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Dissertation Abstract

The semantics and pragmatics of Amharic spatial expressions

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Dissertation Abstracts

GASHAW ARUTIE ASAYE, *The semantics and pragmatics of Amharic spatial expressions*, PhD Dissertation in Descriptive and Theoretical Linguistics, College of Humanities, Language Studies, Journalism and Communication at Addis Ababa University, defended on 25 December 2019.

This dissertation describes the semantic and pragmatic contents of spatial expressions in Amharic, with particular focus on the variety spoken in Godzdam. The study has been conducted within the framework of cognitive semantics. Specifically, motion description is approached from the perspective of the lexicalization pattern theory, and the analysis of spatialization metaphors is guided by conceptual metaphor theory. The database of the study includes written texts, elicitation, and introspection (as a supporting method). The analysis examines the fact that the semantic component of site (which is subsumed under path) is expressed by adpositions, and the semantic features of locatedness with the manner of positioning are encoded in verb roots. The dissertation points out that the core meaning resides in the root of verbs. Based on semantic components in verb roots, verbs of motion can be classified into five types: (1) verbs designating motion per se, (2) verbs of path, (3) figure-conflated verbs, (4) manner-conflated verbs, and (5) cause-conflated verbs. Most Amharic verbs of motion are either path or manner conflated. Although the semantic component of path is lexicalized in many verb roots, the study shows that adpositions merged with nouns of a ground entity have roles in encoding the vector and conformation components of path (i.e. source, goal, medium, and route). For instance, *bounded* source is expressed by the preposition *kə-* or its variant *tə-*, ‘from’, and source *direction* by the combined prepositions *kə-* or its variant *tə-*, ‘from’, and *wədə*, ‘toward’, which results in the term *kəwədə* or *təwədə*, ‘away from’. For *bounded* goal, the preposition is *ɨ-*, ‘at’, and for goal *direction*, the preposition is *wədə*, ‘toward’. Moreover, the dissertation claims that Amharic is typologically a ‘mixed-framed’ language. Please note that in static locative expressions, Amharic uses satellite-framed patterns exclusively. In motion expressions, however, it uses both verb-framed and satellite-framed constructions. It is also attested that all types of spatial frames of reference (i.e. absolute, intrinsic, and relative) are routinely used.

In the language, metaphors with the source domain of ‘space’ and its aspects, such as ‘moving entity’, ‘location’, and ‘motion’, are ascribed to vari-

ous abstract concepts including ‘death’ and ‘time’. Some target domains are organized in terms of two and more aspects of ‘space’. For instance, the concept of ‘death’ is understood as a moving entity, falling, a quasi-goal, a departure, and a rest. Besides, the concept of ‘trouble’ is conceived as a moving entity, a bounded space, a container, and a downward location. The concept of ‘human relationship’ is also construed as a spatial distance between two entities and bounded space. Moreover, the concept of time is described as a moving entity and a location.

On the other hand, some concepts are understood using a single aspect of space, for example power, personal matter, secret, and so on. The concepts of ‘power’, ‘quantity’, ‘success’, and ‘relevance’ are organized through verticality schema. The positively valenced states of such concepts are associated with an ‘up’ schema and their negatively valenced opposites as a ‘down’ schema. Besides, the concept of a personal affair is perceived as a bounded space. The concepts of ‘name’, ‘secret’, and ‘ideas’ are viewed as moving entities in a container. Furthermore, continuous and process types of ‘change of state’ are apprehended as deictic motions.

Finally, the occurrence of the motion verb type in metaphorical expressions is not uniform. Path oriented verbs of motion are used predominantly more than any other types of motion verbs including manner verbs. Manner verbs denoting speed of movement metaphorically express subjective temporal experience. Verbs encoding slow speed of movement (for example, *tənk’əraffəf-*, ‘move sluggishly’) elaborate on ‘protracted duration’, while verbs lexicalizing fast speed of movement (for instance, *rot’-*, ‘run’) describe ‘temporal compression’.