

## SWAHILI-LOANWORDS IN OROMO

CATHERINE GRIEFENOW-MEWIS

It is not unexpected that we can find several Swahili-loanwords in Oromo because Swahili- and Oromospeaking people were neighbours for, at least, several centuries. If we are looking for Swahili-loanwords in Oromo we have, of course, to examine the southern Oromo-dialects first. Table 1 contains a map of the Oromo-dialects which Bernd Heine published in his book *The Waata dialect of Oromo* in 1981; table 2 shows a detailed map of Oromo speaking tribes in Kenya, published by Harry Stroomer in his book *A Comparative Study of Three Southern Oromo Dialects in Kenya* in 1987.

Though the description of the different Oromo-dialects cannot be called satisfactory we have a good basis for comparisons of the southern Oromo-dialects with the two mentioned books by Heine and Stroomer. In addition I found a lot of material in the preprint of a big Borana-English Dictionary compiled by Rev. Ton Leus who is working in Southern Ethiopia in a Borana speaking area; and I found some interesting examples in *An Oromo-English Vocabulary* by the Revs. Ton Leus, Joseph Van de Loo and George Cotter who in this vocabulary published 7,700 English words with their approximations in the Macha, Guji and Borana dialects of Oromo.

In table 3 I indicate a list of 28 loanwords in Oromo which I found in, at least, two of the mentioned sources and which are called Swahili-loanwords by some of the authors. For comparison I also gave the equivalents which I found for the English words of my list in the *Handbook of the Oromo Language* by Mohammed Ali and Andrzej Zaborski which is based on the Harar dialect of Oromo, though among the examples only the word *bishingaa* 'millet' shows a relation to the Borana-word *misinga*, in Swahili *msinga*. Stroomer, Heine and Leus indicated in their books a supposed Swahili-origin. Stroomer mentioned 194 Oromo words in one of the three dialects (Borana, Orma or Waata) and sometimes for all of them: BOW as originated from Swahili, in a few cases with question mark. Heine mentioned a Swahili-equivalent for 46 words of the Waata dialect, and Ton Leus marked 39 words of the Borana dialect as originating from Swahili. My Oromo colleague, Tamene Bitima, and me are not so sure in all the cases where Ton Leus marked a Swahili origin for words that are also in Swahili loanwords from Arabic, particularly in cases when there is the same loanword in northern Oromo dialects, too. So we can find a word *baari* 'sea' not only in Borana but also in the Macha dialect of Oromo, *dahaba* 'gold' is used also in the Harar dialect, *maqasii*, *makasi* 'scissors' seems to be used in all Oromo dialects, as well as *qalamu* 'pen', *sahani*, *saani* 'plate' and *sanduga* 'box'. I am sure, however, that there were different ways for originally Arabic words to enter the Oromo language, sometimes directly from Arabic (through the Islam or trading), sometimes via Amharic and, surely, sometimes through Swahili. A borrowing from Swahili seems to be evident in the case of *duka*, *-ni* 'shop' (in table 3 no. 24) which in Arabic is *dukkan*. In table 3 in the column Zaborski you can find the Harar-Oromo form *dukaana*. If we

have *duka* in the southern dialects - which sounds so similar to Swahili *duka* (locative *dukani*) - this indicates a borrowing from Swahili namely when in the northern dialects *duka* is not used but the word *suuqi* or *suuki* in the meaning 'shop' which is originally Arabic for 'market'. A similar situation seems to exist for *askari*, *askartii* 'soldier' (no.25) and *alfuu*, *elfuu* 'thousand' (27) and for the Borana word *gaarii*, BOW *gaarii*, Sw. *gari* (no.4) for 'car' which is supposed to be of Indian origin. The Northern Oromo dialects use the words *makina* and *konkolata*, the Ethiopian branch of the Borana uses *makina*, *babura* or *gaari* and the Somali use *baabuur* for 'car'. So, if we find a term *gaari* only in the Southern dialects of Oromo and in Swahili as well it seems much more likely to have been borrowed from Swahili than from any other language.

Besides the Swahili-loanwords given in the handout Heine found the nouns *kitáanda* 'bed', *mzigo* 'load' in the Waata dialect of Oromo, the verbs *ans-* 'to begin', *tooshit-* 'to be enough', *ba'dilisha'd-* 'to exchange', *piim-* 'to measure' and the adverbs *kipófu* 'blind' and *sawasawa* 'correct'.

Stroomer, who collected a much larger amount of words for Borana, Orma and Waata, gave among others the following Swahili-loanwords: *ahsaantaa* 'thank you', *barwa*, Sw. *barua* 'letter', *bas*, *basi* 'so, well', *cumbaa* 'room, chamber', *falume*, Sw. *mfalme* 'king, chief', *jamboo* 'hello!', *jariba* 'to try', *jiikoo* 'kitchen', *kaazii* 'work', *kanisaa* 'church', *karibuu* 'near, approximately, welcome!', *jumaa taatuu* or *jumaa sadii* 'Monday', *ki'saa* then, *kitaandaa* 'bed', *kiyaamaa* 'resurrection', *lakinii* 'but', *meezaa* 'table', *milimaa* 'mountain', *ndizii* 'banana', *sirkaala* 'government', *'sambaa* 'farm, garden', *ukutaa* 'wall', *wiasii* 'potatoes', the interjection *yaani* 'well', and *zaidii* 'high (of prices), more'.

Here I did not include Arabic loanwords from Stroomer's vocabulary which we find in the Northern dialects, too.

The most remarkable point in Stroomers' vocabulary for me is the fact that we find so many prepositions beside greetings, nouns, verbs and interjections which are borrowed preferentially: *baada* (OW) 'after', *bakaa* (BO), *pakaa* (O) *mpaka* (without any mark for a dialect), Sw. *mpaka* 'until', *bilaa* (W) 'without', *hataa* (W) 'until', *kablaa* or *kabilaa* (OW) 'before'. I examined the Arabic loanwords in Somali, in Swahili and in Oromo - in none of these languages, however, I found as many prepositions in comparison with the total amount of loanwords borrowed from another language as in Stroomer's vocabulary.

I am sure that there exists a very high degree of bilingualism or diglossy with Swahili, especially in the Orma and the Waata dialect. The use of the Swahili conjunction *au* 'or' in Orma shows this high degree, too. When we find the Swahili word *kila* in Waata-Oromo as *kilaa* or *killaa* all for example in a sequence *killa bonnii* 'every snake' beside *kilaa sikuu* for 'always' or if we see the Swahili-word *kisha*, in Waata *ki'saa* 'then' also in a quite Oromized form: *ki'saatiillee* 'also then' or 'even then' it shows that these words are not only borrowed as an idiomatic expression but they are separated in their details and used according to their individual meaning. Another example from Orma is *guyya kiyaamaa* 'the day of resurrection' (Stroomer). *Guyya* is the Oromo word for 'day'.

For the form *bakaa* in Borana and Orma given by Stroomer beside *pakaa* in Orma from Sw. *mpaka* 'until' there may be two explanations:

- 1 the sound *p* does not exist in Oromo, we find this sound only in loanwords such as *poostaa*, *polotikaa*, *poolisii* beside *foolisii*.
2. We have an Oromo word *bakka* with the meaning 'place'. Perhaps the Borana and Orma saw a connection between the Swahili word for 'until' and the Oromo word for 'place', perhaps in the sense of a folk etymology.

A sequence of two consonants is common in Oromo only if one of the sounds *r* or *l* is a part of it. So the Oromo will prefer *pakaa* instead of *mpaka* and *masingaa* or *masingaa* instead of *msinga*. Surprisingly I did not find a variant form beside *mlangoo*.

The Swahili word *msinga* is given in Heine (1981: 61) with the mark: „Swah. dial.“ for the Waata form *msiinga* 'millet'. Stroemer wrote behind *msinga* and *masingaa* Swahili with a question mark. The problem that we find this word not in Standard Swahili and only in the Southern Oromo dialects as well as in the Harar dialect, but there in the form *bishingaa*, raised some doubts about a Swahili origin. I have not solved this problem yet.

If we look at the maps (table 1 and 2) and see the region inhabited by Orma and Waata or even the Southern Borana branch it is not surprising that we find such a strong influence of Swahili there. But I was really surprised when I found words as *simu* for 'telephone', *rangi* for 'colour', *soka* or *shoka* for 'axe' and *jembe* for 'hoe' in Ton Leus' *Borana-English Dictionary* and in the vocabulary of Ton Leus, Joseph Van de Loo and George Cotter, i.e. in vocabularies collected not in Kenya but in Ethiopia. These words are typical Swahili words and, of course, not used in the Northern Oromo dialects.

I would like to close my paper with a Swahili-verse with Oromo-words described by Ernst Dammann in *ZfE*, vol. XXX, which shows the relations between Swahili and Oromo, however, in opposite direction:

*Karatasi ya kimanga tukuwa yangu damisa!  
wende nayo Pate Yunga, hofu kibarasisa.  
umwambie ndiwa Manga dubi kina kubisisa.  
jarhama unash, mina basa, dubaidana.*

On Arabic paper take my message!  
Go with it to Pate Yunga and inform him himself.  
Speak to the pigeon from Arabia and explain the matter to him:  
Remove the bad people from the house; then we will talk with each other.

This verse was written by Sultan Ahmed in Kau to Sultan Ahmed bin Sheik in Pate, probably the governor of Pate Bwana Madi bin Sheik who governed Pate between 1840 and 1856. The writer of the letter warned his brother that bad people are among his followers. He used Oromo words for preventing others to understand this warning:

*damisa*, *dams* is Oromo 'message'  
*hofu* = *ofi* means 'himself'  
'barasisa' means 'to let know, to inform'  
*dubi* is 'speech, matter'  
*kina* - 'this'  
*kubisisa* = *hubachisa* 'to explain, make clear'

*jarhama* = *jari hama* 'bad people'

*unash* was translated by the informant *uwafukuze*

*mina* = *mana* 'house'

*basa* = 'to let come out'

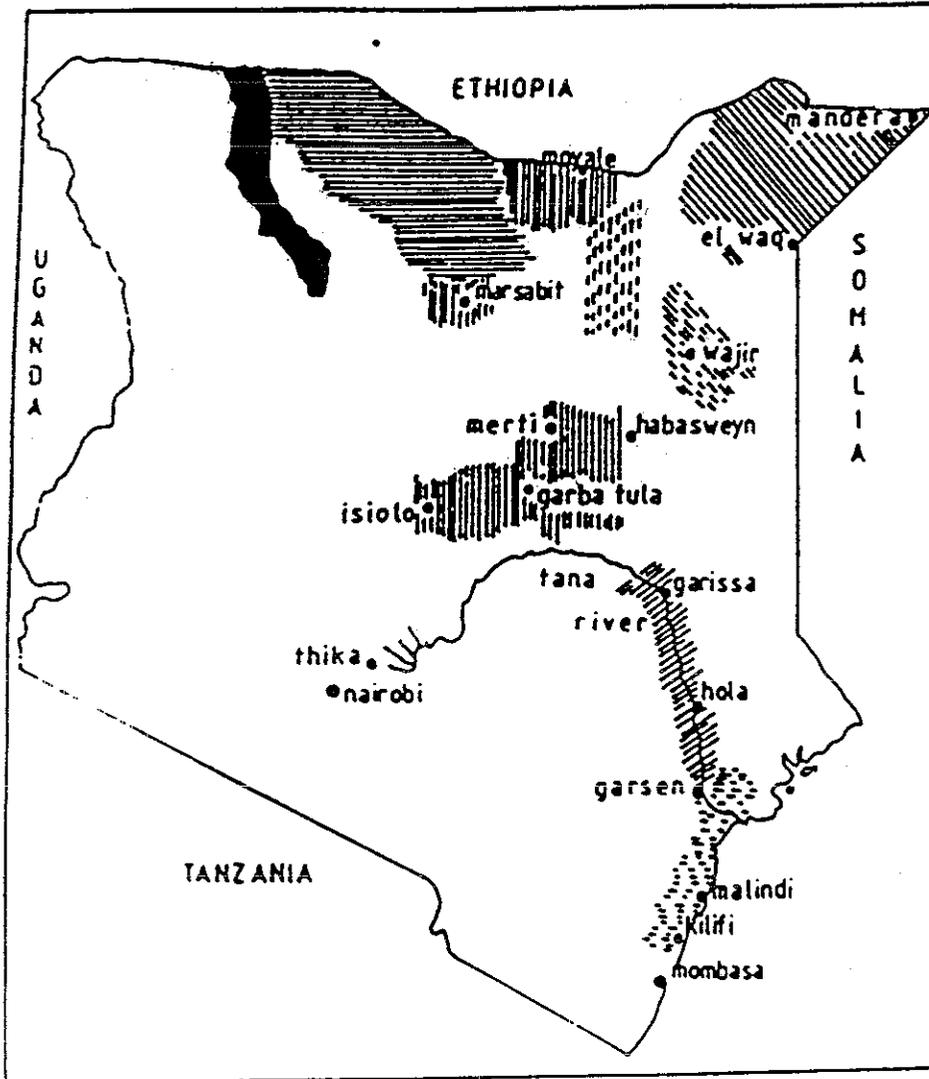
*dubaidana* - *dubanna* means in Oromo 'we will speak', the ending *-ana* seems to be the Swahili associative form, so we have 'we will speak with each other'.

### References:

- Mohammed Ali & Andrzej Zaborski. 1990. *Handbook of the Oromo Language*. Wroclaw. (Cited in the table as Zaborski).
- Dammann, Ernst. 1939/40. "Ein Suahelivers mit Gallawörtern." *Zeitschrift für Eingeborenen-Sprachen* 30: 233-234.
- Gamta, Tilahun. 1989. "Oromo-English Dictionary." No place.
- Gragg, Gene. 1982. *Oromo Dictionary*. Michigan.
- Heine, Bernd. 1981. *The Waata Dialect of Oromo. Grammatical Sketch and Vocabulary*. Berlin.
- Höftmann, Hildegard. 1963. *Suaheli-Deutsches Wörterbuch* Leipzig.
- Leus, Ton, Joseph van de Loo & George Cotter. 1992. *An Oromo-English Vocabulary*. Debre Zeit.
- Leus, Ton. 1988. "Borana-English Dictionary." Mimeographed copy.
- Stroomeier, Harry. 1987. *A Comparative Study of Three Southern Oromo Dialects in Kenya*. Hamburg.



Table 2: Map of the Oromo speaking tribes in Kenya (Stroomer 1987: xii)



MAP 11 Oromo speaking tribes in Kenya.

- |         |   |          |   |
|---------|---|----------|---|
| Gabra   |  | Maata    |  |
| Garre   |  | Sakuye   |  |
| Boraana |  | Ajuruaan |  |
| Oree    |  |          |   |

Table of Oromo terms in different dialects:

English	Leus, van de Loo & Cotter (1992)			Stroomer (1987)
	Macha	Guji	Borana	BOW
1 'auction'	caal baasi	dabarsisa	nadi	naadada O
2 'axe'	qottoo, fassi,	carataa agaraa, dhagaraa	carratisa (dh)agara, soka, qoci	sookaa B
'axe handle'	muka qottoo, fassi	sukeya	suka	
3 'cap'	qoobi, gomfoo	maleyo	kofia	kofiyaa BO
4 'car'	makina, konkolata	maakina	makina, babura, gari	gaarii BOW
5 'chair'	barcuma, wonberi, teesuma	wombari, barcumma	barcuma, borati, marcuma	kitii O
6 'colour'	bifa, qalami, simbo	bifa, malki, qalami	bifa, rangi, qalami	rangii Om
7 'cooking pot'	disti, thuwwe, jallo, okkote	okkote, disti	ele, difti, okote	sufriyaa BOW
8 'devil', 'spirit'	sethana, jinni, dabis i	seetanna	setana	jinnii Bi
9 'door'	balbala, ula, karra	balbala, kara	balbala, karra	mlangoo BOW
10 'Europe'	biyya Awropa, Ropa	Europia	Walaya, lafa faranji	ulaayaa O
11 'first'	jalqaba, dura, qente	matooma, tokkeesso	qara, tokeso, dura	kwansaa B
12 'hoe'	dooma, gasoo	qoto, dooma	qoto, jembe	jembee BO
13 'iron'	sibila	sibiila	sibila	c'uumaa O
14 'lamp'	faanosi, ibsa	faanosi	fanusi	taa BOW
15 'mangos'				mayembee O
16 'market'	gabaa	gabaya	fulla gabay	sookoo BOW
17 'millet'	daguja	daawusa	misinga	masingaa W, misingaa O
18 'money'	qarshi, horii, ganzaba, birii, warqi	ganzaba	bese, hori	beesee BW, peesaa W, p'eesaa O
19 'oranges'	burtukani	burtukaan	burtukani	mac'ungaa BOW
20 'pepper'	mimmitha, qara	barbare	barbare	pipilii W
21 'to read', 'to study'	qaraha, dubisa	abbabisa	dubisa, anababa	sooma BOW
22 'sea'	galaana, baari	galaana gudda	galana, bari	baharii Om
23 'seed'	sanyi, guma, miciran	sanyi, midhaan	midhani, sanyi	beeyuu BOW
24 'shop'	suuqi, dhaba	suuki	suuki, duka	dukaa B, d'uukaa BOW
25 'soldier'	wattaddara, warantu, loftu	wotadara, makala	askari, watadara	askarii B, askartii B
26 'telephone'	silki, bilbila	silki	silki, simu	
'telephone' (v.)	silki dawala, silki bilbila	silki dawalisa	simu erga, silki dawala	
27 'thousand'	kuma, kumme	kuma	kuma	alfuu O, elfuu W
28 tomatoes	timatimi	timaatini	nyanya	nanaa B

Leus (1988) Borana	Heine (1981) Waata	Zaborski (1990) Harar	Swahili	
nadia, -ni <i>f</i> nadisi munada ( <i>f</i> <i>cattles</i> )			mnada	1
soka, shoka, -ni	shóoka ( <i>Garreh</i> ), dágará	qottoo	shoka	2
kofia, -ni			kofia	3
gaari, makina		makiina	gari	4
marcuma, barcuma	kíiti	kursi	kiti	5
rangi, -ni		bifa	rangi	6
okote, -ni	sufuríá, ókóte	okkotee	sufuriya	7
jinni, -ni			jini	8
balbala, -ti	fula'; mlango	balbala, hulaa	mlango	9
			ulaya	10
dura	dura, kwáánza	dura dursaa	kwanza	11
jembe, -ni; qoto, -ni	jéembe'	dongoraa	jembe	12
sibiila	cuúma, sibiil <sup>a</sup>	sibiila	chuma	13
fanusa, -i, difti	táa	laampaa	taa	14
	meembe' <i>m</i>		maembe	15
gabaya, -ni <i>f</i>	sóoko <i>f</i>	magaalaa	soko	16
msinga, mashila ( <i>Am</i> )	msinga	bishingaa	msinga	17
beese, -ni	péesa' <i>m</i>	saaqa	pesa	18
	macúungwa <i>f</i>	burtukaana	mchungwa	19
barbare, -ni	pipíili, pilipíili		pilipili	20
soma ( <i>associated with Koran + Islam</i> )		dubbisa, baraddha	soma	21
baari, -ni			bahari	22
	beeyu' <i>f</i>	shanyii	mbegu	23
duka, -ni; suqi ( <i>Am</i> )		dukaana	duka	24
askari, askarti		duultuu	askari	25
simu, -ni; shilqi, -ni			simu	26
kuma	elf <sup>a</sup>	kuma	elfu	27
nyanya, -ni	timmaatima	nyanya		28