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MICHAEL SCHULZE, Universität Hamburg

Review article

BINYAM SISAY MENDISU, *Aspects of Koorete Verb Morphology*

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Bairu Tafla, Ulrich Braukämper, Ludwig Gerhardt,
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Review articles

BINYAM SISAY MENDISU, *Aspects of Koorete Verb Morphology* = Cushitic and Omotic Studies 1, edited by HANS-JÜRGEN SASSE – MAURO TOSCO. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2010. 218 pp. Price: € 34.80. ISBN 978-3-89645-486-7.

The Koorete language is a member of the Omotic family of Afroasiatic. Within Omotic it is a member of the so called Omoto cluster. According to the 1998 census Koorete is spoken by 103,879 people east of Lake Abbayya in south-western Ethiopia (Gordon 2005: 116).

Like many other Omotic languages Koorete is only sparsely described. Binyam Sisay Mendisu now presents us with his Ph.D. thesis a first detailed account of the verb morphology of this language. Compared with the earlier grammatical sketches by Cerulli (1929), Hayward (1982) and Beletu Redda (2003) this work is an important step forward. Binyam has already worked on Koorete for a long time, for example in 2002 he wrote his M.A. thesis about the noun phrase. He collected his data during several months of fieldwork in Keele and Addis Abäba in 2005 and 2006. His description of Koorete verb morphology is mainly based on the Basic Linguistic Theory (Dixon 1997; Dryer 2006).

The thesis is composed of nine chapters. The first two chapters provide an introduction and an overview of the state of the art respectively. Binyam gives a critical account of the earlier grammatical descriptions of Koorete. He states that a number of aspects have to be revised and that his thesis presents a considerably large variety of verb forms.

The third chapter is a grammatical sketch of the Koorete language, excluding verb morphology. The phonological description is based on Theil's (2011) study of Koorete phonology. Binyam uses a phonemic transcription in a revised Latin alphabet, which – following Theil (2011) – slightly differs from the existing Latin orthography. The reader gets a basic impression of Koorete phonology and pronunciation. Theil (2011) states that tone is phonemic at a word level. Binyam had already collected most of his data prior to this, and due to lack of time the language material in his thesis is not marked for tone. Although he claims that tone has no grammatical relevance, future works on Koorete should contain such a marking. As far as the different functions of tone are concerned, surprises are always possible and have to be kept in mind. The short description of morphology and syntax are based on Hayward (1982), Beletu Redda (2003) and the author's own data. The fourth chapter deals with morphophonemic processes occurring at morpheme boundaries.

The following chapters make up the body of the thesis. Chapter 5 is about the verb root and verb derivation, chapter 6 about verb inflection, chapter 7 about negation and chapter 8 about focus. The last chapter is a conclusion and summary of the author's results. These results will now be discussed in detail.

One of Binyam's most important discoveries is the existence of a system of grammatical assertive focus in Koorete, i.e. – with some exceptions – one constituent of a sentence is obligatorily marked for focus by means of special suffixes. In addition to this default focus marking, the focus morpheme can be moved to another constituent for pragmatic reasons. The author gives a detailed account of this focus system.

For the *Tense, Mood and Aspect* (TMA) system of Koorete, Binyam describes a basic distinction between a perfective and an imperfective aspect. The perfective aspect is marked by the suffix *-d*. The past perfective is the only simple (not compound or complex) verb form using this marker:

- | | | |
|--------------------|-------------|----------------|
| (1) <i>garma-i</i> | <i>doro</i> | <i>muu-d-o</i> |
| lion-NOM | sheep | eat-PF-PAi |
- 'A lion ate sheep.' (p. 91)

Hayward (1982: 239) calls the suffix *-d* a "perfect marker" without giving a definition of "perfect". Binyam identifies the suffix as a perfective aspect marker. This definition is supported by the fact that the marker is also used to form a perfective converb.

The suffix *-o* is called a past tense marker by the author. This interpretation is of course possible because the suffix only occurs in verb forms with a past tense reading. On the other hand, in combination with perfective *-d* there are no other tense suffixes paradigmatically contrasting with *-o*. Assuming that a simple perfective verb form had a default past reading in Koorete, no additional past tense morpheme would be necessary. In fact, the perfective verb stem marked with *-o* could have a nominal original with *-o* being the absolutive ending of the nominal predicate. The suffix *-o* in some cases occurs as an absolutive suffix in noun inflection (cf. chapter 3). So, if one does not analyze it as a past tense morpheme, one could alternatively call it a predication marker. Hayward (1999: 304) for example uses the term "final predication marker" for the suffixes *-in/-en* in Zayse, which is closely related to Koorete.

If *woon-d-o* is in focus, it must be followed by personal agreement suffixes and a focus marker. The personal agreement suffixes are closely connected with the focus marker and dropped once the verb is not in focus. There are different series of personal agreement markers for declarative and interrogative focus. Such special interrogative conjugations are typical for Ometo languages. In connection with the agreement markers, Koorete verb forms seem to have undergone complex morphophonemic processes, so that

it is not easy to identify the shape of the agreement morphemes. Binyam makes some good proposals in this respect, but more research is needed.

Followed by a suffix *-i*, the perfective marker *-d* is used to form the converb:

- (2) *is-i* *og-apa* *yoo-d-i* *gat-t-o* *ba-nni-ko*
 she-NOM road-ABL come-PF-CNV be tired-PF-PAi not_exist-3FS-AFOC:DEC
 ‘Having come from a trip she is NOT tired.’ (p. 39).

Unfortunately Binyam mentions converbs and converb construction only briefly, without paying special attention to them. Besides the converb formed with *-d-i* no other converbs were identified in the text of his book. This raises the question whether *-i* can really be analyzed as a special converb morpheme. Alternatively one could conclude that there is a perfective morpheme *-di* which elides its vowel before the vocalic suffix *-o*. On the other hand, one should be prepared to detect other converbs in Koorete in the future, meaning that it is indeed appropriate to interpret *-i* as a separate morpheme. Azeb (2001: 190–191) mentions a converb suffix *-i* for the Ometo language Maale. This morpheme “can be used to express simultaneous or sequential events in relation to that expressed by the verb in the main clause”. In Koorete the converb seems to express only sequential events due to the perfective marker *-d*.

Binyam calls the structures in (3) and (4) present perfect and past perfect respectively.

- (3) *doro* *woon-d-i-ko* *ta* *yes-e*
 sheep buy-PF-PFT-AFOC:DEC 1SG exist-PRES
 ‘I have BOUGHT sheep.’ (p. 94)
- (4) *doro* *woon-d-i-ko* *ta* *ye-tsha*
 sheep buy-PF-PFT-AFOC:DEC 1SG exist-PAii
 ‘I had BOUGHT sheep.’ (p. 95)

Here we have constructions with complex verbs in Binyam’s terminology. A perfect suffix *-i* is attached to the perfective verb stem. The main verb has a focus marker and is followed by a clitic personal pronoun and a copula verb in present or past tense respectively. It is apparent that the verb form *woon-d-i* is formally identical with the converb. The converb *woon-d-i* has the meaning ‘having bought’, the whole construction means ‘having bought, I exist/existed’, i.e. ‘I have/had bought’. So *-i* should in any case be considered a converb, not a perfect marker. The meaning of perfect aspect is conveyed by the whole construction, not by the converb alone. Unfortunately Binyam also uses the term ‘perfect’ for many converbs, which do not depend on a copula verb. Thus they cannot be interpreted as perfect forms. Indicating anteriority to the action of the main verb, they are a part of typical converb constructions.

Hayward (1982: 242) identifies an “imperfect velar suffix” which only occurs with certain verbs. He has no explanation for “the extensive gaps in the distribution” of this suffix. Binyam shows that the occurrence of the

velar suffix is conditioned by a clearly defined phonetic context. Outside this phonetic context the realization is zero. The author convincingly demonstrates the existence of an imperfective suffix *-g* that has a zero allomorph, depending on the phonetic environment. By calling it “imperfective”, he emphasizes the aspectual meaning of the suffix.

The imperfective stem appears in combination with three morphemes: a progressive morpheme *-iya(ka)*, a present tense morpheme *-e/-ne* and a past morpheme *-tsha*. The following verb forms result from these combinations:

Present progressive:

- (5) *doro woon-g-iya-(ka)-ko ta yes-e*
 sheep buy-IMF- PROG-(LOC)-AFOC:DEC 1SG exist-PRES
 ‘I am BUYING sheep’ (p. 97)

Past progressive:

- (6) *doro woon-g-iya-ko ta ye-tsha*
 sheep buy-IMF-PROG-AFOC:DEC 1SG exist-PAii
 ‘I was BUYING sheep’ (p. 99)

Present habitual:

- (7) *doro woom-a-ko ta woon-g-e*
 sheep buy-DEP-AFOC:DEC 1 SG buy-IMF-PRES
 ‘I (will) BUY sheep.’ (p. 102)

Past habitual:

- (8) *doro e woong-i-tsha*
 sheep 3MS buy-EPN-PAii
 ‘I used to buy sheep’ (p. 105)

A progressive form consists of two elements: a main verb with the imperfective suffix *-g* (or zero) and a suffix *-iya* and a final copula verb in the present or past tense respectively. Binyam calls *-iya* a progressive morpheme. On a purely synchronic level there are no objections to this analysis. But the fact that the locative suffix *-ka* may be optionally attached to *-iya* raises the suspicion that the progressive forms are indeed composed of a verbal noun in the locative case and a following existential verb. Thus the forms could be paraphrased as ‘I am/was within buying’. In chapter 3 the full form of the locative suffix is given as *-aka* and Binyam mentions another locative suffix *-a* (pp. 39–40). So the form *woon-g-iya-(ka)* could be alternatively analyzed as an imperfective verb stem *woon-g-* followed by a vowel, a glide *y*, and a locative suffix, that can have the shape *-a* or *-aka*. The vowel preceding the locative suffix could be *-i* or an original *-e* which is raised to *-i*. This vowel may be a nominalizer, like the infinitive suffix *-e* in *oo-w-e* (‘bringing’ from *oo-* ‘bring’, p. 69). In this alternative analysis *-iya* is not treated as an aspect marker. The progressive forms are simply the result of a periphrastic construction with a verbal noun.

Binyam states that the present tense is marked by a suffix *-e* which takes the shape *-ne* after verb roots ending in a vowel (p. 89). In the sentence the pairs (5)/(6) and (7)/(8) *-e* contrast with *-tsha*, expressing a difference between present tense and past tense in the imperfective aspect. So it suggests itself to call *-e* a present tense and *-tsha* a past tense suffix. The verb in (8) indeed has a meaning of a habitual past, but it is not accurate to call the tense in (7) a present habitual, because the verb can also have a future meaning. It would be more appropriate to call it a non-past. Now look at the following sentences:

- (9) *doro oo-tta-ko i oo-ne*
 sheep bring-DEP-AFOC:DEC 3FS bring-PRES
 ‘She BRINGS sheep.’ (p. 103)
- (10) *tan-i doro woon-d-o baa-s-so*
 I-NOM sheep buy-PF-PAi not_exist-1SG-AFOC:DEC
 ‘I did NOT buy sheep.’ (p. 181)
- (11) *tan-i doro-ko woon-d-o baa-ne*
 I-NOM sheep-AFOC:DEC buy-PF-PAi not_exist-TEMP
 ‘I did not buy SHEEP.’ (p. 182)
- (12) *es-i ba-tta-ko baa-ne*
 he-NOM disappear-DEP-AFOC:DEC disappear-PRES
 ‘He DISAPPEARS.’ (p. 112)

In (9) *oo-ne* contains the suffix *-ne* which, according to Binyam, is an allomorph of the present tense suffix *-e* after the vocalic ending of the verb root *oo-* ‘bring’. (10) is a sentence in the negative past. The negative existential verb root *baa-* is automatically marked for assertive focus, it is followed by an agreement suffix and the final focus marker *-ko*, which due to assimilation has the shape *-so*. In (11) we have the same sentence, but for pragmatic reasons the focus marker *-ko* is moved to the object *doro* ‘sheep’. In such a case the agreement suffix of *baa-* is also dropped. Interestingly now the suffix *-ne* is attached to *baa-*. Binyam considers it to be a temporal suffix. Such temporal morphemes occur in many of the examples given by Binyam, but he does not explain their function. It seems that they are attached to the verb of a subordinate clause in order to mark an action that happens simultaneously to the action of the main verb (see e.g. pp. 94–95, sentence 11 (d)). But in (11) there is no such context. In (12) the same verb root *baa-* is used as a main verb with the meaning ‘to disappear’. Binyam gives a detailed explanation of the grammaticalization process from this full verb to a negative auxiliary in detail in chapter 7 (pp. 142–147). In (12) Binyam glosses *-ne* as a present tense morpheme. If one compares (11) with (12), the question arises whether the *-ne* suffixes in both sentences should be treated as separate morphemes. In (11) *-ne* cannot have a present tense meaning, nor can it be a temporal marker. It actually serves as a kind of “final predication marker” to use Hayward’s (1999:

304) term again. The suffixes *-in/-en* in Zayse which Hayward assumes to be such markers seem to be used independently of aspect and tense and could even be cognate with the Koorete suffix *-ne*. For Maale Azeb Amha (2001: 149) identifies an affirmative declarative marker *-ne*. It is possible that the suffix *-ne* in (9) and (12) is also such a marker and not a present tense morpheme after all. If this is the case and *-e* was seen as an allomorph of *-ne*, *-e* would not be a present tense marker either and would result in absence of the present tense morpheme in Koorete. But since *-e* almost consequently occurs in present tense sentences in Binyam's material, it is hardly possible to find arguments against his interpretation of *-e* as a present tense morpheme. But maybe *-e* and *-ne* are separate morphemes, and *-e* indicates present tense and *-ne* a "final predication marker".

If it is true that *-o* and *-e/-ne* were not tense markers, the next question would be whether *-tsba* is really a past tense morpheme. Binyam considers *yese* and *yetsba* to be present and past forms of the copula verb *yes-*. But one could alternatively analyze *yese* as an imperfective and *yetsba* as a perfective form. The suffix *-itsba* in (8) could be seen as a suffixed version of the perfective copula verb. In such an extreme case, that would mean that the Koorete TMA system completely relies on aspect distinctions, without the notion of tense. There is no claim that all these alternative interpretations are true, they are just an attempt to show that the position of tense in Koorete is by far not clear and that more research has to be done on this topic.

Conclusion

Binyam Sisay Mendisu's book about Koorete verb morphology is founded on a solid theoretical base, and the grammatical descriptions are clearly structured and easily understandable.

The author discovered that most Koorete sentences are obligatorily marked by focus. The focus morphology is comprehensively dealt with in chapter 8. A major part of the book is dedicated to TMA morphology. The author convincingly elaborates a basic dichotomy between a perfective and an imperfective aspect. A perfect and a progressive can be formed periphrastically. Binyam identifies special morphemes for these forms, but it seems that a perfect is made up of a converb construction and the progressive forms use a construction with a verbal noun in the locative case. Two tenses are identified: past and present. The above discussion of the corresponding forms and constructions shows that there is still a lot of research to do in order to clarify the complicated situation. It could be the case that at least some of the tense markers identified by Binyam are in fact just predication markers. Evidence from closely related languages supports this assumption. It seems that many of the verb forms have originally evolved from nominal predications with

verbal nouns. Binyam mentions such nominalized verbs only marginally, but a comprehensive discussion of them could shed more light on the nature of certain verb forms. Subordinate clauses are hardly dealt with in the book, only relative clauses are shortly described. It becomes clear that special morphemes are used in relative clauses and also appear in focus constructions. A more detailed account of relative clauses would be helpful to attain a deeper understanding of some forms. Other kinds of subordinate clauses are treated even more scantily. If they were given more attention, a variety of additional verb forms could come to light and verb forms that are already known could be interpreted in a different way.

The numerous references to grammaticalization processes in Koorete are an especially interesting aspect of the book. Binyam for example explains how the negative auxiliary evolved from a full verb, which is still in use in the language, and how cleft sentences can be the origin of focus constructions.

In any case, Binyam made an important contribution to the documentation of the hitherto scarcely described Koorete language.

Abbreviations

ABL	Ablative	incl	inclusive	PROG	Progressive
AFOC:DEC	Assertive Focus, declarative	LOC	Locative	PRES	Present
CNV	Converb	NOM	Nominative	TEMP	Temporal
DEP	Dependent	PAi	Past 1	1PL	1 st person plural
EPN	Epenthetic	PAii	Past 2	1SG	1 st person singular
excl	exclusive	PF	Perfective	3FS	3 rd person feminine singular
IMF	Imperfective	PFT	Perfect	3MS	3 rd person masculine singular

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Michael Schulze, Universität Hamburg

ANDREAS WETTER, *Das Argobba. Eine deskriptive Grammatik der Varietät von Šonke und T'ollaha (Zentraläthiopien)* = Grammatische Analysen afrikanischer Sprachen 38, Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2010. 434 S. Preis: € 78,00. ISBN: 978–3–89645–554–3.

Argobba ist eine mit dem Amharischen nahe verwandte süd-äthiosemitische Sprache, die heute noch in einer Reihe von Enklaven in einem langgestreckten Gebiet am östlichen Rand des äthiopischen Hochlandes gesprochen wird. Sie ist großem Druck von Seiten des Amharischen und des Oromo ausgesetzt und somit in ihrem Bestand gefährdet. Ursprünglich wurde Argobba auch in der Gegend um Harar gesprochen, die Sprecher haben aber inzwischen wohl einen vollständigen Sprachwechsel zum Oromo vollzogen. Die Varietät von Harar wurde 1939 von Marcel Cohen in einer grammatischen Skizze dokumentiert (Cohen 1939:373–427).¹ Wolf Leslau sammelte zwischen 1945 und 1950 Daten zur Varietät von Aləyyu Amba, die im südlichen Teil des heutigen Verbreitungsgebietes gesprochen wird. Diese Daten veröffentlichte er in mehreren Artikeln und einer kurzen Grammatik.² Andreas Wetter führte zwischen 2001 und 2006 Feldforschungen zur Argobba-Varietät der Dörfer Šonke und T'ollaha im Norden des Argobba-Verbreitungsgebietes durch. Diese Varietät wird nach Wetters Schätzungen von insgesamt etwa 3000 Menschen gesprochen und unterscheidet sich deutlich von der Varietät von Aləyyu Amba. Als Ergebnis seiner Arbeit präsentiert Wetter nun in deutscher Sprache die erste umfangreiche Grammatik des Argobba.

¹ M. COHEN 1939, *Nouvelles études d'éthiopien méridional* = Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, Sciences Historiques et Philologiques 275, Paris: Ancien Honoré Champion.

² W. LESLAU 1957, "Arabic Loanwords in Argobba", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 77, S. 36–39; DERS. 1959, "A Preliminary Description of Argobba", *AE* 3, S. 251–273; DERS. 1966, "An Analysis of the Argobba Vocabulary", *Journal of African Languages* 5/5, S. 102–112; DERS. 1978, "Argobba Vocabulary", *RSE* 26, S. 21–43; DERS. 1997, *Ethiopic Documents: Argobba. Grammar and Dictionary* = ÄthFor 47, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.