Notes on the North Ometo dialects: mutual intelligibility tests and structural variations

Hirut woldemariam
Addis Ababa University

1.   Introduction

This study deals with members of the North Ometo subgroup, one of the four subgroups within the Ometo linguistic group, a branch within the Omotic language family. The North Ometo subgroup comprises several members, such as Wolaitta, Gofa, Dawuro, Gamo, Oyda, Malo etc. (Fleming 1976). This study focuses specifically on four members of the subgroup, namely, Wolaitta, Gofa, Dawuro and Gamo[1]. The four dialects are the major ones considering population size of the speakers. Besides, external perceptions consider the four dialects as one. Recently, for instance, in the process of implementing mother tongue education in, an attempt was made to make a composite written dialect out of the four dialects that serves as a media of education. The composite language, however, was not accepted by members of the four dialects. The action rather caused socio-political tension, conflict and reclassification of the administration zone.

The aim of the study is, therefore, three-folded and it depends on a variety of methods including quantitative and qualitative approaches. One is vocabulary count of the four dialects and the second is different mutually intelligibility test. The third aim is providing comparisons of some aspects of the linguistic structures of the dialects. These include phonemic inventories and

morphological elements. In addition, incompatibility of semantic references of cognate lexical items will be presented. This includes instances whereby words which have taboo references in one dialect but have healthy references in the others.

The data for mutual intelligibility analysis was collected in subsequent fieldworks made in 1998 and 1999 from the Gamo-Gofa and Darwuro zones, namely, Chencha , Marak'a Gena and Arba Minch provinces . Maraka Genna is a province where mainly Dawuros live and Chencha is primarily a province of Gamos. A lot of Wolaittas are also found there. Arba Minch, the town of Gamo and Gofa, is also a place where members of all the four groups can be found. Supplementary data was collected in September 2004 in Arbaminch.

Different methods of collecting dialect information and testing intelligibility introduced by Voeglin and Harris (1951), Vaux and Cooper (2003), such as testing the informants, asking the informant and counting sameness are applied in the study.

The paper is divided into five sections. The first section, which is this one, briefly introduces the study. Then, the second section presents results of vocabulary counts. Section three discusses results of testing the informants mutual in which analysis of translation tests of the non-native texts. Next, in section four, analysis on the informants' opinions on to what degree they understand the non-native dialects will be presented. Section five, deals with some notes on the structural variations attested among members of the North Ometo group. Finally, the last part

will provide conclusive remarks. The findings of this paper may be relevant for decisions on language planning and language development involving the dialects under concern[2].

2. Vocabulary Count

In this section, the basic vocabulary items in the four dialects under concern are counted, compared and contrasted. The rates of cognate words which are shared by the dialects and that of different words will be given. Words with same forms but different meanings will be discussed later in section 4.3.

The vocabulary items used in the comparison are members of major word classes such as Noun, Verb, Adjective, and Adverb. In addition, vocabulary items pertaining to the cultural aspects are also included. Correspondences of vocabulary items between each possible pair of dialects are elucidated. The possible pairs of dialects for which correspondences are investigated are; Gamo-Gofa; Gamo-Wolaitta; Gamo-Dawuro; Wolaitta-Gofa; Wolaitta-Dawuro; and Dawuro-Gofa. Total numbers of vocabulary items used in comparison are 200. Correspondences of the vocabulary items are categorized in to three categories, namely:

1. Items having identical phonetic forms

2. Items having partial resemblance with systematic sound correspondences

3. Items having totally different forms

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[2] In the process of implementing mother tongue education in the area where the four dialects are used, teaching materials were prepared in a composite language that involves the four dialects. This results in a societal tension and pedagogical problems.

The three categories are represented by I (Identical), P (Partial), and D (different) respectively.

Correspondents	I		P		D	
Gam-Wolaitta	61	22%	172	61%	48	17%
Gam- Dawuro	58	20%	170	59%	59	21%
Gam-Gofa	83	42%	83	42%	30	16%
Wol-Dawuro	134	47%	115	40%	36	13%
Daw-Gofa	32	17%	129	68%	29	15%
Wol-Gofa	45	27%	100	60%	21	13%

Table 1: Identical, Partial and Different vocabulary correspondences

As shown in the above chart, highest rate of identical vocabulary correspondences (47%) is exhibited between the Wolaitta and Dawuro varieties. Subsequently, Gamo and Gofa share 42% of their vocabularies which are identical in form. The minimum rate of shared identical cognates (17%) is observed between Dawuro-Gofa.

Except the Wolaitta–Dawuro correspondences whereby the number of identical correspondences are greater than the partial correspondence and that of Gamo-Gofa correspondences that have equal rate of partial and identical correspondences, all the other pairs show greater number of partially similar correspondences than identical correspondent forms.

On the other hand, a relatively maximum rate of dissimilarity (21%) is attested for cognates of Gamo and Dawuro. In the case of the others, the variation ranges between 13% and 17% of the items. It is, therefore, possible to conclude that majority of the vocabulary items in the four

dialects are share cognates. Only few numbers of vocabulary items are found being peculiar to each speech variety. The following table shows the number of cognates (both identical and partly similar forms) versus non-cognate (different) forms among the dialects.

Correspondences	No of vocabularies	Cognates		Non-cognate	
Gam-Wol	281	233	83%	48	17%
Gam- Daw	287	228	79%	59	21%
Gam-Gofa	196	166	84%	30	16%
Wol-Daw	285	249	87%	36	13%
Daw-Gofa	190	161	85%	29	15%
Wol-Gofa	166	145	87%	21	13%

Table 2: Cognates) and Different vocabulary correspondences

As shown in the above table, the smallest number of correspondences is exhibited in the Gamo-Dawuro correspondences, in the contrary, the largest number of cognates is attested for Wolaitta-Gamo and Wolaitta-Dawuro correspondences. It is also possible to infer from the above table that, Gamo shares more vocabulary items with Gofa (84%) and Wolaitta (83%) than with Dawuro (79%).

On the other hand, Wolaitta shares the same number of vocabulary items (87%) with Gofa as well as Dawuro and relatively less number of items (83%) with Gamo. Similarly, it is attested that Dawuro shares the highest portion of its vocabularies (87%) with Wolaitta. Next to Wolaitta, a large number (85%) of the Dawuro vocabulary items are shared with Gofa. Relatively less number of vocabulary items (79%) is shared with Gamo.

Maximum number of vocabularies in Gofa (87%) is shared with Wolaitta. Next to Wolaitta, Gofa shares secondly large number of vocabularies (85%) with Dawuro. A little bit less number of items than what is shared with Dawuro, that is, (84%) of the Gofa items is common with Gamo. In general, the cognates shared by the dialects extend beyond 80% of the total stock under comparison. An exception to this is the cognates shared by Gamo and Dauro that share 79% of the words under comparison.

3.   Testing the informants

A sample of 20 speakers has been selected from each of the four dialects and tested for comprehension of the non-dialectal speech. All members who took the test were carefully selected to be native speakers in their respective dialect and not to have knowledge on the non-dialectal dialects. All of them speak and understand Amharic fluently. The informants who took the test were first year students in the Arba Minch Teachers Training College coming from their respective areas.

Each informant was asked to translate three different texts written in the respective non-native dialects into Amharic. Each text was produced by members of the respective dialect and each one was on a distinct topic containing a different story or experience. The texts were also read out for the informants by the respective native speakers to avoid potential problems and ambiguities that may arise from the writing form. The purpose of the test was to check how much they grasp the non-native dialects by using knowledge of their native dialect.

The amounts of correctly translated material were calculated over the total number of words contained in the text. In addition, distortions and omissions of ideas are also taken into consideration. In what follows, analysés of the results of the tests are presented.

3.1.1. Test Results of the Dawuro Informants

1.   The Gamo Test

All the Dawuro informants have translated the Gamo text in to Amharic without distorting or omitting the original idea. Of the Gamo text that contains 90 words, only four words are identified as unfamiliar ones by the Dawuro informants. The remaining 86 words, that is, 95.5% of the text was understood and translated correctly.

Like the situation with the Gamo test, the Wolaitta test has been translated by Dawuros with less difficulty. The translation is attested fitting well with the original idea in the text. There has been no distortion or omission exhibited in the translation. Of the 95 words contained in the Wolaitta text only 2 were underlined as unknown ones by the Dawuro informants. All in all, 97.8% of the Wolaitta text was understood correctly by the Dawuros.

97.8% of the Gofa text was correctly understood by the Dawuros without any problem. Only two words out of 91 in the text that were identified as strange by the Dawuros. Generally, one can infer from the results shown here that Dawuros can understand the Gamo, Gofa and Wolaitta dialects without an interpreter.

3.1.2. Test Results of the Wolaittas Informants

Unlike the situation with Dawuro, it was no so easy for the Wolaittas to translate the Gamo text. They have attempted to translate a relatively less amount of the Gamo text. As a matter of fact, the Gamo text does not appear to be easy for Wolaittas as it does for the Dawuros. The Wolaittas who have taken the Gamo test understood and translated about 88% of the text. From the 95 words, which are contained in the Gamo text, the Wolaitta respondents marked 11 words as strange. Besides, the content of the text was not fully reflected in the translation. Some points in the original text are attested missing out from the translation.

The test result indicates that Wolaittas understand Gofa better than they do Gamo. From the Gofa text, which contains 91 words, only 4 words are considered as outlandish forms by the Wolaitta informants. That means, 95.5% of the total text was understood and translated correctly.

Like the situation with the Gamo test, the Dawuro test is attested being a bit for the Wollaitas. From the 108 words contained in the text, 10 to 13 word items are labeled as untried. Only 87.9% of the text was attempted in the translation. Of the translated items, 6% were misunderstood and incorrectly translated. All in all, only 81.9% of the text was acceptably translated. Some instances showing the misunderstandings are presented below.

1. The proper noun, *Darota* was misunderstood as 'many' by the Wolaittas. Hence, a sentence *daroti tammanne laa?u lays'a na?a* ' Dorota is a boy of 12 years old' is translated by almost all the Wolaitta respondents as 'Many are 12 years old' . A few others have translated the item as 'The big /elder is 12 years old'.

2. The Dawuro numeral element, *itte* 'one', was incorrectly translated as 'bad' by most respondents, and as 'they' by some others.

3. The kinship term *aawu* 'father' in Dawuro was translated as the interrogative pronoun 'where' and so the Dawuro sentence, *itti gallasi Dorota aawu ogiya biide* 'One day Dorota's father went to market' was erroneously translated as 'Where did many go in a bad day? '. Some others understood it as 'on their day many went to market'.

4. The verb form *uša* 'drink (imperative)' was interpreted as a causative verb 'make drink' by many Wolaittas. Because of that the expression *šonkooruwo shamma uša* 'Buy and drink (suck out the flood from) sugar cane' was misunderstood as "Buy sugar cane and make me drink it."

5. The demonstrative element *hawaa* ' this' was misinterpreted as ' sun'.

6. The Dawuro word *uzze* 'young (for hen) is misunderstood as ' three' by the Wolaitta informants. In t he e xpression ... *u zze kutatto š ammi a kki y eddo* , " ... having b ought a nd having brought a young hen.." was translated as "...having bought and having brought three hens." The Dawuro word *uzze* which refers to young (for hen) was considered as an equivalent form to the word *heezza* 'three' in Wolaitta. Also, in the Dawuro noun *kutatto,* the consecutive morphemic e lements –tt- and -o which function as a feminine definite marker and Absolutive/Accusative case marker r espectively, were c onsidered as sequences of the plural marker –t- and the –o an Absolutive/ Accusative case marker.

7. The Dawuro sentence *Daroti hawaa beñidi daro našettedda,* which is suppose to mean "Having looked at this, Darota became very happy" was perceived as "Having looked at the sun Darota became very happy".

From what has been discussed so far, it is possible to conclude that Wolaittas have much more difficulties in understanding the Dawuro and Gamo speech varieties than in understanding Gofa. In other words, they can understand the Gofa dialect better than they do the Gamo and Dawuro dialects. The study also indicates that from the Gamo and Dawuro dialects, the Dawuro dialect appears to be more complex for the Wolaittas. Generally speaking, for Wolaittas, the difficulty to understand the non-native dialects increases when they go from Gofa to Gamo and, then, from Gamo to Dawuro.

3.1.3. Test Results of the Gamo Informants

Unlike the reverse, all the Gamos who were asked to translate the Wolaitta text have done the task perfectly. Out of the 95 words in the text, they found only two words as alien to their knowledge. They have understood and translated 97.8% of the text right. No distortion of ideas is attested in the translation. In general, one can conclude that, it is much easier for Gamos to understand the Wolaitta speech than the other way round.

Results of the text translation reveal that, the Gamo speakers can understand the Gofa dialect without much difficulty. Out of the 91 words occurring in the Gofa text, only 2-3 words were recognized as out of the ordinary for the Gamos. The remaining 95.6% of the text was fully understood and correctly translated by them. This reveals that Gamos can evidently understand the Gofa dialect.

Unlike the case with the Gofa and Wolaitta texts, the Dawuro text appears to be less familiar for the Gamos. Out of the 108 words contained in the text, 13 to 20 words, that is, about 19 % of the

text was pointed out as difficult ones to understand. Moreover, most of the original idea in the text is distorted in the translation. 6% of the translated item is incorrect. Some examples of distorted translations are given below.

1. The sentence *dagatteedda k'uuk'ulliya hak'a afa zalʔñno loʔeešša giidi i k'oppišin šoorwwan deñya itti zalʔñanccay sisiidi ubba k'uuk'ullyakka aappe šammiya geedda"*, which means "While Darota was thinking about where to take and sell the eggs, a merchant in his neighborhood, having understood his idea, came to his house and bought all the eggs" has got misunderstood to be translated as 'While he was arranging things to get chickens out of the eggs, suddenly, a merchant from his neighborhood came and bought away (against Darota's wish) all the stored eggs.' As just indicated, the translation was totally distorted and deviated from the idea the sentence in the native dialect intends to mean.

2. The sentence *Daroti tammanne laaʔu lays'a naʔa* 'Darota is a 12 years old boy' was incorrectly translated as 'Darota is a two years old uneducated boy' by most informants. Some other Gamo informants have provided 'many are 12 years old.' as an equivalent form.

3. The noun phrase *itti gallassi* ' one day' was also wrongly understood as 'a bad day'.

4. The noun *aawuu* ' father' was also translated as ' where'. Thus, the sentence *itti gallassi darota aawuu ogiya biidde,* that means, 'one day Darota's father had a trip' is translated as 'where to did Darota go in a bad day?'

5. The phrase *itti uzze kuttatto* ' one young hen' was translated as ' bad young hen'

6. The verb *uša* ' drink (imperative)' was misunderstood as a causative verb ' make drink'

As, the test indicates it, Gamos understand Gofa and Wolaitta much better than they understand Dawuro. They found the Dawuro dialect difficult for them to understand.

3.1.4. Test Results of the Gofa Informants

The translation tests revel that Gofas understand Wolaitta with no much problem. As shown above, the reverse is also true. Of 95 words presented in the Wolaitta text only 4 were identified as strange ones by the Gofas. The rest 96% of the text was correctly understood and translated. There was no significant distortion or omission of ideas encountered in the translation.

Similarly, it is attested that Gofas have correctly translated 95% of the Gamo text. With the exception of 5 words that were marked as unknown, the Gofas understood and translated the Gamo text perfectly.

On the other hand, it was not easy for the Gofas to understand the Dawruo text. The Gofa informants have translated 85% of the Dawuro text. They have reported that, 16 words in the text are totally unfamiliar to them. Moreover, distortion of ideas or incorrect translations is also attested. About 6% of the translated item has been identified inaccurate. Examples of distortions are presented below.

1. The proper noun *darota* was translated as ' many' and as ' all' by some other. As shown earlier, the same misapprehension was made by the Wolaittas.

2. The sentence, "Dawuro is 12 years old" was interpreted as "Many are 12 years old" by nearly every Gofa who took the test and as 'All are 12 years old' by a few others.

3. The noun *itti* 'one' was translated as ' they' by the majority of the informants and as ' bad' by a few others. As a consequence, the sentence *itti uzze kuttaytto* 'one young hen' was misunderstood as ' bad hen' and *itti gallassi* 'one day' was perceived as 'their day'.

4. The compound numeral adjective *tammanne laaʔu* ' twelve' was translated as 'students and two'. Hence, the sentence *daroti tammanne laaʔu lays'a naʔa* was incorrectly translated as ' many are students and of 2 years old.'

5. The word *aawuu* 'father' was also misinterpreted as 'where' and because of this the sentence *darota aawuu ogya biidde* "Darota's father had a trip (Lit: Darota's father went a road)" was translated by nearly every one of the informants as "Where did Darota go?" A few members translated the sentence as "which way did many go?"

6. The sentence *daroti hawaa beʔidi daro našettedda* 'Darota was happy to see this.' was misunderstood as "Many (of them) loved to go far. "

The following table presents a summary of the findings.

Test Native dialect	Gamo	Gofa	Wolaitta	Dawuro
Gamo	X	95.6%	97.8%	75%
Gofa	95%	X	96%	85%
Wolaitta	88%	95.5%	X	82%
Dawuro	95.5%	97.8%	97.8%	X

Table 3: Summary of the Translation Test Results

All in all, the test results points towards the fact that there is a higher mutual intelligibility among the speakers of Wolaitta, Gamo and Gofa than they have with Dawuro. It is also indicated that Wolaittas, Gamos and Gofas face similar problems in understanding the Dawuro dialect. On the

other hand, the intelligibility between Dawuros on one hand and members of the other three groups on the other does not appear to be mutual. The Dawuro speakers understand Woalitta, Gamo and Gofa much better than the other way round. In other words, the Dawuro informants have faced a lesser degree of trouble to understand the speeches of Wolaitta, Gamo and Gofa while the Wolaittas, Gamos and Gofas have much trouble to understand the Dawuro dialect.

Concerning mutual intelligibility of the Ometo dialects in general, there exists one unpublished previous study (Ethiopia Languages Academy: 1980). In the study a mutual intelligibility test was made on 8 Ometo dialects of which the four dialects under investigation are part. The method applied in the study was 'testing the informants'. The results obtained in the previous study differs in some way from that of the present and share similarity in some other way. Compare the two results of below. (Adopted from Ethiopian Language Academy, 1980: 15)

Test Native Dialect	Gamo		Gofa		Wolaitta		Dawuro	
	Previous	Present	Previous	Present	Previous	Present	Previous	Present
Gamo	X		97%	95.6%	99%	97.8%	80%	75%
Gofa	95%	95%	X		94%	96%	80%	85%
Wolaitta	93%	88%	82%	95.5%	X		86%	82%
Dawuro	89%	95.5%	95%	97.8%	99%	97.8%	X	

Table 4: Mutual intelligibility test results

As shown in the table, test results of the two studies indicate that members of the Gamo, Gofa and Wolaitta dialects have the lowest score in their Dawuro performance but not the reverse. Discrepancy between the previous and present time results is exhibited in the Wolaittas' test for

Gamo and Gofa. The same divergence is attested in the Dawuros' test for Gamo. Different factors may cause the variation shown in the result and that is not possible to tell the exact reason. As mentioned earlier, the present study applies other methods such as asking the informant's opinion and structural similarity to cross check the finding which are attested from the translation tests. These will be presented in the following sections.

4. Attitudes of the Gamo, Gofa, Dawuro and Wolaitta informants on how well they understand the non-native dialects

In this section, we investigate the attitudes of Gamo, Gofa, Wolaitta and Dawuro speakers concerning what they think about their understandings of each others dialects. Sample speakers from the dialects under concern have been made to fill questionnaire. Unfortunately, due to some technical limitations the Gofas did not fill the questionnaire.

The question type used in the questionnaires was objective and the main question was 'In What degree do you understand your non-native dialects (Gamo,Gofa, Wolaitta, Dawuro) ?' The choices provided were: Fully (totally), Partly (moderately), or Not at all? Below will be analysis of the answers.

3.2.1. Attitudes of Dawuros on how well they understand

Wolaitta, Gamo and Gofa

As presented in the chart the majority (96%) of the Dawuro respondents think that their dialect is to some extent related to the Wolaitta dialect and they can understand it partly. A small number (4%) has replied that their dialect is entirely similar to Wolaitta and they can understand everything in that dialect. None of the respondents provided the choice 'Not at all' as an answer.

Concerning the Dawuros' understanding of the Gofa dialect, a relatively less number of the Dawuro respondents, that is 91% of them, believe that they can understand Gofa partly. The remaining 9% have pointed out that they do not understand Gofa at all.

On the other hand, much less number of Dawuros than those who replied they understand Wolaitta, that is, 83% of the respondents, indicates that they understand the Gamos' speech moderately. The remaining 17% responded that they never understand the Gamo speech at all. This is even a bigger number compared to those who believed they do not understand Gofa at all. There is no single respondent who thinks that he/she can understand Gamo totally. In conclusion, considering the speakers self judgment, one can say that Dawuros understand Wolaitta better than they do Gamo and Gofa; and they understand Gofa better than they understand Gamo.

3.2.2. Attitudes of Wolaittas on how well they understand
Gofa, Gamo and Dawuro dialects

85% of the Wolaitta respondents indicate that they understand the Gofa dialect moderately but not entirely. On the other hand, 15% of the respondents said that they do not understand Gofa at all. This shows that the number of Dawuro respondents who believe that they understand Gofa is more than the number of the Wolaittas who believe they understand Gofa.

With regard to their understanding of Gamo, a greater number of the Wolaitta respondents, 90% of them, indicate that they understand the Gamo dialect moderately. The remaining 10% said that they could understand Gamo fully. No one is obtained saying that he/she does not understand Gamo at all. This indicates that the number of respondents who believe they understand Gamo is

more than those who believe they understand Gofa. Such a result is, however, unexpected considering the test results we have seen in the previous section.

In the same manner, 90% of the Wolaitta respondents said that they do not understand Dawuro while the remaining 10% thinks that they understand it partly. No one said that he/she understands Dawuro fully. Members of the Wolaitta respondents pointed out that, Dawuro is the most complex one for them to understand. Note that a similar result is attested in the translation test presented earlier. In general, it is attested from the informants self evaluation that Wolaittas understand Gamo better than they understand Gofa and, on the other hand, Wolaittas hardly understand the Dawuro dialect. The following diagram summarizes how close the Gamo, Gofa and Dawuro dialects are to the Wolaitta dialect.

3.2.3. Attitudes of Gamos on how well they understand

Wolaitta, Dawuro and Gofa

As exhibited in the above chart nearly all of the Gamo respondents (96%) indicated that they could understand Wolaitta partly. On the other hand, 4% of the respondents said that they understand Wolaitta even entirely. No one was found saying that he/she can not at all understand the dialect under question.

Concerning their understanding of the Gofa dialect, on the other hand, only a little more than half of the Gamo respondents (55%) think that they understand Gofa moderately . The others, that is, almost half (45%) indicate that they don not understand Gofa at all. No Gamo respondent said that he/she understands Gofa totally.

In t he contrary, except v ery f ew r espondents t hat c ounts a bout 4 %, a ll t he G amo r espondents pointed out that they do not understand Dawuro at all. The remaining 4% of replied that they understand Dawuro only to a certain extent. No one is encountered replying that he/ she understands Dawuro fully. Accordingly, the Gamos believe that they understand Wolaitta well and they also understand Gofa to a certain degree but they hardly understand Dawuro. It is also attested that they believe they understand Wolaitta better than Gofa. Note that, somewhat similar finding, that the Gamos understand Wolaitta and Gofa better than they u nderstand Dawuro, is attested in the translation tests presented earlier. The following table presents summary of the responses calculated in percentage .T stands for 'totally', P stands for 'Partly' and N stands for 'Not at all'.

Wolaitta			Gamo			Gofa			Dawuro		
	T	*P*	*N*	*T*	*P*	*N*	*T*	*P*	*N*	*T*	*P*	*N*
Dawuro	4%	96%	--	--	83%	17%	--	91%	9%	X	X	X
Wolaitta	X	X	X	10%	90%	--	--	85%	15%	--	10%	90%
Gamo	14%	96%	--	X	X	X	--	55%	45%	--	4%	96%

Table 5: Attitudes of the speakers of Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa and Dawuro on their mutually intelligibility

As shown in the table, almost all speakers of Wolaitta and Gamo believe that they do not understand Dawuro (unfortunately, we do not have data on Gofa's attitude on this.). The same result is obtained from the translation test. However, from the large number of lexical items the dialects share, such a result may be unexpected. As shown in section 2, Wolaitta and Dawuro share 97% of their vocabularies while Gamo and Dawuro share 79% of their vocabularies. It seems that even if the individual word cognates in the four dialects show similarity, it is difficult for the speakers to decipher the meaning of sentences in the non-native dialects. Such a difficulty might be caused by phonological and grammatical variations exhibited in the speech varieties.

Besides, semantic incompatibility of words in the four dialects may cause the lack of mutual intelligibility among speakers of member of the dialects. In what follows, we will discuss the different aspects of structural variations among the dialects.

4. Structural Comparisons

This section attempts to compare and contrast the different structural aspects in Gofa, Wolaitta, Gamo and Dawuro dialects. Comparison of the phonological and morphological structures will be presented. In addition, incompatibility in the semantics of words in the four dialects will be investigated.

5.1. Phonological variations

This section will present the comparison of phonological systems of the four dialects by dealing with their phonemic inventories. As shown below, first of all, the four dialects show noteworthy divergence in their phonemic inventories. Wolaitta has 24 consonant phonemes, Gamo has 26 consonant phonemes, whereas, Dawuro and Gofa have 25 consonant phonemes.

Gamo   p b p' m w t d n l r D s z s' š t' dz c j c' y k g k' ʔ h

Dawuro   p b p' m w t d n l r D s z s' š t' c j c' y k g k' ʔ h

Wolaitta   p b p' m w t d n l r D s z t' š c j c' y k g k' ʔ h

Gofa   p b p' m w t d n l r D s z s' š c t' j c' y k g k' ʔ h

Considering the phonemic inventories of the four dialects, Wolaitta differs much from the other three because, firstly, i t l acks t he a lveolar affricate c onsonant t s and, s econdly, i t h as i ts o wn

peculiar phoneme, /t'/, which is absent elsewhere. However, the **t'** in Wolaitta regularly

corresponds to **s'** in the others as illustrated in the following cognates.

Wolaitta	Dawuro	Gamo	Gofa	
t'ugunta	s̲' ugunsa	s̲'ugunsu	s̲'ugunt̫	'nail'
t̲'eeta	s'eeta	s̲' eetu	s̲' eeta	'hundred'
int'arsa	ins'arsa	ins̲'arsi	ins̲'ars	'tongue'
it̲'wa	is̲' o	is̲'o	is'o	'hatred'

On the other hand, as the following cognates show that the **t̫** in Dawuro, Gamo and Gofa

corresponds to the geminated **tt** in Wolaitta.

Wolaitta	Dawuro	Gamo	Gofa	
su̲tta	suut̫a	suut̫u	suut̫	'blood'
t'ant̲ta	Dant̫a	Dant̲a	Dant̫i	'breast'
mek'et̲ta	mek'̩et̫a	mek'̩et̫i	mek'et̲	' bone'
agunt̲ta	agunt̫aa	agunt̫u	agunt̲	' than'

On the other hand, Gamo has a unique consonant, **d^z**, which is absent from any of the other

three. This makes Gamo different not only from Wolaitta but also from Gamo and Gofa. As

illustrated in the following cognates the **dz** in Gamo corresponds to **z(z)** elsewhere.

Gamo	Wolaitta	Dawuro	Gofa	
heed^za	heezza	heezza	heezza	'three'
ed^zo	erzo	izzo	erzo	'a kind of music instrument'

There are also other sound correspondences exhibited in words of Gamo, Gofa, Dawuro and Wolaitta. r of Wolaitta is observed corresponding to **D** in the others. Compare the following words.

Gamo	Dawuro	Gofa	Wolaitta	
siiDe	siDiya	siiDe	siiriya	'nose'
kooDe	k'ooDiya	k'ooDe	koriya	'elbow'
waDa	waDa	waDa	wara	' killing'

In addition, the phoneme /p'/ of Dawuro corresponds to /k'/ in the others as in the following cognate.

Dawuro	Gamo	Wolaitta	Gofa
K'uk'ulia	p'upulle	p'up'ulia	p'up'uule

Based on the phonological inventories and sound correspondences shown above, it is possible to make a general statement that Gamo, Dawuro and Gofa have much phonological feature in common to each other than to Wolaitta. They share 25 consonants phonemes of which two are absent from Wolaitta. Among the tree, Gamo seems a bit divergent from the other two (Dawuro and Gofa). Gamo has /d^z/ which is absent from the phonemic inventories of the others.

5.2. Morphological Variations

5.2.1. Aspects of Nominal Morphology

Aspects of the nominal morphology in the north Ometo dialects show that the languages are diverging. Good instances of this are the system of definiteness marking and the system of case marking which are discussed in turn below.

In a recent study (Hirut 2004), it is attested that the language ancestral to the Ometo group must have had an archaic system of definiteness marking, which involved two gender-sensitive elements: *-t(t)- and *-z(z)- occurring with feminine and masculine nouns respectively. Most languages of Ometo have lost the archaic definite markers partly or totally. In Dawuro the feminine definite nouns are expressed by suffix –tt- as illustrated below.

IND/DF: MAS:ABS		DF:FEM:ABS	
kana	'dog /the dog	kana-tt-o	'the bitch'
naʔa	'child/the child (MAS)'	naʔa-tt-o	'the child (FEM)'
dorssa	'sheep/the sheep (MAS)'	dorssa-tt-o	'the sheep (FEM)'
ʔadaana	'cat/the cat (MAS)'	ʔadaana-tt-o	'the cat (FEM)'

Hence, feminine nouns in Dawuro have two distinct forms: the indefinite and definite while their masculine counterparts have only one form functioning both as indefinite as well as definite.

IND/DF:ABS		IND:FEM:ABS		DF:FEM:ABS	
ʔazna	'a/the husband'	mačČo	'wife'	mačČa-tt- o	'the wife'
ʔiša	'a/the brother'	mičČo	'sister'	mičČa-tt-o	'the sister'
wodalla	'a/the boy'	gelaʔo	'girl'	gelaʔa-tt-o	'the girl'

In contrast to Dawuro, which has preserved the archaic feminine definite marker, Gamo has preserved the masculine definite marker -z-. Thus, Gamo has acquired a new way of indicating definite feminine nouns from the indefinite ones, suffixation of -i. Examples on the indefinite, masculine definite and feminine definite nouns in Gamo are given below.

IND	Gloss	MAS:DF	Gloss	FEM:DF	Gloss
kana	'dog'	kana-z-a	'the dog'	kan-i-o	'the bitch'
naʔa	'child'	naʔa-z-a	'the child'	naʔ-i-o	'the girl'
dorssa	'sheep'	dorssa-z-a	'the sheep'	dorss-i-o	'the she-sheep'
ketse	'house'	ketsa-z-a	'the house'		

On the other hand, in Wolaitta and Gofa, none of the two archaic definite markers has been attested. In Wolaitta, different strategies are used to express definiteness. For instance, a class of Absolutive nouns in Wolaitta indicate definiteness via the suffix -a and -i for masculine and feminine nouns respectively. Nouns ending in -e change the terminal vowel to -i and those with -o change it to -u in the process of suffixation. In the phonetic representation, a glide *y* is inserted in nouns ending with i and a glide w is inserted in those ending in u before the definite marker. Compare the following examples of indefinite and definite nouns in Wolaitta (Hirut 1999).

para	'horse'
paraa	'the horse'
kana	'a dog'
kanaa	'the dog
naʔa	'boy'
naʔaa	'the boy'
mehe	'cattle'
mehia	'the cattle'
hare	'donkey'
hariya	'the donkey'
kapo	'a bird'
kapuwa	'the bird'

In the Nominative case the definite marker -a gets dropped and replaced by the nominative case marker -i/y leaving the meaning of definiteness to the terminal vowel. Similarly, indefinite nouns

also lose their terminal vowels to replace it with the nominative case marker. Compare the following definite and indefinite nominative nouns in Wolaitta.

1a) **kan-i**   **boč'č"is**

     dog-NOM   (barked)

     'A dog barked'

1b) **kan-a-**   **y**   **boč'č'is**

     dog-MAS:DF-NOM   barked)

     'The dog barked'

2a) **naʔ- i**   **yeekis**

     child-NOM   (cried)

     'A child cried.'

2b) **naʔa-y**   **yeekis**

     child-NOM   (cried)

     'The child cried.'

As mentioned above, Wolaitta, which has lost both the archaic definite markers, indicates feminine definite nouns by suffix -i. y is inserted between the definite marker and the case marker, which is -o for Absolutive/Accusative and -a for nominative. Examples on the Absolutive/accusative forms are given bellow.

     dors-iy-o   'the sheep(FEM)'

     kan-iy-o   'the bitch'

     naʔ-iy-o   'the girl'

The suffix-*i* is considered as definite marker rather than gender marker as it also occurs with nouns, which are lexically marked for gender.

     miizza   'cow'   **miiz-iy-a**   'the cow'

     ʔaayo   'mother'   **ʔaay-iy-o**   'the mother'

     mičč o   'sister'   **mičč-iy-o**   'the sister'

Gofa follows exactly the same pattern to Wolaitta, marking the masculine and feminine definite nouns by the suffixes-a and -i respectively.

Members of the North Ometo show similarity in their system of case marking. Except Dawuro, the other dialects under concern involve similar gender sensitive case marking elements in the Accusative/Absolutive and Nominative cases. In the former case, suffixes – a and –o are used with masculine and feminine nouns whereas in the latter case suffixes –i and –a are used with masculine and feminine nouns respectively. The same forms of peripheral case markers are also used across the four members. Of the four members under investigation, however, Dawuro shows certain differences in its case marking. In the case of Dawuro, forms of the Nominative and Accusative/Absolutive case markers vary based on the number feature of a noun, and so different forms are used with singular and plural nouns. In addition, the elements used to mark the Commitative and Dative cases in Dawuro differ from their correspondents in Wolatta, Gamo and Gofa. The following table presents forms of the case markers in the four dialects.

	Nominative			Accusative			Dative	Comitative	Instrumental	Ablative
	FEM	MAS	PL	FEM	MAS	PL				
Dawuro	-a	-i	-u	-o	-a	wa	-wu	-na	-n	-ppe
Gamo	-a	-i	-i	-o	-a	-a	-ssi	-ra	-n	-ppe
Gofa	-a	-i	-i	-o	-a	-a	-ssi	-ra	-n	-ppe
Wolaitta	-a	-i	-i	-o	-a	-a	-ssi	-ra	-n	-ppe

As it is indicated in the above Dawuro, as different from the others has separate case markers, /-u/ and /-wa/ used for accusative and nominative plural nouns. In the other dialects the masculine case marker is the one used with plural nouns. Forms of the dative and Commitative case markers in this dialect are also exhibited being different from those in the other dialects.

5.2.2. Aspects of the Verbal Morphology

The dialects under investigation also show certain variation in their verb conjugation systems such as pronominal markers and tense markers.The Dawuro dialect is found being different in its verbal affixes from the other three. Compare pronominal markers of the imperfective verb in the table given below.

	Dawuro	*Gamo*	*Wolaitta*	*Gofa*
1SG	-ai	-ayis	-ayis	-ais
2SG	-aa	-aasa	-aasa	-asa
3SF	-au	-aysu	-ausu	-ausu
3SM	-ee	-ees	-ees	-ees
1PL	-etto	-oos	-oose	-oose
2PL	-iita	-eeta	-eeta	-eeta
3PL	-iino	-eettes (oosona)	-oosona	-oosona

The following verb forms indicate the occurrences of the pronominal markers with the verb **m-** 'eat' in the four dialects.

Gamo	*Wolaitta*	*Gofa*	*Dawuro*	
mayiss	m-ays	mais	m-ai	'I eat'
m-aasa	m-aasa	m-asa	m-aa	'you eat'
m-aysu	m-ausu	mausu	m-au	'she eats'
m-ees	m-ees	m-ees	m-ee	'he eats'
m-oos	m-oose	m-oos	m-iita	'we eat'
m-eeta	m-eeta	m-eeta	m-iino	'you pl. eat'

m-eettes   m-oosona   m-oosona   m-oosona 'they eat'

As it is indicated in the above paradigms the Dawuro pronominals have lost the phoneme /s/ that is found in the others .It seems that this dialect is diverging from the others.

1. The pronominal markers of the perfective aspect, which are discontinuous in their forms do also show certain differences among the dialects. Here also Dawuro is the one in which the variation looks noticeable. Gofa and Wolaitta have almost identical forms. While Gamo is in between. Compare paradigms given below for the verb ' I went'.

Wolaitta	*Gofa*	*Gamo*	*Dawuro*
b-aas	**b-as**	**b-adis**	**b-addi**
b-aa-d.asa	**b-adasa**	**b-adasa**	**b-adda**
b-aa...su	**b-adasu**	**b-adus**	**b-addu**
b-ii-s	**b-is**	**b-ides**	**b-edda**
b-iida	**b-ida**	**b-idos**	**b-eddo**
b-iiteta	**b-ideta**	**b-ideeta**	**b-eddita**
b-ii-d-osona	**b-idosona**	**b-ida**	**b-eddino**

As shown in the above the past tense morpheme occurs being inserted in the pronominal morpheme which is discontinuous.

Variation is also observed in the form and occurrence of the tense mark across the dialects. As indicated in the above paradigm the past tense is marked by /-dd-/ in Dawuro but by /-d-/ in

Gamo, Gofa and Wolaitta. The past tense marker in Dawuro and Gamo occurs with all persons. In contrast, the same morpheme in Gofa and Wolaitta occurs only with certain persons.

The 1st person plural form of the verb in Wolaitta is similar with the third person plural in Gamo. This can be a possible source of misunderstanding in a communication situation between the speakers of the two dialects.

The present tense is marked by a zero morpheme. It is indicated by the form of the imperfective pronominal marker. The other difference with regard to the past tense marker is that it does not surface in third person and first person singular forms of Wolaitta and Gofa verbs. In Gomo and Dawuro, it appears consistently with all persons. (See the paradigm in 2 above).

5.3. Semantic incompatibility of cognates

Instances whereby cognate words in the four dialects show variation in their semantic references or appear to be incompatible in their meaning are frequently. Below is a discussion on some examples.

The Dawuro verb form **šammedda**, for instance, refers to both 'he bought' as well as 'he sold'. Only the context can indicate the exact reference a speaker wants to mark. On the other hand, the cognate correspondences in the other dialects, that is, **šammides** (Gamo) and **šammis** (Wolaitta and Gofa) are used to mean only 'he bought' but not he sold. On the Contrary, in Gamo, Wolaitta and Gofa dialects the word **bayzides** and **bayzis** respectively is used to mean 'he sold'.

In the contrary to the above situation, there are instances where Dawuro uses two distinct words for concepts expressed by a single word in the others. In Gamo, Gofa and Wolaitta dialects, the word **wont^sa** covers two semantic references: 'morning' and 'dawn'. In Dawuro, on the other hand, the same word is used to mean only 'morning' but not 'dawn'. Dawuro has a distinct word, that is, **guraa,** which functions to refer to 'dawn'. In the same manner, in Dawuro, the words **sint^sa** and **som?o** are used to refer to 'front' and 'face' respectively. The other three use a single word **sint^sa** to mean both. A similar instance of that kind is the verb 'burn' in Dawruo and the others. There are two specialized verb forms used to refer to 'burn' in Dawuro. These are: **s'elle** 'burning of the stomach as a result of hot drinks' and **s'uge** 'burning ones external body by touching a hot material'. In the other three dialects, the word **s'uge** is used to cover the two meaning that are expressed by using two distinct words in Dawuro. A case in which Dawuro makes use of three words for a reference which is elsewhere expressed by a single form is also attested. The word 'house/home' is expressed via the forms **keet^sa, golle** and **so** which occur in different contexts. Wolaitta has two of them, while Gamo uses only the first form.

On the other hand, there are instances where by a word in Gamo appears to be incompatible with its cognate in the other three. The word **k'uma** means 'food' or 'lunch' in Gamo. The cognate in Wolaitta, Gamo and Gofa, however, means only 'food'. In the latter dialects, there is another special word referring to 'lunch'. **lat'a** in Wolaitta and **las'a** in Dawuro and Gofa refers to 'lunch'. In the contrary, the word **las'a** refers to 'break fast' in Gamo.

In the same manner, the word **k'amma** refers to 'yesterday' in Gamo, Wolaitta and Gofa but it refers to 'night' in Dawuro. On the other hand, Dawuro uses **zino** for ' yesterday' while Wolaitta and Gamo use **omarsi / omari** to mean ' night' respectively. Dawuro uses **omarsa** for 'night'.

Another example of semantic incompatibility of cognates is attested with the word **demoo** which means ' forehead' in Gamo but 'eyebrow' in Wolaitta and Gofa. Dawuro also uses **demoo** for eyebrow. **ginde** ' palm' in Gamo means 'heel' in Dawuro and Wolaitta. On the other hand, Gamo has a different word, **tangille,** used to refer to ' heel'.

In the same manner, 'ankle of an animal' and 'ankle of a human being' are expressed by using separate words in Wolaitta and Dawuro. The word **k'inč'ifile** (Wolaitta) / **kinč'afile** (Dawuro) is used to refer to ankle of an animal and the expression **mešša mek'atta** is used to refer to 'ankle of a human being'. In contrast, in Gamo the two concepts are expressed by using a single word that is, **k'inč'file.**

Words used to stand for 'country, earth, people and mountain are incompatible across the dialects, as presented below.

gade	'earth (Wolaitta, Gamo)'
gadia	'people / country (Dawuro)'
deria	' mountain (Wolaitta, Dawuro)'
dere	'people/country (Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa)'
zuma	'mountain (Gamo)'

Moreover, there are cognate words which are taboo in one dialect but have a different non-taboo meaning in the others. These words can, obviously, create misunderstandings and ambiguity among members of the different dialects. The following are some examples.

1. **wooma**	' buy/ purchase (imperative) '	*Gofa*
	'Have a sexual intercourse (imperative)'	*Gamo*
2. **bogga bogga**	'rob (imperative)'	*Gamo*
	'work fast '	*Wolaitta*
	'Have a sexual intercourse'	*Dawuro and Gofa*
3. **awa**	' sun'	*Dawuro*
	'where '	*Gamo, Gofa, Wolaitta*
4. **s'ede**	' down ward'	*Gamo*
	'vagina	*Gofa*
5. **zin?a**	'sleep (imperative)	Gamo
	'Have a sexual intercourse (imperative)'	*Wolaitta*
6. **ičča**	'sleep (imperative)	*Wolaitta*
	'Have a sexual intercourse'	*Gofa*
7. **šonte**	'a cooking stick'	*Wolaitta*

The use of words like the above can cause a communication break down and cultural shock among the speakers of the different dialects.

5. Conclusive remarks

The dialects show variation about 20% of their vocabularies. In addition, as evidenced from the phonological systems and from the grammatical features like definiteness marking and in nominals and pronominal markers of verbs show structural divergence among the dialects. Words also vary in their meaning.

Concerning the degree of closeness among the Wolaitta, Dawuro, Gamo and Gofa, one can say that, Dawuro is more divergent from the others. This is attested in the mutual intelligibility tests and also from the structural comparison as well as semantic incompatibility of words.

A one way intelligibility is also attested between two dialects. Dawuros understand Wolaitta better than any other dialect and also share much more vocabulary items with Wolaitta than the others; however, the reverse is not true.

It is also attested that different tests exhibit different results concerning intelligibility among members of the four dialects. The result found from asking the informants seems quit exaggerating the actual variations. Considering only linguistic factors, one may assume that Wolaitta, Gamo, Dawuro and Gofa are so close to be viewed just as dialect variants as in the case of the dialects of Oromo spoken in different regions such as Wollega, Tullema, Shewa and so on, and as that of dialects of Amharic such as that of Gojjam, Wollo, Shewa etc. However, unlike the

situation with dialects of Amharic and dialects of Oromo, dialects of North Ometo, has no common name.

This paper has attempted to show that, the four dialects even though they share a large number of vocabularies; the speakers show low level of mutual intelligibility. This may be because of the variation in the phonological, grammatical systems and semantic incompatibility or variation that the cognate words across the dialects have developed. Besides, attitudes of the speakers towards each other's dialect may aggravate the situation. The four groups lack a common ethnic identity to share. Each group and its speech variant has rather a distinct name, that is, there is no common name that can serve as bondage among the varieties.

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Abbreviations and Symbols

ABS	Absolutive
ACC	Accusative
DF	Definite
FEM	Feminine
IND	Indefinite
MAS	Masculine
NOM	Nominative
PL	Plural

D	Voiced alveolar Implosive consonant