

¹Some Notes on social, cultural and linguistics aspects of Dime

Mulugeta Seyoum Gebeyaw
(Academy of Ethiopian Languages and Cultures,
Addis Ababa University)
mgebayaw@yahoo.com

1. Introduction

Dime is an endangered Omotic language which is spoken in the southern region of Ethiopia by a population of 5,400 (1994 census). Surprisingly, the 2007 National Census Reports the population of Dime as 895.

Dime has a number of interesting social, cultural, political and linguistic features which needs urgent documentation. Among these the clan system, the chief system and chief election process will be treated in this paper in brief.

Dime has kinship terms and it made distinction between relatives, social groups and marriage related groups. Dime seems productive in kinship terms. It may needs further investigation and comparative studies how far it is poor or richer in terms of kinship terms comparing to the other Ethiopian languages. In some extent both cultural and linguistic aspects of the language will be discussed here.

2. Dime clans and their chief system

2.1. Dime Clan types and their status

Dime has a very large number of clans who have very strong cultural and administrative rules. According to my informant, it was estimated about 60 clans some years back. Due to their internal conflict and fighting with Bodi community their clan number decline through time. Comparing to other Ethiopian Languages the number of clan in Dime seems very large. For instance, Konso, Ale and Derashe have 9 clans each². The current number of Dime clans may exceed up to 30 clans. These are the followings³.

1. mar níts
2. man níts
3. bangsom níts

¹ Fieldwork on Dime was made possible by Professor Hideyuki Inui and Professor Yochi Tsuge. I am grateful for my Japan Colleagues for their help and possible facilities.

² Interviews of Yonas Bekele, Konso native speaker and Dechasa Alemayehu, Ale native speaker, September 22-27, 2011.

³ According to my data that was collected from my informants Defaru Siftaye and Shambel Comadi, August 2011. They have given me the clan lists from their note books which is already has been listed by them.

4. ʔalf níts
5. baygon níts
6. karaf níts
7. maʃtab níts
8. gʔnaf níts
9. bal níts
10. ʔačgoid níts
11. ʃur níts
12. gun níts
13. dimaf níts
14. gaizaf níts
15. mirčab níts
16. gaʃ níts
17. ʔʔʃmub níts
18. bandmub níts
19. ʃih níts
20. banks níts
21. baraχ níts
22. kob níts
23. las' níts
24. ʔargʔn níts
25. dəmab níts
26. gədaf níts
27. zúχ níts
28. k'onub níts
29. dir níts
30. gis' níts

As can be seen from the above data the entire clans names are followed by the noun **níts**, which means 'child'. This may indicates that each clan considered being the children of the mentioned clan group. Thus, most of the clan name is a combination of noun-noun and some of them seem adjective noun combination as in example (7, 10, 15, 17 and 18) which is suffixed gender marker that is the properties of adjective in Dime. There is no Dime person who can make marriage from his own clan. Such kind of marriage is strongly forbidden in their tradition. The least and neglected clan among the other clans is called **gis' níts** which is one of the above clans and listed at the end. The members of this clan groups are wise men and women. They melted metal and also made clay from soil. That means they are gallery and pottery. The Dime people love and used their product, however, they discriminated the clan groups because of their traditional believes and cultural influences. Dime has a very rich metal product using their traditional system. Most of the metal farming furniture of the community is their own traditional production of metal in the area.

The other clans never make their marriage from **gis' níts** clan since it is traditionally forbidden. Thus, the **gis' níts** clan member has been facing two problem to make their marriage in the community.

- Based on their traditional rule making their marriage from their own clan is forbidden
- Due to their lower status making their marriage from other clan group is not possible.

In order to solve these problems they choose their partner from the same clan, who lives far from their village. Because these wise group are living around each clan groups to provide them metal and clay products so that they have to looking for their wife from other village which is far from their home. It is not possible to make their marriage from their clan member who lives around in the same village. This is done just to make some distance for their marriage system. In relation to this my informant told me one instance as follows:

One Dime guy from **?arg?n nits** clan fall into love with beauty girl from **gis' clan** and later she becomes pregnant. Since their relation is against their tradition, the chief of the clan refused to accept their relation. He is assuming that some danger would happen in the community or on the chief himself due to this violation of traditional rule. Finally, the chief decide to cancel their relation despite of their love and interest.⁴

2.2. Dime chief and his election processes

Each of the clan group has their own chief with proper way of traditional election system. They do not have centralized chief administration system. Their chief system is decentralized which is each clan chief is formed based on the election system of each clan group. However, all clans are speaking the same language living in the same territorial place and consider themselves under the same Dime community with their decentralized Chief system. An important point in this regard is, the chiefs of each clan group respects each other and they discussed and work together for the benefit of the Dime communities. Especially, the elder and well-known chiefs are more respectful so that they try to mediate and keep the proper application of their cultural and traditional rules in the community.

The chief election system of each clan group is similar. There are responsible men to guide the chief election tradition and apply the rule properly. Each clan group has a right to participate actively in the election of his chief. If the other clan groups going to elect their chief the other clan member has no right to interfere in the group which he is not belonging to. Choosing and discuss about the election of their own chief is the right of each cal member. Person from the other clan may be invited to participate as a guest just to observe the process. In addition some of the well known elders in the community will be invited for their comment and advice. The followings are some of the procedures to elect a chief.

The chief election will be made due to various reasons as pointed out below:

- If the previous Chief become older and, he propose his successor from his sons or relatives.
- If the pervious Chief violate the traditional rules of the community and committed wrong activities so that the community offended by him.

⁴ Fieldwork interview from Defaru Sitaye, August, 2011.

- If the previous chief has died by various reasons.

As of the first reason, the elders and the community must agree with the previous chief proposal to make it practice. For the second one the elders looking for the proper person and they proposed him as a candidate for the new Chief election. After the new proposal approved by the whole community, the election process of the chief will proceed.

The newly proposed candidate must fulfill the following criteria to be accepted by the community as a chief.

- He must be not a drunkard
- He must be free from any addiction of bad habit.
- He must be free from any crime and related problem
- He must be free from any adultery
- He must be matured enough and well experienced
- He must be generous for his people and not biased in his decision

Having the above good qualities the new candidate will precede the election process. The new candidate to be a chief his interest must be checked in order to appointed him. The people will be gathered around the home of the new candidate. The responsible person in the community who can catch the elected chief prior to the other people during his ordaining must be ready. This man, according to their custom, will carry the candidate on his shoulder. The people following him are dancing by saying woze sheme. Woze means “we” and sheme means “praying” so that it means praying for us. The responsible person carries to the especial place where the chief commonly ordained.

In this especial place the chief will sit at higher position while, the people will sit at lower level than him. The elders who apply the traditional process sit in between the newly proposed chief and the community.

The following traditional rule will apply in the process:

- The nettle (*urtica simensis*) will be attached on his naked body. The leave which is called **samma** or **dobbi** in Amharic is very hot and he sensed it. This indicates that the big responsibilities of the chief will burn his body like the hot leave.
- The chief body will be brushed with honey. In Dime honey is a symbol of cleanness, confession and so sweet. Thus, such kind of process implies that the chief is become clean and confesses from his previous sin in order to lead the community. Honey is sweet so that the chief has to be also sweet for the community in his good governance.
- The food types that are allowed to the chief must be identified. He will eat only cow and ox but not sheep, goat and hen. He eats only buffalo from the wild animals. Concerning cereals he eats everything except chickpea.
- The stone type which tastes like a salt mixed with milk, honey and teff will be brushed on his body. The bole salt stone, milk, honey and teff are

much respected and symbol of honor. Thus, they express their respect and honor of for their chief.

Having finished all the above processes based on their tradition an ox will be slaughtered. The elders will see the intestine of the ox and made their forecast about the newly appointed chief as follow:

- Whether the future will be the time for peace or war
- Whether the future will be the time of wealth or famine
- Whether the future will be good or bad for their cattle to reproduce more or not

Finally, the elders inform all the prophecy of the intestine reading to the people. All people leave the place for their home except the chief and the elders. The elders and the chief will stay in the place where the chief is ordained. There is a final traditional rule that must be employed at this level. The elders prepare the two back legs of the ox with their meat on it for the chief to be handled by his two hands for longer time with out any interruption. It may take a week. Until the meat become rotten and the worm in the rotten meat moving on his hands, he has to hand up the two back legs of the ox. The elders are around him to guide and control him at every step according to the tradition. This worm movement in the rotten meat at the end of the day is considered as a blessing of God. The blessing is measured on the amount of worms coming out from the meat. If there are more worms coming out, it is assumed to have more blessing of God. If the number of worms decline there will be a tension for famine and war.

This message will be transmitted for each community through the channel of the elders.

The newly appointed chief begins his duty after passing through all the above processes. The chief discuss with the elders everything he needs transparently in order to get their help and advice during his time. He will check the previous number of the elders in order to replace the missed one. If there is any elder who passed away, he must replace him by others new elders. The chief also arranged his calendar per year to communicate the people and provide sacrifices for his god. Therefore, the elders forecast after watching the intestine of the ox that they would sacrifice. Each clan members should provide part of every product for their chief during each production years. It may be considered as taxation.

Finally, the burial ceremony of the chief at the end of his life will discuss below. When the chief has died his burial ceremony is very special from the normal person. After the above all process of appointing a new chief is over, the elders prepare the dead body of the chief in special way. They put his leg in front of his chest and tied his knee with his chest contacted together. He looks like a person who sat in special manner. Finally, they buried him putting his body as a seated person with his buttock by leaving his neck above the ground. His body buried under the ground up to his neck. The head of the dead chief is left unburied above the ground and covered by a basket. After a few days it spoiled out and produced worms being it is a rotten meat. If too much worms are coming out from his head and moving here and there on the ground, they are very happy assuming that the blessing of the chief is on his people. If it is on the contrary with out many worms, they are angry assuming that they would face bad future i.e., famine, war and drought etc.

As we have discussed so far the Dime clan systems, cultural and social integrity of the communities is very strong. The linguistics complex also observed in the kinship terms based on the identification of different terms with different lexical words and lexical expressions. The types of kinship terms in the language identified as follows:

3. Kinship Terms in Dime

Now a days kinship terms have been widely described and analyzed across languages. It makes quite different distinctions. Some languages are richer in Kinship terms, while some other are poor comparing to the other ones⁵.

Dime has kinship terms and it made distinction between relatives, however, it needs further investigation and comparative studies to know how much it is poor or richer in terms of kinship terms comparing to other Ethiopian languages. The followings are dime kinship terms that I collected from fieldwork through my informants.⁶

3.1. Blood relations

01.	bábé	‘Father’
02.	ʔíínd	‘Mother’
03.	túsú	‘relative’
04.	ʔiiko ʔiik	‘ancestor’
05.	ʔiik	‘grand parent’
06.	ʔifim	‘brother elder’
07.	káni	‘brother younger’
08.	míčí	‘sister elder’
09.	káni	‘sister younger’
10.	kibab kan	‘uncle, father brother’
11.	ʔirk	‘uncle, mother brother’
12.	ʔinkan	‘aunt, mother sister’
13.	báhe	‘aunt, father sister’
14.	ʔááke	‘cousin, uncle child’
15.	yəke	‘cousin, aunt child’
16.	ʔat’imt’ee	‘descendant’
17.	gúʃníts	‘first born’
18.	góʃtu níts	‘son’
19.	ʔámzi níts	‘daughter’
20.	nítskó níts	‘grand child’
21.	ʔifim níts	‘nephew, elder brother child’
22.	kán níts	‘nephew, younger brother child’
23.	míčí níts	‘nephew, elder sister child’
24.	kán níts	‘nephew, younger sister child’
25.	mízi	‘name’

⁵ As I read from website, Japanese’s are oriented around family and ancestry so that their language is richer in kinship terms comparing to English. Japanese’s makes distinctions between my relative and your or other relatives. For instance, mago ‘my grandson’, omagosan “your grand son” are some of the evidences.

⁶ According to my informants Defaru Siftaye and Shambel Komadi native Dime speakers, August 26-SEP 2, 2011.

26. mokǰé ‘name sake’

As can be seen in the above examples Dime has independent lexical forms to identify different kinship terms. For instance, we observed different forms for elder brother and younger brother as in example (06 and 07), elder sister and younger sister as in (08 and 09), uncle who is either father or mother brother as in (10 and 11), aunt who is either father or mother sister as in (12 and 13), cousin who is either uncle child or aunt child as in (14 and 15). This may indicate the productive application of kinship terms in Dime. In some of the above examples kinship terms are expressed noun followed by noun as in (17-24).

3.2. Marriage relations

27. wúnnú ‘relatives by marriage’
 28. búbúd ‘husband’
 29. ʔindid ‘wife’
 30. sibind ‘mother-in-law’
 31. sibud ‘father-in-law’
 32. bollé ‘brother/sister-in-law’
 33. ʔiǰim níts ‘nephew, elder brother-in-law child’
 34. kán níts ‘nephew, younger brother-in-law child’
 35. míǰi níts ‘nephew, elder sister-in-law child’
 36. kán níts ‘nephew, younger sister-in-law child’
 37. ʔúnsət ‘wife, younger’s brother’
 38. tʔsé ‘wife, elder’s brother’
 39. sátsind ‘fiancée (girl)’
 40. sátsub ‘fiancé (boy)’
 41. gám ‘bastard’
 42. gulond ‘widow’
 43. gulob ‘widower’
 44. gízdi ‘orphan’

Dime identifies four different names for nephew as in examples (31-34) above. Wife for elder and younger brother have also different forms as in (35 and 36). Male and female Fiancées has different forms as in example (37 and 38). In most cases the language has distinct form for a number of different terms.

3.3. Extended and social relations

45. siid ‘tribe’
 46. tússú ‘clan’
 47. tussaf ‘family’
 48. láág ‘friend’
 49. wúlú ‘neighbor’
 50. yífid ‘guest’
 51. k’ím ‘enemy’
 52. dibúb ‘thief’
 53. wútób ‘guide’
 54. kitab ‘messenger’

- | | | |
|-----|--------|----------|
| 55. | zimé | ‘chief’ |
| 56. | k’óbsú | ‘master’ |
| 57. | ʔifim | ‘elder’ |
| 58. | ʔayilé | ‘slave’ |

4. Conclusion

Generally, the traditional administration system and the chief election process in Dime are very democratic. The traditional system facilitate to able to be participated each clan members. With out the agreements of the clan member no chief will be appointed. It needs the approval of the community. The chief has also be fulfilled all the requirements to his position otherwise he can not be a chief with out the requirements. All the community members are loyal for their culture and tradition. The process of each step to choose their chief, their commitments and devotion to follow up and apply each traditional rule, their trust and convention towards their tradition is remarkable.

In the analysis of kinship terms, Dime used different forms for brother, sister, identifying whether they are elder or younger. It also identifies uncle, aunt and cousin whether they are belonging to father or mother. Wife for elder and younger brother, male and female Fiancées have different forms. This may indicates the productive application of kinship terms in Dime.

Reference

- Fleming, Harold (1990) “A Grammatical Sketch of Dime (Dim-Af) of the Lower Omo”. In: Hayward, R.J. (ed.) *Omotic Language Studies*. London: School of Oriental and African studies. pp. 494-583.
- Mulugeta Seyoum (2008) *A Grammar of Dime*. PhD Dissertation. LOT publication. Graduate School of Linguistics. The Netherlands.
- Mulugeta Seyoum (2005) “The Dime Language”. In: Uhlig, Siebert et al. (eds.) *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*. Vol. 2. Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag.
- Mulugeta Seyoum (1997) “Survey on the culture and Language of the Dime People (in Amharic)”. In: Zena Lissan (ed.) *Journal of Ethiopian Language Research Center*. No.1. Addis Ababa University. pp. 52-62.