

# Dahalo: An endangered language

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## 0. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Dahalo is a language spoken in the Lamu district of Coast Province, Kenya, by a few hundred people of all ages (see below, 1., for the ethnic denomination and the number of speakers); the speakers are former hunter-gatherers who partly turned to a sedentary existence in recent years.

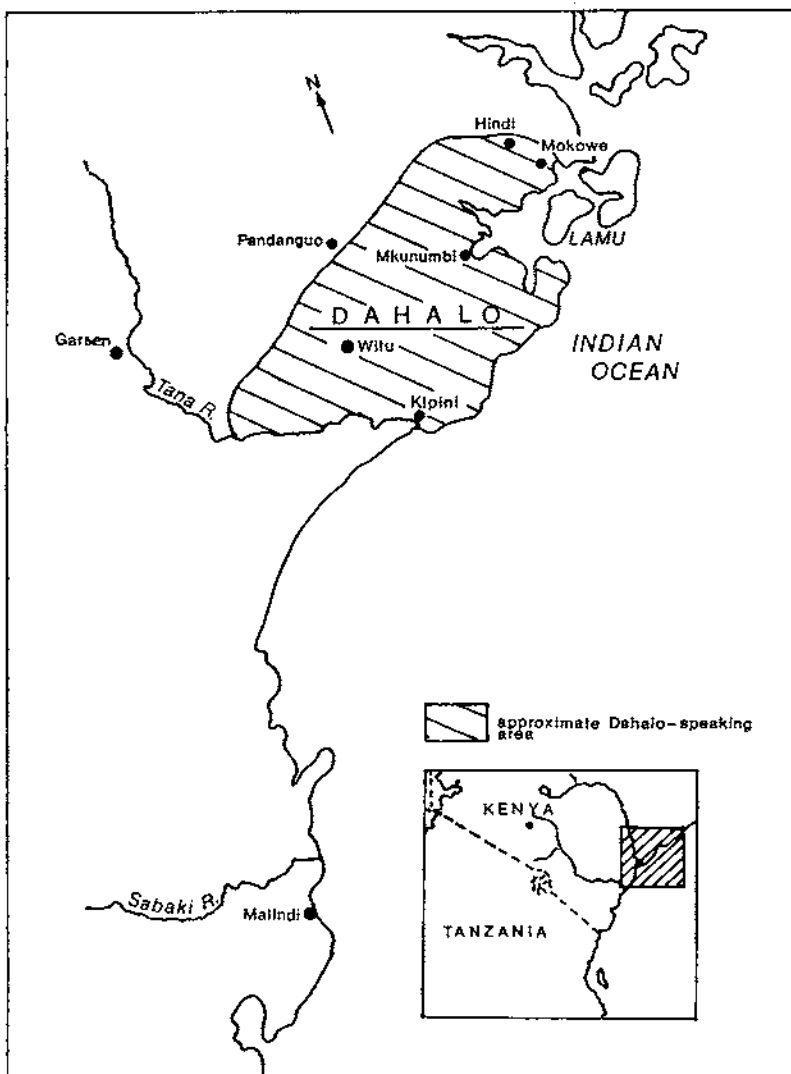
From a genealogical point of view, Dahalo has been classified as a Cushitic language, but about its inclusion in the Southern group (as expounded especially by Ehret 1980) doubts have been expressed (e.g., by Zaborski 1986 and 1987), and the present writer finds a tentative classification within the Eastern Cushitic group (possibly in a subgroup together with Yaaku) more in line with the available, still limited, data (Tosco 1992).

Dahalo has a very mixed lexicon, in which a great deal of Somali, Oromo, Swahili and other Bantu language loans are found, together with ancestral words of probable Khoisan origin, as can be argued by the presence of two clicks.

In the following, we shall concentrate on the present sociolinguistic status of the language *vis-à-vis* its major neighbour, Swahili, and on the ongoing process of assimilation of both the Dahalo language and people.

## 1. Basic information on the sociolinguistic status of Dahalo

Statistics dealing with the number of Dahalo-speakers are totally lacking; the Kenya Population Census gives, quite naturally, the ethnic affiliation without regard to the actual language(s) spoken by the communities. In the case of the Dahalo, the ethnic affiliation is concealed under the cover-term of "Sanye-Boni", applied for the Boni of the Lamu District, the Waata of the Tana River and Kilifi Districts and the far less numerous Dahalo.



Map 1.

The same confusion is found in Tucker – Bryan – Woodburn (1977: 319), where Dahalo is considered “one of the so-called ‘SANYE’ dialects, spoken in coastal pockets north of Mombasa in Kenya”, therefore putting the Dahalo together with the Waata, actually speaking an Oromo dialect (on which see Heine 1981).

The townspeople’s attitude which is mirrored in these works blurs the differences among the different groups of bush-dwellers under a denomination which, being sociological, reflects the traditional opposition in terms of occupation and social status between the inhabitants of the bush and the “others”, either agriculturalists, cattle-keepers or townspeople.

On the other hand, the groups of bush-dwellers often lack an ethnic self-denomination, even if they can understand the derogatory meaning of the current appellations. As a consequence of this, the same term can be used for what are ethnically/linguistically different peoples, and, on the contrary, different appellations can be applied to the same people in different areas.

The question has been discussed by Heine (1977) with regard to the Boni: Heine refused the denomination “Aweer(a)”, claiming it to be a generic term (meaning simply ‘hunter’), and adopted the term “Boni”, which is today generally used in linguistics, even if “Boni” is in its turn derogatory (being the Somali denomination of various low-caste groups; in Somalia therefore, “Aweera” – a foreign term, and consequently neutral – is preferred).

We shall return below to the Boni, their language and its radically different – in comparison with what we find among the Dahalo – sociolinguistic situation.

Among the Dahalo themselves, while the term “Dahalo” (*d’aháálo*; Singulative M: *d’aháálotó*) is understood, it is never used, and the Dahalo pretend that it means ‘slave’ in their own language (but my informants were not able to elaborate on this point, such as to give plural forms, etc.); they further say that “Dahalo” is a term used by the Swahili, to which they in return refer to the Swahili as *kúúdzá* (Singulative M: *kúúdzeti*), which would likewise mean ‘slaves’.

The Dahalo we met always referred to themselves as *dááko* (Singulative M: *dáákoto*). Probably this is just the name of a section of the people, as the informants were also very firm in saying that, while all the Daako are sedentary, not all the Dahalo are Daako; they furthermore demonstrated that they understand the precise sociological value of the term “Sanye”, applying it with preference to the little groups of hunters which live only in the bush and do not practice cultivation. This sharp sociological distinction between the two groups is not accompanied, we were assured, by any practical language difference, and we have been told on many occasions that dialect variability

is minimal between the D groups, involving above all the lexicon (more Southern groups having been influenced by Pokomo and Elwana).

The people we interviewed occasionally used for themselves the denomination of *gutho g'ristso* 'Little People'; on the other side, the denomination of *gutho g'arimaani* ('People of the outside') reported by Elderkin (1974: 2) was unknown. The language was called simply *ĩáfo gũhooni* 'the language of the people'.

Apart from the Daako, we recorded the following names of Dahalo sections (the Swahili prefix *wa-* is occasionally used):

*maata*  
*d'igisima*  
*Kilmitu*  
*lũnkũ*

## 2. Sociolinguistic aspects of language shift

Concerning the actual number of Dahalo speakers, it is calculated in "a few hundreds" by Ehret (1980: 12), about 500 (followed by a question mark) by Sasse (1981: 199), while Zaborski "could estimate about 280 of them, though the upper limit may be about 400" (1987: 223-234). The same estimate of "less than 400" is made by Art Rilling of the Kenya Working Group of the Summerer Institute of Linguistics, who adds that "This is admittedly a guess, and the figure is probably generous" (Rilling 1986: 5). We think that the figure of 400 cannot greatly exceed the truth: in the peripheral (for the Dahalo people) area of Mokowe we met in one occasion about 50 of them, and we were told that many more lived in the same area.

The 1979 Kenya Population Census gives a number of 4,170 "Boni/Sanye", of which 2,212 are living in the Lamu District. If we compare these figures with those of the 1969 Census (3,972 of which 1,276 are living in the Lamu District, with an increase of 73.3%), we can get the impression of a vital community, but when we consider that the Boni are estimated to be about 3,000, the vast majority of them living in the Lamu District (only the very little Wayoore section and the Kilii section living on both sides of the Kenyan-Somali border; Heine 1982: 13), very little place is left for the Dahalo, and also the figure for the Boni should probably also be lowered.

To our knowledge, the Dahalo have never been the object of any sociolinguistic research, with the exception of the survey carried out for the Kenya

Working Group of SIL by Art Rilling and Eric Graham in September 1985. The aim of the research, which covered both the Dahalo and the Boni, was to ascertain the languages spoken by these communities, their degree of literacy and the eventual need for written material in their mother tongues. 24 Dahalo were asked to complete a questionnaire made up of 27 questions: the first eight concerning general information (age, sex, origin of the subject), the remaining being sociolinguistic questions, and the last exploring the attitude toward the eventual development of written material in Dahalo. The results are presented in the *Boni/Dahalo Report* (Rilling 1986), on which we shall largely draw in the following.<sup>2</sup>

The results are not surprising. All the 24 Dahalo interviewees (a slight majority of them being from the area of Mikunumbi and males) claimed to be bilingual in Swahili, although "29% said that there were very few monolingual Dahalo speakers, and that these were all elders" (Rilling 1986: 14); it is significant that 21% of the interviewees acquired Dahalo as a second language (i.e., they were brought up in Swahili) and the same rate admitted not to use Dahalo as "the language of the home". 29% claimed to know Swahili better than Dahalo.

Our informants repeatedly told us that, while in the olden days there were Dahalo who did not master Swahili, today everybody can at least understand it. As a matter of fact, all the Dahalo we met were bilingual, while nobody had a good command of any other language. In particular, English – Kenya's official language – was totally unknown.

Little can be said about age as a factor in language proficiency; the eldest Dahalo-speaker I interviewed in the area of Mikunumbi spoke with the same high amount of Swahili loans as the younger ones, could not remember the Dahalo numerals from 6 onwards, nor many words referring to hunting and other traditional practices (sentences [1] and [2] below were uttered by him).

In mixed couples (which are very common, given the small size of Dahalo groups; see below) Swahili is now used as the medium, and the children are therefore brought up in that language; young people we met in Mikunumbi had a lower proficiency in the Dahalo language than their parents. For many of them, exposure to the language was limited to listening to stories narrated by the elders: they had not learnt Dahalo by way of a normal acquisition process, and had become – or were going to become – semi-speakers (in the sense outlined by Sasse, this volume).

The answers of the interviewees to the questions about the degree of bilingualism and of literacy, and about the need for written material are very interesting. The SIL researchers (Rilling 1986: 15) comment that "the Dahalo-speaking community seemed to be more proficient [than the Boni;

MT] in Swahili, but less interested in mother tongue literacy": 37% admit that Swahili is the most important language, while only 17% pretend to use Dahalo "most often" and "1/4 of the Dahalo-speaking interviewees prefer to use Swahili rather than KiDahalo". None of them had learnt to read, and even the hypothesis of written material in Dahalo seems to have been largely misunderstood: "They seemed personally disinterested though not opposed to the development of mother tongue materials"; the totality of the interviewees answered positively to question 27 ("There is a need for literature in KiDahalo"), but were mostly unable to give reasons for that need; one can note, nevertheless, that eight interviewees answered "To help preserve the language, that it not be lost" (Rilling 1986: 15).

On the other hand, Dahalo do not seem conscious of any threat to their language on the part of Swahili. Reactions to question 25 ("KiDahalo will continue in use?") are for 79% positive.

Needless to say, the SIL report does not plead for the idea of developing written material in Dahalo, proposing "to re-evaluate the sociolinguistic situation among the Dahalo community after five or ten years", while a deeper interest in the development of material in Boni is recommended (Rilling 1986: 16).

The different "score" of the Boni and the Dahalo raises many questions: the Boni show all the characteristics of a vital community: there are monolinguals, foreign languages (Swahili and, to a lesser extent, Somali) are known, but to a lesser degree and with lower proficiency than found among the Dahalo. The answers to the questions concerning the actual use of the mother tongue in different occasions show that Boni is practically the only language used by the Boni-speakers in many social occasions (work, home, meetings, festivals), while Dahalo retains the majority of uses only at home (79% of total) and especially at festivals, dances, etc. (96% of total), but counting, praying and, presumably, working ("in the forest") are carried on in Swahili.

### 3. Motivations for the language shift

The reason for this very different resistance of the two languages cannot just be the difference in numerical strength of the two communities (about 3,000 the Boni, less than 400 the Dahalo). In our opinion, a major role in the decline of the Dahalo language has been played by the proximity to the Dahalo area of such important Swahili centres as Lamu and, in the past, Witu. On the contrary, the Boni have been divided between Swahili and Somali influence,

and we can assume that a multiplicity of influences can result in a partial weakening of their strength and, consequently, in a better resistance of the "dominated" language.<sup>3</sup>

Stiles (1988) has recently pointed to the mechanism of casting out as at least a partial answer to the problem of the origins of "outcast peoples" such as the Boni; intermarriage and casting out have in our opinion played a decisive role in the formation of the Dahalo people, just as today seem to work for language shift in favour of Swahili. The Dahalo, being a low-caste people, intermarry with any other people, especially the Boni, but also the Giriama, the Pokomo, etc.; intermarriage is considered by the Dahalo themselves a decisive factor in the lexical differences between the various Dahalo groups.

Economic shift to a semi-agricultural way of life is of course playing a decisive role in the process of replacement of Dahalo by Swahili.

This shift has been favoured by the increase in land suitable for agricultural use; the government settlement scheme at Lake Mukunguya, or Lake Kenyatta, has attracted in the area many Bantu farmers from the overpopulated Highlands, thus complicating the linguistic and ethnic situation of the area, and exalting the role of Swahili as an inter-community medium; naturally, the precarious role of the little peoples of the interior of the coast has been affected negatively by these developments.

Agricultural and townlife terms in Dahalo are with no exception Swahili, often unassimilated loans. The ban on hunting practices in Kenya is likewise contributing to disrupting traditional ways of life, and, from a linguistic point of view, knowledge of the hunting-gathering vocabulary is today low among the young Dahalo we met. And, as we know from other cases of language death in Africa, the linguistic and cultural collapse of the minority peoples has increased and is gathering momentum from the economic upset of the last decades.

But that the process of language shift is not at all recent is shown by the fact that even older speakers, living in the bush in the area of Mkunumbi and economically "unassimilated", make an extensive use of Swahili loans and expressions, which cover, in addition to the more technical domains mentioned above, even general "cultural" vocabulary as 'to marry' (*hoovaad-*, from Northern Swahili *-o(w)a*), 'to pray' (*ʔo<sup>n</sup>boleʔad-*, from Swahili *-omba*), 'to bury' (*ʔdrigad-*, from Northern Swahili *-dika*), etc.

#### 4. Cultural aspects of language shift

The cultural identity of the Dahalo seems presently realized "negatively" through the only partial assimilation to the agricultural economy predominant today in the Dahalo area.

Most Dahalo in the Mokowe area live as hired labour in the *shambas*, carrying out such duties as fruit-picking, water-fetching, etc., but refusing to sedentarize and cultivate on their own.

A "parasitic" attitude is thus developing, radically transforming the traditional symbiosis between hunter-gatherers and sedentary people, made of reciprocal duties and interests (cf. Galaty 1986 for the Torrobo-Maasai relationships).

The psychological effects of this marginality are often passivity and a sense of dejection, in their turn leading to drunkenness, which local – not always groundless – rumours frequently associate with the Dahalo (cf. Guenther 1986 for a description of similar disruptive effects of sedentarization coupled with economic marginality among the Bushmen of Botswana).

On the other side, it could perhaps be argued that social marginality is slowing down the process of cultural and linguistic assimilation, which would be enhanced by an unconditioned acceptance of the new culture represented by agriculture and townlife.

#### 5. Linguistic aspects of language shift

We already mentioned the heavy borrowing of Swahili lexical items in Dahalo. It must be noted that until today all Swahili material has been to a considerable extent successfully assimilated in the grammar. Phonologically and morphologically unassimilated borrowing frequently occurs only in specific areas of the lexicon associated with "modern" cultural domains traditionally alien to Dahalo culture, such as agriculture and housing.

In the following we shall provide examples from different parts of the grammar, mainly on the basis of Tosco (1991).

##### 5.1. Phonological aspects of the impact of Swahili

All the (very few) descriptions of Dahalo phonology illustrate the exceptional richness of consonants: Ehret (1980) arrives at a chart of 51 consonants,

Elderkin (1974 and 1976) works on the basis of a 57-consonants inventory, while Tucker – Bryan – Woodhurn (1977) record "only" 39 consonants.

Now, similar arrays of phonemes are always suspicious, and indeed we think that true phonemes and allophones have been merged in all previous accounts, together with, probably, idiolectally different realizations. This is probably true of the presence of both a bilabial /b/ and a labiovelar /v/ fricative, proposed by Ehret (1980), and which would make of Dahalo a *unicum* among the languages of the world (cf. Maddieson 1984: 46); another case in point is the presence of the dental fricative /θ/, which, when coupled with an alveolar implosive /dʒ/ and with both dental and alveolar plain stops would make the Dahalo system at least unusual (cf. Maddieson 1984: 32 for relevant figures and the constraints on the presence of different stops in the same places of articulation).

On our side, we regard /b/ and /θ/ as intervocalic allophones of /b/ and /d/, respectively.<sup>4</sup>

The simultaneous presence of dental and alveolar stops is indeed a feature of Dahalo, but this typological oddity is well explained when one departs from the idea that alveolarity is original and dentality the acquired feature, as proposed by Ehret (1980) in his reconstruction of Proto-South-Cushitic. In order to account for Dahalo reality (which knows overwhelmingly more dentals than alveolars), Ehret has then to propose a rule changing alveolars to dentals in Dahalo.

Nurse (1985) supports the same idea; he explains dentality – said to be occurring "in a minority of languages worldwide" (Nurse 1985: 243), which seems to us unproved – as an areal feature, arisen firstly in Dahalo and probably in Boni and then passed to Bantu languages such as Elwana, Pokomo and Northern Swahili. This view is consistent with Nurse's hypothesis of a long-term influence of Dahalo over the Kenyan coast (and of an even more ancient influence of Southern Cushites over most of Kenya, as proposed in Nurse 1986).

To discuss the soundness of this reconstruction would lead us too far away from what is our present aim; for what concerns Dahalo, we prefer to consider dentality as original (Cushitic languages as a whole have dental rather than alveolar stops), and alveolarity as borrowed from Bantu (in Dahalo as in the South Cushitic languages): only dentals occur in suffixes and are still predominant in the lexicon; alveolars, on the other hand, are found only in Swahili words or in items of doubtful origin, but which in any case do not look Cushitic and are therefore to be regarded, at least tentatively, as loans.<sup>5</sup>

In our view, the phonological system of Dahalo can only be understood as the reflex of a process of heavy and continuous borrowing, especially from Swahili.

Now, the phonological system of Dahalo is indeed rich and asymmetrical, and these characteristics are a function of the mixed nature of its lexicon, in which multiple borrowings have not (yet) been equally absorbed.

In other words, it is simply unrealistic to look at the "sounds" of Dahalo as constituting a system: they do not, because different systems are always present in any utterance of a Dahalo speaker. As it is probably the case in any bi- and multilingual community, the boundaries between the systems, initially strongly perceived by the speakers, gradually fade away, as one of the systems conquers new communicative fields; while in the first phase the loans are adapted to the phonological system of the target-language, successively, as more and more loans creep in, they are simply stored, unanalyzed. In other words, looking at Dahalo phonology one has to distinguish between *Lehnwörter* and *Fremdwörter*, and their respective phonological systems.

Therefore, the size of the consonantal inventory of Dahalo is a function of the history of the Dahalo people: like all hunter-gatherers, the Dahalo have probably always been subject to multiple, long and deep influences, resulting in heavy borrowing, and, probably, recurrent language shifts; in recent years we have "witnessed" the shift of the Yaaku from their Cushitic language to Maa and, some centuries ago, the shift of the Boni to Somali (Ali 1985 has proposed that the Boni are just Dahalo who switched to a Somali dialect – more precisely, the Karre dialect – some centuries ago).

As a consequence of all this, many of the consonantal phonemes of Dahalo have a very low rate of occurrence, or are subject to positional restrictions.

The following phonemes have been found in initial position only:

/d/	(three items)
/j'/	(three items, two Swahili loans)
/k <sup>w</sup> /	(four items)
/ts'/	(three items)

The following phonemes have not been found in initial position:

/d/	
/b/	(the only voiced bilabial stop in initial position being the implosive <i>b'</i> )

Other very rare phonemes without positional restrictions are:

/ɛ'/	(found in two items in initial position – probably as an allophone of /ɛ/ – and in one item medially)
/ɛ/	(found only in a few items in initial position and medially in one item – probably a reduplicated stem: <i>ɛ'ikoɔɕik-</i> 'to saw')
/i <sup>w</sup> /	(found in one item only: <i>t<sup>w</sup>ah-</i> 'to pitch')
/p'/	(found only in initial position – except in one instance in a reduplicated stem and stem-finally in <i>k'arap-</i> 'to cut' and <i>t'up-</i> 'to leak')
/s/	(found in ten items, all of them loans, mainly from Swahili, but also from Somali)
/ll'/	(found in six items in initial position and stem-finally in <i>vall-</i> 'to return' and <i>hull-</i> 'to chew')
/y/	(found only in <i>yááyo</i> 'mother (alive)')
/ <sup>m</sup> d/	(two items, loans from Northern Swahili; freely alternating with / <sup>m</sup> ɖr/ and / <sup>m</sup> t/ (as it does in Amu and Baraawa dialects of Swahili)).

The labialized velars (probably all of loan origin) and several prenasalized phonemes are for the most part of limited occurrence; in particular, /<sup>m</sup>g<sup>w</sup>/ occurs only in *há<sup>n</sup>g<sup>w</sup>ara<sup>n</sup>g<sup>w</sup>ára* 'centipede'; /<sup>m</sup>j/ in *kípu<sup>n</sup>ju* 'place where the maize is seasoned', /<sup>m</sup>dz/ in three items; /<sup>m</sup>l/ (prenasalized dental click) in five.

Other phonemes occur only in *unassimilated* Swahili loans (and are therefore not to be considered as parts of the phonological system of Dahalo), such as /z/, which is constantly replaced by /d/ – phonetically /ʀ/ intervocally (see above) – in assimilated loans (as in the Swahili word *kaskazi* 'drought, hot season', realized both as *kásikazi* and *kásikadi*).

The phonological shape of words has been so much influenced by Swahili that today all Dahalo words end by one (short) vowel. This constraint is surely the effect of heavy Swahili loaning, as no other Cushitic language has anything similar.

## 5.2. Morphological aspects of the impact of Swahili

In the domain of morphology, a first effect of loaning has been the fading away of the deeply rooted Cushitic gender distinction (masculine/feminine). Today, Dahalo nouns do not have any affix which could be interpreted, at least synchronically, as gender-marking. Given the existence of separate masculine (3M) and feminine (3F) forms of the determinants and of the 3 singular verbal forms, an obvious possibility is that nouns are subcategorized according to gender. Now, only semantically feminine subject nouns (i.e. nouns whose referent has female sex) govern feminine forms of the determinants and, as

subjects, of 3S verbal forms; this seems to have already been recognized by Elderkin (1976: 292): "Gender in Dahalo is natural". All evidence seems to indicate that the category of gender is gradually dying out in Dahalo. That we are facing here the fading away of a single category, and not of nominal morphology as a whole – and that therefore bilingualism is probably the cause – is demonstrated by the fact that number marking is vital in Dahalo, even more than in those neighboring Cushitic languages (Oromo, Southern Somali dialects, Boni) in which overt expression of the plural on the noun is often avoided if number can be recovered semantically or is already marked (e.g., on the verb).

In number marking, the impact of loans has shifted the balance between the different types of Dahalo plurals, which can take the form of:

- a. partial reduplication;
- b. partial reduplication plus suffixation
- c. suffixation
- d. change of final vowel
- e. change of tonal pattern (without change in segments)
- f. irregular formation

While "original" Dahalo nouns are pluralized by any of the above types, loanwords never form their plural by types b., e. or f., and only very occasionally by type d. Indeed, Swahili loanwords are consistently pluralized through reduplication (type a.) and, less frequently, suffixation (type c.).

The high percentage of loans in Dahalo vocabulary has as its major consequence that plural types a. and c. are the most frequent (accounting for, respectively, about 34% and 44% of all plurals in our corpus). Moreover, many nouns which form their plural through the change of the tonal pattern (type e.) have another alternative plural in types a. or c. One may say that plurals of types d. (change of final vowel) and e. (change of tonal pattern) are no longer productive in Dahalo.

Still another possibility in number marking is to recur to Swahili plural prefixes. This frequently occurs with phonologically unassimilated loans, and especially with adjectives, which never change their final vowel to *-i*, as most Dahalo adjectives do. Note the following short sentence:

- (1) *ɾaddókʷa mambo ɾákkale mapya*  
 day-this-M things all new-P<sup>6</sup>  
 'everything is new today'

where *mapya* is in agreement with *mambo* 'things, affairs'.

As we know it often occurs in bilingual contexts, it may well be that the presence of an unassimilated noun as *man-bo* (a Swahili plural) enhances the adjective in its Swahili plural form; normally, *mpia* would rather be left unchanged.

This means that, when loans enter in a language as phrases, their "strength", i.e. their possibility to be accepted and to resist assimilation, is increased.

With nouns my informants were normally able to provide a true plural, or even more than one – as it often happens in Cushitic –, and even for unassimilated singulars, but occasionally the Swahili plurals were used (and they were often given first, therefore demonstrating that they were more "normal" than the use of the Dahalo pluralizing devices); an example is *zumba* 'rooms', as plural of *ɕúúʷba*, alongside the proper Dahalo plural *ɕúúʷbabbi*.

Bilingualism can result in the substitution of native Dahalo words with Swahili equivalents, especially if the word is a member of a set in which Swahili is predominant, as the numerals: Dahalo numerals are preserved until '5'; from '6' onwards Swahili numerals are used; but in the following sentence the Dahalo numeral *dáwatte* '5' has been substituted by Swahili *tanu*; naturally, *ɾamma* is Swahili, too:

- (2) *háŋi sašála ɾamma tanu rats:si guɖle*  
 men 4 or 5 go-PrfPs-3P hush  
 'four or five men went into the bush'

### 5.3. Syntactic aspects of the impact of Swahili

Dahalo has up until today retained the Cushitic SOV basic word-order, but SVO is frequent: while in many cases it can be said that this permutation serves a topical function, sometimes it is just a reflex of Swahili SVO word-order:

- (3) *ɾá+na+te váha déélc*  
 O+PERF+AFF see-PrfPs-1S girl  
 'I have seen the girl'

Swahili *ni* is perhaps at the origin of Dahalo *ɾni*, which is best interpreted as a focus marker (the initial syllable *ɾni*, which serves the purpose of bearing the high tone, is deleted when the particle is suffixed); while it would be possible to analyze *ɾni* as an invariable copula (which would be more in line with the value of Swahili *ni*), we must note that a true copula seems to occur in Dahalo *-sú*, which is sometimes found in nominal sentences, otherwise without overt marking.

The following sentences illustrate the use of *ʔni*:

- (4) *nár'etstsa ʔt[ə] ʔni d'aháálotstsi*  
 woman-F that-F FOC D.-F  
 'this woman is Dahalo'
- (5) *nat'á+[ə] ʔni te lúbo*  
 woman+that-F FOC AFF beat-Pr-1S  
 'I am going to beat that woman'
- (6) *ʔáata ʔni dáákotstsi*  
 you-S FOC D.-F  
 'are you (SF) Daako?'
- (7) *háájɔ ʔíku ʔni jíkotu*  
 man than-M FOC who-M  
 'who is that man?'
- (8) *dééka ʔi[a] ʔni jíkotstsi*  
 girl that-F FOC who-F  
 'who is that girl?'

Swahili *ni* has better retained its copular value in Dahalo negative sentences (in which *ni* is changed to *si* in Swahili), where it is suffixed to the negative selector *b'a* (in past sentences) and the negative+irrealis selectors *b'a+ka* (in non-past sentences), as a quicker and invariable alternative to the use of the Dahalo verb *ʔeek-* 'to be':

- (9) *múvi ʔíku ʔni b'a+ka+ni b'ára+ani*  
 house this-M FOC NEG+IRR+FOC before+GEN  
 'that house is not old'
- (10) *b'a+ka+ni+va+ʔa háʔi*  
 NEG+IRR+FOC+PAST+0 men  
 'they were not men'
- (11) *b'a-ka+ni+va+ʔa háájɔ*  
 NEG+IRR+FOC+PAST+0 man  
 'I was not a man'

As can be seen in the last two sentences, this construction is ambiguous as far as the subject is concerned; cf. the similar explicit sentences with the Dahalo verb *ʔeek-*:

- (12) *b'a-ka ʔééketo víne*  
 NEG+IRR be-Pr-2S good  
 'you (SM) are not good'

- (13) *b'a+ku+va ʔeeka háájɔ*  
 NEG+you-SM+PAST be-Inf man  
 'you (SM) were not a man'
- (14) *b'a+va ʔeeka háájɔ*  
 NEG+PAST be-inf man  
 'he was not a man'
- (15) *ʔáʔi b'a+ni+va ʔeeka hóʔi*  
 we NEG+us+Past be-Inf men  
 'we were not men'

A Dahalo conversation is normally interwoven with (Northern) Swahili expressions, such as *b'asi* 'well!, that's all!', *ʔdro* 'well!', *héla* 'come on!', etc.; other Swahili elements is present in positional terms (adverbs, prepositions): *saa* 'time, hour', *saa sita* 'noon', *sasa* 'now', *sikuzote* 'always', *zamani* 'formerly', *ʔa<sup>n</sup>de* 'outside' (cf. Baraawa *ʔde*), *mpaka* 'until', and in WH-words: *kwani* 'why? because', *ʔboma* 'why?' (Swahili *mboma*). Myers-Scotton (this volume) points to the attractiveness for borrowing of these "discourse markers, lexemes hovering near the border between content and system morphemes. These morphemes have 'positional salience' in that they may occur in initial position in a conversational turn, or at least as heads of constituents (e.g., as prepositions in PPs). Also, of course, they are often free forms" (Myers-Scotton, this volume).

Actually, many sentences of a Dahalo text often begin with *b'asi*, *sasa*, *ʔdro*, etc. In our opinion, the importance of the extensive use of these discourse markers as a hint of deep borrowing and bilingualism has often been neglected. In the case of a bilingual society, it can become fashionable to use them in the L1 from the very beginning of the contact, when the material from L2, although extensively borrowed, has not yet been assimilated in L1 and the two languages are kept distinct.<sup>7</sup> It does not seem possible, therefore, to regard the borrowing of the "discourse markers" as secondary in respect to the borrowing of content words as nouns and verbs.

Moreover, these words, being free forms, can be accepted in the language without being assimilated phonologically, but they can have at the same time deep repercussions in the syntax, if, for example, a language with postpositions borrows prepositional terms, as it is the case in Dahalo. In this way, these positional words can act as a sort of "advanced column" toward the relexification of the language.

Naturally, Swahili loans enter in Dahalo both as isolated words and as idioms, such as *nafáási paʔad-* 'to get a chance, an opportunity' (from Swahili *nafasi* and *-paʔa*); under the influence of Swahili, a Dahalo item can shift and



extend its meaning in order to cover the range of meanings of a corresponding Swahili word; it is the case of the verb *pah-* 'to hit, beat', used with an object in order to translate many Swahili expressions built with the verb *-piga*; we have even recorded *ripoti pah-* 'to report'.

Taking into consideration both assimilated and unassimilated foreign material, the net result is often some kind of *Mischsprache*, in which Swahili is framed into Dahalo; but it may be surprising to know that Swahili loans account for about 15% only of our Dahalo glossary (made up of nearly 1,000 words<sup>8</sup>). This Swahili-borrowed section of the glossary is made up for the most part of nouns (63%), then follow the verbs (23%) and the "discourse markers" (14%). This would seem to rule out the possibility for Dahalo to become a true *Mischsprache*. Rather, if the sociolinguistic conditions which we tried to sketch persist in the next years, Dahalo will soon be on the verge of extinction, the economic and social conditions which so far have permitted this little language and people to exist having disappeared.

### Notes

1. This work originates from a two-month period of field work among the Dahalo in the Lamu District (Coast Province, Kenya), in January-March 1988, which was made possible by a scholarship granted by the Istituto Italo-Africano. The main aim of our work was to collect material on the morpho-syntax of this language. The morphology has been dealt with by Elderkin (especially 1974) and a certain amount of lexicon has been presented in various sources, most notably Ehret (1980) in his reconstruction of Proto-South-Cushitic.

Our principal informant was Dawa Hamadi, 30 years old, niece of one of Zaborski's informants. Although she had been living in Lamu town for many years, she was born in the area of Mkunumbi and was fluent in Dahalo. Like most Danfo, she was bilingual in (Amu) Swahili and spoke no other language.

The research was carried out in Lamu town and in the surrounding areas of Mckowe and Mkunumbi.

We want to express our thanks to: the Istituto Italo-Africano for the grant which made this research possible; Mr. Athman Lalli, the Curator of the Lamu Museum, who helped us in any possible way during our stay in Lamu, and, naturally, our informants.

2. We thank Mr. Athman Lalli for having provided us with this precious source of data, and Mr. Ed Loving (Kenya Working Group, Language Programs Coordinator) for having granted us the permission to quote it.
3. This would apply only to the last centuries, if Ali's (1985) hypothesis about the origins of the Boni proves correct. See section 5.1.

4. In our informant's speech [β] never occurs initially; e.g., Elderkin's (1974: 81) *buddad-* is for us *buddad-* 'to ask'. Concerning the use of the subscript [ɿ], see note (5) below. One can note that Tucker - Bryan - Woodburn (1977: 320) noted the existence of a voiced velar fricative /ɣ/, unknown to other authors (and which we never heard). It can perhaps be seen as a "negative" proof of the allomorphic character of the other two fricatives /β/ and /θ/, too.

5. Coherently with this approach, we mark alveolarity (with subscript [ɿ]) and leave dentality unmarked.

6. The following tags are used in the glosses to the Dahalo sentences:

O:	particle-complex marker
AFF:	affirmative selector
F:	feminine
FOC:	focus marker
GEN:	genitival postposition
Inf:	infinitive
IRR:	unrealised action selector
M:	masculine
NEG:	negative selector
P:	plural
PAST:	past selector
PERF:	perfect selector
Pr:	present paradigm
PrfPs:	perfective past paradigm
S:	singular
+	a morpheme boundary

7. One can here mention Maltese, in which a conversation is frequently interwoven with English expressions such as "all right!", "that's all!", even if the English borrowed in Maltese has not been assimilated yet, contrary to the Siculo-Italian material, borrowed at an earlier date and for a longer time.

8. This is a rough - and probably underestimated - figure, obtained by ruling out many probable early loans from Swahili (or some older forms of it), fully assimilated and no more recognizable today as such, not even to the Dahalo speakers. Loans from Lower Pokomo, Giriama, as well as forms for which a parallel can be found in ChiMiini (Barawa Swahili) are likewise excluded.

To draw up an etymological dictionary of Dahalo would require the joint work of both Cushitists and Bantuists (not to speak of Khoisanists), and it is well beyond our possibilities. Ehret - Elderkin - Nurse (1989) is a first step in this direction, although flawed by the "Southern Cushitic" bias of the authors, which makes them recur to Proto-South-Cushitic roots in cases in which borrowing from an Eastern Cushitic language (as Somali and Oromo) is more probable. Still in other cases, the authors are inclined to see in a Dahalo word not a Bantu loan, but, conversely, the source of words found in various Bantu languages of Kenya; this view is consistent with Nurse (1985 and 1986).

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