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Whistling your identity: name tunes and music among the Oyda people of Ethiopia

In this presentation I discuss the music-language interface observed among the Oyda people of southwest Ethiopia, speakers of an Omotic language by the same name. Most likely influenced by their natural environment that is dominated by mountains and valleys, the Oyda people use a naming and distance communication system (*moyzé*) that involves whistling, blowing out air through the mouth while modulating it by using the fingers. Most people in Oyda have *moyzé súnts*: a short, melodic name-tune that is used side by side their *s'ééggo súnts* (lit. 'calling name'). With few exceptions, there is no correspondence between the *moyzé súnts* and *s'ééggo súnts* of an individual. *Moyzé* is also the name of a wind-instrument exclusively used in funeral dirges, indicating a link between the naming system and music, but this is not all: there are two other musical practices which exhibit even more clearly the link between music and *moyzé súnts*. After introducing the characteristics of *moyzé súnts*, the way it is learnt and remembered as well as the cultural and day-to-day contexts of its use, I illustrate the two musical practices. I then focus on the claim of reciprocal identification between the interlocutors when initiating distance interaction via *moyzé súnts*, i.e., the assertion that the addressee/name-bearer can identify the whistler/caller even though the latter is not visible - because s/he "knows the hand of his/her caller". I discuss what "knowing the hand" might mean.

Azeb Amha is a linguist, senior researcher at the African Studies Centre Leiden, Leiden University. Her research interest includes morpho-syntax, language-culture interface, and linguistic documentation. As co-founder of the ASCL's Collaborative Research Group: *Collaboration and Contestation in Words: dialogues and disputes in African social realities*, she is engaged in the study of discourse and rhetoric of inclusion and alienation in (public) speeches. Azeb teaches on language and power, linguistic diversity and language policy, and research methodology. Her publications include *The Maale Language* (2001), several articles on the grammar and typology of Omotic languages of Ethiopia, and three co-edited books. Azeb is president of the Netherlands Association of African Studies and chair of the Research Masters African Studies programme at Leiden University.



Moyzé, wind-Instrument.
Photographed by
Azeb Amha in
Garda Qebele of
Oyda district
(12 Nov 2010).

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Weitere Informationen: www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de

JG | ■