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Sketch Phonology of Me'enit

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Abstract

This study attempted to provide a descriptive account of the sketch phonology of Me'enit (Me'en, as some scholars name the language). The method used mainly in the study is qualitative, in which various linguistic data are collected from the native speakers and analyzed categorically. Accordingly, the various phonetic and phonological aspects of the target language are thoroughly identified and described. In the language, the consonant phonemes are thought to be twenty seven and the vowel phonemes are seven as clearly discussed in the study. Phonotactic aspects, such as consonant cluster, vowel length, and consonant gemination and syllable structures are other elements presented. The study, at last, mentions some basic lexical items of Me'enit. Accordingly, Me'enit has three open and three closed syllables which have thirteen types of structures.

Keywords: Nilo-Saharan; Me'en; Me'enit; Ethiopia; Phonology; Bench Maji

1. Introduction

Nilo-Saharan language phylum is spoken in Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Chad and Mali, and has a very vast variety within itself. The language phylum represents more than 196 "languages" most of which have not yet been studied and documented. Four main genetic families of the Proto-Nilo-Saharan phylum are the Songhay, Saharan, Kuliak and Satellite-Core group.

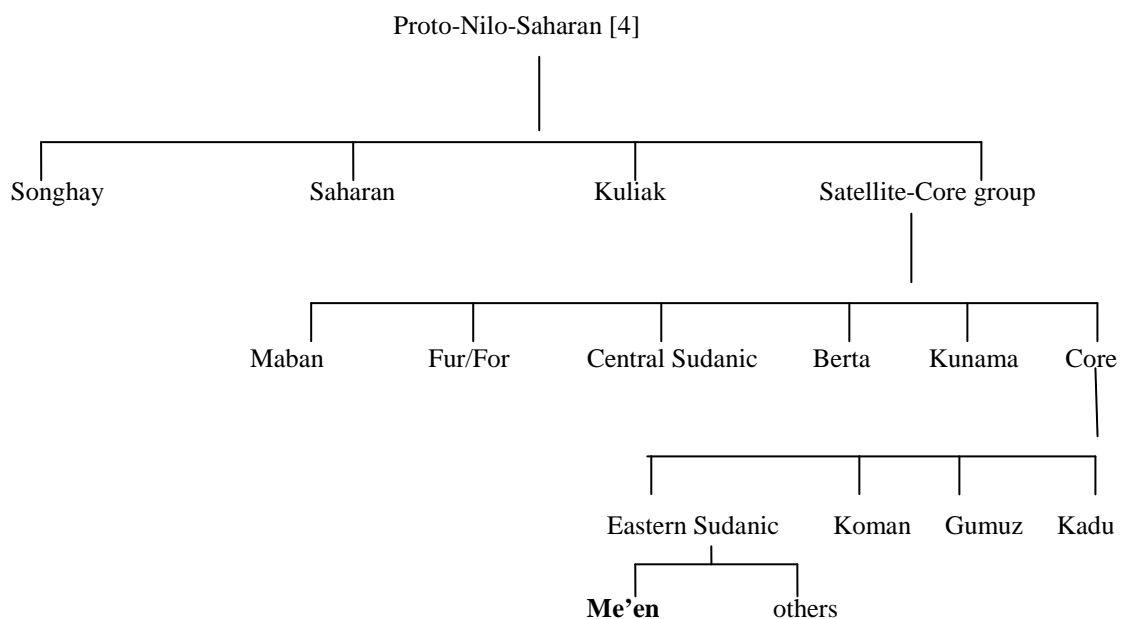
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The Satellite-Core group is further classified into Maban, Fur/For, Central Sudanic, Berta, Kunama and Core. The Core cluster is further divided into Eastern Sudanic, Koman, Gumuz and Kadu. The classification of Me'en is under Eastern Sudanic as shown in the tree diagram shown below [1]. There are serious concerns among scholars with regard to the classification of Nilo-Saharan phylum due to its disputable internal classification, invisible demarcation of Niger-Congo and Nilo-Saharan and some isolated languages like Gumuz, Shabo and Kuliak. Hence, there is great gap to be filled in the study of genetic and/or areal classification of Nilo-Saharan languages.

The name “Me'en” (Me'enit) or “Mekan” is used both for the language and the speakers of the language. Me'enit is one of the least-known and endangered Nilo-Saharan languages of Ethiopia which are found under Eastern Sudanic subgroup. The Me'enit language is spoken in the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS for short), particularly around central Kafa (the Zone found in SNNPRS), MizanTeferi and Jinka areas. The speakers live in the Tishena, in and around Bachuma (Kafa and Mizan), the Bodi in lowlands to the south (Jinka), near the Omo River of Ethiopia [1, 2].

The language is tonal in its nature. It is located at the distance of 250km from Jimma town and 600km from Addis Ababa. This language is bounded by Sheko (Omotic) in north and north-west, by Bench (Omotic) in north-east and east, and the Omo River in south. On the other hand, the language has 56,585 monolinguals and 6,300 bilinguals who are estimated to be about 62,885 [3].



As we (the researchers) have tried to review different literatures [5, 6, 7, 8], there are no enough or hardly any contemporary research works done on the language as a whole. Besides, there are no literature books or textbooks in Me'enit because it has no script (orthography). However, Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL for short) identified that the language has two varieties: Bodi and Tishena. They are spoken in two different geographical areas. The study, thus, tries to describe the sketch phonology of Me'enit, and attempts are made to answer the question: What does the sketch phonology of the Me'enit language look like?

The main objective of this study was to describe each phonetic and phonological phenomenon of Me'etit in great detail. The study specifically tried to provide complete phonetic and phonological aspects of the language, and to identify the peculiar features of the language in relation to other Nilo-Saharan clusters.

2. Review of Related Literatures and Methodology

So far, very few studies have been conducted in different areas on the Nilo-Saharan languages. Me'etit is the language which is left out in the research works. Almost none of the works on Nilo-Saharan seem to have addressed the issue of Me'etit in particular as their main concern as we have tried to review many of the works. Yet, there are considerable gaps to be filled on the area of grammar of many of the languages under the above family tree. The present study in part is, thus, an attempt to fill one of these gaps by focusing on the phonology of Me'etit.

The study used qualitative method in general because the linguistic items were collected and described according to their existence. It was conducted through library research and fieldwork. The library work was used, according to Goldstein, as a pre-field work preparation [9]. The library research involved assessing studies conducted previously on Nilo-Saharan languages of Ethiopia in general. Since the study was a description of phonology of the Me'etit language, the subjects were in effect the native speakers of the language, which is to mean the speakers of Bodi (Jinka area) and Tishena (Kafa and Mizan areas) dialects. Because the method was not primarily a quantitative investigation, it was necessary to ensure that the data collected from a smaller number of speakers were representative of the whole group.

Large portions of the work were carried out with a small number of co-workers. This is due to practical concerns, as they are able to work with us outside of the area, but it also has a methodological advantage, as many tasks are better carried out together with co-workers who have some basic education, which can be provided within the study. The total number of co-workers to be selected was 16 from three major study sites: from Mizan and Kafa sites, 8 co-workers were selected, and from Jinka site 8 co-workers were selected. Since there were various phases in the collection of data, the co-workers were selected at different times; two co-workers were with one researcher at once.

The selection of informants was done using convenient sampling and snowball sampling. Convenient sampling (accidental or haphazard sampling) helped us to ask for volunteers, or a set of subjects who just happened to be available. The samples were selected because they were convenient for us. This non-probability method was used during preliminary research efforts to get a gross estimate of the results. In snowball sampling (judgmental sampling), we collected data on the few members of the target population, and then we asked those individuals to provide information needed to locate other members of that population whom the sample speakers know. The data were collected from three major sites of SNNPRS, namely Kafa, MizanTeferi and Jinka areas. Accordingly, we selected 70 native speakers of the language from Kafa (35 speakers) and MizanTeferi (35 speakers) areas (Speakers of Tishena Dialect) and 70 native speakers from Jinka area (Speakers of Bodi Dialect) using the above two techniques. The total number of samples to be included in the study was 140 native speakers. This was due to practical reasons. For one reason, there were slight differences between the two dialects (Bodi and

Tishena) in the areas so that both dialects should be included in the study [10]. The second reason was that language use can vary from age to age; therefore, the study should incorporate all the ages according to their levels. These speakers were from different social structures of the speech community.

Since the procedures required for data collection and analysis differ to great extent, they were divided into distinct sections below. It should be borne in mind, however, that there were also some areas where data collection and analysis intersect. Swadesh wordlist is a basic spoken vocabulary listed in alphabetical order, order of parts of speech, order of frequency and a simple word meaning. The words in the list are convenient for taped interviews and written records of spontaneous association. From the list, each spoken word/word form could be transferred singly and in context onto punched cards. This main wordlist started out as a list of random words to be recorded, and then transcribed with a phonemic transcription system developed for the purpose. This part of the work was carried out by us and trained co-workers. Words from a variety of sources were later added to this, gradually expanding and revising it. Some areas, especially those where there is some systematicity, required specialized wordlists. In line with main wordlist and paradigms, there was collection of stories, tales and any other oral forms on the Me'enit language and culture available at all social, age and sex levels in the fieldwork from the selected key informants.

With respect to the instruments, elicitation, and participant observation were dominantly used in the research. In elicitation, speakers were asked to comment on or provide contexts for a given word/construction, co-workers were asked to translate a given word/utterance, and they were also asked to evaluate the acceptability of a given form. In participant observation, external interference was limited to the fact that the communicative event was being observed and recorded – attempt to create a 'natural' context of interaction. In other words, we used participant observation as an important component of a data corpus. Telling of a story/joke and matching/sorting games which involved non-linguistic categorisation or linguistic interaction were demonstrated. All these data were gathered from the samples mentioned above.

The analysis was carried out on several levels. The criteria of wordlists, paradigms and stories all required high level of analysis, but the bulk of the data could also be analyzed and brought together into an overview of the main areas of the language.

The consonant and vowel phonemes of the language were identified at the very beginning using the preliminary data from Swadesh wordlist. For phonology, the starting point was a wordlist recorded by a native speaker, and then semi-phonetically transcribed. Subsequently, minimal pairs were sought out, that prove some contrasts to phonemic. A system of transcription was created once the phonemes of the language were found out. Like all other areas, this work needed to be continuously revised throughout the time-span of the research. Whatever procedure was followed, care was taken that the data were presented in a way that allowed other analyzed to be made.

3. Constraints/Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to only few informants who can be representatives of the speech community of the two dialects of Me'enit. Therefore, the data collected could not incorporate idiolects of individual speakers, which

might show certain unique features of the language. The other constraint we faced while conducting this study was lack of written resources on the language as it is immature in its orthography and it lacks literatures for review. Financial and time constraints are among others which did not allow us to make the project deep-rooted and sustainable.

4. Results and Discussion

With regard to the basic questions and objectives of the research, the main features of the phonetic and phonological systems of the language in this study are exhaustively identified and described in this section. Thus, this section presents the phonology of the language that includes phonemic inventory (consonant and vowel sounds), phonotactics and syllable structure.

4.1. Phonemic Inventory of Me'enit

4.1.1. Consonant phonemes

According to Diehl, Me'enit has twenty-six consonant sounds (phonemes) [11]. Though he mentioned the number of the phonemes, Diehl has not indicated the phonemes using either minimal pair test or near minimal pair test to prove the existence of these phonemes by taking different pairs of words. He also missed one consonant phoneme from his phonemic inventory; the sound [f] is not found in Diehl's phonemic inventory. However, this sound is one of the consonant sounds to be proved for its existence in the language. Thus, the present study reveals that there are twenty-seven consonant phonemes in Me'enit language; such situation can be discussed taking some words in minimal/near minimal pair tests after the phonemes are presented using the tables below.

In fact, there are certain consonant phonemes which are common to Surmic (Nilo-Saharan) languages, but uncommon to Omotic, Semitic and Cushitic languages of Ethiopia. These phonemes are implosive sounds. Most speech sounds in any language are articulated by breathing out air from pulmonary area; such speech sounds are known to be explosive or egressive sounds. However, there are few speech sounds which are produced by breathing in air. Such speech sounds are said to be implosive or ingressive sounds.

Again, from explosive sounds, the common types of speech sounds are stops/plosives, fricatives, affricates, nasals, laterals and liquids. These are found in many languages most commonly. However, ejective sounds are uncommon among many languages. These are speech sounds articulated by obstructing/modifying the air that comes from pulmonary area on two points above the glottis.

The following tables indicate the above features and the existence of vowel phonemes in Me'enit language. Table 1 shows the consonant phonemes found in Me'enit language. The number of these consonant phonemes, different from that of Diehl, is twenty-seven. The consonant that is not found in Diehl's phonemic inventory is [f], which is labio-dental fricative voiceless consonant. One can categorize this sound under consonant phonemes of the language after identifying its existence at word initial and word medial as in [feskaʃf] <eye lid> and [kofon] <hip>, respectively.

To illustrate whether the consonant phonemes indicated in the table are speech sounds of the language, let us take some minimal/near minimal pair test and show the cases.

Table 1: Consonant phonemes of Me'enit

| Manner of articulation | | Place of articulation | | | | | |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|--------------|----------|--------------|---------|-------|
| | | Bilabial | Labio-dental | Alveolar | Post-palatal | Palatal | Velar |
| Stops | Voiced | p | | t | | | k |
| | Voiceless | b | | d | | | g |
| Implosives | Voiced | ɓ | | ɗ | | | |
| Fricatives | Voiced | | f | s | ʃ | | h |
| | Voiceless | | | z | | | |
| Affricates | Voiced | | | | | ɟʒ | |
| | Voiceless | | | | | tʃ | |
| Ejectives | Stop | | | t' | | | k' |
| | Fricative | | | s' | | c' | |
| Nasals | Voiced | m | | n | | ɲ | ŋ |
| Lateral | Voiced | | | l | | | |
| Liquids/Flaps | Voiced | | | r | | | |
| Glides/Semivowels | Voiced | w | | | J | | |

Minimal/near minimal pair

Gloss

- | | | | |
|----|--------|---|----------------|
| 1. | [poli] | } | <throat> |
| | [boli] | | <to tear down> |
| 2. | [kara] | } | <bed> |
| | [ʃara] | | <hair> |
| 3. | [sit] | } | <hand> |
| | [liʃ] | | <touch> |
| 4. | [wufi] | } | <four> |
| | [wali] | | <white> |

5. [kaŋaʃ] } <baboon>
 [nidaʃ] } <molar teeth>

As indicated in data 1-5, minimal/near minimal pairs show that sounds [p, b, k, ʃ, s, t, l, d, ŋ and ɲ] are consonant phonemes of Me'nit language, which are found at the beginning of the words. We can also prove the existence of these and other consonant sounds in the language by checking whether the sounds can be found at word initial, word medial and word final or at least at two of these positions.

| Consonant phoneme | word initial | word medial | word final |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| 6. [b] | [bi] <cow> | [saba] <head> | - |
| 7. [p] | [poli] <throat> | [matdampu] <smoke> | [tip] <full> |
| 8. [ʃ] | [ʃogof] <chest> | [naʃeʃ] <ear> | - |
| 9. [m] | [manaʃ] <ox> | [tumatuntə] <sky> | [c'alkum] <cat> |
| 10. [w] | [wuf] <four> | [tuntuwə] <blow> | - |
| 11. [f] | [feskatʃ] <eye lid> | [kofon] <hip> | - |
| 12. [t] | [tuk] <mouth, lip> | [kutu] <skin> | [is:et] <eight> |
| 13. [d] | [dɔnɔ] <hippopotamus> | [kedo] <tree> | - |
| 14. [d] | [duka] <ash> | [hidə] <cloud> | - |
| 15. [s] | [saba] <head> | [tasi] <think> | [idibis] <pour> |
| 16. [z] | [zama] <brother in law> | [bizinjit] <chief> | - |
| 17. [n] | [nigeʃ] <door> | [anit] <bite> | [kun] <come> |
| 18. [l] | [limen] <cut> | [kolku] <charcoal> | [bal] <day> |
| 19. [r] | [romosi] <wet> | [bergu] <year> | [daŋk'ar] <mud> |
| 20. [j] | [jet] <river> | [moji] <see> | [saj] <skin> |
| 21. [t'] | [t'it'ij] <aunt> | [bat'j] <uncle> | - |
| 22. [s'] | [s'ɔ:] <sound of oil in a pan> | [bis'ara] <mule> | - |

| | | | |
|----------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 23. [c'] | [c'ora] <beard> | [nac'ɔ] <husband> | - |
| 24. [ʃ] | [ʃokum] <chin> | [aʃuku] <meat> | [kabaŋeʃ] <waist> |
| 25. [dʒ] | [dʒijak] <around> | [wundʒe] <son> | [fadʒ] <night> |
| 26. [ʃ] | [ʃubune] <father> | waʃanaʃ] <bamboo> | - |
| 27. [ŋ] | [niɗaʃ] <tooth> | [kabaŋeʃ] <waist> | [golɔŋ] <red> |
| 28. [k] | [kɔnɔ] <snake> | [ʃ'ɔkaʃ] <wolf> | [dʒijak] <around> |
| 29. [g] | [gasa:] <behind> | [sigiro] <hourse> | - |
| 30. [k'] | [k'afɔʃ] <fish> | [dank'ar] <mud> | - |
| 31. [ŋ] | [ŋɔdare] <wound> | [keŋɔ] <abdomn> | [giroŋ] <nose> |
| 32. [h] | [haduru] <cat> | [kurah] <donkey> | - |

As can be clearly indicated in the above data, all consonant sounds/phonemes exist at least at two places in the words given in front of the corresponding sounds. In fact, some consonants appear at the three places, which is supplementary for the approval. Most words in Me'enit end by vowel phonemes, which make these words vowel ending. Based on the above data, we can say that the consonant sounds listed are the sounds of the language, with no any lone sound.

4.1.2. Vowel phonemes

Consistent with Diehl, in this study seven vowel phonemes are identified in Me'enit [11]. The following chart presents the vowel phonemes of the language. One vowel phoneme, [ɔ], is unique in the language from other Surmic languages. This phoneme is mid-low, back, rounded short vowel as in [ʃ'ɔkum] <chin> and [k'ɔrɔŋ] <neck>.

Table 2: Vowel phonemes of Me'enit

| | Front | Central | Back |
|----------------|-------|---------|------|
| Close | i | | u |
| Mid | e | | o |
| Mid-low | ɛ | | ɔ |
| Open | | a | |

Table two shows that there are seven vowel phonemes in Me'enit. These are three front unrounded close, mid and mid-low vowels, one central unrounded open vowel and three back close, mid and mid-low unrounded vowels. We can check the presence of these vowel phonemes by taking minimal/near minimal pair tests as shown below.

| Minimal/near minimal pair tests | Gloss |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 1. [tek]] [tuk]] | <inside> <mouth or lip> |
| 2. [kat]] [kək]] | <tongue> <release> |
| 3. [bukuŋ]] [bəgoŋ]] | <shoulder> <chest> |
| 4. [kεŋɔ]] [kurɔ]] | <abdomen> <buttock> |
| 5. [sizi]] [site]] | <three> <lower arm> |

The above example reveals that vowel phonemes of Me'enit can be tested using minimal/near minimal pairs. Accordingly, one can easily find vowel phonemes [e, u, a, ɔ, o, ε and i] in data 6-10. We can also prove these vowel sounds by identifying whether they appear word initial, word medial and word final as indicated below.

| Vowel phoneme | word initial | word medial | word final |
|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| 38. [e] | [egan] <pull> | [bergu] <year> | [ke] <for> |
| 39. [u] | [uro] <milk> | [dunk'it] <worm> | [faltanʉ] <wide> |
| 40. [a] | [al:a] <with/by> | [nabɛŋ] <ear> | [saba] <head> |
| 41. [ɔ] | [ɔtun] <whistle> | [rɔmsi] <wet> | [kɛdɔ] <tree> |
| 42. [o] | [ojina] <open> | [lolu] <mad> | [bojo] <soil> |
| 43. [ε] | [εli] <say> | [kɛdɔ] <tree> | [k'erdʒɛ] <horn> |

44. [i] [il:e] <seven> [giron] <nose> [poli] <throat>

Data 38-44 shows that vowel phonemes in Me'etit are found at word initial, word medial and word final. Thus, based on the occurrences of the vowel sounds and minimal/near minimal pair tests, we can say that they can be found anywhere in a word of Me'etit language.

4.2. Phonotactics of Me'etit Language

It is stated in Katamba that phonotactic shows constraints on the combination of segments into words or phrases [12]. In Me'etit, we have various domains of phonotactic constraints.

4.2.1. Consonant Cluster

All consonant phonemes in Me'etit are found at the beginning and in the middle of words as indicated above (See Data 6-32 above for the details). However, there is no any consonant cluster allowed in the language; this is to mean that next to the initial consonant sound, there always exists a vowel sound. Of course the vowel that occurs can be long or short based on the meaning of the word (see Data 62-73 below). All in all, consonant cluster is not permissive at word initial in Me'etit. Contrarily, there are certain words which allow consonant clusters (only the combination of two consonants) in the middle of the words. Gemination is also allowed in word medial in Me'etit. We can elaborate the two occurrences of consonant sounds using some examples.

| Word | Gloss |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 45. [maduksite] | <fist> |
| 46. [bitrɛf] | <ankle> |
| 47. [sambata] | <Sunday> |
| 48. [logro] | <summer time> |
| 49. [kolka] | <small peacock> |
| 50. [zunk'u] | <sheep> |
| 51. [dolme] | <frog> |
| 52. [bajt] | <monkey> |
| 53. [tunto] | <sky> |
| 54. [piski] | <drink> |

| | |
|----------------|----------|
| 55. [bult'a] | <dust> |
| 56. [garsan] | <forget> |
| 57. [kunkula] | <rat> |
| 58. [gont'it] | <rope> |
| 59. [ʃɛbʃɛbu] | <smooth> |
| 60. [matdampu] | <smoke> |
| 61. [faltiŋu] | <wide> |

In data 45-61, the combinations of consonants occurring within a word across syllable boundaries have been identified: [ks, tr, mb, gr, lk, nk', lm, jt, nt, sk, lt, rs, nk, nt', bf, td, mpandŋ]. Based on such consonant clusters, we can say that the maximum consonant cluster allowed in Me'eni word medially is two. Nevertheless, Me'eni does not allow consonant cluster word finally, except in rare cases like data 52. In general, the only permissible consonant cluster in the language is word medial, not word initial and word final.

4.2.2. Vowel Length and Consonant Gemination

In Me'eni, both vowel length and consonant gemination are phonemic, as the examples in data 62-65 below show.

4.2.2.1. Vowel Length

| Minimal/near minimal pair tests | Gloss |
|--|----------------|
| 62. [na] | <and> |
| [na:] | <later> |
| 63. [liʃ] | <thatch> |
| [li:ʃ] | <look for> |
| 64. [basi] | <despise> |
| [ba:si] | <color of cow> |
| 65. [kək] | <release> |
| [kə:k] | <up> |

The above data show vowel length as phonemic property of sounds using minimal/near minimal pair tests. The meanings of the words are given under gloss. The first vowel sounds in the pairs of words in data 62-65 are short and long respectively; vowel length is indicated by colon (:) sign. Due to occurrence of short vowel

phoneme in the first words of the pairs and long vowel phoneme in the second words of the pairs, the meanings of the two words become different. Thus, they bring about meaning difference between the pairs of words.

4.2.2.2. Consonant gemination

| Minimal/near minimal pair tests | Gloss |
|--|--------------------------|
| 66. [bdʒak] | <to another place> |
| [bdʒ:ak] | <bend downwards> |
| 67. [dulo] | <he enters> |
| [dul:ɔ] | <enter!>(plural command) |
| 68. [baso] | <get healed> |
| [bas:ɔ] | <march> |
| 69. [kɔnɔŋ] | <one> |
| [kɔn:ɔŋ] | <silently> |
| 70. [orɛn] | <to see> |
| [or:ɛn] | <to meet> |
| 71. [haka] | <hit!> |
| [hak:a] | <ready> |
| 72. [kʻenɛ] | <he causes to pass> |
| [kʻen:ɛ] | <he foretells> |
| 73. [sabɔ] | <in front of> |
| [sab:ɔ] | <at first> |

Concerning consonant gemination, there exists a consonant and the same consonant following it immediately which leads to meaning difference between the two words in a pair. Instead of writing the repeated consonant, we can represent it by colon (:). Hence, the data bring about meaning change in words.

4.3. Syllable Structure in Me'eni

Katamba defines syllable as a group of phonemes consisting of a vowel or a continuant alone or combination with consonant or consonants which represents a complete articulation consisting a unit of word formation [12]. Syllables are identified as open and closed based on their structures. Open syllables are syllables which end in a vowel (v). The most common open syllable is cv (consonant and vowel) syllable. Closed syllables are syllables that have at least one consonant following the vowel. The most common closed syllable is the cvc (consonant, vowel and consonant) syllable. With regard to syllable structures in Me’nit, we get the following combinations.

| Open syllable | example word | Closed syllable | example word |
|---------------|----------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| 74. v | [a] <be> | 77. cvc | [tuk] <mouth> |
| 75. cv | [mɛ] <man> | 78. vc | [bɔ-lɔŋ-ɛŋ] <cheek> |
| 76. ccv | [ba-ta-nda] <houses> | 79. ccvc | [i-s:et] <eight> |

Data 74-79 show the two structures of syllable in Me’nit. Where there exist two or more syllables in a word, the syllables are identified from one another by hyphen (-). The open syllable structures in the language as indicated above with examples are v, cv and ccv while the closed syllables as indicated above with example words are cvc, vc and ccvc.

With regard to parts of syllables, Me’nit syllable has three parts. These are onset, nucleus and coda. Nucleus and coda together are known as rhyme. Of these three parts, nucleus is obligatory, whereas, onset and coda are optional. The maximum syllable template of Me’nit is as follows:

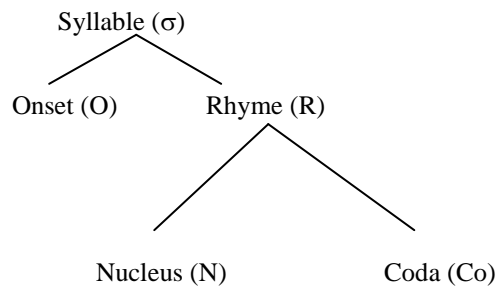


Figure 1: Syllable structure sketch of Me’nit

In general, from the above syllable template, we have the following syllable types.

| Syllable type | Example word | Gloss |
|---------------|--------------|---------|
| 80. i. v | [a] | <is/be> |
| ii. vc | [al] | <sit> |
| iii. cv | [bi] | <cow> |

| | | |
|--|-------------|---------------------|
| iv. cvc | [bɛr] | <spear> |
| v. vv | [aa] | <when> |
| vi. cvv | [ba:] | <land> |
| vii. vvc | [a:ŋ] | <why> |
| viii. cvvc | [ge:n] | <some> |
| ix. cvc ₁ c ₁ | [bas:] | <march> |
| x. c ₁ c ₁ v | [ho-l:o] | <tobacco container> |
| xi. c ₁ c ₂ v | [ba-ta-nda] | <houses> |
| xii. c ₁ c ₁ vc | [i-s:et] | <eight> |
| xiii. c ₁ c ₂ vc | [lɔlsɛn] | <cough> |

As illustrated in data 80 above, the language has thirteen types of syllable structures. The structures listed i-ix mostly come about within monosyllabic words (monosyllabic words are words which have only single syllable or only one nucleus), but those listed in x-xiii usually occur in di/polysyllabic words (disyllabic words are those which have two syllables, and polysyllabic words are those which contain more than two syllables within them) in Me'enit language. In the language, consonant cluster is permissible word medially.

Generally, this section presents the sketch phonology of Me'enit language. We presented the two components together because the boundary is usually unclear. When we deal with the production of consonant and vowel sounds, we consider the phonetics of Me'enit so that twenty-seven consonant phonemes and seven vowel phonemes are identified. However, these consonant and vowel phonemes are proved to be speech sounds of the language using minimal/near minimal pair tests and their distribution at word initial, word medial and word final, which is the concern of phonology. Again, consonant clusters permissible in the language are discussed in detail with vowel length and consonant germination which in turn brings about meaning differences between words in the language. At last, the syllable structures of the language are raised, indicating the common and uncommon types of syllables by certain examples. Accordingly, Me'enit has three open and three closed syllables which have thirteen types of structures. All in all, the section gives clear linguistic description about the sound systems of Me'enit language.

5. Conclusion

This article presents sketch phonology of Me'enit, Eastern Sudanic subfamily language of Nilo-Saharan super family in Ethiopia. The number of the speakers is about 62,885. The Me'enit people are relatively settled farmers and pastoralists. Me'enit has two dialects: the Bodi and the Tishena dialects. The present study is based

on both dialects. The linguistic description is based on about 8 weeks fieldwork conducted between April and June 2013.

The Me'etit people are found in SNNPRS Bench Maji Zone, Bachuma and JemuWoredas in specific local kebeles such as Shasha/Jemu, Bachuma/Goldiya and Shebench. The language has contact with Benchnon, Dizi, Surma and Sheko. The main objective of the research is description of the sketch phonology of the language. Descriptive/Qualitative method is thoroughly used because there is no any statistical description in relation to phonetic description of the language. The different techniques and tools of data collection and analysis are used in detail under the methodology section.

The main section presents the phonetic and phonological systems of Me'etit language. When we dealt with the production of consonant and vowel sounds, we found that Me'etit has twenty-seven consonant phonemes and seven vowel phonemes. Further, consonant clusters permissible in the language are discussed in detail with vowel length and consonant germination. Syllable structures of the language are also described, indicating the common and uncommon types of syllables. Accordingly, Me'etit has three open and three closed syllables which have thirteen types of structures.

6. Recommendations

As Me'etit is on the languages which have still at their early stage in academics, school and work places, several linguistic works should be done on it. Using the findings of this study, one can modify and revise the orthography of the language and make it a bit formatted. To conclude, it is our view that this study does not treat all the points that need to be done in the phonology of Me'etit as it is the sketch phonology of the language, but it spots ground for further research in similar direction. Thus, attention is needed to be given to this language which is spoken by tens of thousands of people and bounded by other Nilo-Saharan and Omotic language speakers.

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