

Sociolinguistic Survey Report on the Dime Language of Ethiopia

Written by
Ralph Siebert

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1 Introduction

This report presents findings from a linguistic survey which was carried out in the administrative area of the North Omo Zone, the South Omo Zone, and the Kafa Zone from February 28 to March 2, 1995.* The survey team included Aklilu Yilma, Simon Caudwell, and Ralph Siebert.

Since the Dime area is not easily accessible, the survey team decided to hire a helicopter, but to save costs, it was decided to also include various other groups who live in the remote areas of these zones. In this way, the amount of time spent on traveling was cut down to a minimum.

The languages which we chose to survey in addition to Dime were Melo, Nayi, and Chara (the findings on these languages will be published in a separate S.L.L.E. report).

We also had the opportunity to gather some Mursi data, because a speaker of this language happened to be traveling in the area.

1.1 Dime population figures, language, and territory

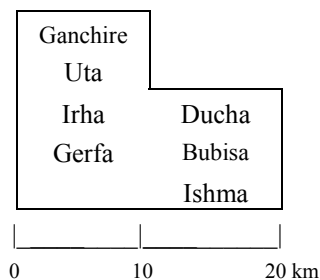
The Dime people are counted among those people groups of Ethiopia who are rather small in number. This and the fact that they live in a remote area probably explains why no recent studies on the Dime language are published. Apart from unpublished studies done at the Addis Ababa University and the Language Academy, Fleming's work of 1990 is the only publication on Dime available, but even with this publication we have to keep in mind that the material on which it is based (Bender's 98-item list of 1971) dates back to as early as 1971 and 1972.

Concerning population figures, Bender (1976:8) estimates the total Dime population at about 2,000, while Harold Fleming (1990:495) states that "they are steadily decreasing and now threatened with extinction." A similar assessment was already made thirty-six years ago by Haberland (1959:230) when he stated that the Dime consider themselves as being "a dying nation". Statements like these should alert linguists who are concerned with "language death" and "endangered languages". The figures we obtained were as high as 5,000, but they were vague estimates.

Linguistically, the Dime belong to the Omotic language family. According to Fleming's classification (1976:299) they descend from the Proto-South Omotic branch, together with the "Hamer-Banna dialect cluster (including Beshada and Karo)", and the "Ari dialects (including Bako, Shangama, Ubamer, et al.) and Galila". The self-name for the language is Dim-Af or Dim-Ap [dim-aφ].

The Dime people live in the North Omo administrative region. Their territory consists of a mountain range of less than 20 kms width and 55 kms length, which stretches from north to south with Mt. Smith (8,294 ft) as highest elevation. Their neighbours are the Chara to the north (across the river Omo), the Basketto to the north-east and east, the Aari to the south-east, the Mursi and some Surma to the south-west, and the Bodi (Me'en) to the west.

The following stylized map, adapted from the Jensen's sketch (1959:227), shows the geographical relations between the Ganchire, Uta, Ducha, Irha, Bubisa, Gerfa, and Ishma—seven main Dime areas.



*An earlier version of this report appeared as "A Survey of the Dime Language," Survey of Little-known Languages of Ethiopia (S.L.L.E.) Linguistic Report 31, July 1995. Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies and Summer Institute of Linguistics.

The purpose of the trip was:

(a) to gather a word list in order to identify the language and make it comparable, and (b) to gather sociolinguistic statements in order to assess the status of the language.

The means of research were:

(a) S.L.L.E. 320-Item Word List, (b) the S.L.L.E. Main Sociolinguistic Questionnaire, and (c) personal interaction.

Aklilu Yilma and Ato Debebe administered the sociolinguistic questionnaires, while Simon Caudwell and Ralph Siebert elicited the S.L.L.E. 320-item word list.

1.2 Acknowledgments

We are grateful for the support of Ato Debebe who helped to administer the questionnaires to individuals of the Dime community in Garo. We also are grateful to Dan Spencer, the helicopter pilot, who made it possible to reach these destinations safely. To walk to these remote areas, with or without a mule, would have taken us many days.

2 Sociolinguistic Information on Dime

2.1 Dime villages and varieties

The interviewees were asked, (a) in which villages the Dime language is being used in exactly the same way, (b) in which villages it is spoken slightly different, but in a way that the mutual intelligibility between Dime speakers is not affected, and

(c) in which villages Dime is spoken so differently that it is not understood any more by other Dime speakers.

2.2 Conforming use of Dime

According to the interviewees, their Dime variety is spoken in exactly the same way in the following villages: Arke, Ashama, Bed, Bubisa, Ducha, Erkia, Ganchire, Garo, Girfa, Gomoze (Gomiz), Irha, Ishma, Kerpa, Komiz, Ut'a, Woida (Wede).

2.3 Divergent use of Dime

All interviewees said that Dime varieties which they do not understand do "not exist".

Bender's statement (1976:299) concerning dialectal differences, thus, cannot be confirmed if Bender was implying problems of intelligibility. But it has to be noted that our information was gathered only in one Dime village: Garo. But even if such differences would exist, it is doubtful that such differences would block communication within Dime.

All respondents stated that the best (or "purest") variety of Dime was spoken in Ut'a, a place which, according to Fleming (1990:498), is "the most secure spot for Dimes".

3 Evaluation of Dime Responses to the Sociolinguistic Questionnaires

On the basis of the responses to our questionnaires, the following statements can be made about sociolinguistic aspects of Dime.

Table I: Age and educational level of respondents

Age	Sex		Education			
	M	F	No education	Literacy and Elementary Sch.	High School	Total
12-30	10	6	7	8	1	16
31-45	6	3	7	2	0	9
46-60	2	3	5	0	0	5
60+	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	18	12	19	10	1	30
Percentage	60	40	63	33	3	99

Table II: Native language of the respondents

Languages	Dime	Basketto	Total
Number	29	1	30
Percentage	97	3	100

Table III: First language of the respondent's parents

Languages	Father			Mother		
	Dime	Basketto	Total	Dime	Basketto	Total
Number	29	1	30	29	1	30
Percentage	97	3	100	97	3	100

Table IV: First language of the respondent's spouse/s* and children*

Languages	Spouse			Children	
	Dime	Basketto	Total	Dime	Total
Number	26	2	28	20	20
Percentage	93	7	100	100	100

* It should be noted that two respondents are not married and ten respondents have no children.

Comments on tables II-IV:

The use of Dime as a native language is dominant throughout three generations. Passing on Dime as first language to the children seems to be not only the normal pattern within the families but almost the only choice, as a very high percentage of the parents (between 93% and 97%) speak Dime.

Table V: Languages within the family (spoken by father, mother, husband/wife, siblings)

- father speaks:

Language	Dime only	Basketto	Amharic	Total
Number	27	2	1	30
Percentage	90	7	3	100

- mother speaks:

Languages	Dime only	Dime	Amharic	Bodi	Basketto	Total
Number	26	4	1	1	3	35
Percentage	74	11	3	3	9	100

- parents speak with each other:

Language	Dime	Basketto	Total
Number	29	1	30
Percentage	97	3	100

- brothers and sisters speak* :

Languages	Dime only	Basketto	Amharic	Total
Number	27	1	2	30
Percentage	90	3	7	100

* it should be noted that three respondents have no siblings

- spouses* speak :

Languages	Dime only	Basketto	Total
Number	26	2	28
Percentage	93	7	100

* It should be noted that two respondents are not married

Comment on table V:

This table shows to what extent the family members have a command of languages other than the mother tongue. Asked about the actual language use in the family, all respondents stated that they speak Dime most often with their fathers, mothers, and siblings. It is striking to notice to what a high degree Dime is being spoken as the only language.

Table VI: **Language use of the children***

Languages	Dime only	Total
Numbers	20	20
Percentage	100	100

* It should be noted that ten respondents have no children

Comment on table VI

There are no alternatives concerning language use within the family. All of the children are monolingual, which corresponds with the fact that all family members (father, mother, husband, wife, siblings) speak Dime at a percentage of more or less around ninety percent.

Table VII: **Languages used with friends**

Languages	Dime	Total
Number	30	30
Percentage	100	100

Table VIII: **Languages used in the village**

Languages	Dime	Total
Number	30	30
Percentage	100	100

Table IX: **Languages used with the elders of the village**

Languages	Dime only	Total
Number	30	30
Percentage	100	100

Comment on tables VII - IX:

Dime is the language which is spoken without exception with friends and in the village. This reflects the outstanding importance of the mother tongue for the Dime people.

Table X: **Languages used in town (Laska, Donti)***

- at the big market:

Languages	Dime	Basketto	Total
Number	26	2	28
Percentage	93	7	100

* Laska is the main place of the Basketto area. Donti is another place in the Basketto area. Two respondents stated that they never go to the Basketto area.

- with the administrators of the district

Languages	Dime	Total
Number	30	30
Percentage	100	100

Comments on table X:

It is surprising that even in areas outside the Dime area, most of the respondents stated that they use Dime. The language of administration would normally be Amharic in most parts of the country. The fact that Dime is being used shows the outstanding importance of the Dime language for their speakers. The question concerning which language would mainly be used in the clinic (which we normally would include in table X) has to drop out here as there is no clinic in the Dime area.

4 Other aspects of Dime language use

The language of religious issues is Dime. Only two respondents said that they sometimes use the Amharic language for personal prayers at home.

When counting, 90% of the respondents use only Dime. 7% use both Dime, and Amharic, and 3% use the Amharic language when counting money but the Dime language when counting other things.

In their dreams, 100% of the respondents experience Dime.

4.1 Language attitudes

The attitude of Dime people to their own language seems to be ambivalent: On the one hand, all respondents stated that it is possible or even good to marry spouses from other ethnic groups (which would result in not passing on the Dime language to Dime children). On the other hand, however, 97% of the respondents said that old people would be unhappy if young people would speak a language other than Dime at home; and 3% stated that this does not happen.

4.2 Language vitality

Concerning the vitality of the Dime language, the majority (83%) of the interviewees answered that (a) they are convinced the Dime language will be spoken by future generations, and (b) it is good that it will be used in the future. However, some of the respondents (17%) stated that the Dime people will switch to Amharic and English. It was also stated that even now there are a few Dime people who live in the Dime area but do not speak the language any more.

4.3 Cultural change

Only 17% of the respondents expressed the opinion that the Dime people are not in a process of change. At the same time these respondents admitted that the Dime people are adopting the customs of (an)other group(s). The respondents probably do not see this acculturation as a threat to their cultural identity or heritage. However, the majority of the respondents (83%) claimed that the Dime people are, in fact, in a process of change.

4.4 Development of the language

The respondent's assessment of the vitality of the language is reflected here by the fact that all interviewees (except one) expressed a high interest in the development of the Dime language. They also stated that Amharic was of equal importance to them, and that Amharic should be used for publications. The areas for which they expressed interest in seeing publications were rather vague though: "Translations from other languages".

All interviewees declared to be willing to attend literacy classes and said they would also send their children. They said they would buy books in Dime—if there were such.

5 Conclusion on the Dime Survey

The evidence of a small scale survey like this certainly cannot be considered statistically "representative", despite the fact that the target group itself is rather small. The results therefore should be considered tentative and preliminary. Supplementary surveys (or data) would be valuable.

The results of this survey do, however, provide some insights into certain sociolinguistic aspects of the Dime language such as, for instance, the aspect of monolingualism versus multilingualism, language use, language attitudes, and language vitality. The results will be summarized briefly.

Presently, the Dime people use their language in all areas of daily life. Whether they will continue to pass it on to their children (quite likely at this stage of time) is related to such facts as (a) the increase or decrease of the population (see Fleming 1990), and (b) changes in the infrastructure (at present, the Dime are locked away in a fairly remote area). There are other factors which however seem to carry less weight: Intermarriage with other groups such as Basketto (this occurs only exceptionally nowadays). At present, the language use seems stable (witness the fact that all of the the respondents' siblings are one hundred percent monolingual!). For the affairs of daily life and for most of the administrative affairs, Dime is the only language.

The results which have been presented previously show that to develop a written form of Dime would be considered worthwhile by most of the speakers of this language. Whether a written form would, in fact, have a vital function cannot be predicted on the basis of today's language use alone. This also depends on other key features (eg., changes in infrastructure, population size, or patterns of intermarriage). These factors might be assessed again in a decade's time, and they might serve as key indicators about the direction in which the people, their culture, and their language are moving.

6 S.L.L.E. 320-Item Word List of Dime

Supplying Dime data: Sibtay Mehel, Aseffa Gebeju; Place: Garo; Date: February 28, 1995. Transcription: Simon Caudwell and Ralph Siebert. [Note: Stress may be read as pitch accent or pitch K. W.]

English	Dime
Key	Responses no.: order of elicitation
all	320a 'kul:um
and	320g
animal	129 'ʃemp ^h kab
ant	137 'ʔik ^h ir, 'ʔik ^h ire
arrow	251 'lɛbɪl
ashes	205 'bindi
ask	118 'ʔɔjsin
at	320h 'ʔusi
axe	051 't ^h ɛbze
back	032 'gomp ^h
bad	257 'k'amoφ
banana	181 'gazɪn
bark	052 'ʔɔχmɔ
bark	178 ʔo'xom

basket	056 'goro
bat	135 'sɪk ^h e
bathe	304 'ʃɪʃɪn
bear child	113 ʔat:'t'isin
beard	018 'batsi
beehive	144 'gɔnɔ
belly	029 'tʃ'ola ⁱ
big	265 gr'tʃo
bird	152 'ʔəφt ^h e
bite	180 'hatsɪn
black	242 'zu:b
blood	046 'maχse
blow	007 'fitsɪn
bone	044 'k'os:
bow	250 'ʃi:tm
breast	028 'ʔɛmɛ

bridge	230	ge'me
brother	120	'iʃʌm, ʔiʃim
brown	246	dala'tʃe
buffalo	171	me'ke
burn	200	'ʔan:atɪn
bush	048	'dɔrɒʃɔ
buttocks	033	'goju
buy	217	'ʃɪne
canoe	229	'go:ŋgo
cat	174	'geɪʃ
chicken	151	'kʷɔjz
chief	126	'zime
child	119	'nit ^h
chin	017	'gʌχ ^ə tʃe
claw	153	'guʃ
clay	211	'ma:ʒil
clothing	296	'ʔaʃal
cloud	222	'tʃ'i:tʃ'
cold	202	'k'εʒɪn
cold	203	
come	179	'ʔoxs
cook	081	'ʔuʃɪn
cough	088	p ^h ə'beʃt ^h ʌn
count	183	'k'aizɪn
cow	148	'wɔχʌn
crocodile	169	'gu:ri
crooked	262	'ʃe:tum
cup	084	'ʔak ^h ʌm
cut	074	't ^h ɪʃɪn
dance	010	'dulumən
dew	227	'tʃ'erke
die	093	'laχtʃ ^h ɪn
dig	062	jε'χʌndʌn
dirty	299	dʒaχ'kaʃt
dog	176	'kene
donkey	149	'jire
door	188	'ʔehe
down	284	'do:to
drink	083	'ʔutʃ'u
drum	011	'k ^h ərəba, 'dʌme
dry	298	'wutʃum
dull	249	pasn'pastu
dust	213	'bu:lu
ear	004	'k'a:me
earth	209	'hilə
eat	082	'ʔitʃɪn
egg	078	'mɔlu

eight	103	'k'ʌʃnaʃ
elbow	035	'k'izit ^h
empty	302	'wu:tʃup
enter	190	sa'he
exit	191	'woxmzɪn
eye	022	'ʔafe, 'ʔaʃe
eyebrow	021	'jiʃe, jife (pl.)
fall	092	'p ^h ɔtsɪn
farm	057	'jʌχʌn
fat	077	'k ^h uʃt ^h u
father	115	'babe
fear	170	'baʃtɪm
feather	155	'k ^h εle
fence	318	'riŋk
few	282	'ʔɪsup
fight	256	'ʔɪksɪn
fingernail	041	'guʃ
fire	199	'nu:nu
fish	162	'ʔɔrɔ'xo
fishnet	163	dal'dalanŋ, est'en
five	100	'ʃən:ε
flower	069	'tʃ'ɪʃʌm
fly	139	'k ^h obzo
fly	156	'fʌɾfʌɾʌn, 'ʃʌɾfʌɾʌn
fool	095	'gaje
foot	036	'dɔt ^h u
forearm	040	'dʒaχe
forehead	003	'bal ^ʃ t ^h i
four	099	'ʔud:ɔ
frog	165	'goʃər
fruit	070	'ʔaʃe
full	303	'ts'u:tʃɪnt
fur	130	'bande
garbage	300	'ʔɔlp'ɪn
gate	319	
give	076	'ʔimzɪn
go	320b	'tɪŋge
goat	146	'dʌre
God	127	'ʔijaʃ, ʔijaʃe
gold	214	'werk'
good	258	'ʔɪŋgu
gourd	085	'maŋgi
grass	066	'ʔaj
grave	094	'duχɔ
green	244	'tʃεɾεχɛnto
guts	031	'tʃ'ola ¹

hair of	001 'bände
head	
hand	039 ?ane
hard	279 'diχub
harvest	059 k'us'k'ustən
he	310 'no
head	002 'mət ^h e
hear	005 k'am'se
heart	045 'bud ^ə
heavy	269 '?intsu
here	293 'sk'io
hide	079 '?atʃin
hit	150 'gitʃ'in
hoe	061 'gajt ^h
hold	185 'bazin
honey	145 'k ^h oru
honeybee	143 '?intʃ'i
horn	147 '?uʃum
hot	201 'susulin
house	187 'do:katʃ
how?	294 ha'si
hundred	107 'ts'ət ^h
hungry	080 ne'nnsin
hunt	132 '?ad:ene
hunter	131 ?a'daŋ
hyena	175 'nai
I	308 '?atə
jump	316 ?otə'lətlə
kill	160 'deisin
knee	034 'boχ
knife	247 '?aɪfə
know	320c 'k'əsin
lake	235 'gimnaχ
laugh	086 jm'tʃ'ntʃ'in
leaf	054 'k'ame
left	275 'hede
leopard	173 'keriŋk
lie	305 giχn'giχntin
light	270 'tʃeku
lightning	225 'belχant
lip	012 '?ɪfe
listen	177 'k'amsin
liver	047 't ^h aχte
long	263 'gudum
louse	136 'garse
machete	060 ʃi'ʃik ^h t ^h ən
maize	064 'k ^h ab:ə

make	193 'goikarab
man	108 '?ɪɬɬ, '?ɪɬje
many	281 'gitʃo
market	219 'ba:lə
marry	111 'ba?in
meat	073 'wəhə
money	216 'meh
monkey	172 gui'do
moon	238 '?iɾfə
mother	117 '?iɪnd ^ə
mountain	220 'mɛ:zɛ
mouth	006 '?afe
mud	210 'tol
name	128 'mize
narrow	260 'bam:
navel	030 'guφu
neck	026 '?ɪχts'i
nest	157 ?ɛφ ^h k ^w ə'ehe
new	272 'wolgo
night	237 '?aχsti
nine	104 'wɪklaf
no	278 '?e:kai
none	274 wokolo'ke:ka
nose	019 'nuku
old	271 '?atsi
one	096 'wək ^h ɪl
other	320d 'balup
path	186 '?i:tsin
pig	133 'gudum
plant	063 k ^h ər'k ^h ərɪn
pot	198 'ma:je
pour	301
pull	315 'ʃaχsin
push	314 ge'he:
rain	223 'dɪ:bə
rainbow	224 'zulu
rat	159 '?urin
red	243
rest	123 'ʃumzən
right	276 'tsitsə
ripe	071 '?uʃɪn
river	228 'naχɛ, 'mire
road	317 'gaʃ
root	053 'tʃ'etʃ'e
rope	055 'gunt ^h o
rotten	072 tʃ'ɪφ'tʃ'ɪφɪn
run	122 '?izizin, '?ɪzizin

saliva	015	t ^h ufo
salt	197	'matsɪn
sand	212	'ʃa:je
sandals	037	'ʃɪϕΛ, 'ʃɛfi
say	116	'gemin
scorpion	161	'ϕɪndɪr
scratch	320e	'kɔts'kɔst'ɛn
see	023	'jɪŋzΛn
seed	058	mΛ'ʃit ^h
sell	218	'ʃɪnɛ
seven	102	t ^h ʊs:ʊm
sew	168	'dʒɪgzɪn
sharp	248	'k'anɛ
shield	254	'gu:ϕ
short	264	'tʃ'ɛidə
shoulder	027	'kaɪϕɛ
sick	091	gu'ŋɪŋt ^h ɪn
silver	215	'bɪr:
sing	009	'dulumən
sister	124	'mitʃ ^h e
sit	195	'dasɪn
six	101	'lahə, 'lah
skin	042	'bɪtʃɛ
sky	236	'ʒɛjaϕ
sleep	307	pasnpa'sɪntsɪn
small	266	'tʃɛko
smell	020	'səlχΛn
smoke	204	'tʃ'ubu
smooth	208	'laxob
snake	158	'gunu
sneeze	090	t'ɪdɪt ^h ɪn
soft	280	
spear	252	'bɪŋgɛ
spider	140	'k ^h ɪŋgə
spit	089	t ^h ut ^h uϕɪn
stand	196	'ʒuɪjuɪn
star	239	'bez
steal	075	'diβzΛn
stick	206	ka'litʃ
stone	207	'la:lɛ
stool	192	wu'tutɪn
straight	261	'ta:ztaz
sun	240	'ʒɪje
sweat	016	'ʒΛrkən, 'ʒΛrxən
sweep	189	'k'ɪrɛ
swim	164	
tail	134	'golan

take	184	'zuku
teach	125	t ^h ΛmΛr'sɪn
tear	025	'ʒaϕo'nΛχɛ
ten	105	t ^h am:ɛ
termite	141	'ʃɪrɪ
termite hill	142	'dūnɔ
that	286	'ʒɪ'seno
they	313	'kɛtɛ
thick	267	'zɛrkab
thigh	038	'k ^h arʃɛ
thin	268	'tɛɪs'tɛɪso
think	109	'ʒɪ'ʃɪntʃ ^h
this	285	'ʒɪ'seno
thorn	049	'ʒɔrk ^h ʊmo
thread	166	'kɪr
three	098	'mΛk ^h ɪm
throw	253	'k'ɔtʃɔ
thunder	226	'gu:ntu
tie	167	'zuk'sɪn
tobacco	065	'damp ^h o
tongue	014	'ʒɪdəm
tooth	013	'ʒɪtsɪ
tree	050	'ʒaχɛ
twenty	106	'wajdʊ
two	097	'k'Λt'ɪm
up	283	'lɛ:sɪn
vomit	087	'ts'ɔts'əhɪn
walk	121	dot ^h ka't ^h ɪŋgΛn
want	182	'mu:z
war	255	'dɪr:mɛ
warm	320f	'su:lum
water	231	'naχɛ
we	311	'wɔtu
wedding	112	'ʒɪsΛ
weed	068	'mantsΛ
weep	024	'ʒɛfsΛn
well	232	'tuso
wet	297	'baxzmu
what?	289	'ʒuɪjo
when?	290	'ʒa'mɔ:t
where?	292	'ʒa'mɔ:
whistle	008	'ʒugum, 'ɕugum
white	241	'guito
who?	287	'ʒa'je:
whose?	288	'ʒajkob
why?	295	wui'gɛsɪn
wide	259	'ʃak

wife	114 ʔin'did ^o
wind	221 'kɔ:mu
wing	154 'gʌsir
woman	110 'ʔamze
worm	138 'kʰatʃʰʌ
yawn	306 haɸʃ'taɸʃtɪn

yellow	245 ka'bainet
yes	277 ʔa'mo
yesterday	291 'naxɛ
you PL	312 'jɛ:se
you SG	309 'ja:ɛ

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