who is not a trained lexicographer or who has had only minimal training. It will not produce a dictionary like some automatic computer program but it does provide lots of good advice and guiding principles. Professional lexicographers will naturally find it rather low-level and seek in vain

for an underlying theory but it is not a book for them. It is a book for the fieldworker who is often left to his/her own devices for long periods and where some manual of this kind, even if it is not perfect, will provide much needed advice and be a comforting support until such times as s/he can get more professional assistance.