

A few Saho texts about bees and honey

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SOMMARIO

Nella prima parte di questo breve contributo dodici proverbi saho vengono presentati e tradotti, analizzandone anche i principali elementi grammaticali e la struttura testuale. Come indicato nelle sezioni “Source”, i proverbi sono stati raccolti in varie epoche e da diversi autori in Eritrea e nell’adiacente zona irob dell’Etiopia. Quelli che non sono stati raccolti direttamente sul campo da componenti del progetto ATMCS vengono riportati nella loro grafia originale, oltre che nell’attuale ortografia saho dell’Eritrea. Ad eccezione del proverbio nr. 6, tutti gli altri sono accompagnati dalla registrazione sonora di come sono stati letti da Axmadsacad Maxammad Cumar.

Nella seconda parte un testo sulle api pubblicato in uno dei libri scolastici eritrei in saho viene presentato, tradotto e commentato nei suoi principali aspetti grammaticali e lessicali. Anche questo testo è accompagnato dalla lettura da parte di Axmadsacad Maxammad Cumar.

Abbreviations and notes on orthography and grammar

Abbreviations:

3p.	3.rd plural	NS.	Northern Saho (Casawurta – Thaaruuca – Xasabat Care)
3s.	3.rd singular	orsp.	original spelling
abs.	absolutive	pf.	perfect
Ar.	Arabic	pl.	plural
caus.	causative	S	sentence
cf.	compare with	sgtv.	singulative
CS.	Central Saho (Minifire)	SS.	Southern Saho (Xazo ~ Xado, Irob)
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example	syn.	synonym
Eth.c.	Ethiopian calendar	tr.	transitive
f.	feminine	Ty.	Tigrinya
gen.	genitive	var.	variant
H	high	vI	first class verbs (verbs with prefixes and suffixes)
impf.	imperfect	vII	second class verbs (verbs with suffixes)
intr.	intransitive	vIII	third class verbs (stative verbs)
L	Low	vIV	fourth class verbs (compound verbs)
lit.	literally	σ	syllable
m.	masculine	~	variant
N	noun		
neg.	negative		
nom.	nominative		
NP	noun phrase		

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Orthography:

Except for the name Saho and when otherwise stated, Saho words are written with the current official orthography used in Eritrea. Notice in particular: *c* = [tʃ], *ch* = [tʃʰ], *č* = [tʃʰ], *dh* = [d] and its allophone *rh* = [ɾ], *gn* = [ɲ], *j* = [dʒ], *kh* = [x], *q* = [kʰ], *qh* = [xʰ], *sh* = [ʃ], *th* = [tʰ], *ts* = [sʰ], *x* = [ħ]. Long vowels are indicated with double letters, e.g., *a* [a] vs. *aa* [a:]. However, tone marks have been added in the grammatical analysis, e.g., *á* and *áa* for high-toned short and long *a*, *a* and *aa* for low-toned short and long *a*, *âa* for falling-toned long *a*, and *ǎa* for rising-toned long *a*.

Grammar

When it is not otherwise stated, the grammatical terms are those used in Banti and Vergari (2005).

I. Traditional texts

A proverb from the nineteenth century

(1.) *Heyaûtí kâ af baská kîní, kâ garbá sirá kîní* (or^{sp}.)

Xiyawti kaa af baska kinni, kaa garba siraa kinni. [I 01 Xiyawti.mp3](#)

‘The mouth of men is honey, his stomach is poison’

Source:

The above proverb is included in the well-known collection of Saho texts published by Leo Reinisch (1889: 302), as nr. 28 in its section VIII on *Sprichwörter*. It is reproduced here in its original spelling and in the Eritrean national Saho orthography.

Meaning:

Don’t believe what people say, because their feelings or what they think may be unpleasant for you. People frequently disguise what they really feel or think.

Grammatical analysis:

Xiyawtí: gen. of *xiyáwto* sgtv. m. of *xiyáw* f. ‘human being, person’. Here the genitive noun is a topic, resumed by the two occurrences of the possessive *káa*.

Káa af: *káa* ‘his’ + *af* (L-toned both as abs. and as nom.) m. nom. ‘mouth’. It is contracted into [kâ:f] with a falling tone in the audio recording.

Baská: f. abs. ‘honey’.

Kinní: 3s. m. present of *kinni* vIII ‘be’. This first occurrence of *kinní* has a final H-tone in order to mark that it is followed by another statement.

Garbá: f. nom. ‘stomach, belly’, here used to indicate ‘what one person thinks or feels’.

Siráa: m. abs. ‘poison’. Notice that this is an invariable noun that keeps the same form *siráa* when it occurs as abs. and nom.

Text structure analysis:

After the topic *xiyawti*, the proverb is formed by two parallel statements of 6 and, respectively 7 syllables of perfectly parallel structure:

[*kaa X*]_{SUBJECT} *Y kinni* vs. [*kaa Z*]_{SUBJECT} *W kinni*

While the two contrasted subjects *af* and *garba* are of uneven length, the two contrasted nouns *baska* and *siraa* are disyllabic nouns.

The two occurrences of *kinni* at the end of the two parts of this proverb provide a rhyme. Notice that it is not infrequent in Saho oral poetry for repetitions of the same word to occur at the ends or in other parts of successive lines. Indeed, it will be seen that many of the following proverbs display aspects of Saho poetic language.

Five other proverbs from the Southern Region of Eritrea

(2.) *Murri qaxar male, baska siraa male* [1 02 Murri qaxar.mp3](#)

‘Fresh milk doesn’t cause stomach ache, honey has no poison’

Source:

Collected by Moreno Vergari in 2002-2004 from Jamaal Cali, a speaker of NS. A variant is published in Abraahim Maxammad Cali (2005: 40): *baska siraa male, murri qaxar malee yaanah* ‘they say that honey has no poison, fresh milk doesn’t cause stomach ache’.

Meaning:

A deed done confidently doesn’t disappoint you. This proverb is used for stressing that something is without defects or blemish.

Grammatical analysis:

Murrí: nom. of *múrra* m. ‘fresh milk’ (of a cow, goat, or sheep).

Qaxár: abs. of *qaxár* m. ‘burning stomach or oesophagus’. Notice that this is an invariable noun that has *qaxár* also as nom and gen. The same noun also occurs in the sentence *qaxár sabbátah umáatih aniyo* ‘I feel bad because of *qaxár*’. The middle verb *qaxaarite* is derived from *qaxár*, *qaxaarite* or *qaxaarítak aniyo* ‘I feel my stomach or my oesophagus burning’.

Malé: ‘doesn’t have’. This first occurrence of *malé* has a final H-tone in order to mark that it is followed by another statement.

Baská: f. nom. ‘honey’.

Siráa: m. abs. ‘poison’ (cf. proverb 1.). Notice that *basár* m. abs. ‘dirt (one sees in dirty water or honey)’ occurs in another variant of this proverb: *murri qaxar male, baska basar male*.

Text structure analysis:

This proverb consists of two rhyming lines, each of six syllables, and of similar syntactic structure. The rhyme is provided by the two occurrences of *male* at the end of each line. The other four words are disyllables, that reinforce the syntactic

parallelism between the two lines:

| [σ σ]_{SUBJECT} [σ σ]_{OBJECT} *male* | [σ σ]_{SUBJECT} [σ σ]_{OBJECT} *male* ||

- (3.) *Baska beetaa baska, alliitaa baska, xarhitaa baska* [I 03 Baska beetaa.mp3](#)
 ‘Honey is honey when people eat it, it is honey when they vomit it, it is honey when they pour it’.

Source:

Abraahim Maxammad Cali (2005: 40).

Meaning:

This proverb is used to express appreciation of something, or to point out that a behaviour, a habit, etc., never changes. Maxammadcali Axmad explained it in Kaaribossa in 2008 saying: “*Baska beetaa basak-ta, gaxaa basak-ta*” (“honey is sweet when they eat it, it is sweet when it comes back”, i.e., when you vomit it you feel its sweet taste in your mouth).

Grammatical analysis:

Baská: f. nom. ‘honey’. Notice that it remains *baská* also when it is used as a N predicate. Here the N predicate *baská* is not followed by the copula *kinní*, even though NS. and CS. commonly use it with N predicates, as in *baská kinní* ‘it is honey’ and *siráa kinní* ‘it is poison’ in proverb (1.).

Béetaa participle of *beete* vII ‘eat’. Notice that this and the two subsequent participles are understood to be 3p. because they refer to an impersonal animate subject, usually expressed in Saho by means of the 3p. They are used here in different-subject configurations, because their subjects are impersonal 3p. while the subject of the three matrix clauses is *baská*, 3s. f.

Allíitaa var. *anlíitaa* participle of *anliite* ~ *alliite* vII ‘vomit’.

Xarhíttaa participle of *xarhite* middle of *xarhe* vII ‘pour, spill’.

Text structure analysis:

After the nominative topic *baska* the proverb is formed by three parallel statements of 4, 5 and, respectively, 5 syllables of perfectly parallel syntactic structure:

[V_{PARTICIPLE} *baska*]_S [V_{PARTICIPLE} *baska*]_S [V_{PARTICIPLE} *baska*]_S

These three clauses can be regarded as rhymed, cf. what has been said under proverb (1.) about multiple occurrences of the same word as rhymes in Saho oral poetry.

- (4.) *Cuureeko dhacaminnetii, baskat dhacam miyaarhige* [I 04 Cuureeko dhacaminnetii.mp3](#)
 ‘Who didn’t taste aloe, can not recognize the taste of honey’

Source:

Abraahim Maxammad Cali (2005: 51), who also provides a variant with *tamo* (m. 'taste, flavour') instead of *dhacam*.

Meaning:

If you didn't have bad experiences, you cannot appreciate good experiences. Only those who suffered can appreciate what is good.

Grammatical analysis:

Cuuréeko: *cuuré* + *-ko* 'from'. *Cuuré* f. is a general term used for different bitter plants of the same family as aloe.

Dhacamínnexétii: *dhacamínnexé* + *tíi*, where *dhacamínnexé* is the neg. relative 3s. of *dhacame* VII 'to taste', and *tíi* is the nom. of *tíya* m. 'one, one who'.

Baskát: gen of *baská* f. 'honey'.

Dhacám m. abs. 'flavour, taste'.

Míyaarhigé: neg. impf. 3s. m. of *eerhege* VI 'know'.

Text structure analysis:

This proverb consists of two halves of almost equal length: the subject NP *cuureeko dhacaminnetii*, and the object NP followed by the negative verb *baskat dhacam miyaarhige*. The former is 9 syllables long, the second 8 syllables.

Parallelism obtains between the two contrastive disyllables *cuure* '(bitter) aloe' and *baska* '(sweet) honey' at the beginning of each half. In the variant with *baskat dhacam* there is also full sound parallelism in the occurrence of the two etymologically related words *dhacaminne* 'who didn't taste' and *dhacam* 'flavour, taste' in the second positions of the two halves.

- (5.) *Zate le zizzaale lee baska betta, zate hin ziizzi lee xage beeta* [I.05 Zate le.mp3](#)
'The bees that agree with each other eat honey, while the beetle that doesn't agree with the others eats faeces'

Source:

Abraahim Maxammad Cali (2005: 137), who spells *zatele* for *zate le* and adds *yaanah* 'they say that' at the end of this proverb. Immediately after it he adds a variant with *qacattit* 'flies' instead of *ziizzi* in its second half, and the two forms of *beete* 'eat' in the pf. instead of the impf.: *Zatele zizzaale lee baska bette, zate hin qacattit lee xage beete yaanah*.

Meaning:

Working together is necessary for achieving success. Achieving unity is important for performing significant tasks.

Grammatical analysis:

Zaté f. abs. 'agreement, discussion'.

Lé relative present 3s. of *le* ~ *leya* VIII 'have'.

Zizzaalé nom. of *zizzaalé* f. ‘bee(s)’ used as a collective term.

Lee ... *lee* enclitic conjunctions used for contrasting NP’s in two successive clauses (*lel* could not be used here). Notice that *lee* occurs in second position, after the first NP of its clause.

Betta impf. 3s. f. of *beete* ‘eat’. Notice that it is realized as [bet:ǎ:] with its final vowel lengthened and with a rising tone in order to mark that it is immediately followed by another clause.

Hín relative present 3s. of *hina* ‘lack, not to have’.

Ziizzí nom. of *ziizza* m. ‘beetle’.

Xáge m. abs. ‘faeces, shit’ (mostly of human beings).

Beetá impf. 3s. m. of *beete* ‘eat’.

Text structure analysis:

This proverb consists of two lines of almost equal length:

<i>zate le zizzaale lee baska betta</i>	11 σ,
<i>zate hin ziizzi lee xage beeta</i>	10 σ.

The two lines display a quasi-rhyme in *betta* vs. *beeta*. There is consonantal assonance in the two initial nouns of each of the two lines (*zate* - *zizzaale* and *zate* - *ziizzi*), as well as alliteration in *baska betta* and *beeta*, and in *le* and the two occurrences of *lee*. The consonantal assonance pattern is thus the following one (notice that Ø indicates a sound that is not relevant for consonantal assonance):

<i>z - l - z (- zz) - l - b - b</i>	[= A - B - A (- A) - B - C - C]
<i>z - Ø - z (- zz) - l - Ø - b</i>	[= A - Ø - A (- A) - B - Ø - C]

The identical initial word *zate* occurs in the two contrastive relative clauses *zate le* ‘who have agreement’ and *zate hin* ‘who don’t have agreement’. The two contrasted nominatives *zizzaale* and *ziizzi* are of unequal syllabic length but display consonant assonance, while the other two contrasted nouns *baska* and *xage* are of identical syllabic length, since both of them are disyllables.

The syntactic structure of the two lines is perfectly parallel:

$$[[[N V]_{\text{RELATIVE CLAUSE}} N]_{\text{SUBJECT NP}} \textit{lee} N_{\text{OBJECT}} V]_s$$

- (6.) *Zizzaale dhaamati duuda, zizzaale yaabixeti duuda*
‘Who buys bees is a fool, who sells bees is a fool’

Source:

This proverb has been collected in Kaaribossa in 2008 during an interview with Maxammadcali Axmad, a speaker of northern Saho.

Meaning:

Doing useless and unnecessary things, or wanting to perform complex tasks without knowing enough about them is foolish. Indeed, those who know about bees know that a swarm may fly away from one's beehive, and are anyhow able to go in the wild and capture a swarm. Only Saho's who don't know how to handle bees could think of buying them.

Grammatical analysis:²

Dhaamati: *dhaama* + *ti*, where *dhaama* is the impf. 3s. m. of *dhaame* VII 'buy', and *ti* is the nom. of *tiya* m. 'one, one who', the same as *tii* in proverb (4.).

Duuda m. 'fool, stupid person'. Notice that here the N predicate is not followed by the copula *kinni*, just as in proverb (3.).

Yaabixeti: *yaabixe* + *ti*, where *yaabixe* is the impf. 3s. m. of *eebexe* VI 'sell'.

Text structure analysis:

The proverb is formed by two rhyming lines of almost equal length:

zizzaale dhaamati duuda 8 σ,
zizzaale yaabixeti duuda 9 σ.

The initial and last words are identical, and the only difference consists in the two dependent verbal forms *dhaama* vs. *yaabixe*. Also the syntactic structures of the two lines are identical:

[[N_{OBJECT} V]_{RELATIVE CLAUSE} *ti*]_{NP SUBJECT} [N]_{NP PREDICATE}

Seven other proverbs from the Irob Saho

(7.) *Hék'i hák'e-h gahá-do, ba'êri málab a'ubīné* (orosp.)

Xeqqi xaqqeh gaxa(a)do, baceeri malab aacubiine [I 07 Xeqqi.mp3](#)
 'If justice became just, the ox would drink honey beer'

Source:

The above proverb was collected by Herma Plazikowsky in Ethiopia from an "Abba Tesfāē", probably to be identified with the well-known Lazarist scholar Abba Täsfa Sällase, and published as nr. XII in Plazikowsky and Wagner (1953: 386). It is reproduced here in its original spelling and in the Eritrean national Saho orthography.

Meaning:

Plazikowsky and Wagner write: "Das Sprichwort spielt auf die Bestechlichkeit der abessinischen Richter an. Es ist genauso unmöglich, daß wirklich Recht gesprochen wird, wie daß ein Ochse Bier trinkt", i.e., the proverb refers to the corruptibility of Abyssinian judges. Just as it is impossible that an ox drinks honey beer, it is unlikely

² No tones are indicated here, because the audio file was not available to G. Banti when he prepared this part of this paper.

for a judge to pass a just sentence.

Grammatical analysis:

Xaqqi: nom. of *xaqqe* m. ‘justice’. Notice that Plazikowsky and Wagner write *hék’i* and *ba’éri* with penultimate stress, while NS. and CS. have ultimate high-tone in the nom. of these m. nouns (*xaqqí*, *beceerí*). If it is not a mistake, this would document a different tonal pattern of these nominatives in the southern Saho dialect of this Irob speaker.

Xáqqeh: *xáqqe* + *-h* ‘by, to, with’ (adverbial, goal, instrument). Here this postposition has an adverbial value.

Gaxáado: 3s. m. of the impf. of *gaxe* vII ‘to return to, to turn, to enter’ followed by the conjunction *-dǒ ~ -dǒo*. This form is used frequently in the protasis of contrary-to-fact conditional sentences as in this proverb, while different compound tenses can be used in their apodosis (see below). Another example of this kind of conditional sentence from a speaker of NS. is *taacubéedǒo béttak tiné* ‘if you had drunk, you would have eaten it’ (with the 2s. of the conjugated participle of *beete* vII ‘eat’).

Baceeri [baʕé:ri] or [baʕe:rí]: nom. of *bacéera* m. ‘ox’, a variant of *becéera*.

Málab m. abs. ‘honey beer, fermented beverage containing honey’.

Aacúbiiné: contracted variant of *aacúbi yiné*, 3s. m. of a compound tense formed by the participle of *oocobe* vI ‘drink’ and the pf. of *ine* vI ‘be, exist’. The form has final short *-i*, consistently with Reinisch (1878: 102) who reports for Irob Saho participles in short *-i* from vI verbs, e.g., *ālíki tîne*³ 2s., *ālíki yíne* 3s. m. from *ilike* ‘send’. In some NS. and CS. varieties these participles of vI verbs have long final vowels, e.g., *aacúbií*; cf. also the long final *-aa* in the three participles of vII verbs in proverb (3.).

Text structure analysis:

This proverb consists of a conditional sentence, whose protasis and apodosis are of unequal length. There are however consonantal assonances in its two clauses:

1st clause: 7 σ, x - x - x
2nd clause: 9 σ, b - c - b - c - b

The syntactic structure of the two clauses is almost identical:

1st clause: N_{SUBJECT} N-*h* V
2nd clause: N_{SUBJECT} N V

(8.) ይ ኢማናህ ግላ ግላን ተ ጁላይተ ።

Yi imaanah cida masaan te dilaalayta [I 08 Yi imaanah.mp3](#)

“‘Only by their trust in me they don’t make debts’ said the bee’.

³ Reinisch uses here an *a* with strikethrough, that is replaced here by *e* for typographical reasons.

Source:

Abba Täsfay Mädhən (1993 [Eth.c. = 2000 A.D.]: 88). It is reproduced here in *abba* Täsfay's adapted *fidel* orthography and in the Eritrean national Saho orthography.

Meaning:

Only reliable people or things should be trusted. Indeed, it is unwise and dangerous to make debts relying only on one's trust in bees, because the next year they may have gone away or not yield any honey.

Grammatical analysis:

Yi possessive 1s. 'my'. This is an instance of so-called objective possession, where the possessive is syntactically the object of its head noun.

Imáannah: *imáan* m. 'trust, belief, faith' + *-h* 'by, with, to' (instrument, adverbial, goal). Here this postposition has an instrumental value. In the recording of this proverb Axmadsacad, a speaker of CS., contracts *yi imáannah* into *yiimaannah*.

Cidá nf 'debt'.

Másâan neg. impf. 3p. of *saye* VII 'enter'. The negative particle in *abba* Täsfay's spelling is *má-*, already observed by Reinisch (1878: 95) for Irob Saho, whereas in NS. and CS. it is usually *mí-*. Axmadsacad in the recording reads *mísâan*. Notice also the construction *cidá saye* 'make a debt'.

Té pf. 3s. f. of *e* VI 'say'.

Dilaalayta southern sgtv. f. of *dilaalé* 'bee', the Irob variant of NS. *zizzaalé* 'id.'.

Text structure analysis:

This proverb is a quasi-wellerism with a dyadic structure consisting in (i.) a statement and (ii.) the identification of the speaker.

The recurrent vocalic pattern *i - a - a* (- *a*) in the three major constituents of this proverb provides it with vocalic assonance:

yi imannah (→ *yiimaannah*),
cida masaan,
dilaalayta.

(9.) ግጋብ ጉርተ ጲላላይታ ጰግሓድ ሓዎ ኮክዋጊይታ ።

Cagab gurte dilaaleyta, dagxad xawwo kok wagiita [I.09 Cagab gurte.mp3](#)
'A bee in search of trouble looks for pollen in your porridge'.

Source:

Abba Täsfay Mädhən (1993 [Eth.C. = 2000 A.D.]: 87). It is reproduced here in *abba* Täsfay's adapted *Fidel* orthography and in the Eritrean national Saho orthography.

Meaning:

Trouble seekers look for silly things where they don't exist. If you fight for defending yourself where you belong, it is your right, but if you fight where you don't belong, in other people's places, it is your fault if you get into trouble.

Grammatical analysis:

Cagáb f. abs. 'fault, crime'.

Gurte: pf. 3s. pf of *gure* vII 'want', SS. equivalent of *farhe*

Dilaaleyta: nom. of *dilaalé* f. 'bee'.

Dagxad: *dagxa* f. 'porridge (usually made of corn flour or also from other cereals)' +
-d 'in', SS. variant of *-ddé*.

Xáwwo m. abs. 'pollen' (also *xáwo*).

Kók: *ku* 'you' + *-k* 'against, from'.

Wagiita: impf. 3s. f. of *wagiye* vII 'look for, search'

Text structure analysis:

This proverb consists of two rhyming 8-syllable lines. The parallelism is highlighted orthographically by *abba* Täsfay' spellings **ዲላላይታ** and **ኮክዋጊይታ**, i.e., *dilalayta* and *kokwagiya*, so that the last two letters are **-ይታ**.

1.st line	σ σ σ σ σ σ σ ta
2.nd line	σ σ σ σ σ σ σ ta

The first line is a complex NP with an embedded relative clause, while the second one consists in the remaining part of the sentence, i.e., three complements and the main verb. The formal parallelism consists not only in the two occurrences of the final rhyming syllable *ta*, but also in the fact that the two initial words of each line are disyllables: *Cagab gurte* 'who wants fault' and, respectively, *dagxad xawwo* 'pollen in the porridge'. In addition to this, the vowels *a - ay - a* and *a - ii - a* of the final three syllables of the two lines are so similar that they can be regarded as an instance of quasi-assonance.

(10.) **ዲላላይታክ ማብሎ ዳየድ ራዕታ ።**

Dilaaleyta kee mablo dhayed racta [I 10 Dilaaleyta kee.mp3](#)
'A bee and sight remain nearby'.

Source:

Abba Täsfay Mädhən (1993 [Eth.C. = 2000 A.D.]: 89). It is reproduced here in *abba* Täsfay's adapted Fidel orthography and in the Eritrean national Saho orthography.

Meaning:

This proverb is often used for saying that one shouldn't underestimate anything. Indeed one's sight and the distance a bee can fly are limited. Because of the phrase *adde* (~ *ed*) *uble* 'see somebody negatively', 'make gossip about somebody', *mablo*

can also mean ‘gossip’ here. In this sense, this proverb can also be used for saying that gossip doesn’t go a long way, and that one can overcome it.

Maxammadcali Axmad of Kaaribossa provided a different interpretation of this proverb: just as bees can be hidden in nearby places while one cannot see them, your fault can be seen by other people while you cannot see it yourself.

Grammatical analysis:

Dilaaleyta sgtv. f. of. *dilaale* f. ‘bee’.

Kee ‘and’. Notice that the CS. speaker actually says *dilaaleytaakée*, with the final *-á* of *dilaaleyta* lengthened because of the enclitic *-kee*, and a final rising tone to mark that something follows.

Mabló nom. of *mabló* f. ‘sight, vision’, verbal noun of *uble* ‘see’.

Dhayéd: *dhayé* + *-d*, where *dhayé* f. is a SS. variant of *dhayí* f. ‘nearness. being near’ (verbal noun of *dhaye* vIII ‘be near’), and *-d* ‘in’ is the SS. variant of *-ddé*.

Racta: impf. 3s. f. of *raace* ‘stay, remain, being together’.

Text structure analysis:

Differently from most other proverbs discussed here, this one consists in a plain sentence with no particular formal features of parallelism. It begins with a subject NP of 7 syllables, formed by two conjoined nouns, and is closed by a sequence of 4 syllables formed by a complement followed by the verb.

The recording shows however that the speaker organizes this proverb in two half lines of 5 and 6 syllables respectively, by splitting up from the conjoined NP the second noun. In this manner, its first line is formed by a single word and an enclitic particle, i.e., *dilaaleytaakee* “a bee and”, while its second half line is formed by 3 disyllables, *mablo dhayed racta*. A structure is thus imposed on it by the performance, that strongly contrasts the first half against the second one.

(11.) ዳናናድ ባስካ ባሳክ ማታ ።

Dananad baska basak mataa [I 11 Dananad.mp3](#)

‘For a donkey, honey doesn’t taste good’.

Source:

Abba Täsfay Mädhən (1993 [Eth.C. = 2000 A.D.]: 89). It is reproduced here in *abba* Täsfay’s adapted Fidel orthography and in the Eritrean national Saho orthography.

Meaning:

An advice to an ignorant is senseless. It is useless to give advice or an important thing to a person who can’t appreciate it.

Grammatical analysis:

Danánad: *danán* m. ‘donkey’ + *-d* ‘for, to, in’. Notice that *danán* is the SS. variant of *zanán*, and that *-d* the SS. variant of *-ddé*.

Baská nom. f. ‘honey’.

Basák: ideophone used in the intransitive phrases *basák e* and *basák erhxe* ‘being sweet, tasty, delicious’.

Matáa: negative impf. 3s. f. of *e vI* ‘say’.

Text structure analysis:

But for the initial topic *dananad* that is a trisyllable, the other three words are disyllables as in proverb (10.). Consonantal and vocalic assonance is apparent in the two central words *baska* and *basak*.

(12.) ዋኒ ዋኒ ባህታ ዲላላ ባስካ ባህታ ።

Waani waani bahta, dilaale baska bahta [I 12 Waani waani.mp3](#)
‘Speech brings speech, honey bees bring honey’.

Source:

Abba Täsfay Mädhən (1993 [Eth.C. = 2000 A.D.]: 89). It is reproduced here in *abba* Täsfay’s adapted Fidel orthography and in the Eritrean national Saho orthography.

Meaning:

This proverb is used for pointing out that one has something to say about what has been just said by another person. Indeed, at times communication creates complex problems. However, when one speaks it is obvious that communication develops, not only creating problems, but also solving them some times.

Grammatical analysis:

Waani f. ‘speech, talking’. The first occurrence of this word is in the nominative, the second one in the absolutive. These two case forms are identical in this class of feminine nouns, that includes also *dilaalé* f. ‘bee(s)’.

Bahtá: impf. 3s. f. of *baahe* vII ‘bring’. At the end of the first line this word is pronounced as [bahtá:], with a lengthened final vowel and a rising tone in order to mark that it is followed by another line.

Dilaalé: nom. of *dilaalé* f. ‘bee(s)’.

Text structure analysis:

This proverb is formed by two rhyming lines of almost equal length. As in the proverbs (1.) and (2.) the rhyme consists in the occurrence of two identical words at the end of each line:

waani waani bahta 6 σ
dilaale baska bahta 7 σ.

Notice that with the only exception of *dilaale*, that is a trisyllable, all other words are disyllables. The initial repetition of *waani* in two different case forms, and the final occurrence of *baska bahta*, that display consonantal and vocalic assonance, provide an

opening and closing pattern, that is strengthened by the rhyme that binds the two lines together.

This pattern can be represented as follows:

A - A - B₁
X - B₂ - B₁

In addition to this, the syntactic structure of the two lines is identical:

[N_{SUBJECT} N_{OBJECT} V]_S

II. A contemporary text

The following text about bees is from *SB2*: 19-22, i.e., from the Eritrean school book on “Saho language” for the 4th class. It is reproduced here in its original text and provided with a translation and an audio recording by Ahmadsacad Maxammad Cumar, one of the two authors.

Curfa 3 Zizzaale



Zizzaale aymi? Zizzaale bahaayimko inki cayna tekkih
awwaaxat filcooko kinni. Zizzaale galil lemhi sabbatah,
firta. Zizzaale ula ulah hido tiyah mimartaaki,
cishleh marta awwaaxa kinni.



Zizzaale mangum farshishsham kee xiyawti barhahi
nabradde naba gide lem kinni. Aki bahaayimko yimfillee
xaal lel leya. Tayim lel xomboobaako xawwo askatti kee
lay guura isheh kee aki xiyawah macaasha abtamhi
sabbatah kinni. Ishi caduuko lel ishe dhawudhdha.
Zizzaale ta xussunte thabiica lemhi sabbatah, tayfaaraw
sahal kinni.

19

In order to enable the reader to follow the translation and the recording more easily, the text has been split up into paragraphs. The beginning of each new page is indicated in square brackets.

[p. 19, § 1] [II 19-01.mp3](#)

Zizzaale aymi? Zizzaale bahaayimko inki cayna tekkih awwaaxat filcooko kinni. Zizzaale galil lemhi sabbatah, firta. Zizzaale ula ulah hido tiya tiyah mimartaaki, cishleh marta awwaaxa kinni.

‘What are bees? Bees are a species of animals that belong to the family of insects. Bees fly because they have wings. Bees don’t live alone, they are insects that live in swarms’.

Comments:

Zizzaale bahaayimko inki cayna tekkih awwaaxat filcooko kinni: even though this sentence has been translated in English with an embedded relative clause, its actual structure is formed by the main clause *awwaaxat filcooko kinni* ‘it is from the family of insects’ preceded by a subordinate clause marked by a pf. with *-h (tekkih)* that is semantically more similar to a conjoined clause: ‘Bees are one species of animals and ...’.

Zizzaale ula ulah hido tiya tiyah mimartaaki, cishleh marta awwaaxa kinni: in this sentence a negative focus (‘not living alone’) is contrasted with an affirmative focus (‘being insects that live in swarms’) by means of a negative verbal form + *-ki*, as in p. 22, § 1.

[p. 19, § 2] [II 19-02.mp3](#)

Zizzaale mangum farhshishsham kee xiyawti barhahi nabradde naba gide lem kinni. Aki bahaayimko yimfillee xaal lel leya. Tayim lel xomboobaako xawwo askatti kee lay guura isheh kee aki xiyawah macaasha abtamhi sabbatah kinni. Ishi caduuko lel ishe dhawudhdha. Zizzaale ta xussumte thabiica lemhi sabbatah, tayfaaraw sahal kinni.

‘Bees are very useful and have an important role for the survival of men. They also behave differently from other animals. This is because they produce food for themselves and for other animals by picking pollen from flowers and fetching water. And they defend themselves from their enemies. Because bees have this aforementioned behaviour, it is easy to raise them’.

Comments:

Xiyawti barha: lit. ‘son of man’ is a quasi-calque from Ar. بنو آدم *banū Adam* ‘sons of Adam, mankind’.

Xomboobaako xawwo askatti kee lay guura: *askatti* and *guura* are pronounced as [aská:ti:] and, respectively [gú:ra:] by Axmadsacad. They are the participles of *eskette* vI ‘collect, pick’ and *guure* vII ‘fetch (water)’.

[p. 20, § 1] [II 20-01.mp3](#)

Akkinnan zizzaalet filci barhsime xaal, gide kee abitto yabbuxute zoobitih yaqhoome. Usun lel reezanto, xunjur kee kaddamte/xawwo taskattem kinon. Akkinnanti lel ishuuray akleya.

‘Each colony of bees consists of groups that have different behaviours, roles and occupations. They are the chief (queen bee), the drones, and the workers/those that collect pollen. Each of them has its own job’.

Comments:

Akkinnanti: *akkinnan* indefinite relative of *ekke* ‘be, become, happen’ + *ti* nom. m. of *tiya* ‘the one that’. Since the indefinite relative is syntactically a modifier, it requires *tiya* as dummy NP head.

Ishuuray: *ishi* reflexive 3s. possessive + *uray* m. ‘work’

[p. 20, § 2] [II 20-02.mp3](#)

Reezanti amaa xawaz/ciyaali aniinah mangum farhshiisha. Reezanti bademko amaa xawaz hido cishli fax-fax yah yalay. Reezanti say zizzaalettö kinni. Inki zizzaaletti qafodde, inki reezanti bisah kinni maram. Aki cusub reezanti yunkulluqhemko, amaa cambaale reezanti lel ishi filco yabbirhih irolle yawce. Cusub cishle lel dhisha. Wohido lel sinne-sinneh yangaaciinih amlikinnanti/subinnanti adde mara. Zizzaalet reezanto saytiya kinamhi sabbatah amfaara tee uray kinni. Xayit waqhte inki lellecidde 2500-3000 lalimtiya dhagan dhalta. Zizzaalet reezantohi cumri aykee 5 iggida dhagan gufa.

‘The chief is very necessary for life of the swarm. If the chief died, the family would scatter and vanish. The chief is a female bee. In one beehive there lives only one chief. If another new chief is born, the chief who resided there takes its own swarm and goes outside. It thus founds a new colony. Otherwise they fight each other and whoever wins lives there. Since the chief of the bees is a female, reproduction is its job. In times of abundance (i.e., when there is much rain and food), it lays up to 2500-3000 eggs in one day. The age of the chief of the bees (can) reach up to 5 years’.

Comments:

Amaa xawaz/ciyaali: the anaphoric demonstrative *amaa* is used here because the concept of bee swarm has already been introduced in the preceding paragraphs.

Xawaz gen. of *xawaz* m. actually means ‘family’, but is used here as a synonym of *cishle* ‘swarm’.

Ciyaali gen. of *ciyaala* ‘family, members of a household’ is a loanword from Ar. عيال ^{‘iyāl} ‘children, dependents’ that also occurs in Ty. ሰያል ^{‘əyāl} ‘members of a household’. (The final *-a* in the Saho word is probably to be explained as a blend with Ar. عائلة ^{‘āla} syn. of ^{‘iyāl}).

Fax-fax yah: from ideophonic *fax-fax* e vIV ‘scatter (intr.)’.

Zizzaalettö: sgtv. f. of *zizzaale* ‘bee’. The dieresis is used in Saho orthography for distinguishing tonal minimal pairs such as *zizzaaletto* [ziz:a:lét:o] m. ‘male bee’ from *zizzaalettö* [ziz:a:let:ó] f. ‘female bee’, *barha* [báɾa] m. ‘male child’ from *barhä* [baɾá] f. ‘female child’, etc.

Inki zizzaaletti qafodde, inki reezanti bisah kinni maram: notice the pseudo-cleft construction where the focussed nominative NP *inki reezanti bisah* ‘only one chief’ is the subject of the 3s. copula *kinni*, while the predicate NP *maram* ‘what exists’ (*mara* ‘it exists’ nominalized by *-m*) occurs after the copula.

Bisah: ‘only’, postposed to the NP it focuses, that can occur in the nom. if it is required as *inki reezanti bisah* ‘only one chief’. Notice that *bisah* is a loan from dialectal Ar. *بِسْ bass ~ biss* ‘only, just’.

Amlikinnanti: *amlikinnan* invariable relative of *imlike* vI ‘win’ + *ti* nom. m. of *tiya* ‘the one who’.

Subinnanti: *subinnan* invariable relative of *sube* vII ‘win’ + *ti* nom. m. of *tiya* ‘the one who’.

[p. 20, § 3] [II 20-03.mp3](#)

Xunjur dulusam kee kurkurin cirhele zizzaalet filco kinon. Xunjur labeeto kinon. Amaa amfaara lel ten araxah yakke. Nibaarholle xunjur lay araktam kinon yaanah warroyshan. Tayim laakin zirab kinni. Tayim kalath akah yakkem lel xunjur cadur miyakdumiini. Amaa macaashat askotta kee aki uray akimara kinni abtam.

‘The drones are a group of bees that are fat and have a round shape. The drones are males. Reproduction takes place by means of them. In our country it is said that the drones are those that fetch water. But this is false. The reason that this is wrong is that drones never work. Food collecting and other jobs, it is other ones who do them’.

Comments:

Amaa amfaara: the anaphoric demonstrative *amaa* is used because the concept of reproduction has already been introduced in the preceding paragraph.

Ten araxah: lit. ‘by means of their way’.

Nibaarholle: *ni* ‘our’ + *baarho* f. ‘country, earth’ + *-lle* ‘in’.

Yaanah warroyshan: notice the 3p. used as an impersonal form, and the subordinate form *yaanah* (from *e* vI ‘say’) used to mark the direct quote that depends from *warroyshan* ‘they claim’.

Amaa macaashat askotta kee aki uray akimara kinni abtam: the object of *abtam* ‘those who perform’ is *amaa macaashat askotta kee aki uray* ‘collecting food and the other work’, that is separated from its verb and put in topic position. *Akimara* (*aki* ‘other’ + *mara* pl. of *tiya* ‘the one who’) is the focussed NP of the pseudo-cleft, while the position of *abtam* after the copula *kinni* marks that it a presupposed element.

[p. 20, § 4] [II 20-04.mp3](#)

Zizzaaleeko takdumem quntsubam kee urhurham yekkiinih ummannimko mangum kinon. Ten migac akah [p. 21] yasxasseekah lel umman uray abtam tena kinni. Ta kaddamte amfaaraako bextih aki uray inkoh sinneh aban. Masalan teelo yaskattin. Baskat xabuz aban. Lay yakkeedo arakan.

‘Among the bees those who work are small and short, and are more numerous than all the other ones. Like their name [p. 21] indicates, it’s they who perform all the work. These workers, except for breeding, perform the other jobs by themselves. For

instance, they collect food. They build honeycombs (lit. combs of honey). They also fetch water’.

Comments:

Ummannimko mangum kinon: *ummannimko* (*umman* + nominalizing *-m* + *-ko* ‘from’), *mangum* (*mango* vIII ‘be many, be much’ + nominalizing *-m*). Notice the comparative construction that is lit. ‘they are many from all’.

Umman uray abtam tena kinni: notice the pseudo-cleft with *umman uray abtam* ‘those who perform (*abtam* 3s. f. of *abe* vII ‘do’ + nominalizing *-m*) all the work’ subject of *kinni* (3s.) and the focussed long non-subject pronoun *tena* ‘them’.

[p. 21, § 1] [II 21-01.mp3](#)


Zizzaalet carek qafō/edcerto akyan. Amaa qafōhi addalle shimceeko yekke baskat xabuz geytima. Zizzaalet samfē akyan. Ta xabuzhi addalle lamma zifraako mango curum geytima. Xashaakul nih lel akah deecimna. Akkinnan xishkol lixa jiha leya. Xashaakul baskat akazzan kee ayfaarah yamficin.

‘The house of the bees is called *qafō* or *edcerto*. Inside the beehive one finds honeycombs made of wax. They are called *samfē* of bees. On the two sides of these honeycombs there are many holes. They are called *xashaakul* (‘cells’). Each cell has six sides. The cells are useful for storing honey and for reproduction’.

Comments:

Ta xabuzhi addalle lamma zifraako: lit. ‘in (*adda* f. ‘interior’ + *-lle* ‘to’) the honeycombs from the two sides’.

Xashaakul nih lel akah deecimna: as in p. 20 § 3 a subordinate form of *e* vI ‘say’, i.e., *niḥ* ‘we said and’ is used to mark a direct quote that depends from *akah deecimna* ‘we call them’ (where *akah* is the free form of the postposition *-h* that here indicates goal or instrument). Here the direct quote is the name *xashaakul* that is given to the cells in a honeycomb.

Jiha: lit. ‘side’ from Ar.  *ġiḥa* ‘side, direction’.

[p. 21, § 2] [II 21-02.mp3](#)

Zizzaalet qafō lamma cayna kinni. Usun lel caadat qafō kee waqhti baahe qafō kinon. Xorhti gonradde hido dhiirhocudde yakkeedo sigta.

‘Beehives (lit. houses of bees) are of two kinds. They are the traditional beehives and the modern beehives (lit. beehives time brought). They live in tree holes and in cliffs’.

Comments:

Zizzaalet qafō: lit. ‘the hives of bees’.

Waqhti baahe qafō: lit. ‘the hives that time has brought’.

[p. 22, § 1] [II 22-01.mp3](#)

Zizzaale fantat lacnale makaano kixina. Xiyawti barhah lel mango nafaaca taxay. Nibaarholle amaa mudhdhug kin zizzaalet nafaaca baska bisah kinni. Zizzaalet nafaaca laakin amayim bisah makin. Baska macaasha kee macabah (birzeh) akah namneefece. Tee limo lel qaali kinni. Zizzaale baska abtam xiyawuh woole aki bahaayimih tih makinki isheh betto kinni. Nibaarholle aki zizzaalet nafaaca shimca kinni. Thuwaafah lel akah namneefece. Amaa tithiwwire dowlalle laakin shimce barhsime qamumti abittoh, diwah kabel akah zuukan liččidoh akah yamneefecin.

‘Bees like places that have intermediate temperatures. They give a huge benefit to people. In our country the most known use of bees is just honey. But this is not the only benefit of bees. We use honey as food and as beverage (as *birze* ‘honey mixed with milk and water’). But its price is expensive. It is not for people or for other animals that bees prepare honey, but it is for eating it themselves. In our country another use of bees is wax. We use it for the *thuwaaf* candles. But in developed countries people use wax for making different chemicals, for medicines, and for the polish with which they make shoes shine’.

Comments:

Fantat lacnale makaano: *fantat lacnale* is a relative clause headed by *makaano* f. ‘place, area’. *Fantat lacna* is the object of the relative verb form *le* ‘that has’, and is formed by *fantat* (gen. of *fanta* sgtv. f. of *fan* m. ‘middle, center’) and *lacna* f. ‘heat, temperature’.

Amaa mudhdhug kin zizzaalet nafaaca: complex NP introduced by the anaphoric demonstrative *amaa*, and closed by the head N *nafaaca* ‘benefit, usefulness’. *Mudhdhug kin* is a relative clause with the N *mudhdhug* m. ‘famous, well-known person or thing’ used as NP predicate of the relative verb form *kin* ‘that is’ (from *kinni* ‘be’). *Zizzaalet* is the gen. of *zizzaale* ‘bee’.

Zizzaalet nafaaca laakin amayim bisah makin: lit. ‘but the benefit of bees is not just that’.

Zizzaale baska abtam xiyawuh woole aki bahaayimih tih makinki isheh betto kinni: this is a complex pseudo-cleft construction where a negative focus is contrasted with an affirmative focus. *Zizzaale baska abtam* is the presupposed part ‘that bees produce honey’. *Xiyawuh woole aki bahaayimih tih makinki* has two focussed disjoined PP’s (*xiyawuh* ‘for people’ and *aki bahaayimih* ‘for other animals’) followed by a subordinate form of *e* vI ‘say’ (*tih* 3s. f.) and *makinki* (*makin* ‘it is not’ + *-ki*). *Tih*, lit. ‘they said and’, ‘having said’, marks that the PP’s that precede it express a purpose that the bees may have had, while *-ki* marks that a contrasted string follows. *Isheh betto kinni* has as focussed constituent the purpose clause *isheh betto* ‘for eating (it) for themselves’, where *betto* is the subjunctive 3s. of *beete* vII ‘eat’, and *isheh* is the 3s. reflexive pronoun with the postposition *-h*, that here marks the beneficiary.

Barhsime qamumti abittoh: lit. ‘for the preparation of chemicals that have been separated’. The pf. of the passive verb *barhsime* ‘be separated, be distinguished’ is used for ‘be different’. *Qamumti* is a gen. of *qamum* pl. of *qamam* ‘spices, chemical’, from Ty. $\Phi\sigma\theta\upsilon$ *qämäm* ‘id.’. *Abittoh* is *abitto* f. verbal noun of *abe* vII ‘do, prepare, perform’.

Kabel akah zuukan liččidoh: consists of the relative clause *kabel akah zuukan* ‘that they polish shoes with, with which they polish shoes’ and its head *liččidoh*, a PP formed by *liččido* ‘shoe polish’ (from Italian *lucido* [ˈluʦido]) and *-h* ‘with, by means of’).

[p. 22, § 2] [II 22-02.mp3](#)

*Aki bahaayim balih zizzaale yakkeedo caduu/cange leya. Amaa mudhdhug kin tee caduuko lel dhuurhe, furut, lashshab, saxdad, cafur, alarhowe kee aki kimbir yanin. Ishi cangeeko dhawrhumto lel barhsime abittot abta. Afti gabolle zizzaale xinze tamneefece. Malammik lel amaa ishi carehi af **dacmur** [sic!] xorhko taskatteyah diriirigishsha. Tee caduu lel sahalah orobo mirhiica.*

‘Like other animals, also bees have enemies. Among their well-known enemies there are ants, rats, bats, *saxdad*, *cafur*, *alarhowe* and other birds. They make different things in order to be protected against their enemies. First of all, bees use poison. Secondly they enclose the door of their home with propolis they collect from trees. Their enemies cannot enter it easily’.

Comments:

Dacmur xorhko taskatteyah: complex PP with a relative clause that follows its head N *dacmur* ‘propolis’. The postposed relative clause is marked by *-ya* at the end of the verbal form *taskatte* ‘they collect’. The postposition *-h* ‘with, by means of’ is phrase final, and is thus added to the postposed relative verbal form *taskatteya*.

[p. 22, § 3] [II 22-03.mp3](#)

Bukaako nayshadhdharho, zizzaale ayqarile kaddamte kinni. Amaa gedda lel mango orba geyno hidhdhah, qarceh baclayishno nelle tane. Tee caduu lel tee carehi wakaliiko mirix ishno missila. Kinni hanuk laakin didit (D.D.T) akyan baalic diwa tee wakalille namnaafaco nelle mitane. Amaa diwa umbukaa amaa zizzaale raacinnixa taylaw dhictamhi sabbatah lel kinni.

‘To make things short, bees are active workers. Therefore in order to get a good harvest, we must treat them in a good manner. And it is necessary to keep away their enemies from the surroundings of their home. But we should not use in their surroundings the insecticide that is called DDT. This is because this insecticide can destroy everything including the bees’.

Comments:

Bukaako nayshadhdharho: purpose clause formed by the PP *bukaako* (*buka* f. ‘excess, exceeding part, superior part’ + *-ko* ‘from’) and the subjunctive 1p. of *iyshidhdhirhe* vI ‘keep distant, distance’, caus. of *edhdheerhe* vI ‘become distant from’, itself the inchoative of *dheedha* vIII ‘be distant, be long, be tall’.

Qarceh baclayishno nelle tane: lit. ‘it is to us that we treat them with care’. The negative form of this construction occurs a few lines later in *namnaafaco nelle mitane* lit. ‘it is not to us that we use’.

Mirix ishno missila: *mirix ishno* is the subjunctive 1p. of *mirix ishe* vIV ‘keep away’, a tr. ideophonic compound verb. The whole clause *tee caduu tee carehi wakaliiko*

mirix ishno ‘that we keep away their enemies from the surroundings of their home’ is the subject of the predicate N *missila* m. ‘appropriate thing, necessary thing’. Notice that differently from the clause *zizzaale ayqarile kaddamte kinni* ‘bees are active workers’ in this very paragraph, here the predicate NP is not followed by the copula, cf. proverbs (3.) and (6.).

Baalic diwa: a neologism that is lit. ‘medicine of parasites’.

Amaa diwa umbukaa amaa zizzaale raacinnixa taylaw dhictamhi sabbatah lel kinni: a complex sentence with an inanimate subject ‘it, this’ implied by the 3s. copula *kinni* ‘it is’.

Amaa diwa umbukaa amaa zizzaale raacinnixa taylaw dhictamhi sabbatah: a causal clause marked by the phrase *-hi sabbatah* ‘because of’ that requires the preceding clause to be nominalised by means of *-m*.

Umbukaa: a var. of *umbuka ~ ambuka* ‘all’. It is syntactically a N and can occur as head of a NP.

Amaa zizzaale raacinnixa: a participial clause with *amaa zizzaale* ‘the bees’ as its subject, while *raacinnixa* is the participle of the negative relative of *raace* vII ‘remain behind, be delayed’; the meaning is thus ‘the bees not remaining behind’, i.e., ‘bees not being excluded’.

Taylaw dhicta: *taylaw* is the subjunctive 3s. f. of *eylee* vI ‘eliminate’, causative of *elee* vI ‘get lost’. *Dhicta* is the impf. 3s. f. of *dhiice* vII ‘can, be able’. The subject of both verbs is *amaa diwa* ‘this insecticide’.