



Multi-media documentation of the Oyda Language



Preparing for the flag ceremony at the primary school, Garda 2010

The Oyda People And Their Locality

Oyda [or: *ʔoida*] is the name by which the language and its speakers, as well as the area in which the people reside, is known. Oyda elders relate the origin of their ethnic and language name to the homonym *ʔoida* 'a seat'. By this identification their ancestors allegedly wanted to indicate the *comfort* and *hospitality* that the place seemed to offer to them after their long travel from southeastern to northwestern direction, when they declared: *'this is the place to be, this is the seat'*.

The Oyda people, the majority of whom are farmers, live in an area of undulating hills and valleys in Southwest Ethiopia. Their present district administration (also called Oyda) is part of the Gamo-Gofa Zone within the 'Southern Peoples, Nations and Nationalities Regional State' (SPNNRS) of federal Ethiopia. It is located about 430 kms south-west of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital.



Type of funeral costume, Garda 2010

The region to which Oyda belongs is culturally and linguistically the most diverse region in Ethiopia. About half of the country's ca. 80 languages are spoken in this region and represent each of the four major language-families: Cushitic, Nilosaharan, Omotic and Ethio-Semitic. However, various policy measures and changes in ways of life threaten this diversity.

Endangerment of the language

Oyda belongs to the Omoto cluster of the Omotic family. The Oyda people are reported to be more than 45,000 in the 2007 national census. Nevertheless, their language risks endangerment, because of high-level bilingualism and shift to Gofa, a neighbouring Omoto language which is the language of primary and secondary education as well as of the administration and the court system in Oyda. There are indications that the situation might be different in the future: since 2010 local initiatives for developing a writing system and using Oyda in primary education are started.



Peeling boyé 'yam', Garda 2010

The project

The project is a cooperation of four linguists and an anthropologist. Little work has been done on the language and culture of the Oyda people prior to our project. We study the Oyda language through discussion with the people on daily activities, like farming and pottery-production, description of cultural artefacts (dress, musical instruments, decoration), and tools (such as household utensils), recipes and texts about various customs such as marriage, funeral ritual and musical performance. These texts will be essential for linguistic studies and for developing tools needed for education, like dictionaries and school books. Equally important, these texts will help preserve

knowledge of the culture, history and environment of the Oyda people in this time of rapid change due to formal education and more intensive contacts with the wider Ethiopian and global community.

Sample from the language

Making *ʔoida*

T: *ʔoidá* *ʔákká-pp* *med-int-ée*
 seat.M.NOM what-ABL make-PAS-Q
 'What is a seat made from?'

E: *mins'á-pp*
 wood-ABL
 'From wood'

T: *ʔíró* *ʔáo* *med-int-ize*
 3FSG.ACC who make-IPF.REL
 'Who makes it?'

E: *yáw ʔasí* *yáw ʔeeráts kúfe* *máss-i* *ʔer-zé* *ʔas*
 DM perso.NOM DM little hand carve-CNV know-IPF.REL person
 'Well, a person who knows carving a little bit, any such person present can shape it and carve a seat from wood.'

yezáy *ʔoidá* *yáw k'irs-t-ó* *báz-i*
 exist.REL.NMZ.NOM seat DM shape-F.DEF-F.ACC do.thing-CNV
 'Well, a person who knows carving a little bit, any such person present can shape it and carve a seat from wood.'



Oyda seat, Shafite 2010

The Research Team

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Preparing to burn clay pans, Shafite 2010

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