FROM GENDER IDENTIFICATION TO ASSERTION: ON THE USE OF -TTE AND -TTA IN ZARGULLA, AN ENDANGERED OMOTIC LANGUAGE[1]

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Zargulla is a member of the East-Ometo branch of the Omotic language family. It is spoken within the Bonke district in South-west Ethiopia. In the 1994 national census, about 8000 mother-tongue speakers of Zargulla are reported. Of these, 390 claim that they are ethnic Zargulla; the others consider themselves ethnic **Gamo**, a name also used to refer to a demographically and socially dominant group that speaks a distinct (North Ometo) language known as **Gamotso** 'the language of the Gamo'. This ethnic identification led the authorities to treat the Zargulla and Gamo people as speakers of the same language. Because of this, Zargulla is dominated by Gamo and risks extinction. The two languages belong to two different subgroups of the Ometo branch of Omotic and they are not mutually intelligible. In some grammatical features such as verbal inflection and focus marking they are very different. In the present contribution we will examine one of the features that distinguishes Zargulla from Gamo and other North Ometo languages. This involves the morphological marking of emphatic assertion and focus.

Le Zargulla fait partie de la branche Est-ometo de la famille omotique. Il est parlé à l'intérieur de la region Bonke au sud-ouest de l'Ethiopie. Lors du recensement national de 1994, à peu près 8000 personnes ont été identifiées comme ayant le Zargulla comme langue maternelle. 390 d'entre elles ont dis qu'elles étaient de l'ethnie zargulla; les autres se considèrent comme étant de l'ethnie Gamo. Or le nom Gamo fait reference demographiquement et socialement à un groupe dominant qui parle une langue distincte nord-ometo. La langue de ce groupe s'appelle Gamotso, ce qui veux dire 'la langue des Gamos'. Cette identification ethnique a amené les autorités à traiter les Zargullas et les Gamos comme s'ils parlaient la même langue. Le résultat est que le Zargulla est dominé par le Gamotso et risque par conséquent de disparaître. Les deux langues appartiennent en réalité à deux sous-groupes différents de la branche ometo de la famille omotique et ne sont pas mutuellent intelligibles. Concernant quelques traits grammaticaux tels que l'inflection verbale et le marqueur de focus, ils sont complètement differents. Dans cet article, nous examinons l'un des traits qui distinguent le Zargulla du Gamotso et d'autres langues nord-ometos. C'est le marqueur morphologique de l'assertion emphatique et de focus.

0. INTRODUCTION

On paper, Ethiopia has had an ideal language policy since the early 1990s. The policy is protected by the Constitution which was proclaimed in 1995. According to the policy, all languages in the country have equal rights and can be promoted for official use in administration and education. In practice, larger regional languages are growing rather quickly at the cost of smaller languages. There are at least seventy languages in the country, several of which can be found in the South. The languages differ a lot demographically: some languages have over a million speakers, others have hundreds of thousands whereas there are some with only a few thousand or even a few hundred speakers. In the present contribution we will examine the case of

Zargulla, one of the smaller languages spoken in the so-called Southern Ethiopian Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State (SNNPRS) of federal Ethiopia.

Zargulla is the name by which the language is known among linguists and in official documents in Ethiopia, e.g. the 1994 national census, which reports that there are 7890 mother tongue speakers of Zargulla. The speakers identify themselves as **Gamo** and their language as **Gamotso**. They use 'Zargulla' to refer to the area where they live and in reference to their Senior Sacrificer (chief) whom they call **Zargulla kaati** (chief of Zargulla area). In the 1994 census, there is a big difference in the figures about language speakers and ethnic identity in the case of Zargulla. While under 'mother tongue speakers' the figure for Zargulla is 7890, in the section where 'ethnic Zargulla' is mentioned, the figure was only 390. This discrepancy occurs because the majority of the people identify themselves as **Gamo**.

Somehow confusingly, there is another dominant linguistic group (800,000 people, 1994 census) just to the north of the Zargulla, who identify themselves as **Gamo** and their language as **Gamotso** and are known officially by this name. Within Zargulla territory itself there are people who speak the same language as the official **Gamotso**. The Zargulla people identify this language as **Zeegétso** whereas the speakers identify themselves as **ɗaac'e** and their language as **ɗaac'etso.** Zargulla is not mutually intelligible with the **Gamo** language (i.e. **Zeegétso** or **ɗaac'etso** as it is known in Zargulla area). In Zargulla, the terms **Gamo** and **ɗaačé** are also understood as clan names, associated with a subtle social hierarchy.[2]

In the linguistic classification, Zargulla belongs to the East Ometo branch of Omotic whereas Gamo belongs to the North Ometo branch of Omotic (cf. Fleming 1976). Languages that are closely related to Zargulla and are classified with it as East Ometo languages are Koorete, Haro, and Zayse, and a number of other little-known languages or dialects such as Garbantsa, Mäle and Ganta (cf. Wondimu Gaga 2006). The official Gamo language is classified as a member of the North Ometo branch of Omotic which also includes Dawro, Gofa and Wolaitta. Omotic it self is part of the larger Afroasiatic language family whose other members are Berber, Chadic, Cushitic, Egyptian and Semitic. In the remaining parts of this paper I refer to the official Gamo language (i.e. the one identified as North Ometo Gamo by linguists) as 'Gamo' and use the term 'Zargulla' as it is already known among linguists, i.e., a name for one of the East Ometo languages.

1. ENDANGERMENT OF THE ZARGULLA LANGUAGE AND THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC SITUATION IN THE AREA

Following the 1993 ethnic group and/or language-based regional division of the country, Zargulla and Gamo were put under one regional administration, known as the **Arbaminch Zuria Woredawocc**. The Zargulla are administratively recognized as belonging to one and the same linguistic group with (the north Ometo) Gamo. Zayse speakers, linguistically the closest to Zargulla, were rather placed in the Dirashe administrative zone where the Cushitic languages including Gidole, Dirayta, Bussa, etc. are dominant.

The regional division and local language policies seem to have the unintended result of threatening the Zargulla language. Gamo became the language of administration and medium of education. For more than ten years it has been used to

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[2] In Zargulla area, younger people from the two clans exchange jokes and talk about stereotypes associated to the clan names. According to Freeman (2006:90) in the official **Gamótso**, the term **ɗaac'e**, "while not a very common word, has the connotation of acting lordly. And 'to be Gamo' means 'to be conquered" (Freeman 2006: 90).

teach Zargulla children with the so-called 'mother-tongue education' initiative. The first batch of these students have reached grade 10 and above, and are fluent in Gamo. A large number of the Zargulla people are already bilingual in Gamo, particularly those that live in villages where the variety of Gamo known as **ɗaac'etso** or **Zeegetso** is spoken side by side Zargulla. In the past ten years or so there has been strong exposure to Gamo as an administrative language, language of education (also in teacher-training colleges) and local radio programs. If this trend continues it will broaden bilingualism and may perhaps lead to shift from Zargulla to Gamo because of the latter's higher status. It is noteworthy that in schools in Zargulla the written (North Ometo) Gamo language is identified as **ɗaac'étso** both by pupil and teachers, a term which is already traditionally associated with a higher social hierarchy, as we mentioned earlier.

The Zargulla-Gamo link is not only the result of administrative boundaries and policy but it is partly because of the historical link between the two groups. A British anthropologist who has done long-term research on the northern Gamo and in the Zargulla area writes the following about the problem of identifying linguistic and ethnic boundaries in the area to which the Zargulla and Gamo belong:

> There are well over 40 communities, or **deres**[3], in the Gamo Highlands. Roughly speaking, all those **deres** south of the **dere** of Bonke are "Gamo" **deres**, while all those further north are "D'ache" **deres**. In the Gamo **deres** there are people who belong to Gamo clans and people who belong to D'ache clans. In most cases there are far more people from Gamo clans than D'ache clans, although in a few cases the numbers are approximately equal. The Gamo and D'ache clans speak different languages. Most people in Gamo **deres** speak both languages, although there are some people from D'ache clans who only speak a rudimentary Gamotso [i.e. Zargulla, AA] (Freeman, 2006:85)

Freeman (2002, 2006) notes that although the cultural forms of the two groups are similar, e.g. both are agricultural societies and have sacrificial and initiation ceremonies, there are significant differences as well. For example, in the sacrificial system there is a difference in the hierarchy and title of the people involved. The Zargulla have a neat hierarchy of sacrificers with titles such as **kawo** (senior sacrificer), **sagga**, **demuts,** etc. Furthermore, such a title is inherited. In contrast in Gamo there is limited hierarchy; titles of the officers at the lower levels differ from the titles among the Zargulla, and each title is acquired through initiation only. The Zargulla have an 'origin myth' about their senior sacrificers (**kawos**) which connects them to the Koorete and Oyda whereas that origin myth is not known at all in Gamo. After a close scrutiny of their current cultural practices and their history, Freeman concludes the following about the Gamo-Zargulla link:

> Prior to the 16th century, most people in the Gamo Highlands belonged to Gamo clans [i.e., Zargulla, AA], followed a cultural form fairly similar to that found in Zargulla or Ch'oye today (with hereditary **kawos** and **maagas** and a neatly stacked sacrificial system) and probably spoke what is now the southern Gamo language [i.e.,

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3 The term **dere** is translated as 'people that belong to the same community' and 'space in mountaineous area'.

> Zargulla, AA]. During the late 16th and early 17th cent., during and
> after the Oromo migrations, it is likely that there was a great influx of
> people into the northern parts of the highlands. Many Oromo and
> Wolaitta people probably moved up into the mountains to find space
> away from the chaos that was taking place in the lowlands (Freeman
> 2006: 90)

Freeman (2006) suggests that the variation in names of the groups as **ɗaače** and **Gamo** is also related to the above-mentioned history of population movement and language shift. She writes (p. 90): "Bahrey, writing from the northern Gamo Highlands in 1593, refers to a group of Oromo called "D'ac'". This is possibly the origin of the word **ɗaač'e** which is used in Zargulla to refer to speakers of the North Ometo language Gamo. Freeman's findings thus suggest an important new direction about the historical relationship among the Ometo groups. Her conclusion may need further testing from different fields of study. From the evidence presented so far, her theory is plausible and it is a reminder that the Zargulla language is at risk for the second time in recent history.

In the remaining parts of this paper, we will discuss one characteristic feature of Zargulla that distinguishes it clearly from Gamo. The topic involves the parallel grammaticalization of the masculine and feminine affirmative copula[4] markers -**tte** and -**tta** as focus and emphatic assertion markers respectively. Azeb Amha (2008), shows that in some grammatical contexts, the variation in vowel quality between the two morphemes (-**tte** and -**tta**) indicates masculine and feminine gender distinction of the subject of the copula clause. However, there are indications that the gender identification role is becoming marginal because some speakers use the two morphemes interchangeably without any apparent difference in the expression of gender. Instead, the copula morphemes -**tte** and -**tta** have different pragmatic values such as indicating contrastive focus (-**tte**) and marking a specific utterance type namely, stronger assertion (-**tta**). In the present contribution we focus on these extended functions of -**tte** and -**tta**, i.e. the relation between gender identification and marking of focus and a specific utterance type. We offer a preliminary analysis of the motivation for the link between the two functions.

The morphemes -**tte** and -**tta** marking copula, focus or emphatic constructions discussed in the present work are not attested in Gamo (cf. Hompó 1990, Hayward 1994, among others). In Gamo the copula is marked by -**ko**. According to Hompó (1990:390), "[I]n the affirmative and interrogative it is optional. It has a single form, which is invariant with respect to tense, aspect and mood." We cannot ascertain from the existing literature, whether -**ko** in Gamo is used as a marker of focus or emphatic assertion.

Data for the present analysis is drawn from an ongoing research on the Zargulla language; fieldwork on the language was conducted by the author in February 2002, during September-December 2003 in **ɗimálle**, and in May-June 2005 in **Geretse**[5].

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[4] An alternative way to characterize the morphemes in question is as 'predicative markers'. However, in Cushitic and Omotic language studies it is common to use the term 'copula' alsofor predicative markers that are not verbs. I will use the term 'copula' following this tradition.

2. THE USE OF -**tte** and -**tta** IN ZARGULLA

Often the choice between the affirmative copula markers -**tte** and -**tta**
corresponds with masculine and feminine gender, respectively, as described in Azeb
Amha (2008). In this function the two morphemes serve to identify participants in
discourse. There are, however, other discourse-pragmatic functions of these two
morphemes which probably developed in conjunction to gender identification in
copula clauses. In the present contribution, emphasis will be on these extended
meanings of the -**tte** and -**tta** morphemes. Sections 2.1 and 2.2 summarise Azeb Amha
(2008). After a general introduction on gender marking in Zargulla (section 2.1), in
section 2.2, we describe copula constructions in Zargulla, separating the parts which
do indicate gender distinction from those where no such distinction is made. In section
3 we discuss the use of -**tte** and -**tta** to mark pragmatic functions which at first sight
seem to have little to do with gender distinction. In section 4 we discuss how the
semantic-based gender system is extended to marking specific utterance types. We do
not mark a morpheme boundary between the consonant and vowel members of the
morphemes -**tta** and -**tte**; and we simply gloss them as copula-1 (COP.1) and copula-2
(COP.2) respectively.

2.1   GENDER MARKING IN ZARGULLA

In Omotic languages, grammatical gender, manifested through obligatory
agreement is not widely used. Rather, most Omotic languages make a semantic-based
masculine and feminine gender-distinction which is directly marked on nouns. The
distinction is important for larger animate nouns. Other nouns may be generalized to
one of the two classes of animate nouns as is the case in Wolaitta in which the forms
which mark masculine gender are also used to mark inanimate nouns. In some
languages such as Maale animate nouns may alternatively take feminine or masculine
gender depending on size or other contextual information. In Zargulla two (semantic)
genders are distinguished. For animate nouns the distinction is based on the sex of the
referent: a noun that refers to a female entity is differently marked from those that
refer to male entity. Feminine is the default gender, which is formally marked but
functionally unmarked (cf. Hayward 1989 on the notion of default gender in Ometo).
That is, the morphological gender marker which is normally used to designate the
feminine form of large animate nouns is affixed to inanimate or abstract nouns (cf.
examples 13-17). Gender is marked only on singular nouns; plural nouns are not
marked for gender.

There are about six domains where gender is morphologically marked. These
include:

a) marking on the noun itself through the selection of distinct definiteness
markers (1), or through using a distinct feminine genitive case marker (2). Masculine
genitive is zero-marked; in example (2b), the morpheme -**(á)z** cannot be analysed as a
masculine genitive case marker because it is also attested preceding other case
markers (e.g. the nominative -**í**). Rather, -**(á)z** is a masculine definiteness marker
which contrasts with the feminine definiteness marker -**att(o)**-, as in the last two
examples in (1).

(1)   **ʔimats**   a guest
       ʔimats-áz-í   the guest (M:DEF-NOM)
       ʔimasʼ-atto-í   the guest (F:DEF-NOM)

(2)   a.   **doró   ʔaápé   zoʔó-tta**
             sheep   eye   red-COP.1
             A sheep's eye is red

       b.   **doró-z   ʔaápé   zoʔó-tta**
             sheep-M:DEF   eye   red-COP.1
             The (M) sheep's eye is red

       c.   **dorr-í   ʔaápé   zoʔó-tta**
             sheep-F:DEF:GEN   eye   red-COP.1
             The (F) sheep's eye is red

   b) gender distinction of third person singular is marked on the verb through -**s**- and -**iš**- as in,

(3)   a.   **maák'-ó-tte-s-ínne**
             return-INT-FOC-3MS-PAST
             He returned

       b.   **maák'-ó-tt-iš-ínne**
             return-INT-FOC-3FS-PAST
             She returned

   c) through distinct subject and object pronouns for the third person singular: **ʔési** 'he', **ʔísí** 'she' and **ʔésá** 'him', **ʔísó** 'her'.

   d) in nominalized relative clauses:

(4)   a.   **geretsa   ham-éss-í**
             G.   go-M:NMZ:REL-NOM
             The one (M) who went to Geretse ...

       b.   **geretsa   ham-íss-í**
             G.   go-F:NMZ:REL-NOM
             The one (F) who went to Geretse....

(5)   a.   **ham-ádés-áz-í**
             go-FUT:NMZ:REL-M:DEF-NOM
             The one (M) who will go...

       b.   **ham-ádés-átt-í**
             go-FUT:NMZ:REL-F:DEF-NOM
             The one (F) who will go...

   e) in demonstratives, where the feminine form is overtly marked through -**nn(o)**- as in, **seí** 'that (M or F:NOM)', **sénnoí** 'that (F:NOM)'; **haí** 'this (M or F:NOM), **hannoí** 'this (F:NOM)'.
   f) Finally, gender distinction is marginally morphologically marked in copular clauses, as we will show in the next section.

2.2. THE COPULAR CONSTRUCTION IN ZARGULLA

When a noun, adjective, pronoun or demonstrative is used predicatively, it is often affixed with the copula markers **-tte** or **-tta** as in examples (6-7). In the examples in (6) and (7b), the vowel u before the copula marker **-tta**, is an epenthetic vowel.

(6)   a.   **haí   tá   maats-ú-tta**
            this   1SG.GEN   thing-EP-COP.1
            This is mine

       b.   **haí   tá   maats-ú-tte**
            this   1SG.GEN   thing-EP-COP.2
            This is mine

(7)   a.   **zargul-eɗé   gádé-y   žillá-tte**
            Zargulla-PL   land-NOM   green-COP.2
            The land of the Zargulla (people) is fertile

       b.   **paranj-eɗé   ʔúmmá-y   boóts-u-tta**
            westerner-PL   hair-NOM   white-EP-COP.1
            The hair of westerners is white

Occasionally, in conversation, the copula affixes are dropped. For example, as a reaction to the utterance in (8a), the speaker gives the response in (8b), in which none of the copula suffixes is attached to the nominal **s'amáta maáts** 'skim milk'. Similarly, in (9) the copula marker is not attached to the word **šaató** 'child' as expected.

(8)   a.   **maáts   hís-oosi   s'amáta   maáts-u-tta**
            milk   say-REL   fresh   milk-EP-COP.1
            What (you) consider (good) milk is skim milk

       b.   **hóo   s'amáta   maáts**
            yes   fresh   milk
            Yes, it is fresh milk

(9)   **birá   bíšš-att-í   šaató   ʔangúss   maák'k'-eésí**
         earlier   wife- F:DEF-F:GEN   child   eldest   happen-IPF.REL
         It is the first wife's child who is considered the eldest
         [i.e. this child is responsible for managing the family and inheritance, even if he is younger than the son(s) of the second wife]

In some contexts, the choice between -**tte** and -**tta** makes a semantic difference. Namely, it identifies the gender of the subject of the predicative clause. When the subject is masculine the copula suffix with the vocalic ending **e** is attached to the non-verbal predicate; when the subject is feminine the copula with **a** ending is used for the same purpose. In identificational clauses in which the nucleus of the predicate is a third person pronoun, and the subject is covert (elliptic), the gender distinction is more consistently made (but see below for a different interpretation of the combination of third person pronouns and the -tta morpheme). Examples of these are given in (10b),

which are possible responses to the question in (10a). Note that, in such predicative pronouns, the consonant of the copula morpheme is not geminated (i.e. -**ta/-te** in example 10b rather than -**tta/-tte**). Moreover, the last segment of the pronoun is dropped when the copula is added to it[6]; compare these to the corresponding subject and object pronouns: **ʔísí** 'he', **ʔésí** 'she' and **ʔésá** 'him', **ʔísó** 'her'.

(10) a. **ʔoóde ʔísi-s   kašš-é**
          who   3FS-DAT   tell-REL:PAST
          Who told her?

      b. **ʔís-ta**   It is her (She told her)   (cf. * **ʔís-te**)
          ʔés-te   It is him (He told her)   (cf. * **ʔés-ta**)

Similar to the case in (10), -**tta** and -**tte** in the examples in (11) are selected to match the overtly expressed gender distinction on the subject of the copula clause (i.e. the deictic form **ha ʔísóy** 'this one (F:NOM)' and **ha ʔísí** 'this one (M:NOM)') as well as the gender markers -**iš** and -**s** on the interrogative pronoun **ʔaála-so** 'why'). Here one can speak of gender distinction by concord.

(11) a. **ha ʔísó-y   s'eenaáde-tta   ʔaála-so-íš hakíme-so yeéde**
          this 3FS-NOM   health.father-COP.1   why-LOC-F   doctor-LOC come:PF
          This one (F) is healthy. Why did she come to the clinic?

      b. **ha ʔís-í   s'eenaáde-tte   ʔaála-so-s**
          this 3MS-NOM   health.father.ACC-COP.2   why-LOC-M

          hakíme-so   yeéde
          doctor-LOC   come-PF
          This one (M) is healthy. Why did he come to the clinic?

Many speakers volunteer simple adjectival predicate clauses in such a way that the copula markers -**tte** and -**tta** correspond to masculine and feminine gender respectively, as in (12). However, some assistants stated that it is also possible to exchange the copula markers in these cases[7].

(12) a. **ʔésí   túlle-tte**
          3MS:NOM   deaf-COP.2
          He is deaf

      b. **ʔísí   túlle-tta**
          3FS:NOM   deaf-COP.1
          She is deaf

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[6] This is the only context where the final vocalic segment of the pronoun, which is associated with case distinction, is dropped.

[7] The age of the Zargulla speakers who assisted in the fieldwork varied: they were between early 20s and 60s, some of whom followed formal education (high school students, teachers and people working in different service sectors). From these speakers it was not evident that age, gender and education play a role in the use of -**tte** and -**tta**. Some younger speakers were conscious of the gender distinctions marked by the two morphemes. Others stated that both -**tte** and -**tta** can be combined either with semantically masculine or feminine animate nouns. The same idiolectal variation was observed with the relatively older people. However, this sociological aspect has not been studied systematically with a large number of speakers.

The distribution of the copula markers -**tte** and -**tta** corresponds to the overall gender-marking pattern observed within noun phrases and in subject agreement-marking in verbs. That is, when the subject of a verbal sentence is inanimate, it is often treated as a feminine noun, e.g. through using third person feminine agreement inflection on the verb. Similarly, when the subject of a predicative nominal is inanimate, the commonly used copula morpheme is -**tta**, which is related to the feminine gender (13).

(13) a. **mins'ó-y   dic'ó-tta**
          tree-NOM   big-COP.1
          The tree is tall/high

      b. **ʔísí   dees'ó-tta**
          3FS:NOM   heavy-COP.1
          It is heavy [referring to a plastic jerry can.]

In 'weather expressions' involving a non-verbal predicate and an inanimate subject, the copula marker -**tta** is used.

(14) a. **gádé-y   ʔawá-tta**
          earth-NOM   sun-COP.1
          It is sunny

      b. **gádé-y   ʔírá-tta**
          earth-NOM   rain-COP.1
          It is rainy

Another context where the copula marker -**tta** is consistently attached to the predicative nominal is when the subject is a verbal-nominal (infinitive).

(15) a. **muús-í   lóʔʔó-tta**
          eat.INF-NOM   good-COP.1
          Eating is good (Infininitive: **muús)**

      b. **ʔúšš-í   lóʔó-tta**
          drink-NOM   good-COP.1
          Drinking is good **(Infininitive: ʔúšš)**

      c. **zargulá yew-é-y   metuts-eés-ta**
          Zargulla come-INF-NOM   trouble.CAUS-REL:IPF-COP.1
          Coming to Zargulla (area) is difficult (Infininitive: **yewe)**

With demonstratives referring to inanimate subjects too, we find the feminine copula marker -**tta**. In demonstratives the consonant of the copula marker is a geminate as in noun phrases (cf. the case of predicative personal pronouns in example (10b):

(16) a.   **hií-tta   s'unduk'a   híyy-útt-es-í**
            that-COP.1   **s'unduk'a**   say-PAS-PAST.NMZ-NOM
            It is *that* which is called **s'unduk'a** (**s'unduk'a** = a kind of food)

      b.   **sénní-tta   ló??ó-y**
            that.F-COP.1   good-NOM
            That is better
            (said in reference to a suggestion on where to place a guest for the night)

Note that in the examples in (16), the subject of the copula clause occurs following the predicate. The pragmatic effect of this constituent order alternation seems to be related to focus/emphasis. If this assumption is correct, it would suggest that the major function of the morpheme -**tta** is not to mark focus (see section 3) . Rather -**tta** marks a strong assertion of an identity or equation in a context in which the assertion is challenged or unexpected.

The expression **hóo ?ísta** 'yes, that is it!' (lit. 'That is **her**') is frequently used as exclamation to confirm an utterance (e.g. when one is trying to remember/guess a name of a person, place or some object). This confirms that feminine is the default gender.

Plural predicative-nominals also often take **-tta** ending as demonstrated in (17) but for some speakers, the same utterance with **-tte** is also acceptable.

(17) **mins'i   zagar-eɗe-í   dic'-eɗé-tta**
      tree:GEN   branch-PL-NOM   tall-PL-COP.1
      The branches of the tree are big

As we demonstrated in this section, the copula markers -**tte** and -**tta** are related to masculine and feminine gender respectively. However, gender-marking through these morphemes is becoming of secondary importance, since speakers are not always consistent in the choice of the two morphemes according to the gender semantics. Some speakers use the two morphemes interchangeably. We conclude that cases like those in examples (10-12), where the two forms contrast, reflect retention of a formerly widely used gender distinction. These examples also explain why there are still two affirmative copula markers in the language. If the semantic contrast was fully abandoned, one of the two morphemes would have been dropped. Moreover, -**tte** and -**tta** are used to express other semantic contrasts in non-verbal predicates, as discussed in the following two sections.

3. OTHER MEANINGS OF -**tta**

As we showed in section 2.1., gender distinction in pronouns is made only for the third person singular forms **?ésí** 'he' / **?ésá** 'him' and **?ísí** 'she' / **?ísó** 'her'. We also showed in section 2.2., that when these two pronouns are used in affirmative copula clauses, the copula marker attached to the two varies: the copula marker **-(t)te** combines with the third person masculine singular pronoun **?ésí/?ésá** to form an identificational copula clause as: **?éste** 'It is him'. In contrast, the third person feminine singular pronouns **?ísí/?ísó** have a corresponding copula form **?ísta** 'It is her'. Considering that gender is not distinguished in the other pronouns, one might expect that one of the copula markers is consistently used with these pronouns to form identificational clauses such as **tánta** 'It is me', **núnta** 'It is us', or that either form could be used without bringing about a difference in meaning. Instead what happens is

that all the pronouns have alternating forms, with each form yielding a slightly different meaning. Note, however, that the meaning difference is not directly related to gender. For example, as a response to the question in (18a), a predicative construction with -**tta** (18b) expresses the idea that the respondent is annoyed by the question and his response is a strong assertion. In the same context, a predicative construction with the copula -**tte** in (18c) is interpreted as a neutral/ informative response to the question. In the latter case the speaker would normally add an explanation such as **demáčče** 'without seeing it' (accidentally) but in the case of the utterance in (18b) no such explanation is made.

(18) a.   **ha   sínn-ó   ments-é-ss-í   ʔoóde-wa**
            this   cup-ACC   break-REL-NMZ-NOM   who-COP:Q
            Who broke this cup?

      b.   **tán-ta   ments-é**
            1SG-COP.1   break-REL
            Why, it is me who broke it!

      c.   **tán-te   ments-é**
            1SG-COP.2   break-REL
            It is me who broke it

Example (18b) may also imply that the speaker broke the glass purposely or the utterance can be understood as 'It is mine and I broke it, why do you bother'. The speaker of (18b) assumes that the speaker of the utterance in (18a) disapproves of the event (that the glass is broken) and by uttering the strong assertion in (18b) he counters or pre-empts reproach. With this utterance it would be incompatible to add an explanation as **demácce** 'with out seeing/accidentally'. In contrast, with the predicative form in (18c) the speaker is simply stating the situation as a matter of fact, as an accident, and most likely s/he is not expecting reproach from the speaker who uttered (18a).

A related use of the copula -**tta** is illustrated in (19), which expresses a warning that the speaker does not want anybody else to interfere in the plan and make the trip to Arbaminch. The speaker might make this utterance even when s/he is going to somewhere else at the moment of speech. As the background of the assertion in (19a), the speaker presupposes that somebody else wants to make the trip and he wants to counter this by strongly asserting that s/he is the one who goes.

(19) a.   **ʔarbamínč'e   hang-eés-í   tán-ta**
            Arbaminch   go-REL:IPF-NOM   1SG-COP.1
            I am the one who goes/will go to Arbaminch (lit. The one who goes to Arbaminch is me)

On the other hand, the same sentence with the copula marker -**tte** does not have such an interpretation. It can be used as a factual statement, for example when the speaker wants to introduce him/herself to someone who would drive him to the destination mentioned:

  b.   **ʔarbaminč'e   hang-eés-í   tán-te**
        Arbaminč'   go-REL:IPF-NOM   1SG-COP.2
        I am the one who goes to Arbaminch (The one who goes to Arbaminch
        is me)

Another example showing that the choice between -**tte** and -**tta** is one of strong assertion is given in (20) in which three participants are involved. As a reaction to the utterance in (20a), the second participant made the utterance in (20b) to simply establish the identity of the person who was making the noise. When the person so identified protested, the speaker repeated (20c) to strongly assert and counter the denial.

(20) a.   **k'ámma   radione ʔuuk-ats-á**
            yesterday.night radio   make.noise-CAUS-INT

            ʔak'-éss-í   ʔoóde-wa
            spend-night-REL.PAST-NOM   who-COP.Q
            Who left the radio on yesterday night, making a lot of noise?

      b.   **nén-te**
            2SG-COP.1
            It is you [stated the first time to identify]

      c.   **nén-ta**
            2SG-COP.2
            It is you! [Stated the second time, when the addressee denied]

The choice between -**tte** and -**tta** seems to rely on the speaker's overall evaluation of the situation. That is, what is expressed by the strong assertion need not be a direct reaction to a verbal expression by another participant in a communicative situation. Rather, the assertion can be made to express the attitude of the speaker towards the referent of the noun in the identificational copular clause. For example, if a higher official comes to a village/**kebele** office for inspection and raises the question in (21a), the speaker would use (21b) if he/she wants to express a favourable opinion of the person being identified. With this assertion the speaker counters a potential negative evaluation or negative attitude by the inspector. If the speaker instead replies **ha ʔeste** 'it is this one/ it is him' no such implication is expressed.

(21) a.   **daanná-z-i   ʔánnesa-z-wa**
            judge-DEF-NOM   which-M:DEF-COP.Q
            Which one is the judge?

      b.   **ha   ʔés-ta**
            this 3MS-COP.1
            It is this one/ it is him

Consider also the use of -**tte** in (22b) which is a response to a question by an irritated owner whose plants in the garden are destroyed (22a). The proper response in this context can only be (22b).

(22)   a.   **ha   kátsó   híso   dink'alo   híyy-éss-í   ?aánna**
            this   food/grain   like.this   IDEO   say-REL.PAST-NOM   What
            What is it that destroyed the plants/farm like this?!

       b.   **gaidé-tte**
            cattle-COP.2
            (It is) cattle

I asked what about using **gaidétta** 'It is cattle' instead, as a response to the question in (22a). Consultants responded saying "that would be possible if the speaker believed that what happened to the owner of the garden is something good". A copula clause **gaidétta** 'It is cattle' would be an appropriate response if for example the speaker had raised a question like the one given in (23a) after unexpectedly finding a difficult path with overgrown plants and wild grass cleared.

(23)   a.   **ha   ?ogé   híso   lo?ats-á   híyy-éss-í   ?aánna**
            this   road   like.this   make.good-INT   say-REL.PAST-NOM   What
            What is it that made this path so good like this?

       b.   **gaidé-tta**
            cattle-COP.1
            (It is) cattle

Like in examples (21 and 23), speakers mention 'approval or positive attitude' towards the (action of the) referent of the copula clause as part of the meaning of -**tta** in (24b), which is a reaction to the utterance in (24a).

(24)   a.   **?e   ?ádda   waatse   háya   híso   ?uššá**
            INTJ   water   this   like.this   do   drink:CAUS

            yéss-í   ?oóde-wa
            exist:PAST.REL-NOM   who-COP.Q
            Good for him! who beat him up like this! (lit. His father! Who made him drink water like this? Cf. **?e** '3MS.POSS'; **?áde** 'father')

       b.   **?ayyéle-tta**
            Ayele-COP.1
            It is Ayele

To sum up, the recurring factor in the interpretation of the copular clauses with -**tta** is that the content of the non-verbal clause is an emphatic assertion. Speakers also insist on its implication of a positive attitude. In the expression in (24a) and the reaction to it (24b), for example, the speakers make utterances that are understood as satisfaction. By the reaction in (24b), the second speaker joins the first speaker's positive attitude. Consultants stated that in this context if the speaker disapproved of the beating or if s/he wanted to remain neutral, his/her response would be: **?yélette**. Thus, the use of the morpheme -**tta** in contrast to -**tte** is not only emphasizing/highlighting the role of the predicative nominal but it also involves the attitude or subjective judgement of the speaker. However, in some of the contexts examined, such as in examples (19-20), this 'positive attitude' is not directly apparent.

4. THE LINK BETWEEN GENDER IDENTIFICATION AND ASSERTION

In section 3 we demonstrated that copula clauses with -**tta** and -**tte** get interpretations that are not directly linked to semantic gender. These morphemes express strong and neutral assertion in non-verbal clauses respectively. The question is, how to account for the two different meanings of the morphemes (especially of -**tta**).

In a number of Ethiopian languages gender-identifying pronouns and/or morphemes are used to express extended meanings such as size, friendship, strength (see among others Hoben (1976) on the case of Amharic, Lydall (1988) on Hamar and Azeb Amha 2001, 2006 on Maale). As mentioned earlier, Zargulla speakers interpreted some of the utterances with the feminine copula marker as 'positive statement' or 'statement about something approved by the speaker'. Thus we suggest that the use of the morpheme -**tta** in non-verbal clauses is motivated by such meaning extension.

Gender distinction is not used with equal consistency by all speakers. However, even the speakers who insist on gender distinction made by -**tta** and -**tte** interpret copula clauses such as those in (18-24) as pragmatically determined assertions. Because of the specific grammatical construction in which the two morphemes occur (i.e. the copula clause), we believe that there are **not** two different sets of morphemes -**tta** and -**tte**, one set expressing gender and the other the pragmatic meaning of strong '(positive) assertion'. Rather, our analysis is that the expression of strong '(positive) assertion' is a case of re-interpretation of gender distinction. That is, as gender distinction in copula constructions is losing its importance, this opened a possibility for a re-interpretation of the contrast between -**tta** and -**tte**.

The model for the use of -**tta** as a strong assertion in non-verbal clauses seems to be the use of the morpheme -**tte** as a contrastive focus marker in verbal clauses. The morpheme -**tte** in Zargulla has two functions. In addition to its function as a clause-final copula marker in non-verbal clauses discussed above, it also functions as a focus marker in verbal clauses. In the latter function, it may be attached to any contrastively focused constituent in a clause. We illustrate this using a short text in (25). The highlighted constituents (in bold-face) are focused. In this text we observe that in most affirmative declarative clauses the verb or one of its complements is focused. This is a common practice in the language. In (25c), however, it is strange that no element is marked for focus although this is where an important new information in the story is introduced i.e., the court where a cat presides. This may be explained by a summary-like representation of a probably long story.[8] That is, the speaker may have opted not to bring the noun **šuure** 'cat' or **šuure pírde keeska** 'cat's court' in focus because he assumed that every speech participant knows who would be the judge in this context. Or this could be a simple error in story telling.

(25) a. **ʔečʼere-í   hang-í-tt-iš   ʔats   káts-a   kást-ínne**
         rat-NOM   go-CNV-FOC-3FS   person grain-ACC   steal-PAST
         A rat *went* and stole somebody's grain

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[8] Thanks to Maarten Kossmann for pointing out this possibility.

b. **kast-íššin-na   ?áik-útt-o-tt-iš-ínne ...**
    steal-TEMP-INST   catch-PAS-INT-FOC-3FS-PAST...

   moot-útt-a-tt-us   mang-ínne
   accuse-RECP-INT-FOC-3PL   start-PAST
   While stealing, it was *caught*. ... They started *accusing/arguing*

c. **moot-útt-išin   moot-útt-išin   šuure   pírde keés-ka**
    accuse-RECP-TEMP   accuse-RECP-TEMP   cat   court   house-LOC

   gákk-ínne
   arrive-PAST
   After a long process, they came to the court of the cat (for a verdict)

d. **šuuro-í   haí??o pírde-tte   ?íng-ínne**
    cat:DEF-NOM   death   verdict-FOC   give-PAST
    The cat gave *a death sentence* (to the rat)

e. **?ing-í   ?ol-í   ?ul-í   hamm-aíte**
    give-SS:CNV   give_up-SS:CNV   return-SS:CNV   go-2PL:IMP

   ?ísó-y   haná yéss-áya
   3FS-NOM   here BE-3FS:OPT

Having made the verdict, the cat said to the people "You go home. Let her (i.e. the rat) be here"

f. **géruns'-í   ?ul-í   hang-í   ?oll-úm   bee-s**
    people-NOM   return-SS:CNV   go-CNV   give.up-DS:CNV   3LOG-DAT

   muútt-á-tte-s-ínne
   eat-INT-FOC-3MS-PAST
   The people having returned to their home, the cat *ate* the rat

Note that with the exception of (25d), the focus marker is immediately followed by one of a set of seven verbal subject-agreement markers which co-vary according to the person, gender and number of the subject noun (see also Azeb Amha 2007a and b).

The masculine copula morpheme -**tte** is also used in cleft constructions (26), which is the only strategy to express subject focus. (See Hirut Woldemariam (2006) for a similar subject-focus strategy in the related east-Ometo language Haro). In such constructions, the subject agreement marker does not occur after the focus/copula marker and the verb always occurs in a relative clause form.

(26) a. **kaati   bíšá?a-tte   waatsé   kís'-a   ham-é**
        king   daughter-COP.2   water:ACC   draw:INF   go-REL
        A king's daughter went to draw water
        (lit. It is a king's daughter that   went to draw water)

   b. **taa   s'aɗé-tte   míy-é**
       1SG:OBJ   flea-COP.2   eat-REL
       Fleas bite me (lit. Me, it is fleas that bite)

In clauses where the verb is in focus we find a fully inflected verbal predicate, in which subject agreement and tense-aspect are morphologically marked. When a constituent other than the verb is focused, that constituent is affixed with -**tte** as well as the subject agreement markers whereas the lexical verb is marked only for tense-aspect.

As already mentioned, -**tte** is a (masculine) copula marker in non-verbal clauses and a contrastive focus marker in verbal clauses. In the latter function it asserts or highlights the role of a constituent. If the focused constituent is a verb, the state of affairs expressed by the verb is emphasized. In case of focus on a constituent other than the verb the role of that referent/entity is emphasized in contrast to that of the other constituents in the discourse context. While -**tte** has this highlighting role in verbal clauses, its role in non-verbal clauses is that of simply identifying or equating the subject of a non-verbal clause (nominal-predicate clause). When the speaker wishes to make an emphatic assertion about a referent identified in a non-verbal clause and/or express a positive attitude towards him/her, the morpheme -**tta** is used which otherwise identifies or equates feminine subject complement nouns. It seems that the morpheme -**tta** is reinterpreted as a marker of strong assertion under analogical pressure from -**tte**, which acquired the pragmatic function of marking focus in verbal-clauses.

It can be said that morphological marking of focus and/or emphatic assertion is **the** characteristic feature of the Zargulla language. As we showed in the present contribution, this is done by the use of -**tta** in non-verbal clauses and by -**tte** in verbal clauses. Parallel to this, the language has a special morpheme -**ǐ**, for emphasizing a questioned constituent. However, this latter case is not dealt with in the present contribution.

5.   CONCLUSION

A combination of recent policy changes and historical circumstances resulted in the endangerment of the Zargulla language. It is one of the minority languages in a region with dominant local languages. There is high-level of bilingualism in Gamo and younger speakers seem to have lower esteem of their language.

The morphemes -**tta** and -**tte** play important grammatical roles in the language. They are used as gender-sensitive masculine and feminine copula markers respectively. However, gender distinction in non-verbal clauses is only marginally distinguished; some speakers use the masculine copula marker with feminine nouns and vice versa. Instead, -**tte** and -**tta** are grammaticalised to indicate discourse-pragmatic information: -**tte** is used to mark focus in verbal clauses whereas -**tta** is used to indicate a strong assertion or counter-assertion in non-verbal clauses.

ACC	accusative	OBJ	object
CAUS	causative	PAST	past
DAT	dative	PF	perfective
DEF	definite	PL	plural
DS:CNV	different subject converb	Q	question
F	feminine	REL	relative clause
GEN	genitive	SG	singular
INT	intensive	SS:CNV	same subject converb
LOC	locative	SUBJ	subject
M	masculine	TEMP	temporal (when. while, etc.)
NOM	nominative		

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