Bayso, Haro and the “paucal” number

History of contact around the Abbaya and C'amo Lakes of South Ethiopia

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Abstract

The present paper is a first attempt of an historical reconstruction on the transmission of the number category “paucal” in the area of the Abbaya and C'amo lakes in Southern Ethiopia. The languages involved are Bayso (Cushitic), Haro (Omotic) and Haro's strongly related sister-languages Ganjule and Gets'ame.
The present situation of bilingualism of the Haro in Bayso suggests that Bayso has passed the paucal to the Haro. However, the presence of the paucal in the other documented dialect of Haro, Ganjule, makes this hypothesis untenable since the Ganjule do not speak Bayso and have no particulal relation with the Bayso group. There is no description of the other dialect of the cluster, Gets'ame, but, according to Haro oral traditions, the Haro come from the Gets'ame, as well as their language. It is, therefore, very likely that the Gets'ame language has also the paucal. The paper presents two hypotheses that explain the presence of the paucal in these languages of the Abbaya and C'amo lake.

Keywords

Bayso, Haro, paucal, language contact

1. THE BAYSO AND THE HARO

The Bayso and the Haro are two minority groups of the North Omo Zone (formerly Gamo Gofa), which is one of the provinces of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Federal State of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The Bayso number about 2.000, while the Haro are around 200. The regional administration does not count the Haro among the recognised groups of the North Omo Zone. These are Gamo, Gofa, Oyda, Zayse and Gidicco. The latter name indicates the Bayso (as we will see it is the name of an island in the Abbaya like inhabited by both Bayso and Haro). The Haro are commonly considered as part of the Gidicco group and they are also referred to as Gidicco. The Bayso and the Haro live together on the Gidicco island of the Abbaya lake and on the mainland village of Alge. Some of them are also found in other villages on the west bank of the lake.

1.1 THE BAYSO

In origin the Bayso were living only in two villages on the Gidicco island of the Abbaya lake: Bayso and Shigima. Presently Gidicco is the only inhabited island of the lake, but formerly the Bayso used to occupy also on the Golmaka island. This island nowadays is only used as a temporary base for fishing. Their main economic activity on the island used to be fishing and crocodile and hippo hunting, but afterwards they abandoned the hunting activity, kept on fishing and developped cattle-keeping, agriculture and honey production.

Since four or five generations the Bayso started migrating to the mainland areas of the lake. The migration was triggered by the raising of the water of the lake, that occupied a major part of the most fertile land, and lack of rain that caused desertification. In particular, lack of rain left an extremely salty and unproductive soil. Nowadays, the migration is almost complete as only a handful of homesteads are found in the island. The main reasons why some of the families did not settle on the mainland of the lake are that the head of the family is deeply involved in fishing, that is more fruitful of the island rather than on the mainland, and they prefer to keep cattle on the island, that is disease-free and guarantees water. They still have relations with the mainland when they visit relatives and because on the mainland they keep their farming fields, mostly growing maize.

The Gidicco island lies about 200 meters from the east coast of the lake, that is inhabited by Guji-Oromo, Gedeo and Sidamo. In spite of the fact that the east bank is so close, the Bayso preferred to settle on the west bank of the river, that is about 20 km away. The reason is that on the west coast urban life and trade are more developped as there is a urban centre, Mirab Abbaya (“West Abbaya” in Amharic), locally known also as Birbir, along the

main road from and to Addis Ababa. In fact, if the trigger of the migration from the island is environmental, the settling on the west coast has economic reasons. Here the Bayso have created a whole village, called Alge, that hosts most of them. Some moved to neighbouring villages such as Shinkiko and Wajifo, mixing with peoples coming from Gamo, Haro and Wolayta ethnic groups. In Alge the Bayso diversified the agricultural production in cooperatives. Besides maize, they started to cooperate in the cultivation of bananas, tomatoes, cabbage, potatoes and carrots. Apiculture was also developped in cooperatives with the use of modern techniques for honey production. Fish cooperatives are also very active and nowadays make large use of motor boats, also in collaboration with the people living on the Gidicco island. In Mirab Abbaya there is the reference weekly market in which the goods are sold. People living on the island also come to the Mirab Abbaya market, but they sell and buy goods also on the market in Melka, on the east coast of the lake. Besides trade, some Bayso found an occupational solution in the administrative and services sectors. There are people working for the local administration, in local health centres as nurses and in schools as teachers.

Bayso people, in particular young people, are very much projected to the Mirab Abbaya urban life. Children are more and more involved in modern education rather than working to support family economy. In town it is possible to find bars and restaurant, that normally have satellite TV, and cinemas. Recently also internet cafés started and there is a branch of the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia. Two visible impacts on everyday life are the conversion to Orthodox and Protestant Christianism, while traditionally the Bayso have their own religion, and the increasing use of Amharic, the Ethiopian economic and administrative working language. The use of Amharic can be appreciated both in terms of bilingualism and code-switching to Amharic while talking Bayso (Savà to appear).

1.2 THE HARO

The Haro occupy one village on the Gidicco island, called Haro, Harro or Haruro. They used to live on crocodile hunting, hippo hunting and fishing. Nowadays they keep on fishing and hippo hunting and practice agriculture, cattle-keeping and apiculture. Like the Bayso, most of them now live in Alge. While the Haruro village is phisically apart from the Bayso and Shigima villages, lying in the middle of the two on the east coast of the island, in Alge the Haro live side by side with the Bayso. This is an important aspect of their life as in the past they have always been despised by the Bayso and only since recently there is more acceptance and collaboration. The reasons for being marginalised are, besides being numerically inferior, the practice of hippo hunting, the fact that they eat hippo meat (that is something aber-

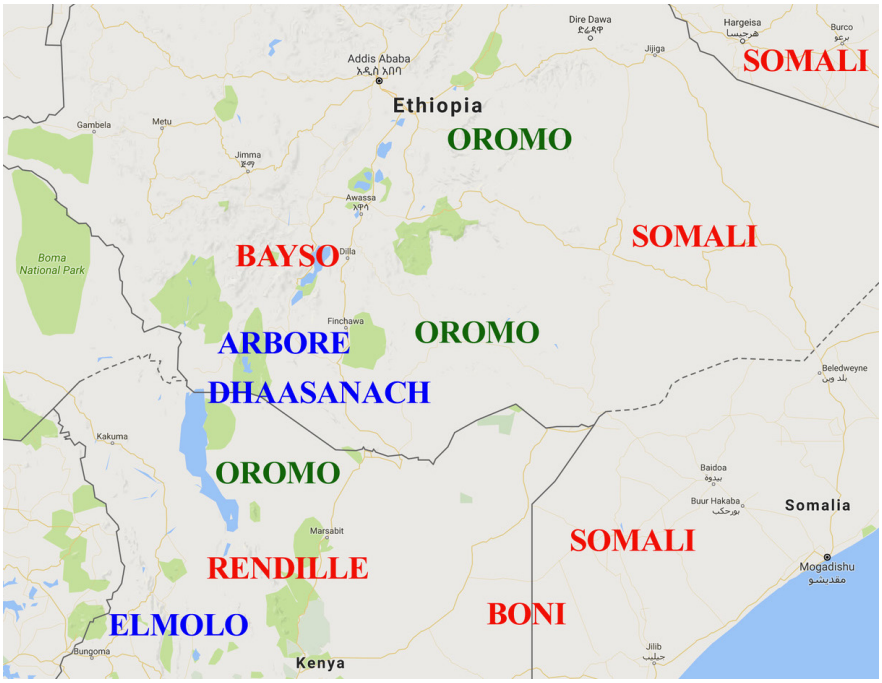
rant for the Bayso) and that the Haro do not circumcise. The last reason (and partly also the second one) has a religious connotation and is due to the fact that the Haro resist more than the Bayso to the conversion to Christianism, even though circumcision is limited to Orthodox Christianism. Moreover, the Bayso consider themselves as the legitimate owners of the Gidicco island and the Haro as the newcomers. Indeed, the Haro originate from a group of Gets'ame, living on the southern part of the lake, that a couple of centuries ago settled on the island asking for permission to fish from there. The most radical Bayso state that the Haro are not an ethnic group at all because, as mentioned previously, they are not officially recognised as such by the administration. The situation nowadays is changing because is order to gain more acceptance from the Bayso the Haro living in Alge are giving up hunting and eating hippo meat. Hunting became also difficult on the coast as it is illegal. An increasing number is also converting to Christianism.

The Haro who left the island and moved to the mainland are not so successful as the Bayso in developping their business. No Haro takes part of the agriculture, apiculture and fishing cooperatives and none of them made it in the public sector. Nonetheless they visit Mirab Abbaya for the market and for relaxing and enjoying the entertainment that a town can offer.

2. BAYSO AND HARO LANGUAGES: CLASSIFICATION AND BILINGUALISM

Bayso and Haro are two Afroasiatic language belonging to two different groups of this language family: Bayso is Cushitic and Haro is Omotic. Haro's classification is based on the assumption that Omotic in an independent branch of the Afroasiatic Family (Bender 1975). In fact, the genetic validity of an Omotic group is one of the most debated questions in Ethiopian lingusitics and until about four decades ago the languages that are now called Omotic were part of the Cushitic group and classified under the west branch of Cushitic. Without going in details into the discussion, my classification refers to the most commonly accepted idea on Cushitic and Omotic as two independend branches of Afroasiatic and that Haro is an Omotic language. Bayso and Haro are two of the endangered languages of Ethiopia indicated by the UNESCO in the Atlas of the World's Language in Danger (http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/).

Bayso is part of the Omo-Tana subgroup of East Cushitic. In particular, it is included in the East Omo-Tana cluster together with Rendille, Boni and Somali. The affiliation with the Omo-Tana languages is historically interesting as these languages, scattered in southwest Ethiopia, northern Kenya and in the Somali Region, are spoken far away from the present location of the Bayso. The main hypothesis is that the area of the Omo-Tana languages was much wider and



Map 1 – Distribution of the Omo-Tana languages of East Cushitic and Oromo

Map 2
Distribution of the East Ometo languages

reached the South-Eastern coast of the Abbaya lake and the separation of the Bayso from the rest or the other Omo-Tana languages is due to the invasion of the Oromo, the numerically most important ethnic group of Ethiopia, in the 16th century. It is probably as a consequence of the Oromo incursions that the Bayso found protection in the Gidicco island and settle there.

Haro is part of the Ometo languages of the Omotic group. Within Ometo it is one of the East Ometo languages together with Zayse, Koorete, Ganjule and Gets'ame, all languages spoken on the coast of the Abbaya lake and the near-by C'amo lake. Within East Ometo, Haro has a particular affiliation with Ganjule and Gets'ame, with which it forms a dialectal cluster. In fact, the three should be treated as variants of one "language", while the linguistic distinction is only ethnically based. This is clear if one has a look to the origins of the Haro. As stated previously, traditional history says that the Haro are the result of the relatively recent migration of a group of Gets'ame people to the Gidicco island. Once settled they defined their identity and developped their actual variant.

In terms of bilingualism Bayso-Haro[1], all the Haro start speaking Bayso since their childhood. In the context of Alge village they learn it easily just because they are constantly in contact with the Bayso children on the streets and in homesteads. On the Gidicco island the most common meeting point between Bayso and Haro children is the primary school that was built besides the Haro village. However, since last year Haro children started to be exposed to Bayso also during classes as these are taught in Bayso and not in Amharic anymore.

Haro adults speak Bayso both to gain social acceptance and to communicate more easily with the Bayso, with which they are in daily contact, particularly in Alge. Moreover, Bayso men speak Haro and for the same practical reason. This is an indication of their growing social acceptance of the Haro.

3. THE PAUCAL NUMBER

The paucal number is a category that is not normally attested in the languages of the Horn of Africa. It is a number category that indicates a handful quantity of items, up to five or six.

According to the available documentation, the paucal is shared by Bayso, Haro and Ganjule. It is highly likely that Gets'ame also has it, but there is no description of this language that can confirm this hypothesis. Since the Haro dialect comes from Gets'ame, probably Gets'ame also has this category.

[1] Even though the discussion is here limited to the bilingualism between Bayso and Haro, it should be noted that the Bayso and Haro are famous in the area for their multilingualism. Thanks to their skills in learning the main languages of the area it very common to find Bayso and Haro people speaking Gamo, Gofa, Wolayta, Oromo, Sidamo and Amharic.

The paucal is very much attested in the languages of the world, but always in the following implicational chain:

singular < plural < dual < {**paucal**, trial}
(Croft 1990, Corbett 2000)

This means that universally the paucal exists only if the language also expresses a singular, a plural and a dual. Bayso and Haro-Ganjule-(Ges'ame?) contradict this alleged universal because they have no dual, so that the implicational chain is reduced to:

singular < plural < **paucal**
(Savà 2011)

In Haro, Ganjule and Bayso the paucal is realised as follows:

Paucal in Haro
– Suffix -**uns'ú** (with nouns having accented penultimate syllable) or **úns'ú** (with nouns having and accented ultimate syllable)
– Attached to the singular
– Paucal nouns are always determined
– Paucal nouns have plural agreement

Hirut Wolde-Mariam (2015: 42) suggests that "The etymological root for the Haro paucal marker may be the quantifier expression **ʔááns'u** 'how many/ how much' ". Here are some examples:

lúkku 'hen' **lúkk-úns'ú** 'few hens'
déyšši 'goat' **déyšš-úns'ú** 'few goats'
s'olínte 'star' **s'olínt-úns'ú** 'few stars'
(Hirut Wolde-Mariam 2015: 42)

ʔass-*uns'ú* **ána** **ʔú-hang-e**
person-PAUC where 3PL-go-AFF:DEC
Where do the people go? (or better "Where do those few people go?")
(Hirut Wolde-Mariam 2015: 43)

Paucal in Ganjule
– Suffix -**úns'o**
– Attached to the singular
– Paucal nouns can be determined
– It is not clear what kind of agreement paucal nouns have (Fitsum Abate 2013:60-61)

See an example of paucal in Ganjule:

kap-*úns'o*-z-i **kárt^{S}-i-kko**
bird-PAUC-DEF-NOM black-NOM-FOC
The few birds are black
(Fitsum Abate 2013:60-61)

Paucal in Bayso
– Suffix **-jaa**
– Attached to the basic, number-undetermined form of the noun
– Agreement with plural
– Part of a number derivational system with singulative (**-ti** and **-titi**) and plurative (**-jool**, **-lal**, **-eel**, **-l**, reduplication, reduplication + PLUR suffix)[2]
– Probably etymologically related to the plural marker **-jool**.

Here is an example of paucal from one of the texts of the DoBeS Bayso corpus[3]:

iso ibaaddo*jaa*na
iso **ibaaddo-*jaa*-na**
SBJ.3PL man/people-PAUC-TOP
As for those few people...

4. WHY DO BAYSO AND HARO SHARE THE PAUCAL?

The present situation shows that, on the one hand, all the Haro are bilingual in Bayso and that bilingualism started a long time ago and that, on the other hand, only some, normally adult men, speak Haro. It is, therefore, logical to think that the Haro speakers absorbed the paucal from Bayso. This is also the idea suggested by Hirut Wolde-Mariam (2015:42).

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[2] Notice that singulative nouns agree with masculine and feminine, while plural nouns agree with masculine. This means that paucal is the only number derivation that triggers agreement with plural. This agreement system is part of a broader discussion on the possible three-gender system masculine-feminine-plural in Bayso and other East-Cushitic languages, which is a very debated topic in Cushitic and typological linguistics (Savà 2006, Mous 2008).

[3] The Bayso and the Haro text corpora were created in the context of the DoBeS project *The Documentation of Bayso (Cushitic) and Haro (Omotic), two Afroasiatic Languages of the Abbaya Lake in the Ethiopian Rift Valley,* on which I was the principal investigator (Savà 2012). The project was sponsored by the Volkswagen Stiftung, which I wish to acknowledge for their substantial financial help. The corpora can be browsed from the Language Archive website https://corpus1.mpi.nl/ds/asv/?0&openpath=node:1569575.

In fact, the transmission of the paucal between Bayso and Haro is not due to present situation and the Bayso did not pass it to Haro. The reason is that also Ganjule, that is closely related to Haro, has the paucal. The Ganjule do not have special relation with the Bayso and are not bilingual in Bayso. This means that between Bayso and Ganjule there is no situation of bilingualism that may justify the influence of Bayso on Haro. Moreover, we know that the Haro are originally a branch of the Gets'ame and that their language comes from the Gets'ame language. Due to lack of documentation we cannot confirm that Gets'ame has the paucal, but in view of the close structural similarity of Haro, Ganjule and Gets'ame it is highly probable that Gets'ame does have the paucal and that Haro inherited it from Gets'ame.

The question now is how come that Bayso has the paucal? The Haro did not pass it to the Bayso since few Bayso speak Haro and they started only recently. I suggest two hypotheses. One is that people speaking East Ometo languages of the Ganjule-Gets'ame group were more powerful than today and were present in the Abbaya area when the Bayso arrived from the Somali area. Once on the coast of the Abbaya and C'amo lakes the Bayso were absorbed by these East Ometo people and became bilinguals in these languages. It is in this situation that they acquired to paucal. Afterwards, the Bayso became more powerful, they settled on the Gidicco island and "received" the Haro establishing a relation of dominance with them. However, in that moment both Bayso and Haro already had the paucal. It is, therefore, a substratum influence that resulted in the integration of the paucal category in the Bayso grammar. It is to note that the formal expression of paucal in Bayso and Haro is different and that the trasmission was limited to the grammatical category. Something very interesting is also that both Bayso and the group Haro-Ganjule-(Gets'ame?) lack the dual, which, as exposed previously, is something universally peculiar to these languages face to the others expressing a paucal in the world.

The aforementioned hypothesis gives from granted that no Cushitic language has the paucal and that the Bayso must have adopted it from some East Ometo languages. However, there is one language, very close to Somali, that has the paucal category (Mekonnen Hundie 2016). It is called Girirra and it is spoken on the eastern part of the Somali Federal State of Ethiopia. Besides the considerable geographic distance between Bayso and Girirra, one should notice that the paucal marker in Girirra, *-ati*, is different from Bayso *-jaa* and that Girirra has a dual, which has a form very clause to the paucal, *-ata.* Some similarity can be found between the expression of plurality in Bayso and Girirra and the paucal marker in Bayso. One of the Bayso plurative marker is *-jool,* while one of the two plural markers in Girgirra is *-jaali.* On the basis of the presence of the paucal in Girirra one may suggest that this language and Bayso are particularly related in the Omo-Tana group since they share this innovation. Indeed, this is a category that is not attested anywhere in Cushitic,

as far as we know. If this is true, one could propose the idea that the Bayso passed it to the Ganjule-Gets'ame group after Bayso lost the dual in a period in which these languages came into contact in the region of the Abbaya and C'amo lakes.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The present paper deals with an universally unique feature shared by Bayso (Cushitic > East Cushitic > Omo-Tana) and Haro (Omotic > Ometo > East Ometo): the presence of the paucal number in a system without dual. In particular, the paper attempts to explain how these languages came to share this feature. The main conclusion is that the observation of the present situation takes to the erroneous idea that the Bayso passed the paucal to the Haro. This conclusion is based on the fact that all the Haro are since a long time bilingual in Bayso in a context of cultural and social dominance of the Bayso group on the Haro group. This idea is erroneous because Ganjule, a dialect of Haro whose speakers are not bilingual in Bayso, also has the paucal. Moreover, the Haro are newcomers on Gidicco the island, that they share with the Bayso. In fact, they come from a branch of the Gets'ame that settled in the island. Gets'ame is a third dialect of the Haro-Ganjule-Gets'ame dialect cluster, that is not documented but that most probably also has the paucal. Another conclusion is that the Haro, as part of the Gets'ame and originally speaking Gets'ame, already had the paucal when they extablished a special relation with the Bayso and started speaking their language.

A consequent conclusion is that the trasmission of the paucal must have happened sometimes in the far past, when people speaking these languages first met on the Abbaya and C'amo lakes region. A hypothesis is that the Bayso, arrived from the Somali area, acquired it from the Ganjule-Gets'ame. In fact, the Bayso had acquired the category concept and not the form, which is different from the one attested in Haro and Ganjule today. This hypothesis is challenged by the fact that a Somali dialect, Girirra, has also the paucal. However, Girirra also has the dual and the shape of the paucal marker is, again, different from the one used in Bayso.

I leave the question open, hoping that further research will reach a definite conclusion about the diffusion of the paucal in South Ethiopia.

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