

Mauro Tosco
The Dhaasanac Language

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Mauro Tosco

The Dhaasanac Language

Grammar, Texts, Vocabulary of a Cushitic Language
of Ethiopia



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Table of Contents

	page
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Symbols and abbreviations</i>	xi
<i>Map</i>	xiv
1. Introduction	
<i>1.1. The Dhaasanac people</i>	1
1.1.1. The Dhaasanac society and culture: an overview	1
1.1.2. The “name” of the Dhaasanac	4
1.1.3. Studies on the language and people	5
<i>1.2. The Dhaasanac language</i>	8
1.2.1. Classification and history	8
1.2.2. Grammatial profile	11
<i>1.3. Collection of data</i>	14
<i>Notes</i>	15
2. Phonology	
<i>2.1. Segmental phonemes</i>	16
2.1.1. Consonants	16
2.1.2. Vowels	25
<i>2.2. Accent and tone</i>	34
2.2.1. Falling and rising pitch contours	36
2.2.2. Tonal minimal pairs	37
2.2.3. Accent placement	38
<i>2.3. Prosodic phonology and word–structure rules</i>	42
2.3.1. The mora	42
2.3.2. The syllable	42
2.3.3. Gemination	44
2.3.4. Clusters	50
2.3.5. Epenthesis	53
2.3.6. Heterosyllabic vowel sequences	54
2.3.7. Intonation and stress	55
2.3.8. Words, affixes and clitics	60
<i>Notes</i>	62
3. Nouns	
<i>3.1. Basic unextended nouns</i>	63
3.1.1. Monosyllabic nouns	63
3.1.2. Bisyllabic CV _x CV _x C nouns	64
3.1.3. Bisyllabic CVCV nouns	64
3.1.4. Longer shapes	65
<i>3.2. Context form</i>	65
3.2.1. Terminal Vowels	65

3.2.2. Nasal context forms	67
3.3. <i>Formatives and Suffixes</i>	67
3.3.1. Summary on the internal make-up of Dh. nouns	69
3.4. <i>Gender</i>	71
3.4.1. Terminal Vowels and Consonant Gradation	72
3.5. <i>Number</i>	73
3.5.1. Singulative marking	75
3.5.2. Plural marking	83
3.5.3. Number-indifferent nouns	93
3.6. <i>Case</i>	93
3.6.1. Absolutive Case form	93
3.6.2. Subject Case form	94
3.6.3. Genitive Case form	97
3.7. <i>Collective Nouns</i>	98
3.8. <i>Attributives</i>	100
3.8.1. Classes of attributives	100
3.9. <i>Names</i>	102
3.10. <i>Compound nouns</i>	103
3.11. <i>Numerals</i>	105
3.11.1. Excursus: A note on counting with the fingers	107
3.12. <i>Coda: Borrowing and internal enrichment in Dh. vocabulary</i>	108
<i>Notes</i>	110

4. Verbs

4.1. <i>General characteristics</i>	111
4.1.1. Vowel-harmony	112
4.2. <i>Paradigms</i>	113
4.2.1. Imperative Positive	114
4.2.2. Perfect	114
4.2.3. Imperfect	116
4.2.4. Dependent	117
4.2.5. Jussive	117
4.2.6. Short Past	118
4.2.7. Negative paradigms	119
4.2.8. Verbal Nouns	119
4.2.9. Compound verbs	122
4.3. <i>Verbal classes</i>	123
4.3.1. Constraints on the final consonant of the stem	123
4.3.2. Monosyllabic and CVCC stems	124
4.3.3. Bi- and plurisyllabic stems	124
4.3.4. The Imperfect base and the Bimoraic Filter	125
4.4. <i>Basic (unextended) verbs</i>	126
4.4.1. Coronal-ending stems (Consonant Gradation)	126
4.4.2. Non-Coronal-Dropping Stems	132

4.5.	<i>“Imperfective” extensions</i>	141
4.5.1.	Patterning of the extensions within the paradigm	142
4.5.2.	Nasal-extension	144
4.5.3.	Reduplication	159
4.6.	<i>Irregular verbs</i>	171
4.6.1.	Irregular stem alternations	171
4.6.2.	Irregular stem extensions	174
4.6.3.	Verbs with suppletive stems	175
4.7.	<i>Derived verbs</i>	176
4.7.1.	Denominal verbs	179
4.7.2.	Middle and Inchoative verbs	184
4.7.3.	Causative	194
4.8.	<i>Prefix verbs</i>	199
4.9.	<i>Coda: Synopsis of inflectional and derivational patterns</i>	202
	<i>Notes</i>	205

5. Closed grammatical categories

5.1.	<i>Adjectives</i>	206
5.1.1.	Invariable adjectives	206
5.1.2.	Adjectives with reduplicating plural	206
5.1.3.	Adjectives with gender and number accord	207
5.1.4.	Adjectival focus form	209
5.2.	<i>Pronouns</i>	210
5.2.1.	Absolute pronouns	212
5.2.2.	Subject pronouns	213
5.2.3.	Verbal pronouns	214
5.2.4.	Object pronouns	223
5.2.5.	Reflexive <i>húol</i>	224
5.3.	<i>Determiners</i>	225
5.3.1.	The General Determiner <i>ka</i>	225
5.3.2.	Deictics	226
5.3.3.	Possessive Determiners	231
5.4.	<i>Adpositions</i>	232
5.4.1.	Core adpositions	232
5.4.2.	Peripheral adpositions	238
5.4.3.	Grammaticalized nouns as adpositions	240
5.5.	<i>Focus and sentence markers</i>	244
5.6.	<i>Adverbials</i>	244
5.6.1.	Time adverbials	245
5.6.2.	Intensifiers	246
5.6.3.	The emphasis marker <i>-lé</i>	247
5.6.4.	The exclamative suffix <i>=e</i>	248
5.7.	<i>Conjunctions</i>	248
5.8.	<i>Interjections and ideophones</i>	249

<i>Notes</i>	251
6. Syntax	
6.1. <i>Phrases</i>	252
6.1.1. Nominal Possessive phrases	254
6.1.2. Pronominal Possessive phrases	255
6.1.3. Adjectival phrases	256
6.1.4. Numeral phrases	257
6.1.5. Adpositional phrases	257
6.2. <i>Sentences</i>	258
6.2.1. Sentence structure	258
6.2.2. Main sentences	261
6.2.3. Movement-derived sentences	274
6.2.4. Interrogative sentences	276
6.2.5. Imperative Positive sentences	278
6.2.6. Jussive Positive sentences	278
6.2.7. Negative Sentences	281
6.2.8. Dependent sentences	282
6.2.9. Verbless sentences	288
6.3. <i>Coordination</i>	295
6.3.1. Pivots	298
6.4. <i>Coda: Discourse structure</i>	298
<i>Notes</i>	301
<i>Appendix 1. Texts</i>	302
<i>Appendix 2. Key to Verbal Forms</i>	320
<i>Appendix 3. Dictionaries</i>	476
1. Dhaasanac–English Vocabulary	476
2. English–Dhaasanac Vocabulary	533
3. Glossaries	571
Foreword	571
Plants	571
Insects and invertebrates	573
Fish	573
Birds	574
Reptiles	575
Wild mammals	575
Domesticated animals	576
Geographical terms	577
Ethnic terms (generation sets, sections, clans, sub-clans, and peoples)	578
Ox-names	581
<i>Appendix 4. Color terms</i>	582
<i>References</i>	585
<i>Subject Index</i>	593

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Symbols and abbreviations

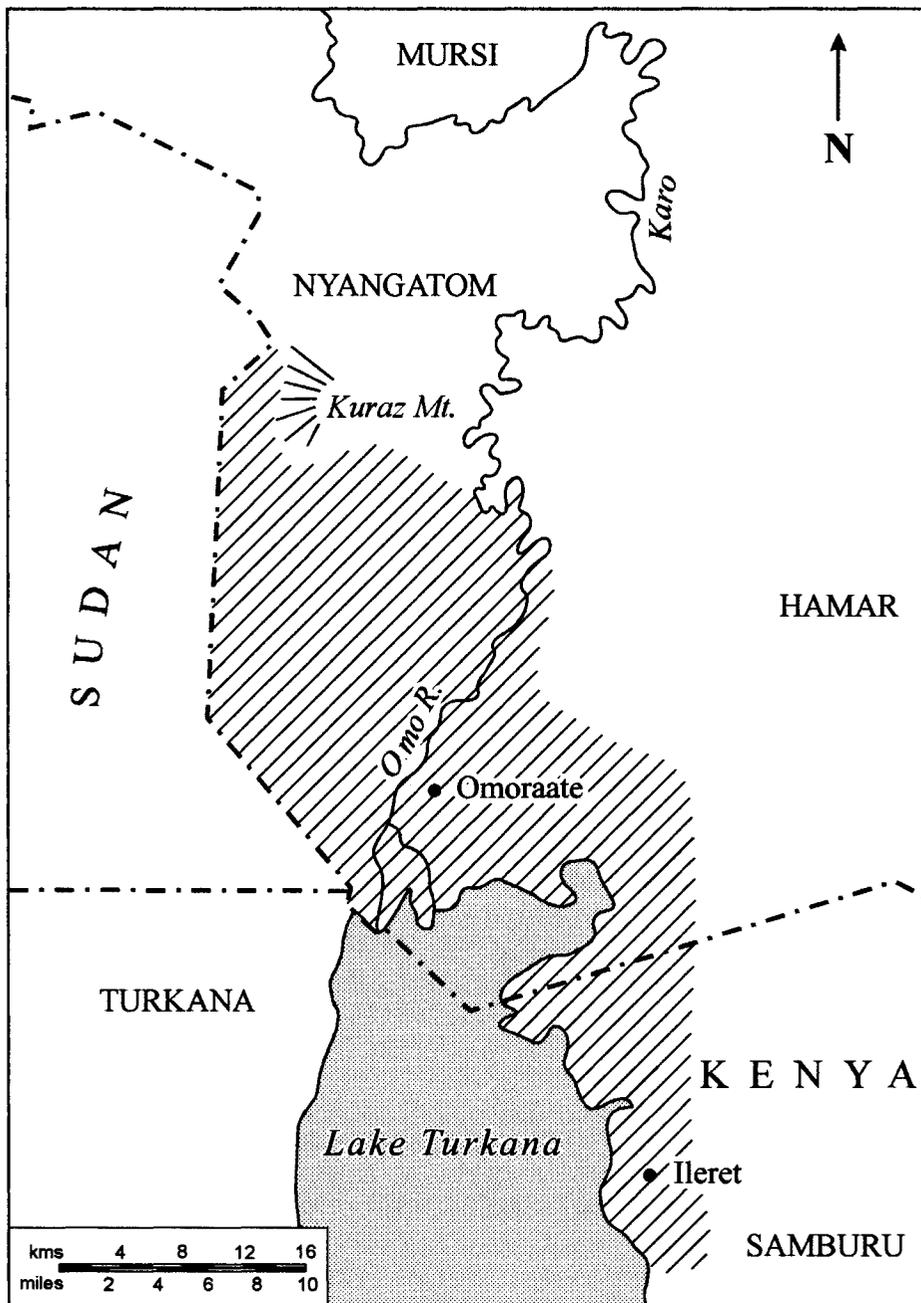
1	1st person
2	2nd person
3	3rd person
Adj.	Adjective
Adp.	Adposition
Amh.	Amharic
ANAPH	Anaphoric Deictic
Attr.	Attributive Noun
CAUS	Causative
Coll.	Collective Noun
CONT	Continuous
DEP	Dependent
DET	Determinative
Dh.	Dhaasanac
Engl.	English
EXCL	Exclusive
F	Feminine
FACT	Factitive
FOC	Focus Marker; Focus form of Adjectives
GEN	Genitive
IMPF	Imperfect
IMPV	Imperative
INCH	Inchoative
INCL	Inclusive
It.	Italian
M	Masculine
MID	Middle

NAS	Nasal verbal extension
NEG	Negative verbal form; Negative marker
NP	Noun Phrase
OBJ	Object Pronoun
ONOM	Onomatopoetic word
PARTIC	Particular Deictic
PF	Perfect
PL	Plural
QUANT	Quantifier Deictic
RED	Reduplicated verbal form
REFL	Reflexive Pronoun
S	Sentence
SG	Singular
SP	Short Past
STAT	Stative
SUBJ	Subject Case; Subject Pronoun
Sw.	Swahili
Top	Topic
Turk.	Turkana
V	Verb
VERB	Verbal Pronoun
VN	Verbal Noun
\$	Syllable boundary
σ	Syllable
μ	Mora
=	Clitic boundary
→	becomes (in synchronic derivation)

Rules

AL	Affix Lengthening
BF	Bimoraic Filter
CG	Consonant Gradation; Compensatory Gemination
NCD	Non-Coronal Dropping
SS	Stem Shortening
VH	Vowel Harmony
VL	Vowel Lengthening
VS	Vowel Shortening

In translations, square brackets are “etic” and contain additions and explanations to adjust to the standard or frame of reference of the target language, while round brackets are “emic” and contain literal translations from the original which are redundant or inadmissible in the target language.



South-West Ethiopia: The Dhaasanac and the neighboring peoples

1. Introduction

1.1. *The Dhaasanac people*

The Dhaasanac (**dáasanac**, phonetically [dʰá:sanæc]) are a pastoral, cattle-keeping people of South-West Ethiopia, stretching into North-West Kenya. Dhaasanac-land (Dh. **lé's dáasanac**) is a plain country, estimated by Almagor (1978: 1) to have an area of about 2,300 square kilometres, roughly cut in the middle by the lower course of the Omo river (Dh. **wár**), the largest river of Western Ethiopia; actually, most Dhaasanac live on the west bank, and graze their cattle as far west as the Sudan-Ethiopian border. To the south, the Dhaasanac stretch to the northern and north-eastern shores of Lake Turkana (Dh. **bás**), into which the Omo river flows (see the Map). They are bordered on the North by the Nyangatom and to the South and West by the Turkana. Both peoples speak dialects of the same language, Turkana (Nilo-Saharan phylum, East-Sudanic; Nilotic; East Nilotic; Teso-Turkana); to the East their immediate neighbors (and enemies) are the Hamar (speaking an Omotic [or West-Cushitic] language of the Aari-Banna subgroup).

The 1994 Ethiopian Census (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1996) gives the total number of Dhaasanac in Ethiopia as 32,029 (16,507 males and 15,522 females). Nearly 99% (31,652) are "rural". Practically all (32,013) live in the Southern Omo Zone (Amharic **yə-dəbbub omo zon**) of the 'Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region' (see Map). In particular, the Dhaasanac are the major group within the Kuraz Wereda (Amharic: **kuraz wərēda**): 31,989 out of a total population of 48,165 (accounting for 66%), followed by the Nyangatom, numbering 14,142 (29%); together, Dhaasanac and Nyangatom make up nearly 96% of the population of the Wereda). To this number a sizable number of Dhaasanac of Kenya must be added, for whom no comparable figures are available. In 1980 SIL estimated their number as 2,500 (Grimes 1996: 260). The total number of Dhaasanac may therefore be estimated to lie somewhere between 35,000 and 40,000. No data has been found on any Dhaasanac living in Sudan, as mentioned by Sasse (1976: 196).

1.1.1. **The Dhaasanac society and culture: an overview**

The Dhaasanac fully and whole-heartedly adhere to the "cattle complex" of neighboring pastoral peoples. Actually, a lot of agriculture and even fishing (considered shameful) are practised, especially along the river banks (for a detailed discussion of agricultural techniques, cf. Almagor 1978). This mixed economy, in which transhumant pastoralism is balanced by agriculture, and both are supplemented by fishing, is a

result of the relative fertility of the ground (made up mainly of dry savanna and grassland) and the availability of permanent water resources, in stark contrast to the surrounding arid and semi-arid plains.

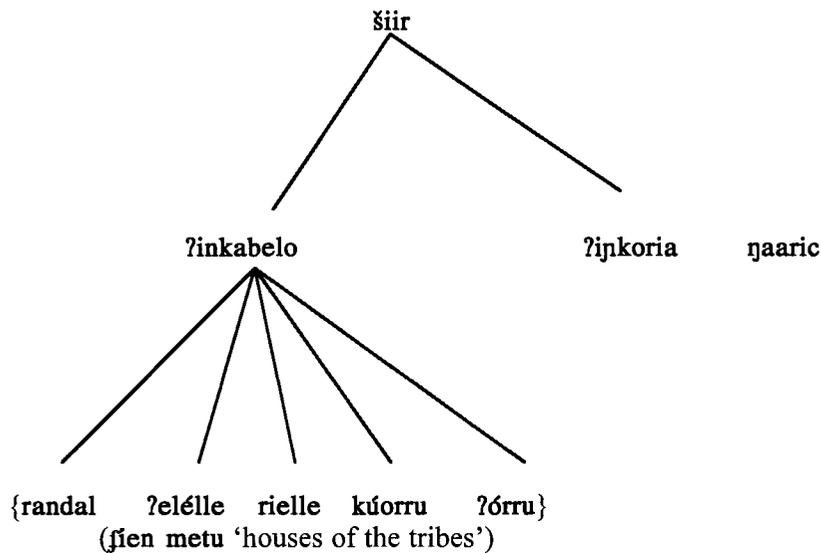
Agriculture (with sorghum, maize, and beans being the main crops) 'is determined solely by the flooding of the Omo River so that the rainfall in the central plateau of Ethiopia determines the crop yield' (Almagor 1978: 37). The Omo River floods annually (Dh. **wár** also means 'year' and, consequently, 'age'), rising in May and generally reaching its peak in August, when it inundates the surrounding flat areas (Dh. **dieli**, Pl. **dielam**) and makes the land suitable for cultivation.

Pastoral life is instead mainly affected by rains. The migrations of the transhumant pastoralists do not coincide exactly with the rainy seasons, but they are highly dependent on them. The whole region is highly unstable in terms of precipitation, but two main rainy seasons are recognized: the "big rains" (Dh. **?ir guddu ka** or **guddu= a**), generally in March–April, and the "small rains" (Dh. **ńirbi** or **?ir níni ka**), which may begin as early as late August but which normally peak in October.

The Dhaasanac are divided into eight tribal sections (Dh. **?é mé** 'house of tribe'), which are very roughly territorially-based (see the Map).

Each section is accounted to have a different and partially mixed ethnic origin — as is most clearly shown by the fact that two sections, the **rándal** and the **kúorru**, simply bear the names that the Dhaasanac give to the Rendille and the Samburu, respectively (their immigration is as recent as the last decades of the 19th century; cf. Sobania (1980) for relevant traditions). The **ńaaric**, too, are said to be of fairly recent Nyangatom origin — as witnessed by the initial /ŋ/ of their name (which violates Dh. positional constraints).

The sections are further grouped into two broad groups: the **š'iir**, or "proper Dhaasanac", i.e., the **?inkabelo** (the largest section), and the **?inkoria**,¹ said to have come from present-day Turkana-land (cf. below, § 1.2.1.), and a collection of immigrants or original inhabitants incorporated within the Dhaasanac society, and which are collectively called **fien metu** 'houses of the tribes' and comprise the **randal**, the **?elélle**, the **rielle**, the **kúorru**, and the **?órru**. According to our informants, the **ńaaric**, as they are more recent newcomers, do not fall into either of the two groups. This may be captured by the diagram on the next page:²



Sections do not bear much consequence in Dhaasanac society. Much more importance is attached to the clans (Dh. **tuurru**), which are technically subdivisions of sections and which are further divided into sub-clans (Dh. **ʔé** 'house' or 'family'). A complete list of clans for all Dhaasanac sections is not available, although Almagor (1978: 19–21) is very rich. Our data is presented in Appendix 3.11.)

While one may change section (as sections are primarily territorial groupings, moving oneself is a primary source of section reallocation), clan affiliation is stable; clans have special "powers" and ritual duties; e.g., the **tuurperim** have paramount ritual importance, both in war and during the **ɗimi** ceremony: they pray to God (Dh. **wáag**, which is grammatically Feminine) and prepare the fire during the **ɗimi** ceremony; the **tuurat** cut the ritual tree called **mier** (Singulative: **miedi**) (*Cordia rothii* or *sinensis*) during the **ɗimi** ceremony, while the **gaalbur** protect from crocodiles during river crossing (a partial list of clan duties and powers is given in Carr (1977: 110); cf. also § 6.2.7. for ritual curses and blessings of different clans).

As is so often the case among East African pastoralists, clans are scattered among different sections — and often among different peoples (ethnic groups), too — and are the primary focus of self-identification; cf. Schlee (1989) for an analysis (primarily based upon the Rendille), and Tosco (1998) for the consequences this fact has on the patterns of language shift. As an example, one may note that, apart from the more recent "immigrant" sections (the **rándal** and the **kúorru**), families of the **tuurperim** clan are scattered among all sections.

Other areal cultural features include the escission of the two lower incisors (**kác bim** ‘pulling out of the teeth’), and, above all, the age-group system and the division into moieties (with the exception of the **rándal** and **kúorru** sections): ‘The Dhaasanac are divided into endogamous moieties (**ḍ ḍ 1 0**). Every Dhaasanac is born into the moiety alternate to that of his or her father. The division into moieties cuts across territory, tribal sections, clan, and the age-system groupings’ (Almagor 1978: 23; transcription of Dh. terms modified according to our system).

The two moieties are called **ḍ ḍ 1 geergi** (connected with **geer-e** ‘womb’?) and **ḍ ḍ 1 5aadʔet** (“of the outside”), and regulate marriage and kinship terms (one calls ‘father’ or ‘mother’ any man or woman of the alternate moiety who is older than himself, and, analogously, ‘son’ or ‘daughter’ any male or female younger than himself).

The age-group or ‘generation-set’ (Almagor 1978) (Dh. **hári**) is the central classificatory device of the Dhaasanac society. The central point is that, again, ‘[e]ach Dhaasanac automatically belongs to the alternate generation-set of his or her father’ (Almagor 1978: 24). The names of generation-sets show a great deal of variation among different sections, and a comprehensive list has not been provided yet. The “immigrant” **randal** and **kúorru** sections have only one generation-set each, with partially different names, and the **ʔorro** are said to have only two generation-sets (cf. Carr (1977: 111–112) for a discussion and explanation).

At least for the predominant **ʔinkabelo** section, alternation is regulated by the division of the generation-sets into two triads, according to the following scheme (following Almagor (1978: 24) as confirmed by our informants; Almagor’s transcription in brackets):

nimor (Numor)	↔	nigolomojin (Nyogolomogen)
nillimito (Nilimeto)	↔	nikorio (Nikorio)
nigabiti (Nigabite)	↔	nilimkorio (Nilimkorio)

E.g., both the father and the sons of a **nigabiti** will be a **nilimkorio**, and will be called as such (Dh. **ʔiḍaa m**) by the **ʔummu** (‘sons’).

At the present time (1998), the following pattern exists:

Fathers	nigabiti	nillimito	nimor
Sons (selves)	nilimkorio	nikorio	nigolomojin
Fathers	nigabiti	nillimito	nimor

1.1.2. The “name” of the Dhaasanac

Like many other African peoples, the Dhaasanac have been very unfortunate with their ethnonym, and a small study in itself could be devoted to the various denominations (of which Grimes 1988: 218 lists

twenty-two) they have received in the literature.³ They are generally known as **galab** among the neighboring peoples, and the term is reflected in Amharic **gələb** (and **gələbiŋna** for the language) and various Western sources, often under the form *Geleba* (thus Haberland 1966), which found its way into Greenberg (1963); many variants helped to complicate the pattern, such as *Gelubba* (Shackleton 1932), or the Italianized *Gheleba* (Trento 1941). The term is felt to be derogatory by the Dhaasanac themselves, although nobody apparently knows its origin. A folk-etymology sees it as related to Amharic **gələba** ‘hull (of coffee-beans)’ (because the Dhaasanac are fond of drinking coffee-hulls in hot water, in a mixture called simply **bie kullá?** ‘hot water’). Other denominations are *Merille* (thus Shackleton 1932) — and its variants *Marille*, *Merelle*, and *Marle*. These are apparently derived from the name the Turkana gave to the Dhaasanac, i.e., **ɲimarille**, which is connected in turn with the Murle people of Sudan and Ethiopia, of which small sections live north of the Dhaasanac along the Omo-River (the so-called Omo-Murle; cf. Tornay 1981). There is also a **murle** clan among the Dhaasanac, and one must also mention that **márle** is the name given by the Dhaasanac to the Arbore (or at least to that section of the Arbore to be of “pure”, ancestral Arbore origin and to which the Dhaasanac claim to be related; Gondorobba is instead the collective name of the other sections of the Arbore; cf. Hayward 1984: 4). Still another denomination was given by Höhnel (1895) as *Reshiat* (and related variants: *Rechiat*, *Reshyat*, *Rachiat*, *Rusia*).

Another term, **šangilla**, is said to be common in Kenya, but similar names are reported for at least the following: the Aari, who live to the Northeast of the Dhaasanac, in and around the provincial capital Jinka (Grimes 1988: 216 reports *Shankilla*); the Birale (or Ongota), who live among the Tsama’ (Grimes 1988: 218 reports *Shanqilla*); and the more distant Gumuz (Grimes 1988: 220 reports again *Shanqilla*). All sources before Sasse (1974) seem to have had problems with the spelling of **dáasanac**; particularly puzzling is the use of «*th*» for *ʃ* and of final «*k*» in such forms as *Dasanek*, *Dathanik*, *Dathanaik*, *Dathanaich*, etc.

1.1.3. Studies on the language and people

Until the seventies the Dhaasanac were as unknown from an ethnographic point of view as they still are linguistically: e.g., just a couple of pages were devoted to the Dhaasanac (called Gelaba) in Cerulli (1956: 82–84).

A breakthrough came in the seventies with Uri Almagor’s studies. His 1978 monography (Almagor 1978) is still the major anthropological description of the Dhaasanac life and social organization, and was preceded and followed by other papers on various aspects of Dhaasanac social life: Almagor (1972) expounds on the “cattle complex” and the

special, symbiotic relation between men and cattle, and its consequences for the complicated and fascinating problem of name-giving among the Dhaasanac; Almagor (1972b) deals with the relationship between Dhaasanac tribal sections (also on the basis of folk tales and myths), and offers, *inter alia*, the estimated numerical strength (but based upon an estimate of 15,000 only for the whole people) and approximate location of the tribal sections; Almagor (1978b) expounds on the age-groups and the solidarity bonds which they establish.

Another major study is Carr (1977), which concentrates on the economy and ecology of the Dhaasanac, but has rich and useful data on the society and culture, too.

The best treatment of the history of the area, and of the Dhaasanac traditions in particular, is found in Sobania (1980). Sobania (1978) discusses, from an anthropologist's point of view, the relation between ethnicity and language loyalty among the Dhaasanac and other pastoral peoples of the area; Sobania (1988) focusses on the role of the little fishermen communities encapsulated amidst their powerful pastoral masters.

The linguistic studies on Dh. are limited for practical purposes to two excellent articles by Hans-Jürgen Sasse (Sasse 1974 and 1976), as well as his unpublished "Habilitationsschrift" (Sasse 1974b). Sasse's account of the phonology and morphology of Dh. is very detailed and generally in agreement with our data, but practically nothing is found on the syntax. Other works by Sasse relating to Dhaasanac are Sasse (1973) — on the development of the historical East-Cushitic pharyngeals, and Sasse (1984) — on object-incorporation. Finally, one must remember that Sasse's seminal (and never published) paper on the classification of Omo-Tana (or Macro-Somali) (Sasse 1975) was a direct offspring of Sasse's research on Dhaasanac.

Previous data is basically limited to short collections of lexical entries, none of them in phonemic transcription and often erroneous in translation. They include: Trento (1941), including 60 items in Italianized transcription; Kelly (1942, unpublished), Fleming (1965), containing 94 basic items and eight additional words relating to agriculture and pastoralism; an addendum to Haberland (1966), including 81 lexical items and the numerals from 1 to 10; Bender (1971: 251), a word-list including 97 items (based upon Swadesh's 100-item list).

Sketches of the language were given by Shackleton (1932, unpublished) and by Tucker and Bryan (1966, based upon Shackleton (1932)) and Kelly (1942)). On the basis of these poor data, Tucker (1967) attempted a typological analysis in order to ascertain the presence in the verbal system of Dh. of typical Afroasiatic features, such as the "interlocking pattern" in person marking. He concluded:

'The claims of Geleba [= Dhaasanac] to Cushitic (or even Erythraic [= Afroasiatic]) membership would appear, from

the foregoing data, to be somewhat tenuous [...] Its allocation by Greenberg to 'Eastern Cushitic', in the company of such 'orthodox' languages as Saho-Afar, Somali, and Galla is hardly convincing' (Tucker 1967: 678).

Jim and Susan Ness, of Bible Translation and Literacy (E.A.) and Wycliffe Bible Translators, have devised a practical orthography for Dhaasanac. A trial edition of the Gospel of Mark in Dhaasanach has been published in this orthography with the title *War'gat Markoká* (Gospel of Mark 1997). Genesis and Exodus 1–20 are planned for publication in 1999. Yergalech Komoi and Gosh Kwanyang' have published a transition primer for Bible Translation and Literacy (E.A.) under the title *Tujifunze Kusoma na Kuandika Ki 'Daasanach / Af 'Daasanach Veeritle Ki Onot* ["Let's learn to write Dhaasanac"]. Jim and Susan Ness have also prepared *A Preliminary Language Learning Lesson Series for The 'Daasanach Language* (Ness and Ness 1995). The main characteristics of this orthography are shown below side by side with the system used in the present study and the corresponding I.P.A. symbols where divergent from ours (cf. also Chapter 2.):

present study	B.T.L./Wycliffe	present study	B.T.L./Wycliffe
ʔ	' (word-finally only)	k	k
a	a	l	l
b	b	m	m
ḃ	'b	n	n
c	ch	ŋ	ng'
d	d	ɲ	ny
ɗ	'd, d (between vowels)	o	o
ḏ	dh	r	r
e	e	s	s
f	f	š (I.P.A. ʃ)	sh
g	g	t	t
ḡ	'g	u	u
h	h	v	v
i	i	w	w
j (I.P.A. ɟ)	j	y (I.P.A. j)	y
ɸ	'j		

In the B.T.L./Wycliffe orthography vowel length and consonant gemination are marked by doubling of the sign, but a macron is occasionally used, too. Tone is marked, it seems, when necessary for purposes of disambiguation.

1.2. The Dhaasanac language

1.2.1. Classification and history

Dhaasanac (*ʔaf dáasanac* in Dh. itself, lit. ‘language [“mouth”] of the Dhaasanac’) is an East Cushitic language of the Omo–Tana branch, as definitely established by Sasse (1975). The genetic affiliation of Dh. is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Dhaasanac genealogical tree

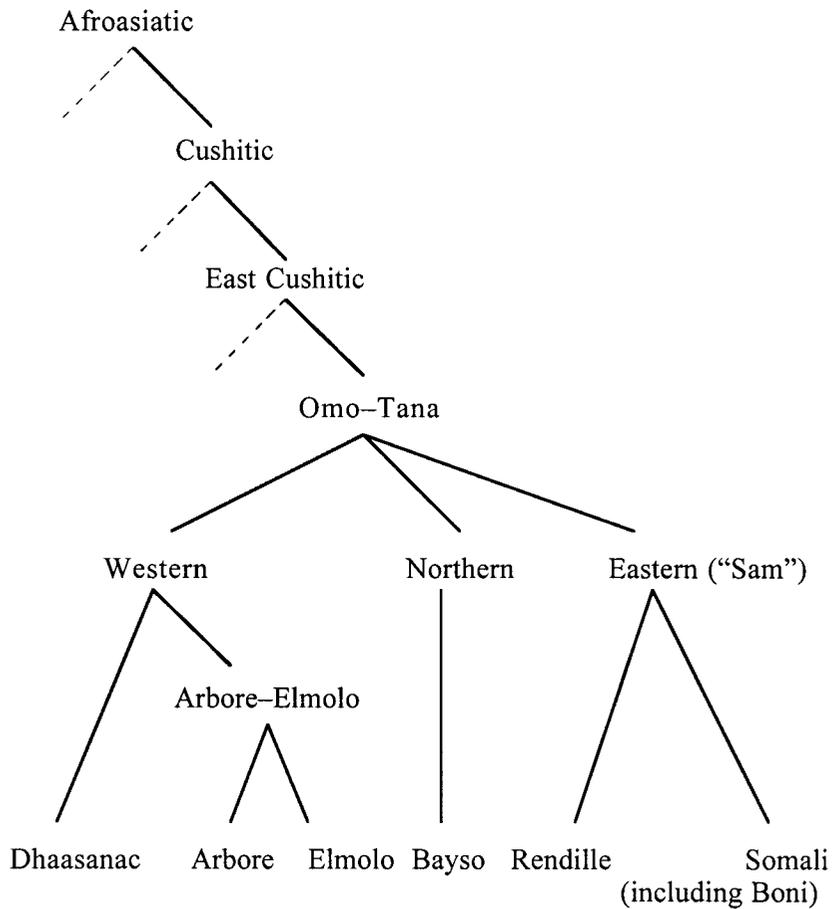


Table 1. requires a few comments: Sasse (1975) proposed Macro–Somali instead of Omo–Tana; the latter was proposed by Heine (1976b) and has gained wider acceptance. The division of Omo–Tana into three branches, Western, Central and Eastern, is the usual one. The common picture of

the Eastern sub-branch represents Boni as a separate entity, possibly halfway between Rendille and Somali. The inclusion of Boni well within the Somali dialects (in a particular subgroup of the Somali Southern dialects) has been defended in Tosco (1994c).

The membership of Dhaasanac within Omo–Tana is well established: Sasse (1976: 197) notes among the morphological correspondences to Somali: a. the Dh. genitive marker **-iet** (§ 3.6.2.), cognate with Somali **-eed**, b. the Negative Imperative marker **ha** (§ 5.5.) and its identical counterpart in Somali, the negative ending **-in** (preserved as such in Somali, reduced to **-i** in Arbore and palatalized to **-ij** in Dh.), and c. the ***-o** allomorph of the Imperative Singular of Middle–extended verbs (**/u/** in Dh., phonetically **(o)**; cf. § 4.2.1.).

As shown by Sasse (1973), Western Omo–Tana languages (i.e., Dhaasanac, Arbore and Elmolo) share a substantial number of lexical material, as well as the shift of ***/a/** to **/e/** in pharyngeal context, as witnessed by, e.g.:

Somali	cad (/ʎad/)	vs. Dh.	ʔéd	‘white’
Somali	kac (/kaʃ/)	vs. Dh.	kéʔ	‘to get up’
Rendille	nabah	vs. Dh.	nee	‘ear’
Somali	carrab (/ʎarrab/)	vs. Dh.	ʔére	‘tongue’

The special relation of Arbore with the extinct Cushitic language of the Elmolo (who shifted to Samburu early in this century) has been argued for by Hayward (1984: 37) on the basis of a few innovations of Dh. (or lack of Arbore–Elmolo innovations), the most convincing of which, in our opinion, are:

- a. the loss of the Imperfect Negative of Common Omo–Tana, essentially based upon the Dependent paradigm, and its replacement by the **-j** suffix of the Imperfect Negative, built on the basis of the Perfect Negative;
- b. the loss of the 3rd persons pronouns;
- c. the absence of the affirmative copula **-da** found in both Arbore and Elmolo.

It must however be noted that, historically, the Elmolo seem to have been in connection with the Dhaasanac and other pastoral peoples to the East of the Lake Turkana (as the Samburu and, in particular, the Rendille), rather than with the Arbore. E.g., no mention is made of the latter in the historical traditions collected by Sobania (1980).

Given the genetic classification of Dh., the utmost ignorance still reigns concerning the history of the Dh. language and the areal connections between the languages of South–West Ethiopia and the Lake Turkana basin.

From the historical traditions and myths collected by Sobania (1980), the Dhaasanac emerge as a conglomerate of peoples of different tribal affiliations, and as relative newcomers in the land they today inhabit. This is confirmed at first glance by the very quality of Dh. vocabulary and the pervasive presence in it of material of non-Cushitic origin. According to a tradition collected by Sobania (1980: 61 foll.) and confirmed by our informants, the first Dhaasanac would have come from **gerr**, said to be the land of the **ɲuube**, i.e., the Pokot, a Southern-Nilotic-speaking people living today immediately to the South of the Turkana, in Western Kenya and adjoining areas of Uganda. A major force behind their forced migration was ecological pressure, described with the metaphor of an animal which ate the grass covering a hut (**buul**; cf. Text 2.; in a legend recorded by Sobania (1980: 63), the animal was the “name-ox” of a **ɲuube**, and this caused the division between **ɲuube** and Dhaasanac). In their new homeland the Dhaasanac found a group of fishing-based people; a story recorded by Sobania speaks of **gaalbur**, a ‘man of the lake who upon emerging from the water was caught, adopted, and given livestock, a cattle brand, a house and a wife’ (Sobania 1980: 57). This would intimate that the Dhaasanac adopted the language of an earlier fishing community living alongside the lake and the southern course of the Omo River. Today the **gaalbur** are a Dhaasanac clan, and have magical power over **?anic** ‘the crocodile’ and **wár** ‘the Lake [Turkana]’. Thus, a Gaalbur will curse saying **?anic hɪ ko yes ~ kuu** ‘may the crocodile kill/eat you!’ or **wár hɪ ko ces** ‘may the river kill you!’.

According to Sobania (1980: 62), who recorded the Turkana version of the story, all this happened as a consequence of the Turkana expansion, which caused the **ɲuube** to split, with some groups fleeing south (and becoming the Pokot people), and other members moving north (and becoming the present-day Dhaasanac). **gerr** would therefore *not* be the modern land of the Pokot, but an area on the Western side of Lake Turkana, in what is today Turkanaland. What is surprising, and constitutes a further confirmation of the suddenness of this kind of language shift, is that all this did not happen until ‘*the first decades of the nineteenth century*’ (Sobania 1980: 62; emphasis ours). If the Pokot kept the original language of the **ɲuube**, i.e., a Southern Nilotic language (of the Nilo-Saharan phylum), the Dhaasanac would be former Southern-Nilotic-speakers,⁴ and the language object of the present study should rather be called, in historical terms, “**?af gaalbur**”. Needless to say, an in-depth investigation of the Pokot vocabulary could reveal substratal traces of Southern-Nilotic in Dhaasanac. At a superficial glance, nothing has been found. Again, this is a further, negative, proof of the pervasive character of these East African abrupt language shifts (cf. Tosco (1998) for further examples and a formalization in terms of the Catastrophe Theory).

1.2.2. Grammatical profile

The main purpose of this work is to present the African linguist and the general linguist alike with a fairly usable description of the language, which may serve as a basis for further theoretical and/or comparative studies. The present grammar is therefore basically couched in broad, unformalized terms, following a “Basic Linguistic Theory” framework (cf. Dixon 1997), although a certain degree of formalization is attempted in the chapter on Phonology (§ 2.), where concepts from Natural and Generative Phonology are put to use from time to time.

Dh. has a number of interesting features for the general linguist. Phonologically, it has at least the following points of typological interest:

- for at least two articulation points (alveolar and palatal), the implosive segment is much more common than the plain voiced one (in the case of the palatal, the plain is virtually absent);
- Dh. has very few fricatives: a laminal voiced fricative /ð/ and a voiceless apical /s/ in the coronal area, plus a labiodental /f/ and a palatoalveolar /ʃ/ ([ʃ]);
- while a voiceless glottal stop /ʔ/ is phonological, the Strict Onset Principle causes an otherwise vowel-initial word to be supplied with a laryngeal onset /h/.

At the suprasegmental level, Dh. is a fairly “classical” pitch–accent language of East Africa — but note that many monosyllables contrast for the presence/absence of accent, and that absence of accent seems on the whole far more common than its presence.

Dh. is a highly fusional language, and morphology is the most complex, fascinating (and frustrating) part of its grammar. Its complexity is the result not so much of any exceptional richness in morphemes, but in allomorphs. Dh. looks even poorer than genetically-related languages as far as its inflectional morphology is concerned. But it is the bewildering amount of downright irregularities which attracts attention, as remarked by Sasse:

‘If all types of distinct formal behaviour (including the different kinds of person marking, etc.) were to be considered for verb classification (i.e., for each verb differing from another with respect to one form not accounted for by simply storable general morphophonemic rules a new class would have to be set up), then Galab [= Dhaasanac] would perhaps reveal the unique example of a language in which nearly every single verb forms a distinct morphological class of its own’ (Sasse 1974: 426).

It is the high number of inflectional irregularities within a language group in which morphology, albeit rich, is essentially regular, which perhaps

caused Tucker (1967) to even doubt the genetic affiliation of Dh. (§ 1.1.3.).

The following categories have been identified in Dh. (with the numbers in parentheses referring to the relevant sections in the grammar):

- Nouns (§ 3.)
- Verbs (§ 4.)
- Adjectives (§ 5.1.)
- Pronouns (§ 5.2.)
- Determinatives (§ 5.3.)
- Adpositions (§ 5.4.)
- Focus and Sentence Markers (§ 5.5.)
- Adverbials (§ 5.6.)
- Conjunctions (§ 5.7.)
- Interjections and ideophones (§ 5.8.)

Only two of these categories are open, insofar as they may have new members added to them: nouns and verbs. The category of nouns is extended through compounding and through borrowing; the category of verbs is extended through denominalizing verbalization devices. The other categories are closed. Dh. nouns show variation according to the parameters of gender, number and case. There are two genders: Masculine and Feminine. Gender has syntactic relevance insofar as it is obligatorily marked in the cross-referencing of verbs (3rd person Masculine and Feminine subject nouns selecting different verbal endings). The gender distinction may be overtly expressed in the lexical form of the noun by a Terminal Vowel, a Formative, or a Suffix, but the gender of unextended nouns (i.e. the nouns which are identical to their stem) is not predictable on the basis of their meaning nor from their phonological form. Nouns with an animate referent may have a grammatical gender which is the opposite of what one might expect on the basis of the sex of their referent. Alternatively, different stems may be used for the male and the female of animates. Gender agreement in the NP is always optional.

As is common in other East Cushitic languages, certain nouns may exhibit the so-called phenomenon of “gender polarity”, whereby a noun expresses number by changing its gender; in Dh. gender polarity is never used alone in order to denote number, and the total number of nouns exhibiting polarity is rather low. The connection of gender with number is also evident insofar as the overwhelming majority of all Plural nouns are grammatically Masculine.

In the analysis of number morphology it is necessary to posit, as a counting unit, a Basic form of the noun. From the Basic form either a Plural or a Singulative may be derived, or, in a limited number of cases, both. Certain subclasses of nouns (proper names, collectives, and also many apparent loans) are not number-sensitive.

Case is limited to Absolutive (unmarked), Subject and Genitive. As in many Cushitic languages, Dh. is a marked–nominative language, in which the Absolutive, rather than the Subject case–form, acts as the basic, citation form of a noun. The Subject case–form is limited to morphologically unextended (by suffixes) nouns; the use of the Subject case–form is syntactically restricted to unfocused and unextended (by modifiers) subject nouns. In these sentences the Subject marks both A and S, while the Absolutive is used for O.

The Genitive case finds a wider application, but its use is again partially avoided through a different possessive strategy. On the whole, the head–marking category of case is recessive in Dh.

The predicate is the most complex part of grammar and the only obligatory element in a clause. It is also the category which bears the maximum load of information. In verbal inflection a number of sentence–level semantic and syntactic categories find their expression:

a. categories which index the subject of the sentence on the verb (and which share a single set of morphemes):

- Person (1st, 2nd, 3rd),
- Number (Singular, Plural),
- Gender (only for a Third person subject),
- Inclusion vs. Exclusion of the addressee (only for a First person Plural subject).

b. categories expressing the non–spatial setting of the sentence:

- Tense (Perfect [= past], and Imperfect [= non–past]),
- Mood (Main, Dependent, Imperative/Jussive),
- Polarity (Positive, Negative).

Another category, Aspect, is expressed through the combination of Tense and Mood marking, and, partially, by a specific paradigm.

Still other categories find their expression in verbal derivation. From a Basic stem one or more derived stems are derived through suffixation, and express Causative and/or Benefactive. Reduplication is another productive derivational process, and applies to both Basic and Derived stems.

Inflectional categories interact in a relatively small number of inflectional endings. Most inflectional distinctions are not expressed on the verbal form alone, but in conjunction with the subject pronouns: due to pervasive assimilation and reduction processes, the derivational and inflectional systems commonly found in other Cushitic languages have almost collapsed in Dh.

Within any paradigm (defined as a set of verbal forms expressing the intersection of tense, mood and polarity), a maximum of two forms only are distinguished, expressing number–gender–inclusiveness distinctions.

Dh. is on the whole a dependent–marking language (following Nichols' 1986 terminology), in which syntactic relations are morphologically marked on the dependent of the constituent.

At the word–order level, Dh. is strictly SOV at sentence–level and consistently Head–Modifier (or Head–Dependent) at clause–level — following a fairly typical East Cushitic pattern (cf. Tosco 1994b). Following Heine’s typological classification of the African languages (Heine 1976) Dh. is thus a Type D language.

Subordinate clauses are all expressed as relative clauses and are marked by specific verbal paradigms and the presence at their end of the General Determinative **ka**. They are consistently placed before the main clause.

As in other Cushitic languages, a central role in syntax is played by focus (either verbal or nominal) and topic. Both categories are morphologically expressed.

1.3. Collection of data

My fieldwork was carried out during three periods, in April 1996, October–November 1996, and in August–September 1998.

During most of the research I was based in Jinka (the provincial capital of the “Southern Omo Zone”), approximately 220 km from Omoraate, and outside the Dhaasanac–speaking area (in Jinka, as in most urban settlements of the area, mostly Amharic is spoken, together with Southern Omotic Aari, which is the language of the surrounding countryside).

My first informants were students at the local Junior Secondary School, which is the only secondary educational institution of the Southern Omo Zone. They were, among others: Moses Nanok Yirg’alle (aged 18 in 1998) and Nyeguron Ammunyo (aged 15). During the worst part of the Ethiopian civil war Moses Nanok had spent a few years with relatives in Kenya, where he had attended school; at the time of my fieldwork he had a much better knowledge of English than of Amharic, and was the Dhaasanac with the highest level of education. He soon became my main informant, and my gateway to the Dhaasanac people. He introduced me to his family, with whom I carried out a good part of my fieldwork on the western side of the Omo river, either in Kalam (**k a l a a m**, in June 1996), in Nyomemeri (**ṗ o m e m e r i**, in November of the same year), and in **k o ḑ o k o ḑ o** (a small settlement West of Kalaam, in August 1998). In the initial stages of my fieldwork I elicited the Dhaasanac data using English and Amharic. During my stay among the Dhaasanac, I collected texts and checked vocabulary items and grammatical points with Moses’ mother, Erek G’uoteko (approximately 40 years of age), and his father, Yirg’alle Loboco, an elder who had memories of World War II (see Text 2.) and was probably between 60 and 70 years of age. Other texts were collected from Yiwalamoy Kamarinyan, Teerle Lotolim, Yirg’ilieb Alunya, and others.

My data is comprised of more than 85 hours of recorded material, dozens of narrative texts, riddles, songs, interviews, and many non-literary texts.

Notes

¹ Both **?inkoria** and **?inkabelo** are Turkana words: the first is the plural of **ε-korri** ‘honey badger’; **?inkabelo** means ‘sparks, grits, pieces’ (G.J. Dimmendaal, p.c.).

² A rather different picture was proposed by Almagor (1978: 17), in which the **ɲaariɕ** are part of the **ʃiir**; Almagor further interpreted **ʃien metu** as **ʃien metu** (transcribed “Yenmeto”), i.e., ‘names of giraffe’, ‘colloquially explained as meaning just a “collection of pieces”’ (Almagor 1978: 15).

³ Sasse (1976: 196), notes that ‘confusion exists regarding nearly every aspect of this language. This begins with the designation itself, of which there are at least 20 variants in the literature’.

⁴ The Pokot language is classified as:

{< Kalenjin {< Southern Nilotic {< Nilotic {< Eastern Sudanic {< Nilo-Saharan}}}}}