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The Ideophones in Gawwada*

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Gawwada is a member of the Dullay dialect cluster (East Cushitic) spoken in south-west Ethiopia. This paper presents a non-exhaustive list of Gawwada ideophones, whose phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics are discussed and compared with the situation in other Cushitic and African languages in general. A number of features setting the ideophones apart from other words in the language are identified (e.g., violation of the usual constraints on word formation, extensive use of reduplication, restriction to occurrence with only two verbs). In the end, ideophones are recognized as an autonomous word class, in spite of the fact that they share a number of features with nouns.

0. On the Gawwada Language and People

Gawwada ([*gaw:áda*]) is part of the so-called Dullay dialect cluster and is spoken in south-western Ethiopia. According to current classifications, Dullay is a direct offshoot of East Cushitic, although Hayward (1978) has substantiated a proposal, originally made by Ehret (1974; 1976), claiming that Dullay forms a genetic subgrouping within East Cushitic together with the isolated (and nowadays extinct or nearly so) Yaaku language of the Mount Kenya area. I generally accept Hayward's arguments and propose the name "Transversal Southern Lowland East Cushitic" to describe the group defined by Dullay and Yaaku (Tosco 2000).

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An overview of the morphology of Gawwada appears in Tosco (forthcoming); the interested reader may consult Amborn, Minker and Sasse (1980) for an excellent coverage of the grammar of Dullay.

Transcription is phonological and follows the I.P.A. conventions, except for /š/ = I.P.A. [ʃ] and /c'/ = I.P.A. [tʃ']. The following abbreviations are used:

CAUS	causative extension	PST	past tense
DEP	dependent mood	S	singular
DET	determiner	SC	subject clitic
FOC	focus marker	1	first person
IDEOPH	ideophone	2	second person
IMPV	imperative mood	3	third person
LINK	linker	=	clitic boundary
M	masculine	:	morpheme boundary

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Within Dullay one may recognise a western and an eastern group of dialects. The former basically consists of Ts'amakko and Gawwada, and geographically spans the two banks of the Weyt'o river. The Eastern dialects occupy the highlands to the east and north of Gawwada; Harso, Dobaze, and the other dialects researched by Amborn, Minker, and Sasse (1980) are representative of the Eastern group. Inter-comprehensibility between the eastern and western groups is high, and Dullay should probably be regarded as a dialect chain; Gawwada speakers have no trouble speaking with Ts'amakko, while they claim to have some problems understanding the Eastern varieties.

The Dullay-speakers have no overall term for themselves. At least three terms have been used in scientific literature: "Werizoid" by Bender (1971:187) and Black (1976); "Qawko" by Hayward (1978), from the term for "man" in all dialects (Gawwada *qáw'ho*); and "Dullay" by Amborn, Minker and Sasse (1980), from the name of the river known in Amharic as Weyt'o, and which is perhaps the most salient geographic feature of the area. This last term, Dullay, has gained wider acceptance and will be retained here, although it must be stressed that none of these denominations bears any meaning to the speakers themselves.

In this article, "Gawwada" is used for the dialect spoken in the town of Gawwada and in the neighbouring villages. The town lies approximately 40 km (one hour drive) west of Konso, and 12 km north of the main road leading from Konso to Jinka and the Omo valley.

"Gawwada" is nowadays used in Ethiopia as a general term for all the Dullay-speaking groups except the Ts'amakko, who live on the western bank of the Weyt'o river. Although linguistically unwarranted, the division of the Dullay-speakers between "Gawwada" and Ts'amakko well reflects the cultural and economic rift between the inhabitants of the highlands, with their economy centred around agriculture, and the Ts'amakko – pastoralists who are allied to the Omotic-speaking Hamar and Banna, from whom they have been heavily influenced.

The practice of labelling all the Dullay-speakers except the Ts'amakko as "Gawwada" is reflected, e.g., in the 1994 Ethiopian Census (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1998, table 2), according to which there were 33,971 ethnic "Gawwada", to which one can add 9,702 Ts'amakko, bringing the total number of the Dullay to more than 43,000.

1. Identifying the Gawwada Ideophones as a Word Class

What is an ideophone? Trask (1993:131-132) defines ideophones as "a distinct class of words [...] which typically express either distinctive sounds or visually distinctive types of action. In languages that have them, ideophones are usually as rigidly conventional in form as other words, although they may sometimes exhibit exceptional phonological characteristics, such as segments not otherwise attested." Much earlier, Doke (1935:118) had offered the following definition of Bantu ideophones: "A vivid representation of an idea in sound. A word, often onomatopoeic, which describes a predicate, qualificative or adverb in respect to manner, colour, sound, smell, action, state or intensity."

As regards their semantics, Gawwada (and Cushitic on the whole) ideophones agree well with both Trask's and Doke's definitions, although they are definitely nominal, rather than verbal. On the other hand, it is well known that ideophones do not conform to a single universal criterion, or list of criteria, and that in general "the features of ideophones are not unique, or even qualitatively different from those possessed by other word categories. *No feature is unique to ideophones*" (Childs 1994:178; emphasis ours). Also, identifying the ideophones may be a problem because they are very similar to onomatopoeias, but, as Ku-

lemeka (1993:11) has put it, “[w]hile iconic or onomatopoeic forms are certainly a part of ideophones, they make up a very small part of the study of the phenomenon”.

Although our list (s. Appendix) is still far from complete, even a cursory analysis of Gawwada recorded conversations, tales, etc., bears evidence to the fact that ideophones are not so common in Gawwada (nor generally in Cushitic) as they are in many other African languages (cf. Childs 1994:179). As anticipated, the most important feature distinguishing Cushitic ideophones from their counterparts in other language families is undoubtedly the fact that in Cushitic languages ideophones are nominal in character.

The following sections present a few criteria identifying the ideophones in Gawwada, and they will show that ideophones are more or less “normal words” (cf. Newman 2001 for Hausa) – although it has not been possible so far to fit them into any major word class, and it is better to think of them as part of an autonomous class. In most African languages ideophones “are closely linked with verbs” (Childs 1994:181), but in Cushitic they are more nominal in character. This is particularly true of a language such as Somali whereby ideophones, which are all feminine nouns, may sometimes be determined through an article or another “determiner”, or may be the basis of typical derivational processes (on the other hand, unlike prototypical nouns, they cannot be pluralized or numbered, etc.; cf. Cabdulqaadir – Tosco 1998 for an overview). The situation is not so clear in Gawwada, but on the whole, ideophones behave like nouns in a number of ways, e.g., they may be focalized (with =*kka/ k=*) just as nouns and NPs; they occur in the same slot in the sentence of an NP – for example, either before a subject clitic or incorporated into a following verbal form, and therefore following a subject clitic immediately after a verbal form, which reinforces the impression that the ideophone is the syntactic object of the verb ‘to say’. On the other hand, unlike nouns, ideophones never appear as subjects, and their morphonology is strikingly different.

2. Phonology and Morphology

Unlike ideophones in many African languages (cf. Childs 1994), Gawwada ideophones use the same phonemes found in other “normal” words of the language; they mainly differ in their phonotactics.

- a. Gawwada nouns are always vowel-ending (the final vowel can be interpreted as a frozen gender marker). Likewise, most other Gawwada words are vowel-ending; the exceptions are: 1. the numerals; 2. a few verbal forms (among them the imperative singular positive); 3. the ideophones; the latter are *always* consonant-ending (___C#).
- b. All syllable types in Gawwada can be defined by the formula: CV(V)(C), which specifies the following syllables: CV, CVV, CVC, and CVVC. In other words, syllables always begin with one and only one consonant, and may end either with a single (short or long) vowel or a single consonant. Ideophones violate this constraint, insofar as the final consonant of an ideophone may be geminated, thereby creating a __CaCa# syllable, otherwise impossible in Gawwada. Final gemination occurs with the fricatives /s/ and /ħ/, the liquid /l/ and the rhotic /r/, but also with the nasal stop /m/ and the oral stop /p/:

/s/: no. 15. *lúss*

/r/: no. 27. *túrr*

/ħ/: no. 13. *lóħħ*, no. 26. *šóħħ*, no. 31. *wáħħ*

/m/: no. 6. *hámm*

/l/: no. 9. *kíll*, no. 10. *k’íll*

/p/: no. 12. *lípp*, no. 33. *xápp*

All in all, final gemination is attested in 10 out of 34 ideophones, 29 % of the total.

- c. While nouns and most words are always at least bi-syllabic, many ideophones are monosyllabic. This occurs in 17 out of 34 ideophones in our corpus (50 %). Only three ideophones with more than two syllables were recorded: no. 4. *goroŋoró?*, no. 5. *gingiri?*, no. 8. *ħaašawšáw*.
- d. A good portion of the bi-syllabic ideophones involve either total or partial reduplication, which is, of course, a well-known feature of ideophones (cf. Childs 1994:186), and Gawwada is no exception. Reduplication is also known in other domains of Gawwada grammar: it functions as a derivational device by verbs and helps form the plural of a class of nouns; but in all these cases, reduplication is partial and minimally restricted to a single segment, e.g., the last consonant of the stem in the plural. In the case of the ideophones, however, reduplication may be complete:

$$C\alpha V\beta C\gamma \rightarrow C\alpha V\beta C\gamma C\alpha V\beta C\gamma$$

Examples are no. 2. *doqdóq*, no. 7. *hofhóf*, and no. 21. *qašqáš*.

Complete reduplication of the second syllable only is found in no. 8. *ħaašawšáw*.

Partial reduplication involves the repetition of the nucleus of the first syllable (i.e., the onset is excluded):

$$C\alpha V\beta C\gamma \rightarrow C\alpha V\beta C\gamma V\beta C\gamma$$

Partial reduplication is found in no. 28. *t'osóŋ* and no. 34. *xapáp*.

Reduplication, as described above, is an *obligatory* feature of many ideophones. A different issue, however, is the *facultative repetition* of an ideophone with expressive purposes. This does not occur very often in my data; only no. 3. *gargác'* is usually repeated.

- e. Total vowel harmony, in the form of identity in the quality of all the vowels, affects bi- and pluri-syllabic ideophones, which have, therefore, the shape $XC\alpha V\alpha C(C)V\alpha C$ (in which X represents any syllable and may also be null. An incomplete list for the word shape $CV\alpha CV\alpha C$ includes: no. 18. *palág*, no. 19. *poróħ*, no. 22. *qodóq*, and no. 28. *t'osóŋ*. A couple of ideophones with the shape $CV\alpha CCV\alpha C$ are no. 3. *gargác'*, and no. 25. *šim-bír*. The same phenomenon also occurs in the three plurisyllabic ideophones.

Vowel harmony is only violated in two cases, which share a $CuCaC$ pattern (and in both the final C is /ʔ/): no. 14. *lumá?* and no. 20. *puká?*.

Among the vowels, /e/ is remarkably rare, being found only in no. 17. *nég*, and no. 24. *šemm*. The other four vowel qualities of Gawwada are fairly well represented, with the mid vowel /o/ and the low vowel /a/ dominating (ten items each), and the high vowels /i/ and /u/ occurring 6 and 4 times respectively.

- f. While nouns are always at least bi-morphemic (being made up of at least a stem and a terminal vowel, often preceded in turn by a singulative marker), ideophones are unanalyzable units, i.e., monomorphemic. This is a very common feature of ideophones all over the world (Childs 1994:185).

3. Syntax

As is generally the case with languages from the Horn (cf. Ferguson 1970), ideophones are restricted to use with the verb *páy* 'to say' in intransitive sentences. The causative form *páas* 'to make say' is used in transitive sentences, while in other regional languages, such as Somali, the verb 'to give' is found in this context. Moreover, ideophones can nei-

ther function as heads, nor can they modify nouns, thus behaving like their counterparts in other languages (cf. Childs 1994:181).

- a. The simplest possible context in which one may find an ideophone is in association with the imperative (either singular or plural) of the verb *páy* 'to say':

- | | | | |
|----|---------------|------------|-------------|
| 1. | <i>qafqáf</i> | <i>páy</i> | 'get lost!' |
| | IDEOPH | say.IMPV.S | |

- b. Whenever a tensed verbal form is used, and a subject is present, the ideophone may either occur unincorporated (no. 2., no. 3., no. 4.), or be incorporated within the verbal form (no. 5.); incorporation is shown by the fact that the subject clitic, which always immediately precedes the verbal form and may only be separated from it by an object clitic, is found in this case before the ideophone, which in turn immediately precedes the verbal form:

- | | | | |
|----|--------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 2. | <i>ǎndē c'óq</i> | <i>i=páyí</i> | 'water dripped down' |
| | water DIEOPH | 3.SC=say.PST.3M | |
| 3. | <i>áno lúss</i> | <i>an=páyí</i> | 'I went in swiftly' |
| | I IDEOPH | 1.SC=say.PST.1S | |
| 4. | <i>áno kill</i> | <i>an=páyí</i> | 'I shut it (past)' |
| | I IDEOPH | 1.SC=say.PST.1S | |
| 5. | <i>áno náʔo=na</i> | <i>an=c'óq páasí</i> | 'I stuck a finger into Na'o's eye' |
| | I N.=to | 1.SC=IDEOPH say.CAUS.PST.1S | |

(note the different meaning of *c'óq* in no. 2. and no. 5.).

In a very few cases, ideophones occur with the nominal focus marker, whose shape is *=kka* (enclitic) or *k=* (proclitic):

- | | | |
|----|--|----------------------------------|
| 6. | <i>qafqáf</i> | <i>k=an=ho=páasí</i> |
| | IDEOPH | FOC=1.SC=you.S.M=say.CAUS.PST.1S |
| | 'I chased you away' (lit., 'I made you go away') | |

- c. The causative *páas* is normally used in transitive sentences:

- | | | | | |
|----|--|-------------------|-------------|----------------------|
| 7. | <i>áno</i> | <i>mangahé=si</i> | <i>kill</i> | <i>an=páasí</i> |
| | I | door=DET | IDEOPH | 3.SM=say.CAUS.PST.3M |
| | 'I shut (past) the door' (cf. also no. 6. above) | | | |

But when the agent is non-human, it can be downgraded to a postpositional phrase; in this case, the ideophone occurs with the verb *páy*:

- | | | | | |
|----|--|--------------------|-------------|-----------------|
| 8. | <i>mangahé</i> | <i>urúure=ttáy</i> | <i>kill</i> | <i>i=páyí</i> |
| | door | wind=with | IDEOPH | 3.SM=say.PST.3M |
| | 'the wind shut the door' (lit., 'the door was shut by the wind') | | | |

d. Ideophones may be used in the usual coordinating construction of Gawwada, which involves the use of the linker =*pa* after the verb of the first clause, followed by a second clause whose verb appears in a “dependent” mood:

- | | | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|---------------|
| 9. <i>gawaʃgó</i> | <i>palág</i> | <i>k=i=páyí=pa</i> | <i>yágamú</i> |
| lightning | IDEOPH | FOC=3.SM=say.PST.3M=LINK | go-in.DEP.3M |
| ‘the lightning came down flashing’ | | | |

4. Semantics

As in other Cushitic languages (cf. Cabdulqaadir – Tosco 1998 for Somali), Gawwada ideophones cover a narrower range of meanings than their equivalents in other African languages, especially Bantu (cf. Samarin 1971; Alexandre 1966).

The commonest semantic fields covered by the Gawwada ideophones are sounds and noises, actions, and movements, the latter generally of a sudden, unexpected, or swift kind.

Finally, it is difficult to ascertain whether phonosymbolism plays any role in Gawwada ideophones. If it does, it is apparently a very minor one. This point is underlined by the fact that ideophones in Gawwada seem to go a long way back in the history of the language, with at least a few of them having etymologies originating in East Cushitic. An obvious case in point is no. 25. *šimbír*, meaning a sudden movement askew, and used collectively for birds taking flight or for a person who turns abruptly. *šimbír* is obviously linked to the common East Cushitic word for ‘small bird’ found in ‘Afar *kimbir*, Saho *kimbiro*, Somali *shimbir*, Baiso *kimbiri*, Dhaasanac *kimírri*, Arbore *kirmaté*, Oromo *simbirroo* etc., and reconstructed by Sasse (1979:13) for Proto-East Cushitic (PEC) as **kimbir*. On the other hand, because the regular reflex of PEC **k/* in Dullay should be either */k/* after consonants, and */x/* or */h/* (according to the dialect) elsewhere, *šimbír* must be considered a loanword in Gawwada. A different case can be made for no. 18. *palág* ‘to flash’, which seems connected to the PEC root **bark’-/birk’-* ‘lightning’ (Sasse 1979:49), whose reflexes are attested in several East Cushitic languages such as Somali *biriq*, Arbore *bilíʔito*, and Dhaasanac *birgac* ‘flashing’.

5. Conclusions

The following criteria identify ideophones in Gawwada:

– morphonology:

- they are always consonant-ending (__C#);
- they may end in a geminate consonant (__CaCa#);
- when not monosyllabic, they often involve reduplication, either
 - complete (CaVβCγCaVβCγ), or
 - partial (CaVβCγVβCγ);
- they are primitive, invariable and cannot function as a basis for derivation;
- identity in the quality of the vowel (total vowel harmony) is typical of bi- and polysyllabic ideophones;

– syntax:

- their collocation is restricted to the role of direct objects of the verb *páy* ‘to say’ and its causative *páas* ‘to make say’;

– semantics:

g. they cover a limited number of semantic fields.

Criteria a.-e. as well as g. distinguish ideophones from “nominals” (nouns, pronouns, adjectives): e.g., nominals are always vowel-ending (with the final vowel expressing the gender/number); with nominals (unlike verbs) reduplication is not used, etc.

Criterion f., and syntax in general, groups ideophones together with nominals.

All in all, and pending further analysis on a richer data base, ideophones are better classified in Gawwada as an autonomous, open-word class.

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Appendix: a provisional list of Gawwada ideophones

1. *c'óq* — 1. the noise of water dripping; 2. the action of sticking a finger into somebody's eyes
2. *doqđóq* — the sound of water gushing out of a container
3. *gargác'* — to move with a swaying motion, as when carrying a weight, or when dancing, or when drunk (generally repeated)
4. *goroſoró?* — the action of food coming up in the throat
5. *gingiri?* — the noise made by a mass of falling water
6. *hámm* — the buzzing noise of flies or small flying insects when swarming together
7. *hofhóf* — the noise made by a knife when entering a body or a soft object
8. *ħaašawšáw* — the sound made by leaves moving together
9. *kíll* — to shut a door
10. *k'íll* — a high-pitched sound, as made by a blade or a light container breaking
11. *lím* — the noise made by something entering into a small hole
12. *lípp* — to go out suddenly (said of fire)
13. *lóħħ* — to enter swiftly, to creep in (said, e.g., of a rat, or a thief)
14. *lumá?* — to slither away (vertically), said of a snake (cf. no. 26.)
15. *lúss* — a sudden, swift catching movement
16. *náf* — to snap, break suddenly
17. *nég* — to go down the wrong way (said of food)
18. *palág* — to flash (said of lightning)
19. *poróħ* — a hollow noise, as made by a wooden container breaking
20. *puká?* — to jump (said of a big animal)
21. *qašqás* — to move away slowly, to slither away, to hide away
22. *qodóq* — hands clapping and resounding strongly; a hollow sound like that of stone beating against wood
23. *qóq* — 1. to break wind noisily (cf. no. 27.); 2. the sound made by a container when pushed down into water to fill it (also a verb: 'to gurgle', subj.: water)
24. *šémm* — the sound of water falling with violence
25. *šimbír* — to move suddenly and askew (said of a flight of birds or of a person who turns abruptly)
26. *šóħħ* — to slither away (horizontally), said of a snake (cf. no. 14.)
27. *túrr* — to fart silently, but producing a bad smell (cf. no. 23.)
28. *t'óšóš* — the noise made by oil when frying
29. *t'udúg* [*ts'udúke*] — to take out of a hole abruptly, to extract
30. *t'úup* — a sucking noise made when drinking, in appreciation
31. *wáħħ* — to roar (said of water)
32. *walág* — to pass by swiftly, to graze, to skim
33. *xápp* — to make a sudden swishing sound, like a spear moving quickly through air
34. *xapáp* — the sound of flapping wings or the sound made while shaking a hideskin (cf. no. 33.?)