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# Journal of Languages and Culture

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*Review*

# Concept of family among Kyrgyz and Native American tribes

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**The growth of technology in the world is the highest achievement of present-day civilization, but it is bringing us into a type of life and unifying our style of living, clothes, behavior and even language. Technology has replaced live communication, and this seems to be marring the borderline between diverse cultures as people become more and more technologically dependent. Smaller nations in this globalized world are gradually losing their cultures and languages, their unique inherited family values, which have been with them through many centuries and through the countless experiences of hundreds of generations. The family, once a source for each family member, has become only a tick on the documents, and it does not play the same role as it did before. Nevertheless, there are a few groups who try to keep their close family relationships and their own family concept for the next generation. Living in large extended families, they show that the family really is a small community, but from the family begins the society and the state. In this article I will refer to some family values of native American tribal peoples and Nomadic Kyrgyz tribal peoples from Central Asia. These two divergent groups have much more common between them and there is much to be shared.**

**Key Words:** Family concept, Native American tribes, Kyrgyz, customs and traditions

## INTRODUCTION

In this article I will try to show some results of my research and my observation, which include the concept of the family of two quite diverse people's living in different parts of the world but keeping very similar customs and traditions in their families, clans and tribes. They are the Kyrgyz nomadic tribal from Central Asia and the indigenous Native American tribal peoples. At a time when population of big cities is taking away the traditions and cultures of many nations and nationalities, and at a time when people are lost in the web net, internet and other bio-technological achievements, achievements which surely improve the search for information but damage the real values of alive communication, people are obtaining information not from simple ordinary books but the different media; and being involved in all this, people have forgotten about the other more valuable and real values such as the family, family relationships, family customs and traditions, family culture and cultural values. The loss of real family values has resulted to a huge gap between us, our parents, grandparents and memory

about ancestors.

According to Kyrgyz folklore and customs researcher (Akmataliev and Акматалиев 2002), the Russian historian (Bartold and Бартольд,1997), our ancestors cared about the future of their generation, they cared about keeping their understanding of the family, tribal, kinship and family values, and they tried to bring us the things which have now developed into huge techno values.  The tribal peoples living in Eurasia and Central Asia are not considered as indigenous people of the North America, Russian Siberia or African continent and Australia, but ethno-national groups and nationalities.

The tribal systems of these peoples were studied, but these peoples were mostly grouped into one or more groups, maintaining following relationships as kinship and tribal relationship.  For example, Kyrgyz tribal life was studied as part of a group Eurasian tribes and they were considered to have one and the same type of relationship in families, tribes and nations. At the end of the 20th century and the start of the 21st century appeared a few works devoted to Kyrgyz tribes by Oliver Roy, Gregory Gleason, Y. Gumilev and Kyrgyz scholars, which were quite interesting and new information about Kyrgyz tribes and their historical background. In the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century the next scholars such as: (Valihanov, 1985), (Abramzon, 1971) and (Zuev, 2004) had investigated the tribal Kyrgyz people and came to the idea that Kyrgyz tribes are one of the most ancient tribes of Inner Asian region and nowadays Central Asia.

When I started my research, I was concerned with the transformation of family values in my own culture and among the Kyrgyz people. This required me to explore our Kyrgyz traditional cultural values and compare them with the other Eurasian and Central Asian nomadic peoples, particularly the Kazakhs, Mongols and other peoples from the Siberian part of Russia. At the very beginning of my research I have found out that the Kyrgyz tribal concept of family clan is connected with its gender roles; child rearing; the sharing of wealth, government and nature which are all quite different from the other people living side by side with the Kyrgyz, such as Kazakhs, Uyghur and Uzbeks.  Even Kazakh people who is the closest (according to their come traditions, and being nomads) to Kyrgyz, but they were mostly steppe nomads, and their customs and traditions in a way have got a lot of differences from the Kyrgyz. And I put forward the following question:

Are there any other cultures and peoples in the world (because of Turkic speaking tribal people, such as Kazakhs and tribal people of Siberia) who have the same values as Kyrgyz people, the same family concepts, similar customs and traditions?

As I can use English, I found the following quote in one of the sources about tribal life of the American Indians: "For all the diversity of the first Americans, they inherited certain common traits from their Old World ancestors. Reflecting their Asiatic heritage, they were generally of short and medium stature, with straight black hair, light brown skin and prominent cheekbones – features. 1492 reinforced Columbus's mistaken conviction that he had reached the East Indies and prompted him to assign to the inhabitants the inaccurate yet enduring title of Indians". (The First Americans. Time Life Books, 1992)

It was like a push for me, why not compare two different and, quite far apart cultures? The other thing which was really interesting for me was language. Could the hunters who had crossed over the bering straits keep even a tiny part of their ancestral language? Some American scholars try to deny this (for example, Vine Deloria: "Scientists, (and I use this word loosely) are committed to the view that Indians migrated to this country over an imaginary Bering Straits bridge, which comes and goes at the convenience of the scholar requiring it to complete his or her theory. Initially, at least, Indians are (said to be) homogenous. But there are also eight major language families within the western Hemisphere, indicating to some scholars that if Indians followed the trend the migration went from the east to west; tourists along the bering straits were going to Asia, not migrating from it" (Vine,  1995).  May be Vine Deloria was right in his own way.

The second point is the emergence of people who are quite similar in appearance to our people, also the relation of the Kyrgyz and Native Americans to nature, to women, to domestic animals and their customs and traditions. Kyrgyz people, as they were nomads they moved from Enisey River in Siberia to the south, in search of more safe and warmer place according to Butanayev and Butaneva's research of the early Kyrgyz people's history and folklore (Butanayev et al., 2002). Kyrgyz people have got a lot of common customs and traditions with Siberian peoples as Khakas, Tiva, Buryuat and many others who are still living in the Siberian regions of Russia.

On the basis of the bering bridge theory "The resourceful Asian nomads who made this pioneering trek to America ages before European explorers dreamed of its existence never paused to savor their accomplishments", "…among the people who ranged into Siberia during the late stages of the Ice Age were nomads from what is now northern China…"(that is, modern Kyrgyz tribes, Khakas Tivas etc)… These well prepared hunters may have been the immediate antecedents of the American Indians (The first Americans, 1992). Perhaps I am idealizing the culture of tribal peoples, but in comparison with the western cultures which conceptualize they are quite different from Kyrgyz (for example, the concept of the nuclear family, male domination (among the English, Spanish and others and mostly among Islamic countries), breaking the will of the child, authoritarian government, and the most dangerous thing for me was the belief that nature was created for the benefit of humans.

As Kyrgyz people lived in their own world before the Russian empire brought the "civilized world to them", the same has lived the American Indians before the arrival of the Europeans onto the American continent.

## Understanding family concept

Everyone has their own conceptualization of their own family and at the same time they believe that they know what family is. Therefore, when teaching about family matters, it is essential to be aware of the apparent contradiction between personal perspectives and "scientific knowledge" (Levin and Jan, 1992). The concept of family differs for family. And modern people sometimes fully lost the value of the family and family concept: gay families; lesbian families; families who do not want children, because they want to live and earn only for themselves; families where animals are considered as a member of the family, and it would be worshiped more than a human being; families where children forget their parents and do not contact them throughout their whole life; families where children are sold for money; and increasing number of divorced and one parent families. All these types of family are quite strange for people living in clans and tribes.

For example, Kyrgyz people, they are still keeping their ancestral type of family: grandparents, father, mother and children. And each family should have at least one child to inherit the family line in the clan. The concept of family has been widely investigated by American and western European scholars of anthropology and sociology, as for Kyrgyz scholars they just get involved into the bulk of theories about family and family concept.

Family is a network of relationships between the members of one family, but in the extended families, it would be difficult to understand where the exact family is, as people living in and nearby. All these people would be included in the family tree. What conceptualizations can be labeled as family by the individual? How do people define their family, are mature enough to know each member of the family and have their own conceptualization of family? (Gilby and Pederson, 1982). Individuals could have a variety of conceptualizations of family, for example, one for their own family of today, one for their own family in the near past, one for their family in the more distant past. We can also have a variety of more or less different perspectives of family generally. The individual's identity can be strongly connected to the perception of family membership.

Murdock as an anthropologist defined the "nuclear family" as classifying societies based upon the sole nuclear family or combinations of these units to form polygamous and extended families. It is essential to challenge the concept of family (Murdock, 1949). At the same time it is equally important to distinguish what family is, for Asian nomads and western people. For Asian nomads as Kyrgyz people are: family is the most important, most people in the world define their family – their future, the role of himself/herself in that family, the contribution of himself/herself into the growth of their family clan etc. And, of course, inheritance of the family values: customs, traditions and continuation of the family tree via children. (If the Kyrgyz family could not have a child, they usually adopt their relative's child, or just adopt from the family who would agree to give their child for adoption).

## Kyrgyz family and clan

Scholars studying clans and tribes have observed multiple types of families existing within a society. One type is ethno-nationality - the common cultural and linguistic traits and shared history or heritage. During Soviet times the nationalities policy specifically linked ethnics to politically recognized and territorially defined groups. Religious identity, a second face of culture, is an ideological or civilization identity based on doctrinal affiliation.

Family of tribal people such as Kyrgyz is sacred - they value all information about their family and clan relationship, and their family history. The family is the reality; the society is changeable as is the policy and the state. For most tribal people the new type of family is quite tough to accept, the nuclear family is nothing. Ethno-national and religious identity have been highlighted as a causal variable in the protracted conflicts of the last decade in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. However, it has not led to conflict in post-Soviet Central Asia. To explain its absence, it is necessary to focus on the *clan* as the critical unit of analysis in Central Asia. Studies of conflict and transition have ignored the clan (Collins, 2006).

Kyrgyz people got used to living in clans – a word which was usually not mentioned and omitted when identifying Central Asian peoples and which only appeared after World War 2 (WWII). Most of the works about tribal and clan structures which were done by Soviet -Russian ethnographers and western scholars were not widely discussed and published on the territory of the former Soviet Union and there were no local ethnographers who would be involved into the mentioned researches of Central Asian tribes and clans. After the collapse of the union of soviet socialist republics (USSR) some works were translated into Kyrgyz language, as the works by Butanayev, Bartold and others, and only now Kyrgyz people have much more free access to the works of the western and other European ethnographers.

Clan identity is a face of culture in many semi-modern societies in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The clan is a unit of analysis addressed by neither contrastive nor international relations hypotheses on identity and conflict.

Clans have often been entirely ignored or dismissed as

primordial and sub national units. However, the clan can be approached conceptually and theoretically as a collective identity network.

Measuring identity, especially collective identity, is a challenge. Clans are informal social organizations in which kinship or "fictive" kinship is the core, a unifying bond among group members. Kinship is necessary even for modern people in the process of communication, as it is an inseparable belonging among tribal people as Kyrgyz, they should know according to their belonging to that or another tribe, clan and kinship until the seventh generations back (Among American Iroquois group of tribes, it is necessary to foreseen the future seven gene-rations, as keeping the pastures, lands, customs etc). Clans are identity networks consisting of an extensive web of horizontal and vertical kin-based relations. Clans are rooted in a culture of kin-based norms and trust, but also serve rational purposes. A clan is an organized group of people distinguished by a single blood family and including all siblings.

The clan is an informal identity network based on kinship ties and is common in semi-modern societies. In such societies, identities embedded in informal networks such as clans are stronger than formally institutionalized ethno-national and religious identities. The Kyrgyz family revolved around one type of relationship - patrilineal, meaning kinship was determined along male line. Tribes – *uruu* - are associations of clans - *tykym.* The Kyrgyz now have more than 40 well-known tribes, including Solto, Sayak, Kushchy (eagle), Bugu, Bory(Wolf), Mongy (hill), Sarybagysh, Nakay - names of tribes of different origin, but there are many animal and birds names.

The role of women in the Kyrgyz family is high and honorable, and it is not limited only by keeping the women as an oven of the family, and as the babygiver, but also as the keeper of family tree also, and as the person who gives the elementary knowledge to children at home about their family, clan, tribe, and the older women were the oral keepers of the seven generations family tree and she gives her knowledge to the next most reliable and honorable woman of the family. The elderly, wise woman who is still worshipped *Umaiene – Buguene* - is the mother of our nation (As clan mother among American Indians). The tribes practiced a primitive way of householding; now times have changed but the role of woman in the family did not change in the mentality of modern Kyrgyz people.

For example, Kyrgyz proverbs about women can say more about the place of a woman in the family (all translations done by the author of the article Mambaeva S):

1. Kizdin kirk chachyuluu - The 40 braids of a girl is more honorable
2. Atalashtan alto bolgoncho, eneleshten ekoo bolsun- Than have six people according your fathers' line it is better to have only two close relatives according to your mother's line.
3. Kizi bar yi- kyialdyy yi -The house with a daughter is a dream house.
4. Jakshi katyn jarym yrys - The good wife is already a good fortune given to you.
5. Tyrmyshtyn tytkasi ayal-The woman is a Core of a life.

A Kyrgyz wedding was mostly an arranged wedding, but it was seldom against the will of the daughter. There is a very interesting and beautiful ceremony of putting earrings onto the future bride's ears; this is actually the engagement ceremony. The boy who liked the girl should put the earring to his future bride's ears, going to her house accompanied by his sisters–in-law, and on that day the two families would settle the date of the wedding. All these type of ceremonies are still kept among Kyrgyz people, even some American volunteers of Peace Co in Kyrgyzstan were trying to break it via telling about another who is not Kyrgyz, but which was widely spread during the Soviet period especially-kidnapping of a bride. The last one start to exist among Kyrgyz people mostly after Socialistic revolution as all tribes should be equal, the poorer clan and tribe members were kidnapping the daughters of richer clans to "balance" the equal rights, with the help of and under the cover of *raskulachivanie* (when the belongings of the rich families was shared among the poor).

Of course, among the Kyrgyz tribes before the Russian came, Muslim missionaries tried to suppress the role of leading women, but anyway, in larger Kyrgyz tribes the role of women is still very high. And child rearing is quite different from westerner practices. For example, the Kyrgyz very seldom oppose the will of their children; and if this is connected with the adult, the tribal elders usually solve the problem of whether to allow the wish of the man or the woman to be take precedence. If a child is being raised by a single parent (in a case when there is only mother), usually the mother's male-relatives from the clan help with brining up the young man and teach him male skills of domestic household.

So the Kyrgyz trust women more than men, especially in child rearing. In the case of the Native Americans, the Europeans were greatly surprised by the role of the father – "the (clan) system takes from the father his proper place as the head of his family and leaves him comparatively little control of his children. Christianity had to contend with that, and is gradually overcoming it" (Collins, 2006). As for the Kyrgyz family clan, it is a supportive system which worked and still works among modern Kyrgyz families too.

As far the Kyrgyz, the family is considered a patrilineal relationship; the boy in the family since childhood should learn all about his seven grandparents, in other for him to be able to answer questions when asked by others about his belonging to the clan and tribe. And in case he forgets or did not know any of his grandparents, this is equal to losing face to his family clan who did not teach him. But

the family history is better told and known by women of the family. The woman should remember all the details about her own and husband's family tree as she should teach her children about their grandparents.

The role of a good storyteller among the Kyrgyz people is given to the grandmother, but the teller of the tribal history is given to a grandfather. And if the grandfather was a *manaschi* - an oral teller of the epic Manas about the Kyrgyz national hero - the women would not interfere.

## The Native American family concept

Indian life revolved around two types of relationships: patrilineal and matrilineal. In a patrilineal relationship, kinship was determined based on the male line, while in the matrilineal kinship was determined based on the female line. In a matrilineal society the role female influence was greater, the residence was *matrilocal*, and the women owned the lodge, the farms or gardens, and they also had a role in tribal affairs. Indian women had great individual freedom in most tribes; they were even portrayed as being downtrodden and hardworking "slaves" to Indian men. And women had autonomy within the home, and they had the right to vote and wield influence in both family and tribal decisions (Moulton Candy, 2001). And women alone determined when they would have children. But in most cases Indian women were not forced to marry against their will, although families arranged marriages.

1. A number of other relationships existed as well:
2. Polyandry-a woman has more than one husband;
3. Polygyny- a man has more than one wife;
4. Levirate -  situation where the place of a dead husband is immediately assumed by his brother;
5. Sororate- situation when the place of a dead wife is immediately assumed by his sister[17].

The last three types of relationships also existed among Kyrgyz tribes, but the *levirate* and *sororate* relationships are less common nowadays.

## The global world and its impact on tribal relationships

The last two decades, an epoch of globalization have brought many changes into the lives of different small nations, nationalities, ethnic groups and to a lot of smaller groups of indigenous people living in different parts of the world. Becoming civilized, people started to lose not only family values, which were kept by their ancestors for thousands and thousands of years from one generation to another, but they started to lose their language, uniqueness, their own customs and traditions, and of course their mentality. Instead of their traditional ways of communication, most of the people now prefer cyber-communication, which forces them to forget their ethnic backgrounds, their language, their national and traditional values and roots in each culture.

In acquiring the possibility to learn more and get more from the globalizing life, people started to ignore their family tree, which is considered as the vestiges of olden time, which is easy to find with the help of the world, where some web people will try to find your ethnic origin, your family tree via the Internet and family tree websites, for a definite sum of money. Small countries and states are striving in this globalized world, even with the lack of financial support to develop their own language and share it with the whole world.  Most of these small countries have their own historical backgrounds which is so long and diverse, and full of different worthwhile historical events.

This type of countries belongs to the Kyrgyz Republic or Kyrgyzstan, as people now name it, which appeared as an Independent state only 20 years ago. This is the smallest country in the center of Central Asia with a population around 5.2 million people. The Soviet Union was a "good supervisor" for such a small country and nationality as the Kyrgyz were at the beginning of the XX century. All the resources were used, only for the development of the Soviet image *and* industry; as for the local people, they were not allowed to take part in all those changes. It could be seen in the policy of Stalin who had genocide all intelligentsia and well educated people even from poor families, being scared to be killed or not promote most of the scholars, political leaders of the 40th till 80th of the 21st century married Russian women, to know better Russian language and to be promoted according to the communist party of the soviet union (CPSU) policy of that time. And now the echo of that political interfere into family structure as we can see in the generation who was born in the 60-s and 70s  who are highly russified and they do not even follow elementary Kyrgyz traditional ceremonies in the families because they do not know, as it was forbidden (those are mostly from the capital of Kyrgyzstan nowadays Bishkek(former Frunze)). Only after the 90s and collapse of the USSR, people started to return to their roots and start to learn and study their historical background and to try to use some of the forgotten customs and traditions.

Surely the last period has brought a lot of new changes into the social life of the Kyrgyz people: for example, education, and economy and into agriculture. But the Kyrgyz people paid for it by their national values, customs, traditions, religions and family values. The people were discriminated against not according to their race, or their color of skin, but their language and culture. The Kyrgyz language (which is belonging to Turkic group of languages) was less taught at schools before, especially in the capital and regional centers, that was the reason that 90% of schools were of the Russian language schools. In the culture of tribal Kyrgyz people have been kept more from Tengrianism and Shamanism, than from

Islam.

## Kyrgyz customs and traditions

The culture of Kyrgyz people was at a risk to be lost during the last two centuries, during Tsarist Russia and then during the Soviet period, because cultural rituals and other customs and traditions were forbidden, as there were lots of religious staff in the Kyrgyz culture. For example, the wedding ceremony at present time is being done mostly in the western way: bride in a white gown and the groom is in the westernized suit.

Kyrgyz people had to forget about their customary engagement ceremony and wedding games on the horses, with the participation of whole villages and even the whole tribe - traditions they had inherited from their ancestors.  It was forbidden as it gathered a lot of people together and this was considered dangerous for the ruling power (especially during the Soviet times). Young people were gradually persuaded psychologically that their customs and traditions were becoming old fashioned, and they therefore did not place the same values on them as their grandparents did, and they had to adapt them to modern life as the whole western world did.

Surely this has brought so many changes into the mentality of Kyrgyz people and the values of national traditions that young people started to hate their own customary wedding ceremony; instead they aimed towards a Soviet type of wedding with an exchange of two rings, with a lot of vodka on the table, dancing of drunk young and old people together and the white wedding gown, instead of the national bridal costumes and bridal jewelries. The big city customs connected with wedding is quite different from the traditional village customs, but the last decade there is no big difference between the rural weddings and urban, as people who has got some money usually celebrate the wedding party in rich restaurants of Bishkek.

The Kyrgyz people have beautiful wedding ceremony which is being revived at the present time, and this is good for us.  It consists of the bridal party in the house of a bride, her departure from home - *kizuzatyy*, which consists of different games among the girls and bridal friends and relatives. There are alot of songs – *kizuzatyykoshok,* which are being sung by close aunts of the bride and relatives. These songs are not ordinary; they are devoted only to the bride who is going to marry. These songs talk about her parents, about her characteristic features, about her achievements, her best skills etc., they are like a limericks, as they are told in an oral way and only once, but very positive.

In preparing her dowry all female relatives of the bride sow about 40 blankets, about the same number of soft woolen and patch worked mats for sitting, pillows, curtains, woolen floor and wall embroidered carpets,  and different type of clothes (embroidered hats and jackets, national embroidered skirts for everyday use, gowns etc). This is also a very awesome ceremony, when female relatives bring their gifts and present them to the bride; and they have to bring gifts for her fiancé too, as he is becomes from the day of their engagement also a relative to the countless bride's relatives. Time has changed even the people's relation to all their national customs and traditions. The naming of children, for example, has lost its value, as most of modern people prefer more short and westernized names instead of traditional names of Kyrgyz people. The name giving ceremony also consists of a lot of interesting things, which play a great role in the life of the new born child: the name is like a face for the future member of the society. There are names which are given according to a person's belonging to this or that tribe. From one's name, people could guess about the position of a person or his status in the tribe. But the present day has changed all this and people give different names and do not think about the future of their child.

As a result of the century of oppression, the Kyrgyz may have become more civilized, but they also the lost the values of their ancestors which previous generations were trying to keep for the present generation.

## Kyrgyz Language

The Kyrgyz language at present time is reviving from loss as are many languages all around the world.  Most of the vocabulary in the speech of the modern people consists of a mixture of Kyrgyz words with Russian and even English. At the same time we can see the influence of Turkish culture and mentality on our young people's effort to get an education. (There have appeared about 20 specialized Turkish private schools during the last 20 years and 4 universities and colleges around Kyrgyzstan), and also the influence of the Arabic and Turkish.

Modern language purists try to cleanse the Kyrgyz language, and try to use original Kyrgyz words on television and other mass media, but the modern people are deaf to these acts. They have started to be more cyber oriented, and instead of Russian they have now started to use more foreign words. They have started to learn more languages in order to get better education abroad, and this has brought new problems for the survival of the language and culture. People are leaving their own country in search of a better place for living and working, and of course earning. And they are right from their point of view, but how much does it cost? I mean psychologically, financially, socially and according to the moral side. It is not so easy to be a foreigner in any country even if you know the language and have learned the history and laws of that country to which you came.

The Kyrgyz people, having a nomadic type of culture, are quite adaptable and adjustable to any new environment, and they have good language learning skills, but all these skills can interfere in the preservation of  their own

culture and traditions. The next generation may very well have only technical skills, the skill to use multilingual speech, but will have no common ties with their own people, culture and language. This is quite tragic for any nation with such a huge historical background as the Kyrgyz people have. The elderly generation is even fighting to keep all those values which came to us from our grandparents, but it is not enough. Some new action needs to be done for saving all those cultural values of the small nationalities such as the Kyrgyz and others who has been living through these kinds of problems. And maybe some global actions need to be done by small nations, ethnic groups to save their real values.

The indigenous peoples of the United States (US), the Native Americans have also undergone and are under-going similar if not larger tribulations. Their tribes and tribal chiefs have done a great deal to revive their traditions for the sake of preserving their long and interesting culture and their languages that are largely unknown to the world. Going deeper into the history of the Native American people, I also see this as a mirror of our own history. Native American tribes were living on the land of the present-day US and Canada for thousands and thousands of years; they kept their own history, statehood, their languages, their traditional way of living in tribes. But look at them now; they have lost their languages as well as their culture and values also as my people did as well. And people are starting to realize this real loss resulting from globalization and other interferences into the lives of small nations, ethnic groups and nationalities. And it is almost too late to revive all the things which they have acquired before.

Where is the way out? What should be done to help all these people to keep the values they have left? I think steps to keep all their values have already started. We only have to pay more attention and try to help them as much as we can. On a governmental level efforts should be made to keep maintaining the cultural values of each nation and nationality. Scholars who are already doing a lot to revive all these nations and nationalities should be supported both by society and by state governments.

When people lose their uniqueness, they are lost people, and there is no way back. People who are already globalized are suffering from this; they have started to understand that nature gives much more than the tech-nological world can give. Nature gives them more energy than all these technical advances used nowadays, such as the Internet, television and other mass media through which people communicate at the present time in order to communicate live. And I really appreciate the work of Green Peace, the anti-global movement, and other types of such organizations that have realized changes of the world and try to save it. I can easily understand my parents and the elderly people in my country when they are asking us to come personally and not speak by phone or via Internet. Nothing is as valuable as live communication with people who have so much to tell us

about their customs, traditions, or even just to talk and tell their life stories. But we often don't have time to listen to them; we are all in a rush, and we try to economize our time when talking with them. But they are leaving us, they may be the last people who really know the valuable information from the history of our tribe and nation or just some stories connected with the building of our country and with the writing of the history of our people.

The idea of writing this article came when I heard one of the tribal women from the US telling us how she envied us Kyrgyz people in having their own country and their own language. As for Amerindians, it is sad that their tribes have lost their languages. They may know some vocabulary inherited from their parents and grandparents, and there may be only about 20 people speaking their language but they are getting old so the tribes and must to take from them as much as they can. This kind of situation is not only among the tribes living in the US but with most ethnic groups, nations and nationalities living all around the world.

Of course many scholars and researchers have talked a lot about the points that were explored in this article, but the idea of this article is to get people in this era of globalization to pay attention to the vanishing peoples, to their unique culture and languages which can easily disappear and we can never learn from them anything more, but to just be careful and let them continue to exist in this multi-colored world.

## Conflict of Interests

The author(s) have not declared any conflict of interests.

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*Full Length Research Paper*

# Writing both difference and similarity: towards a more unifying and adequate orthography for the newly written languages of Ethiopia: the case of Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa and Dawuro

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Among the most important linguistic developments in Ethiopia since 1991, the development of written forms for many languages that did not have orthographies before has been one. By far the most diverse region in terms of the number of languages spoken is the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS). This paper deals with the pan-dialectal orthography designed for Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa and Dawuro (WOGAGODA here after), closely related speech varieties spoken in a contiguous territory within the SNNPRS. The orthography has been designed by a team of local experts who comprises of the four groups and has been put to use since February, 2003. The orthography follows the Alphabetic writing system and makes use of an extended version of the Latin script. Among the various limitations the orthography exhibits, over-representation and under-representation of the phonemic inventory of WOGAGODA is one. The main objective of this study is, therefore, to examine the orthography under concern particularly from the point of phoneme-grapheme relationship, irregularity in symbolizing phonemic features and problems associated with diagraphs, etc. Further, the study tries to look at reading difficulties arising from the interference of readers' knowledge of the English orthography in using the WOGAGODA orthography and vice versa. The two languages use the same writing system but not always the same conventions of sound-grapheme relationship. The paper suggests ways of developing a simpler, more systematic, and unified alphabet that is also more harmonious with the English Alphabet.

**Key words:** Orthography, script, phoneme, grapheme, diagraph, representation.

## INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia is a country that has more than 85 languages grouped by linguists into Semitic, Cushitic, Omotic of the Afro-asiatic and Nilo-Saharan Phyla. Until recently, Geez, Amharic and Tigrigna were the only written languages that had a shared orthography. Amharic enjoyed a privileged position as the only official language and medium of instruction in the Education sector. Other languages of the country were only spoken languages but

not language of literacy. Since 1991, however, the country has undergone major political changes that had far-reaching implications for language policy and language use. Among other things, regional governments that were mostly organized along ethnic lines have been set up and empowered to govern their respective regions and work towards the development of local cultures, including the development of local languages.

The education and training policy (1994) promotes the use of regional and local languages basically for both pedagogical and ideological reasons. It endorses the idea that learning in the mother tongue has clear pedagogical advantages for the child, who feels comfortable and reassured by their ability to understand and analyse information in their own language. The new policy further endorses the claim that the use of local languages in education accords with the rights of nationalities to self-expression that are enshrined in the constitution of Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian education system aims to produce equity and provide primary education to an increasing proportion of children in the state. This includes, providing education in children's mother tongue languages, and thereby making education more accessible. The Ethiopian education system aims to produce equity and provide primary education to an increasing proportion of children in the state. This includes, providing education in children's mother tongue languages, and thereby making education more accessible. (Cohen, 2007:2)

Wolaitta, Gamo, Dawuro and Gofa are spoken in a contiguous territory in the southern nations, nationalities and people's regional state (SNNPRS), in an area previously known as "North Omo Zone". Recently, following a decision to have a restructuring of the administration zone, the "North Omo Zone" has been further split into three smaller administrative zones, namely, Gamo-Gofa, Wolaitta and Dawuro-Konta zones. Genetically, the four dialects are classified as members of the North Ometo sub-group within the Ometo group of the Omotic language family. The North Ometo subgroup is one of the four subgroups of the Ometo group comprising several related languages and dialects (Fleming 1976).

The four speech varieties are mutually intelligible, sharing a significant portion of their vocabulary and grammatical features. The cognates shared by the dialects extend beyond 80% and a slightly greater distance exists between Gamo and Dawuro, which share 79% cognates. The four varieties have also a large amount of phonological and grammatical shared features to be considered as dialect variants rather than separate languages (Bender 1976, 2000, Fleming 1976). This is in keeping with the criteria employed in characterizing various regional dialects of other major languages of the country. In fact, the closeness between the dialects is such that one could expect that an orthography developed for one of them could as well serve the other three with little or no modification. However, things on the ground

are more complicated than what the purely linguistic data tends to suggest.  The major source of complication is the fact that similarity in the speech forms does not reflect itself in the form of shared sense of identity among the speakers of the dialects. Elites in each of the four communities tend to assert their distinctiveness vis-à-vis the rest and see little commonality of culture or other forms of affinity.  This stands in strong contrast to the situation among some major linguistic communities in the country, most notably among the Oromo who, in spite of considerable differences of culture and dialect all identify themselves as Oromo and share a strong sense of affinity.

For most local people, there are only the Wolaitta, Gamo, Dawro and Gofa languages, cultures and identities, each independent of the other and recognizing nothing beyond mere contiguity of territory by way of commonalities that binds it to the others. This sense of difference is doubtless exaggerated by the noticeable phonological, lexical and grammatical variations which serve as dialectal markers.  Adding more complication to the matter is the fact that Gamo, one of the variants, has multiple dialects of its own such as D'aacetstso, diitatstso, Dookkotstso and K'ucatstso, Baltatstso, Garbansatstso, Ochollo, etc (Hirut 2007a: 214).

In the process of implementing mother tongue education, successive attempts have been made to find one common language/dialect that can serve as a medium of instruction for all the major groups in the locality used to be known as "North Omo Zone". First, Wolattia was selected by the local administration among the others to serve as a common language for all. When that was not accepted by the other groups, Wolaitta was maintained only for the respective group. Then, DAGOGA (Dawuro-Gofa-Gamo), a hybrid or composite language was created by merging linguistic elements from Gamo, Gofa and Dawuro to serve as a language of textbook that can be used by all the three concerned groups. Again, another composite medium of instruction and a text book language known as WOGAGODA was created by a team of local experts out of the linguistic elements of Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa and Dawuro. Note that, DAGOGA and WOGAGODA are not "languages, they are simply local convenient acronymic labeling conventions used by the local administration for referring to pan-dialectal linguistic identities. Some informants argue that the reason is a political one not to recognize each dialect as an independent linguistic group. However, all attempts by the local administration to form a common composite dialect have failed as the consecutive endeavors were rejected by the people. At last, the local administration has accepted the people's proposal to use its respective individual dialect as a medium of instruction and a language of textbook in its particular locality (Hirut, 2007b). However, the orthography designed for the pan-dialectal composite linguistic forms is still under use by all the four groups. The orthography, which is the main issue in this study, has been design by local experts in the area.  The orthography involves a set  of pan-dialectal

**Table 1.** The consonant phonemes of Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa and Dawuro

|  |  | Bilabial | Alveolar | Palatal | velar | Glottal |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Stops | Voiceless | p | t |  | k | ʔ |
|  | Voiced | b | d |  | g |  |
|  | Ejectives | p' | t'*(Wo)* |  | k' |  |
|  | Implosive |  | D |  |  |  |
| Fricatives | Voiceless |  | s | ʧ |  | h |
|  | Voiced |  | z | ʤ |  |  |
|  | Ejectives |  | s' *(Ga, Go, Da)* |  |  |  |
| Affricates | Voiceless |  | ts | č |  |  |
|  | Voiced |  | dz *(Ga)* |  |  |  |
|  | Ejective |  |  | č' |  |  |
| Nasals |  | m | n |  |  |  |
| Flap |  |  | r |  |  |  |
| Lateral |  |  | l |  |  |  |
| Glides |  | w |  | y |  |  |

unified conventions with, apparently, some minor concessions for each dialect. It adopts the alphabetic writing system and makes use of an extended version of the Latin script. The script follows its own spelling conventions and sound-symbol mapping that is different from English and other languages using the same script. The main objectives of this paper were to examine this orthography against the phonemic inventories of the dialects, identify its shortcomings, and suggest ways of improving it. Before getting down to the results and analysis, it would be necessary to give a brief overview of the phonemic accounts of the four dialects first.

**THE PHONEMIC INVENTORY OF WOGAGODA**

**Consonants**

Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa and Dawuro share the greatest majority of their consonant inventories. Consonants in the four dialects can be categorized into six categories: stops, fricatives, affricates, nasals, approximants and semi-vowels. In addition, in all the four variations there is a three-way distinction between voiceless, voiced and ejective consonants for stops, fricatives and affricates in several places of articulation. On the other hand, the phonemic inventories of the four dialects do show certain differences both in terms of number and type. The following chart presents the consonant phonemes in Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa and Dawuro (Adams (1983) for Wolaitta and Samuel (2004) for Gamo; Moreno (1938) for Gofa; Bender (1976) for Dawuro). Peculiarities to each dialect are indicated in brackets; *Wo* stands for Wolaitta, *Ga* stands for Gamo, *Go* stands for Gofa and *Da* stands for Dawuro (Table 1).

As displayed in the chart, Gamo has twenty-six

consonant phonemes while Dawuro, Wolaitta and Gofa have twenty-five phonemes each. Gamo has one peculiar consonant, /dz/, which is absent from the others. The orthography developed for the four dialects does not include a symbol for this consonant. This has been perceived as negatively by many speakers of Gamo who believe that the unique consonant of their dialect is under-represented by the orthography and in a way that disfavors the group. There is no linguistic ground, however, to disregard this phoneme from being represented in the script. Phonemic inventories of the four dialects also show variation with respect to the consonants /t'/ and /s'/. Wolaitta has /t'/ while the other three have /s'/ instead. The consonants /t'/ and /s'/ variably occur in the cognates of the four dialects as illustrated below in table 2.

**Vowels**

The vocalic inventory is the same for all the four dialects. Five short and five long phonemic vowels are found in all the four dialects that is, "Wolaitta (Adams 1983), Gamo (Samuel 2004, Hampo 1990); Gofa( Moreno 1938); Dawuro (Bender, 1976 and Hirut (2007a) (Table 3).

**Tone-accent**

From the studies made so far, the dialects under consideration are recognized as tone–accent languages (cf. Azeb (1996) for Wolaitta, Hayward (1994) for Gamo). In such dialects, a change in tone pattern of a word may result in change in the word's meaning. The following minimal pairs from Gamo illustrate this point.

**Table 2.** The /t'/ and /s'/ consonant correspondence in the cognates of the four dialects

| Wolaitta | Dawuro | Gamo | Gofa | Gloss |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| t'ugunta | s'ugunsa | s'ugunsu | s'ugunt[s] | 'nail' |
| t'eeta | s'eeta | s' eetu | s' eeta | 'hundred' |
| int'arsa | ins'arsa | ins'arsi | ins'ars | 'tongue' |

**Table 3.** Vowel phonemes of Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa and Dawuro

|  | Front | Central | Back |
|---|---|---|---|
| High | i   ii |  | u   uu |
| Mid | e   ee |  | o   oo |
| Low |  | a      aa |  |

góda    'lord'
godá    'wall'

ʔáwa    'where'
ʔawá    'sun'    (Samuel 2004: 59)

With this basic information on the phonemic inventories of the dialects under investigation, we shall now proceed to an examination of the orthography designed for them.

**MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted based on data collected from teachers who were involved in mother tongue education in the concerned localities. Local experts who were engaged in mother tongue education, designing the orthography and preparation of the textbooks serve as informants. Qualitative research methodology was employed to collect the necessary data on the problems associated with the practical use of the orthography. The data was collected by the researcher herself through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. Amharic, the language serving as a lingua franca in Ethiopia, was used as a medium of communication with the informants. The authors' critical investigation of the orthography against the phonological inventories of the four dialects has been accounted in the study. The research, however, has a limitation. It failed to employ a method of testing the students' practical challenges that arise out of the shortcomings of the orthography.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**The Orthography of WOGAGODA and its problems**

The orthography formulated for Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa and Dawuro employs the Alphabetic Writing System with an extended version of the Latin Script. It incorporates its own system of spelling, different sound-symbol mapping and punctuation conventions.

The orthography under concern consists of 34 letters. Every letter has two forms, one capital and one small, so

that the overall number of symbols in the orthography is 68. The four dialects contain certain orthographically important consonants for which the Latin letters do not offer equivalents. This is what necessitated diagraphs.

Though the orthography appears to be phonemic, it does not ensure a one-to-one correspondence between the graphemes (letters) and the phonemes of the dialects in such a way that each phoneme would be represented by its corresponding grapheme. There are cases of over-representation and under-representation of phonemes of the four dialects in the orthography. There are also circumstances in which the spelling of a word would not fully or unambiguously represent the phonemes. The orthography displays a number of deviations from what can be called the phonemic ideal orthography. To begin with, an exact one-to-one correspondence between phonemes and a grapheme/letter does not exist because there is a case of under-representation of some of the phonemes in the script. Conversely, the script shows an over-representation as it comprises graphemes for which no phoneme counterpart exists in the dialects.

Moreover, phonemic features represented by a diagraph do not follow regularity, which means that there is no an algorithm for predicting the pronunciation from the spelling and vice versa. There are also irregularities that arise from conventional spelling of certain words in ways that does not accord with the representation of sounds in the orthography.

The orthography also exhibits the use of a diagraph, a sequence of characters combined together to represent one phoneme. Such a situation has been creating ambiguity in reading. This happens because of the fact that the pair of letters does not correspond to the sum total of the readings of the each character as presented later in this section.

Below, table 4 presents chart of the WOGAGODA alphabet with the phonemic representation given in italic symbols).

Below we shall look at each of the issues raised in some detail. However, it might be useful to note that, in all cases, the yardstick on the basis of which the orthography is deemed to fall short is based on the widely acknowledged connection between clear and unambiguous system of writing and facility of reading and learning. As Grace (2006:1) puts it: "the orthography that facilitates the mapping of speech sounds in the language with the symbols representing them facilitates the reading skills and cognitive capacity of the students". Research on phoneme awareness indicates that early instruction linking speech sounds to alphabetic symbols strengthens phonemic awareness, decoding skills, spelling and word reading (see also Henry (2004), Hooper and Moats (2010), Cheung and Chen (2004).

**Problems of under-representation**

The orthography under study fails to represent certain

**Table 4.** The WOGAGODA alphabet with phonemic representations given in bracket

| WOGAGODA alphabet and phonemic representation | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
| a *(a)* | b *(b)* | c ( č') | d *(d)* | e *(e)* | f *(f)* | g *(g)* |
| H | I | J | K | L | M | N |
| h *(h)* | i (i) | j (ʤ) | k *(k)* | l *(l)* | m (m) | n *(n)* |
| O | P | Q | R | S | T | U |
| o (o) | p (p) | q (k') | r *(r)* | s *(s)* | t *(t)* | U *(u)* |
| V | W | X | Y | Z | CH | DH |
| V *(v)* | w *(w)* | x *(t'/s')* | y *(y)* | z *(z)* | ch *(ʧ)* | dh *(D)* |
| NH | NY | H | SH | TH | ZH | |
| nh | ny *(Ŋ)* | ph (p') | sh *(ʃ)* | th (ts) | zh *(ʒ)* | |

important consonant phonemes of the four linguistic variants. One such a phoneme is /dᶻ/, the voiced alveolar affricate consonant, that appears in words like *kondᶻa* 'a cup made up of clay', *wondᶻa* 'accumulated milk in the breast', *zindᶻo* 'cockroach' and *bandᶻo* 'danger'. In fact, the consonant /dᶻ/ in Gamo has a phonemic status and brings a meaning change in a minimal pair as in below.

| | |
| --- | --- |
| *heeza* | 'like this' |
| *heedᶻa* | 'three' |
| *edo* | 'chorus' |
| *edᶻo* | 'an instrument of music' |
| *piddᶻo* | 'a kind of short used by men' |
| *piddo* | 'outspread (for cloth)' |

The fact that *dᶻ* is missing from the script chart has consequences for Gamo since it is a distinct phoneme and cannot be represented even by characters of related consonants such as /z/ or /d/.

Apart from the practical problem, omission of this consonant from the orthography seems to have created negative impressions among the speakers of Gamo towards the orthography. Teachers who participated in the development of the orthography and interviewed in Arbaminch by the author confirmed that there has been an ongoing complaint by the Gamo to the effect that an important sound of their language has been made to disappear from the script. Indeed, a Gamo-speaking member of the Orthography developing taskforce is held responsible by them for this crucial omission, or rather exclusion. An explanation from the script developers is that consonant dz was excluded from the script because it is not a common feature of all the four linguistic variants, that it is a distinct feature of only one variant. Some members of the Gamo group has reflected regretfully on this issue that the script should have been loyal to the phonemic inventory of each one of the linguistic varieties, without exception, all the more so since each one is functioning as a distinct written language in its respective locality. However, this might have been taken as a strategy to promote a unified pan-dialectal orthography and a medium of instruction that would encourage ethnic harmony and integration. As mentioned earlier, the orthography was initially designed to write WOGAGODA, a composite language that was designed to serve as a medium of instruction for all the four groups.

Another consonant which has not been properly incorporated in the orthography is the glottal stop. This consonant has a phonemic status in all the four dialects (see, for instance, Hampo 1990, Samuel 2004, Bender, 1976 and Adams 1983). Strangely, the glottal stop is inserted in the orthography by way of an endnote in the script list, that merely states that states: "Notice: '7' is a symbol used to write and read vowels that are altered into consonants." This note fails to recognize the true nature of the consonant that it mistakenly consi-ders the sound segment primarily as a vowel that has changed into a consonant. Among the Ometo varieties, glottal stop is observed occurring frequently as a distinct consonantal phoneme. In general, the script has failed to consider it as one of the important consonant phonemes.

The other point that has to be raised here is the case of tone-accent. As shown earlier, tone-accent can determine the meaning of a word in the four dialects. It is therefore essential that it is represented in the orthography. To use the words of Pike, (1947:210), "… where tone and stress are phonemic and affect the meanings of words they should be symbolized….These symbols should be used to distinguish words where the tone is the only distinctive characteristic." It should be noted that under-representation of phonemes and phonemic features is a far more serious problem for learners than over-representation.

**Problem of over-representation**

In contrast to missing out exiting sounds, the orthography under consideration comprises three letters representing speech sounds that do not exist in the phonemic system of any of the four dialects. These are: *V/v* that stands for voiced labio-dental fricative [v], *NY/ny* [Ŋ] voiced palatal nasal and *NH/nh,* which has no consonantal representation but stands for nasalization according to my informants. The implication here is that it is a non-contrastive phonological processs of an element that is otherwise oral and it has a low functional load. It is not clear at all why this symbol is needed in the list since nasalization is not an important phonological feature in the dialects (see for instance Samuel 2004).

Further research is needed as to why and how the decision was made to have this character included in the orthography. As shown above (in table 1), the phonemic inventory of the Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa and Dawuro

**Table 5.** The WOGAGODA alphabet and its negative impact on the students' English reading

| English words English orthography | [IPA correct pronunciation] | Students' misrecognition of the words [IPA incorrect pronunciation] |
|---|---|---|
| cat | kæt | *[ č'at]* |
| call | kɔ:l | *[ č'ol]* |
| came | kæm | *[ č'am]* |
| candy | kændi | *[ č'andy]* |

dialects does not include the consonants /v/ and / ɲ /. Evidently, the fact that the orthography contains unnecessary symbols means that it has elements that affect the learning process negatively. It unnecessarily adds to the number of symbols in the orthography and, therefore, to the burden of the learners. This is against one of the principles of a practical orthography to the effect that there should be no more symbols than there are phonemes (Pike 1947: 208). A good orthography should represent and reflect only the phonemes that exist in the language.

**Not accounting the interference from/to English reading**

The language policy in the SPNNR dictates that English will be thought as a subject starting from grade one and used as a medium of instruction starting from grade five. In fact, English plays a big role in the educational system of Ethiopia in general. Though both English as well as the local languages under discussion are alphabet based, it so happens that certain symbols represent different sounds across the languages. It is now well accepted that performance on phonological-awareness is important for learning to read. The reader understanding of how the writing system of a language encodes the spoken form and how each grapheme represents a sound is a very good predictor of reading ability in children (Lyon, 1998).

When a student encounters sound-grapheme relationships in the local languages that are inconsistent with English, it can be said that a situation that negatively affects the reading process has occurred. It would have been a great advantage to the learner if the value of the letters in the orthography of the local languages corresponds to their value in English. It is now an established fact that the orthography of first language (L1) has an effect on second language (L2) reading and reading skills acquired from learning to read a first language. Orthographic structure of a reader's L1 has been shown to affect the way that they recognize words in their L2. L1 orthographic properties systematically affect L2 word recognition as the L1 word recognition is transferred to L2 word recognition (Miller, 2011: 79-80). The orthography under discussion does not seem to take this reality into consideration. Consequently, as the information from the teachers confirms it, the situation creates confusion

among the learners who are shifting back and forth between English and the mother tongue, the two languages using the same writing system but differently. It was also indicated that the condition affects students' English reading proficiency. Very often, students misread English lessons with an interference of the orthographic conventions from the mother tongue.

This happens because cross-linguistic influences interfere with their efforts to establish clear sound-symbol correspondences and work in ways that carry over sounds from the mother tongue to English.

According to interviews with the teachers, who were using Gamo as a medium of instruction, students often try to establish a three way relationship among sound-symbol-teacher to overcome the recognition problem associated with different readings of a single letter in different languages, that is, in English and the local language. They say, for instance, letter *c* represents *k* (the voiceless velar stop consonant) for English language teacher while it represents *č'* (the palatal affricate ejective consonant) for all other teachers using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction. It has been attested that in self-contained classes where a single teacher teaches both English and the mother tongue, the problem is even more severe as the sound-letter relationship cannot be associated with different teachers. There are students who consider their teachers as 'inconsistent'. According to interviews with the teachers, students often complain that their teachers are misleading them, teaching them contradictory lessons in English and the mother-tongue-based subjects. The interviewed teachers agreed that this makes reading difficult for the little children, making them commit reading errors in both English as well as mother tongue by affecting spelling predictability which is of course based on the orthographic convention of sound/symbol correspondences. According to an English teacher in Arbaminch[1] schools, the following are some examples of English words which are frequently misinterpreted or misread by the students. As shown in table 5.

Similarly, *x,* which stands for *ks* in English is associated with the ejective consonants *s'/ t'* in the mother tongue. This results in making reading errors as in (5) below:

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[1] Arbaminch is a capital city of the former North Omo Zone, an administrative zone for Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa and Dawuro

**Table 6.** Compound letters and their sound representation

| Compound letters | Sounds represented by the compound letters | Sounds represented by the components of the compound letters |
|---|---|---|
| CH/ch | [č] | [čh] |
| PH/ph | [p'] | [ph] |
| NY/ny | [Ɲ] | [ny] |
| TH/th | [tˢ] | [th] |
| DH/dh | [D] | [dh] |
| SH/sh | [ʃ] | [sh] |
| ZH/zh | [ʒ] | [zh] |

*axe*      as      *[as' / at']*
*ox*       as      *[os' / ot']*

The above instances show that properties of the orthography for Wolaitta, Gamo, Dawuro and Gofa affect how students recognize words in English due to the cross-orthographic influence. According to the teachers who were participating in the interview, the situation affects students' word recognition processes by creating uncertainty about the kinds of sound-symbol association they employ in different school subjects. The use of one symbol to generate different sounds in different subjects is obviously complicating. Cross-linguistic studies of word recognition have shown that orthographic features of a reader's first language affect second language word recognition (Akamatsu 2003 and Miller 2011). As long as the two languages that the student deals with share the same system of letters, the advantages of assigning the same sound value to the same symbol in both languages is thus only too apparent.

**Problems associated with diagraphs**

A diagraph is a compound letter, a sequence of two characters representing a single phoneme. As shown above (in table 1), the orthography under examination comprises eight diagraphs. These are *NY/ny, NH/nh, SH/sh, TH/th, ZH/zh, CH/ch* and *DH/dh.* The use of compound letters to represent sounds which do not exist in the Latin script is not a problem by itself. The problem is that, in some cases a component of a compound letter, when it occurs in isolation, represents a different sound from what it represents within the compound. In other words, the sound represented by a compound letter differs from the sounds represented by each componential member. That means, a compound letter is associated with two possible readings that creates ambiguity. The following table shows the compound letters with their two readings, that is, as a unit and a sequence (Table 6).

**Lack of Uniformity in representing ejective consonants**

If a phonemic feature gets represented regularly by a

diacritic marker one can easily predict the pronunciation from the form, and vice versa. In the process of learning to read, students need to establish relationships between phonemes (that is, the sounds they hear) in a word and the graphemes (or the letters that represent those sounds). Students may face difficulties transferring their phonological awareness to writing if a script is not prepared in ways that enables them to learn mapping words while diagramming the letter/sound relationship (Grace 2006, Hooper and Moats 2010).

The phonological system of Wolaitta, Gamo, Dawuro and Gofa, comprises four ejective consonants:

*p', s'/t', c'* and *k'.*

Each has a non-glottal counterpart:

*p, s/t, c* and *k.*

It would have been ideal to capture the glottalization by adding some kind of diacritic mark uniformly on the respective non-glottal consonant. This would have reduced the memory burden of the learners, as the sounds and their representative symbols have a systematic relationship. The orthography under discussion, however, lacks uniformity in symbolizing the ejective consonants. As shown above, there is actually no formal relationship between the non-ejective and ejective consonant counterparts:

The suggestion here is that ejective consonants have to be formed from their respective non-ejective ones by adding a common diacritic mark in such a way that students can have memory correspondences between the two sets; that is, highly likely to facilitate learning. As shown in Table 7.

**Problem of using numerals as letters**

In the orthography under examination, there are three letters which have forms identical to Arabic numerals. These are:

*1* which represents a voiced lateral stop as well as, of

**Table 7.** Representation of non-ejective and ejective consonants

| Non-ejective Consonants | | Ejective Consonants | |
|---|---|---|---|
| P/p | /p/ | PH/ph | /p'/ |
| T/t | /t/ | X/x | /t'/ |
| S/s | /s/ | X/x | /s'/ |
| CH/ch | /c/ | C/c | /c'/ |
| K/k | /k/ | Q/q | /k'/ |

course, number one; o which represents a back mid round vowel as well as zero and *7* which stands for the voiceless glottal stop. This is, in fact, true of every orthography that uses roman script and Arabic numerals.

As presented in Table 4, the glottal stop is represented by number 7 and is introduced in the form of a footnote in the orthography with a notice that states:

 "Notice: '7' is a symbol used to write and read vowels that are altered into consonants."
The use of the symbol '7' stands for two readings as a glottal stop and as numeral seven the situation creates ambiguities of reading. In this case, the reader would be left to make his or her own decision as to which of the representations were meant.

  According to teacher-informants, when these letters occur consecutively, students often get confused as to whether they should read them as numerals or as letters. For instance, students often read the word for 'beautiful/good', *'10770',* as 'ten thousand seven hundred and seventy'.   The two are written the same way.


**CONCLUSIONS**

This paper has aimed at examining the orthography of WOGAGODA to identify its shortcomings, and suggest ways of improving it. Accordingly, it has unraveled that the orthography exhibits problems that arise from omission of phonemes that might be crucially important for one or another of the speech varieties and the use of symbols that create ambiguities. As the paper argued, these shortcomings would negatively affect learning among school children and most likely inhibit possibilities for ethnic harmony and integration. Therefore, to avoid these problems it needs to develop a simpler, more practical, and unified alphabet for all the four dialects. To this end, as an option, the researcher has forwarded the following recommendations based on Pike (1947:208).


**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Avoiding unnecessary letters:** Extra and unnecessary symbols that do not represent phonemes of the dialects

should be excluded from the script. Thus, symbol *V/v* that represents consonant [v], symbol *NY/ny* that represents consonant [ň] and symbol *NH/nh* that represents a nasalized vowel that actually does not have a phonological value in the dialects under consideration may better be excluded from the script. As indicated earlier (section 2 above), these consonants are not part of the phonemic inventory of the dialects.

**Recognizing existing phonemes:** The orthography needs to be equally loyal to all the dialects that it represents.

  Thus, the phoneme /*dz*/ of Gamo has to be represented in the orthography.  One possible way to represent this complex consonant in the script may be by using a compound letter *dz*.

  Similarly, the glottal stop, which is a distinct phoneme in the four dialects, has to be represented in the orthography. Instead of being introduced in a footnote as it is currently, it should appear with the other letters in the script. The glottal stop can be represented by using a question mark without the lower dot as used in the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) or an apostrophe ('). The use of the symbol 7 is not at all recommended because it confuses the reader with the symbol for the Arabic numeral '7'.

**The glottalalized consonants:** As mentioned earlier, the orthography under study contains symbols *ph, x, c* and *Q*, which are used to represent the ejective  consonants *p', t'/s', c'* and *k'* respectively. As indicated earlier, the ejective consonants in the four dialects have non-glottal counterparts.  It would be pedagogically helpful if a set of sounds which share a common special phonetic feature like glottalization exhibit a certain degree of regularity in their form.  All the ejective consonants in these dialects can, therefore, be represented uniformly by using an apostrophe mark next to their respective non-glottal counterparts as shown below. This can make learning easier and faster. The use of apostrophe to mark the ejective property of a consonant is also common in the phonetic alphabet

| | |
|---|---|
| p | p' |
| t/s | t'/s' |
| c | c' |
| k | k' |

The extended function of apostrophe, which was already recommended to represent the glottal stop, to symbolize the secondary phonetic feature of glottalization, would strengthen the principle of regularity of mapping between sound and symbol.

**The diagraph symbolizing the alveolar implosive consonant:** Implosive sounds are consonants of plosive nature formed by a sucking in of the air. Generally, glottal closure   accompanies   an   implosive   consonant. To

**Table 8.** Recommended revised Orthography with grapheme-phoneme representation

| Grapheme representation | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
| a *(a)* | b *(b)* | c *(tʃ)* | d *(d)* | e *(e)* | f *(f)* | g *(g)* |
| H | I | J | *k* | *L* | M | N |
| h *(h)* | i *(i)* | j *(dʒ)* | *K (k)* | l *(l)* | M (m) | n *(n)* |
| O | P | R | S | T | *U* | |
| o (o) | p (p) | r *(r)* | s *(s)* | t *(t)* | *U (u)* | |
| *W* | Y | Z | *DZ* | *TS* | *SH* | ' (ʔ) |
| w *(w)* | y *(y)* | z *(z)* | dz *(dz)* | ts *(ts)* | sh *(sh)* | |
| P | T' | S' | C' | K' | D' | |
| p' | t | s' | c' | k' | d' | |

represent the peculiar character of this sound and at the same time to show its similarity with *d*, the ordinary letter *d* followed by an apostrophe is recommended. As discussed earlier, the use of a compound letter *DH/dh* to represent the alveolar implosive consonant causes a reading problem because the combination can also be read as [dh], following the readings of the two consonants *d* and *h* . It is therefore proposed that the letter *d* followed by an apostrophe mark should be used to represent this consonant, thus:

*d'.*

The use of apostrophe not only for symbolizing ejective consonants but also for representing the implosive consonant might look standing against the principle of regularity. However, since both consonant categories share some level of complexity in articulation, an extended use of the apostrophe diacritic mark to symbolize implosive consonant might still be recommendable than the use of a different diacritic mark or a diagraph.

**Similarity of sounds in English and the local dialect:** As mentioned earlier, English is given as a subject as early as grade one for students in Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa and Dawuro areas. Currently, sounds which are commonly found in English and the local languages are represented by different symbols in the two scripts, even though the languages use the same alphabet. In order to enable the students to have an easy transfer from the vernacular alphabet to the alphabet of English and vice versa, it is suggested that sounds of Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa and Dawuro that also exist in English be represented by similar symbols and read the same way. Once they learn to read their language, the students can utilize that knowledge in the easiest way for obtaining knowledge of reading English or vice versa. Thus, the use of *c* to symbolize the ejective palatal affricate /*c*/ and the use of x to represent alveolar ejective s'/t' need to be reviewed. As mentioned above (recommendation 3), the symbols *c'* and *s'/t'* can be used instead of *c* and *x*

respectively.

**The compound letter th/TH:** The letter *th/TH* that stands for voiceless alveolar affricate /$t^s$/ may better be replaced by *ts* because the sound represented by this letter is a combination of   t and s but not t and h and that tend making the relation between spelling and pronunciation more complex, affecting its predictability. It is not unusual for a phoneme to be represented by a diagraph sequence of letters rather than by a single letter as in the case of the diagraph *ch* in English and French, and the trigraph *sch* in German. This is often due to the use of an alphabet that was originally used for a different language and thus does not have single letters available for all phonemes in the language currently being written although some orthographies use devices such as diacritics to increase the number of available letters. However, such a use fails to retain predictability as the complex letter can be broken down into smaller units, and there is no way to distinguish between "th" and "t" + "h". The use of another devise such as a deictic mark would solve the problem.

**Tone-accent:** Tone-accent should be marked when it has a grammatical function, or when it serves to distinguish words. It might be a better solution to mark either the high or the low tone feature. An accent above a vowel is recommended to mark tone-accent. For instance, high tone can be marked as á and a low tone can be marked as à. However, it may be sometimes omitted when the context makes it quite clear which word is intended.

Finally, based on the arguments presented so far, the following revised form of the existing orthography is recommended: As shown in Table 8.
   It is obvious to see that these recommendations advocate modification in the interest of improvement rather than radical alteration or abandonment of the existing orthography.  As such it is hoped that they would be given positive consideration on the part of policy makers as well as all stakeholders. A more meaningful and practical orthography for Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa and Dawuro is obviously in the interest of all.

**Conflict of Interests**

The author(s) have not declared any conflict of interests.

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