

**Sociolinguistic Survey Report of the  
Chara, Dime, Melo, and Nayi  
Languages of Ethiopia  
Part I**

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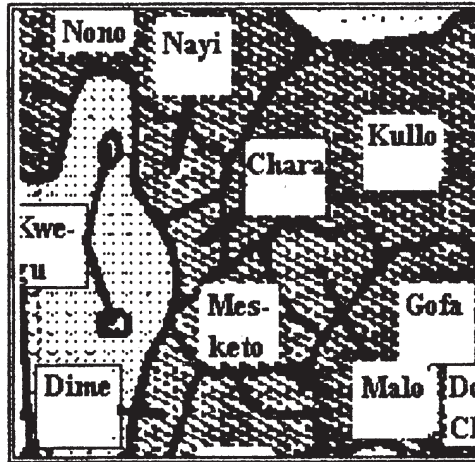
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*Sketch map*

**Chara, Dime, Malo, and Nayi**  
in their geographical relations

## 1 Introduction

This report presents findings from a survey trip undertaken to North Omo and Kafficho Zone between February 28 and March 2, 1995, to gather information on the languages *Dime*, *Melo*, *Chara*, and *Nayi*.

The languages Melo, Chara, and Nayi are classified as “North Omotic” languages, and Dime is classified as “South Omotic”. According to the Housing and Population Census of 1984, the population figures are as follows:

<i>Language group</i>	<i>Population figures of 1984</i>
Chara	13,051
Dime	2,218
Melo	58,039
Nayi	12,177

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\*An earlier version of this report previously appeared as “Survey of Chara, Dime, Melo, and Nayi”. Survey of Little-known Languages of Ethiopia (S.L.L.E.) Linguistic Report 25, March 1995. Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies and Summer Institute of Linguistics.

The two purposes of the trip were:

- (1) to gather a word list in order to identify the language and make it comparable to others, and
- (2) to gather sociolinguistic statements in order to assess the status of the language.

To gather the sociolinguistic information, interviews were held at the following places:

Language group	Location of interviews
Chara	Ch'och'a K'ola desert
Dime	Garo
Melo	Laha
Nayi	Dishi (in the Decha Woreda)

The means of research were (a) the S.L.L.E. word list of 320 items, (b) sociolinguistic questionnaires, and (c) personal interaction.

### **1.1 Acknowledgments**

We are grateful for the active support of the interpreters Wondimagegne Kumala, Kifle Gebre-Mariam, and Kedir Mekonnen Ali in Dishi, and for the support of the Nayi representative.

## **2 Sociolinguistic Information on Nayi**

### **2.1 Nayi villages and varieties**

The interviewees were asked:

- (a) in which villages the Nayi language is being used in exactly the same way,
- (b) in which villages Nayi is spoken slightly differently, but in a way that the mutual intelligibility between Nayi speakers is not affected,
- (c) in which villages Nayi is spoken so differently that it is not understood anymore by other Nayi speakers.

**2.1.1 Conforming use of Nayi.** According to the interviewees, Nayi is spoken in exactly the same way in these villages:

*Ada, Angla, Dishī, Gebera, Goda, Gushi, Kaida, Ogeya, Ouya, Shashi Bera, Shekibamba, and Shocha.*

**2.1.2 Divergent use of Nayi.** Some interviewees mentioned the following villages as places where Nayi is spoken only slightly differently: *Chocha, Masha, and Sharmo.*

Almost all interviewees said that there are no Nayi villages where people claim to speak Nayi while their dialect is not recognized as Nayi by others. Two respondents mentioned that the Nayi spoken in Masha is spoken so poorly that it is incomprehensible to them. The best or “purest” variety of Nayi was said to be spoken in *Dishi* and in *Gushi Goda*.

## 2.2 Evaluation of responses to sociolinguistic questionnaires

On the basis of the questionnaires, the following preliminary statements can be made about sociolinguistic aspects of Nayi.

Table 1. Age and educational levels of respondents

Age group	Sex		Education*	Literacy and		Total
	M	F	No education	Elementary Sch	High Sch.	
15–30	13	2	8	3	4	15
31–45	2	3	4	1	0	5
46–60	4	0	4	0	0	4
60+	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	19	5	16	4	4	24
Percentage	79	21	67	16.5	16.5	100

\*Four respondents made no statement concerning their education.

Table 2. Native language of the respondent

Languages	Nayi	Kaffa	Total
Number	13	11	24
Percentage	54	46	100

Table 3. First language of the respondent’s parents

Languages	Father			Mother			Total
	Nayi	Kaffa	Total	Nayi	Kaffa	Amharic	
Number	17	7	24	8	15	1	24
Percentage	71	29	100	33	63	4	100



spouses also speak:\*

Languages	Kaffa only	Nayi	Kaffa	Amharic	K/C/A	not married	Total
Number	5	3	4	1	1	2	16
Percentage	31	19	25	6	6	12.5	100

\*Eight interviewees made no statement.

**Comment on table 5:** This table clearly shows the outstanding importance Kaffa has as a language of communication for the family members.

Asked about the languages used most often with the family members, the interviewees responded as follows:

Table 6. Languages used most often within the family with the father:

Languages	Nayi	Kaffa	Nayi/Kaffa	Kaffa/Oromo	Total
Numbers	9	9	5	1	24
Percentage	37.5	37.5	21	4	100

with the mother:

Languages	Nayi	Kaffa	Nayi/Kaffa	Nayi/Amh./Oromo	Total
Numbers	5	14	4	1	24
Percentage	21	58	17	4	100

with the siblings:

Languages	Kaffa	Nayi	Nayi/Kaffa	Kaffa/Amharic	Total
Numbers	12	5	6	1	24
Percentage	50	21	25	4	100

with the spouses:

Languages	Kaffa	Kaffa/Nayi	Nayi	Total
Numbers	10	6	1	17
Percentage	59	35	6	100

\*Two interviewees are not married and five did not respond.

**Comments on table 6:** While Kaffa is being mostly used by the respondents when speaking with spouses, siblings, and mothers, this is not true when speaking with the fathers. Nayi is used here to the same degree. This corresponds with the tendency that Nayi men marry Kaffa women. On the other hand, the dominance of Kaffa is very significant as a language which is actually being used in the families to a large extent.

Table 7. Languages used most often with their own children\*

Languages	Kaffa only	Kaffa/Nayi	Nayi only	Total
Numbers	12	5	3	20
Percentage	60	25	15	100

\*It should be noted that four respondents were stated to have no children.

**Comments on table 7:** Within the family, Kaffa is the language used predominantly. Despite the fact that 54 percent of the respondents have Nayi as their native language, far fewer actually use it to communicate with their own children. This means the mother tongue is passed on to the children only to a small degree.

### Language use in the village and in town

In public life, the majority of the respondents claim to speak both Kaffa and Nayi with friends, at the local market, and with the elders of the village. At the same time, when asked about the extent to which the language is used in these ways, most of the respondents stated that Kaffa was being used predominantly, and Nayi only some.

Even when speaking with administrators in the district, Kaffa is mostly being used. Amharic, being the standard language in many parts of the country where matters of administration are concerned, is only used to a small degree.

The situation is a bit different when people go to the market in town (Bonga). To communicate there, people employ various languages: Kaffa, Nayi, Chara, and Amharic. Kaffa was mentioned by everybody as being used. Nayi and Chara are spoken to the same degree but only half as much as Kaffa. Also some Amharic is being spoken.

### 2.3 Other aspects of language use

The languages used in religious situations are both Kaffa and Amharic (language use in church and for personal prayers at home).

We also asked the interviewees concerning situations when language is used in a more emotional context. We got the following responses: About 20 percent of the responses were that when dreaming, or when angry, they never “use” Kaffa but always Nayi. The remaining 80 percent use Kaffa along with Nayi, Amharic or Chara, to varying degrees.

### 2.4 Language attitudes and vitality of the language

The attitude towards one’s own language seems to be somewhat indifferent. All respondents stated that it is good if Nayi people marry people who are

not Nayi (with the exception of Chara), and they said that this does in fact happen very frequently.

Approximately 30 percent said that old people would not be unhappy if they did not hear their mother tongue being spoken in their homes. More than half of the respondents said that Nayi will not be spoken “to some degree” by future generations, but at the same time more than 50 percent stated that in the village of *Dishi*, where the interview took place, Nayi will be spoken any more in the future. Already, today, they know many of the Nayi people who have abandoned their mother tongue in favor of Kaffa; such people are said to live “in many villages”. Only in remote villages of the surrounding area like in *Gushi* and *Goda* could the Nayi language possibly survive, they claimed.

### **2.5 Cultural change**

Approximately 37 percent of the interviewees answered that the Nayi people are not in a process of change and that they do not adopt the customs of other cultures. Nevertheless, approximately 63 percent stated it was “good” and even “useful” to marry Kaffa people and adopt their customs. By contrast, it was also said that it is “not good” to marry Chara people and adopt their culture.

### **2.6 Development of the language**

The interviewees mentioned Amharic and Kaffa as the best languages to choose for producing books and magazines. However, the majority of the interviewees (approximately 70 percent) expressed also an interest in the development of the Nayi language. Concerning the topics for publications in the Nayi language, the interviewees mentioned agriculture, education, health, and religion.

Nearly 70 percent of the interviewees declared they would be willing to attend literacy classes, but 33 percent said they would not—without giving reasons why not. Approximately two-thirds would send their children to attend literacy classes in Nayi.

## **3 Conclusion**

This survey among the Nayi people was meant to be a follow-up survey to strengthen the results gained during the previous S.L.L.E. survey of Nayi. We think it is correct and obvious to conclude, on the basis of these and previous data, that the Nayi people are in fact in a process of changing where they

adopt not only the customs, but also the language of the Kaffa people. This was welcomed by the majority of the respondents.

In support of this statement, we shall summarize the main points of the sociolinguistic survey: Intermarriage occurs very frequently, and as a result of intermarriage, young people gradually abandon Nayi in favor of Kaffa which now is predominantly being used in the families as well as in public life. Already 90 percent of the Nayi respondents' children acquire Kaffa as their first language, and in addition 60 percent of the respondents speak only Kaffa with their children. It was further stated that young people speak Kaffa less and less. As a result, Amharic and Kaffa were mentioned as the best languages for publishing books.

Nayi might survive as a language in small and remote pockets for some time, but the results as presented above would seem to suggest that a development of the language into a written form would not be a worthwhile project.

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