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Determining the genetic classification of Ganta within the Omoto group

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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 Omoto 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 Omoto subgroup and argues that Ganta should be reclassified under the East Omoto 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 Omoto speech varieties and their classification.

Key words: Ganta, East Omoto 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 Omoto linguistic group. Omoto is a linguistic group under the Omotic language family comprising several related languages and dialects classified under four linguistic sub-branches, namely North Omoto, South Omoto, East Omoto and West Omoto. The North Omoto sub-branch comprises members like Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa, Dawuro, Dorze and Oyda; the South Omoto group has a single member, Maale; East Omoto consists of Zayse, Zergulla, Korette, Haro, Ganjule and Kachama; to West Omoto

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 Omoto 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

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 tongue 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 Omoto group, specifically as a dialect of Gamo. It argues that Ganta is a member of Omoto that is genetically related to members of the East Omoto 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; Dimmendaal, 2008). This study has two aims. One is identifying morphological and lexical isoglosses that can draw a line between the North Omoto and the East Omoto 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 Omoto and North Omoto languages 1.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section tries to unravel the long held misconception about the position of Ganta as a member to the North Omoto branch and therefore prove Ganta's membership to the East Omoto group. In this process, certain morphological features in Ganta would be compared and contrasted with their equivalents in the East Omoto and North Omoto 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.

¹ On the East Omoto 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 Omoto 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.

Morphological properties

Number marking in nouns

This study has attested that the system of plural marking in nouns clearly takes the East Omoto languages apart from those of Omoto. The East Omoto languages use a special plural marker for kinship nouns which is absent from North Omoto. This marker is absent from the other sub-branches too (see, for instance, the case of South Omoto in Azeb, 2001). Moreover, the regular plural marker in the East Omoto languages differs from its equivalent in North Omoto. 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 Omoto 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.

(1) a.	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
	?indo	?ind-as'i	'mothers'
	?adda	?add-as'i	'fathers'
	miččo	mičč-as'i	'sisters'
b.	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
	kana	kan-ide	'dogs'
	kapo	kap-ide	'birds'
	doro	dor-ide	'sheep (pl)'

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

(2)	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
	naʔa	naʔ-as'i	'boys'
	šaato	šaas-as'i	'children'

The plural marking suffixes in Ganta, –**ide**, and –**as'i**, are also attested in other members of the East Omoto subgroup such as Ganjule, Haro and Zayse. In Haro, the regular plural marker is suffix –**iDé** as in the examples below.

(3)	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
	kapó	kap-iDé	'bird'
	moló	mol-iDé	'fish'
	doró	dor-iDé	'sheep'

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

(4)	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
	?ádda	?add-áás'i	'father/uncle on father's side'
	?índo	?ind-áás'i	'mother/father's sister'
	téngo	teng-áás'i	'second-wife'
	míšo	miš-áás'i	'sister'
	bólla	boll-áás'i	'in-law (MAS)'
	bóltte	boltt-áás'i	'in-law (FEM)'
	lánko	lank-áás'i	'aunt (mother's side)'

In Ganjule, a somewhat similar form, suffix **-ás'ii**, 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 **-íDe**. Consider the following examples:

(5)	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
	ʔundo	ʔinda-ási	'mother'
	lagge	lagga-ási	'friend'
	bíššo	bišš-íDe	'girl'
	mááččo	maačč-íDe	'woman'
	ʔats	ʔats-íDe	'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 Omoto 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)	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
	kana	kan-ir	'dog'
	maydo	mayd-ir	'ox'
	hare	har-ir	'donkey' (Hirut)

(7)	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
	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 Omoto languages. As we shall see below, no such similarity exists with the North Omoto 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 Omoto languages differs from its equivalent attested in Ganta. While the suffix **-ide/ íDe/ir** is used in Ganta as well as in other East Omoto languages, suffix **-ta³** is consistently used in the North Omoto varieties. See the following examples from Gamo, Wolaitta and Malo concerning the case in North Omoto.

(8)	Gamo		
	<i>Singula</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
	kana	kana-ta	'dog'
	dorsa	dorsa-ta	'sheep'
	kapo	kapo-ta	'bird'

(9)		<i>Singula</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
		naʔa	naʔa-ta	'boy'
		kapo	kapo-ta	'bird'
		kana	kana-ta	'dog'

(10)	Malo		
	<i>Singula</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
	kana	kan-ita	'dog'
	gemate	gemat-itæ	'ox' (Mahder 2002)

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

Definiteness marking

The Omoto 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 Omoto 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 Omoto 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.

(11)	Zergula	<i>Gloss</i>
	kana	'dog'
	kana-za	'the dog'
	kana-tto	'the bitch'
	ollo	'horse'
	ollo-za	'the horse (MAS)'
	ollo-tto	'the horse (FEM)' (Baye, 1994: 421-22)

(12)	Haro	<i>Gloss</i>
	gáárma	'lion: IND'
	gaarmá-z-a	'lion-MAS:DF-MAS:ABS'
	gaarmá-t-o	'lion-FEM:DF-FEM:ABS'
	kaná	'dog:IND'
	kaná-z-a	'dog-MAS:DF-MAS:ABS'
	kana-t-ó	'dog-FEM:DF-FEM:ABS'

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 *-ta* occurs as *-ti*.

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

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)	<i>Definite Nouns</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
	mačča-tt-o	'the woman'
	adde-z-a	'the man'
	bišša-tt-o	'the girl'
	gawara-tt-o	'the cat (Fem)'
	gawara-z-a	'the cat (Mas)'
	kapa-tt-o	'the bird (Fem)'
	kapo-z-a	'the bird (Mas)'

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 Omoto sub-group but not among members of the North Omoto sub-group. Few members of the North Omoto 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 **-t-** 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	Gloss	MAS:DF	Gloss
	kana	dog	kana-z-a	the dog
	naʔa	child	naʔa-z-a	the child
	dorssa	sheep	dorssa-z-a	the sheep

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 Omoto languages such as Haro and Zergula. On the other hand, this morphological property, separates Ganta away from Gamo and other members of the North Omoto sub-group.

The Nominative Case marking

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

Languages of Omoto 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 Omoto for which we have data. The system of Nominative case marking, on the other hand, divides the Omoto languages into two groups, that

is, the East Omoto group and the rest of Omoto. With members of the East Omoto sub-group, a single morph is used as a Nominative case marker with all nouns irrespective of gender, whereas, with the rest of the Omoto 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 Omoto, South Omoto (Maale (Azeb, 2001)), and West Omoto (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 Omoto, occurs as the only Nominative case marker in this sub-branch of Omoto.

Like other members of East Omoto, 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:

- (15) a. bišša-tt- i yeedi
 girl-FEM: DF-NOM (came)
 'The girl came.'
 b. naʔa-z-i yeedi
 boy-MAS: DF- NOM (came)
 'The boy came.'

As mentioned earlier, such property is peculiar to members of East Omoto. See, for instance, the following structures from Haro:

- (16) a. gaarmá-z- i yedine
 lion- M:DF- NOM (came)
 "The lion 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 Omoto languages such as Haro, the Nominative case marking in North Omoto 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

	Ganta		East Ometo				North Ometo					
			Haro	Zayse	Koorete	Gamo	Dawuro	Wolaitta				
3MS	ʔesi	ʔe	ʔesi	ʔe	ʔesi	ʔe	ʔesi	ʔe	ʔizi	ʔi	ʔizi	ʔi
3FS	ʔisi	ʔi	ʔisi	ʔi	ʔisi	ʔi	ʔisi	ʔi	ʔiza	ʔa	ʔiza	ʔa

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 *-ayto* to mark the same grammatical category. Ganta, like the East Ometo languages, uses suffix *-ayto*. 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 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.

	(Haro)	Gloss	
hang- áyto	hang-áyto	b-ité	‘go!’
m-áyto	miy-áyto	m-ité	‘eat!’
ʔing- áyto	ʔing-áyto	ʔimm- ité	‘give!’
wos’- áyto	woss-áyto	wos’s’- ité	‘run!’

This material shows that the plural imperative verbs in Ganta follow the same pattern as those in Haro while differing from their counterparts in Gamo. Note that the distinction is not simply morphological but also lexical. The verb roots for ‘go’ and ‘give’, for instance, have totally different forms in the two subgroups. In North Ometo, *b-* and *ʔimm-* are used for ‘go’ and ‘give’ respectively, while verb forms *hang-* and *ʔing-* are used for the same reference in the East Ometo subgroup. Again, the comparative lexical data presented below supports the claim that Ganta fits in better with the East Ometo subgroup than with the North Ometo subgroup.

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), Kooreete (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:

(19)	<i>Haro</i>	<i>Ganta</i>
1SG	yottá-tá -dde	yeetta-kko-te
2SG	yottá-kko-né-dde	yetta-kko-ne-dde
3MS	yottá-kko-ʔé-dde	yetta-kko-yi-dde
3FS	yotá-kko-ʔí-dde	yetta-kko-se-dd-e
1PL	yottá-kko-ʔúnú-dde	yetta-kko-nu-dde
2PL	yottá-kko-ʔíní-dde	yetta-kk-u-dde
3PL	yottá-kko-ʔú-dde	yetta-kk-itidde

Lexical Variation

Lexical comparison also shows that Ganta is closer to East Ometo than it is to Gamo or to any other North Ometo language. The following are some of the words selected to illustrate the similarity and the differences Ganta has with the East Ometo and North Ometo languages respectively:

(20)	<i>Ganta</i>	<i>Haro (East Ometo)</i>	<i>Gamo (North Ometo)</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
	šuuuro	šúr-o	gawara	'cat'
	garma	gaarma	gaamo	'lion'
	zawa/ket ^s i	zawa	ket ^s i	'house'
	maydo	maydo	boora	'ox'
	ade	ade	azina	'husba
	muk'o	muk'o	budit ^s t ^s e	'ash'
	ollo	ollo	para	'horse'
	tolko	tolko	godare	'hyena'
	kunkke	kunke	side	'nose'
	waye	waye/waše	haytsa	'ear'
	baade	bade	duuna	'mouth'
	wat ^s t ^s e	wasi	hat ^s i	'water'
	galičči	galči	gelešo	'monke'
	doro	doro	dorse	'sheep'
	hang-	hang-	b-	'go'
	ʔáwwa□	ʔáwwa	arše	'sun'

Sociolinguistic information

According to the information from Gamo and Ganta speakers, mutually intelligibility is not possible between Ganta and other Gamo speakers. Unless they learn it as a second language, Ganta speakers have difficulty in understanding Gamo and vice versa. On the other hand, Gantas indicate that they understand the East Ometo varieties such as Zayse, Zergula, Ganjule etc much better. A field report by Siebert and Hoef's (2002: 11) also indicated that Gantas consider Kachama-Ganjule, which is a member of the East Ometo variety, 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.

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ⁱ In most members of Omoto, 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.