

SOME ASPECTS OF OROMO PHONOLOGY

by

MELAKU DISSASSA

B.A., KANSAS WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY, SALINA, KANSAS

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree


MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Modern Languages

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY, MANHATTAN, KANSAS

1980

Approved by


Major Professor

SPEC
COLL
LD
2668
.R4
1980
057
C.2

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank all the members of my supervisory committee. My special thanks go to Dr. James L. Armagost for his kind advice and help throughout my study. I also wish to thank Michael and Merry Spangler for the indispensable support they have given me over the years. Finally, I want to thank Sonya D. Stewart for giving me moral and emotional support both in good and bad times. I also want to commend Sonya for the excellent typing.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PART I: INTRODUCTION	1
PART II: THE BASIC SOUND SEGMENTS	5
2.1. THE CONSONANTS	7
2.2. THE VOWELS	15
2.2.a. DEVOICING OF FINAL VOWELS	18
PART III: NASAL PHENOMENA	19
PART IV: SYLLABLE DIVISION	23
PART V: STRESS ASSIGNMENT	25
PART VI: AGENT NOMINALIZATION	27
CONCLUSION	30
FOOTNOTES	31
BIBLIOGRAPHY	32

I. INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia, as a nation, is comprised of four major ethnic groups. These include the Omotic people, the Nilotic people, the Semites, and the Cushites. Although these ethnic groups are bound together by one political boundary, each has its own history, culture and language distinct from the others'.

The Omotic people are the least numerous, and are confined to a small portion of land in southwest Ethiopia along the Omo River, hence the name Omotic.

The Nilotic people, as the name may suggest, inhabit the lowlands of Ethiopia along the Blue Nile, and also the remote fringes of Ethiopia along the Sudan border. They encompass a much larger area of land than the Omotic people, and are greater in number. The Nilotes are subdivided into several tribes. The Anuyak, Fakosho, Gunza, Mao, Nuer and Saysay are the most important ones. These groups have a much darker complexion than the rest of the Ethiopians, and that is due to the tremendous heat in the lowlands which they inhabit.

The Semites are Semitic speaking people who inhabit mainly the highlands of Ethiopia. Numerically, the Semites constitute approximately one-quarter of the total population, and they are subdivided into various tribes, of which the Amharas, the Tigreans, and the Gurage are the most significant. Of all the many tribes of Ethiopia, it is the Amharas who have totally dominated the political scene in the history of the nation. One of biggest achievements the Amharas

made is the promotion of their tribal language, Amharic, to national prominence over the other languages. Today Amharic is the national language of Ethiopia, and everybody is obligated to learn it.

The Cushites are people of the Hamito-Ethiopian stock. Estimated to be the largest ethnic group in the land, the Cushites are dispersed over the whole nation. The Cushites are subdivided into numerous tribes, among which Oromo¹, Somali, Borena, Afar, and Beja are the most important both in terms of number and political significance. Many of the Cushites have intermarried with the Semites, with the Amharas in particular, in the highlands and the central plains. However, some members of the Oromo tribe, the largest subdivision of the Cushites, have managed to stay pure and free of intermixing in the West, Southwest, and South. They thus preserve the culture, customs and language of true Oromo.

The Oromo language belongs to the Cushitic subclassification which in turn belongs to the Afro-Asiatic family of languages (see Greenberg 1970). It is the most widely spoken language in Ethiopia, occurring in virtually all of the fourteen provinces with expected regional variation². The Oromo analyzed in this monograph is that of Wallaga, a western province with which I am most familiar.

Oromo is a non-literary language, without a writing system of its own³. For many years now, Oromo intellectuals both at home and abroad have tried to elevate Oromo to a national prominence. Nevertheless, their effort has yet to be recognized as Oromo is still held to a low profile by government officials who are apparently non-Oromo speakers⁴.

For this reason, Oromo has remained hidden from and unexplored by many outsiders who possibly could have contributed the kind of linguistic analysis that, for instance, Amharic has been given. Today, however, things seem to have changed in Ethiopia as newspapers are allowed to be printed in Oromo, and Oromo even has a daily television and radio program⁵. Nonetheless, it is still overshadowed by Amharic.

Prior to the 1930's most of the work done on Oromo had been mostly by missionaries whose major interest was to learn the grammar for communication and pedagogical purposes. In recent years, there have been some linguistic contributions made in Oromo and in other related Cushitic languages of Ethiopia (e.g. Borena, Beja, Somali, Afar) by a few scholars here and there. The most notable individuals that have made contributions in one area or another include B.W. Andrzejewski (1957) on Borena phonology, J.J. Pia (1970) on Somali phonology, and L.F. Bliese (1975) on Afar vowel dissimilation. As far as contributions in the Oromo dialect of Wallaga, I find the works of R.J. Hayward (1976), and Gene Gragg (1976) to be very productive. Both Hayward and Gragg, while working independently, remark along the same line. Hayward's remark is on Oromo monophophonology in which he presents a clear and concise discussion on the subject. On the other hand, Gragg's work is more general and covers a lot more ground. Gragg's article entitled Oromo of Wallagga was edited by M.L. Bender (1976) in The Non-Semitic Languages of Ethiopia.

While intensive study in Oromo phonology is still lacking, such contributions as made by both Hayward and Gragg are significant and

indispensable for future further studies.

The purpose of this study is to provide a partial analysis of Oromo phonology within the realm of generative phonology. In order to facilitate this analysis, the study has been divided into six parts. Part I contains the introduction. In part II the basic sound segments are presented and discussed. Part III deals with nasal phenomena. Parts IV and V contain syllable division and stress assignment respectively. The sixth and final part is concerned with agent nominalization. The conclusion gives a brief summary of the work.

II. THE BASIC SOUND SEGMENTS

A total of ten vowels and twenty-five consonants, when correctly combined, make up all the vast number of words in Oromo. Before turning to a technical description of these sounds, let us consider a random listing of them. After each entry in the list is given an Oromo word in which the sound to the left is satisfactorily represented. On the right-hand side is found an English gloss of the Oromo word.

1.	A	bAdu?	[bÁdu?]	'to flee'
2.	b	bekumsa	[bekúmsa]	'knowledge'
3.	d	dega	[déga]	'poverty'
4.	e	ebo?	[ébo?]	'spear'
5.	E	Erga?	[Érga?]	'errand'
6.	a	badu?	[bádu?]	'cheese'
7.	f	fula	[fúla]	'face'
8.	g	gAra?	[gÁra?]	'stomach'
9.	h	hAra	[hÁra]	'today'
10.	i	jisu?	[jísu?]	'to make wet'
11.	I	jIsu?	[jÍsu?]	'to fell'
12.	j	jama?	[jáma?]	'blind'
13.	k	kAra?	[kÁra?]	'way'
14.	l	lAfa	[lÁfa]	'land'
15.	m	mAk'a?	[mÁk'a?]	'name'
16.	n	nano?	[náno?]	'area'
17.	o	k'osa?	[k'ósa?]	'joke'

18.	p'	TIp'na	[TIp'na]	'sufferance'
19.	o	k'Otu?	[k'Otu?]	'to dig'
20.	r	rAfu?	[rAfu?]	'to sleep'
21.	s	sAre?	[sAre?]	'dog'
22.	t	teso?	[téso?]	'throne'
23.	u	tulu?	[tulu?]	'to heap'
24.	U	tUlu?	[tUlu?]	'mountain'
25.	w	wak'a	[wak'a]	'God'
26.	y	yAro?	[yAro?]	'time'
27.	c	bacu?	[ba ^v cu?]	'to carry'
28.	c'	c'Ubu?	[č'Ubu?]	'sin'
29.	s	bIsan	[bI ^s an]	'water'
30.	s'	s'omu?	[s'omu?]	'to fast'
31.	t'	t'Ino?	[t'Ino?]	'small'
32.	T	Tiga	[Tiga]	'blood'
33.	k'	k'Ufa?	[k'Ufa?]	'cough'
34.	n	nara	[nara]	'brow'
35.	?	bA?esa	[bA?esa]	'good'

In Oromo each vowel is pronounced separately and distinctly. Vowels in the language never combine to form diphthongs as is common in English. Thus the word duu? 'to die' must be treated as a word of two clearly distinct syllables as du and u? with stress on the second syllable counting right to left. It ought to be noted, further, that when two different vowels come together as in such

glide in English

words as mbou 'they cry', the two vowels are again treated separately. Stress in this case, however, falls on the third syllable rather than on the second.

Words in the language may end in either a vowel or a consonant. If a word ends in a vowel, then that vowel becomes voiceless and is normally unstressed. If a word ends in a consonant, then that consonant could be either /?/, /n/, /r/, /l/, or /t/. The consonants /?/ and /n/ occur with a much greater frequency than the rest.

Consonant clusters are permissible, but never with more than two consonants in a sequence. Unlike English, Oromo does not allow word initial and word final clustering. There are the m- and n- prefixes that may occur initially in front of another consonant. The m- and n- prefixes are something more than ordinary consonants as they constitute a distinct syllable and are pronounced separately, thus preventing word initial consonant clustering.

All other phonetically possible combinations of consonants occur in word medial position. During syllable division these clusters are broken up, thus preventing the appearance of two consecutive consonants in one syllable.

2.1. THE CONSONANTS

Oromo has twenty-five consonants. They are arranged in the following table, and their arrangement into such a table is based on the places and manners of articulation. The places of articulation are indicated across the top of the table beginning with bilabial (the

most forward place of articulation) and going to the glottal (the furthestest place of articulation into the vocal tract). The manners of articulation are shown on the left on the vertical line of the table. The voiced-voiceless distinction is shown by placing the voiced phonemes to the left of their voiceless counterparts.

Place of Articulation

	BILABIAL	LABIODENTAL	DENTAL	ALVEOLAR	ALVEOPALATAL	RETROFLEX	PALATAL	VELAR	GLOTTAL
STOP	b		d t			T*		g k	ʔ
NASAL	m		n				ɲ		
FRIC.		f		s	ʃ				h*
AFFRIC					tʃ				
GLIDE							y	w*	
LIQUID				l r					
EJECT.	p'		t'	s*	ʃ'			k'	

Manner of Articulation

Table 1.0 The Consonants of Oromo

*/T/ is implosive. /h/ is a glottal fricative, but without the heavy stridency that is characteristic of Amharic and Arabic /h/. /w/ is pronounced with rounded lips and high back tongue position. /s'/ is borrowed from Amharic.

Some of the Oromo sounds are the same, or nearly the same, as in English. These include /b, f, m, g, k, h, č, ĵ, w, y, s, š/.

The phonemes /d, t, n/ are dental. They are produced by making the tip of the tongue strike the upper part of the teeth at the gumline (vs. the English alveolar ridge).

The phonemes /ɲ, r/ are the same as in Spanish. /r/ is an alveolar tap while /ɲ/ is a palatal nasal. The conventional IPA symbol for a palatal nasal sound is /ɲ/. In this paper I am using /ɲ/ for practical reasons. /l/ is similar to the Spanish /l/ or the English 'light' /l/.

The ejectives (or glottalized consonants) /p' t', k', č', s'/ are, of course, not found in English. All of the ejectives, except /p'/, have plain counterparts as indicated below:

/t'/	vs.	/t/
/k'/	vs.	/k/
/č'/	vs.	/č/
/s'/	vs.	/s/

The plain counterpart of /p'/' is nonexistent in pure Oromo words. It is, however, used in some loan words such as /pásta/ 'spaghetti', /polísi?/ 'one who keeps law and order', /pósta/ 'letter', and so on. In some regions of Ethiopia, these loan terms are pronounced with a voiced bilabial stop as /básta/, /bolísi?/, and /bósta/ respectively.

In addition to the above sounds, Oromo is also uniquely distinguished from many world languages in that it has a voiceless ingressive retroflex stop. The IPA symbol for this sound is /ɬ/, but **the**

symbol /T/ will be used here. The choice of /T/ over the conventional /ʈ/ is purely a matter of practicality in this paper.

The phoneme /T/ is produced by positioning the tip of the tongue as though one is going to make a /t/ sound in English, then curling up the blade of the tongue while pressing against the hard palate, drawing the breath in by lowering the larynx with vocal cords closed. It is a rather difficult sound to make for non-native Oromo speakers.

Finally, Oromo has a glottal stop which will be represented by the symbol /ʔ/ in this paper. /ʔ/ is pronounced as the syllable initial sounds of the English 'uh-uh' used as a negation or warning. In Oromo, the glottal stop occurs predominantly at the end of a word in almost all infinitives and many nouns. It may also occur medially between vowels as in words such as /bAʔesa/ 'good'.

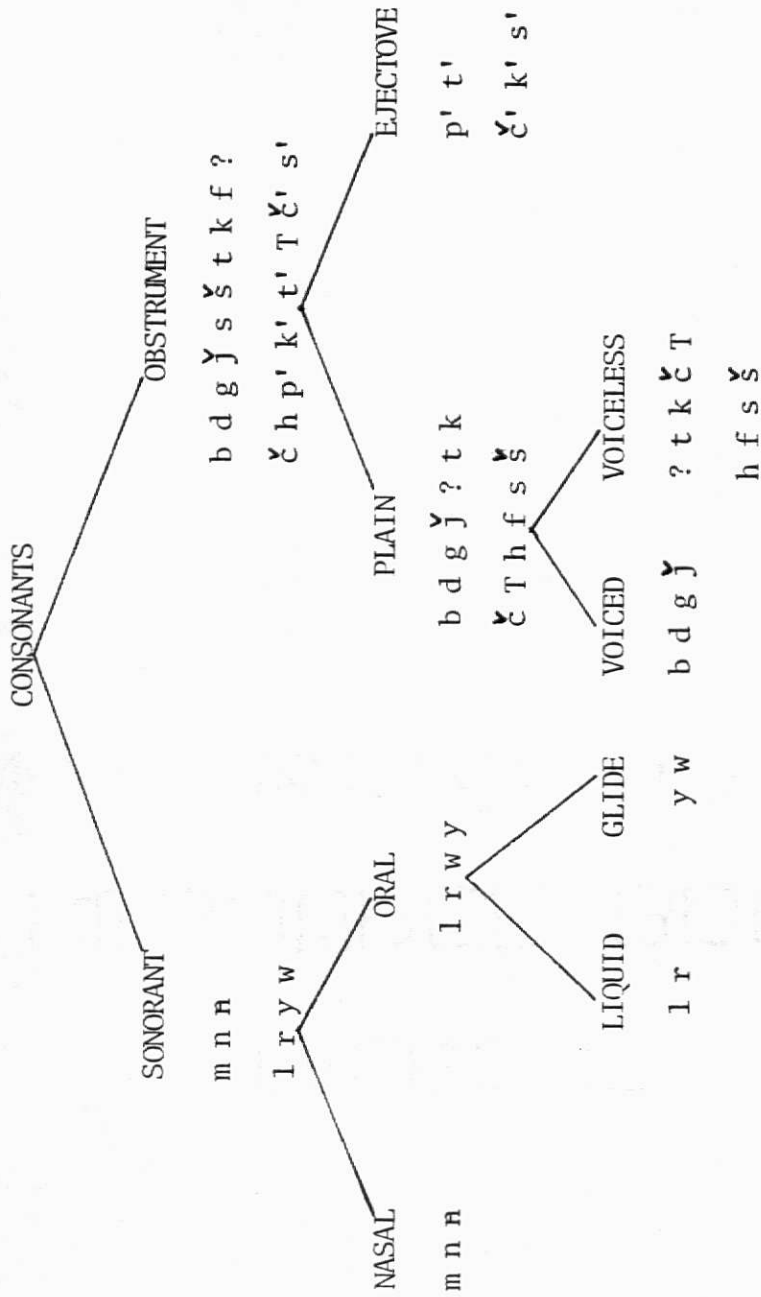


Table 1.1. Binary Division of the Consonants

The division of the consonants on binary principles as illustrated in the scheme above will enable us to see at a rapid glance to which category a consonant in the language belongs. In addition, the sonorant-obstruent classificatory system distinguishes all consonants according to the amount of vocal tract obstruction required for their production. Obstruent consonants are produced with more obstruction than the sonorants. Based on vocal tract opening, all of the consonants can be graded as more open (sonorants), slightly open (fricatives), and completely closed (stops).

The feature [-syll] includes all consonant phonemes in the language. Within this general class, the consonants of Oromo can be broken down as follows.

STOPS. All of the stops can be specified as

[+ stop]

The class of stops can be further broken down into voiced and voiceless stops. The voiced stops require the following two feature specifications:

[+ voiced]
[+ stop]

The voiceless stops will have the features

[- voiced]
[+ stop]

FRICATIVES. The fricatives are all voiceless and will require only one feature to uniquely identify them,

[+ fric.]

AFFRICATES. The affricates are generally assigned the feature

[+ affric.]

Since the affricates are divided into voiced and voiceless affricates, more feature specifications are needed to distinguish between the two classes. Thus, the affricates /č, č'/ are assigned the features

[+ affric.]
[- voiced]

and the affricate /j/ is specified as

[+ affric.]
[+ voiced]

APPROXIMANTS. The glides /w, y/, and the liquids /l, r/ are collectively referred to as approximants. There is no opposition between the approximants as regards voicing. All approximants are voiced and, therefore, only one feature is needed to identify them. All approximants are labelled

[+ approx.]

The lateral /l/ can be distinguished from the other approximants by using the feature [+ lateral] for /l/, and [- lateral] for /w, y, r/.

EJECTIVES. All of the ejectives are voiceless, and will require a statement about only one feature as

[+ ejective]

We are unable to include the feature [+ stop] to describe ejectives in general, because the ejective /s'/ does not belong to the class of stops.

NASALS. The nasals /m, n, ŋ/ are all voiced, and require only the feature

[+ nasal]

as a distinctive marker.

In addition to these 'manner' features, Oromo consonants will be specified for various 'point of articulation' features along the lines of table 1.0. Thus, /n, y/ are uniquely [+ palatal], /b, p'/ are uniquely [+ stop
+ bilabial], /r, l/ are uniquely [+ approx.
+ alveolar], and so on.

2.2 THE VOWELS

Oromo has the following ten vowels:

i	I		u	U
e	E	A	o	O
			a	

The vowels /i, e, u, o, a/ are phonetically tense. On the other hand, the phonemes /I, E, U, O, A/ are phonetically lax. All vowels may appear in either stressed or unstressed syllables.

The conventional IPA symbol for the lax counterparts of /e, o/ are /ɛ, ɔ/ respectively. In this paper, however, /E/ and /O/ will be used for practical reasons. The symbol /A/ is used in place of the conventional schwa /ə/ for the same reason.

In terms of tongue advancement in the oral cavity, the vowels may be divided into three major classes as front, central, and back. They may also be divided as to tongue height, namely high, mid, and low. Regarding lip rounding, /u, U, o, O/ have rounded lips; all other vowels have unrounded lips.

Based on tongue height and tongue advancement in the oral cavity,

the vowels can be organized into a table **of** the following type.

	FRONT	CENTRAL	BACK
HIGH	i <i>long</i> I		u U
MID	e E	A	o O
LOW			a

Table 1.2. The Vowels of Oromo

/i/ is a high front tense vowel. It is generously used in the language, and it occurs in words such as Tisu? 'to quit', jisu? 'to make wet', kObi? 'pencil', and so on. /i/ may occur in either stressed or unstressed syllables. This vowel has a longer duration than its lax counterpart /I/.

/I/ is a high front lax vowel. It is freely used in Oromo, occurring in either open or closed and either stressed or unstressed syllables. Consider:

<u>Open and Stressed</u>		<u>Closed and Unstressed</u>	
[TÍsu?]	'to stretch'	[Ilkán]	'tooth'
[ǰÍsu?]	'to fell'	[IntÁlǎ]	'girl'
[Íǰa]	'eye'	[Irbátǎ]	'dinner'
<u>Open and Unstressed</u>		<u>Closed and Stressed</u>	
[Iǰára]	'edifice'	[TÍgdu?]	'bleeder'
[mInán]	'food'	[Ílma]	'boy'
[bIšán]	'water'	[mÍrga?]	'right'
[ImÍman]	'tear'	[tÍrfi?]	'surplus'
[fIt'énsa]	'dew'	[TÍrsa]	'husband'

/e/ is a mid front tense vowel. It may occur in either stressed or unstressed syllables, and either in open or closed syllables. In the words [éle?] 'cookware', [béla?] 'hunger', it occurs in open and stressed syllables. In the word [fIt'énsa?] 'dew', it is stressed but in a closed syllable.

The vowel /E/ is a mid front lax vowel. Both of the mid front vowels have a low frequency of occurrence. /E/ can occur in either open or closed syllables. The words [Élmu?] 'to milk', [Érga?] 'errand' exemplify the occurrence of /E/ in closed and stressed syllables. In the word [kÉsa?] 'in' and [kÉna?] 'ours', it occurs in open and stressed syllables.

/u/ is a high back tense vowel. This vowel is frequently used in the language. It occurs in either open or closed syllables. In the word [k'úfa?] 'arrogant' /u/ appears in an open syllable, and in [bekúmsa?] 'knowledge' it appears in a closed syllable.

/U/ is a high back lax vowel. It occurs in both open and closed syllables. Consider:

<u>Open</u>		<u>Closed</u>	
[k'úfa?]	'cough'	[TÚgdu?]	'drinker'
[tÚlu?]	'mountain'	[fÚrtu?]	'relief'
[Úmu?]	'to create'	[fUrda?]	'fat'
[TUGáti?]	'drink'		

/o/ is a mid back tense vowel. It is widely used in the language. It occurs in words such as [óla?] 'sheep', [bóru?] 'turbulent', [kóbi?] 'hump', [k'óbi?] 'hat', [kóki] 'peach', and so on.

/O/ is a mid back lax vowel. Like its tense counterpart, this vowel is generously used. It occurs in words like [ólla?] 'neighbor', [bÓru?] 'north', [gOsu] 'to make dry', [gOgu?] 'to dry'.

/a/ is a low back tense vowel. It is the only low vowel, and thus is the most open of all the vowels. It occurs in words such as [hára?] 'new', [bádu?] 'cheese', [hámu?] 'to mow', [wámu?] 'to call', [ráfu?] 'cabbage', and so on.

/A/ is a mid central lax vowel. It may occur in both open and closed syllables, as in [gÁra?] 'stomach', [kÁra?] 'way', [dArgAgésa] 'youth', and so on.

2.2.ä. DEVOICING OF FINAL VOWELS

In Oromo, vowels are voiced in both initial and medial position but they become voiceless in word final position. Consider:

[fAra]	'friend'
[Ija]	'eye'
[boye]	'pig'
[ndemu]	'they go'
[moti]	'she governs'

We can thus write the following rule of devoicing for word final vowels.

[+syll] → [-voiced] / ___ #

III. NASAL PHENOMENA

At the phonetic level there are many nasal phones in Oromo. Consider these examples, noting prevocalic contrast but only [n] in word final position:

	<u>Initial</u>	<u>Medial</u>	<u>Final</u>
[m]	mÁna 'house'	[hamumáču?] 'to yawn'	
	[miTágsu?] 'to beautify'	[ama] 'now'	
	[mílla] 'foot'	[k'Ómo] 'race'	
[n]	[náma] 'person'	[ána] 'I'	[bišán] 'water'
	[níti?] 'wife'	[wAlinmáku?] 'to mix'	[Ilkán] 'tooth'
	[nÁga] 'peace'	[náno] 'area'	[mInán] 'food'
[ŋ]	[náču?] 'to eat'	[fAkéna] 'resemblance'	
	[nára] 'brow'	[fúro?] 'rope'	
[ŋ]	[ŋgóTá] 'he does'	[maŋgúdo] 'old people'	
	[ŋkéna] 'he gives'	[gaŋgo?] 'mule'	

The nasals /m, n, ŋ/ are distinct phonemes in the language. They are, therefore, represented in the consonant chart (tables 1.0 and 1.1). Here are some further examples of contrast to demonstrate that these consonants are separate phonemes.

/m/ - /n/ :	[mána]	[náma]
	'house'	'person'
	[áma]	[ána]
	'now'	'I'
/n/ - /b/ :	[náču?]	[báču?]
	'to eat'	'to carry'
	[nára]	[bára]
	'brow'	'eon'
/n/ - /d/ :	[náma]	[dáma]
	'person'	'honey'
/m/ - /b/ :	[mÁru?]	[bÁru?]
	'to roll'	'to know'
/n/ - /l/ :	[náču?]	[laču?]
	'to eat'	'to give'

The nasal [ŋ] can only occur in front of a velar consonant, however.

It thus derives from /n/ as follows:

/n/	[ŋ]	
/ango?/	[áŋgo?]	'power'
/gango?/	[gáŋgo?]	'mule'
/Tungu?/	[Tuŋgu?]	'kiss'
/kAnko/	[kAŋko]	'mine' (pro.)
/ndank'o?/	[ndaŋk'o?]	'chicken'

/n/	<u>[ŋ]</u>	
/k'onk'o?/	[k'oŋk'o?]	'throat'
/sunk'o?/	[suŋk'o?]	'spice'

The nasal /n/ assimilates to the point of articulation of the following velar consonant, thus becoming [ŋ]. It is important to note that there will not be a velar nasal in the language until the nasal /n/ assimilates to a velar consonant. This, of course, accounts for the absence of [ŋ] from the consonantal chart.

We have seen what happens when the nasal /n/ is immediately followed by a velar consonant. Now we will see how /n/ behaves before a labial consonant. Consider the following data wherein the prefix /nan-/ is added to imperfect verbs for first person singular.

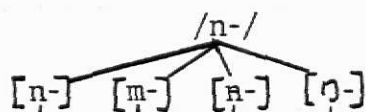
<u>Infinitive</u>		<u>Imperfective</u>	
[bou?]	'to cry'	[namboə]	'I cry'
[mou?]	'to govern'	[nammoə]	'I govern'
[fou?]	'to spin'	[namfoə]	'I spin'

These data show that the nasal /n/ again seeks the same point of articulation of the consonant immediately following it; in other words, /n/ has become homorganic with the following consonant. We can thus write the following general rule to account for this and other instances of nasal assimilation:

$$/n/ \longrightarrow \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{pt of artic} \\ - \text{syll} \end{array} \right] / - \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{pt of artic} \\ - \text{syll} \end{array} \right]$$

The syllabic nasal is another phenomenon that needs to be accounted for in this language. When a nasal appears at the beginning of a word immediately before another consonant it becomes syllabic. This, of

course, breaks up word initial [-syllabic] clusters. All of the syllabic nasals [m̩, n̩, ŋ̩, ɲ̩] derive from the nasal /n-/ as indicated in the following scheme. /n-/ is the imperfect verbal prefix for all persons excluding first person.



In the following data, we see the nasal /n/ becoming [+syll] in front of another consonant, as well as assimilating to the point of articulation of that consonant.

/n + dema/	[ndema̩]	'he goes'
/n + wama/	[ɲwama̩]	'he calls'
/n + ʝIsa/	[ɲʝisa̩]	'he fells'
/n + bosɪ/	[mbosɪ̩]	'she cries'
/n + fota/	[mfota̩]	'you spin'
/n + č'Ufa/	[ɲč'Ufa̩]	'he closes'
/n + k'Aba/	[ɲk'Aba̩]	'he catches'

! End
an

We can thus write a syllabic nasal rule as,

$$[+nas] \rightarrow [+syll] / \# _ [-syll]$$

The rule states that a word-initial nasal segment will become syllabic in front of a non-syllabic segment.

IV. SYLLABLE DIVISION

As an introduction to the syllable system, consider how the word /ebo?/ 'spear' is divided. It is divided into syllables, e and bo?. The division of the word /ebo?/ creates two syllable structures, one a single phoneme, V, and the other three phonemes sequenced as CVC. ! R.E Let us now examine how another word, /mou?/ 'to govern', divides. Here again there are two syllables, and they are mo and u?. We notice that the sequences in this case are CV and VC respectively.

So far, we have V, VC, CU, and CVC. Before a decision can be made as to whether these four syllable types are the only ones in the language, we need to consider some polysyllabic words. One such word is the word /hamumacu?/ 'to yawn', which is divided into four syllables, as ha, mu, ma, cu?. Obviously, there is no new syllable type realized. Finally, let us consider the word /bekumsa/ 'knowledge'. It is divided into the syllables be, kum, and sa. Here again, we do not see any new sequence as regards syllable type. Through an examination of this and similar data, we conclude that V, VC, CV, and CVC are indeed the only possible syllable types in Oromo. ✓

The sequences in which the different phonemes combine to form syllables or words are inherent to that particular language and may differ from the way other phonemes in another language combine linearly. There are rules in each language that dictate such sequences of sounds. To further illustrate this argument, a comparison between English and Oromo is given on the next page.

English: (C) (C) (C) V (C) (C) (C)
 Oromo: (N) (C) V (C)

where C = consonant
 V = vowel
 N = syllabic nasal
 () = optional

In English it is possible to have up to three consonants at the beginning of a syllable, as in the word 'spring'. It is similarly possible to have up to three consonants at the end of a syllable, as exemplified by the word 'wilts'. In English where we have the CCC cluster in initial position, the first C in the sequence must be /s/, and the third C must be a liquid.

In Oromo, the situation is quite different. First of all, Oromo does not allow the sequencing of three consonants. Only a maximum of two consonants can be clustered. This may occur either in word initial position in which the first consonant must be a nasal, or in word medial position. In all such cases, the syllable division comes between the clustered consonants. Consider the following examples.

Initial position:

[ɲdaʔk'oʔ]	ɲ, <u>da</u> , <u>k'oʔ</u>	'chicken'
[ɱbosɨ]	ɱ, <u>bo</u> , <u>si</u>	'she cries'
[ɲč'ufa]	ɲ, <u>c'u</u> , <u>fa</u>	'he closes'
[ɟk'Abu]	ɟ, <u>k'A</u> , <u>bu</u>	'they catch'

Medial position:

[biftuʔ]	<u>bif</u> , <u>tuʔ</u>	'the sun'
[Ibsaʔ]	<u>Ib</u> , <u>saʔ</u>	'light'
[fArɗa]	<u>fAr</u> , <u>ɗa</u>	'horse'
[bInensa]	<u>bI</u> , <u>nen</u> , sa	'beast'

V. STRESS ASSIGNMENT

In most instances stress assignment in Oromo is simple and straightforward. Consider the following verb-noun relationships.

VERB	NOUN	
[TÚgu?]	[TUGáti?]	'drink' - 'drink'
[fígu?]	[figÍça]	'run' - 'race'
[k'Ótu?]	[k'Otísa]	'dig' - 'something dug up'
[hÍmu?]	[hImÁta]	'tell' - 'tale'
[bÁru?]	[bArÚmsa]	'study' - 'lesson'
[béku?]	[bekÚmsa]	'know' - 'knowledge'

It is evident in these examples that stress in Oromo follows a pattern. In all the disyllabic words stress falls on the second to last syllable. The noun forms of the above disyllabic verbs appear as trisyllabic nouns. In the trisyllabic words, stress still falls on the second to last syllable.

Now let us consider some other examples.

[hasáú?]	'to speak'
[hamumáču?]	'to yawn'
[walinmÁku?]	'to mix'
[wArabeśa]	'hyena'
[dArgAgésa]	'youth'
[hArkÍsu?]	'to pull'
[IranfÁču?]	'to forget'

Even in these polysyllabic words stress falls on the second to last syllable. The verb [hasáú?] 'to speak' has a corresponding disyllabic noun [hása?] 'speech'. Compared to the verb, the noun has stress shifted one syllable to the left so as to land on its 'desired' position of second to last syllable in the word.

So far we have seen that stress is predictable as it follows a systematic pattern of falling on the penultimate syllable. We can thus postulate the following rule of stress assignment in Ormo.

[+ syll] → [+ stress] / ___ [- syll] [+ syll] [- syll].#

The rule states that a syllabic segment before a word final syllable becomes stressed. There are some exceptions to the above stress rule, however. The following words are stressed on the last syllable rather than on the second to last. Consider:

[bIšán]	'water'
[afúr]	'four'
[sAgÁl]	'nine'
[sAdét]	'eight'

Whether these examples are in fact just exceptions or whether there are unanswered questions as regards the validity of the above stress rule remains to be worked out.

VI. AGENT NOMINALIZATION

All infinitives in the language are characterized by stem final /-u?/. /-u? is a suffix that is added syntactically to verbs lacking subjects. It is similar to the 'to' in English, or to the /-r/ in Spanish and French. The infinitive marker /-u?/ is absent from conjugated verbs. In agent nominalization, however, /-u?/ is retained. Consider the following data.

<u>VERB</u>			<u>NOMINAL</u>
	DATA I		
fo + u?	'to spin'	fótu?	'spinner'
mo + u?	'to govern'	mótu?	'governor'
	DATA II		
ban + u?	'to open'	bántu?	'opener'
wam + u?	'to call'	wám ⁶ tu?	'caller'
hAr + u?	'to sweep'	hÁrtu?	'sweeper'
mur + u?	'to chop'	múrtu?	'chopper'
	DATA III		
k'Ot + u?	'to dig'	k'Óttu?	'digger'
hAt + u?	'to steal'	hÁttu?	'thief'
dut + u?	'to bark'	dúttu?	'barker'
	DATA IV		
TUg + u?	'to drink'	TUgdu?	'drinker'
fig + u?	'to run'	figdu?	'runner'
k'Ab + u?	'to catch'	k'Ábdu?	'catcher'
Tib + u?	'to push'	Tíbdu?	'pusher'
sob + u?	'to lie'	sóbd ⁶ du?	'liar'

DATA V

goT + u?	'to do'	gótu?	'doer'
fuT + u?	'to take'	fútu?	'taker'
hIT + u?	'to tie'	hítu?	'tie'

DATA VI

bač + u?	'to carry'	bátu?	'carrier'
nač + u?	'to eat'	nátu?	'eater'
hojěč + u?	'to work'	hojětu?	'worker'

DATA VII

bOkIs + u?	'to boast'	bOkíftu?	'one who boasts'
dubIs + u?	'to read'	dubíftu?	'reader'
ajes + u?	'to kill'	aješftu?	'killer'

Data I through III illustrate agent nominalization in a straightforward way. Notice the geminate [tt] in data III. In data III, the verb stem already has a stem final /t/. The addition of the syntactic marker /t/ to such stems will produce words with geminate consonants. In data I and II we do not have /t/ in the stems, and therefore no gemination of consonants is expected in the nominals.

The stems in data IV end in voiced stops. The addition of /t/ to these stems will form the clusters /gt/ and /bt/ in these data. The /t/ will become voiced in the nominals, showing up as [d], by the following rule:



So the clusters /gt/ and /bt/ in the underlying representation will become [gd] and [bd] respectively in the surface representation.

In data V and VI, the stems end in /T/ and /Č/ respectively. If

the syntactic marker /t/ is added directly to these stems, the clusters /Tt/ and /čt/ will be obtained. In Oromo these clusters are not permissible, and therefore it is necessary to drop /T/ and /č/ from the stems. This can be executed by the following rule of deletion.

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} [+ \text{ affric}] \\ [+ \text{ retro}] \end{array} \right\} \rightarrow \emptyset / \text{---} \left[\begin{array}{l} + \text{ dental} \\ - \text{ voiced} \end{array} \right]$$

Data VII presents evidence of another phonological process in Oromo. Here we see that [st] clusters are not permitted. The final /s/ in the stem will become [f], and the following rule can be written to account for the process.

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} + \text{ fric} \\ + \text{ alv} \end{array} \right] \rightarrow \left[+ \text{ labiodent} \right] / \text{---} \left[\begin{array}{l} + \text{ dental} \\ - \text{ voiced} \end{array} \right]$$

CONCLUSION

I undertook this study with the intention of establishing the beginning of a phonology for Oromo. I hope to have achieved that in this report. Although there have been some previous studies by other people along the same line, my work was not influenced by any of them in any respect. I had to rely on personal knowledge, as a native speaker, for the data used in this report. Thus the data have been arrived at through introspection and careful deliberation.

In the introductory section, I noted some historical and cultural background of the Oromo language. In this same part, I pointed out some of the reasons why Oromo still remains clandestine and unexplored by international scholars. In section II, the basic sound segments-- consonants and vowels-- were introduced and discussed. In the remainder of the paper I discussed some phonological and morphological processes from the standpoint of generative phonology. Some rules have been written to account for the processes that occur in the study. Needless to say, some of the rules are restrictive and narrow in their scope of applicability. For example, the stress rule in section V will only affect words or nouns in the same class as those in the data and cannot be generalized to affect all words in the language.

This report will have to be restricted to its present form due to the deadline I have to meet. I hope to have initiated a beginning step towards a more complete and comprehensive study of Oromo phonology.

FOOTNOTES

¹The Oromo are also called 'Galla', a name given to them by their Amhara counterparts. The term 'Galla' has a negative connotation, although nobody really knows what it means, and the Oromos vehemently hate to be referred to by it. A. Meillet et M. Cohen (1952:170) in Les Langues Du Monde write the following:

Galla est un terme partiel mal localisé qui a été généralisé par les Abyssins et transmis par eux aux Européens; les Galla eux-mêmes se nomment Oromo, ainsi que leur langue.

²Oromo spoken in western Ethiopia differs somewhat from that spoken in the eastern regions. The main difference is in choice of vocabulary. For example, what we in the West call ok'ak'u? 'egg' is referred to as bup'e? in the East. Both words are known in the two regions, but each region has its preference. Regardless of such differences, individuals from these areas would be able to communicate and understand each other.

³The Holy Bible was translated into Oromo by Onesimus Nesib (Ca. 185-1931) and other books have been printed in Oromo, but using the Amharic syllabary system. Onesimus Nesib was a native of Wallaga who worked for and with the Swedish missionary.

⁴The now defunct government of Haile Sellassie banned all publications in Oromo for half a century. It severely penalized individuals who made such an effort and their publications were burned and destroyed.

⁵This was a result of the 1974 revolution in which Haile Sellassie lost power to the military junta.

⁶This form shows that the nasal assimilation rule given earlier does not affect any nasal phoneme other than /n/.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Andrzejewski, B.W. 1968. Inflectional Characteristics of the So-Called 'Weak Verbs' in Somali. African Language Studies IX, Vol. IX, 1-50. School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.
- Bliese, L.F. 1975. Afar Vowel Dissimilation: A Problem in Rule Ordering. Anthropological Linguistics Vol. 17, No. 3. 102-106
- Gragg, G. 1976. Oromo of Wallagga, ed. by M.L. Bender, 166-195, Michigan State University.
- Greenberg, J.H. 1970. The Languages of Africa. Indiana University, Bloomington. Mouton and Company, The Hague, The Netherlands.
- Hayward, R.J. 1976. A Question of Oromo Morphophonology. Folia Orientalia, Vol, XVII, 29-40
- Hudson, R.A. 1973. Syllables, Moras and Accents in Beja. Journal of Linguistics Vol. IX, No. 1, 53-63
- Meillet, A. and Cohen, M. 1952. Les Langues Du Monde. New edition, Paris, France.
- Pia, J.J. 1970. Two Principles of Phonology and Somali Sandhi Rule. Journal of African Languages, Vol. IX, No. 2, 77-82
- Welmers, Wm. E. 1973. African Language Structures. University of California Press, LTD. London, England.

SOME ASPECTS OF OROMO PHONOLOGY

by

MELAKU DISSASSA

B.A., KANSAS WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY, SALINA, KANSAS

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Modern Languages

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY, MANHATTAN, KANSAS

1980

ABSTRACT

This study attempts to shed some light on Oromo phonology. The manuscript has been divided into six parts. Part I contains the introduction in which I have noted some historical and cultural background of the Oromo language. In part II I discuss Oromo consonants and vowels. In part III I present a discussion of nasal allophones. Parts IV and V contain the discussions on syllable division and stress assignment respectively.

The sixth and final part is concerned with the agent nominalization.

The conclusion gives a summary of the study and also points out some of the major problems encountered in this endeavor.