Some Comparative Phonology and Morphology of Kambata and Oromo

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Abstract

Comparative linguistics is a study which mainly focuses on comparing languages with a view of establishing their relatedness. This article presents some comparative analysis of studies on the phonological and morphological systems of Cushitic languages namely; Kambata and Oromo. Kambata is under Highland Land East Cushitic and Oromo is under Lowland East Cushitic. Comparative study of the Cushitic languages has been done fairly and this necessitated the study to be undertaken to determine the relatedness of the two Cushitic languages. The proposed study was guided by two objectives; to establish whether the languages are related and to discuss some forms and differences of linguistic elements in the languages. The data in this study was gathered from two natives from each language and the secondary data collected on the two languages. The comparative method then was involved in data analysis. The majority of the comparison is based on the secondary data collected on the respective languages from earlier studies on the languages. Distinctive features of the languages are indicated based on the findings. Correspondingly, different phonological and morphological aspects that make the languages identical or different are valued in the paper. The study established that the languages are related. It is observed that there are extraordinary similarities in phonemic and morphemic inventories. Based on the study objectives, it was recommended that Study of the Cushitic language should be done to clearly show their degree of relatedness.

Key words: Linguistics, Phonology, Morphology, Cushitic, Highland

1. Introduction

A number of languages are related to one another and go back to a common origin. Afro-asiatic, otherwise known as Hamito-semetic, is a linguistic super-family consisting of language families including Berber, Chadic, Ancient Egyptian, Semitic, Omotic and Cushitic (Wolff, 2017).

The history of Cushitic studies goes back to Hiob Ludolf's study of Oromo in the seventeenth century. Bruce's records of Agew are from the studies of the end of eighteenth century. From the first half of the nineteenth century, Oromo studies by J.L Krampt and C. Turschak is the other Cushitic study. Leo Reinisch must be considered as a creator of Cushitic linguistics for a real progress he made in identification and classification of Cushitic languages (Zaborski, 1976:72 in Bender et al., 1976).

After Reinish, who made a single distinction between high and low Cushitic, a number of linguists modified their study and developed it into a more sensible one. Among those are: Moreno, Bryan, Plazikowky, Tucker and Bryan and Greenberg. These studies led people to the timely classification of Cushitic family into North Cushitic (Beja), Central Cushitic (Agew), South Cushitic and East Cushitic which is sub-classified into Highland East Cushitic (Burji-Sidama),Worizoid and Lowland East Cushitic. The sub-family Lowland East Cushitic is further classified into Afar-Saho, Oromoid, Arbore Dasenech, Baiso and Somaloid.

Even though much work was done on the identification and classification of Cushitic language family, there are no sufficient studies on the comparative aspect. Regarding this, Andrzej, cited in Bender (1976:73) says, "a comparison and reconstruction within the particular groups is an extremely preliminary step as we lack not only a comparative study of the whole of Cushitic'. In using the comparative method we contrast forms of two or more related languages to determine their precise relationship. The purpose of this article is thus, to show some phonological and morphological features that make Kambata and Oromo identical.

Within the Cushitic branch of the Afro-Asiatic language phylum, Kambaata belongs to the Highland East Cushitic (HEC) language group. It is spoken in the South of Ethiopia in an area approximately 300 km south-west of the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa in the Kambaata Xambaaro Zone. Afan Oromo is one of the languages of the Lowland East Cushitic within the Cushitic family of the Afro-Asiatic phylum (Gragg 1982, Baye 1986, Mi'eessaa and Robbin 2009). It is the first language in terms of number of speakers from Cushitic languages (Bender and others, 2003). The

language is mainly spoken in Oromia regional state of Ethiopia. Oromia is the largest region in Ethiopia in terms of land mass and population. It occupies approximately 34 per cent of the land in Ethiopia and accounts for 37 per cent of the population. It is one of the major Ethiopian languages.

Ancient East Cushitic is sub-classified into Highland Land East Cushitic and Lowland East Cushitic (Fleming, 1976). Kambata is under Highland Land East Cushitic and Oromo is under Lowland East Cushitic. The comparison is between two East Cushitic languages; one from High and the other from Low East Cushitic group. The first part of the paper discusses the phonological comparison and the second part presents the morphological comparison. Finally the paper summarizes what was evidenced through the examples.

2. Phonological Comparison

In this section we shall consider some basic phonological similarities and differences in Oromo and Kambata. The majority of the comparison is based on the secondary data collected on the respective languages and what we shall do is bringing close those data and adding some data gathered from informants and compare the languages. The attempt is to show how closer the languages are or how far apart the languages are. However, since the scope of the paper won't let us go further details, this work won't give all the details of the languages. But I hope that it gives at least a highlight to what extent the languages are related.

According to Margaret (1985) and Wako (1981), both Oromo and Kambata have almost the same number of consonant phonemes. Kamabata has 23 consonant phonemes while Oromo has 24 consonant phonemes: 9 stops, 4 fricatives, 3 palatals, 3 nasals, 1 lateral, 1 flap and 2 semi vowels are the consonant phonemes of the language. Kambata has one less consonant phoneme to Oromo in that it does not have the alveolar implosive sound /ɗ/ which is common in Oromo. Yet Kambata does not have palatal affricate sound /dʒ/, but it does exist in Oromo. On the other hand, Oromo does not have voiced velar fricative /z/ while it exists in Kambata.

2.1 The Vowel Phonemes

In both Kambata and Oromo (according to the same source for consonants), there are five basic vowels: two front vowels / ɪ, e/, two back vowels /ʊ, o/ and one central vowel /a/. All vowels in both languages occur both short and long. The contrast between the short and long vowels in the same environment causes meaning change. Thus, vowel length is phonemic in both Kambata and Oromo. Hence, based on this evidence, it is worth to come to the conclusion that both languages have ten vowel phonemes at phonemic level. To enrich the argument with evidence we shall consider few examples from both languages.

2.2 consonant phonemes

Kamabata

(1) /gobʊ/'tosew'/go:bʊ/'neck'/kʼelʊ/'to win'/kʼe:lʊ/'snail' Oromo
(2) /lafa/'earth'/la:fa:/'soft'/lola/'conflict'/lola:/'flood'

Based on the above examples, we can say that Kambata and Oromo are quite close to each other though we do not dare to say they are identical. Even though they share common features in the case of vowel phonemes, there are other aspects that keep the languages distinct and independent languages. We shall see this point through the next sections of the article.

2.3 Consonant Clusters

Consonant clusters are possible only in the medial position in Kmbata. There are neither initial nor final clusters of consonants in the language. Even in the medal position, clusters of three consonants are not allowed. Consider the following examples.

(3) /darʃanta/'inflation'/inkʼʊta/'tooth'/dimbanʧʊ/'drunkard'/manʧʊ/'man'

In the same way, Oromo doesn't allow initial and final consonant clusters. Consonant clusters occur only in medial positions and the number of consonants forming a cluster is limited to two (Wako, 1981:34). In this respect, Oromo is similar to Kambata for neither initial nor final consonant clusters are found in Oromo. Consider the following examples:

(4) /sirba/'song/dance'/jilba/'knee'/ʔilma/'son'/korma/'bull'

However, the consonant used in the formation of cluster is language specific. There exist differences between the two languages in the formation of the clusters. For example, in Oromo /h/ and /w/ do not form clusters.

2.4 *Gemination*

According to Margaret (1985:44) all consonants except the glottal stop /ʔ/ and /h/ geminate in Kambata. Similar to the occurrence of consonant clusters, germination is possible only word medially in the language. The same is true for Oromo in that except the stated two consonants /ʔ/ and /h/ all consonants occur as geminates (Wako, 1981). But Tilahun (2018), identifies /ʔ/ as a geminate consonant citing one example word; /ʔoʔʔa/ 'heat' even though he agreed on /h/ as non-geminate consonant in Oromo. The occurrence of gemination may be because of its occurrence. The consonant sound /h/ occurs only in word initial position in Oromo. The difference between the short and the geminated form is significant in influencing the meaning of words in both languages. So, gemination is phonemic in Oromo and Kambata. The following are the examples that help us justify the argument.

Kambata

(5) /bʊlʊ/'white'/bʊllʊ/'ugly'/worʊ/'to add'/worrʊ/'snake'/agana/'moon'/aganna/'story Oromo
(6) /bala:/'accident'/balla:/'blind'/baru:/'to learn'/barru:/'palm'/ʧʼabbi:/'snow'/ʧʼabi:/'let you break'

As was discussed earlier, vowels in Kambata and Oromo occur both short and long. The contrast between the two forms in the same environment brings meaning change. Vowel length is phonemic in both Kambata and Oromo. However, the sequences of two different vowels are not allowed in both languages. If different vowels occur within a word, the glottal stop is inserted to break impermissible sequences of vowels in the case of Oromo. The same is true for more than two identical vowels within a single word. The following examples are from Oromo.

(7) /reʔee/'goat'/rarraʔe/'suspended'/waaʔee/'about'

The other point about Oromo is that words do not begin with vowels (Wako, 1981; Tilahun 2018). This makes Oromo different from Kambata. However, since we can observe some words that begin with vowels when we discuss morphological comparison, this argument requires more strong evidence or it needs serious internal reconstruction study.

In the previous sub-section of the article, we discussed at some phonological relations of Kambata and Oromno. In doing so, we extracted some similarities and differences between the languages based on the work done on the languages. In the following section, we shall make a progress into further relation between the languages. We shall make some morphological comparison of Kambata and Oromo. Thus, what we do is looking briefly into noun morphology in general and noun inflection in particular. We shall also account for other areas of morphology.

3.   *Morphological Comparison*
3.1 *Noun Inflection*

Gender is of two types for both Kambata and Oromo: masculine and feminine. Nouns in the languages are classified either as masculine or feminine on the basis of sex, age, weight and the like (Shelleme, 1989; Wako 1981). Animate nouns of male sex and inanimate nouns which are big in size or heavy in weight are treated as masculine, whereas animate nouns of female sex and inanimate nouns which are small in size or light in weight are treated as feminine. This is not a phenomenon common only to the languages under consideration. It also appears in some other languages of the world. Although Kambata and Oromo exhibit similarity in distinguishing gender, there exist differences between the two languages in making gender. In Kambata, masculine is marked by a zero morpheme {ø} whereas feminine is expressed by the suffix {-ta}. In Oromo, masculine is marked by the morpheme {-ssa} while feminine is marked by {-tti}. Both languages are similar in making feminine gender. This may be because {-t-} is a proto feminine marker in Afro-asiatic languages in general. The following are some example words indicating gender.

Kambata

(8) /man-ʧʊ/'man'/man-ʧʊ-ta/'woman'/noba-ʧʧʊ/'old man'/noba-ʧʧʊ-ta/'old woman'/antʼabe-ʧʧʊ/'cock'/antʼabe-ʧʧʊ-ta/'hen'/hol-ʧʊ/'male sheep'/hol-ʧʊ-ta/'female sheep' Oromo
(9) /ʔobbole:-ssa/'brother'/ʔobbole:-tti:/'sister'/ʤalde:-ssa/'male monkey'/ʤalde:-tti:/'female monkey'/ʤa:r-sa/'old man'/ ʤa:r-tti:/'old woman'

In some cases Kambata and Oromo indicate gender by independent lexical items. The following are some example words.

Kambata

(10) /adabo/ 'boy'/meseleta/'girl'/bara/'ox'/saʔa/'cow'/anna/'father'/amata/'mother'/botʊ/'bull'/sʊlʊmata/'heifer'

Oromo

(11) /ɗiːra/ˈmale'/dʊrba/ˈgirl'/kʼotijjoː/ˈox'/ saʔatiː/ˈcow'/ʔabbaː/ˈfather'/haːɗa/ˈmother'/dʒibitʃʃa/ˈbull'/raːda/ˈheifer'

From the above examples we can understand that both languages exhibit the same properties except having different root words or lexical items.

3.2 Number

In Kambata, there are the singulative, the plural and the collective forms of the noun (Leslau, 1952:351). In Oromo, however, we do not find singulative except the other two forms of nouns. Ferguson (1976), states that the singulative feature is the distinctive feature of all Ethiopian languages or it is the feature of Afro-asiatic languages in general. Regarding this Tosco (1988) explains that in any case if this is true what we can say here is Kambata retained the singulative feature while Oromo lost it.

Yet in Kambata, there is a very close relationship between gender and number. Except a few derived plural nouns, all masculine nouns are made feminine in the plural and therefore they take the feminine marker {-ta}. This property of Kambata is quite opposite from Oromo. The plural nouns are masculine in Oromo except when we want them for other semantic purpose.

3.2.1 Singulative in Kambata

Singulative in Kambata is expressed by {-tʃtʃʊ} after vowels and /-tʃʊ} after other sonorants. Consider the following examples taken from Shallama (1989).

Root noun Singulative Gloss

(12) /wele//wele-tʃtʃʊ/ˈsaddle'/wori//wori-tʃtʃʊ/ˈsnake'/zoːbe//zoːbe-tʃtʃʊ/ˈlion'/fele//fele-tʃtʃʊ/ˈgoat'/man//man-tʃʊ/ˈman'/hol//hol-tʃʊ/ˈsheep'

3.2.2 The plural

Plural is marked by {-aka-ta} in Kambata. As we have stated above, plurals are treated as feminine in Kambata and in the morpheme sequence {-aka-ta}, the first morpheme {-aka-} is the plural marker and {-ta} is the feminine marker. When we come to Oromo, there are ways of marking plural nouns and among which {-ota/oːta} is more frequent. Both languages have ways of forming plural, but the way they form the plural is different. That is in Kambata, plurals are considered feminine while it is not the case in Oromo. Yet the morphemes are also different. They have differences in marking plural. Consider the following examples:

Kambata Singular Plural Gloss

(13) /lokka-ta//lokka-aka-ta/ˈlegs'/ama-ta//ama-aka-ta/ˈmothes'/kʼʊpʼa-ta//kʼʊpʼa-aka-ta/ˈeggs'/oda-ta//oda-aka-ta/ˈgoods'Oromo

Singular Plural Gloss

(14) /nama//nam-oːta/ˈmen'/mana//man-oːta'houses'/sanga//sang-oːta/ˈoxen'/harre//harr-oːta/ˈdonkeys'

In addition to the above points, we can also observe similarities between the languages in that in both of them singular noun is marked by zero morpheme {ø} as we can deduce from the above examples. In the same way, {-a-ta}, {-u} and, etc. are plural markers in Kambata while {-lee} and {-een} are plural markers in Oromo. Similarly suppleteve plural formation is common in Kambata while there is suppletive plural formation in Oromo. The following example words from the languages under study.

Kambata Singular Plural

(15) /saʔa/ˈcow'/lalu/ˈcows'/adabo/ˈboy'/oːsuta/ˈboys'

On the other hand, some nouns that take quantifiers do not take plural marker in both Oromo and Kambata. The following are some examples.

Kambata

Quantifier Noun Gloss

(16) /mato//bora/ˈone ox'/saso//bora/ˈthree oxen' Oromo
(17) Quantifier Noun Gloss
(18) /tokko/ˈnama''one man'/kuɗan/ˈnama''ten men'

According to Ferguson (1976) singular nouns with plural number is the property of Ethiopian languages, but Tosco (1988) says it is the feature of Afro-asiatic languages. Whatever the arguments by the two scholars are, what we can observe here is that the two languages preserved the feature of their ancestor language.

3.3 Case
3.3.1 Nominative Case

Nominative case is marked morphologically by the suffix {-n} for both masculine and feminine gender in Oromo (Baye, 1981). However by nominative case is marked by the suffix {-u} and {-i} for masculine and feminine gender respectively in Kambata, even though the nominative case is marked morphologically in both languages, kambata makes gender distinction while Oromo doesn't make gender distinction. On the other hand, {-i} is also nominative marker in Oromo when the words end with clusters of consonants, yet it doesn't show any gender distinction.

3.3.2 Accusative Case

The accusative or else absolute form is marked morphologically in both Kambata and Oromo. The accusative is the absolute or citation form of the noun. The following are the examples.
Kambata
(19) gɪtʃamʊ adabo wakʹaro Gichamu boy (Acc.) hit 'Gichamu hit a boy' Oromo
(20) tʃʹaːla-n sareː rʊkʊte Chala (Nom.) dog hit 'Chala hit a dog'

3.3.3 Dative Case

The dative case which is the benefactor of the action is marked morphologically by the suffixes {-ha} anf {-f} in Kambata and Oromo respectively. In both languages, the dative do not distinguish between genders. This is another similarity the languages exhibit. As we have seen earlier, the suffixes are different except the consonant parts of the suffixes which are related in manner. The following examples can strengthen our argument.

Kambata

(21) man-tʃ-ʊ adabɪ-ha gɪzza asso Man sg. Nom.boy-Dat. Money gave'A man gave the money to a boy' Oromo
(22) ɪnnɪ faradaː-fmarga kenne he horse-Dat. grass gave'He gave grass to the horse'

3.3.4 The Instrumental Case

The instrumental case in both languages are marked morphologically by the suffixes {-ni} for Kambata and {-ɗaan} or {-n} for Oromo. In most cases since {-ɗaa-} from {-ɗaan} is deleted in Oromo, it is better to assume that both languages mark instrumental case in the same way with almost the same morpheme. The other assumption we can make here is as Oromo does, Kambata also undergoes the same morphological/phonological process. Take the following examples in to account.

Kambata

(23) ɪse woʃi-tʃtʃ -ʊ bɪtʹɪ-nɪ wokʹartoʔʊ She-dog-sing. Stick-inst.-hit'She hit a dog with a stick Oromo
(24) ɪʃee-n saree ʊlee-ɗaan(-n) rʊkʊte She-Nom.-dog-stick- Nom.-hit 'She hit a dog with a stick.'

4. Conclusion

The languages on which the comparison is done (kambata and Oromo) can be grouped under the same language family as they share some phonology and morphology. This is evidenced through the examples shown in the paper. One can also say that they are not dialects of the same language; they are independent languages for there are phonological and morphological differences between the two languages. Furthermore, there are clues from the paper that indicate they are of from different sub-families of Cushitic languages. The study established that the languages under study are typologically related. The study makes the following recommendations based on the findings: an in-depth study is required on neighboring languages in terms morphological structures which could look at and compare grammatical constructions, word order or types of affixations for creating words or word forms to check the extent of the relatedness of them. In addition, the comparative study of other seemingly related languages in terms of a large percentage of common words to establish their origin which may lead to creation of new language families.

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