SOME NOTES ON THE PHONOLOGY 
AND MORPHOLOGY OF CHARA

Aklilu Yilma

1. Introduction

Chara or s'a:ra is a little known language which belongs to the West Ometo cluster of dialects and languages under the north branch of the Omotic family. Most of the Chara speakers reside in Decha Wäräda of Kaffa area of the Kaffa-Sheka Zone, in a vast area called č' özgü'a, scattered in three different villages: gebaza meša, buna anta and kumba. The Chara population in the Decha Wäräda is estimated at about 7000.¹

Other members of Chara, whose clan name is called ba:č’a’, live in Cheta (č’üta ) district in a village called midrä gänät. Other language groups found in Cheta district include Dawro (Kullo), Me’en and She (dialects of the Bench language).

The Chara people call their language s’ara atsa no:na 'Chara people language'. Some members of the community identify themselves with the Bench (formerly called Gimira) people and insist that their language be called gimira no:na 'Gimira language'.

¹ This estimation was given in an interview by Ato Alemayehu Ambo, a contact person between the Chara and the government officials in the area.

² It has been reported that the term Bacha refers to the Kewegu of the Surmic linguistic group (Gerrit Dimendaal, 1998:26)
Dialectal differences are observed in different parts of the Decha area of the present Kafficho Zone.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Angela Menesh</th>
<th>Northern</th>
<th>Southern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'body'</td>
<td>suma</td>
<td>?ačča</td>
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<tr>
<td>'hair'</td>
<td>kusna</td>
<td>gusna</td>
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<tr>
<td>'nose'</td>
<td>sint'a</td>
<td>sinDa</td>
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<tr>
<td>'breast'</td>
<td>t'ama</td>
<td>Dama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'belly'</td>
<td>yi:na</td>
<td>hi:na</td>
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</tbody>
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A few linguistic studies have been made on Chara. The first one is that of Enrico Cerulli (1938). Cerulli has made some analysis on the sound system and the grammar of the language. M. L. Bender (1971) has listed 59 lexical items taken from Cerulli.

Comparing my list against Bender's, it has been found that out of the 59 lexical items only 46 of them happen to be similar. The basic word list of Chara in my data corresponds 11% strong and 5% weak or very weak with Kunama, 30% strong and 5-8% weak or very weak with Northern Mao and 45% strong and 5% weak with Wolaitta. I have also found that Chara cognates 52% strong and 4% weak with Beng and 48% strong and 1% weak with She.
2. Phonology

2.1 Consonants

Stops

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<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>g</td>
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<tr>
<td>[p]</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ejective</td>
<td>p'</td>
<td>t'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>implosive</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>(D)</td>
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</table>

Fricatives

<p>| | | |</p>
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<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>ʂ</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affricates</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>ts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasals</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lateral | l |

Trill | r |

Semi-vowel | w | ɣ |

In the phonemic inventory of the Chara language ten stops / b, p', B, d, t,
t', g, k, k', ?, four fricatives / f, s, š, h /, five affricates / ts, s', j, č, č'/, two nasals /m, n/, a lateral /l/, a trill /r/ and two semi-vowels /w, y/, all together 25 consonants are found. The phonemic inventory presented in this study differs from that of Cerulli's article published in 1938. The alveolar implosive /D/ , which is included in Cerulli's phonemic inventory, has been found only once alternating with the glottalized alveolar stop /t'/: [jolDa] [jolt'a] 'crooked'. The bilabial implosive /B/, which has not been mentioned in Cerulli's inventory occurs at least in five lexical items and considered as a phoneme in this study. The voiced alveo-palatal fricative [ž] is extremely rare. Only two items consisting of [ž] have been found out of around 550 lexical items. In both cases [ž] occurs word medially following the vowel /i/ and preceding /a/. In Cerulli's analysis [p] and [t] are also considered two distinctive phonemes. But my data shows that the two consonants are in free variation.

Moreover, Cerulli has included two more consonants / nd/ and / y/ , om the he refers to as 'dei fonimi con occulsione glottale'. In Cerulli's data, one of the sounds happen to occur intervocally in one lexical item in each case [s] sidin 'nose' to:ya 'foot'. In my data, the semivowel /y/ occurs preceded by a glottal stop: / to:ya/ or as a compensatory lengthening of the vowel after deleting the glottal stop: /to:ya/. The comparison of the two containing / n/ in Cerulli's data with the corresponding items in my.

1 One reviewer of this article and one of the editors of this Journal have questioned the manner in which the phoneme / s'/ is described. I analyze this sound as a glottalized counter part of the voiceless alveolar affricate /ts/, not that of the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/; and this is true not only for Chara but also for all Omotic and Cushitic languages which include the phoneme /s'/ in their sound systems.

2 This phrase could be translated as 'phonemes with glottal release'.
shows that /n/ occurs before a glottalized alveolar stop /t/: sidan vs. sint’a. In the second item the glottal release /n/ of Cerulli corresponds to the glottal stop in my material: nanza vs. na’a ‘child’.

Another difference is the occurrence of the alveolar implosive /D/. Comparison of the items which contain /D/ in Cerulli’s material shows correspondence with /t’/ in my vocabulary list: hayD vs. hayt’ ‘listen’, woD vs. wot’ ‘kill’.

The absence of the voiceless glottalized stop /p’/ in Cerulli’s phonemic inventory is difficult to explain. Eleven lexical items have been found containing /p’/ in my vocabulary list. This discrepancy may be attributed to dialectal variation in the Chara language.

Another consonant which has not been included in Cerulli’s phonemic inventory is the bilabial implosive stop /B/. In my list /B/ occurs in five lexical items.

1. aBa ‘dream’ oBma ‘touch’
   Bada ‘long’ Balk’a ‘storm’

2.2 Vowels

Chara has a five vowel system /i, e, a, u, o/. The short and the long vowels are minimally contrastive.

2. mola ‘fish’ buna ‘flower’
   mo:la ‘egg’ bu:na ‘coffee’
   masa ‘to wash’
   ma:sa ‘leopard’
The mid central vowel [ä] seems to be an allophone of /a/, and it occurs at word medial position when the syllable is unstressed.

(3)  
[zaa'kà]  'elephant'  [baa'kà]  'to slap'  
[bälá]  'forehead'  [tämä]  'fire'  
[märğä]  'fence'

The language allows two or three clusters at word medial and final positions. The alveolar sonorants /n, l, r/ occur most frequently as first members of clusters. Clusters with the stops /t, t', k, k', ñ/, the nasals /n, m/ and the alveolar fricative /s/ as second members are relatively more frequent than the other phonemes. Three consonant sequences (CCC) with /n/, /s/ or /t/ as last member occur in root morphemes or across a morpheme boundary.

(4)  
doklsa  'circumcize'  p'irk'na  'open'  
aštna  'hide!'  gočnti  'pick(pl.)!'

Three consonant sequences (clusters) with /r/ as the last member are also found in root nouns:

(5)  
funt'ra  'naked'  antra  'peas'

2.3 Suprasegmental

At the present stage of my analysis Chara seems to be a stress language. The following examples illustrate that stress is phonemic in the language:
2.4 Morphophonemics

2.4.1 Assimilation

In Chara assimilation may take place across a morpheme boundary. A morpheme-initial nasal assimilates its manner and/or point of articulation to that of a preceding consonant. The assimilation could be complete or partial. This consonantal process is usually observed when the singular imperative morpheme { -na } is suffixed to root verbs.

Complete assimilation:

(7) / k’er-na/ --- > [ k’erra ]
circle-imp.

/ boč-na / --- > [ bočča ]
dance-imp.

/ uš-na / --- > [ ušša ]
drink-imp.

Partial assimilation:

/ dub-na / --- > [ dubma ]
hit-imp.
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\[/omp'\text{-}n\text{a}\/ \rightarrow [omp'm\text{a}] \]
\to\bold{hold-imp.}

\[/sunk'\text{-}n\text{a}\/ \rightarrow [sunk'\text{\eta}a] \]
\bold{kiss-imp.}

\[/bok-n\text{a}\/ \rightarrow [bok\text{\eta}a] \]
\bold{throw-imp.}

3 Noun Morphology

3.1 Noun Inflection

Chara nouns are inflected for gender, number definiteness and case. The inflections are expressed through suffixes, except for the possessive which is always marked by prefixes.

3.1.1 Gender

There are a few items where I found the masculine noun marked by the suffix \{-i\}, and the feminine one by \{-a\}:

(8) \text{ge\d{s}-i} 'younger brother' \hspace{1cm} \text{iz-i} 'he'
    \text{ge\d{s}-a} 'younger sister' \hspace{1cm} \text{iz-a} 'she'
    \text{ha\text{:}yisi} 'this (masc)' \hspace{1cm} \text{ha\text{:}na} 'this (fem)'

Gender is usually expressed by using distinctive lexical items:
3.1.2 Number

Chara singular nouns are unmarked for number. The plural is expressed by suffixing \{-e:ndi \} to singular nouns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'ow'</td>
<td>mansa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'cow'</td>
<td>miya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'mother'</td>
<td>ina</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adjectives which are treated in this analysis as a class of substantives are inflected for number.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'white'</td>
<td>dala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'black'</td>
<td>karta</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1.3 Definiteness

Definiteness is designated by the attaching the morpheme \{-na:zi \} for the masculine singular nouns and \{-e:na \} for the feminine ones. The morpheme na:zi also mean 'the male /man'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'ox'</th>
<th>mansa</th>
<th>mansana:zi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'cow'</td>
<td>miya</td>
<td>miye:na</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adjectives are marked for definiteness by the suffix \{-bi \} for masculine and \{-e:na \} (which is identical with the feminine nouns definite marker) for feminine.
(13) dala  'white'
dala-bi  'the white (masc.)'
dale:na  'the white (fem.)'
karta  'black'
kartabi  'the black (masc.)'
karte:na  'the black (fem.)'

3.1.4 Case

Nouns inflect for nominative, accusative, dative, genitive, ablative, instrumental and vocative cases.

It seems that the nominative case marker alternates freely between {-i} and{-e} in the language.

(14) (a) ke:met-i polise-ne wot'-is-en
'Kemeto has been killed by a police man'

(b) ta:n-e ha:s'e ham-iš
I-Nom. river go-past
'I went to the river'

The accusative is indicated by the suffix {-is} or {-e}.

(15) (a) iz-i kan-is wot'-iš
he-Nom. dog-Acc. kill-past
'he killed a dog'
As shown in examples 15a and b {-is} occurs following a consonant and {-s} occurs following a vowel.

The dative case is marked by the suffix {-(i)ri}.

(16) (a) no:ne/nu:ni ganayen-ri ača ebam-ıš
        we old woman-Dat. meat take-past
        'we took meat to the old woman'

(b) na?-t’a:ze mans-iri dara im-ıš
    boy-Def. ox-Dat sorgum give-past
    'the boy gave sorgum to an ox'

The genitive is marked by {-e}.

(17) (a) aklil-e dorsa 'Aklilu’s horse'
        Aklilu-Gen. horse

(b) kan-e ač’a 'dog’s tooth'
    dog-Gen. tooth

When the possessed noun is missing, the morpheme {-ri} occurs with the possessor, following the genitive case marker {-e}.

(18) (a) aklil-e-ri 'Aklilu’s'

(b) kan-e-ri 'dog’s'
The ablative is indicated by {-k'ay}.

(19)  
(a) izi mizan-k'ay woy-iš  
he Mizan-Abl. come-past  
'he came from Mizan'  

(b) iza ke:ti-k'ay kes-iš  
she house-Abl. get out-past  
'she got out from the house'  

The instrumental is shown with the morpheme {-en}.

(19)  
(a) izi kats-en' gas'-iš  
he stick-Inst. hit-past  
'he hit with a stick'  

(b) ats-e:na ta:y-en ha:miša  
person-Def(fem) foot-Inst. went  
'the woman went by foot'  

The Vocative case marker is {-o}.

(20) ta-?iš-o  
my-brother-Voc.  
'oh! my brother (older)'

Here, the vowel [a] in the word katsa 'stick' is deleted before [e]: / katsa-en / → [katsen]
3.2 Adjectives

Like nouns, all adjectives end with the vowel /a/ and are inflected for number, definiteness and case. In noun phrases, adjectives precede the head noun they modify, but show no agreement in gender, number, definiteness or case. The following are typical adjectives of Chara:

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
(21) & \\
\text{dala} & \text{'white'} \\
\text{dala-e:ndi} [\text{dale:ndi}] & \text{'whites'} \\
\text{dala-bi} & \text{'the red (masc.)'} \\
\text{dal-e:na} [\text{dala-e:na}] & \text{'the red (fem.)'} \\
\text{dale mansa hay-i\text{"}{-i}\text{"}s} & \text{white ox die-past} \\
\text{'the white ox died'} & \\
\text{dale miy-e:na hay-i\text{"}{-i}\text{"}-a} & \text{white cow-Def. die-past-3f} \\
\text{'the white cow died'} & \\
\end{array}
\]

3.3 Pronouns

3.3.1. Personal Pronouns

Chara personal pronouns are composed of pronominal stems and a nominative case marker {-i} which is preceded by /-n/ in the first and second person
singular and first person plural. The only exception is in the third person feminine singular. The pronominal stems in the language are presented below:

(22) Singular Plural
1st tæ- no:-/nu-
2nd ne:- int-
3rd iz- its-

The independent subject pronouns, therefore, look like the following:

(23) Singular Plural
1st tæni no:ne/nuni
2nd ne:ni intf
3rd masc. izi itsendi
  fem. iza

The pronominal stems (forms listed under 22) suffix the case marker to construct various forms of pronouns. The object personal pronoun formed by suffixing the accusative case marker {-i}s to the pronominal stems.
Indirect object pronouns are formed by suffixing the dative case marker {-ri} to the personal pronoun bases:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(25)</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>ta-ri</td>
<td>nu-ri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>ne:-ri</td>
<td>int-ri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd masc.</td>
<td>iz-ri</td>
<td>itsend-ri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fem.</td>
<td>iz-ri</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) na?-taze its-e:nd-ri ača eham-iš
boy-Def 3per.-pl-Dat. meat give-past
'the boy gave meat to them'

The possessive pronoun forms have two phonologically conditioned allomorphs { -rerí}, { -eri} to the pronominal stems. The allomorph { -rerí} occurs after a vowel and { -eri} following a consonant.
The base pronouns are also affixed to possessed nouns to express possession.

Reflexivity is shown by prefixing the base pronouns to the word to:ya 'head' and by suffixing the instrumental case marker {-en}.

It is also possible to express an activity directed towards oneself or performed by oneself with the morpheme { ba-} and the instrumental case marker {-en} in nouns referring to body parts.
3.3.2 Demonstrative Pronouns

Chara has two demonstrative pronoun roots. \{ ha:\} is the proximal root and is inflected for number, gender and case:

\[(30)\] ha:na 'this (fem.)' \quad eg. ha:na miye:na 'this cow'
ha:yisi 'this (masc.)' \quad eg. ha:yisi mansa 'this ox'
ha:ri/ha:šši 'here'
ha:?endi 'these'

The distal root in Chara has different forms as shown below:

\[(31)\] sekn 'that' (object to the side of the speaker)
sekom 'over there'
den 'that' (object in front of the speaker)
yatin 'that' (object behind the speaker)

The distal root can be inflected for number:

\[(32)\] sekn?endi 'those'

3.3.3 Wh-Pronouns

The interrogative in Chara is composed of simple stems and case,
definiteness, postpositions, etc., elements. The three basic interrogative stems are the following:

(33)  

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{who-} & \quad \text{'who?'} \\
\text{o:-} & \quad \text{'who is?'} \\
\text{o:-} & \quad \text{'who hit the boy?'} \\
\text{o:-} & \quad \text{'whom do you want?'} \\
\text{am-} & \quad \text{'where?'} \\
\text{am hamobi} & \quad \text{'where are you going?'} \\
\text{a:-} & \quad \text{'what?'} \\
\text{na:zi a: ebam-} & \quad \text{'what did the man take?'}
\end{align*}
\]

The rest of the interrogative pronouns are formed by suffixing various morphemes to the base stems. Below are the elaborated list of interrogative pronouns with examples:

(34)  

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{who-} & \quad \text{'whom?'} \\
\text{o:-} & \quad \text{'whom do you want?'}
\end{align*}
\]
o:-reri 'whose?'

o: kan-e / o:-reri kan-e 'whose dog is it?'
who-poss. / who dog-Gen who-poss dog-Gen

äm-eši 'where?'
where-postposition(?)

äm-abi 'which? (masc)' 
where-Def.(masc)

äm-abi-s mansa koyt-obi
where-Def.(masc) ox take-Q.(present)

'which ox do you want?'

äm-e:na 'which (fern.)?'
where-Def.(fem)

äm-e:na miya koyt-obi
where-Def.(fem) cow take-Q.(present)

'which cow do you want?'

a:-ze 'what?/ what is?'
what-

a:-s-iri 'why?' (for what cause?)
what-causative-Dat.

a:-s-iri wo:y-enne 'why did you come?'
what-caus.-Dat. come-Q (past)
a:-mata 'when?'

a:-mata wo:?-enne 'when did you come?'
what-temporal(?) what-temporal(?)come-Q.(past)

a:-rara 'how?'
what-

a:-rara hay-enne 'how did he die?'
what-? come-Q.marker(past)

a:-rare / a:-mbitse 'how much?'
what-? / what?

a:-rare/a:mbitse waga 'how much is the price'

3.3.4 Derived Agent Nouns

Agent nouns are formed by suffixing {-atsa} for masculine and {-atse:na} for feminine.

(35) ki:ta 'work' ga:?na 'wealth'
ki:t-atsa 'worker (masc.)' ga:?n-atsa 'rich man'
ki:t-ats-e:na 'worker (fern.)' ga:n-atse:na 'rich woman'
work-person-fem

gira 'poorness'
gir-atsa 'poor man'
gir-atse:na 'poor woman'
4. Verb Morphology

Most of the root verbs in Chara are monosyllabic, and have a typical shape of CVC- with some having CVCC-:

(36) duk- 'bury' hay- 'die'
    boč- 'dance' č'ad- 'sew'

(37) buk's- 'urinate' (the noun is bukusa) wost- 'take'
    sink' 'smell' durk'- 'push'
    ?irm- 'embrace' faks- 'release'

There are also a few disyllabic roots in the language:

(38) ?omp'it- 'shake, hold' šakit- 'scatter'
    k'undit- 'feel indignant about'
    ?unk'it- 'steal' (from ?unk'u 'thief (N)'

4.1 The Copula

The copula form is {-be} and has the meaning 'is/was' or 'are/were'. It has the following functions:

*I am not quite comfortable with the tense/aspect system of Chara language since my data on this is very limited. Further field research is needed.*
1) It occurs in predicate sentences of equation type:

(39)  

(a) tan-i goš-ma-s-be 'I am a farmer'
I-Gen farm-eat-one-cop.

(b) izi onsa-be 'he is good'
he good-cop.

(c) du:ta k’aya onsa-be
early rise good-cop.
’it is good to rise early in the morning

Some sentences of the above type are recorded without the copula.

(40)  

nun-i goš-ma-s 'we are farmers'
we-Gen farm-eat-one

2) The copula {-be } also optionally compounds with different aspectual morphemes (past perfect, progressive, etc.) to form different types of verbal aspects.

(41)  

(a) kafa wališ-be 'the bird flew'
bird fly-cop.

(b) tan-i bongi ham-os-be 'I am going to Bonga'
I Gen Bonga go-Prog-cop.

(c) atsa kana be?-iš-be 'the man has seen a dog'
man dog see-cop
(d)  k'aya de?en-be
    work have-cop.

'I have work'

In Chara, verbs do not inflect for all persons and number. They show 3rd
person, feminine singular only.

Singular

- ta:ne ebam-iş 'I took'
- I take-past
- nene ebam-iş 'you took'
- inte ebam-iş 'you took'
- izi ebam-iş 'he took'
- itsende ebam-iş 'they took'
- iza ebam-iş-a 'she took'
- she take-past-3sf

Plural

- no:ne ebam-iş 'we took'
- inte ebam-iş 'you took'
- itsende ebam-iş 'they took'

4.2 Derived Verb Stems

4.2.1 Causative

The causative is formed by affixing the morpheme {-is} to the root:

(43)  č'alk-is-iş
      cool-caus.-past

'made something cool'

- ta:-s gas'-is-iş
- I-Acc. hit-caus.-past

'made me be hit'
4.2.2 Passive

The passive is also formed by suffixing {-is} to the root. The passive marker is homophonous with the causative morpheme.

(44) ma ma?-is-iš
food eat-passive-past
'food was eaten'

ke:meti polis-en wot’-is-iš

'Kemeto was killed by police'

ta:-ne gas’-is-iš
I-Nom. hit-passive-past

'I was hit'

4.2.3 Reciprocal

The reciprocal refers to an activity carried out by participants who are both agent and patient. The reciprocal stem is formed by suffixing {-it(a)}.

(45) gas’-ita ganča-be
hit-Recp. bad-Cop.

'it is bad to hit each other'
4.2.2 Passive

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(44) ma maʔ-is-iƙ
food eat-passive-past
'food was eaten'

ke:meɓi polis-en wot'-is-iƙ

'Kemeto was killed by police'

taː-ne gas'-is-iƙ
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hit-Recp. bad-Cop.

'it is bad to hit each other'
č'ada č'ad-it-iš
fight-Recp.-past
'fought with each other'

taki tos-it-iš
meet talk-Recp.-past

'having met, we talked'

References


