The Oromo Dictionary Project

Gene B. Gragg

The past year has been devoted almost exclusively to writing the actual articles for my Dictionary of the Oromo language, the most widely spoken language of Ethiopia, belonging to the Cushitic family. Each article covers a group of words derivationally related to the same root, with the head-word for each article chosen on formal criteria—taking the simplest form—or, failing that, on semantic criteria. Each entry, head- and sub-, in phonological transcription rather than the standard syllabary, is followed by inflectional and syntactic information (where necessary) and by a translation, as well as, where relevant, its status as a loan-word from or into Amharic, the national language of Ethiopia and principal contact language for the dialect with which I am working. Within each article examples are given illustrating the principal usages of the head-word, and of the derivationally related words, when their usage does not follow predictably from that of the head-word. The resulting dictionary, containing some 2700 articles with about 10,000 entries, should be a useful instrument of research for linguists, anthropologists, and historians interested in Ethiopia and the Cushitic language area.

The final stage in the preparation of the basic manuscript is the drawing up of an alphabetic English-Oromo index. In addition I am preparing a systematic index, making the work more useful as an aid to special and comparative studies in ethnology (terms and taxonomies for flora, fauna, artifacts, social organization, kinship) and linguistics (general semantic componental organization— especially to the extent that this intersects with patterns of derivation and polysemy which are characteristic of Ethiopia/Horn of Africa areal semantics).

After a final going-over for mistakes and inconsistencies, I hope to have a publisher-ready manuscript by the fall of this year.