

How to find one's way in Gawwada
(on the grammar of space of a Cushitic language of Ethiopia)

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Gawwada, an East Cushitic language of the Dullay group, is spoken in a mountainous part of Southwest Ethiopia, at about 1,600-1,700 meters upon the sea level. This fact apparently has momentous consequences on the semantics of the language insofar as the linguistic expression of position and movement is concerned.

Building on Levinson's (2003) and Levinson and Wilkins' (2006) "Grammar of Space", the paper will address the question of the conceptualization of space in Gawwada. In particular, it will be seen that, e.g., "left" (Gawwada **pihatte**) and "right" (**miskitte**) have no place whatever in the expression of position and movement and are used for the right and left arms/hands only.

The Gawwada system is instead centered around a three-way distinction 'uphill' vs. 'downhill' vs. 'on the horizontal level'. In this regard, Gawwada is very similar to Tzeltal (Mayan; Levinson 2003: 109) and scores of other languages. A very similar system is also attested in the neighboring languages belonging to what Sasse (1986) has called the "Southwest Ethiopian language area". In particular, the spatial system of Konso, as investigated by Daudey and Hellenthal (2004), bears striking resemblances to what we find in Gawwada.

In Levinson's (2003) terms, the Gawwada spatial frame of reference is therefore allocentric and absolute: in other words, it makes reference to fixed elements, not to the speaker's or addressee's position.

In the paper the semantics and morphosyntax of the system will be sketched; it will be seen that in different roles the "uphill/downhill/same level" morphemes will be employed with different affixes, marking position or movement, or different degrees of distance, and often supplemented by additional elements.