



Aethiopica 21 (2018)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

YVONNE TREIS, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique–Langage,
Langues et Cultures d’Afrique Noire, Paris

Review

DAWIT BEKELE, *Lexical Study of Dawuro*

Aethiopica 21 (2018), 286–289

ISSN: 1430-1938

Edited in the Asien-Afrika-Institut
Hiob-Ludolf-Zentrum für Äthiopistik
der Universität Hamburg
Abteilung für Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

by Alessandro Bausi

in cooperation with

Bairu Tafla, Ulrich Braukämper †, Ludwig Gerhardt,
Hilke Meyer-Bahlburg, and Siegbert Uhlig

Reviews

Unione Nazionale studenti eritrei in Italia, *Dizionario italiano tigrino*, Ripartizione educazione civiche scuole secondarie (Milano: Scuola professionale di legatoria e stampa Offset, 1984), iv, 133 S.) versucht sein, zu dem Band zu greifen, was die Gefahr birgt, durch die zahlreichen regelwidrigen Beispielsätze (sonst ein Gewinn für ein Wörterbuch) verwirrt zu werden. Sie sollten sich nicht darüber freuen, wie viele Wörter (darunter auch Verben) das Tigrinische—angeblich—mit dem Italienischen teilt.

Alle möglichen Benutzer des Wörterbuchs werden eine gewisse Tragik empfinden, dass die lexikographische Begabung und der große persönliche Einsatz, der für die Erstellung solch umfangreicher Wörterbücher notwendig ist, durch die abwegigen Ideen, nach der die Sprache nicht ein historisch gewachsenes Gebilde ist, das ein einzelner nicht zu ändern vermag (auch wenn er zur Stilistik und Idiomatik in gewissem Umfang etwas beitragen kann), zu einem Werk geführt haben, das nicht die gewünschte Rezeption finden wird.

Rainer Voigt, Freie Universität Berlin

DAWIT BEKELE, *Lexical Study of Dawuro*, LINCOM Language Research, 10 (München: LINCOM GmbH, 2017). xii, 338 pp. Price: €78.80. ISBN: 978-3-86288-835-1.

The book under review (henceforth *LSoD*) is a study of the vocabulary of selected semantic fields of Dawuro. It is based on a PhD thesis that was defended by Dawit Bekele (henceforth DB) at an unspecified date at Addis Ababa University. Dawuro (usually written Dawro in the literature) is a language of the Central Omoto cluster and thus closely related to Gamo, Gofa, and Wolaitta. It is spoken by more than 500,000 speakers in an area to the west of the Omo River in southern Ethiopia. The grammar of the language has hardly been documented so far: there are only two grammatical sketches by E. J. Allan and Hirut Woldemariam,¹ a paper on demonstratives by Hirut Woldemariam,² and a handful of BA and MA theses from Addis Ababa University, which are not generally accessible. Apart from a 300-wordlist collected

¹ E. J. Allan, 'Kullo', in M. L. Bender, ed., *The Non-Semitic Languages of Ethiopia*, Committee on Ethiopian Studies, Occasional Papers Series, 5 (East Lansing, MI: African Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1976), 324–350; and Hirut Woldemariam, 'Some aspects of the phonology and morphology of Dawuro', *Folia Orientalia*, 42–43 (2006–2007), 71–122.

² Hirut Woldemariam, 'Demonstratives in Dawuro', *Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere*, 65 (2001), 157–167.

for a dialect survey,³ to the best of my knowledge, no lexical material has so far been published. The *LSoD* could, therefore, constitute a welcome contribution to help advance Omotic research, if only its data was reliable and its description comprehensible.

The *LSoD* has nine chapters and two appendices. After the Introduction, Chapter 2 sets the scene for the study and provides geographical, administrative, economic, and historical information on the Dawuro area and people. Chapter 3 reviews selected publications on lexical semantics and historical linguistics, while Chapter 4 discusses questions of data collection. A grammatical sketch of the language is found in Chapter 5. The semantic fields and sub-fields whose analysis constitutes the core of the *LSoD* are introduced in Chapter 6. DB divides the collected lexical items into those related to the field of (1) 'honour', which encompasses terms referring to the Dawuro king's residence, his movable goods, his family, and his servants; (2) 'political issues', which covers administrative titles and terms relating to warfare; and (3) 'traditional elements', which are lexemes surrounding traditional jurisdiction and religion, local food and drink preparation, clothing and decoration, housebuilding, musical instruments, farming, and handicrafts (metalwork, pottery, tannery, woodwork, and weaving). Chapter 7 is intended to shed light on the origin of the collected lexemes and their morphological make-up. Chapter 8 looks at dialectal differences and diachronic changes in the lexicon. Chapter 9 summarizes the findings. The *LSoD* closes with a Bibliography and two Appendices: Appendix 1 contains the lexical database in list form, Appendix 2 presents a sample of colour photographs.

In my opinion, the book hardly qualifies as a scientific publication: it is inadequate with regard to the quality of the empirical data, to its analysis, form, and style.

Despite a section dedicated to linguistic methodology, the information on how and from whom the data was collected remains vague. Audio recordings, for instance, that are mentioned in Chapter 4 are never again referred to in the remainder of the book. The list of informants (pp. 55–57) leads one to assume that no women and no members of the smith, potter, tanner, and hunter groups were consulted. The relevance to the ensuing discussion of Dawuro of secondary sources (e.g. on Nigerian military coup speeches, Maori in television, revival of Modern Irish), which are summarized in the literature reviews, is not clarified. The myths surrounding the origins of the Dawuro people are never critically reviewed but taken as historical facts. Important linguistic con-

³ Alemayehu Abebe, *Ometo Dialect Pilot Survey Report*, SIL Electronic Survey Reports (n.p.: SIL International, 2002).

cepts are not well understood by DB, most notably the concept of ‘compound’. Any productive, non-lexicalized sequence of two (inflected) word forms is considered a ‘compound’, whereas it would make much more sense to interpret these sequences as phrases. His approach, however, grants DB the advantage of increasing his 1500-lexeme database easily, as all compounds are considered complex lexemes. DB often refers to ‘representations’ and the reader is at loss as to what this means (transcriptions? pronunciation variants? words? meanings?). Furthermore, it is unclear where the semantic categories into which the lexemes are grouped come from. DB’s core categories, ‘honour’, ‘political issues’, and ‘traditional elements’, are neither defined nor is there any discussion as to why they are considered primordial. They rather seem to be mere convenience categories—which, however, does not prevent DB from considering the simple classification of lexemes into these categories a lexical analysis. Finally, one wonders according to which non-arbitrary criteria lexemes were collected and why certain items made it into the database (e.g. *mokoronija*: ‘spaghetti’, *zi:p:ija*: ‘zipper’, or *pest:a:lija*: ‘plastic bag’) whereas other more central ones are missing (e.g. ‘enset plant’).

Except for the faulty section on phrase structure rules (§ 5.4), the grammatical sketch (§ 5) is an almost one-to-one copy of Hirut’s ‘Some aspects of the phonology and morphology of Dawuro’. Although this source is acknowledged in introductory sentences (e.g. p. 60), it is shocking to realize, after having consulted the article, that its whole structure, the entire analysis, and almost all examples, titles, and tables are copied! If DB’s description deviates from Hirut’s, then this is usually due to copy errors, incorrect reanalyses, or the replacement of some examples. If Hirut’s words are rephrased, then to the worse. DB adds a few missing glosses (following arbitrary and changing conventions) and transfers Hirut’s data into IPA symbols. Apart from this, DB’s contribution is restricted, firstly, to the addition of two new phonemes to Hirut’s system (p. 62), namely / Φ / allegedly contrasting with /p/, and / \tilde{h} / contrasting with /h/. While the first opposition seems unlikely, the existence of a marginal nasalized glottal fricative (or approximant) phoneme is also reported for some related languages.⁴ Secondly, DB adds one paragraph on tone (p. 64), where he seems to claim that Dawuro has three tonemes (H, L, M); however, no minimal tonal triplets are provided, and tone is never again marked.

The *LSoD* is written in such a poor variety of academic English that is often difficult, if not impossible, to understand what DB wants to tell readers (e.g. ‘Larger percentage of the lexical items consists of indigenous elements which

⁴ See e.g. M. Wakasa, *A Descriptive Study of the Modern Wolaytta Language*, PhD Dissertation, University of Tokyo (2008), pp. 44–45.

incorporate representations from varieties of sorts', p. 185). The publisher did not even make the effort to revise the English of the abstract on the back cover page. While context and common sense may help to disambiguate parts of the text, the reader has little chance of guessing the meaning of odd translations of examples and of entries in Appendix 2 (e.g. the photo on p. 329 of 'swinging milk' might mean 'churning milk'; 'crash' is used for 'grind' and 'thresh'). The bibliography contains many works that are not cited. No page numbers are given in in-text citations.

A linguist with a comparative Omotic interest or a particular interest in Dawuro could still make use of the *LSoD*—if the transcription of the data was trustworthy, which is clearly not the case. The Dawuro data is presented in two ways, in a phonological transcription (provided in phonetic brackets!) and a simplified, so-called 'English', transcription. The 'English' transcription is often used as the only transcription in the running text and as an additional transcription in examples and appendices. It is used, as DB states, 'so that also readers with no linguistic background could understand [the IPA-transcriptions]' (p. 7). It is in a random relation to the phonological transcription and, mostly, does not mark vowel and consonant length, it leaves glottalization (ejectives, implosives) unmarked as well as some other phonemic oppositions, for instance in [god:om:a gaduwa] *godoma gaduwa* 'king's home' (p. 113). Why DB does not use the local Dawuro orthography (as listed on p. 58) to make his description accessible to non-linguistic readers is unclear. The phonemic transcription seems to mark most phonemic distinctions apart from tone but does not render the data much more reliable and is riddled with mistakes. The marking of length is often inaccurate, see, for instance, the first vowels of *naga* 'keeper' (p. 122), *bora* 'ox' (p. 274), *matsa* 'milk' (p. 153), and *jala* 'meeting' (p. 306), which are very likely to be long. One and the same word or morpheme is often given in different transcriptions, for example the 2nd person plural ending of perfective verbs is alternately transcribed *-i:ta* (p. 78), *-ita:* (p. 79), *-i:ta* (p. 80), and *-ita* (p. 85). The transcriptions of the interrogative pronouns on pp. 84 and 92 also have little in common.

The abysmal quality of the *LSoD* shows me that the publisher, LINCOM, has spent not a single minute proofreading the manuscript, but printed it unseen. Despite this minimal commitment, the publisher charges €78.80 for the book! In conclusion, we might ask to what extent our knowledge has increased following the publication of the *LSoD*. At best, we have a list of 1500 Dawuro lexemes and phrases whose translation and transcription still require meticulous rechecking in the field.

Yvonne Treis, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique–
Langage, Langues et Cultures d'Afrique Noire, Paris