

First Language Influence on the Spoken Amharic of Gurage Speakers

This paper describes the form and use of Amharic by the Gurages. It investigates those areas in which Gurage is different and distant from Amharic and whether these differences and distance have any influence on spoken Amharic among Gurage speakers. Languages can be different from one another in almost every linguistic feature, like phonetics, phonology, phonotactics, syntax and semantics. There has been research in each of these features in various languages of Ethiopia in relation to Amharic. But as far as it has been noticed, no such research has ever been done on the linguistic relation between Gurage and Amharic at least not in the case of what and how linguistic features of Gurage languages influence the spoken Amharic among Gurage People. To this effect, the paper attempts to provide answers to the following basic questions:

1. What are the specific phonological features that characterize the Amharic spoken in Gurage?
2. Which morphological and syntactic features are characterized the Amharic spoken in Gurage?
3. What are the semantic, pragmatic and lexical peculiarities of the Amharic spoken in Gurage?

Since it is a very limited level of investigation with short duration, it has not been possible to do any experimental research or laboratory work with large numbers of Gurage peoples. Rather an interview method has been adopted and 24 Gurage peoples have been interviewed for 30 minutes to one hour. The interview situation has not been controlled and in the conversations various issues like culture, education etc. issues have been discussed in Amharic. All the interviews have been well recorded for the purpose of analysis. All the informants are ethnically Gurages and residents of Gurage Zone.

Thus, the corpus data comprises a collection of spoken texts gathered from informants who live in Gunchire¹ town of Gurage Zone. The spoken Amharic data gathered through interview was segmented, transcribed, and annotated using tools like AUDACITY and ELAN, and analyzed thematically.

¹ *Gunchire town is one of my research sites in Gurage Zone, Southern Ethiopia.*

This paper serves as a foundational research for the creation of new speech variety of Amharic. It is also hoped that it has significant for research in language contact and change, as well as for a more detailed description of Amharic. What is more, it will add some knowledge in the applied aspect. Put differently, the findings of this study could be of assistance in understanding the performance of speakers/learners in second language learning situation and that would assist applied linguists in curriculum design or other pedagogical purposes. And again, it serves as a reference in studying other varieties of Amharic with similar linguistic and cultural situations.

This paper is restricted to the Amharic variety spoken in the Gurage Zone. Its scope is on three sample Gurage towns: Welkite, Buttajira, and Gunchire. Other Gurage towns, if considered, are discussed in relation to the three sample Gurage towns. The Amharic variety spoken in Addis Ababa² city is considered to represent the so called standard Amharic for comparison.

² Zelealem (2007: 1) suggests that Addis Ababa Amharic is a standard Amharic.