

# The ensete in Gurage

## Nomenclature, use and meaning extension

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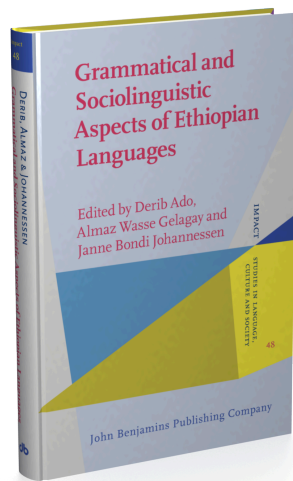
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# The ensete in Gurage

## Nomenclature, use and meaning extension

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The aim of this article is to investigate the way Gurage people name the diverse ensete (*Ensete ventricosum*) varieties and how that naming categorises varieties of the plant. It also attempts to describe lexical entities associated with ensete and its products, meaning extensions of ensete names and the associated vocabularies in everyday language use, such as in proverbs and insults. The study follows cross-sectional research design and qualitative methodology. Key consultant interviews and interview guides were used as a method and tool, respectively. Eight key consultants from Gumer, Chaha, Inor, Ezha, and Gyeta participated in the study. The findings show that there are about 71 ensete varieties in Gurage. The people classify ensete varieties according to color, size, value, propensity, source of the plant, height, and other variables. The lexical nets related to the plant, its products and byproducts are significantly large and qualify documenting them as part of lexicography. Some ensete variety names are metaphorically used to insult someone, as in *g'inb"ə* 'obese' and in proverbs, as in *g'inb"ə ihata birəzin t'onata jim"əsin* [Gynbuwe its.water heavy.on.it its.power it. seems.to it] 'When the ensete variety Gynbuwe carries much water in its stem, it considers itself as an entity that has much power'. The study can help linguists, anthropologists, and ethno-botanists in studying the interaction between man, language and nature, in this case the ensete plant.

**Keywords:** culture, ensete, Gurage, nomenclature, semantics

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Background

Culture is man's intervention in nature. Language is both a part of culture, as the way people use it and interact with one another is culture specific, and is the means by which culture is encoded and transferred.

Gurage refers to south Ethiosemitic speakers living in the Gurage Zone of the Southern Nations and Nationalities Regional State (SNNPRS). It also refers to the place the people live in, and with the addition of the morpheme {-ina} to their language, assuming the form Guragina. The main diet of Gurage comes from the ensete, named in Gurage as *əsət*, plant ('*Ensete ventricosum*', also known in English as Ethiopian banana, Abyssinian banana, or false banana). They have in fact have been described as the people of ensete culture (Shack 1966). The plant is drought-resistant and, hence, contributes largely to food security in the often drought-stricken tropical country, Ethiopia. The plant is grown mostly in the south-west, where Cushitic, Omotic and Semitic speakers live (Blench 2007).

Ensete has been a topic of interest to anthropologists, botanists and anthropological linguists. A few studies have been done from perspective of economic values, including food security in densely populated areas, commercial values and tourism.

The diversity of the plant has been relatively better studied from an ethnobotanical perspective. It was discovered that there are cultivated and wild varieties of ensete (Blench 2007; Smeds 1955), although there is an argument that the wild varieties may not be the same species as the cultivated varieties. This needs more scientific explanation through comparative study of the two varieties. Within the cultivated varieties of the plant, farmers distinguish several types. For instance, a recent work by GCTC, 2004 [2012 E.C.] lists about 60 varieties of ensete varieties in Gurage.

Names are labels given to humans, plants, places and objects. Names are studied for various reasons. Human names have been studied from cultural, semantic and pragmatic perspectives, including metaphorical extensions (Fekede 2014). Plant names have been studied by botanists to classify plants and preserve them. Place names, or toponyms, have also been studied to uncover historical and anthropological facts, such as settlement patterns, mobility, contact situations, etc. Names of objects have been studied by lexicographers and anthropologists to document languages and cultures. The study of nomenclatures of the ensete plant and the objects associated with it will help as an input for lexicography on one hand, and to classify the plant's varieties based on the indigenous knowledge of the plant's users. The fact that ensete is part of Gurage culture has not only contributed to hundreds of lexicons of the language, but also it is the sources to several proverbs and metaphors. This language use, together with the nomenclature of the ensete plant and its culture deserves description and documentation.

## 1.2 Statement of the problem

There are a few descriptive studies on ensete (cf. Section 1.6); however, there are no in-depth studies on ensete plant in Gurage dealing with the nomenclatures, patterns of classification of the plant's varieties and uses of the product and byproduct of the ensete plant.

Only a few farmers, often elders, are able to distinguish the several varieties of the ensete plant. When it comes to knowledge of ensete varieties with medicinal value, very few people even among the elders could identify them. Documenting the nomenclature and the traditional classification of the plants with different associated meanings can help knowledge transfer among individual members of Gurage society. The different uses of the ensete plant have less scientifically been documented. In fact, it has been reported that every part of the plant is used as a product or byproduct. It is food for both people and animals, and the byproducts are used for making mats, bags, sacks and building houses with its rope (Shack 1966; Blench 2007; Hudson 2007).

From a linguistic perspective, despite lists of a few names of the plant, the language use associated with ensete plant – particularly the proverbs and semantic extensions – need attention. There are a number of attributes that show the value difference among the plant's varieties as in: *bək'ət'əra; badədetim wəra* (drought Badedet delicious *'during a drought, even the Badedet variety is delicious'*). Again, a variety of ensete, *g'imbiwə* which has the ability to contain more water than other varieties has been attributed metaphorically with human qualities, as in: *g'imbiwə iha-ta b-irəzi-n, t'ona-ta ji-m"əsi-n* (Gimbuwe water-3SGM.POSS when-heavy-3SGMO, power-3SGM.POSS 3SGM-seem-3SGMO *'when the water it contained in its stem makes it heavier, Gimbuwe thinks that it has much power'*). The actual meaning is that someone who is physically huge thinks that he has the strength to defeat a person who is not physically big. The language used as attribute with the products of the plant as well needs attention: *buja*: 'byproduct of *wussa*' is metaphorically assigned to a 'foolish person'; *gagəra* 'white strip on cooked *wussa*' is metaphorically used to mean 'not courageous'; *at'irk'ujə* 'dried and baked *buja*' is used as attribute for 'teeny weeny'. Thus, this study is an attempt to fill this knowledge gap.

## 1.3 Objective

The main objective of this study is to provide a descriptive account of əsət culture in Gurage with particular emphasis on nomenclature, which somehow presupposes a traditional classification of the plant's varieties, use and meaning extension.

Specifically, the study aims to:

- Uncover the existing ‘traditional’ classifications of the ensete plant, and thereby find out if the classification helps one to differentiate the ensete varieties.
- Find out the different uses of the plant’s products and byproducts in the cultures, including: food, medicine and other uses of socio-cultural and economic importance.
- Document ensete-related vocabularies, and investigate semantic extensions and pragmatic uses of the ensete vocabulary in everyday communication.

#### 1.4 Significance

The study will help to document the diversity of the plant, knowledge about it and the practice of use. It can aid lexicographers to include ensete vocabularies in dictionaries. The semantic extensions will aid language users in understanding the expressions and the culture, which can help educators in preparing teaching materials. As many parts of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People’s Regional State practice the ensete culture, the findings will help knowledge and skills transfer, as well as comparative study of the plant in the region.

#### 1.5 Methodology

The research is cross-sectional description in design and qualitative in methodology. Regarding sampling, two types are used, namely, area and participant sampling. Different agro-ecological areas in Gurage – namely, Gumer, Chaha, Inor, Ezha and Gyeta – were included. Ensete may grow in Dega ‘temperate’ zones (2300–3200 mSL) only in small scale, Woinadega ‘sub-tropical’ zones (1500–2300 mSL), and Qolla ‘tropical’ zones (1100–1500 mSL). The districts selected include all the three ecological areas. The maturation time and the ensete varieties are expected to vary in these climatic zones. It is also good to check if a particular ensete variety has the same status, attribute and value in the different agro-climatic zones. Participants were selected purposefully based on age: elders (40–55), middle-aged (31–40) and youngsters (18–30); and by gender: male and female of the various age ranges. The age difference was included if there is intergenerational transfer of ensete variety names. Gender difference is required because there are clear-cut gender roles regarding labour. For example, men plant the plant and look after it, while women are responsible for providing manure for the plant, and for processing the plant in converting it into food and other byproducts, such as fibre. The main tool used is semi-structured interview guide, with which information on ensete varieties,

uses, and semantic extension was obtained. We also made elicitation of ensete nomenclatures from the key consultants. The data obtained were transcribed phonemically. We used the Chaha variety for transcription because it is understood by many Guragina speakers. We tried to indicate the source dialect when names of ensete varieties totally differed formally and/or semantically from the other dialects. The analysis method is categorisation, thematic description and interpretation of semantic extensions.

## 1.6 Literature review

Shack (1966) in his book *The Gurage: A People of the Ensete Culture* describe the importance of ensete in Gurage. He also provides the various cultures of the people from an anthropological perspective. Alemayehu (1992) discusses ensete culture and its importance in Gurage with much focus on the history of the people. Gebreyesus (1991) has a section on the description of ensete in his book *The Gurage and Their Culture*. GCTC (2004 [2012]) describes the ensete culture in Gurage and lists 60 ensete varieties. Blench (2007) offers a history of ensete in Highland Ethiopia and compares the name ensete in some Cushitic, Omotic, Semitic and Nilo-Saharan languages. Hudson (2007) provides a comparative distribution of 20 ensete vocabularies among five Highland East Cushitic Languages (Burji, Gedeo, Sidama, Kambata and Hadiyya) and three Gurage languages (Chaha, Silte and Soddo). Leslau (1969) offers a text describing the importance of ensete in Gurage. As most of the works had broader perspectives and described ensete only partially, a focus on the classification, the ensete vocabularies documentation and semantic extensions of the lexical items were not well studied. This study attempts to provide a descriptive account of ensete vocabularies and their semantic extensions from the Gurage cultural milieu to fill the existing gap.

## 1.7 Organisation of the chapter

This chapter has three sections consisting of introduction, presentation of the results and summary and discussion. Section 1, the introduction, provides the background to the research site and the people being studied, the problem statement, the objective of the study, significance of the study, the research methodology used and literature review on ensete. Section 2 presents the result of the study in two main parts: Section 2.1 provides the ensete nomenclature and its diversity, and Section 2.2 deals with the semantic extensions of ensete-related expressions. The third section summarises the study and discusses the results.

## 2. Presentation of results

### 2.1 Nomenclature and diversity

Gurage people speak about 12 dialect clusters of a language called *Guragina*. A recent study (Fekede 2015) shows that some of these dialects are less intelligible to others, but most of them in Sebatbet Gurage are relatively well understood by most Gurage language speakers, mainly by the west Gurage people and Mesqan. The fact that Gurage languages exhibit variation is also seen in the very name of ensete, which is called *əsət* in Chaha, Inor, Endegegn, Geto; *əssət* in Ezha, Muhir, Mesqan, Gogot, and Kistane. Wolane, an east Gurage language variety has *wesse* for ensete, which is borrowed from the Highland East Cushitic languages such as Sidama, Kambata and Hadiyya. Another east Gurage language variety called Zay, which is found in Oromya in the Island of Zway Lake, has *wərqe* for the plant. It seems that Zay borrowed the name from Oromo.

#### 2.1.1 *Nomenclature based on development stages*

Six stages of growth have been recorded across Sebatbet Gurage. Due to dialect variations, some stages have different names. For instance, the first seedling stage is named *fʷənɸʷə* in Gumer and Geto, but *bʷəfa* in Chaha. The latter name applies only to the leaf of the eucalyptus tree in Gumer and not for the stage of the ensete plant. Similarly, the fourth stage is called *təkʷət* in Gumer and Chaha but *məsra* in Ezha. This latter term has the meaning ‘about to reach’ implying that it is about to reach the stage at which it will be transplanted to *hiba* the ‘fifth stage of ensete’. Some *məsra* can directly be transplanted to the ensete stage escaping the fifth, *hiba*, level. The term *əsət* has both a specific meaning, the grown stage of four to five years, of the plant and a generic meaning all the varieties and stages of the plant. Figure 1 shows *fʷənɸʷə* / *bʷəfa* ‘the first seedling stage of ensete’.

To grow the seedling, farmers uproot ensete plant at its fourth stage, and then cut off the stem at about five centimetres above the corm. After that, they drill out its centre that basically grows tiller, then they fill the drilled part with stone and rids so that a single tiller may not grow. Next, the plant is placed in a hole prepared for it. Within a year, the plant grows a number of seedlings as shown in the Figure 1, and all the set are called *fʷənɸʷə*. In some Gurage language varieties, *fʷənɸʷə* is also called *bʷəfa*, which has the meaning ‘leaf’ in other varieties.

The second growth stage of the ensete plant is *simʷa*. At this stage the sets in the *fʷənɸʷə* are separated, and are planted in pairs in rows. Usually, they are planted closer to one another and often near the home of farmers so that they may get heat from the smoke that comes out of their huts. The *simʷa* looks like the one shown in the Figure 2. The *simʷa*, which were planted closer to one other and in pairs of rows, are transplanted after a year, after which they are planted far apart and in a





Figure 1. fʷən fʷə (*bwäfa*) 'seedlings'



Figure 2. simʷa



single row, rather than in pair of rows. This third growth stage of the plant is called *jə-mara sim<sup>w</sup>a* (of-line *sim<sup>w</sup>a*) ‘lined *sim<sup>w</sup>a*’.

The picture in Figure 3 shows this third stage. After a year, or when the *sim<sup>w</sup>a* is two years old, it is transplanted into separate holes dug about 50 cm apart. The plants are still in rows like *sim<sup>w</sup>a*, except for the distance between them. This fourth growth stage of the ensete is named *t’ək’jət* in Chaha and Gumer, but *məsrə* in Ezha; cf. Figure 4.

As shown in Figure 4, *t’ək’jət* is independently planted and the wider space between the plants allows for the plant to grow thicker and branch out several leaves. A year later, the *t’ək’jət* are transplanted into similar rows, but placed farther apart from one another so that they can grow bigger without much competition for nutrients. The plant at this fifth stage is called *hiba*. Some bigger *t’ək’jət* ensete plant may be transplanted to a permanent ensete plant hole, rather than to the *hiba* stage. *Hiba* is transplanted to a permanent ensete hole after a year, and it is now called *əsət* (ensete). Figure 5 shows ensete in its final planting location.

Since each stage of development between transplantation requires a year, ensete becomes a foodstuff only after six years. A six-year-old ensete can be uprooted mainly for its corm. The stem part reaches for the stage of scraping often at seven years. Though the ensete is uprooted at the age six, it may be scraped together with those ensete plants aged seven and above to make *Wussa* ‘the main product of ensete’, out which varieties of bread types are prepared.



Figure 3. *jə-mara sim<sup>w</sup>a*



Figure 4. t'ak'at



Figure 5. asat

### 2.1.2 Parts of ensete and its products

Ensete has several parts, including the leaf, branches carrying the leaves, stem, root and corm. There are also other names that are not shown in Figure 6 below, because a few of such parts are invisible at the surface and the others are the results of physical changes, such as some parts of the plant becoming dry. The names of invisible parts and those that are results of change are verbally described.

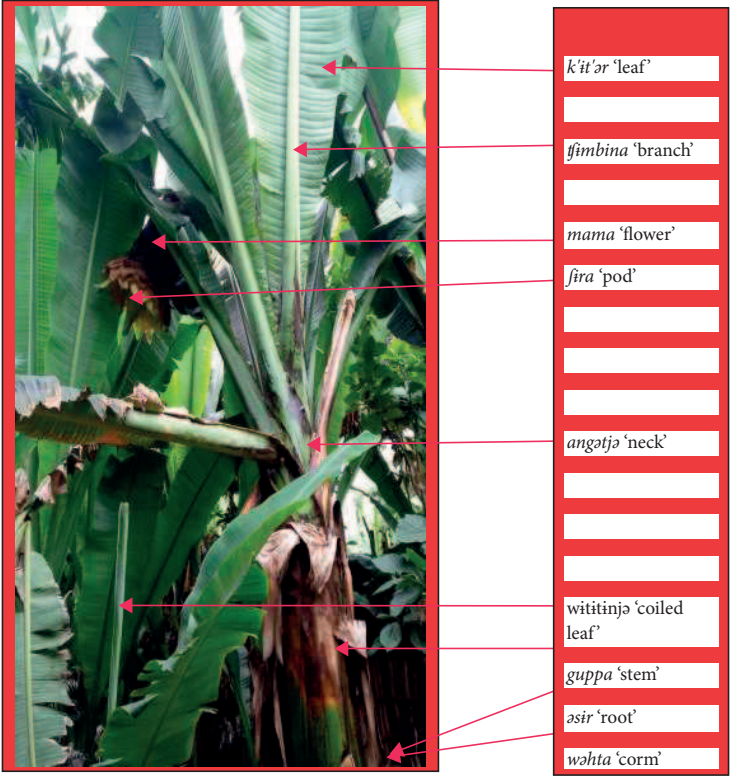


Figure 6. Parts of ensete

Note that *wititinjə* 'coiled leaf' becomes a flower when the ensete becomes mature enough. The flower bears pods that look like bananas. After flowering, the ensete plant becomes dry if it is not uprooted and scraped.

When the ensete plant is uprooted, the *guppa*, which has several layers, is detached layer by layer. Three names of *guppa* are identified, based on the layer levels. The outer-most layers are called *nitḡijə* 'detached stem', the second layer is *nətf'wə* 'whitish' and the inner layer is *ink'j'ink'ina*, which is used as food for animals, since it is not scraped and fermented for human consumption. It is not known why this

part is avoided in making ‘*wussa*’. It could be chopped, since it is very soft, and fermented together with the other parts of the scraped stems.

When *nifija* becomes dry, it is called *enwa*; when *tifimbina* gets dry, it is called *wədərə* ‘rope’; if the *wədərə* is not cut off and collected for use, it becomes extremely dry and cannot be used for tying or other useful purposes. Extremely dry *wədərə* is called *kʷəkʷasa*, and can only be burnt and used for cooking food.

Inside the *guppa* and *tifimbina*, there is a soft substance with netlike holes, called *zanza*. This is often chopped into pieces and added as a component in making *wussa*. In fact, *wussa* is a mixture of scraped *guppa*, chopped *zanza* and tiny ground *wəhta* ‘corm’. Figure 7 shows a corm made ready for grinding (a) and after grinding (b):

a. Wəhta ‘corm’



b. Burəma ‘ground/chopped corm’



Figure 7. Corm before and after grinding

*Burəma*, chopped *zanza* and scraped *guppa* are mixed and stored for fermentation. The output of these three is called *t’ikʷət*. When *t’ikʷət* becomes well-fermented after a couple of weeks, it is called *wussa*, which also represents the name for bread made out of the same. A jelly-like liquid that is obtained from *burəma* and scraped *guppa* is called *at’met*, which is used to make porridge. The raw *wussa* is often squeezed with *kəbsasa* ‘less finely scraped fibre’, then placed on a wooden tool called *zəmbʷərə*, chopped with a big knife called *sənda* and finger-protecting wooden tool called *jifotfpʷətʃə* ‘wood for doing’. The liquid that comes out when the *wussa* is squeezed is called *bʷija*, which may be boiled and eaten during the rainy season, or can be dried and baked as a type of bread called *at’irkʷijə*.



*Wussa* in its ‘bread’ form has three names often based on its thickness. The extreme thin type is called *albab<sup>w</sup>ətfat*; the mid-level is called *afafat* and the thick variety is *dap<sup>w</sup>a*. Raw *wussa* that is squeezed and finely cut may be roasted rather than baked. This roasted *wussa* is called *braprat*.

2.1.3 *Ensete variety names*

In this subsection, we discuss the naming of the diverse ensete varieties in Gurage culture. Most ensete names are based on shape, color, value, size, origin, originator, character and other semantic fields. We attempt to present them with these semantic fields. In cases of overlap in the semantic fields, we provide explanation. The ensete varieties whose semantic category refers only to label the plant are presented in a separate category.

a. *Ensete variety names based on shape or size*

About eleven ensete varieties seem to have been named, based on their shape or size. Table 1 provides such ensete varieties:

Table 1. Ensete names associated with shape & size

SN	Name	M-by-M gloss	Transliteration
1	<i>antf<sup>i</sup>r-o</i>	short-VOC	‘the short’
2	<i>ank’əf<sup>w</sup>-jə</i>	spoon-INS	‘spoon like’
3	<i>aba-k’it’e</i>	father-leaf	‘leafy’
4	<i>tfəh<sup>w</sup>-jət</i>	spear-like	‘the sharp (slim)’
5	<i>f<sup>w</sup>ir-inzir</i>	rat-ear	‘small leafy’
6	<i>gufən-wə</i>	grow.fast-of	‘growing fast/become big’
7	<i>kəkəra-t</i>	stretch-ADV	‘stretchy (spreading leaves)’
8	<i>atfak’it’</i>	Crack	‘cracking’
9	<i>imir-jə</i>	stone-ADJ	‘tight’
10	<i>zəg<sup>w</sup>irə-t</i>	wood.store.on ceiling-ADV	‘growing very high’
11	<i>dər-jə/ dəre</i>	tight-ADJ	‘having tight layers of stem’

It is worth explaining the morphology and meaning of the words representing ensete varieties in Table 1. The name *antf<sup>i</sup>ro* comes from *antf<sup>i</sup>r* ‘short’ in Silt’e language, but *atf<sup>i</sup>r-* with deletion of /n/ in central Gurage languages. The morpheme {-o} – vocative marker- gives it the gloss, ‘you short’ or characterizing the plant as ‘the shot’. In *ank’əf<sup>w</sup>jə*; *ank’əf<sup>w</sup>ə* refers to ‘spoon’; and the morpheme {-jə} is used as instrument marker, and to derive attributive adjectives. Thus, *ank’əf<sup>w</sup>jə* is an ensete variety having ‘spoon shape’ stem layers called ‘*k’əsra*’ when the plant is uprooted and the stem layers are detached from one another. The name *abak’it’e* is a compound of *aba* ‘father’ and *k’it’e*, which in isolation is spelt *k’it’ər* ‘leaf’; so,

*abak'it'ar* refers to 'ensete variety having wide leaves'. The name *tʃəh<sup>w</sup>jət* is from *tʃəh<sup>w</sup>ə* 'spear' and morphemes {-jə-} and the {-t} feminine and focus marker, so *tʃəhwjət* characterises the ensete variety as 'slim' and growing vertically, but not becoming much broader. The variety *f<sup>w</sup>ir-inzir* is named by combining an animal name *f<sup>w</sup>ir* 'rat' and *inzir* 'ear'; implying a 'rat's ear'. For the Gurage community, a rat's ear is considered the smallest ear animals have. Thus, this attribute is given to the variety of ensete that has small leaves.

The name *gufən-wə* comes from *gufən*- 'big and growing fast', and {-wə} is attributive or agentive morpheme with masculine gender as in *ʃəg<sup>w</sup>ərwə* [wizard-AGE.M 'the he wizard'] as opposed to *ʃəg<sup>w</sup>ərwət* 'the she wizard'. Therefore, *gufənwə* characterises the ensete variety as the one growing wider (bigger) and fast. The variety *kək'ərat* is derived from the verb *kək'ərə* 'stretch' with an adverbial affix {-t}. The name characterises the plant by its shape of leaves, which are stretched sideways rather than vertically. The variety *atʃak'it* 'crack' is a verb used as a noun. The label shows that the stem of the plant often cracks as it grows higher. The name *imirjə* is from *imir* 'stone' and the morpheme {-jə} 'adjectiviser'. The name characterises the corm of the plant as the variety that does not get cooked easily and fast. Note that corm is not only ground to make *wussa* 'bread', but it is also cooked and eaten without being ground. The name *zəg<sup>w</sup>irət* is from a noun *zəg<sup>w</sup>irə* 'fire wood store near the ceiling at the house' and {-t} is adverb morpheme. The name characterises the plant as the one growing very high. The name *dərijə* is from *dərə* 'tightly woven' and the morpheme {-jə} is 'adjectiviser'. It is reported by consultants that the stems of the variety are tightly layered, unlike some other varieties.

Of the lists in Table 1, *ank'əf<sup>w</sup>jə* is preferred to produce best *wussa* 'bread made of ensete', and *dəre* is well known as a medicine, its corm being cooked and eaten to heal broken bones.

#### b. Ensete variety names based on colour

Some ensete names are based on the colour with which the plant is associated. Table 2 below shows such names:

Table 2. Ensete name based on color

SN	Name	M-by-M gloss	Transliteration
12	<i>ajwə-jɪə</i>	Animal salt-like	'grey' (Inor, Geto dialects)
13	<i>bərəs-jə</i>	mixed colour-ADJ	'White with red strips'
14	<i>bifa-amərat</i>	red-amerat	'red of <i>amerat</i> '
15	<i>nətf-wə</i>	white-ADJ	'whitish'
16	<i>sin-wət</i>	tooth-ADJ	'white like a tooth'
17	<i>jə-get'-jə</i>	GEN-decorate-ADJ	'the decorated'
18	<i>b-en-əʒ-ə</i>	with-eye-see-JUS	'let it be seen with eyes'



The name *ajwəɲə* is from *ajwə* in Geto and Inor varieties (in Gumer and Chaha *ewə*) ‘animal salt’ and {-ɲə}, of course {-nə} in Chaha, an ‘adverb marker’. Semantically, it can mean ‘salty’ or ‘looking like the salt’s colour’. With regard to the label of ensete here, it assumes the second meaning ‘looking-like a salt’, which actually has a grey ash colour. The name *bərəsjə* is from *bərəs* ‘a mix of red with white’ and {-jə} ‘adjectiviser’. The stem of the plant is brown, not actually red, with white strips. The variety *bifaamərat* is combination of *bifa* ‘red’ and *amərat* ‘a variety of ensete’ discussed below under classification with propensity. Thus, *bifaamərat* is the sub-variety of *amərat* distinguished by its red, actually brown color. The names *nətfʷə* (from *nətfʷə* ‘white’ and {-wə} adjectiviser), and *sinwət* (from *sin* ‘teeth’ {-wət} adjectiviser and {-tʃ} feminine marker) characterise ‘white colour’, yet *sinwət* is whiter than *nətfʷə*. The name *jəgetʃjə* is a combination of {-jə} ‘genitive marker’ *get* ‘decoration’ and {-jə} ‘adjectiviser’ characterising the plant as a decorated by nature. It is less specific to identify it compared to the other varieties, since decoration has many forms and types. Similarly, *benəzə* (from {bə-} ‘with (INS)’, *en* ‘eye’, *əz* ‘see’ and {-ə} ‘jussive affix’ all together giving the literal meaning ‘let it be seen with eyes’ or metaphorically implying ‘attractive’.

### c. Ensete names based on significance

Table 3. Variety name based on significance

SN	Name	M-by-M gloss	Transliteration
19	<i>agade</i> > <i>an-gad-e</i>	not-hungry-1SGO	‘I am not hungry’
20	<i>a-j-tʃor-e</i>	not-3SG-sick-1SGO	‘I will not get sick’
21	<i>dəm-ərtʰ</i>	blood-clot	‘that clots blood’
22	<i>dən-kʷi-nət</i>	stomach-roast-NOM	‘stomach roast’
23	<i>mar-jə</i>	heal-GEN	‘healer’

The name *agade*, which is reduced form of *angade*, constitutes the negative morpheme {*an-*} ‘not’, *gadə* ‘be hungry’<sup>1</sup> giving the meaning ‘I am not hungry’. Though all ensete varieties in Gurage are edible, this variety is more significant in that it can reach a stage where its corm can be used faster than other varieties. The people can consume it in short period of time after it was transplanted from *hiba* to the *ensete* stage. The variety *ajtfore* (from *a-* ‘negative’ {-j-} ‘1SG’ *tʃ* or ‘sick’ {-e} ‘1SGO’)

1. The word *gadə* (V) ‘one gets hungry’ becomes *gadʒə* ‘hunger’ (n) by palatalizing /d/ to /dʒ/; the same word by changing the last vowel /ə/ to an /a/; hence, *gada* gives it the opposite meaning ‘having plenty’.

mean ‘I will not be sick’, implying that ‘as far as I am eating this plant, I will not get sick’. It is unclear why it was named this way, since this variety is not categorized with ‘medicinal varieties’. The variety named *dənk<sup>w</sup>inət* from (*dən* ‘stomach’, *-k<sup>w</sup>i-* ‘roast’ and *{-nət}* ‘nominaliser’) is metaphorically used to mean ‘satisfy the stomach’. The variety *marjə* is from (*mar* ‘heal’ and *{-jə}* ‘agent marker’), hence, having the meaning ‘that heals’.

#### d. Ensete names based on source

Table 4. Variety based on source

SN	Name	M-by-M gloss	Transliteration
24	<i>bazər-jə</i>	guest-ADJ	‘the guest’
25	<i>b<sup>w</sup>atfə&lt; bə-awətfə</i>	after-out	‘after having been lost’
26	<i>dəre-wət'-jə</i>	tight.strips-out-of	‘when <i>dere</i> <sup>2</sup> has been lost’
27	<i>jədərma-k<sup>j</sup>ink<sup>j</sup>ə</i>	stallion-pod	‘pod of stallion’
28	<i>jəfira'- k<sup>j</sup>ink<sup>j</sup>ə</i>	ensete.flower-pod	‘pod of ensete flower’
29	<i>jawi-arə</i>	wild.animal-shit	‘shit of wild animals’

The ensete varieties here get their names from where they originated. For instance, *bazərjə* (from *bazəra* ‘guest’ and *{-jə}* ‘adjectiviser’) shows that the plant is not ‘indigenous’ to the area, and it came from somewhere else as a guest. The variety *bəawətfə* (from *{bə-}* ‘after’ *awətfə* ‘get lost’), implies that the variety had been lost, and was re-gained, or this variety has replaced the lost variety. Similarly, *dərewətfə* (from *dəre* ‘one variety of ensete’ *wət'a* ‘out’ and *{-jə}* ‘after’ represents a variety name that has been found after the variety named *dəre* had been lost. The other three *jədərmak<sup>j</sup>ink<sup>j</sup>ə* (from *{jə-}* ‘of’, *dərma* ‘stallion’ and *k<sup>j</sup>ink<sup>j</sup>ə* ‘pod’), *jəfira'- k<sup>j</sup>ink<sup>j</sup>ə* (from *{jə-}* ‘of’ *fira* ‘flower of ensete’, *k<sup>j</sup>ink<sup>j</sup>ə* ‘pod’) and *jawiarə* (from *{jə-}* ‘of’, *awi* ‘wild animal’ and *arə* ‘faeces’) show the way the plant varieties reproduced or came into being. Unlike the accustomed ways farmers grow shoots of the ensete plant, these ensete varieties grew naturally from the faeces of stallions (domestic animal), from the faeces of an unidentified wild animals and from the pods of ensete flowers.

2. Dəre is a medicinal variety of ensete (see Example 4).

e. *Ensete names based on Propensity*

Table 5. Varieties based on propensity

SN	Name	M-by-M gloss	Transliteration
30	<i>ag<sup>w</sup>e-warə</i>	thrifty- gone	‘no more a stingy/offers much’ product’
31	<i>ag<sup>w</sup>ərg<sup>w</sup>ir &lt; ag<sup>w</sup>ək<sup>w</sup>ir</i>	growl	‘grow aggressively’
32	<i>amər-at</i>	conduct-one	‘good/suitable’
33	<i>b<sup>w</sup>əsər-ə &lt; b<sup>w</sup>isir</i>	ripe-of	‘of ripen’
34	<i>e-hir-e</i>	NEG-forbid-1SGO	‘let it not forbid me’
35	<i>g<sup>w</sup>ar-jə</i>	competition-of	‘of competitive’
36	<i>k’antf-wə</i>	fibre-ADJ	‘having fibre’
37	<i>e-tk<sup>w</sup>ak<sup>w</sup>əf</i>	not-offer	‘mean to supply/give’
38	<i>fərt’-jə</i>	conspire-of	‘conspiring’
39	<i>t’ər-jə</i>	hunger- of	‘for extreme hunger’
40	<i>jə-gətir</i>	3SGM-mercy	‘let it not harm’
41	<i>jī-rəg-jə</i>	3SGM-coagulate-of	‘of coagulating’
42	<i>k<sup>w</sup>afk<sup>w</sup>af-jə</i>	kuash (idiophone)-of	‘getting dry’

The varieties, *ag<sup>w</sup>ewarə* ‘no more a thrifty’, *ehire* ‘let it not forbid me’; *etk<sup>w</sup>ak<sup>w</sup>əf* ‘mean’ and, *fərt’jə* ‘conspiring’ got their names based on the product the plants offer. The *ag<sup>w</sup>ewarə* variety offers much product, thus, people are no longer thrifty since they have much to offer. Similarly, *ehire* is a variety that is positively valued with regard to the product it provides, ‘one it does not forbid’. The other two *etk<sup>w</sup>ak<sup>w</sup>əf* and *fərt’jə* are considered ‘less productive’, hence, considered ‘mean’ and ‘conspiring’, respectively.

The variety *ag<sup>w</sup>ərg<sup>w</sup>ir < ag<sup>w</sup>ək<sup>w</sup>ir* ‘growl’ has the property of growing aggressively. Similarly, *g<sup>w</sup>arjə* ‘competitive’ grows faster. The variety *k<sup>w</sup>afk<sup>w</sup>af-jə* ‘shouting’ characterises the variety as having leaves that often get dry. The varieties *amərat* ‘good’/‘suitable’, *b<sup>w</sup>əsərə* ‘ripping’, *jəgətir* ‘let it not harm’, *t’ərjə* ‘for an extreme hunger’, *jīrəg-jə* ‘that coagulates’, and *k’antf-wə* ‘having fibre’ are named after the quality of the food, *wussa*, obtained out of them.

f. *Ensete names based on dedication to or use for*

Table 6. Variety based on use for

SN	Name	M-by-M gloss	Transliteration
43	<i>fəraz-jə</i>	horse-of	‘of the horse’
44	<i>wənad-jə</i>	mare-of	‘of the mare’
45	<i>mujət-jə</i>	muyet-of	‘of Muyet’
46	<i>k’əs-wə</i>	priest-of	‘of the priest’
47	<i>mifra-t</i>	bride-F	‘of the bride’

Many key consultants could not figure out why *fərazjə* ‘of the horse’ and *wənadjə* ‘of the mare’ were labelled to the varieties. Though ensete serves as food for animals, only cows – not horses or mares – are fed with it. The other three *mujətajə*, *kʲəswə*, *miʃrat* have cultural meanings. *Mujət* refers to ‘spirit’ often possessed by women, and a few men. It has a power and can cause ailment if angered. Those people who have possessed this spirit receive annual gifts including ensete, thus, *mujətajə* is an ensete variety whose purpose is identified as gift. Similarly, *kʲəswə* is a variety meant for *kʲəs* ‘priest’. Priests in the culture used to receive such gifts. In Gurage culture, a newly married bride is promised a gift of cows, ensete and other property, the promise ceremony being called *misagʲə*. Thus, *miʃrat* is the ensete variety meant for *miʃra* ‘bride’ though it is not common to use the name of this specific variety during *misagʲə* ceremony.

A few ensete varieties given below are named after human and material names.

48	<i>ismajl</i>	‘Ousmail’
49	<i>marde</i>	‘youngsters’
50	<i>zəmbile</i>	from Amharic <i>zəmbil</i> ‘bag’

The ensete variety *ismajl* is named after a person’s name, *Ousmail* who is reported to have brought the ensete variety to the area. Another ensete variety name *marde* comes from a collective noun ‘youngster’. The reason behind naming it after the ‘youngsters’ is not clear. The ensete name *zəmbil* comes from a ‘type of bag made of the fibre of ensete’. Probably, this ensete variety is good for ‘fibre’ production.

The names of quite a large number of ensete varieties could not be glossed by certain attributes, and are just labels for each ensete variety. The names below are examples:

**Table 7.** Variety without attributive meanings

SN	Name	Remark
1	<i>anzana</i>	
2	<i>Astara</i>	Medicinal plant
3	<i>badədet</i>	Its corm is poor in quality
4	<i>egəndijə</i>	
5	<i>gəzod</i>	
6	<i>gʲinbiwə</i>	It stores comparatively much water in its stem
7	<i>gʲindʒiwə</i>	
8	<i>gumbura</i>	
9	<i>helod</i>	
10	<i>hone</i>	
11	<i>iniba</i>	

(continued)

Table 7. (continued)

SN	Name	Remark
12	<i>kəmbat</i>	
13	<i>k'ibnar</i>	Good for its good quality 'wussa'
14	<i>lemat</i>	
15	<i>ore(jət)</i>	
16	<i>Sapara</i>	
17	<i>təgadəd</i>	Its corm is preferred, good for porridge
18	<i>wək'a</i>	
19	<i>wəfmədɟja</i>	
20	<i>zigezwə</i>	
21	<i>zober</i>	Is medicinal ensete variety

The variety *k'ibnar* seems a combination of *k'ib* 'butter' and *nar* the 'copula is' in Silte language. So, *k'ibnar* may be attributive, 'it is butter' implying having a good quality.

#### 2.1.4 Names related to ensete processing tools

There are several tools directly associated with the ensete plant. They are used to cut its leaves and stem, to uproot the corm, to split the layers of stem, scrape the stem, chop down the corm, cut the *wussa* into fine flour, which is the main product of ensete, etc. Some of these tools are provided as follows:

<i>təbatfə</i>	'a big knife for uprooting ensete'
<i>murəja</i>	(probably from <i>mur-</i> 'cut' in Cushitic and <i>-ja</i> 'instrument marker') 'a knife to cut off leaves of ensete'
<i>jəzəmb"ərə sənda</i>	(from <i>jə-zəmb"ərə</i> 'wooden tool on which <i>wussa</i> is placed for cutting', and <i>sənda</i> 'knife') 'a big knife to chop <i>wussa</i> with'
<i>wək'ara</i>	'a small knife to split <i>kəsra/guppa</i> stem with'
<i>zəmb"ərə</i>	'a circular wooden tool on which ' <i>wussa</i> ' is placed and chopped'
<i>jitfotf"ə ətfə</i>	(from <i>ji-</i> 3SG, <i>tfot-</i> 'do', <i>p"ə</i> 'instrument marker', and <i>ətfə</i> 'wood') 'wooden tool used to protect fingers from being cut when chopping <i>wussa</i> '
<i>sibisa</i>	'bamboo made tool used for ensete stem scraping'
<i>ɟibang'iba</i>	'wooden made tool with gears used to chop corm into small pieces'
<i>watar</i>	'lumber like wood on which stem of ensete is placed and scraped'
<i>wərəra</i>	'hole used for <i>wussa</i> storage'
<i>gərə</i>	'clay pot used for storing <i>buja</i> '

The first four, *təbatf*, *murəja*, *jəzəmb"ərə sənda*, and *wək'ara* are types of knives. They differ in size, thickness, and shape. The *təbatf* is tall and thick knife with wooden handle which is used to uproot ensete by cutting the plants roots. The *murəja*, and *jəzəmb"ərə sənda* are both double bladed tall knives with wooden handle. The former is relatively shorter and thinner than the latter. The *wək'ara* is small sized

with one edge blade used for splitting the stem of ensete layers to make ready for scraping. The other four tools; namely, *jitfoṭṭp<sup>w</sup>ə atfə*, *sibisa*, *zibang<sup>i</sup>iba*, and *water* are wooden made. The first is small a half-moon shaped wooden finger protecting tool while cutting the raw *wussa* into pieces. The second tool, *sibisa* is a half splinted one node bamboo used for scraping layers of ensete stem. The *zibang<sup>i</sup>iba* shown in Figure 8 below is made of wood with three different shapes; it is flat with two blades like edges at the top, round in the middle and with gears at the bottom. The top knife looking part helps to hit and mix a scraped stem and ground corm; the middle part is used to handle the tool and the gear is used to grind the corm into smaller pieces. *Watar* is wooden made tool on which layers of ensete stems are placed and against which the stem is scraped with *sibisa*.



Figure 8. Zhibangiba

*Wərara* is a hole of different width and height dug often inside the ensete yard to store a processed raw *wussa*. It is a place of fermentation as well as a store house. The hole is carefully bedded with ensete dry stems called *enwa*, and then with untorn fresh ensete leaves called *bəra-k'itər*.

### 2.1.5 Action verbs related to ensete processing

There are several action verbs that are used mainly in relation to ensete plant processing, some of which can, in fact, be used in other contexts. The verbs listed below are the most common action verbs associated with ensete processing.

<i>t'ənfot</i>	(from <i>t'ənf</i> 'cut off at distance' and -ot 'GER')	'cutting off the leaves of ensete'
<i>nikrot</i>	(from <i>nikr-</i> 'uproot' and -ot 'GER')	'uprooting'
<i>k'əsra nifk'ot</i>	(from <i>k'əsra</i> 'ensete stem' <i>nifk</i> 'detach', and -ot 'GER')	'detaching the layers of <i>k'əsra</i> 'ensete stem'
<i>mədər t'ət'ot</i>	(from <i>mədər</i> 'place', <i>t'ətf</i> 'lay' and -ot 'GER')	'bedding a place with ensete leaves to store <i>burəma</i> 'scraped ensete'
<i>fak'ot</i>	(from <i>fak</i> 'scrape' and -ot 'GER')	'scraping ensete stem'
<i>dəbsot</i>	(from <i>dəbf</i> 'chop' and -ot 'GER')	'chopping a corm into pieces'
<i>k'irak'itot</i>	(from <i>k'irak'ir</i> 'mix' and -ot 'GER')	'mixing <i>burəma</i> '
<i>səfrot</i>	(from <i>səfr</i> 'cover' and -ot 'GER')	'covering <i>burəma</i> '
<i>əsəsot</i>	(from <i>əfəf</i> 'mash' and -ot 'GER')	'mashing the <i>burəma</i> '
<i>t'ik'rot</i>	( <i>t'ikr</i> 'hide' and -ot 'GER')	'putting <i>t'ik<sup>w</sup>ət</i> 'fresh <i>wussa</i> in a hole'



The action verbs *nikrot* ‘uprooting’, *k’irak’irot* ‘mixing’ *səfrot* ‘covering’ and *əsəsot* ‘mashing’ can be used in other general contexts in addition to their use with ensete. The other action verbs provided here above are *t’ənfot*, *k’əsra-nifk’ot*, *mədər t’ət’ot*, *fak’ot*, *dəbsot* and *t’ik’rot* are only used in the context of ensete plant processing. The verb *mədər t’ət’ot* seems an extension of making a bed, since it can also be used to make bed ready. The action verb in non-specialised and literal use can refer to ‘hide’ rather than store in the ensete product context.

The following nouns are worth noting as they only occur in context with ensete:

<i>wussatfa</i>	‘turn taking for scraping of ensete’
<i>fak’ət</i>	‘woman whose job is ensete scraping’
<i>wajwəto</i>	‘women song sung during <i>wussatfa</i> ‘ensete scraping’

The first word *wussatfa* is derived from *wussa* ‘bread’ and {-*atfa*}. This bound morpheme is not common and productive to derive other nouns in the language. The noun *fak’ət* is derived from the verb *fak’*- ‘scrape’, an agent nominal marker: {-i} which is changed into glide and nested palatalising *k* to *kʲ* and feminine marker {-ət}. The derivation of *wajwəto* is not clear: *waj-* can be used as onomatopoeia in shouting, and {-*wət*} is nominaliser with feminine gender marker as in *ʃəgʷər-wə-t* [wizard-NOM-F ‘she-wizard’]. The vowel {-o} is a vocative marker as in *mifst-o* [woman-VOC ‘you! woman’].

### 2.1.6 Products of ensete

There are several products and byproducts of the ensete plant. The main direct products are *at’met’* ‘porridge making powder of ensete product’ *wussa* ‘bread making part of ensete product’ and *wehta* ‘corm of ensete’. Many of the others are products of these main products or just byproducts of the plant. Some of such products and byproducts are presented below:

<i>at’met’</i>	‘liquid of scraped ensete which is stored and when cools down becomes solid. It is used for porridge making’
<i>t’ikʷət</i>	‘stored <i>wussa</i> which is not yet fully fermented’
<i>wussa</i>	‘fermented product of the scraped ensete’ and ‘the bread of it’
<i>t’ikuraja</i>	(from <i>təkərə</i> ‘keep’/‘hide’) ‘ <i>wussa</i> stored for several years in a hole’

*Wussa* is divided into two groups based on quality: *mətf’i* ‘best quality’ and *tikʷirjə* (from *tikʷir* ‘black’ and {-jə} ‘adjectiviser’, hence, ‘blackish’), which is poor quality.

A baked *wussa* is divided into three groups based on its thickness: *albʷabʷətf’at* ‘too tiny’ *afafat* ‘tiny’ and *dapʷa* ‘thick’. Another name for the thick variety is *kimʷis* which, however, differs in its content because other ingredients, such as flour or barley are added to it.

Foods made of *wussa* other than the breads mentioned above include:

<i>birapirat</i>	‘dried and chopped <i>wussa</i> is finely ground with hand and roasted with oven’
<i>ozat</i>	‘porridge’
<i>buja</i>	‘squeezed out liquid of <i>wussa</i> ’
<i>atirk<sup>w</sup>ijə</i> (from <i>a-</i> ‘Causative’ <i>t’ərək</i> ‘dry’ and <i>jə</i> ‘ADJ’)	‘squeezed out liquid of <i>wussa</i> is dried and then baked’
<i>sostaziz</i>	(from <i>sost</i> ‘three’ and <i>aziz</i> ‘a bound morpheme probably referring to a mix’) ‘mix of roasted <i>wussa</i> with cheese and butter’
<i>k’əmb<sup>w</sup>ənə</i>	‘mix of <i>wussa</i> and cabbage cooked in a pot’, often food only for women.

By products of ensete are *k’antf’a* ‘fibre’, *kəbsasa* ‘fibre which is not well scraped’, and *wədərə* ‘rope’. *Wədərə* in its unwoven form is used to tie different things, including mowed grass, to make fences, to build houses with instead of nails, and so on. In woven form, it is used to tie animals, to tie loads on a horse’s or mule’s back, etc. The woven rope can be made directly from the unprocessed form of rope called *j-əsət wədərə* (of ensete rope/rope of ensete) or from fibre of ensete termed *jə-k’antf’a wədərə* (of fibre rope ‘rope made of fibre’)

There are several products made of *k’antf’a* ‘fibre’ and *wədərə* ‘rope’. These include *if<sup>w</sup>ət* ‘cover for kettle’; *tjəfat* ‘round substance for putting a kettle on’; *ḏḏipə* ‘mat’ with several brands, and meant for different sections of a house, including *‘jək’akət ḏḏipə* ‘mat for sleeping area’, *jofəntfə ḏḏipə* ‘mat of entrance’, *jətfəbaj ḏḏipə* ‘mat for an area near the middle pole of a house called *ətfəba*’ There are also other products of rope used as mattress, such as *kap<sup>w</sup>at* ‘thick mattress’ and *k’ətf’k’ətf’ə* ‘thinner mattress which is laid over the *kap<sup>w</sup>at*’. *Wussa* is made into flat and thin shape for baking with *jitəf<sup>w</sup>əp<sup>w</sup>ə*, literally ‘slapper’ but actually ‘flattening into thin and circular shape’, which is made of fibre and rope. Another very important tool made of fibre and rope is *jiwədərə*, which is a blend of *jiwərap<sup>w</sup>ə* ‘eating for’ and *wədərə* ‘rope’ by dropping *-rap<sup>w</sup>ə* from the former and *wə-* from the latter, and used for dining from, like a plate.

## 2.2 Semantic extension

The ensete vocabularies discussed above can be used metaphorically to *insult* someone. We here distinguish insult from cursing contextually. Insult refers to assigning to someone a negative attribute, which could be behavioural or an act. On the other hand, cursing refers to a wish that something evil or bad may happen to somebody. For example, *en t’ərək* (eye dry ‘who never obeys anyone’) is an insult, but *en-ahə afər* (eye-2SGM soil ‘literally let your eyes be soil’ and metaphorically referring to

‘die’) is a curse. Thus, I consider that all the ensete-related vocabularies are used as insults and not as curses:

Lexical item	Actual meaning	Its metaphorical use (insult)
<i>t'ik<sup>w</sup>ət</i>	‘fresh unbaked and unfermented <i>wussa</i> ’	‘powerless’
<i>buja</i>	‘left over liquid of squeezed <i>wussa</i> ’	‘lazy’
<i>gagəra</i>	‘White strip on improperly baked <i>wussa</i> ’	‘fearful’
<i>jə-t'ət'ar-jə</i>	‘(of-left.over.of <i>wussa</i> -ADJ) ‘left over of <i>wussa</i> on a hand’)	‘untidy’/‘unclean’
<i>t'im<sup>w</sup>jət</i>	‘a small roll of <i>wussa</i> to be squeezed’	‘weak’/‘small’
<i>əgır-tfeffat</i>	(leg-kettle ‘seat of kettle made of rope’)	‘amorphous leg’
<i>k'əsra</i>	‘layers of ensete stem’	‘unmotivated, idle’
<i>at'irk<sup>w</sup>ijə</i>	‘bread made of dried <i>buja</i> ’ (liquid of <i>wussa</i> )	‘teeny-weeny’
<i>g'inb<sup>w</sup>iwə</i>	‘ensete variety that carries much water’	‘obese’
<i>kəbsasa</i>	‘not finely scraped fibre’	‘one who is grudge’/‘revengeful’
<i>zanza</i>	‘net like soft substance inside leaves of ensete’	‘forceless’/‘powerless’
<i>k'əmb<sup>w</sup>ənə</i>	‘food made of <i>wussa</i> and cabbage’	‘useless’
<i>fak<sup>j</sup>ət</i>	‘woman who scrapes ensete stem’	‘scrapper’/‘low status worker’

Many of the ensete vocabularies are also used as *a proverb* in a several socio-cultural contexts. We have provided some examples elicited from key consultants:

- (1) *ema wədərə hərə-m*  
 route/trio rope happen-PST  
 ‘The trip has become rope’

Actually, it means ‘the distance to a destination is far, hence, the travelers could not reach on time’. The word *wədərə* ‘rope’ in this context implies ‘length’. A similar expression with a slightly different meaning is given in (2):

- (2) *nibrət wədərə hərə-m*  
 existence rope happen-PST

‘Existence or life has become rope’ with the implied pragmatic meaning ‘life has become bad or boring’. Thus, the meaning of *wədərə* here is ‘boring’.

Two proverbs given in (3) and (4) are based on the names of ensete varieties:

- (3) *bə-k'ət'əra bədədet-im wəra*  
 In-drought Badedet-even good  
 ‘During a drought, even the corm of the *Badedet* ensete variety is good’

Actually, *badedet* is not a variety preferred for its corm. It is only good for scraping to make *wussa* ‘bread’. Thus, during periods of drought, people cook and eat the corm of this variety. The proverb is used when one is at a disadvantage and has to compromise.

- (4) *g'imbiwə iha-ta b-irəzi-n t'ona-ta ji-m'əsi-n*  
 Gymbuwe water-3SGM When-heavy-3SGO power-3SGM 3SG-seem-3SGO  
 'When the water in the stem of Gymbuwe gets heavier to it, the plant thinks it has got much power'.

The proverb is used to downgrade someone who thinks he is superior or stronger than others. The proverb is used to nullify one's boasting by showing him the fact that what he claims is nothing more than the water in the stem of the ensete plant that flows out or soon becomes dry.

Different stages of growth of the ensete plant are also used to express success through patience, as in (5):

- (5) *fənah'im bə-səb ji sərə, f'ənf'wə antf'im fira ji-wərə*  
 be.patient on-person 3SG-reach, shoot cut flower(pod) 3SG- eaten  
 'By being patient one becomes rich like other rich ones; he reproduces ensete shoots and eats the products of ensete plant that reached the stage of flowering'.

The proverb is used to encourage one to endure problems and to win over poverty through patience and hard work.

The next three proverbs are related to tools for processing and storing *wussa* from ensete. They have relatively similar meanings, that is, expressing laziness, as shown:

- (6) *məhəna e-tfən barə-tfi-m watar-eh'ta səpərə-tfi-m*  
 Mehena NEG=come say-3SGF-CONV lumber-her break-3SGF-PST  
 'Thinking that *Mehena* will not come again, she burnt her lumber of scraping'

As discussed above, *watar* is lumber used to put on *k'əsra* 'stem of ensete' to scrape it. A lazy or a careless woman burns her lumber in summer when ensete is not scraped, and she looks for another (often borrowing for her neighbours) during *məhəna*, period or season when ensete is scraped.

- (7) *ji-tfən e-məsin-a, b-orəra-h'ta tara*  
 3SG-come NEG-seem-3SGF In-hole-her defecate  
 'Not thinking that the time for scraping and storing ensete comes, she defecates in the hole meant for storing *wussa*'.

The proverbs, (6) and (7) are actually used to warn people not to be careless, and not to be less helpful to others, as they may in turn need help.

- (8) *b-awfa wussatfa k'imar ji-k'am'ir-p'wə*  
 In-lazy.woman ensete. scraping. time louse 3SG-kill-INS  
 'During the lazy woman's ensete scraping days (time), the workers kill their lice'

The implication is that a lazy woman cannot manage time and the workers who are scraping ensete for her. Because of that, the workers just sit down and kill the lice found on their hair or clothes. Practically speaking, people clean their hair or rid themselves of lice only when they are idle or not at work. Thus, the proverb is used to express the fact that one should not be foolish, lest others take advantage of him.

In Gurage culture, when an important person dies, there is a song called *wərko* sung to the dead man or woman. The next two proverbs use ensete vocabulary as a simile to express the behaviour and colour of a deceased woman:

- (9) *amerali bəra, ja-bfa danəra*  
 conduct soft. leaf, GEN-red skin(hid)  
 ‘your conduct is like a soft leaf of an ensete, and like a red hide of an animal’

*Bera* is thornless and soft ensete leaf. *Danera* is tanned soft hide used for sleeping with like a sheet of cloth. These two items are used as similes to express the good conduct of the deceased woman.

- (10) *dəmər-ahī j-odgi ja-k’antfiwə mətʃi*  
 color -3SG 3SG-tell GEN-Kanchiwe good.wussa  
 ‘Let it be told about your color, it looks like the wussa made of the Kanchiwe ensete variety’

The *wussa* from *k’antfiwə* ensete variety is white in colour and the best quality. The people used it to magnify how beautiful the deceased woman was.

### 3. Summary and discussion

Our aim in this article was to provide a descriptive account of *əsət* culture with due attention to the nomenclature of ensete varieties, the traditional classification of the plant and its uses in Gurage culture. We used cross-sectional design and qualitative methodology to obtain and analyse our data. Though we did not statistically quantify the degree of knowledge of ensete varieties among the people of the sampled areas based on age, gender and ecology, we found from the small samples of people we had interviewed that youngsters have relatively less knowledge of the ensete varieties than elders. Elder women had better knowledge of ensete varieties compared to young boys and girls, as well as some adult men. The ensete varieties we have provided were distributed across the sample areas without restriction to the ecological zones, however, some medicinal ensete varieties, such as *astara* were found in limited areas, as in Ezha. We have also seen that some farmers plant fewer ensete varieties than others. People from lowland areas, such as Chaha, Ezha and Inor plant much more diversified ensete varieties than the people in highland areas, such

as Gumer and some parts of Geto. This is because some highlanders, such as Gumer and Geto also produce cereal and potatoes to supplement their diet. Lowlanders, on the other hand, are highly dependent on ensete as a drought-resistant crop. This must have contributed to the extensive farming and diversity of ensete in lowland Gurage land as compared to the highland areas.

It is important to mention that ensete can be harvested at any time of the year. However, it is rarely uprooted and scraped during the summer, which is a rainy season. This is because the rain makes the scraping process difficult, as it is done in an open space in the ensete garden where there is no protection from the rain, and also because people believe that products such as *wusa* and *at'met'* lack quality when processed in rainy seasons.

It was learnt that ensete's medicinal values generally lie in the corm. Corms of *Astara* and *g<sup>w</sup>arjə* are eaten to soften and mend broken bones, respectively. The former is eaten before mending a broken bone by traditional healers and the later after the bone has been fixed, to strengthen it. Other ensete varieties are also selected for the higher quality of their corm or *wusa*. The variety selection for different purposes requires more investigation and is not within the scope of this article.

Generally, ensete, which is highly diversified, is a huge part of the Gurage culture. About 60 varieties were identified by GCTC (2012: 75–76), of which two *nəfʷə* and *wəfʷməɖa* are repeated twice. This makes the list 58. Haile (2009: 16), on the other hand, identified only 17 varieties for Chaha. In our finding, 71 varieties were listed, of which 24 varieties, namely, *antʃiro*, *abak'it'e*, *f<sup>w</sup>irinzi*, *gufənwa*, *zəg<sup>w</sup>irət*, *jəget'jə*, *ajtfore*, *jədərmak'ink'jə*, *jawiara*, *ag<sup>w</sup>e-warə*, *k<sup>w</sup>afk<sup>w</sup>afjə*, *marde*, *zəmbile*, *anzana*, *gəzod*, *gindziwə*, *helod*, *hone*, *lemat*, *wek'a*, *zigezwə*, *wənadjə*, *mujatjə*, *mifrat* and *zober*<sup>3</sup> were not found in GCTC (2012) and Haile (2009). To the contrary, four varieties identified by Haile (2009), namely, *girinde*, *charqemar*, *Yesohdemyet* and *yet'efye* were not found in our findings. Similarly, 10 varieties, namely, *tikureset*, *yekechirye*, *yefugag<sup>w</sup>arye*, *bishwet*, *yedbirye*, *gembena-badedet*, *yezara-badedet*, *mintigir*, *sero* and *kabsaswe*, which were identified in GCTC 2012, were not found in our study.

The fact that there is a discrepancy in the number of ensete varieties identified by different studies implies that there is a need for more study in clearly soliciting the ensete varieties in Gurage. The studies should include whether there are different names for the same variety in different areas of Gurage. Naming according to dialect variations should also be negotiated. We found that *zobr* in Chaha is *zobero* in Gumer.

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3. Zober seems to have been identified as *sobil* in GCTC (2004 [2012]: 76), and hence may not be considered different.



Ensete has different growth stages distinguished by various labels. The plant also has several uses in Gurage culture. It is used as a foodstuff for people and animals. Its byproducts, such as its rope and fibre, are used in building houses and fences, and to make different household furniture including mattresses, mats of different types, bags and many others things. The ensete vocabularies have enriched the Gurage language and are used, in addition to labelling the plant varieties, in insults and in proverbs expressing wisdom, laziness, goodness and beauty. These rich vocabularies will be lemmatised and included in the Gurage dictionary, which is in preparation by the author. The fact that ensete vocabularies are linked to all aspects of Gurage life: food, utensils and general language use confirms the characterisation of Gurage as ‘a people of the ensete culture’ by Shack (1966) and the attribution of ensete as ‘the soul of the Gurage’ by Leslau’s (1969).

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations used in this article are:

ADJ	adjective	M	morpheme, masculine
ADV	adverb	MSL	meters at sea level
AGE	agent	NEG	negation
CONV	con verb	NOM	nominative
F	feminine	O	object
GCTC	Gurage Culture Tourism and Communication	PST	past tense
GEN	Genitive	SG	singular
GER	gerundive	SNNPRS	Southern Nations and Nationalities Regional State
INS	instrument	VOC	vocative.
JUS	jussive		

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