

Linguistic Distance among Gurage Varieties: Revisiting the Internal classification

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Gurage refers to South Ethio-Semitic language Speaking groups living in the Gurage Zone of the Southern Nation, nationalities, and peoples Regional State. The purpose of this article was to provide descriptive account of linguistic distance among Gurage varieties and thereby re-classify the Gurage Varieties. There have been a few studies on the classification of South Ethio-Semitic languages in General and the Gurage Varieties in particular. However, there has been often confusion as to the positions of some of the Gurage varieties, such as Dobi which was considered to be closer to Kistane. Muhir has sometimes been grouped into the North Gurage and other times to the West-Gurage. Though the position of Meskan as a West Gurage was not questioned, its relative distance within the West Gurage was not clear. The position of Geto as Peripheral West Gurage or Central West Gurage was a further problem. The present study provides the distance among each variety. We Elicited 205 lexicons from all the language varieties. Then, we have used Cog 1.3.1 software to analyze the similarity matrix and to chain the varieties with Dendrogram. The dendrogram output of UPGMA analysis, which assumes change over time and Neighbor joining analysis that trims off the assumed overtime changes showed slight variation with regard to the relative distances of the language varieties, such as Meskan against Inor and Dobi against Muhir and Kistane. We have included in the analysis Amharic language, partly because it is spoken natively in one of the Gurage district called Abeshge, and partly to check the degree of divergence of some of the Gurage varieties vis-à-vis their distance with Amharic. Both UPGMA analysis and Neighbor-joining analysis showed that Welene variety is nearly as distant as the Amharic language.