Notes on Copula Constructions in Hamar[1]

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1   Introduction

This paper deals with preliminary analysis of copula constructions in Hamar. The Hamar live in the plain lands of the semi-desert region of the rift valley in the south western corner of Ethiopia, in South Omo zone of the SNNPR (Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State). Their territory stretches from the lower Omo valley in the west across the rift valley of Chew Bahir in the east. While to the south their border coincides with the Kenyan border, to the north they are bordered by their closet kins – the Benna and the Aari.

The language is called Hamar - the name by which they are also known to outsiders. But the language is called by its speakers as *Hamar apo*, which means 'mouth of the Hamar'. The Hamar uses different names to refer to their neighbors. *Murso* for the Surmic Mursi, *Bume* for the Nilotic Nyangatom, *Muguji* for the Surmic Koegu, *Galab* for the Cushitic Danssenech, *Marale* or *Ulde* for the Cushitic Arbore.

The Hamar are semi pastoralists keeping cattle near the Omo valley. They mostly feed on milk and cow-blood. They take blood by letting arrow in the jugular vein of the cow. Then, they mix blood with fresh milk. This is supplemented by "kurkufa" which is made of corn or sorghum flour. Their subsistence can be characterized as a mixture of pastoralism (keeping cattle, goats and sheep) and shifting agriculture (planting sorghum, maize and beans). To an outsider, the Hamar appear to lead, an ageless, unchanging way of life since women wear skin clothing, and their men carry spears or guns, while

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[1]   This working paper is a work in progress on the grammar of Hamar.

established religions such as Islam and Christianity are noticeable only by their absence (Lydall, 1980:147).

According to Lydall (1976:393), the Hamar together with the Benna and Bashada, with whom they share their language, form a cultural unit; between these groups intermarriage is free, war is prohibited and most rituals and institutions are the same. Lydall suggested the name "Hamar cluster" to refer to the three groups as well as the Kara.

Recently, however, a mutual intelligibility test was conducted among the Hamar, Benna, Beshada and Kara groups coupled with a lexicostatistics comparison in order to determine the level of intelligibility and dialectal variation between them (Moges (a), forthcoming). The result of the study shows that while Hamar and Beshada are linguistically identical with nearly 100% lexical similarity, Hamar and Benna are found to be dialects of the same language with some 5% lexical variations, within the 300 items wordlist, between them. On the other hand, Hamar and Kara are found to be independent languages with an average of 60% cognate words and 46.66% spread count average percentage which is indicative of the fact that 60% of their basic vocabulary appears to have a common origin. Hence the study concludes that Hamar and Kara are not mutually intelligible but they are closely related languages.

Genetically Hamar is classified, with Aari, Dime and Kara, as a member of the South Omotic branch of the Omotic family in the Afro-Asiatic phylum (Fleming, 1976). Aari is the far northern member of the group spoken in the mountainous areas of Bako and Gazer. Dime is far to the west spoken up in the lower Omo valley neighboring to Nilo-Saharan Surmic languages such as Mursi and Bodi. Hamar and Kara are the southern member of the group situated in the lower Omo valley, not far from Lake Turkana.

Nevertheless, the genetic classification of the southern branch of Omotic, also known as Aroid languages, is far from settled and there have been debates going on in the last few decades. Currently there are different views on the genetic position of Ariod languages. Linguists such as Fleming (1974, 1976, 1988) and Tsuge (1996) maintain the view that Aroid languages belong to the Omotic family. Lamberti (1993) argue that Aroid languages must be classified as a separate branch of the Cushitic family. Whereas Zaboriski (2004) and Moges (2007) contend that Aroid languages must have a Nilo-Sharan origin. Bender (2000, 2003), in his extensive study of the Comparative Omotic

languages, reiterated that Ariod languages must have a non-Afro-Asiatic origin. Quite differently, Theil (2006) questions the classification of the whole family of Omotic under Afro-Asiatic and argues that the Omotic family as a whole should be treated as an independent language family since no convincing evidence has ever been presented to show that Omotic is indeed Afro-Asiatic (Moges (b), (forthcoming)).

2   Previous studies

Quite a lot has been done on the ethnographic aspect of the Hamar people. Particularly anthropologists Jean Lydall and Ivo Strecker have conducted an extensive fieldwork and published an enormous literature over the last 40 years. But sadly the linguistic literature has been scanty. The only descriptive study for decades was Lydall's (1976) article which was the first contribution made to our understanding of the structure of the Hamar language. Though Lydall's pioneering work on Hamar is a short grammatical sketch and many of the sections are too brief, for a long time it has been the only source on Hamar grammar. Later in 1987, a senior essay entitled "Hamar Phonology" was written by Mary Yohannes. This paper has two serious weaknesses. One is its inaccurate transcription of the data and the other is it is partly a duplication of Lydall's article. Another recent descriptive study was made by Getahun (1991) entitled "The Structure of Noun Phrase in Hamar" in which the author described the noun phrase structure of the language within the generative framework. Generally, from the descriptive linguistics point of view Hamar is among the barely described languages in Ethiopia.

Some comparative studies within Aroid languages and beyond have been done by Tsuge (1996) and Moges (2005, 2007), Moges (b) (forthcoming). The current contribution is a preliminary report on field work conducted recently on the Hamar language, which is part of an ongoing research.

3   Phonology

The following is a brief summary of the sound pattern of Hamar as a background to the discussion on the copula constructions of the language. Hamar has 24 consonant phonemes that include voiceless stops [**p, t, k, ʔ**], voiced stops [**b, d, g**] ejectives [**s'~t', tʃ', k'**] and implosives [**ɓ, ɗ**], having a four-way distinction in the stop series. Fricatives [**s, z, ʃ, h**], affricates [**tʃ, ʤ**],

nasals [**m** and **n**] liquids [**r** and **l**] and semi-vowels [**w** and **j**] are also part of the phonemic inventory of the language.

Our consonant phonemes are slightly different from Lydall's (1976: 402) phonemic chart in the following respects. (a) the velar implosive phoneme is recorded in Lydall's chart and not found in our data, (b) the palatal and velar nasals are recorded as phonemes in Lydall's chart but not found in our data; the velar nasal in fact occurs as an allophone of the alveolar nasal phoneme, (c) the glottal stop is a full-fledged phoneme in our analysis while it is a marginal consonant in her analysis, and (d) the alveolar affricate [**ts**] is a marginal consonant in our data and found only in two words out of the 400 lexicon.

Hamar has also a fairly complex vowel system with two sets of vowels that can be distinguished by [ATR] feature. Lydall (1976) recorded a ten-vowel system for Hamar; and Moges (2007:249) reconstructed a ten-vowel system for Proto-Aroid and states that "Proto-South-Omotic or Proto-Aroid must have had a ten-vowel system, which may be distinguished by the feature [ATR]".

It should be noted that the consonant and vowel systems of Hamar summarized above must be taken as a preliminary report on such a complex system that requires an in-depth analysis and we hope to report on this in the near future.

4   Some Notes on Copula Constructions in Hamar

This section provides a preliminary account of the description of copula construction in Hamar. A basic definition of copular constructions is given by Currnow (1999: 1) as follows:

A copula construction is defined as the most basic construction or constructions which a languages uses to encode the meanings of: (a) identity of two participants normally encoded as noun phrases in that language (for example, 'that man is my father', 'that woman is Mary'); and (b) group membership or classification using noun phrases (for example, 'that woman is a doctor', 'that man is a teacher').

Additionally, Curnow (1999: 3) notes that typologically there are four kinds of copula construction forming strategies. These are:

(a)   Verbal copula construction: the use of copula verb
(b)   Particle copula construction: the use of an additional particle

(c)   "Inflectional" copula construction: the copula complement is inflected

(d)   "Zero" copula construction: the simple juxtaposition of copula subject and copula complement

In what follows, we present discussion on the description of copula constructions in Hamar and the typological strategy the language employs.

4.1 Affirmative, Declarative

In the affirmative declarative, copula construction in Hamar is a non-verbal sentence. The copula subject of the setence appears first followed by the copula complement. However, the copula complement carries the declarative sentence marker **–ne**. There are no person agreement markers. The following are some examples:

1   (a)   **ʔinta**   **hamar-ne**
          I   Hamar-DECL
          'I am Hamar.'

    (b)   **ja**   **hamar-ne**
          you   Hamar-DECL
          'You (SG) are Hamar.'

    (c)   **kidi**   **hamar-ne**
          he   Hamar-DECL
          'He is Hamar.'

    (d)   **kodi**   **hamar-ne**
          she   Hamar-DECL
          'She is Hamar.'

    (e)   **wodi**   **hamar-ne**
          we   Hamar-DECL
          'We are Hamar.'

    (f)   **jesi**   **hamar-ne**
          you   Hamar-DECL
          'You (PL) are Hamar.'

(g) **kidi   hamar-ne**
they   Hamar-DECL
'They are Hamar.'

The paradigm provided above illustrates that the copula complement remains the same for the different grammatical persons.

More examples are provided below.

2   (a) **ʔak'a-no   gaari-ne**
tree-DEF   big-DECL
'The tree is big.'

(b) **ʔajka   ʔi-miʃa-ne**
Ayka   1SG-older sister-DECL
'Ayka is my older sister.'

4.2   Affirmative, Interrogative

In the affirmative interrogative, the copular construction once again occurs without a verb. In this case, the interrogative sentence marker **–u** is suffixed to the the copula complement. Note the following examples:

3   (a) **ʔinta   hamar-u**
I   Hamar-INT
'Am I Hamar?'

(b) **ja   hamar-u**
you   Hamar-INT
'Are you (SG) Hamar?'

(c) **kidi   hamar-u**
he   Hamar-INT
'Is he Hamar?'

(d) **kodi   hamar-u**
she   Hamar-INT
'Is she Hamar?'

(e) **wodi   hamar-u**

we   Hamar-INT

'Are we Hamar?'

(f) **jesi   hamar-u**

you   Hamar-INT

'Are you (PL) Hamar?'

(g) **kidi   hamar-u**

they   Hamar- INT

'Are they Hamar?'

Additional examples are provided below. As can be observed in (4a), the interrogative marker is realized as **–wu** when the word ends in a vowel.

4   (a) **ʔak'a-no   gaari-wu**

tree-DEF   big- INT

'Is the tree big?'

(b) **kidi   naas-u**

he   boy- INT

'Is he a boy?'

4.3 Negative, Declarative

In the negative declarative, the copula construction has a copula subject and copula complement without a verb. In this case, the negative suffix **–te** is added to the copula complement. Declarative sentence is not overtly marked in such constructions. Consider the following examples:

5   (a) **ʔinta   hamar-te**

I   Hamar-NEG

'I am not Hamar.'

(b) **ja   hamar-te**

you   Hamar-NEG

'You (SG) are not Hamar.'

(c) **kidi**   **hamar-te**

he   Hamar-NEG

'He is not Hamar.'

(d) **kodi**   **hamar-te**

she   Hamar-NEG

'She is not Hamar.'

(e) **wodi**   **hamar-te**

we   Hamar-NEG

'We are not Hamar.'

(f) **jesi**   **hamar-te**

you   Hamar-NEG

'You (PL) are not Hamar.'

(g) **kidi**   **hamar-te**

they   Hamar-NEG

'They are not Hamar.'

More examples are provided below.

6   (a) **zabo**   **k'awo**   **dabi-te**

lion   wild   animal-NEG

'Lion is not a wild animal.'

(b) **ʔak'a-no**   **gaari-te**

tree-DEF   big- NEG

'The tree is not big.'

4.4   Negative, Interrogative

In the negative interrogative, the copula construction is once formed with the juxtaposition of the copula subject and copula complement. The negative marker **–ta** and the interrogative sentence marker **–u** are added to the copula complement. The negative suffix in this case appears as **–ta** and the interrogative marker is realized as **–ju** due to the fact that the previously occurring suffix ends in a vowel.

7 (a) **ʔinta** **hamar-ta-ju**
    I   Hamar-NEG-INT
    'Am not I Hamar?'

  (b) **ja**   **hamar-ta-ju**
    you   Hamar-NEG-INT
    'Are not you (SG) Hamar?'

  (c) **kidi** **hamar-ta-ju**
    he   Hamar-NEG-INT
    'Is not he Hamar?'

  (d) **kodi** **hamar-ta-ju**
    she   Hamar-NEG-INT
    'Is not she Hamar?'

  (e) **wodi** **hamar-ta-ju**
    we   Hamar-NEG-INT
    'Are not we Hamar?'

  (f) **jesi** **hamar-ta-ju**
    You   Hamar-NEG-INT
    'Are not you (PL) Hamar?'

  (g) **kidi** **hamar-ta-ju**
    they   Hamar-NEG-INT
    'Are not they Hamar?'

Additional examples are given below.

8 (a) **ʔak'a-no** **gaari-ta-ju**
    tree-DEF big- NEG-INT
    'Is not the tree big?'

  (b) **ʔajka** **ʔi-miʃa-ta-ju**
    Ayka   1SG-older sister- NEG-INT
    'Is not Ayka my older sister?'

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5   Summary

In Hamar, as in many Omotic languages, copular constructions are expressed through non-verbal sentences. There are no verbs in the sentences. It can, therefore, be concluded that that Hamar typologically employs the 'zero' verb copula strategy. Yet, it is worth noting that the sentence type and negation marker are suffixed to the copular complement. Since sentence type and negation markers are not typical inflectional categories, we refrain from concluding that the language employs 'inflectional' copula constructions.

Structurally, the copula subject occurs first followed by the copula complement. The copula complement however is made to carry sentence type and negation markers. In the affirmative declarative and the affirmative interrogative, the sentence type markers **–ne** and **–u** are suffixed to the copula complement respectively. On the other hand, in the negative copula constructions, the negative suffix **–te/ta** is added to the complement. Unlike the declarative, the interrogative additionally adds the interrogative suffix **–(j)u**.

List of Abbreviations

1	First person
DECL	Declarative
INT	Interrogative
NEG	Negation
PL	Plural
SG	Singular

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