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RONNY MEYER, Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales

## Review

SARA PETROLLINO, *A Grammar of Hamar: A South Omotic Language of Ethiopia*

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by Alessandro Bausi

in cooperation with

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

SARA PETROLLINO, *A Grammar of Hamar: A South Omotic Language of Ethiopia*, Cushitic and Omotic Studies, 6 (Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2016). xxii, 342 pp. Price: €69.80. ISBN: 978-3-89645-491-1.

Hamär is spoken by less than 50,000 people in southern Ethiopia, in an area which was difficult to access until recently. The Hamär, who form a cultural and linguistic unit with the Banna and the Bašadda,<sup>1</sup> have been extensively researched by the ethnologists Ivo Strecker and Jean Lydall since the 1970s. Later, a number of their students from Johannes Gutenberg-Universität, Mainz, were involved in the research, for which they had to learn the basics of the Hamär language, mostly from Jean Lydall who published the first (and, for a long time, the only) grammatical sketch of Hamär,<sup>2</sup> as well as two articles on specific grammatical aspects.<sup>3</sup>

The book under review is the first comprehensive grammar of Hamär. It provides a detailed description of the phonology and morphology, and elaborates on syntax and the interface between morphosyntax and pragmatics. The author of the book, Sara Petrollino, studied African linguistics at Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale” (Italy) and Universiteit Leiden (The Netherlands), before she became a PhD researcher at the *laboratoire d’excellence* ASLAN in Lyon (France). This position allowed her to conduct fieldwork on Hamär, for five months in 2013 and for four months in 2014. Under the supervision of Gérard Philippson and Maarten Mous, she finalized and successfully defended her PhD dissertation, the present book, at Leiden University in November 2016.<sup>4</sup> Her analysis of the language is based on the speech of fourteen native speakers of Hamär with

<sup>1</sup> Here, names of places, ethnic groups, and languages follow the transliteration system of the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopia*, rather than that of the volume under review or my own.

<sup>2</sup> J. Lydall, ‘Hamer’, 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), 393–438.

<sup>3</sup> J. Lydall, ‘Gender, Number, and Size in Hamar’, in M. Bechhaus-Gerst and F. Serzisko, eds, *Cushitic—Omotic: Papers from the International Symposium on Cushitic and Omotic Languages, Cologne, January 6–9, 1986* (Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag, 1988), 75–90; and J. Lydall, ‘Having Fun with Ideophones in Hamar, Southern Ethiopia’, in Baye Yimam, R. Pankhurst, D. Chapple, Yonas Admassu, A. Pankhurst, and Birhanu Teferra, eds, *Ethiopian Studies at the End of the Second Millennium: Proceedings of the XIV<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, November 6–11, 2000, Addis Ababa*, II (Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, 2002), 886–911.

<sup>4</sup> For the dissertation, cf. <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/44090>, accessed on 15 May 2019.

whom she recorded about forty (presumably short) texts and elicited further data.

The book is divided into thirteen chapters, followed by three glossed and translated ‘Selected Hamar texts’ (Appendix A, pp. 287–295), a ‘Hamar–English selected lexicon’, and a ‘English–Hamar selected lexicon’ (Appendices B and C, pp. 297–332), and a rather brief ‘Subject index’ (pp. 341–342). The ‘List of morphemes’ (pp. xiii–xiv) is of great help in keeping track of the language examples; the three maps on pages xvii–xix give a good overview of the geographical location of the Hamär and surrounding peoples.

The first chapter, ‘Introduction’ (pp. 1–7), deals with the geographical and sociolinguistic background of the Hamär, previous research, and describes the research setting. The following chapter, ‘Phonology and morphophonology’ (pp. 9–69), is, with sixty pages, the largest single chapter. It contains a detailed description of the consonants and vowels, the syllable structure, stress and tone, as well as of the (morpho)phonological processes. In the remaining ten chapters, mainly morphological aspects of Hamär are elaborated, accompanied by observations on syntax and pragmatics. The nominal domain is the theme of Chapter 3, ‘Nouns’ (pp. 71–97), of Chapter 7, ‘Basic syntax’ (pp. 157–182), and of Chapter 8, ‘Syntax of the noun phrase’ (pp. 183–208). Chapter 3 is mainly concerned with basic nouns and their declension classes, with the morphology of gender and number marking and their pragmatic effects, as well as with noun derivation (limited to abstract nouns). Chapter 7 presents the structure of noun phrases and elaborates again on the pragmatic use of gender/number marking with regard to definiteness, discourse prominence, pragmatic implications of number marking, and illustrates core case marking (which also includes a subsection on the impersonal passive). Peripheral cases and genitive/possessive relations are discussed in detail in Chapter 8, which also contains subsections on relative clauses and coordination. Features of adjectives—a proposed separate word class that includes common nouns and nouns derived from stative verbs—are also mentioned in a subsection in Chapter 3. Thus, with more than seventy pages, noun morphology and its pragmatic implications represent the most prominent thematic complex in the book. Surprisingly, the verb morphology only amounts to about sixty pages distributed over four chapters, namely Chapter 6, ‘Verbs’ (pp. 137–155), Chapter 9, ‘Simple clauses’ (pp. 209–227), Chapter 10, ‘Complex clauses’ (pp. 229–246), and Chapter 12, ‘Negative clauses’ (pp. 259–266). Basic verbs and TAM forms, subject marking on verbs, and verb derivation are outlined in Chapter 6. General information about verbs in main clauses, including copular and existential predications, is given in Chapter 9, while converbs and subordinate verbs in adverbial clauses are presented in Chapter 10. Negated verbs

as well as tag questions are found in Chapter 12. Other types of interrogative sentences and question words, however, are illustrated in Chapter 11, ‘Interrogative clauses’ (pp. 247–257). Furthermore, independent personal and reflexive pronouns and pronominal subject clitics are discussed in Chapter 4 (pp. 99–112), while Chapter 5, ‘Other word classes’ (pp. 113–136), deals with adverbs (locational, temporal, and manner), numerals, and ideophones. The last section of the book, Chapter 13, ‘Classification’ (pp. 267–285), is concerned with the genetic classification of Omotic and presents comparative data from the Hamär perspective.

This book represents the most detailed treatise of the Hamär language so far, containing a wealth of new data and interesting typological findings. To name only a few, stress (a fixed culmination of duration, loudness, and high pitch) co-exists with a falling tone as part of grammatical morphemes.<sup>5</sup> Hamär has a flexible gender/number system in which most nouns can occur in a neutral form, with feminine or masculine gender, or in the gender-indifferent paucal. The choice of a specific gender conveys additional pragmatic information with regard to definiteness, and to the speaker’s attitude towards the entity (i.e. feminine gender as augmentative/appreciative vs masculine gender as diminutive/depreciative). There exists a specific paucal morpheme *-na*,<sup>6</sup> but no morphological plural marker, which results in a singular/paucal number dichotomy. As far as I know, such a type has not yet been mentioned in the literature.<sup>7</sup> As well as common and same-event converbs, Hamär is said to have a different-subject converb,<sup>8</sup> which is a rare phenomenon in African languages.<sup>9</sup> A last, apparently rare, feature in the Ethiopian linguistic area is that the patient argument of derived passive verbs is obligatorily marked for accusative case in the impersonal construc-

<sup>5</sup> However, it is odd that the falling tone exclusively occurs in the absolute word-final position (thanks to Yvonne Treis who brought this to my attention). Given the phonetic alternations presented in later sections of the book, the falling tone could also result from the contraction of diphthongs (or long vowels).

<sup>6</sup> The morpheme is confusingly labelled and glossed ‘plural’ but clearly described in the function of the paucal: ‘The plural marker refers to small quantities, usually no more than four or five countable units’ (p. 77).

<sup>7</sup> G. G. Corbett, *Number*, Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 39–42.

<sup>8</sup> Assuming that the analysis is correct, as the author also presents examples in which the different-subject converb is used without a subject switch (e.g. p. 233, ex. 11, or p. 236, ex. 18a).

<sup>9</sup> Y. Treis, ‘Switch-reference and Omotic–Cushitic Language Contact in Southwest Ethiopia’, *Journal of Language Contact*, 5/1 (2012), 80–116.

tion, but unmarked in the canonical passive (cf. pp. 146–148, 179–181). A very similar situation with regard to subject marking with derived passive verbs occurs in Čabu—also known as Šabo, a severely endangered isolate language in southern Ethiopia. In Čabu, the subject of derived passive verbs is also marked for accusative case; only if a reflexive reading is intended, is it unmarked for case.<sup>10</sup>

Although the present grammar results from a supervised PhD project, it is not free of drawbacks that hinder a clear understanding of the linguistic facts. First of all, the organization of the book is confusing. Data and analyses belonging to the same grammatical domain are often disjointed, spread over several chapters, so that it is difficult for the reader to get a comprehensive picture of specific grammatical forms and constructions. For instance, the predicate of equative and attributive nominal sentences is a copula element with three allomorphs in complementary distribution. The allomorphs are outlined in three different chapters, namely the copula *-ne* in affirmative declarative sentences (discussed in § 9.2), its negative counterpart *-tê* (found in § 12.1), and the element *-u* in (affirmative?) interrogative clauses (found in § 11.2.1). It is not clear whether these three allomorphs have the same morphosyntactic features, that is, they are invariable elements (they do not inflect for subject and are unmarked for tense/aspect) and occur clause-finally (instead of a verbal predicate) in main clauses. The disjointed treatment of these allomorphs probably makes the information somewhat inconclusive: it remains unclear as to whether in negative interrogative sentences the copula *-u*, *-tê*, or another element is used, while imperative copula sentences are not mentioned at all. Furthermore, there is no explanation as to how these copula elements relate to the tense markers *-á* (past) and *-é* (present) also found in interrogative nominal sentences (e.g. p. 247, ex. 2), which could suggest that Hamär has an additional zero copula.

Not all linguistic concepts are clearly defined. For instance, it is unclear why adjectives (§ 3.6) should be a separate word class and not simply subgroups of nouns and verbs. Other concepts are described in a rather puzzling way, such as ‘Hamar passives are syntactically agentless but an agent is always assumed to exist’ (p. 145), a statement which neither fits the impersonal passive (as it has an implied agent as syntactic subject, in Hamär the default third singular feminine, probably in its collective reading), nor the canonical passive (in which the agent is typically syntactically and semantically absent).

<sup>10</sup> Kibebe Tsehay Taye, *Documentation and Grammatical Description of Čabu*, PhD Dissertation, Addis Ababa University (2015), 290–294.

Hamär has a rich TAM system with about twenty verb conjugations in main clauses (cf. p. 209, Tables 9.1 and 9.2) and another ten conjugations for verbs in subordinate clauses (cf. p. 229, Table 10.1). In addition to the non-transparent terminology for conjugations (e.g. ‘imperfective’ for verbs consistently translated as past habitual, ‘general declarative’ for probably the general present, a ‘present’ which most frequently translates as future), the TAM system lacks proper analysis and description. There is no information about how the verb conjugations could fit into a coherent system with core and extended forms, and whether this system is primarily based on tense, aspect, or mood distinctions. A statement like ‘[r]egardless of the presence of the aspectual markers *-de* [perfective] and *-da* [imperfective], tense always carries aspectual information in declarative-affirmative verbs’ (p. 210) further adds to the confusion, as well as mismatches between the analysis in the ongoing text and the example data. With regard to verbs in relative clauses, for instance, it is stated, ‘If the event has taken place in the past, the markers *-â*, *-óno* and *-ána* are suffixed to the verb’ (p. 201). The preceding example (p. 201, ex. 51a), however, is obviously not translated with a past reading: *ée dagad-â* (man:M be\_angry-REL.PAST.M), ‘the angry man (the man who is angry)’. The example is also not translated with a resultative reading, which could be associated to inchoative-stative verbs, like ‘the man who became (and still is) angry’. If (inchoative-)stative verbs (to which ‘be(come) angry’ would belong) trigger a resultative present tense reading, then the verb is certainly not marked for past tense, but for the perfective aspect.<sup>11</sup> Apparently, the current description of the verbal system differs from that presented in a 2012 paper,<sup>12</sup> of which Sara Petrollino is a co-author. But the reason behind the new analysis is not stated.

A similarly unsatisfactory situation is also found in the phonology. While in her co-authored paper,<sup>13</sup> it is claimed that Hamär has a ten-vowel system (i.e. five cardinal vowels which distinguish  $\pm$ ATR), Petrollino, in the

<sup>11</sup> Cf. H.-J. Sasse, ‘Aspekttheorie’, in H.-J. Sasse, ed., *Aspektsysteme*, Institut für Sprachwissenschaft, Universität zu Köln, Arbeitspapier, 14, Neue Folge (Köln: Institut für Sprachwissenschaft, Universität zu Köln, 1991), 1–35; and A. Timberlake, ‘Aspect, tense, mood’, in T. Shopen, ed., *Language Typology and Syntactic Description*, III: *Grammatical Categories and the Lexicon*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 280–333.

<sup>12</sup> L. Cupi, S. Petrollino, G. Savà, and M. Tosco, ‘Preliminary notes on the Hamar verb’, in M.-C. Simeone-Senelle and M. Vanhove, eds, *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Cushitic and Omotic Languages, Paris, 16–18 April 2008*, Cushitic and Omotic Studies, 3 (Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2013), 181–195.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

volume under review, proposes a seven-vowel system with an additional phonemic length distinction (p. 29), in which *e*, *o* as well as *ɛ*, *ɔ* are considered phonemes (although no minimal pairs are given for the latter vowel set). There is no explanation for this change of analysis.

Furthermore different analyses are sometimes presented side-by-side. For instance, in Chapter 4 a short and a long paradigm of clitic subject pronouns are presented. The long paradigm consists of the short clitics plus an additional *-n* (cf. p. 100, Table 4.1). Later this *-n* is reanalysed as a nominal dependency marker (pp. 176–179, § 7.4.4). Although the author alludes to the two analyses of the long subject clitics (cf. p. 99, n. 32), she does not indicate which is the more plausible or preferred.

Often, varying functions or analyses of morphemes remain indistinct, giving the impression that they represent ad hoc findings. For instance, initially it is mentioned that the suffix *-á* attached to a verb root is the citation form of the verb, which also serves as second person singular imperative (e.g. p. 137, ex. 2). In Table 9.1 (p. 209) and in § 9.1.1 (pp. 210–211), the same suffix *-á* becomes a distinct second person singular imperative marker (which is also its sole function in the ‘List of morphemes’, p. xiii). Later, a probably distinct suffix *-á* is introduced as a past interrogative marker (p. 247). A further example concerns the instrumental case suffix *-ka* whose function is defined as encoding the instrument, a temporal relation or the perlocative ‘through’ (p. 190), but earlier the same suffix also marks a locative relation (p. 145, ex. 32).

Despite its organizational and analytical shortcomings, the present grammar is a welcome and important contribution to the documentation and linguistic description of Hamār, a hitherto little-known South Omotic language. The grammar is certainly of interest to typologists and to linguists focusing on the comparative study of Ethiopian and Afroasiatic languages.

Ronny Meyer, Institut national des langues  
et civilisations orientales