

KOORETE TONOLOGY

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The Omotic language Koorete is spoken in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State in southwestern Ethiopia, Sidama Region. According to Hayward (2003), it belongs to the East Omoto subgroup of the Omoto-C'ara group of the Gimojan subbranch of the Ta-Ne branch of North Omotic. Koorete phonology has been described by Cerulli (1929), Hayward (1982), Ford (1990), and Theil (forthcoming). Hayward (1982) described it as an *accentual* language, with an accent realized as a heightened pitch. Ford (1990) «feel[s] that loudness, rather than heightened pitch ... is the principle exponent of stress.» She adds, however, that «[t]hough rare, there is a downward gliding tone which seems to be contrastive and which occurs only on stressed syllables.»

In my analysis, based on data collected in Addis Ababa and Amaaro-Keele in May 2005, and in Addis Ababa in February, November/December 2006, and November/December 2007, Koorete is not a stress or accent language. It has two distinctive word level tones, a *rising* tone and a *falling* tone, marked in the following minimal pairs with an acute accent (´) and a grave accent (`), respectively, on the first vowel letter in a word (the phonemic transcription is based on Theil, forthcoming):

|        |                   |        |                    |
|--------|-------------------|--------|--------------------|
| ʔááʔe  | v 'curse'         | ʔàáʔe  | v 'scratch'        |
| k'áme  | v 'speak angrily' | k`àme  | v 'become evening' |
| s'óome | v 'throw'         | s`òome | v 'fast'           |

The rising tone is realized as a pitch rising throughout the word. Before a pause, the last syllable has a low tone (in Koorete, all non-clitic words are polysyllabic). The falling tone is realized as a slightly falling pitch throughout the word. Typologically, this tonological system seems to differ strongly from the systems found in other Ta-Ne languages.

#### References

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