

Converbs in Gwama

Dirk Kievit

SIL - Ethiopia

Gwama (more commonly known as Kwama) is a little-known—and possibly endangered—language spoken in western Ethiopia. It belongs to the Koman cluster of the Nilo-Saharan language family. The present study examines the use of converbs (or ‘nonfinite verb forms’) in Gwama based on their occurrence in a number of short narratives, thus answering Amha and Dimmendaal’s call for more a detailed study of converbs in Nilo-Saharan languages, particularly involving texts. In a typical case, the converb has no inflection while the main verb is inflected for person. Some of the questions to be examined are: 1) what morphological differences are there between converbs and main verbs? 2) What range of functions does the converb express? 3) Is word order used to distinguish between simultaneous and sequential relations? and 4) How are converbs used in discourse?