

# 1. Introduction

This work is a grammar of Konso. So far, the language has not been intensively studied. In this chapter, I introduce the people and the language, review previous linguistic works, and outline the nature and organisation of this study.

## 1.1. The people

The Konso live in the southwest of Ethiopia in the Segen Area Peoples' Zone in the state of Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR). They number about 250,000 (Central Statistical Agency 2009), and call themselves *χonsitta*; they call their land *χonso* and their language *?afaa ?a χonsó?* 'language of Konso'.

The Konso are organised in nine exogamous clans: *Keertitta*, *Arkaamayta*, *Sawdatta*, *Paasanta*, *Tookmaleeta*, *Eelayta*, *Ifalayta*, *Tikissayta* and *Mahalayta*. I belong to the *Keertitta* clan. Except for the *Keertitta* clan, each clan has its own chief. There are two clan chiefs for the *Keertitta*: *ǧuufa* (in *Kenaa*) and *Kala* (in *Karatte*). Males of the same clan consider themselves as brothers, and the females as their sisters. This prohibits *Keertitta* men from marrying women from their own clan. A clan chief does not marry from the land he administers. This makes the marriage of clan chiefs different from that of the common people. Konso villages are not clan-based.

The Konso have an age grading system, called *Kataa*, which is similar to the well-known *Gada* system of Oromo. The *Kataa* system has become less important in the past few decades. The Konso are socially divided into two classes, the *Etanta* and the *χawǧaa*. The former comprises farmers who hold a high social profile while the latter comprises traders and craftsmen.

The Konso are hard-working people who make a living in the mountainous hills of their land. They are predominantly farmers and are known for their indigenous terracing system, which allows them to make use of even the most precipitous slopes while preventing erosion. With the efforts of many scholars and organisations, UNESCO inscribed the Konso Landscape as a World Heritage in June 2011. The inscription of the Konso Landscape was celebrated in *Karatte* in April 2012.

The Konso produce maize, wheat, barley, different types of beans and sorghum, and cotton, among other things. Their staple foods are *ǧamaa* and *χarǧa*. *ǧamaa* is prepared from sorghum, maize, wheat and/or barley flour, while *χarǧa* is prepared from beans. *ǧaǧaa* is a locally brewed drink and has different varieties.

Most Konso villages are established on hilltops and are densely populated. The villages are surrounded by high walls of piled stones for protection against attacks. Each family compound traditionally consists of an upper part, called the *oytaa*, and a lower part, called the *arɣatta*. The former is used for living and the latter for storage and keeping animals.

## 1.2. The language

Konso belongs to the Lowland East Cushitic languages of the Afroasiatic phylum. Within the Lowland East Cushitic family, it belongs to the Oromoid group, and further to the Konsoid group. The language has four dialects: Faafse, Karatte, Tuuro and ɣolme (see also Black 1973). Data for this study come from the Faafse dialect, which I speak.

Though attempts have been made to develop an alphabet, there is still no standard alphabet for Konso. Two scripts have been proposed for a standard alphabet: Fidäl script (the script used for writing Amharic and Ge'ez, among others) and the Roman alphabet. The first scholar who made the attempt to establish the alphabet for Konso is Haile Eyesus Engidashet (1986). He proposes the Fidäl script after studying the phonology of the language very briefly. The other script, Latin, was first proposed by the Konso Orthography Committee in 1997. The most recent decision to adopt the Latin script was made in April 2012. On 29 April 2012, the Bureau of Culture, Tourism and Government Communications Affairs organised a one-day Language and Culture symposium in which four papers that dealt with script selection were presented. The first paper was presented by me. In my presentation, I focussed on comparing and contrasting the adoption of Fidäl and Latin scripts. The second paper proposed a modified version of the Fidäl script. The third paper dealt with the report of the 1997 Konso Orthography Committee, and the reasons why the Committee adopted the Latin script. The fourth paper was about an attempt made by a Konso native to invent a new script for writing in Konso. Interestingly, this presenter trained some children from his village on how to use the script and demonstrated that to the participants. After the paper presentations, group discussions were held to make a decision on the adoption of either the Fidäl or Latin script. After the group discussions, group representatives presented the script they proposed and the reasons why they made the choice. Except for one group that could not make a clear decision, the rest adopted Latin script for the language. The adoption was directed to the Konso Wereda Administration Council to officially endorse the adoption of Latin script. The symposium was concluded by setting up Konso Language Promotion Committee.

Although there is no standard alphabet for Konso, some written materials have been produced. The Evangelical Church of Makane Yesus has produced quite a number of materials in Konso using the Fidäl script. These materials include

the translation of both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, religious short stories, arithmetic booklets and so on. So far, little has been produced in Latin script. Korra Garra published two storybooks at the department of African Languages and Cultures, Leiden University. The arithmetic booklets produced by Mekane Yesus Church are also available in Latin version.

### 1.3. Previous linguistic works

Though Konso does yet not have a comprehensive grammar, there have been some linguistic works written on the language. As the review below shows, most of the works are unpublished B.A. and M.A. theses.

Paul Black (1973) studies the phonology, morphology and syntax of the language. In the phonology part, he presents the phonemic inventory of the language and identifies twenty-one consonant phonemes and five short vowels, each with a long counterpart. He also discusses the allophonic distribution, the phonemic and phonotactic rules of consonants. In the morphology section, he deals with nominals, including nouns and pronouns, and with adjectives. In the syntax section, he describes predicate and nominal phrases as well as the formation of conditional clauses.

Ronald J Sim (1977) provides a phonemic sketch of the segmental phonemes; he discusses the phonemic status of gemination and vowel length, and presents suprasegmentals and distinctive features. He also discusses nouns, verbs and adjective categories.

Getahun Amare (1999), in his published article, deals with the structure of the noun phrase. He examines nominal positions, interrogatives, and independent personal pronouns. He also presents complements, modifiers and specifiers of the noun phrase.

In his unpublished BA thesis, Mehamed Ahmed (1999) describes the relativisation of subjects, direct objects and objects of postpositions. He claims that Konso does not have a relative pronoun like English *who*. His claim is not correct. Konso has a relative pronoun ?a, which does not appear when the subject head noun is definite.

In his unpublished BA thesis, Beniam Mitiku (2000) presents the noun inflections for number, gender, person and case. He also examines the derivation of nouns from verbs and adjectives, and discusses noun-deriving affixes.

Daniel Damtew's (2000) thesis presents compounding in nouns, adjectives and postpositions. His examples are based on compounds in Amharic and English, and are not natural compounds in Konso (see 4.12).

Ongaye Oda (2000) writes in his unpublished BA thesis about the structure of simple sentences. He analyses the structure of declaratives, interrogatives (of yes–no questions and wh-questions), and imperatives. He also attempts to show the basic transformational rules operating on simple sentences, such as an insertion rule, optional and obligatory subject deletion rules, substitution transformation, and movement rules of object, verb and the wh-word.

In his unpublished MA thesis, Ongaye Oda (2004) presents an overview of complex sentences and complement clauses in Konso. He presents simple sentences, compound sentences and (compound-)complex sentences. He also treats result clauses, conditional clauses, concessive clauses, purpose clauses, and temporal clauses. He additionally discusses complement clauses, syntactic and semantic analysis of complementisers, the derivation of subject and object complement clauses and syntactic variations in complement clauses. Finally, he deals with higher predicates and complement clause modalities.

In his (2004) article, Maarten Mous describes middle and passive in Konso. Here he identifies the suffixes that mark these two voices. He also discusses the fact that the middle derivation is occasionally used with the passive meaning.

Maarten Mous (2005) analyses conjunctive coordination, disjunctive coordination and adversative coordination. He identifies lexical and clitic conjunctive and disjunctive coordinations.

Maarten Mous and Ongaye Oda (2009) analyse clause linking in temporal (succession) clauses and conditional clauses. They also analyse (possible) consequences of clause linking.

Daudey, H and A.C. Hellenthal (2004) study some morphosyntactic aspects of the Konso language. They discuss the structural and semantic functions of the suffixes *-eeyye*, *-n(n)*, and *-ʔ*. They also present the locational, directional, elevational and distance adverbs.

In his unpublished MA thesis Gallo Aylatte (2008) treats the verbal system, the relationship between tense and aspect and the inflection of the verb in the context of the past, present, and future tenses. He also describes the inflection of the verbs in relative clauses.

In her unpublished BA thesis Tizita Getahun (2003) discusses the inflection of the verb for person, number, gender, aspect, tense, mood and voice. She also deals with the derivation of the verb stem in the passive, causative, intensive, reciprocal, benefactive, gerundive and singulative. Finally, she presents morphophonemic processes such assimilation, consonant insertion (though there is no such thing in the language, as far as I know), vowel length, and epenthesis.

Alemayehu Dereje (2003) discusses the simple and complex constituency of a noun phrase. He further analyses agreement between modifiers and the head noun. He also describes the patterns of noun phrase constituents, and finally the functions of a noun phrase as a subject, object and complement.

Anna Vähäkangas's (2009) grammatical sketch of Konso (45 pages) is published by the Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus. The booklet presents a description of the consonant as well as vowel phonemes, nouns, noun phrase modifiers, pronouns and possessives, subjects and predicates, verbs, transitive and intransitive verbs, non-final verbs and verb derivation and (some) cases. The booklet has many descriptive problems, as well as some analytical ones. For example, the uvular consonants /ɢ/ and /χ/ are described as velar consonants. The glottal stop that marks the nominative case is missing. The middle derivation is not discussed in the work. Subject clitics are poorly analysed. I have not made any use of the material in the booklet. In other words, my work is an independent research based on my own data.

#### 1.4. The present study

This study has developed out of contact professor Mous made with me in 2000 in Ethiopia. During the summer of 2003, professor Mous invited me to Leiden University where I met scholars (Azeb Amha, Christian Rapold, Anne-Christie Hellenthal and Graziano Savá) working on Ethiopian languages. During this visit, professor Mous and I started working on Konso. I also did library work for my MA research. He again invited me to Leiden University during the summer of 2004. This time, I gave a talk at the Colloquium on African Languages and Cultures and then started writing my PhD proposal ("A Grammar of Konso"). With his and Dr Azeb Amha's support, I wrote my project proposal and submitted a couple of applications in the subsequent years. It was in 2007 that my project proposal was selected for a fully funded PhD position at Leiden University Centre for Linguistics (LUCL). The research project was supervised by both professor Mous and Dr. Azeb Amha.

As there is no standard alphabet for Konso, the transcription employed in this study closely adheres to the IPA; the exceptions include the use of *y* instead of *j* for the palatal glide, doubling letters instead of using a colon (: ) to represent geminate consonants as well as long vowels.

In the next chapter, I describe phonology and morphophonemics (Chapter 2). In chapter 3, I discuss the basics of simple sentences to orient the reader on the syntactic structure before dealing with morphology in subsequent chapters. In chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7, I analyse nouns, pronouns, verbs and adjectives, respectively. Postpositions, adverbs and conjunctions are discussed in chapter 8. In chapter 9 I discuss syntax and in chapter ten interrogative clauses. In chapters

11 and 12 I present negation and complex sentences, respectively. Ideophones and interjections are discussed in chapter 13. Chapters 14 and 15 contain list of nouns and stories, respectively.

### **1.5. Fieldwork**

I conducted fieldwork during two trips to Ethiopia. The first field trip took place from end of April to mid August 2008. During this period, I recorded stories and checked my preliminary analyses on phonology with native speakers. I also conducted library research at Addis Ababa University and participated in a conference organised by the Ethiopian Language Research Centre at Addis Ababa University.

I carried out fieldwork on the second trip from September 2009 to January 2010. During this period, I recorded more stories and transcribed some of these. I checked my preliminary analyses on morphology and syntax with several Konso native speakers and developed the chapters on these topics.