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Explorations in Ethiopian Linguistics: Complex Predicates, Finiteness and Interrogativity

Edited by
Ronny Meyer, Yvonne Treis
and Azeb Amha

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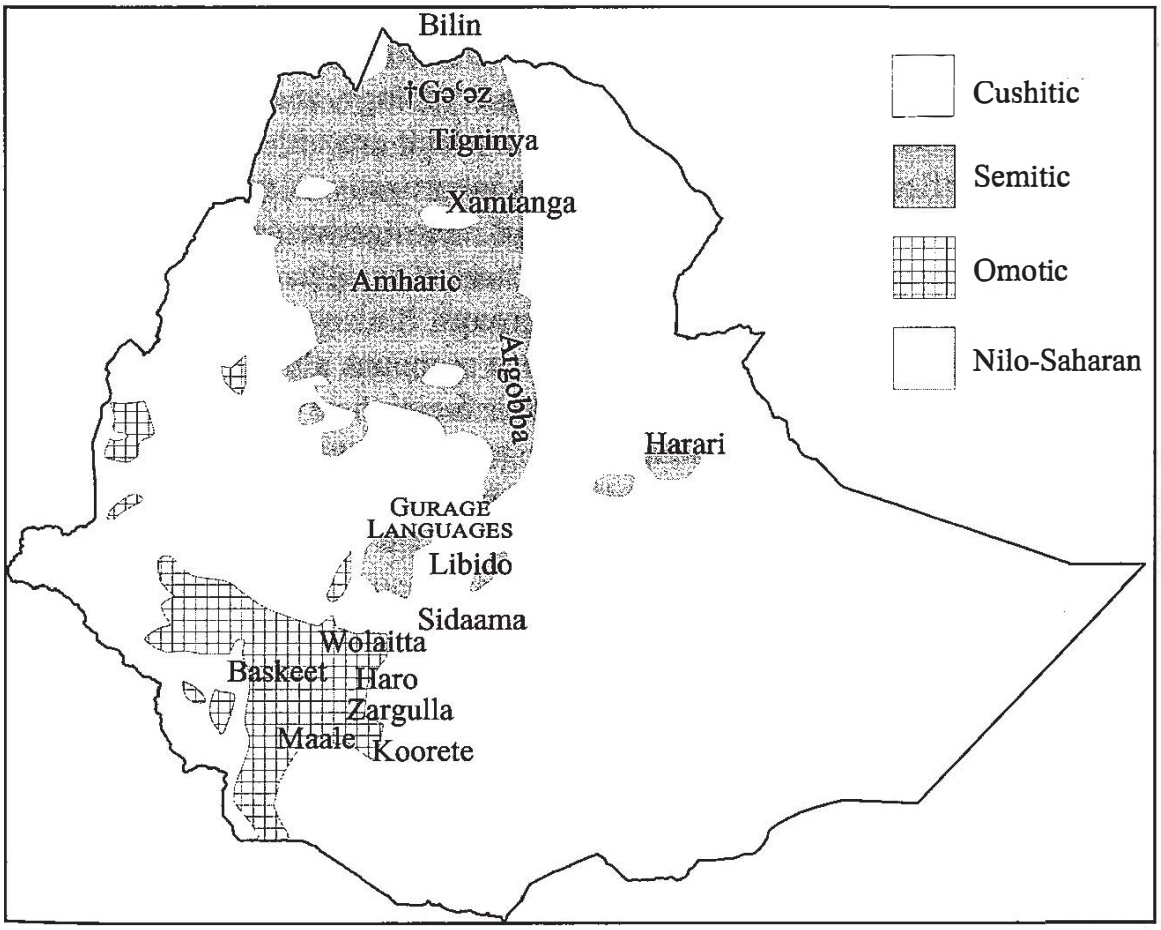
Preface

Ronny Meyer & Yvonne Treis

The present volume brings together twelve contributions reflecting recent research trends in the description of Ethiopian languages. All contributions published in this volume deal with linguistic problems at the interface of morphosyntax and semantics/pragmatics; more precisely, they are analyses of interrogativity, complex predicates and finiteness in Ethiopian languages.

Map 1: Approximate Location of Cited Ethiopian Languages



Most of the contributions are based on research presented in the linguistic panels at the *18th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, held on 29 October – 02 November 2012 in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia. The multi-disciplinary conference was jointly organized by the French Center for Ethiopian Studies

(Addis Ababa) and the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (Addis Ababa University) under the motto *Movements in Ethiopia, Ethiopia in Movement.*

Seven contributions are concerned with Ethio-Semitic languages, in particular with Amharic, Argobba, Gəʿəz, Harari, Tigrinya and different Gurage languages. Two contributions deal specifically with the Cushitic languages Xamtanga and Libido, while the remaining three articles focus on the Omotic languages Baskeet, Koorete and Zargulla. Furthermore, the Cushitic languages Bilin and Sidaama, the Omotic languages Haro, Maale, and Wolaitta, as well as various Semitic languages outside Ethiopia are cited in some contributions for comparative purposes. The approximate location of these languages is indicated on Map 1.

The first section of this volume contains two articles from the panel on *Interrogativity*. Interrogativity has hitherto often only been handled in a very cursory manner in the grammatical descriptions of Ethiopian languages. In-depth analyses of this grammatical domain could, however, contribute interesting details to intonation research, language typology, and areal and historical linguistics. Omotic languages, many of which are hitherto little known, mark mood inflectionally and thus possess interrogative verbal morphology. Furthermore, the study of the morphology of interrogative pronouns and their diachronic origin can reveal interesting historical insights for the classification of individual languages or language groups. It also remains to be examined how widespread the use of interrogative pronouns plus an additive focus morpheme (similar to English 'even') in the function of indefinite pronouns is attested in Ethiopia. This phenomenon may well turn out to be an areal feature. The following two contributions take a first step towards a detailed examination of issues related to interrogativity in two selected Ethiopian languages.

Yvonne Treis' contribution on *Interrogativity in Baskeet*, a language of the Omotic family, is an in-depth study of morphological, syntactic and pragmatic aspects of interrogativity based on a corpus of recordings of natural speech events. Questions in Baskeet are either marked by intonation only, by an additional interrogative morpheme *-a*, or by a special interrogative verb form. The article discusses, among others, the form and function of the six simplex interrogative pronouns in Baskeet, namely PERSON, THING, TIME, QUANTITY, MANNER, PLACE, and SELECTION, and pronouns derived from them. Furthermore, these pronouns are compared with equivalents in related languages from the Ometo branch of Omotic. Finally, Treis demonstrates the use of interrogative pronouns in non-interrogative contexts in Baskeet.

The second contribution on interrogativity, *Question about Amharic Questions with yəhon: A Tentative Semantic Study* by Magdalena Krzyża-

nowska, is concerned with the Ethio-Semitic language Amharic. It provides a semantic analysis of a special type of Amharic content and polar questions, namely those with the modal epistemic auxiliary *yəhon* 'might'. Krzyżanowska's analysis is based on a model developed by Andrzej Bogusławski and other Polish linguists. Accordingly, Amharic questions with *yəhon* are analyzed as consisting of three main components: the theme (i.e. a declarative sentence underlying the question), the rheme (i.e. the interrogative intention marked by prosody), and an additional predication on the theme conveyed by the auxiliary *yəhon.* It is shown that *yəhon* conveys epistemic modality *de re* in content questions, whereas it carries epistemic modality *de dicto* in polar questions. Polar questions with *yəhon* are then compared with declarative sentences marked by the auxiliary *yəhonall* 'might', and the additional pragmatic information conveyed by the particles *mənalbat* 'perhaps' and *ənde* 'really' in questions with *yəhon* is discussed. Finally, the use of *yəhon* as a marker of politeness is shown.

The second section of the volume assembles contributions dealing with *Complex Predicates*, which attracted considerable theoretical interest over the past years. Here Ethiopian languages are of particular interest because of the diversity of complex predicate structures attested in different linguistic families in the country. The two most frequently mentioned features of complex predicates in the linguistic literature (see, for instance, Mengistu, Baker & Harvey 2010) are (i) that they comprise of a sequence of verbal predicates that are structurally and semantically related, and (ii) that verbs in complex predicates typically share an argument as well as tense, aspect, modality and/or polarity. Commonly, periphrastic causatives, converb-plus-verb constructions, particle-plus-verb constructions and ideophone-plus-verb constructions are subsumed under the concept of complex predicate.

The four contributions of the second section discuss empirical issues related to complex predicates in individual Ethiopian languages. They point out the semantic/pragmatic differences between complex predicates and their monoverbal counterparts, the morphosyntactic properties of the component verbs in complex predicates, and the differences between complex predicates on the one hand and multi-clausal constructions or clause chains on the other. Of particular interest are syntactic and morphological mechanisms for combining verbs in a complex predicate, ordering restrictions regarding the component verbs, selection criteria for combining verbs in complex predicates as well as ways to subordinate or nominalize complex predicates and to mark modality and polarity in clauses headed by complex predicates. Thus, different types of complex predicates can be identified in individual languages, and

historical processes such as grammaticalization as well as contact phenomenon can be examined.

Abdu Ahmed's contribution *Complex Predicates in Amharic Counterfactual Antecedent Clauses* is concerned with syntactic and semantic aspects of complex predicates in a single clause type. There are two canonical types of counterfactual antecedent clauses in Amharic: one is based on a monoverbal construction, the other on a complex predicate consisting of a converb and the auxiliary verb *honä* 'be(come)'. In addition to counterfactuality, the latter clause type encodes uncertainty of the speaker. It is shown that the converb encodes reference to the subject (and, optionally, to objects or adjuncts) of the verbal event, while the main verb, *honä* 'be(come)', is only marked for agreement with an expletive subject. The main verb is also the carrier of information on tense, aspect and modality. The author draws a distinction between converb-plus-verb and coverb-plus-verb complex predicates, which differ morphologically but share syntactic features. As subordinate conjunctions or adverbs can intervene between converb/coverb and main verb, complex predicates in Amharic cannot be considered serial verb constructions, which is in agreement with Azeb Amha's analysis of complex predicates in Zargulla.

Azeb Amha identifies in her contribution, *Complex Predicates in Zargulla*, three types of complex predicates. Based on the first component verb, she distinguishes between complex predicates based on converbs, intensive verb stems and ideophones. While basically every verb could occur as first component verb, the number of verbs occurring as second component in complex predicates is restricted to eight verbs – most of them are motion verbs. Semantically, complex predicates encode specific aspects of a verbal event as well as the effect, manner or path of the event. Complex predicates in Zargulla always consist of two component verbs, whereby the first component itself may be represented by a complex predicate.

Binyam Sisay Mendisu's contribution, *Grammaticalization of Existential Auxiliaries in Koorete*, explores the grammaticalization processes undergone by the verbs *ba-* 'disappear, not exist' and *yes-* 'live, exist' in Koorete, an Omotic language. It is shown that several grammaticalization stages (as full verb, existential verb, auxiliary, and grammatical morpheme) exist simultaneously in the language. In the analysis of complex predicates, in which the morphemes under investigation are used as auxiliaries, it is observed that inflectional morphemes occur on both the auxiliary and the main verb. Thus, auxiliary verb constructions in Koorete are categorized as split-headed.

In her contribution *Benefactive Applicative Periphrases with yiw-* 'give' *in Xamtanga*, Chloé Darmon shows that the applicative in the Central

Cushitic language Xamtanga is based on a biverbal periphrastic construction, which licenses the expression of an additional beneficiary participant. The construction involves the converb form of a lexical verb followed by the valency operator *yiw-* 'give'. Based on a comparison of the characteristics of the benefactive converb-plus-finite verb constructions with other formally identical V1–V2 patterns, it is argued that the 'give'-periphrasis in Xamtanga is a complex predicate. While *give*-benefactives may be common in other parts of the world, Xamtanga is so far the only known language of the Ethiopian linguistic area that has developed an applicative construction with 'give'.

The third section of this volume concentrates on issues of *Finiteness*. The finite/non-finite distinction is frequently made in grammars but there is no general consensus on their cross-linguistic definition (cf. Nikolaeva 2007). Often finiteness is considered to be a phrasal or verbal category – mainly defined through specific values for TAM and person marking – but sometimes it is regarded as a clausal category that also encompasses, among others, illocutionary force, i.e. markers of assertion, questions, etc. With regard to Ethiopian languages, the finite/non-finite distinction displays a high degree of linguistic variability. Even within the same linguistic sub-family, independent affirmative clauses may contain a verb only inflected for aspect or modality, and subject agreement, or they may require additional information on tense, focus, or illocutionary force. Furthermore, there are several unsettled debates on certain grammatical phenomena in Ethiopian languages in which finiteness plays a crucial role: Regarding Ethio-Semitic languages, it is, for instance, contested that they have converbs in the strict sense. In Highland East Cushitic, the function of the so-called "additional morphemes" on main clause verbs is still unclear. Six contributions give an overview about the complexity of the questions relating to finiteness in Ethiopian languages. Their general tenor is that finiteness is a scalar or relational category rather than a binary one.

One-to-many correspondence between a grammatical meaning and its morphological realization within one word is the topic of Maria Bulakh's contribution *Multiple Exponence in the Long Prefix Conjugation of the Transversal South Ethio-Semitic Languages*. She focuses on the analysis of "multiple exponence" for subject referencing on imperfective verbs in main clauses of Amharic, Argobba, Harari, Wolane, and Zay. In these languages, this verb form consists of a main verb in the imperfective aspect followed by the auxiliary verbs **hallawa* or **nabara*. The original analytic construction of this verb form is said to have had double marking of person, once on the main verb and once on the auxiliary verb. The common trend in today's lan-

guages, however, is to eliminate one of the redundant morphemes, either throughout the entire paradigm or in certain persons only. Bulakh shows that the individual languages use different patterns for dealing with multiple exponence, i.e. the discussed languages do not equally tolerate multiple exponence. There is a general tendency to avoid repetition of formally identical morphemes and to tolerate double marking only if the two markers are formally not too similar.

Joachim Crass discusses clausal finiteness and the mismatch between morphological markedness of affirmative and negative main and subordinate verbs in his contribution *The Asymmetry of Verbal Markedness in Libido*. Libido – a Highland East Cushitic language – has a fairly complex verbal morphology. For the description of the verbal system, Bisang's (1998; 2001; 2007) concept of asymmetry is applied, which is concerned with the occurrence of obligatory categories in main and subordinate verbs. Miestamo's (2005) typology of standard negation is used to describe and categorize the structural asymmetries between affirmative and negative forms of main and subordinate verbs.

Lutz Edzard is concerned with the notion of finiteness from a general comparative Semitic perspective in his contribution *The Finite–Infinite Dichotomy in a Comparative Semitic Perspective*, in which he discusses data from Akkadian, Arabic, Aramaic, Biblical Hebrew and Ethio-Semitic. It is shown that a clear-cut dichotomy between the categories *finite* and *infinite* is problematic in the verbal domain of Semitic – notably as far as the Ethio-Semitic converb/gerund, the Akkadian stative/verbal adjective, and the conjugated noun in predicative position are concerned. In many Semitic languages, verbal nouns or infinitives can adopt a *finite* function pragmatically, notably as imperatives. Furthermore, the first element in serial verb constructions tends to lose the morphological features associated with finiteness and to be grammaticalized into an adverb. In Amharic, certain converbs have become lexicalized in a frozen form with default 3SG.M subject reference; they function synchronically as adverbs.

In his contribution *Finiteness in Gurage Languages*, Ronny Meyer outlines the remarkable variation in marking verbs for finiteness in independent main clauses vis-à-vis dependent clauses in genetically closely related and geographically adjacent languages. The detailed analysis of inflectional features of verbs including TAM, subject indexing, polarity and clausal status, and a comparison of these features in dependent and independent clauses shows that finiteness in Gurage languages is a relational category of the clause that can best be defined through a combination of morphological and syntactic features.

Mulusew Asratie's contribution *Case Marking in Amharic Copular Constructions* discusses the nominative/accusative alternation of NP and AP predicates in Amharic copular constructions from a generative perspective. Based on differences between the accusative and nominative predicates regarding their semantic interpretation, agreement and word order, it is argued that accusative predicates must be assigned by a functional element that introduces "eventivity".

Stefan Weninger studies the Ethio-Semitic converb from a comparative and diachronic perspective in his contribution *Wandering along the Border of Finiteness: The Gəʿəz and Tigrinya Converb(s) in a Diachronic Perspective.* He compares the Gəʿəz converb with its counterpart in modern Tigrinya, the closest modern relative of Gəʿəz. In some respects, the Tigrinya converb has lost features of finiteness still present in Gəʿəz. In other respects, it behaves more like a finite verb. Moreover, the modern cognates of the Gəʿəz converb have neither developed into a fully finite nor into a fully infinite verb form in any modern Ethio-Semitic language. Instead, converbs have remained a fuzzy category, which makes the author develop a scalar definition of finiteness.

We have made no attempt to unify the transliteration and transcription systems across the individual contributions. Apart from IPA, representations in Fidäl (for some Ethio-Semitic languages) and specialized transliteration/transcription systems are used. The reader should, therefore, be aware that a single sound might have various representations across the contributions, but is usually consistently reproduced by the same symbol in individual contributions. The ejective velar plosive, for instance, is represented by the IPA symbol *kʼ*, or the symbols *ḳ* and *q* according to the conventions of the *Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* (DMG) and the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* (EAE), respectively. Palatal consonants are marked by a haček in some contributions, i.e. IPA *ʤ* is represented by *ǰ* or *ǧ*. Regarding the vowels, the mid-central vowel is either given as *ä* or *ə*. Note, however, that the symbol *ə* can also represent the mid-high vowel in some contributions on Ethio-Semitic languages, which appears as *ɨ* elsewhere. Vowel length is either marked by a double vowel, e.g. *aa*, or by a macron above the vowel symbol, e.g. *ā*.

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