

GAMO: a dialect variant or a group with its own dialects?

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1. Introduction

This study deals with the Gamo linguistic variety, a dialect within the North Ometo subgroup. The North Ometo subgroup is one of the four subgroups of the Ometo group comprising several related languages and dialects, Ometo is a linguistic group within the Omotic language family (Fleming 1976, Bender 2000). In addition to Gamo, the North Ometo subgroup contains several other members such as Wolaitta, Gofa, Kullo (Dawuro), Dorze, Oyda, etc. Gamo is mutually intelligible with the other varieties of North Omo such as Wolaita, Dawuro, Gofa (Ethiopian Language Academy 1980).

The Gamo dialect constitutes its own regional dialects which differ in their lexical items, phonological and grammatical structures. In the earlier studies of the Ometo group, however, some of the dialects of Gamo such as Dorze, Dac'e, Zala are considered as sisters to Gamo while others have not been mentioned at all.

This study will show the fact that Gamo is not a homogeneous dialect and it has a large diversity within it. The various dialects of Gamo differ significantly in their phonological, morphological and lexical systems. The speakers of the various dialects of Gamo identify themselves primarily as the small group to which they belong such as Dorze, Ochollo etc, and only secondly as Gamo. Thus, this study suggests revision of the already existing internal classification of Ometo by including a new subgroup within the North Ometo, namely, GAMO, which comprises its own members. This paper also forwards some corrective remarks on the existing classification of the North Ometo variants. Some members which

were identified as direct decedents of the North Omeo branch, such as Dorze, Ochollo, etc, are reconsidered as dialects of Gamo.

The paper is divided into five sections. The first section, which is this one, is introduction of the study. The second section gives a brief overview of the Gamo dialect and the Gamo people. Then, the third section discusses Gamo versus other member of the North Ometo subgroup. Section four deals with showing the dialects of Gamo and the linguistic features distinguishing them. Finally, reclassification of the North Ometo linguistic group that assumes a new subgroup, GAMO, will be presented. This study is based on fresh data collected by the author from native speakers of Gamo in 1998, 1999, 2004 in Arbaminch.

2. Gamo

The Gamo people are located in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region, in the following Woredas of the Gamo Gofa Zone, namely, Arbaminch Zuria, Chench, Bonke, Kucha, Kemba, Zala, Boredda, Mirab Abaya, Dita and Dara Malo. The boundaries of Gamo are: Lake Abaya and Chamo in the East, Zayse in the South, Wolaitta in the North, Gofa and Male in the West.

The term used to refer to the Gamo people has been changed successively. Before 1974, the Gamo people were referred as 'Gamu', a derogative term in Amharic, 'they stink'. During the Derg regime, where equality of nations, nationalities and ethnic groups has been declared, the name 'Gamu' has been replaced by 'Gaammo' which means 'lion' in the same language. There was a feeling among the people who proposed this name that being called after 'lion', external perceptions will associate such a positive image to the people. However, it seems that even this name has not got full approval by the entire community. The name 'Gaammo'

has been also considered as a derogative by some others who are arguing that this word is used to refer to a kind of wild animal, 'lion' and it cannot be our name. Most people have argued that their self-name is 'Gamo'. Currently, this name is widely used as a name of the people and the language.

According to the Central Statistics Authority (CSA) abstracts of population and housing census of 1994, the total number of speakers of the Gamo language is 719, 874.

3. Gamo versus other speech varieties of North Ometo: mutual intelligibility and external perceptions

Gamo is mutually intelligible to the other speech varieties in the North Ometo, namely, Wolaitta, Gofa and Dawuro. According to a mutual intelligibility test made by the Ethiopian Language Academy, (1980:15) Gamo understands 95% percent of Gofa text; 93% of Wolaitta and 89% of Dawruo. A somewhat similar result has been attained in a recent study on mutual intelligibility tests and cognate counts in Gamo, Gofa, Wolaitta and Dawuro. Accordingly, Gamos understand, 95% of a text in Gofa; 88% of a text in Wolaitta and 95.5% of a text in Dawuro. The cognate count also shows that Gamo shares 83% of its words with Wolaitta and 79% of its words with Dawuro and 84% of its words with Gofa (Hirut forthcoming) . Thus, Gamos are mutually intelligible with the other varieties of North Ometo, namely, Wolaitta, Gofa and Dawuro and so the four speech varieties can be considered as dialect variants rather than separate languages.

External perceptions consider the varieties of North Ometo as a single linguistic entity. This is also observed in the scholars work. Fleming and Bender (1976) consider Gamo, Gamo,

Dawuro, Dorze and other dialects of Gamo as dialects of Wolaitta. Similarly, in 1992, in the process of implementing mother tongue education, the four speech varieties have been considered as one. Wolaitta, a language that has a relatively developed history as a written language, was proposed to serve as a central language. Thus, teaching materials were prepared in Wolaitta language and distributed to the elementary schools in the entire zone. That approach, however, did not work as planned because the other major groups such as Gamos, Dawuros and Gofas were reacting as being disfavored. As a result, the Wolaitta language was left only for Wolaittas, that is, in some districts of the zone. Having a desire to have a homogeneous language/dialect in the zone, the government came up with a very new idea, that is creating an artificial written composite language named DAGOGA. DAGOGA is an acronymic term made up of initial letters of names of the three major languages: Dawuro, Gofa, Gamo. Without evaluating the effectiveness of DAGOGA as a mother tongue, the composite language was made to include Wolaitta. Thus, WOGAGODA, was developed. Again, new schoolbooks were produced in WOGAGODA. Paradoxically, all the inhabitants of the zone rejected WOGAGODA for being nobody's mother tongue. 'WOGAGODA was seen as anything but a retrogressive step away from an established form of their own language, which was diluted with alien variants (Hirut forthcoming).

4. The diversity within Gamo

As mentioned in the introduction, the Gamo language exhibits a significant variation across the different places it is spoken. Particularly Gamo used in Ochollo, Ganta, K'uc'a, Boreda and Dorze show noticeable differences from Gamo used in the other places. An examination of the phonological, grammatical and lexical differences attested among the Gamo dialects will be made in the following sections.

4.1 Phonological and phonetic variations

The common phonetic and phonological differences in the dialects of Gamo are the points of discussion below.

1. The alveolar consonants such as /t/, /d/, /t^s/, /d^z/, /s/ and /z/ have dental point of articulation in the Dorze and Ochollo dialects. This is clearly noted in the fieldwork.
2. In its phonemic inventory, the K'uc'a dialect appears differs from the rest for it lacks two phonemes /t^s/ and /s'/. In contrast, the K'uc'a Gamo has /t'/ which is not found in the others. K'uc'a replaces /tt/ in place of /t^s/. The following words show the /t'/ - /s'/ and /tt/ - /t^s/correspondences found in K'uc'a against the others.

<i>Ochollo</i>	<i>Dorze</i>	<i>Boreda</i>	<i>K'uc'a</i>	
s'ugunt^s	s'ugunt^s	s'ugunt^{su}	t'uguntta	'nail'
Dants	Dants	Dantsi	t'antta	'breast'
mek'et^s	mek'et^s	Mek'et^{si}	mek'etta	'bone'
ket^s	ket^s	ket^{sa}	ketta	'house'

As indicated above, K'uc'a uses the phoneme /s'/ where the others use /t'/. It is also shown that /t^s/of Ochollo, Dorze, Boreda corresponds to /tt/ in K'uc'a.

3. It is also attested that a word-initial alveolar ejective t' in K'uc'a corresponds to the alveolar implosive D in the other dialects such as Bonke, Kemba and Dita Compare the following cognates.

<i>K'uc'a</i>	<i>Other dialects</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
t'ale	Dale	'medicine'
t'iilee	Diille	'flour'
t'isko	Disko	'sleep'

mero	meDo	'appearance'
wora	woDa	'trophy'
gara	gaDa	'low land'
siire	siiDe	'nose'

The features shown just above make the K'uc'a dialect resemble more like Wolaitta. The K'uc'a dialect is spoken adjacent to Wolaitta and the variation attested with it could be the result of contact.

Another phonological distinction among the Gamo dialects is the situation of terminal vowels of nouns, specially, vowels that occur following the sibilant consonants, namely, **t^s**, **s** or **c**. In Dorze and Ochollo terminal vowels which occur following the mentioned sibilants can be optionally deleted while that is not the case in the others as illustrated below.

Dorze	Ochollo	K'uc'a	Others	
mits	mit^s	Mitta	mit^sa	'tree/wood'
miz	miz	miziya	Miza	'cow'
s'ugunt^s	s'ugunt^s	t'uguntta	s'ugunt^su	'nail'
apunt^s	apunt^s	apuntta	apunsuu	'tear'
dors	dors	Dorsa	dorsa	'sheep'
ket^s	ket^s	Ketta	kept^sa	'house'

5. **z** of the K'uc'a dialect corresponds to the respective affricate consonant, that is, **dz**, **b** elsewhere.

K'uc'a	Other dialects	Gloss
heeza	heedza	'three'
donza	dondza	'adult'

wonza

wondza

'udder'

4.2 Grammatical Variation

The grammatical variations exhibited in the regional dialects of Gamo include the following. The definite marking element has different forms across the different dialects of Gamo. In the Bonke and Ochollo varieties, the element *-za* is used as a definite marker, whereas in Dorze, the element *-če/-e* is used for the same function. In Kamba and K'uc'a definiteness is expressed by using suffix *-a*.

Dorze	Ochollo and Bonke	Kamba and K'uc'a	
bor-če	bora-za	bora	'the ox'
kani-če	kana-za	kana	'the dog'
šoš-e	šoša-za	šoša	'the snake'

The element used to mark past tense is *-r* in Dorze and Ochollo but *-d* in the others.

woor?	'he killed'	<i>Ochollo</i>
woor?	'he killed'	<i>Dorze</i>
woD	'he killed'	<i>Others</i>
y-i-r-a	'they came'	<i>Ochollo</i>
y-i-r-a	'they came'	<i>Dorze</i>
y-i-d-a	'they came'	<i>Others</i>

Forms of the agreement markers of verbs show certain variation across the dialects. Compare the paradigms for the imperfective/present tense forms of the verb *m-* 'eat' in Ochollo, Dorze, Kemba and K'uc'a, Bonke, Doko and Dita

Ochollo	Dorze	Kemba, K'uč'a	Bonke, Doko, Dita	
m-aiss	m-ais	m-ais	m-ais	'I eat'
m-aassa	m-aasa	m-aasa	m-aasa	'You eat'
m-aassu	m-aazu	m-aysu	m-aysu	'She eats'
m-eess	m-ees	m-ees	m-ees	'He eats'
m-ooss	m-oos	m-oos	m-oos	'We eat'
m-eeta	m-eta	m-eeta	m-eeta	'You eat'
m-iza	m-iza	m-oosona	m-ettes	'They eat'

4.3 Lexical variation

Examples of lexical variations among certain dialects of Gamo are given below.

Dorze	Ochollo	K'uc'a	Others	
hu?e	hup'e	huye	hu?e	'head'
konke	konke	som?o	deemo	'forehead'
waye	waye	haytta	haytse	'leaf/ear'
zawk'-	zawk'-	suyk'-	wayik'-	'whistle'
aypeso	sinobagga	sintta	sinsse	'face'
ing-	ing-	wuk'k'-	imm-	'give'
wul-	b-	b-	b-	'go'
awa	anttaa	ayba	aazi	'why'

5. The reconsideration of the internal reclassification of North Omoto and conclusive remarks

This study points out the following to be reconsidered in respect to the existing internal reclassification of North Omoto with special reference to Gamo.

The consideration of the dialects of Gamo such as Zala, Dac'e and Dorze as direct decedents of North Ometo, that is, as sisters to Gamo, Dawuro, Gofa, Wolaitta etc., and equating of North Ometo to Wolaitta, (Fleming 1976, Fleming and Bender 1976) does not appear to be plausible.

According to the information from the Gamo informants, the linguistic differences among the varieties considered here as the Gamo dialect, namely, Dorze, Ochollo, K'uc'a, Dac'e, etc., is minor as compared to the differences that these dialects have from the other members of North Ometo such as Wolaitta, Gofa and Dawuro.

In addition, the linguistic varieties such as Zala, Dac'e, Dorze, Ochollo, Bonke, etc., share a common ethno-linguistic identity, Gamo. This is unlike the situation with Wolaittas, Dawuros and Gofas that identify themselves distinctively. There is no common ethno-linguistic identity covering the North Ometo varieties such as Wolaitta, Gamo, Dawuro and Gofa together.

This study also identifies additional speech varieties which were not listed under the North Ometo group in the earlier studies. These varieties include, Ocholo, K'uc'a, Bonke, Bonke, Kemba, Boreda and Ganta. For the reasons mentioned above, all these varieties are considered as the dialects of Gamo.

Taking into consideration the above facts, this study suggests a new reclassification of the North Omoto subbranch that can show the diversity in Gamo. Compare Fleming (1976)'s classification and that of the present study¹.

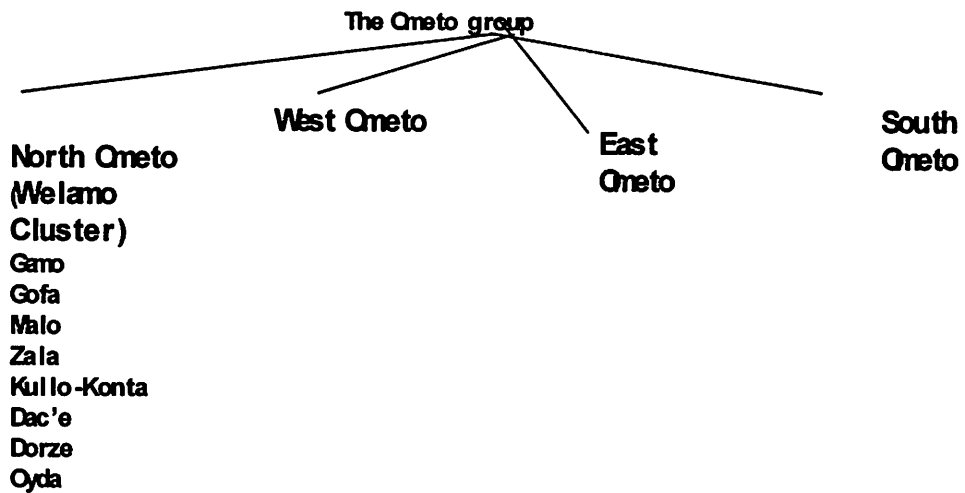
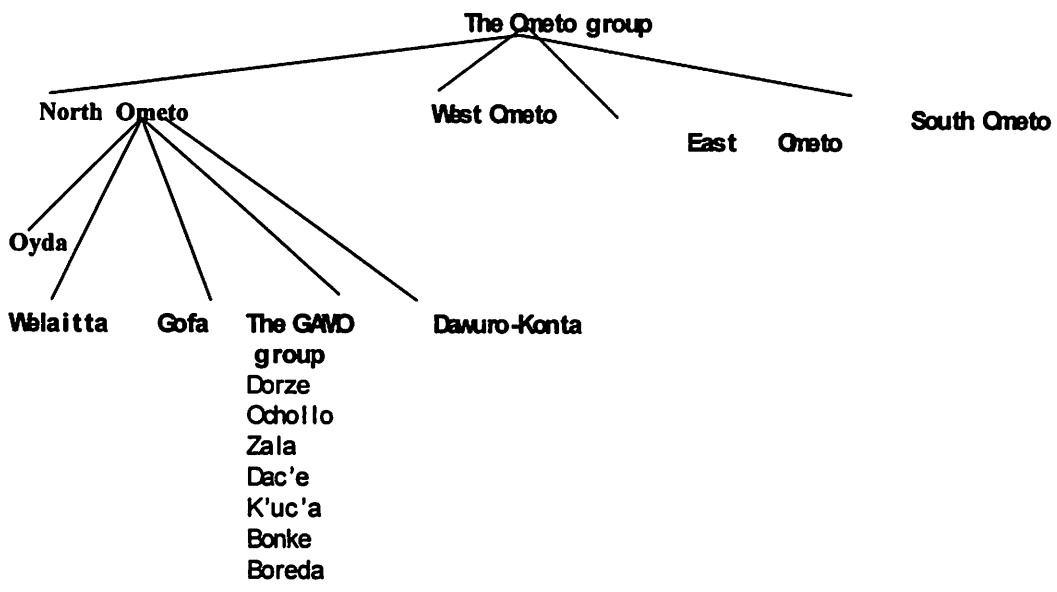


Fig. 1 Omotic Language Family tree adopted from Fleming (1976)



¹ Some names of dialects given here are different from their Original names given in Fleming (1976) because the names of the groups are officially changed since then. In the original study, Dawuro was referred as Kullo, Wolaitta was referred as Welamo.

This study, therefore, shades light on the fact that, Gamo unlike the case with the other members of the North Ometo, such as, Wolaitta, Dawuro and Gofa, is not a homogeneous speech variety; it is rather a common name for those who speak Dorze, Ochollo, Ganta, K'uc'a, etc., and who have double identity. The Gamo speakers primarily identify themselves as Dorze, Ochollo, Ganta, etc., then, they identify themselves as Gamo. It is also attested that some people primarily identify themselves as Gamo and secondly as Dorze, Ochollo, etc. A further more exhaustive study is required on the linguistic features and intelligibility of the Gamo dialects.

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Abbreviations and Symbols

ABS	Absolute
ACC	Accusative
DF	Definite
FEM	Feminine
IND	Indefinite
MAS	Masculine
NOM	Nominative
PL	Plural
D	Voiced alveolar Implosive consonant