Spatial Deictics and Grammaticalization in Tigrinya

The concern of this paper is to examine the morphological structures, semantic features, syntactic functions and pragmatic uses of spatial deictics as well as grammaticalization of the definite article in Tigrinya—a member of the northern group of Ethiopian Semitic languages. The Tigrinya deictic expressions which involve encoding demonstratives are contrastive—proximal and distal. They have pronominal, adnominal and adverbial functions. As pronouns and noun modifiers, they inflect for gender, number and case while as locational and manner adverbs for case. In addition, pronominal and adverbial deictics may take enclitics. A deictic noun modifier, with either a proximal or distal status and inflected for gender, number as well as case, may be interpreted as an adjective or a definite article. If, however, it is repeated after the noun, it is interpreted only as an adjective. A deictic element in a relative clause has the function of a definite article. The fact that the deictic expressions which function as the variant forms of the definite article are those of the demonstrative counterparts shows that grammaticalization of the definite article is underway. The Tigrinya deictics which share the same roots of the proximal and distal forms are phonologically unbound but variable with the roots affixed and possibly encliticized.

Key words: Tigrinya, deictic, demonstrative, grammaticalization, definite