At the Ḣikūllum mission station, under the supervision of the Swedish missionary society and with the assistance of Aster Gannoo, O.N. produced the following literary works in Oromo, written in fiddāl (Hylland 1969; ArtEvang): Galata Waagyey Woorstii Maċčā (‘Evangelical Songs and Psalms’, 1887); Kakwa Haaraa (‘the New Testament’, 1893); Mačča Qalqulluun (‘the Holy Bible’, 1899); Katekusmos (‘Luther’s’ Catechism); Garraamin Namaa Mana Waagyeyyo Yookis Bultii Seetanaa (‘Man’s Heart either God’s Temple or Satan’s Abode’, 1899). The following were co-authored with Aster Gannoo: Dr. Barth’s Bible Stories Translation (1899); Galqabaa Barstiiṣaa. The Galla Spelling Book (and Reader) (1894). All, except the Spelling Book, were scripture-based translations into Oromo.


Kebede Hordofa Janko

Ongota

Ongota language

‘O’. (Ifa ‘ongota, ‘the language [lit. mouth] of the ‘O.’) is the original language of the ‘O. people, who live on the west bank of the Wayro River, in the South-Omo Zone. The majority of the ‘O. use Šamakko (the westernmost dialect of the Ḩullay cluster of East Cushitic) for everyday communication. The ‘O. language is still spoken by a handful of elders, although code switching in Šamakko is the rule. A few more ‘O. understand, at least partially, portions of the ancestral language. Approximately half of the lexicon and most of the limited morphology of ‘O. is from Šamakko.

The classification of ‘O. is uncertain. It is probably affiliated to the Ḩullay-Afrasiatic phylum (either Ṣushitic or Ḩomotic); at the same time, its lexicon shows elements of Ḩnilo-Saharan origin, and certain features of the grammar suggest origin from a creolized pidgin (as suggested by Aklih Yilma).

The ‘O. vowels are a, i, o, u, u. The consonants of ‘O. are: plosives b, t, d, k, g, q; ; implosives d, g; nasals m, n; affricates s, ñ; fricatives f, z, s, i, x, b, ’, h; trill r, liquid l; glides w, y. The status of the voiced-voiceless opposition is unclear. Final stops are devoiced. Vowel length and consonant gemination are phonemic, as in āka ‘foot, leg’ vs. āakka ‘women, females’ vs. akka ‘grandfather’. Pitch-accent is also phonemic: cf. yōoba ‘men, males’ vs. yuoba ‘see!’. On long vowels, pitch can fall on the first or second mora: cf. kaj=xaad [kaxaad] ‘I scratched’ (= marks clitic boundaries) vs. kaj=xaad [kaxaad] ‘I (will) scratch’ (pitch opposition is extensively used in the verbal system; s. below). The syllable structure is (CV)(C).

‘O. nouns, as a rule, are invariable. In a few cases, the Šamakko number affixes (both sg. and pl.) are used. A few nouns have suppletive plural forms: cf. áyama (sg.)/āaka (pl. or collective), ‘woman, female, wife’; inta/yoooba ‘man, male, husband’; mâara/eela ‘boy, son’.

The personal pronouns follow the usual Cushitic seven-member system, with separate masc. and fem. elements for the 3rd pers. sg. Six se-
The past tense is marked by an accent on the first (or only) mora of the verbal form. The non-past tense is used for an incomplete action, either present or future, and is marked by the absence of an accent on the mora of the stem if it is monomoramic (CVC). In this case, the subject clitic bears the accent (cf. \(kä\=çog\) ‘I hit’ vs. \(kä\=çog\) ‘I (will) hit’). If the verb is at least bimoramic, the past has the accent on the first mora of the stem, and the non-past on the last (cf. examples of ‘to scratch’ above). An ongoing action is expressed through the ending -\(i\) (for consonant-final stems) or -\(ni\) (for vowel-final stems); the verbal form has the accent on the first mora. The positive imperative singular is marked by final -\(á\) for consonant-final verbs and by -\(é\) for vowel-final stems; the imperative plural is expressed by the affix -\(ta\).

\(O\). is a verb-final, dependent-marking language. The verb is the last element of a sentence, but a pronominal object often follows the verbal form: \(kíta\, cáta\, kë=ga\, =\, ñi\, (he\, meat\, 3SG.MASC–bite. PAST)\) ‘he bit the meat’ vs. \(gabare\, kë=ga=ki\, (snake\, 3SG.MASC–bite. PAST–him)\) ‘a snake bit him’. Modifiers follow the head.

The standard ten-word list is as follows: (\(ak\)=kalbhono ‘one’, \(lámä\, \text{two}\), \(zá\ñ\, \text{three}\) (from \(śamakko\)), oxóni ‘fire’, \(č\, \text{áwa}\, \text{water}\, \text{ásaxo} ‘sun’, \(lé\=é ‘moon’\) (from \(śamakko\)), \(óxô\ ‘blood’, \(́dašà ‘tongue’, \(ítìma ‘tooth’\).

Src.: Aklilu Yilma, personal communication.


Mauro Tosco