

The 'say' verbs in Ometo languages (Ethiopia): Forms and usages

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There is a long tradition of research on the wide importance of the verb 'say' in languages of Northeast Africa and South Asia (for an early study see Waley & Armbruster 1934). This verb, normally meaning that somebody utters something, can also be used to express non-verbal emotions or special verbal and adverbial concepts, often in combination with ideophones. Furthermore, it is found in complex verb forms for certain aspects and / or tenses. Given the geographical distribution of such phenomena, it is obvious that they may be spread by language contact, especially in Ethiopia (see already Leslau 1945: 72), but also beyond.

The present paper will concentrate on the far western area of this high relevance of 'say', where the Ometo languages are spoken, a family of about twelve languages. First of all, it will discuss the concrete 'say' verbs, most of which begin with the consonant /g/ (in the northwest group) or /h/ (in the southeast group). After that, the paper will exemplify the different functions in which 'say' verbs occur in Ometo languages, starting with the introduction of direct speech and then proceeding to constructions with ideophones as well as grammatical contexts. Particular emphasis will be given to the historical comparison of the data within the Ometo family. However, it goes without saying that areal linguistic and typological studies can considerably benefit from a family-specific contribution such as attempted here.