Modifiers in Gwama

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Abstract

Gwama is one of the least described Nilo-saharan languages of the Koman sub-group found in Ethiopia. This work is a portion of the documentation and comprehensive linguistic description of the language. The data for the documentation and description of this least studied endangered language was collected in four different fieldwork periods. This section presents the results of these fieldworks in the form of descriptive analysis. Gwama has morphemes functioning as modifiers of nouns and verbs. These include Adjectives, Adpositions, Adverbs, and the Numerals. The Gwama adjectives express six semantic categories: dimension, colour, age, value, physical property, and human propensity. These adjectives have noun-like feature, for they are inflected for number and definiteness. Derivation of adjectives is not productive. The attested adpositions of Gwama are only prepositions. The language has three types of adverbs: time adverbs, manner adverbs, and frequency adverbs (cf. Goldberg and Hellenthal 2014). It has different adverbs of time that describe periods in a day, days in a week, months in a year, and years (present, past, and future). Adverbs of manner, on the other hand, are derived from adjectives by attaching a prefix *gi-*. Adverbs of frequency are formed from time adverbs through partial reduplication such as *anzil-anzili* 'every morning' or combining two words like *kaj-kukum* 'always', which is the result of the words *ka:ja* 'sun' and *kukum* 'all'. Similar to other Koman languages, Gwama has cardinal and ordinal numerals. The numbers follow the first five number system, which seem to be quinary (cf. Kievit and Robertson 2012; Zelealem 2005), though the names for the fingers of the hand are not exactly the same as the numerals. The numbers from six to nine take the lexeme *kub* to numbers one to four. The etymology of the morpheme *kub* is not yet identified, but from the numeral system of other Koman languages like Komo (Tesfaye 2014) and Opuo (Mellese 2017), it can be deduced as having the meaning 'add'. Number ten is *k'u:zi*, and the numbers from eleven to nineteen suffix the first nine numerals to *k'u:zi*. In fact, the Gwama word for number ten drops its final vowel as well as length and followed by a morpheme *–ot-*, i.e. *k'uz-ot-*. The morpheme *–ot-* is potentially used to mean 'and'. The Gwama equivalent for number twenty refers to the sum of fingers and toes. It is formed from the word *jis* 'body', the genitive marker *a*, and the word for number one *se:ne* (i.e. *jis-a-sene*, which literally means 'one body'). To mean 'forty', they say *s'it-suja* 'have two', which can be interpreted as 'two bodies'; and to mean hundred they use *s'it-kumut'* 'have five'. This indicates that Gwama has a vigesimal number system based on base twenty, probably developed from counting fingers and toes. Ordinal numerals of the language, on the other hand, are constructed by attaching the ordinal morpheme *t'o-* 'th' to cardinal numbers. Since Nilo-Saharan particularly the Koman sub-group are understudied languages, this work provides much-needed data and analysis for the furtherance of Nilo-Saharan linguistics.

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