

Some Observations on the Pronouns of Hamar : A Comparative Perspective

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1. Introduction

Hamar is a member of the South Omotic group of languages classified under the Omotic family of the Afro-Asiatic phylum (Fleming, 1976). Hamar, the name by which they are also known to the outsiders, is also known to its speakers as **hamar apo** ‘mouth of the Hamar’. The Hamar together with **Benna** and **Bashada**, with whom they share their language, form a cultural unit. Between these three groups intermarriage is free, war is prohibited, and most rituals and institutions are the same (Lydall, 1976:393). The Hamar, who are predominantly pastoralists keeping cattle near the Omo valley, live in the plain lands of the semi-desert region of the rift valley, in the south-western corner of Ethiopia, in South Omo zone of the Southern Region at State.

Previous studies on the structure of the language include: Lydall (1976), Mary (1987), Getahun (1991), Tsuge (1996), and Moges (1999). Of these, only Lydall (1976), Getahun (1991) and Moges (1999) are relevant to the topic under discussion. Lydall has published the first article on Hamar in which she gave an overview of the phonology and grammar of the language. The article is a short grammatical sketch, and the sections on the pronouns in particular are brief and largely limited to a few tables containing the summary of the various pronominal forms. In spite of the fact that the article is a pioneering work to Hamar grammatical study, the author’s failure to use a standard linguistic terminology makes it difficult to read. Getahun’s paper on the structure of the

noun phrase is more of theoretical interest dealing with the structure of NPs within the framework of generative syntax. In his analysis, the writer however touched upon some aspects of interrogatives, demonstratives and the various genitive NPs.

Apart from these attempts, the system of Hamar pronouns has remained largely undescribed. The present contribution¹ is an attempt to fill in this gap by putting on record some observations made on the topic under consideration. To this end, the paper is organised as follows. In addition to this introductory section in what follows the paper has four other sections. The second section deals with the different categories of personal pronouns. The third section attends to interrogative pronouns. Finally, section four gives the highlights of the paper from a comparative-historical perspective.

2. Personal pronouns

The system of personal pronouns in Hamar makes a distinction between first, second, and third persons. Pronouns also make a distinction between singular and plural number. Gender distinction is made only in the third person pronoun forms. Like nouns, pronouns are marked for case and hence they can be categorized into different classes, namely nominative, accusative, genitive and dative cases.

Hamar has two sets of personal pronoun paradigms: bound and free forms. The bound forms cannot occur independently but they require case marking suffixes to occur as full-fledged words. These bound set of pronouns are eight from which other pronouns are derived by attaching various suffixes marking different cases. These bound forms are the following² :

(1) 1sg	ʔi-	‘I’	1pl	wo-	‘we’
2sg	ha-	‘you’	2pl	yΛ -	‘you’
3sg(m)	ki-	‘he’	3pl	kε-	‘they’
3sg(f)	ko -	‘she’			
3sg(n)	yi -	‘(s)he’			

The bound pronoun forms do not occur in any position within a sentence, but occur as verbal agreement markers in a subordinate clause. The occurrence of these forms can be illustrated in the following sentences.

(2) i) **eya hamo-rra ki niʔ-a**
man where-from he come-Impf.

‘Where does the man come from ?’

ii) **memayini ki kaf-a**
how much he pay-Impf.

‘How much does he pay?’

Hayward (1990: 448) has also identified a separate set of ‘unaffixed pronominal stems’ for Aari where such minimal bound forms occur immediately before various dependent clause verb forms and function to distinguish the subject when independent subject (nominative) pronouns don’t occur ⁽³⁾.

The same observations have been made in Kara (Moges, forthcoming) another South Omoti language which also distinguishes between independent subject pronouns (free forms) and a

separate set of basic pronominal stems (bound forms) occur as verbal agreement markers in subordinate clauses in the absence of the nominative pronouns in a sentence.

2.1. Nominative pronouns

In the nominative case there are seven personal pronouns that are used as the subject of a clause.

In most cases, they are derived by attaching the suffix – si to the basic pronominal bound stems.

(3)	1sg	ʔin-ta	‘I’	1pl	wo-si	‘we’
	2sg	ya	‘you’	2pl	ya-si	‘you’
	3sg(m)	ki-si	‘he’	3pl	kì-sí	‘they’
	3sg(f)	kó-sí	‘she’			

Why the first and second person singular forms differ in form from the rest of the pronouns is not clear for the time being. –ta could be the number marker. In the nominative forms, gender is marked only for masculine and feminine. Note also the tone difference in the third person singular and plural forms where the former has a high pitch while the latter is assigned a low-high tone⁵. The use of nominative pronouns in a sentence is obligatory since in Hamar person is not marked morphologically in the verb form. Some examples are as follows:

- (4) i) **kisi niʔi-dine** ‘he came’
 he come-perf.
- ii) **kosi niʔi-dine** ‘she came’
 she come-perf.

Compare the data in (4) with the following data in (5):

(5) i) **alemu niʔi-dine** 'Alemu came'

Alemu come-perf.

ii) **aster niʔi-dine** 'Aster came'

Aster come-perf.

2.2. Accusative pronouns

A set of object pronouns is formed by suffixing the accusative marker - **na** to the bound stems given in (1) above. The element - **na** is reconstructed as the archaic form of the accusative marker in Proto-Omoti (Hayward and Tsuge 1998). In this set there are eight independent pronouns that are used as direct objects of a clause.

(6) 1sg	ʔi-na	'me'	1pl	wo-na	'us'
2sg	ha-na	'you'	2pl	yʌ-na	'you'
3sg(m)	ki-na	'he'	3pl	ke-na	'them'
3sg(f)	ko-na	'she'			
3sg(n)	yi-na	'him/her'			

Unlike the nominative, the accusative case makes a three-way distinction of gender into masculine, feminine, and neuter. The impersonal use of the third person singular form is found throughout the entire set of personal pronouns except in the nominative form⁵.

In case marking of nouns as well the same forms are used as accusative markers attached to direct object nouns. Examine the following examples:

(7) i) **wuf-ke gaita-n desi-dine**

bullet-Def. monkey –Acc. kill-Past.

‘The gun shot the monkey’

ii) **ey-a gaita-n desi-dine**

man-Def. monkey-Acc. kill-past

‘The man killed the monkey’

As can be seen from the above examples, in the direct object function the head of a definite NP receives an accusative marker **–n(a)**. In this respect, Hamar resembles Amharic in having a marked accusative in definite NPs. This has also been observed by Hayward (1990: 491) in Aari, a genetically related language, which appears to have the same case marking system. According to the same author, this type of case system is typologically different from that of the North Omotic languages, which have a marked nominative and unmarked accusative case, in nouns. But in North Omotic languages pronouns are marked for both subject and object functions. Note that the final vowel of the accusative marker **–na** drops out when used in a clause.

2.3. Genitive pronouns

In the genitive case as well, there are eight pronouns that mark possession. These possessives that are used in a genitive NP construction are composite forms derived from the basic pronominal bound stems plus a genitive case marker as can be shown below.

(8)	1sg	?i-nno	‘my’	1pl	wo-nno	‘our’
	2sg	ha-nno	‘your’	2pl	yΛ-nno	‘your’
	3sg(m)	ki-nno	‘his’	3pl	ke-nno	‘their’

3sg(f)	ko-nno	'her'
3sg(n)	yi-nno	'his / her'

The final form **-nno** is a genitive case marker in pronouns suffixed to the basic form of pronominal stems. It becomes **-nna** when the possessed noun is plural. The genitive case marker in nouns is, however, **-sa**, as in

- (9) i) **taye-sa** **gefo-to-no** 'Taye's wife'
 Taye-GEN wife-Def.-fem.
- ii) **nok'o-sa** **?ol-la** 'holes of water'
 water-GEN hole-pl.

The following examples illustrate the use of these genitive pronouns within an NP.

- (10) **k'amo ?i-nno** 'my ear'
 k'amo ha-nno 'your ear'
 k'amo ki-nno 'his ear'
 k'amo ko-nno 'her ear'
 k'amo yi-nno 'his/her ear'
 k'amo wo-nno 'our ear'
 k'amo ya-nno 'your(pl) ear'
 k'amo ke-nno 'their ear'

There is also another form **-nti** used when the possessed noun is singular.

- (11) **k'amo ?i-nti** 'my ear'
k'amo ha-nti 'your ear'
k'amo ki-nti 'his ear', etc.

From the above data Hamar may look a head initial language where usually the possessor is followed by the possessed. Nevertheless, the opposite order is also possible.

- (12) **?inno onno** 'my house'
onno ?inno 'my house'

Possessive marking can also be used with locative case marker as in the following examples.

- (13) i) **pee wonno-nte** 'in our country'
country our-Loc
ii) **pee-na wonna-nte** 'in our countries'
country-pl our-Loc
iii) **k'amo ?inno-nte** 'in my ear'
ear my-Loc
iv) **?ono ?inno-nte** 'in my house'
house our-Loc

The locative case marker **-nte** is attached to locative nouns in order to express place and specific location respectively.

2.4. Dative pronouns

In the dative case also there are eight pronouns used as the indirect object of a clause. This set of pronouns is also composite forms consisting of an object pronoun plus a dative case marker-**nal**.

(14) 1sg	?i-nal	'to me'	1pl	wo-nal	'to us'	
	2sg	ha-nal	'to you'	2pl	yΛ-nal	'to you (all)'
	3sg(m)	ki-nal	'to him'	3pl	kε-nal	'to them'
	3sg(f)	ko-nal	'to her'			
	3sg(n)	yi-nal	'to him/her'			

This dative case marker **-nal** is suffixed to nouns as well as pronouns serving as the indirect object of a clause. The following are some more examples:

- (15) i) **waggin ?i-nal ?im-a** 'give the cow to me'
cow me-Dat give-Impf.
- ii) **ki-nal ?im-a** 'give (it) to him'
him-Dat give-Impf.

Compare the above example in (20-ii) with the following data:

- (16) **kina ?im-a** 'give him'
him give-Impf.

2.5. Reflexive pronouns

The reflexive pronouns are formed by attaching the suffix **-mal** 'self' to the basic pronominal stems as can be shown below.

(17)	?i-mal	‘myself’
	ha-mal	‘yourself’
	ki-mal	‘himself’
	ko-mal	‘herself’
	yi-mal	‘him/herself’
	wo-mal	‘ourselves’
	yΛ-mal	‘yourselves’
	ki-mal	‘themselves’

The same pronouns are used in expressing reflexive action, and occur preceding the verb root within a clause or a sentence. There is no morpheme marking the reflexive action in the verb form. This action is expressed by the above reflexive direct object pronouns. These reflexive pronouns are not case marked, however. Examine the following examples:

(18)	?inta ?imal k’Λn-idi	‘I hit myself’
	ya hamal k’Λn-idi	‘you hit yourself’
	kidi kimal k’Λn-idi	‘he hit himself’
	kodi komal k’Λn-idi	‘she hit herself’
	wodi womal k’Λn-idi	‘we hit ourselves’
	yΛdi yΛmal kΛ’n-idi	‘you hit yourselves’
	kidi kimal k’Λn-idi	‘They hit themselves’

As already pointed out, person is not marked in the verb; as a result the use of nominative pronouns within a sentence is obligatory.

3. Interrogative pronouns

The following is a list of interrogative pronouns in Hamar.

(19) hammote	‘where?’
hammote-ne	‘where is it?’
ha	‘when?’
hate-ne	‘how?’
har	‘what?’
harna	‘why?’
har-na-ne	‘why is it?’
hayi	‘who?’
hayi-ne	‘who is it?’
hamadʌne	‘how much is it?’
hammo	‘which one (f)?’
hamma-ne	‘which one (m)?’

A discussion of the morphology of these forms is in order. The root for the interrogative pronoun **hammote** ‘where?’ seems to be **hammo-** since forms such as **hamo-rra** ‘from where’ and **hamo-ʃete** ‘to where’ are possible. The suffixes **-rra** and **-ʃete** are case markers, locative (showing place) and direction respectively. Examine the following interrogative sentences.

(20) i)	ey-a	hamo-ʃete	ki	yeʔ-e	‘where does the man going?’
	man-Def	where-Dat	3sgm	go-Impf	

ii) **ey-a hamo-ra ki ni?-a** 'where does the man come from ?'
 man-Def where-Loc 3sgm come-Impf

The form for 'why' **har-na** is made of **har** 'what?' plus an accusative marker **-na** that is also suffixed to nouns and pronouns. The same root **har-** may take other case markers as in the following examples.

(21) **har-bet** 'with what ?'

har-ka 'by what?'

Both suffixes **-bet** and **-ka** mark 'commutative' and 'instrumental' cases respectively. The latter form is reduced here from **-nka** to **-ka** for phonotactic reasons.

The root form **hamo** is also used in two other forms given below.

(22) **hama-dʌne** 'how much is it?'

hama-yise 'thus'

4. Comparative Notes⁶

As can be gathered from the preceding discussions, all personal pronouns such as the nominative, accusative, genitive, dative as well as the reflexive are derived from the 'basic bound stems' by attaching different suffixes. This is also true for other South Omotic languages such as Aari (Hayward, 1990), Kara (Moges, forthcoming) and Dime (Fleming, 1990). Besides, in Hamar and the rest of the South Omotic languages person, number, and gender are not marked in the verb form since all the semantic content is carried by the basic independent pronouns, and this makes the use of subject pronouns in a sentence mandatory. Wherever independent subject (nominative) pronouns fail to occur in subordinate clauses, or in question sentences when the questioned

constituent is a non-subject, then the basic pronominal bound stems fill in the gap by appearing in a preverbal position in order to mark the subject of the clause or a sentence.

Comparison of Hamar pronouns to the other South Omotic languages shows that Hamar forms are particularly close to Kara and Aari. The following paradigms of basic pronominal stems from Hamar, Kara, Aari and Dime illustrate this point.

(23)	<u>Hamar</u>	<u>Kara</u>	<u>Aari</u>	<u>Dime</u>
1sg	ʔi	ʔi	ʔi	(ʔ)is
2sg	ha	hɑ	ɑɑ	(y)in
3sg(m)	ki	ki	ki	kin
3sg(f)	ko	ko	ko	kon
3sg(n)	yi	yi	yɨ	---
1pl	wo	wo	wɔ	wo(n)
2pl	yʌ	yʌ	yʌ	yʌn
3pl	ke	kɛ	ke	ken

The possible proto-forms of the South Omotic independent personal pronouns are the following

(24)	1sg	*ʔi-	1pl	*wo-
	2sg	*ha-	2pl	*yʌ-
	3sg(m)	*ki-	3pl	*ke-
	3sg(f)	*ko-		
	3sg(n)	*yi-		

Note that the 3rd person pronoun paradigm is formed from a common root ***ki, *ko, *ke**. The ***k-** could possibly be the 3rd person category and the following vowels are person markers. Hirut (2003) claimed that for Ometo, a genetically related group to South Omotic, that 3rd person category is derived from a common root by attaching person markers.

As already pointed out by Fleming (1976: 314), Dime could be the archaic form and the drift has been from an ancestor of Dime type towards the present condition of Hamar and Kara. Certain diachronic changes must have had occurred in the process of drifting from the Dime type to the Hammer-Kara type. One apparent sound change that occurred historically, as can be seen in the above paradigm, is the loss of the final nasal consonant in Hamar, Kara and Aari languages, i.e. **n > ∅ /--#**. Loss of word final nasal consonant is not a common process in the synchronic descriptions of these languages, however. But all the three languages exhibit a wide range of preconsonantal occurrence of the nasals in word-medial position than elsewhere.

The **aa** form for the 2sg in Ari is the result of loss of an initial consonant which is followed by lengthening of a vowel, i.e., loss with compensatory lengthening: *** ha > a > aa > aa**. The lost consonant has also left its trace in the form of breathy phonation as a compensation for the loss. But we have to make two independent distinctions here. On the one hand, the lengthening of the vowel is perhaps not for the loss of the segment, but for the fact that loss of a segment affects syllable mora count and the compensatory lengthening is considered to be a ‘temporal compensation’ for the mora of the lost segment. In other words, the mora of the lost segment reattaches itself to a nearby syllabic segment thereby lengthening it. On the other hand, the trace left behind in the form of breathy phonation is actually to compensate for the loss of the segment.

Synchronically, the presence of breathy voice quality in Aari and Kara languages is an interesting issue. This feature is observable in Kara only in connection with the glottal fricative **h** consonant whereas in Aari, as shown by Hayward (1990: 431), it is also attested elsewhere. In both languages whenever it occurs in connection with the **h** consonant, the word can also be pronounced without such a consonant, and the consonant being marginal in both languages is leaving a trace of itself in the form of breathy phonation. In the personal pronouns it is observable especially in the nominative forms.

One obvious question would then be what is the origin of the breathy voice quality? Is it the result of innovations in Kara and Aari at some point in their history or is it an archaic feature retained in these languages? Or it is simply the result of borrowing through contact from other languages possibly Nilotic languages? The latter is the most unlikely reason as there is no known contact historically with languages having the breathy voice quality such as the Anuak and Nuer located on the edge of the western borderland. As to whether breathiness is a result of innovation or retention in Kara and Aari is an issue requiring further investigation, and I hope to report on this on a separate article.

In Aari the impersonal distinction in the third person singular form is attested only in the ‘reflexive direct object pronouns’ as in **yi-matam** (Hayward, 1990: 451); whereas this distinction is found throughout the entire set of third person pronouns except in the nominative forms in both Hamar and Kara. But it seems to be absent in Dime altogether. Hayward states that the presence of the **yi-** pronominal stem in Aari, as opposed to **ki-** or **ko-**, reflects a uniquely preserved referential or impersonal distinction still found elsewhere (cf. footnote 17, Hayward, 1990).

Fleming, on the other hand, posited proto-forms for South Omotic pronouns based on nominative forms than the ‘basic pronominal stems’ from which all the other pronouns are derived. The following are the proto-forms given by Fleming (1976: 314-316)

- (25) 1sg *inta 1pl *waɫ
 2sg *ya 2pl *yɛs
 3sg(m) *no 3pl *ket
 3sg(f) *na

Apparently the third person singular neutral form is absent in the nominative paradigm. As compared to the other pronouns, the nominative forms also show considerable variations and there seem to be some irregularities especially in the third person singular forms. Compare the following nominative forms in the four languages of South Omotic.

(26)		<u>Hamar</u>	<u>Kara</u>	<u>Aari</u>	<u>Dime</u>
	I	ʔi-nta	ʔi-nta	ʔi-ta	ʔate
	thou	ya	ya(h)	aa-na	yaai
	he	ki-si	ng(h)	ng(o)	nuu
	she	ko-si	na(h)	naa	naa
	we	wo-si	wo-ti	wota	wotu
	you	yʌ-si	yʌ-ti	yʌta	yʌsi
	they	ki-si	kɛ(h)	keta	ketɛ

In most cases, the nominative form is derived by attaching some kind of suffix to the basic pronominal forms. The irregularities seem to occur in the second and third person singular forms

in particular. For the second person singular the basic pronominal form **aa** is used as a base only in Aari whereas in the rest of the three languages the **ya** form is used. In the third person singular forms, on the other hand, only Hamar used the basic form to derive the nominative pronoun. The other languages Kara, Aari and Dime used separate stem for both the third person singular feminine and masculine forms.

As can be seen in the preceding discussions, unlike in some forms of the nominative, in the derivation of the rest of the pronouns, i.e., the accusative, genitive, dative and reflexive pronouns the ‘basic pronominal stems’ are consistently and regularly used as a stem. It seems plausible therefore to base the reconstruction of the proto-forms of South Omotic independent pronouns on the basic pronominal stems rather than on the derived nominative pronouns.

Notes

¹Fieldwork was conducted in the lower Omo valley in January 1998, August 1998, and February 1999 among the Hamar speaking areas. I would like to acknowledge the various kinds of help that made this study possible especially the House of Federation of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia for sponsoring and financing the project, and the Research and Publication office of AAU for kindly facilitating the fieldtrips. My thanks also go to my informants particularly to Hora Gelcha and Ziya Geya who provided the data with patience and interest.

²Hamar has the following consonant phonemes as described in Moges (1999). Note that this phonemic chart is different in some respects from that of Lydall (1976) and Mary (1987).

	<u>labials</u>	<u>alveolars</u>	<u>palatals</u>	<u>velars</u>	<u>glottal</u>
stops	p b	t d	c j	k g	ʔ
ejectives		*t'	c'	k'	
implosives	ɓ	ɗ			
fricatives		s z	ʃ		h
nasals	m	n			
liquids		r,l			
semi vowels	w		y		

*s' is sometimes interchangeably used with t'

The vowel phonemes consist of two sets of phonemic vowels, which could perhaps be labelled as +ATR, and –ATR vowels.

i	u	ɪ	ʊ
e	o	ɛ	ɔ
a		ʌ	
+ATR		-ATR	

³Daniel (1995) has a different view on this point. He considers Hayward's 'unaffixed pronominal stems' or clitics as prefixes attached to the verb roots in order to mark person in the verb form. In other words, he analysed the 'unaffixed pronominal stems' as dependent personal pronouns prefixed to the verb roots marking person.

⁴A preliminary and tentative analysis of pitch in Hamar suggests that the language is a register tone language with two-tone levels- high and low. Tone will not be marked, however, in the rest of the paper since its function and pattern in the nominal morphology in particular is not fully understood.

⁵It is also common to see the impersonal use of demonstratives in Hamar as in,

ka c'ʌwli-ni 'It is white'

this white-be

ka det'i-ni 'It is heavy'

this heavy-be

⁶The comparative notes are only concerning personal pronouns, and do not include interrogative pronouns.

Abbreviations used

Acc	Accusative	Lik	Linker
Aux	Auxiliary	Loc	Locative
ATR	Advanced Tongue Root	m	Masculine
Dat	Dative	n	Neuter
Def	Definite	NP	Noun Phrase
f	Feminine	Perf	Perfective
Gen	Genitive	pl	Plural
Impf	Imperfective	Prog	Progressive
Inst	Instrumental	sg	Singular
1, 2, 3	1st, 2nd, 3rd person	NOM	Nominative

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