Determining the genetic classification of Ganta within the Ometo group

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Accepted 17 September, 2013

Numerous speech varieties exist in the Southwest part of Ethiopia. In most cases, membership of the speech varieties to the different linguistic genetic groups is blurred. The situation with Ganta is one such a case. There was no study done so far on Ganta except an MA thesis that deals with a brief description of the language prepared under the supervision of the author. However, there is a tendency among scholars as well as regional authorities to consider Ganta as one of the speech varieties known by the common denominator “Gamo”, a language classified under the North Ometo subgroup of the Omotic language family along with Wolaitta, Dawuro, Gofa and many others (cf: Bender, 1975; Brenzinger, 1999:35). This paper contests the earlier consideration of Ganta as a member of the North Ometo subgroup and argues that Ganta should be reclassified under the East Ometo subgroup along with Haro, Zayse, Zergula, Ganjule, etc. The claim is made here mainly on ground of comparative morphology. The study will add to the body of knowledge available to linguists about the Ometo speech varieties and their classification.

Key words: Ganta, East Ometo subgroup, linguistic genetic groups.

INTRODUCTION

Ganta

The classification of Omotic as a separate language family in its own right has been controversial, as has the classification of languages within this relatively new family (Bender 1967, 2000; Fleming 1976, Jordan 2009). There is a particular need to fill in the gaps within the Ometo linguistic group. Ometo is a linguistic group under the Omotic language family comprising several related languages and dialects classified under four linguistic sub-branches, namely North Ometo, South Ometo, East Ometo and West Ometo. The North Ometo sub-branch comprises members like Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa, Dawuro, Dorze and Oyda; the South Ometo group has a single member, Maale; East Ometo consists of Zayse, Zergulla, Korette, Haro, Ganjule and Kachama; to West Ometo belong Chara, Doko, Dollo, and Basketo (Bender, 1976; Fleming, 1976; Hayward, 1990). There is, particularly, a great need to define the position of speech varieties that have simply given a Gamo identity within the North Ometo sub-group of which Ganta is one. The Gantas live in the Gamo-Gofa Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Regional State (SNNPRS). More specifically, they inhabit five villages known as Bonke, Ocholle, Mechye, Kanchama and Apaze. The Gantas call their language Gantestso, 'language of Ganta'. They share boundaries with the Zigiti and the Garbanssa in the West, the Ochollo in the North and the the Zayse in the south. In parts of the North and the whole of the East, their land borders on Lake Abaya and the Nech-Sar National Park respectively.

There is no reliable information on the size of the

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Ganta population. The closest approximation of population of Gantas is about 13,000. However, the national census considers Ganta a subset of Gamo and there is no reliable information on the exact size of this group. Because of the misconception that treats Ganta as a subset of the Gamo ethnic group, the regional administration has arranged mother tongues education for the children of Gantas with the Gamo language. This situation of misunderstanding Ganta as Gamo is causing a problem in the teaching-learning process. This paper challenges the claim made by some scholars and authorities to consider Ganta as a member of North Ometo group, specifically as a dialect of Gamo. It argues that Ganta is a member of Ometo that is genetically related to members of the East Ometo subgroup.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was based on a comparative method of language classification. Hence, it employed morphological, lexical, and sociolinguistic data, which were collected from primary and secondary sources. Research on language classification indicates that the only valid evidence for determining genetic relationship of languages that can indicate the significance of morphological, and sound correspondence for establishing a genetic relationship between languages of the same ancestor (see for instance, Greenberg, 1948; Campbell and Poser, 2008; Dimmendal, 2008). This study has two aims. One is identifying morphological and lexical isoglosses that can draw a line between the North Ometo and the East Ometo genetic groups and the second is examining the position of Ganta against the two. It also takes account of some sociolinguistic information collected via interviewing to grasp an overview of mutual intelligibility between Ganta and related members in the group. The following section will compare and contrast certain morphological features in Ganta with their equivalents in the East Ometo and North Ometo languages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section tries to unravel the long held misconception about the position of Ganta as a member to the North Ometo branch and therefore prove Ganta’s membership to the East Ometo group. In this process, certain morphological features in Ganta would be compared and contrasted with their equivalents in the East Ometo and North Ometo languages. The specific linguistic features dealt with in this process include number, definiteness, and nominative case marking elements, forms of the third person singular pronouns, focal verbs and the imperative verb. What is more, lexical assessments and sociolinguistic explorations would also be presented to substantiate the argument of the paper.

Morphological properties

Number marking in nouns

This study has attested that the system of plural marking in nouns clearly takes the East Ometo languages apart from those of Ometo. The East Ometo languages use a special plural marker for kinship nouns which is absent from North Ometo. This marker is absent from the other sub-branches too (see, for instance, the case of South Ometo in Azeb, 2001). Moreover, the regular plural marker in the East Ometo languages differs from its equivalent in North Ometo. The two peculiarities in number marking are attested consistently, demarcating languages of the two subgroups. The system of plural marking in Ganta, like in the other East Ometo languages, differentiates kinship nouns from the rest. Kinship nouns use suffix – as'i while other nouns use suffix – ide as in examples (1a) and (1b) respectively.

In addition to kinship terms, the suffix –as'i also occurs with nouns having [+Human] feature.

The plural marking suffixes in Ganta, –ide, and -as'i, are also attested in other members of the East Ometo sub-group such as Ganjule, Haro and Zayse. In Haro, the regular plural marker is suffix -Dé as in the examples below.

With kinship terms plurality in Haro is marked by way of a suffix áás'i as in (4).

1 On the East Ometo subgroup, we have data from Haro (Hirut 2004) Zayse (1990), Koyra (Hayward 1982), Koorete (Beletu 2002) and Ganjule (my own field notes). On the North Ometo subgroup we have data on Gamo (Hampo 1990), (Hirut 1999a, 2001), Dawuro (Allan 1976), (Hirut 1999b), Wolaitta (Hirut 1999c; Adams 1983), Oyda (Haileyesus 2002), Malo (Mahder 2000) etc. The Ganta data is collected by myself from Shele Mela area in 1998. There is also material from Selamawit (2004) an MA thesis on Ganta.
In Ganjule, a somewhat similar form, suffix -ás‘íí, is used to mark plurality with kinship nouns. Unlike the situation in Ganta, Ganjule nouns with [+ Human] feature do not take the same suffix as nouns with [+ Kinship] feature. [+ Human] nouns use the regular plural marker, that is, suffix -iDé. Consider the following examples:

(5) Singular Plural Gloss
?undo ?inda-ási 'mother'
lagge laggá-ási 'friend'
bíššo bíšš-iDé 'girl'
mááččo maačč-iDé 'woman'
?ats ?ats-iDé 'man/huma
moló mol-iDé 'fish'

The use of distinct plural markers for kinship nouns and non-kinship nouns is also observed in Zayse, another member of the East Ometo subgroup. In Zayse, suffix -ir occurs as a regular plural marker whereas suffix -as' is used with kinship nouns as presented in (6) and (7) below.

(6) Singular Plural Gloss
kana kan-ir 'dog'
maydo mayd-ir 'ox'
hare har-ir 'donkey' (Hirut)

(7) Singular Plural Gloss
ango ang-as' 'elder sister
indo ind-as' 'mother'
adda add-as' 'father'

From the data seen so far, one can conclude that the system of number marking in Ganta nouns appears to be similar to those in the East Ometo languages. As we shall see below, no such similarity exists with the North Ometo languages. In the case of the latter, as mentioned earlier, there is no distinction between plural marking in regular and kinship nouns. A single morphological element functions as a plural marker for all nouns, irrespective of their semantic class. Furthermore, the element which is used as a plural marker in the North Ometo languages differs from its equivalent attested in Ganta. While the suffix -ide/ iDé/ir is used in Ganta as well as in other East Ometo languages, suffix -ta2 is consistently used in the North Ometo varieties. See the following examples from Gamo, Wolaitta and Malo concerning the case in North Ometo.

(8) Gamo Plural Gloss
Singular kana-kana ‘dog’
dorsa dorsa-ta ‘sheep’
kapo kapo-ta ‘bird’

In general, the system of plural marking in Ganta looks very much like that of the East Ometo varieties. In the contrary, the system shows difference from that exhibited in the North Ometo languages. A similar result, which suggests a closer relationship of Ganta to the East Ometo sub-group rather than to the North Ometo, is also attested in the definiteness and case marking of noun phrases, as presented below.

**Definiteness marking**

The Ometo languages differ significantly from each other in the way they mark definite nouns (Hirut, 2004: 230). In fact, most of them do not even use a distinct morpheme that stands for definiteness. Most members of Ometo use a portmanteau morpheme that cumulatively represents definiteness along with other grammatical features such as gender and/or case. Besides, some members mark definiteness only on a certain class of nouns. Some tend to mark definiteness only on masculine nouns while others do so only on feminine. Others which are from the East Ometo sub-group, namely Haro and Zergula, both believed to be conservative, are known to be marking both masculine and feminine nouns with the suffix z(z) and t(t) respectively.

(9) Singular Plural Gloss
na?a na?a-ta ‘boy’
kapo kapo-ta ‘bird’
kana kana-ta ‘dog’

(10) Malo
Singular Plural Gloss
kana kan-ita ‘dog’
gemat gemat-it: ‘ox’ (Mahder 2002)

As shown below, Ganta, like Haro and Zergula (members of the East Ometo languages), marks definiteness on

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2 The plural markers identified for Zayse in Hirut (1988), are also attested in Hayward (1990).
3 When a noun occurs in the Nominative case, the vowel -a of the plural marker changes into -i and hence the marker -as occurs as -ít.
both masculine and feminine nouns. Besides, the same forms of definiteness markers, as in Zergula and Haro, that is, suffix -z- and suffix -tt- are employed in Ganta for masculine and feminine nouns respectively.

(13) **Definite Nouns**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mačča-tt-o</td>
<td>‘the woman’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adde-z-a</td>
<td>‘the man’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bišša-tt-o</td>
<td>‘the girl’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gawara-tt-o</td>
<td>‘the cat (Fem)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gawara-z-a</td>
<td>‘the cat (Mas)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kapa-tt-o</td>
<td>‘the bird (Fem)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kapo-z-a</td>
<td>‘the bird (Mas)’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Such a way of marking definiteness in Ganta, that is, through the use of two gender sensitive allomorphs, -z- and -tt-, occurring with masculine and feminine nouns respectively, is attested only with members of the East Ometo sub-group but not among members of the North Ometo sub-group. Few members of the North Ometo subgroup use one of the two definite marking elements. Gamo, for instance, uses the element -z- with masculine definite nouns but lacks the feminine definite marker -tt- from its system. However, the feminine definite nouns in Gamo language are indicated by suffix -i, as illustrated in (14) below. Note that the Accusative case markers -a / -o occur following the definite marker.

(14) **Ind. Gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kana</td>
<td>dog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naʔa</td>
<td>child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dorssa</td>
<td>sheep</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On account of the use of the two gender sensitive definite markers, -tt and -z-, on the feminine and masculine nouns respectively, Ganta appears to be alike to the East Ometo languages such as Haro and Zergula. On the other hand, this morphological property, separates Ganta away from Gamo and other members of the North Ometo sub-group.

**The Nominative Case marking**

Another aspect of noun morphology suggesting that Ganta is more like the East Ometo languages is the system of Nominative case marking. The Ometo languages have two core cases: Accusative and Nominative (see, for instance, Azeb, 2001; Hayward, 1990; Hirut, 2004).

Languages of Ometo show similarity in the Accusative case marking while they display a remarkable difference in the system of Nominative case marking. The system of Accusative case marking involves two gender sensitive portmanteau morphs, i.e., -a and -o, which occur with masculine and feminine genders respectively. This holds true for all languages of Ometo for which we have data. The system of Nominative case marking, on the other hand, divides the Ometo languages into two groups, that is, the East Ometo group and the rest of Ometo. With members of the East Ometo sub-group, a single morph is used as a Nominative case marker with all noun irrespective of gender, whereas, with the rest of the Ometo languages two gender sensitive Nominative marking allomorphs are involved. These two Nominative case markers are suffixes -i and -a, and they are used with noun stems associated with masculine and feminine genders respectively. The latter refers to accusative case in languages of North Ometo, South Ometo (Maale (Azeb, 2001)), and West Ometo (Basketo (Azeb, 1993)) whereby the Nominative case marking, like that of Accusative case marking, involves gender polarity. The suffix -i, which functions as a masculine Nominative marker elsewhere in Ometo, occurs as the only Nominative case marker in this sub-branch of Ometo.

Like other members of East Ometo, Ganta does not distinguish gender in the system of Nominative case marking. Hence, suffix -i is used to mark Nominative case both on masculine and feminine nouns. Consider the following illustrative structures:

    b. naʔa-z-a -i yeedi boy-MAS: DF-NOM (came) ‘The boy came.’

    b. gaarmá -t - i yedine lion- FEM:DF-NOM (came) ‘The lioness came.’

In contrast to what is attested in Ganta and the other East Ometo languages such as Haro, the Nominative case marking in North Ometo involves two gender sensitive allomorphic variants: suffix -i and suffix -a. The former occurs on masculine nouns, the latter on feminine. This is illustrated in the following examples from Gamo (Hirut 1999):

(17) a. iz-i dorsa -z -a šukk -i -d -es he-NOM sheep-MAS:DF-ACC slaughter -3MS-PAS-3MS ‘He slaughtered the sheep (Mas).’
    b. iz-a dorsa -z -a šukk -u -d -us she-NOM sheep - MAS:DF- ACC slaughter - 3FS-PAS - 3FS ‘She slaughtered the sheep (Mas).’
Forms of the Third Person Singular Pronouns

One other point that separates the East Ometo subgroup from North Ometo, and from the rest of Ometo in general, is the third person singular pronoun paradigm. The third person singular pronouns in East Ometo have a structural pattern different from that of their cognates in the rest of Ometo. The pronouns in Ganta show exactly the same pattern as the ones observed in the East Ometo languages. A comparison of the third person singular personal pronouns in Ganta with their correspondents in the East and North Ometo languages respectively is given in the following table. The Nominative forms are used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ganta</th>
<th>East Ometo</th>
<th>North Ometo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3MS</td>
<td>?esi ?e</td>
<td>?i ?i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3FS</td>
<td>?isi ?i</td>
<td>?isa ?a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One point of distinction between the pronouns in the two subgroups concerns the structure of short and long forms. All members of the East Ometo subgroup have two sets of pronouns that can be labeled “short” and “long” forms. This is not always true with members of the North Ometo subgroup. For instance, Dawuro has long forms without the short counterparts whereas Wolaitta has short forms without the long counterparts. Gamo has both long and short forms. However, the short forms in Gamo, unlike their counterparts in Haro, Zayse and Koorete, comprise the final segment of the respective long form. This means that the short forms involve case markers which are, for instance, -i and -a in the Nominative case for masculine and feminine respectively. With the East Ometo languages, on the other hand, the initial syllable of the long form makes up the short counterpart in each category. It is also clear that the long forms involve an element -s or z-. The -s/z variation in the cognates of the third person singular pronouns is an isogloss that keeps the East Ometo group apart from the rest. As displayed in the above table, the element -s is attested in cognates in the East Ometo languages, whereas the element -z- is attested in cognates in North Ometo. The third person pronouns in Ganta follow a pattern similar to the forms in East Ometo.

The Imperative Verb

The imperative verbs in Ometo languages distinguish between the singular and plural categories. The singular imperative verb in the Ometo languages is characterized by a suffix -a, which is attached to a verb root. The plural imperative verb, on the other hand, bears structural distinction across the subgroups of Ometo. The North Ometo languages such as Gamo and Dawuro use suffix -ité as a plural imperative marker. Haro, Zayse and other members of East OmetoS use suffix -áyto to mark the same grammatical category. Ganta, like the East Ometo languages, uses suffix -áyto. Below is a comparison of forms of the plural imperative verbs Ganta to North and East Ometo languages:

(18) Ganta East Ometo North Ometo (Gamo)


The Focal Verb Paradigm

The East Ometo languages are notable for having a special verb paradigm that is identified as grammaticalized unitary entities of syntactic patterns (cf: Hayward, 1999:314). This is attested in all East Ometo languages for which we have data, that is, Haro (Hirut, 2004), Zayse (Hayward, 1990, 1999), Koorete (Hayward, 1982) and Zergula (Baye, 1994).

The paradigm has a complex structure and it is exclusively used in the domain of focus. Structurally, this verb involves different components: an infinitive verb (Verb root + INF marker) + a focus marker, which is also used as a copula, a pronominal suffix, aspect marker and mood marker.

The focal verb paradigm attested in the East Ometo languages is also found in Ganta. However, it is not attested in any other North Ometo language for which we have data. Consider the perfective paradigm of the verb yott- ‘come’ in Haro and Ganta respectively:
difficulty. He that Ganta is important to document Ganta as an "of the (2002: 11) dialect of Gamo, it separately in the mother independent variety. The situation better. A thorough report by Siebert and Hoett's (2002: 11) also indicated that Gantas consider Kachama-Ganjule, which is a member of the East Ometo variety varitate, to be a similar language as theirs. However, most Gantas are bilingual in Gamo proper and that creates ambiguity on the level of mutual intelligibility. A thorough sociolinguistic study is needed to understand the situation better. As a separate language from that of Gamo, it would be important to document Ganta as an independent variety. It would also be relevant to consider it separately in the mother tongue education.

Conclusions

In the previous studies, Ganta was considered as a dialect of Gamo under the North Ometo subgroup. However, the facts presented in this paper show that this speech variety should rather be regarded as a member of the East Ometo group along with Zayse, Haro, Ganjule, Koreete, etc. As the morphological, lexical and sociolinguistic facts indicate, Ganta is closer to the East Ometo varieties than to members of the North Ometo. The shared morphological features reflect the close relationship between Ganta and members of the East Ometo sub group. One can claim that the shared morphological features may be innovations of the ancestral form of the East Ometo sub group. On the other hand, this study points out that Ganta is relatively distantly related to Gamo. This information would be relevant to the current program on mother tongue education in the Gamo-Gofa Zone. The consideration of Ganta as a dialect of Gamo and the implementation of mother tongue education by using Gamo as a medium of instruction including for the Ganta children may have a negative impact creating a great linguistic impediment in the teaching-learning process.

**REFERENCES**


In most members of Ometo, a noun in the Accusative case can also serve as a citation form and a complement of a copular verb and therefore there is a consensus among most linguists working on these languages call the accusative case as Absolutive case due to the extended function of the noun in this case.