

74. Ethiosemitic-Cushitic Language Contact

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Abstract

The article gives an overview of phonological, morpho-syntactic and lexical contact features between Ethiosemitic and Cushitic languages. In addition to older research hypotheses on phonological and lexical borrowings from Cushitic into Ethiosemitic, the current research on the Ethiopian linguistic area is also included. The latter approach deals mainly with rare grammaticalizations which have evolved due to mutual influence between Ethiosemitic and Cushitic languages.

1. Introduction

According to a widely accepted view, Semitic-speaking peoples left their homeland on the Arabian Peninsula at the end of the 1st millennium B.C. by crossing the Red Sea, and migrated into today's Ethiopia and Eritrea. They experienced extensive linguistic and extra-linguistic influence from Cushitic-speaking peoples (cf. Hetzron 1972, 122 ff., Ullendorff 1955, 4 ff.). A different view considers Ethiopia to be the homeland of Semitic-speaking peoples, as it is assumed that the linguistic diversity among Semitic languages in Ethiopia is much greater than elsewhere in Semitic (Hudson 1977, Murtonen 1967). According to Gordon (2005), more than eighty languages are spoken in Ethiopia. Most of these belong to three language families of the Afroasiatic phylum, namely Semitic, Cushitic and Omotic. A number of languages in the west and south-west belong to different families of the Nilo-Saharan phylum.

Traditionally it is assumed that the various Ethiosemitic languages emerged due to unilateral linguistic influence of Cushitic languages (Leslau 1945, 1952, 1959). The assumption is based on the concept that features which exist in Ethiosemitic and Cushitic but not in Semitic languages outside Ethiopia are a Cushitic substratum. Hetzron (1972, 123) explicitly states that most probably all modern Ethiosemitic languages are characterized by Agaw (Central Cushitic) influence. He considers Tigre to have evolved due to influence of the North Cushitic language Beja, Tigrinya due to Agaw influence and most Gurage languages due to influence of Sidaama (and probably other Highland East Cushitic languages).

In opposition to the view of unilateral Cushitic influence on Ethiosemitic, Ferguson (1976, 64) is of the opinion that 'the languages of Ethiopia [and Eritrea] constitute a linguistic area, [because] they tend to share a number of features which [often] result

from the processes of reciprocal diffusion among languages which have been in contact for many centuries'. This view is further modified, for example, by Crass (2002), Crass/Bisang (2004), Hayward (1991), Tosco (1994, 1996), Zaborski (1991), but denied by Tosco (2000). In the following sections the prominent contact features between Ethiosemitic and Cushitic are described.

2. Phonological features

The existence of labio-velars (k^w , g^w , k'^w , x^w) in Ethiosemitic is commonly considered to be of Cushitic influence (Leslau 1945, 61 f., Ullendorff 1955, 83). While they are not attested in unvocalized Ge'ez inscriptions and Semitic languages spoken outside Ethiopia, vocalized Ge'ez inscriptions and all modern Ethiosemitic languages either possess labio-velars or have traces of them (Ullendorff 1951). The contact situation regarding the ejectives is not so clear. Although Leslau (1945, 63; 1957, 159) claims that the ejective articulation in Ethiosemitic evolved due to Cushitic influence, Ullendorff (1955, 151 ff.) remarks that it can be considered Afroasiatic in origin and may, thus, have been preserved by a 'combined action of Semitic and Cushitic'. Crass (2002) argues that the occurrence of ejectives is an areal feature. Reconstructions of different stages of proto-languages of Afroasiatic show that ejectives were lost over the course of time. Recently, however, ejectives were re-imported into most of the languages via contact (Crass 2002, 1683 ff.). In Proto-Highland East Cushitic, for example, only the velar ejective is attested but in most of the modern Highland East Cushitic languages four ejectives occur as phonemes, namely t' , $tʃ'$, k' and to a smaller extent p' (Hudson 1989, 11). In the Agaw languages, ejectives occur predominantly in loan words from Amharic and Tigrinya but their phonemic status is problematic (Appleyard 1984, 34 f.). The occurrence of an implosive d is attested in several Cushitic languages but not in Ethiosemitic, with the exception of Zay into which it entered due to language contact with Oromo (Meyer 2006). Ethiosemitic-Cushitic language contact may also yield the deletion of features. Although ʃ and ħ are reconstructed for Proto-Afroasiatic (cf. Crass 2002, 1687 for references), they do not occur in most South Ethiosemitic and Cushitic languages (Leslau 1959, 2). The non-occurrence of these phones is considered an areal phonological feature of Central Ethiopia (cf. Crass 2002, Tosco 2000).

3. Morpho-syntactic features

A frequently cited result of Ethiosemitic-Cushitic language contact is the change of the Semitic word order VSO/SVO to SOV in Ethiosemitic. Other areal features are, for example, the existence of converbs, compound verbs (consisting of an ideophone bearing the semantics and an auxiliary, commonly the verb 'to say') and the fact that the unmarked form of a noun gives no reference to number (cf. Ferguson 1976, but cf. Leslau (1945, 1952) for other features). Linguistic features of the Highland East Cushitic/Gurage sub-area have been investigated thoroughly for K'abeena, Libido (Highland East Cushitic), Gumär, Muher, Wolane and Zay (Ethiosemitic) by Crass/Meyer

(2007a). Beside these vernacular languages, the role of the *linguae francae* Amharic and Oromo (Lowland East Cushitic) is also considered. The features presented in the following sections occur in all the above listed languages if not mentioned otherwise.

3.1. Ablative > ‘since’-temporal > real conditional

The ablative case marker can be grammaticalized to a marker of ‘since’-temporal clauses (Heine/Kuteva 2002, 35). This grammaticalization is attested in all investigated languages except Oromo, which possesses conjunctions to mark ‘since’-temporal and real conditional clauses. Example (1) shows that an identical morpheme occurs in the functions of the ablative marker and the ‘since’-temporal clause marker.

(1) ZAY

<i>bä-järmän</i>	<i>bä-mät'aah^w</i>	<i>awji</i>	<i>wär</i>	<i>tä-saamit</i>	<i>haanämmaa.</i>
ABL-Germany	SINCE- come.PRV.1s	today	month	with-week	become.PRV. 3SM.FC.CNV. AUX.3SM

‘It is five weeks ago today since I came from Germany.’

In all languages except Muher and Gumär, the function of the ablative morpheme is further grammaticalized to mark real conditional clauses.

(2) ZAY

<i>c'aat</i>	<i>bä-k'aamuh</i>	<i>ay-aamuuk'te-ño.</i>
Khat	CND-chew.PRV.1S	NEG-let.sleep.IPV.3S-1S.OBJ.DC

‘If I chew khat, I cannot sleep.’

The grammaticalization from a ‘since’-temporal to a real conditional marker is not listed in Heine/Kuteva (2002) and seems not to be well attested in the languages of the world. Therefore, we assume that this grammaticalization evolved or was reinforced due to contact.

3.2. Simile > complementizer > purpose

A similitive marker, i.e. a morpheme indicating that an entity matches a standard entity, may grammaticalize into a complementizer (Heine/Kuteva 2002, 273 f.) and probably into a marker of purpose clauses. While the grammaticalization of a similitive marker into a complementizer is attested in many languages, this does not hold true for the grammaticalization into a marker of purpose clauses (Heine/Kuteva 2002, 91). Both grammaticalizations occur in all investigated Ethiosemitic and Cushitic languages.

(3) MUHER: Similative

yä-leba-häma t'if'ä'e yännä.
 GEN-thief-SIM bad.thing not.exist.PRV.3SM
 'There is nothing as bad as a thief.'

Complementizer

abbäbä nägä yibäsa-häma sämmahum banno.
 Abebe tomorrow 3sm.come.IPV-CMPL hear.PRV.1S.CNV AUX.past.3SM.DC
 'I heard that Abebe will come tomorrow.'

Purpose

dähä tük'aw-häma bä'awawe k'ib gäffattim.
 2SM drink.IPV.2S.M-PURP in.coffee.DEF butter add.PRV.3SF.DC
 'She added butter to the coffee for you to drink it.'

The grammaticalization of a complementizer to a marker of purpose clauses is more frequent than Heine/Kuteva consider it to be. The cross-linguistic rarity makes it reasonable to consider the occurrence in Ethiosemitic and Cushitic languages as due to language contact.

The grammaticalization of a similative marker to a marker of purpose clauses in the investigated Cushitic languages indicates that this feature is more common in Cushitic than Hetzron (1972, 129, footnote 11) supposes. He considers the morphological identity between a similative marker and the marker of a purpose clause to be early Agaw influence on Ethiosemitic. Hetzron does not discuss the connection between a similative marker and a complementizer, which we consider the link between the grammaticalization of a similative into a purpose clause marker.

3.3. Different copulas in main and subordinate clauses

Different copulas in main and subordinate clauses are found in all investigated languages except Zay. In affirmative main clauses the copula agrees in person, number and gender with the subject in Ethiosemitic languages. In Cushitic either the gender of the predicate nominal is referred to on the copula or an invariable copula is used.

(4) K'ABEENA

is^u rosisaanco-h^a
 3S.M.NOM teacher. ACC-COP.M
 'He is a teacher.'

In subordination, a fully inflected perfective verb with the meaning 'to live, to become' occurs as copula but it refers to present or future tense.

(5) K'ABEENA

maat'aaree ikkoo mann^u...
 wise be.PRIV.3S.M.REL person.NOM
 'A person who is wise / a good judge ...'

Copulas or/and existential verbs are further involved in the expression of possession and obligation, which follows in most Ethiosemitic and Highland East Cushitic languages the same pattern (see Crass/Meyer 2007a).

3.4. Experiential perfect

A construction with the verb 'to know' in the main clause and a converb clause as complement expresses the experiential perfect. It indicates that a given situation has been experienced at least once in a lifetime (Comrie 1976, 58 f.). The situation, which was experienced, is encoded in the converb clause.

(6) WOLANE

amarikan hedī-nā yiclīnan.
 America go.PRIV-1P.CNV know.IPV.1P.AUX.3S.M
 'We have been in America.'

3.5. Past > apodosis of an irreal conditional clause

Beside its function to express tense, the past marker indicates the apodosis of irreal conditional clauses.

(7) GUMÄR: Past

b-abba-nä bet k'e bahu-m ambwär-hu banä?
 LOC-father- house wait.IMP.2S. say.PRIV.1S-CNV NEG.go.PRIV-1S AUX.PAST.
 POSS.1S 1S.OBJ 3S.M
 'Didn't I leave by saying to you: "Wait in the house of my father!"?'

Irrealis condition

tramäna zīrab tanzänübä ihin nīdirgnä banä.
 yesterday rain SUB.NEG.rain.PRIV. corn thresh.JUS.1P AUX.PAST.3S.M
 3S.M
 'If it had not rained yesterday we would have threshed corn.'

The use of past markers in the apodosis of irrealis conditional clauses is rare. Frequently, the past marker in conditional sentences occurs in the protasis of hypothetical or contrary to fact conditions. The relative rareness of the occurrence of past markers

in the apodosis in the languages of the world (cf. Fleischman 1989, 4 ff.) leads to the assumption that language contact is the reason for its occurrence in Ethiosemitic and Cushitic.

4. Lexical features

Lexical borrowing is a major topic in the description of Ethiosemitic-Cushitic language contacts. Although there is a tendency to enumerate Cushitic lexical items in Ethiosemitic languages, most scholars are aware of the fact that the contact is mutual between both languages families (Appleyard (1978), Gragg (1982), Hudson (1994), Leslau (1980, 1990), etc.).

Hayward (1991) postulates three categories of lexicalizations which are typical for Ethiopian languages (including Omotic). The first category comprises 'single-sense lexicalizations', such as lexical items for seasons of the year, categories of terrain, skin colors for people, the suppletive imperative of the verb 'to come' (also listed in Ferguson 1976), etc. The second category, namely lexicalizations with two or more distinct senses, is comprised of verbs and some nouns, like the respective verbs for 'hold, catch' which have the secondary meaning 'start, begin' or the respective verbs for 'play' which have the secondary meaning 'chat'. The third category includes (i) verbal derivations (e.g. the causative of the verb 'want' having the meaning 'need', the causative of the verb 'enter' having the meaning 'marry' and the causative of the verb 'pass the night' having the meaning 'administer'), (ii) possessive constructions including two NPs (e.g. 'son of man/people' having the meaning 'mankind, human being' and 'land of man/people' with the meaning 'foreign country'), and (iii) idiomatic expressions (e.g. 're-gain/recover control, take courage' being composed of the noun 'heart' and the verb 'return (intransitive)', and 'catch cold', in which the noun 'cold' is the subject and the experiencer the object of the verb 'catch').

5. Conclusions

Besides contact-induced changes in the phonology and the lexicon of Ethiosemitic languages, many morpho-syntactic features evolved through grammaticalization. Especially in the case of rare or unattested grammaticalizations, contact-induced language change is one possible way of explaining the similarities (cf. Bisang 1996, Heine 1994, Heine/Kuteva 2003). A number of areal features, like general number, converbs, and cleft construction, show a considerable variation in the grammatical systems of individual languages. Converbs, for instance, can be marked by a separate morphological form (e.g. Amharic, Libido) or by using an inflected verb plus a converb marker (Gurage languages, Oromo). Furthermore, while some languages do not make a morphological distinction between narrative and adverbial converbs (e.g. Amharic, Oromo), other languages distinguish between them (e.g. Gurage languages, Libido).

Abbreviations

1,2,3	first, second, third person
ABL	ablative
ACC	accusative
AUX	auxiliary
CMPL	complementizer
CND	conditional
CNV	converb
COM	comitative
COP	copula
DAT	dative
DC	declarative clause marker
DEF	definite marker
F	feminine
FC	focus marker
GEN	genitive
IMP	imperative
IPV	imperfective
LOC	locative
M	masculine
NEG	negative
NOM	nominative
OBJ	object
OBL	obligation
P	plural
POSS	possession
POST	posteriority
PRV	perfective
PURP	purpose
REL	relative marker
S	singular
SIM	similative
SUB	subordinator
VN	verbal noun

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Zaborski, A.

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Joachim Crass, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)

Ronny Meyer, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)

