

SOME NOTES ON THE PHONOLOGY AND MORPHOLOGY OF CHARA

Aklilu Yilma

1. Introduction

Chara or s'a:ra is a little known language which belongs to the West Omoto cluster of dialects and languages under the north branch of the Omotic family. Most of the Chara speakers reside in *Decha Wārāda* of Kaffa area of the Kaffa-Sheka Zone, in a vast area called *č'oč'a*, scattered in three different villages: *gebaža meša*, *buna anta* and *kumba*. The Chara population in the *Decha Wārāda* is estimated at about 7000.¹

Other members of Chara, whose clan name is called *ba:č'a'*, live in Cheta (*č'ata*) district in a village called *midrā gāndt*. Other language groups found in Cheta district include Dawro (Kullo), Me'en and She (dialects of the Bench language).

The Chara people call their language *s'a:ra atsa no:na* 'Chara people language'. Some members of the community identify themselves with the Bench (formerly called Gimira) people and insist that their language be called *gimira no:na* 'Gimira language'.

¹ This estimation was given in an interview by Ato Alemayehu Ambo, a contact person between the Chara and the government officials in the area.

² It has been reported that the term *Bacha* refers to the Kewegu of the Surmic linguistic group (Gerrit Dimendaal, 1998:26)

Dialectal differences are observed in different parts of the *Decha* area of the present Kaffičo Zone.

	Angela Menesh	Northern č'oč'a	Southern č'oč'a
(1)	'body' suma	ʔačča	suma
	'hair' kusna	gusna	kusna
	'nose' sint'a	sinDa	sinDa
	'breast' t'ama	Dama	---
	'belly' yi:na	hi:na	hi:na

A few linguistic studies have been made on Chara. The first one is that of Enrico Cerulli (1938). Cerulli has made some analysis on the sound system and the grammar of the language. M. L. Bender (1971) has listed 59 lexical items taken from Cerulli.

Comparing my list against Bender's, it has been found that out of the 59 lexical items only 46 of them happen to be similar. The basic word list of Chara in my data corresponds 11% strong and 5% weak or very weak with Kunama, 30% strong and 5-8% weak or very weak with Northern Mao and 45% strong and 5% weak with Wolaitta. I have also found that Chara cognates 52% strong and 4% weak with Bench and 48% strong and 1% weak with She.

2. Phonology

2.1 Consonants

Stops	b	d	g	
	[p]	t	k	
ejective	p'	t'	k'	?
implosive	B	(D)		
Fricatives	f	s	ʃ	h
Affricates		ts	j	
		s'	č	
			č'	
Nasals	m	n		[ŋ]
Lateral		l		
Trill		r		
Semi-vowel	w		y	

In the phonemic inventory of the Chara language ten stops / b, p', B, d, t,

t', g, k, k', ʔ/ four fricatives / f, s, ʃ, h /, five affricates / ts, s', j, č, č' /, two nasals / m, n /, a lateral / l / a trill / r / and two semi-vowels / w, y /, all together 25 consonants are found. The phonemic inventory presented in this study differs from that of Cerulli's article published in 1938. The alveolar implosive / D /, which is included in Cerulli's phonemic inventory, has been found only once alternating with the glottalized alveolar stop / t' /: [jolDa] [jolt'a] 'crooked'. The bilabial implosive / B /, which has not been mentioned in Cerulli's inventory occurs at least in five lexical items and considered as a phoneme in this study. The voiced alveo-palatal fricative [ž] is extremely rare. Only two items consisting of [ž] have been found out of around 550 lexical items. In both cases [ž] occurs word medially following the vowel / i / and preceding / a /. In Cerulli's analysis [p] and [f] are also considered two distinctive phonemes. But my data shows that the two consonants are in free variation.

ḡ tmo

ḡ ʃɪɔ

Moreover, Cerulli has included two more consonants / ɳ / and / y /, ማጠቃለል he refers to as 'dei fonimi con occlusione glottale'. In Cerulli's data, ማጠቃለል sounds happen to occur intervocallically in one lexical item in each ማጠቃለል [ɳ] ማጠቃለል 'nose' to:ḡ 'foot'. In my data, the semivowel /y/ occurs preceding a glottal stop: / to?ya / or as a compensatory lengthening of the vowel after deleting the glottal stop: / to:ya /. The comparison of the two containing / n / in Cerulli's data with the corresponding items in my

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³ One reviewer of this article and one of the editors of this Journal have questioned the manner in which the phoneme / s' / is described. I analyze this sound as a glottalized counter part of the voiceless alveolar affricate / ts /, not that of the voiceless alveolar fricative / s /; and this is true not only for Chara but also for all Omotic and Cushitic languages which include the phoneme / s' / in their sound systems.

⁴ This phrase could be translated as 'phonemes with glottal release'.

shows that / n / occurs before a glottalized alveolar stop / t' /: *siɲn* vs. *sint'a*. In the second item the glottal release / ɲ / of Cerulli corresponds to the glottal stop in my material: *nanza* vs. *naʔa* 'child'.

Another difference is the occurrence of the alveolar implosive / D /. Comparison of the items which contain / D / in Cerulli's material shows correspondence with / t' / in my vocabulary list: *hayD* vs. *hayt* 'listen', *woD* vs. *wot* 'kill'.

The absence of the voiceless glottalized stop / p' / in Cerulli's phonemic inventory is difficult to explain. Eleven lexical items have been found containing / p' / in my vocabulary list. This discrepancy may be attributed to dialectal variation in the Chara language.

Another consonant which has not been included in Cerulli's phonemic inventory is the bilabial implosive stop / B /. In my list / B / occurs in five lexical items.

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|-----|------|---------|--------|---------|
| (1) | aBa | 'dream' | oBma | 'touch' |
| | Bada | 'long' | Balk'a | 'storm' |

2.2 Vowels

Chara has a five vowel system /i, e, a, u, o/. The short and the long vowels are minimally contrastive.

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|-----|-------|-----------|-------|----------|
| (2) | mola | 'fish' | buna | 'flower' |
| | mo:la | 'egg' | bu:na | 'coffee' |
| | masa | 'to wash' | | |
| | ma:sa | 'leopard' | | |

The mid central vowel [ə] seems to be an allophone of / a /, and it occurs at word medial position when the syllable is unstressed.

(3)	[zǎkká]	'elephant'	[bǎk'á]	'to slap'
	[bǎlá]	'forehead'	[tǎmá]	'fire'
	[mǎrgá]	'fence'		

The language allows two or three clusters at word medial and final position. The alveolar sonorants / n, l, r / occur most frequently as first members of clusters. Clusters with the stops / t, t', k, k', ? /, the nasals / n, m / and an alveolar fricative / s / as second members are relatively more frequent than the other phonemes. Three consonant sequences (CCC) with / n /, / s / or / t / as last member occur in root morphemes or across a morpheme boundary.

(4)	doklsa	'circumcize'	p'irk'na	'open'
	aštna	'hide!'	gočnti	'pick(pl.)!'

Three consonant sequences (clusters) with / r / as the last member are also found in root nouns:

(5)	funt'ra	'naked'	antra	'peas'
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2.3 Suprasegmental

At the present stage of my analysis Chara seems to be a stress language. The following examples illustrate that stress is phonemic in the language:

(6)	bak'á	'empty'	wóya	'to come'
	bák'a	'to slap'	woyá	'wolf'
	mína	'strong'		
	mína	'worm'		

2.4 Morphophonemics

2.4.1 Assimilation

In Chara assimilation may take place across a morpheme boundary. A morpheme-initial nasal assimilates its manner and/or point of articulation to that of a preceding consonant. The assimilation could be complete or partial. This consonantal process is usually observed when the singular imperative morpheme { -na } is suffixed to root verbs.

Complete assimilation:

(7)	/ k'er-na/ ---> [k'erra	'circle!'
	circle-imp.	
	/ boč-na / ---> [bočča	'dance!'
	dance-imp.	
	/ uš-na / ---> [ušša	'drink!'
	drink-imp.	

Partial assimilation:

/ dub-na / ---> [dubma	'hit!'
hit-imp.	

/omp'-na/ ---> [omp'ma] to hold-imp.	'hold!'
/sunk'-na/ ---> [sunk'ŋa] kiss-imp.	'kiss!'
/bok-na / ---> [bokŋa] throw-imp.	'throw!'

3 Noun Morphology

3.1 Noun Inflection

Chara nouns are inflected for gender, number definiteness and case. The inflections are expressed through suffixes, except for the possessive which is always marked by prefixes.

3.1.1 Gender

There are a few items where I found the masculine noun marked by the suffix {-i }, and the feminine one by {-a}:

(8)	geš-i	'younger brother'	iz-i	'he'
	geš-a	'younger sister'	iz-a	'she'
	ha:yisi	'this (masc)'		
	ha:na	'this (fem)'		

Gender is usually expressed by using distinctive lexical items:

(9)	mansa 'ox'	?iši 'older brother/uncle'
	miya 'cow'	miča 'older sister'

3.1.2 Number

Chara singular nouns are unmarked for number. The plural is expressed by suffixing {-*ndi*} to singular nouns.

(10)		Singular	Plural
	'ox'	mansa	manse:ndi
	'cow'	miya	miye:ndi
	'mother'	ina	ine:ndi

Adjectives which are treated in this analysis as a class of substantives are inflected for number.

(11)		Singular	Plural
	'white'	dala	dale:ndi
	'black'	karta	karte:ndi

3.1.3 Definiteness

Definiteness is designated by the attaching the morpheme {-*na:zi*} for the masculine singular nouns and {-*e:na*} for the feminine ones. The morpheme *na:zi* also mean 'the male /man'

(12)	mansa 'ox'	mansana:zi	'the ox'
	miya 'cow'	miye:na	'the cow'

Adjectives are marked for definiteness by the suffix {-*bi*} for masculine and {-*e:na*} (which is identical with the feminine nouns definite marker) for feminine.

(13)	dala	'white'
	dala-bi	'the white (masc.)'
	dale:na	'the white (fem.)'
	karta	'black'
	kartabi	'the black (masc.)'
	karte:na	'the black (fem.)'

3.1.4 Case

Nouns inflect for nominative, accusative, dative, genitive, ablative, instrumental and vocative cases.

It seems that the nominative case marker alternates freely between { -i } and { -e } in the language.

- (14) (a) ke:met-i polise-ne wot'-is-en
 Kemeto-Nom. police-Inst. kill-passive- perf.
 'Kemeto has been killed by a police man'
- (b) ta:n-e ha:s'e ham-iš
 I-Nom. river go-past
 'I went to the river'

The accusative is indicated by the suffix { -in } or { -n }.

- (15) (a) iz-i kan-is wot'-iš
 he-Nom. dog-Acc. kill-past
 'he killed a dog'

- (b) ke:met-i ta-s gas'-iš
 Kemeto-Nom. I-Acc. hit-past
 'Kemeto hit me'

As shown in examples 15a and b {-is} occurs following a consonant and {-s} occurs following a vowel.

The dative case is marked by the suffix {-(i)ri}.

- (16) (a) no:ne/nu:ni ganayen-ri ača ebam-iš
 we old woman-Dat. meat take-past
 'we took meat to the old woman'
- (b) na?-t'a:ze mans-iri dara im-iš
 boy-Def. ox-Dat sorgum give-past
 'the boy gave sorgum to an ox'

The genitive is marked by {-e}.

- (17) (a) aklil-e dorsa 'Aklilu's horse'
 Aklilu-Gen. horse
- (b) kan-e ač'a 'dog's tooth'
 dog-Gen. tooth

When the possessed noun is missing, the morpheme {-ri} occurs with the possessor, following the genitive case marker {-e}.

- (18) (a) aklil-e-ri 'Aklilu's'
 (b) kan-e-ri 'dog's'

The ablative is indicated by {-k'ay}.

- (19) (a) izi mizan-k'ay woy-iš
 he Mizan-Abl. come-past
 'he came from Mizan'
- (b) iza ke:ti-k'ay kes-iš
 she house-Abl. get out-past
 'she got out from the house'

The instrumental is shown with the morpheme {-en}.

- (19) (a) izi kats-en' gas'-iš
 he stick-Inst. hit-past
 'he hit with a stick'
- (b) ats-e:na ta:y-en ha:miša
 person-Def(fem) foot-Inst. went
 'the woman went by foot'

The Vocative case marker is {-o}.

- (20) ta-?iš-o 'oh! my brother (older)'
 my-brother-Voc.

' Here, the vowel [a] in the word **katsa** 'stick' is deleted before [c]: / **katsa-en** / → [katsen]

ta-ba:b-o 'oh my father'
 my-father-Voc.

3.2 Adjectives

Like nouns, all adjectives end with the vowel / a / and are inflected for number, definiteness and case. In noun phrases, adjectives precede the head noun they modify, but show no agreement in gender, number, definiteness or case. The following are typical adjectives of Chara:

- (21) dala 'white'
 dala-e:ndi [dale:ndi] 'whites'
 dala-bi 'the red (masc.)'
 dal-e:na [dala-e:na] 'the red (fem.)'

dale mansa hay-iš
 white ox die-past

'the white ox died'

dale miy-e:na hay-iš-a
 white cow-Def. die-past-3f

'the white cow died'

3.3 Pronouns

3.3.1. Personal Pronouns

Chara personal pronouns are composed of pronominal stems and a nominative case marker {-i } which is preceded by /-n/ in the first and second person

singular and first person plural. The only exception is in the third person feminine singular. The pronominal stems in the language are presented below:

(22)		Singular	Plural
	1st	ta-	no:- /nu-
	2nd	ne:-	int-
	3rd	iz-	its-

The independent subject pronouns, therefore, look like the following:

(23)		Singular	Plural
	1st	tani	no:ne/nuni
	2nd	ne:ni	intf
	3rd masc.	izi	itsendi
	fem.	iza	

The pronominal stems (forms listed under 22) suffix the case marker to construct various forms of pronouns. The object personal pronouns are formed by suffixing the accusative case marker {-i)s } to the pronominal stems.

(24)		Singular	Plural
	1st	ta-s	nu-s
	2nd	ne:-s	int-is
	3rd masc.	lz-is	itsend-is
	fem.	íz-is	

(a) ats-e:na iz-is sunk'-is-a
 person-Def(fem) he-Acc. kiss-past
 'the woman kissed him'

(b) itsende nu-s gas'-iš
 they we-Acc. hit-past
 'they hit us'

Indirect object pronouns are formed by suffixing the dative case marker {-ri} to the personal pronoun bases:

(25)		Singular	Plural
	1st	ta-ri	nu-ri
	2nd	ne:-ri	'nt-ri
	3rd masc.	iz-ri	itsend-ri
	fem.	iz-ri	

(a) na?-taze its-e:nd-ri ača ebam-iš
 boy-Def 3per. -pl-Dat. meat give-past
 'the boy gave meat to them'

The possessive pronoun forms have two phonologically conditioned allomorphes {-reri} and {-eri} to the pronominal stems. The allomorph {-reri} occurs after a vowel and {-eri} following a consonant.

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|------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (26) | Singular | Plural |
| | ta- <i>ri</i> 'mine' | nur- <i>eri</i> 'ours' |
| | ne:- <i>ri</i> 'yours' | int- <i>eri</i> 'yours' |
| | iz- <i>eri</i> 'his/hers' | itsend- <i>eri</i> 'theirs' |

The base pronouns are also affixed to possessed nouns to express possession.

- | | | |
|------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| (27) | ta- <i>miya</i> 'my cow' | nu- <i>miya</i> 'our cow' |
| | ne- <i>miya</i> 'your cow' | intā- <i>miya</i> 'your (pl.) cow' |
| | izā- <i>miya</i> 'his cow' | itsende- <i>miya</i> 'their cow' |
| | izā- <i>miya</i> 'her cow' | |

Reflexivity is shown by prefixing the base pronouns to the word *to:ya* 'head' and by suffixing the instrumental case marker {-en}.

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|------|-------------------------------|--|
| (28) | ta- <i>to:y-en</i> 'myself' | nu- <i>to:y-en</i> 'ourselves' |
| | ne- <i>to:y-en</i> 'yourself' | inte- <i>to:y-en</i> 'yourselves' |
| | ize- <i>to:y-en</i> 'himself' | its- <i>e:ndi-to:y-en</i> 'themselves' |
| | ize- <i>to:y-en</i> 'herself' | |

Here, the vowel [a] in the word *to:ya* 'head' is deleted before [e] of {-en} as in /ta-*to:ya-en* / ---> [tato:oyen]

It is also possible to express an activity directed towards oneself or performed by oneself with the morpheme {*ba-*} and the instrumental case marker {-en} in nouns referring to body parts.

- | | | |
|------|-----|-------------------------------------|
| (29) | (a) | ba- <i>to:y-en hay-iš-a</i> |
| | | own head-Inst. die-past-3per. (fem) |
| | | 'she died by herself' |

- (b) ba-kuč-en hay-iš-a
own-hand-Inst. die-past-3per. (fem)
'she killed herself with her own hand'
- (c) ats-e:na ba-ta:y-en ham-iš-a
person-Def.(f.)own-foot-Inst.go-past-3s(fem)
'the woman went on (her own) foot'

3.3.2 Demonstrative Pronouns

Chara has two demonstrative pronoun roots. { ha:- } is the proximal root and is inflected for number, gender and case:

- (30) ha:na 'this (fem.)' eg. ha:na miye:na 'this cow'
ha:yisi 'this (masc.)' eg. ha:yisi mansa 'this ox'
- ha:ri/ha:šši 'here'
ha:?endi 'these'

The distal root in Chara has different forms as shown below:

- (31) sekn 'that' (object to the side of the speaker)
sekom 'over there'
den 'that' (object in front of the speaker)
yatin 'that' (object behind the speaker)

The distal root can be inflected for number:

- (32) sekn?endi 'those'

3.3.3 Wh-Pronouns

The interrogative in Chara is composed of simple stems and case,

o:-reri 'whose?'

o: kan-e / o:-reri kan-e 'whose dog is it?'
 who-poss. / who dog-Gen who-poss dog-Gen

am-eši 'where?'
 where-postposition(?)

am-abi 'which? (masc)'
 where-Def.(masc)

am-abi-s mansa koyt-obi
 where-Def.(masc) ox take-Q.(present)

'which ox do you want?'

am-e:na 'which (fem.)?'
 where-Def.(fem)

am-e:na miya koyt-obi
 where-Def.(fem) cow take-Q.(present)

'which cow do you want?'

a:-ze 'what?/ what is?'
 what-?

a:-s-iri 'why?' (for what cause?)
 what-causative-Dat.

a:-s-iri wo:y-enne 'why did you come?'
 what-caus.-Dat. come-Q (past)

a:-mata	'when?'
a:-mata wo:?-enne	'when did you come?'
what-temporal(?) what-temporal(?)come-Q.(past)	
a:-rara	'how?'
what-?	
a:-rara hay-enne	'how did he die?'
what-? come-Q.marker(past)	
a:-rare / a:-mbitse	'how much?'
what-? / what-?	
a:-rare/a:mbitse waga	'how much is the price'

3.3.4 Derived Agent Nouns

Agent nouns are formed by suffixing {-atsa} for masculine and {-atse:na} for feminine.

(35)	ki:ta	'work'	ga:ʔna	'wealth'
	ki:t-atsa	'worker (masc.)'	ga:ʔn-atsa	'rich man'
	ki:t-ats-e:na	'worker (fem.)'	ga:n-atse:na	'rich woman'
	work-person-fem			

gira	'poorness'
gir-atsa	'poor man'
gir-atse:na	'poor woman'

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4. Verb Morphology *

Most of the root verbs in Chara are monosyllabic, and have a typical shape of CVC- with some having CVCC- :

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|------|--------|---------------------------------|--------|-----------|
| (36) | duk- | 'bury' | hay- | 'die' |
| | boč- | 'dance' | č'ad- | 'sew' |
| (37) | buk's- | 'urinate' (the noun is bukusa) | | |
| | wost- | 'take' | durk'- | 'push' |
| | sink' | 'smell' | faks- | 'release' |
| | ?irm- | 'embrace' | | |

There are also a few disyllabic roots in the language:

- | | | | | | |
|----|------|----------|-----------------------------------|--------|-----------|
| LP | (38) | ?omp'it- | 'shake, hold' | šakit- | 'scatter' |
| | | k'undit- | 'feel indignant about' | | |
| | | ?unk'it- | 'steal' (from ?unk'u 'thief (N)') | | |

4.1 The Copula

The copula form is {-be} and has the meaning 'is/was' or 'are/were'. It has the following functions:

1. _____

* I am not quite comfortable with the tense/aspect system of Chara language since my data on this is very limited. Further field research is needed.

1) It occurs in predicate sentences of equation type:

- (39) (a) tan-i goš-ma-s-be 'I am a farmer'
 I-Gen farm-eat-one-cop.
- (b) izi onsa-be 'he is good'
 he good-cop.
- (c) du:ta k'aya onsa-be
 early rise good-cop.
 'it is good to rise early in the morning

Some sentences of the above type are recorded without the copula.

- (40) nun-i goš-ma-s 'we are farmers'
 we-Gen farm-eat-one

2) The copula {-be} also optionally compounds with different aspectual morphemes (past perfect, progressive, etc.) to form different types of verbal aspects.

- (41) (a) kafa wališ-be 'the bird flew'
 bird fly-cop.
- (b) tan-i bongi ham-os-be 'I am going to Bonga'
 I Gen Bonga go-Prog-cop.
- (c) atsa kana be?-iš-be 'the man has seen a d
 man dog see-cop

- (d) k'aya de?en-be 'I have work'
work have-cop.

In Chara, verbs do not inflect for all persons and number. They show 3rd person, feminine singular only.

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|------|-------------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| (42) | Singular | | Plural |
| | ta:ne ebam-iš | 'I took' | no:ne ebam-iš 'we took' |
| | I take-past | | |
| | nene ebam-iš | 'you took' | inte ebam-iš 'you took' |
| | izi ebam-iš | 'he took' | itsende ebam-iš 'they took' |
| | iza ebam-iš-a | 'she took' | |
| | she take-past-3sf | | |

4.2 Derived Verb Stems

4.2.1 Causative

The causative is formed by affixing the morpheme { -is } to the root:

- (43) č'alk-is-iš
cool-caus.-past
'made something cool'
- ta:s gas'-is-iš
I-Acc. hit-caus.-past
'made me be hit'

4.2.2 Passive

The passive is also formed by suffixing {-Is} to the root. The passive marker is homophonous with the causative morpheme.

- (44) ma maʔ-is-iš
food eat-passive-past
'food was eaten'

ke:meti polis-en wot'-is-iš
Kemeto-Nom. police-Inst kill-passive-perf.

'Kemeto was killed by police'

ta:-ne gas'-is-iš
I-Nom. hit-passive-past

'I was hit'

4.2.3 Reciprocal

The reciprocal refers to an activity carried out by participants who are both agent and patient. The reciprocal stem is formed by suffixing {-it(ə)}.

- (45) gas'-ita ganča-be
hit-Recp. bad-Cop.

'it is bad to hit each other'

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- (45) gas'-ita ganča-be
hit-Recp. bad-Cop.

'it is bad to hit each other'

č'ada č'ad-it-iš
fight-Recp.-past
'fought with each other'

taki tos-it-iš
meet talk-Recp.-past

'having met, we talked'

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