

BOOK REVIEW

Amharic Grammar: In a simple presentation. Improved 2nd edition. By Getahun Amare. 2019. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University B.E., xiii + 331 pp. Price: 180ETB, ISBN: 978-99944-73-76-2

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The book under review is the improved version of the author's previous work entitled *Modern Amharic Grammar in a Simple Presentation* (Getahun, 1998). The author rewrote nearly all sections and subsections of the book. He provided additional explanations and examples. The book is one of the two comprehensive Amharic grammar books written in the language (i.e., the medium is Amharic).² It is of interest to the following target audiences³. First, it is for secondary school and university students who are learning Amharic grammar. Second, it is for teachers who are teaching Amharic grammar at the secondary school and university level. However, readers should be warned that the data is not corpus-based.

The book is organized into three chapters that are broken into well-conceived subsections and contain exercises and bibliographies at the end. The first chapter deals with Amharic phonetics and phonology. The second chapter discusses the Amharic morphology. The last chapter is concerned with syntax. In the following paragraphs, I have summarized the main points raised in the book.

Chapter 1 (“Phonetics and phonology” pp. 1-73) describes Amharic phonemes, phonological processes, and syllable structures. The author establishes that Amharic has twenty-eight consonant phonemes (labials: *p, p', b, m, w*; labiodentals: *f, v*; alveolars: *t, d, t', s, z, s', n, l, r*; palatals: *ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ, tʃ', ɲ, j*; velars: *k, g, k'*; glottals: *ʔ, h*) and seven vowels (i.e., *i, e, i, ə, a, u, o*) (pp. 8, 17). Getahun also mentions that the following conditioned sound changes: assimilation (e.g., labialization, velarization, palatalization, glottalization, voicing, and devoicing), dissimilation, epenthesis, and metathesis have been observed in the language (pp.29-

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² The other one is Baye's book entitled “Amharic grammar”, which was first published in 1995 and revised twice in 2008 and 2017.

³ The earlier version of the book was mainly for secondary school students and teachers.

63). Besides, he states that Amharic has six types of syllable structure: v , VC , $VC_1C_{1(2)}$, CV , CVC , and $CVC_1C_{1(2)}$ (p. 66).

Chapter 2 (“Morphology”, pp. 74-180) examines Amharic morphology. In this section, Amharic lexemes are classified into five categories, nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions (including postpositions) (p.79). And derivational and inflectional systems of the first three lexical categories have been addressed. Getahun has mentioned that Amharic nouns can be derived through root modifications (e.g., $C_1iC_2(i)C_3$, *t’ik’im* ‘benefit’; $C_1\emptyset C_2C_3$, *sərg* ‘wedding’; $C_1\emptyset C_2\emptyset C_3$, *zəfən* ‘song’, etc), affixations (e.g., suffixation: $-n\emptyset t$, $-ə\eta\eta a$, $-ə t$, $-aw i$, $-o\int$, etc; prefixation: *mə-* for verbal nouns), and compounding (noun (+ə) + noun) (pp. 86-110). Also, nouns can be inflected for number (i.e., $-ot\int\int$ for plural), gender ($-it$ or $-a$ for feminine gender), case ($-n$ for accusative), and definiteness ($-u$ for definite thing) (pp. 115-126).

Section 2.2.2 discusses adjectival morphology. It identifies that adjectives can be derived through root modification (e.g., $C_1\emptyset C_2iC_3$, *t’əbib* ‘wise’; $C_1\emptyset C_2\emptyset C_3$, *dərak* ‘dry), suffixation (e.g., $-ita$, $-ama$, $-ə\eta\eta a$, etc), and compounding (e.g. noun + \emptyset + adjective, *hod* ‘belly’ + \emptyset + *səfi* ‘wide’ > *hodəsəfi* ‘patient’). It also examines that adjectives can be inflected for gender, number, definiteness, and accusative case, like nouns (pp. 128-141).

Section 2.2.3.1 shows that Amharic verbs are formed from roots with vocalic templates (e.g., $C_1\emptyset C_2C_2\emptyset C_3-$, $C_1\emptyset C_2C_3-$). Also, passive, reflexive, and causative verbs can be derived through prefixation ($t\emptyset-$, $as-$, $a-$ + verb stem). Moreover, verbs can be derived through compounding (i.e. ideophones followed by the dummy verbs *all-* ‘say’ or *adərrəg-* ‘do/make’) (pp.148-160). Getahun mentions that an Amharic verb cannot stand alone as a word; it is a bound stem. On the other hand, section 2.2.3.2 reveals that verbs can be inflected for gender, number, person, tense, aspect, and mood (pp. 160-173).

Chapter 3 (“Syntax”, pp. 181-320) is concerned with Amharic phrasal and clausal structures. Getahun claims that Amharic is a right-headed language. He identifies five kinds of phrase structures, noun, verbal, adjectival, adverbial, and prepositional phrases. The author also stated that a phrase can be built up out of a head, (a) complement (s), (a) modifier(s), and (a) specifiers.

Section 3.1.1 (pp. 187-210) deals with noun phrase structures. It reveals that the head of a noun phrase, that is, a noun can be preceded by a complement (i.e., NPs), a modifier (e.g., NPs, APs, relative clauses), and (a) specifier(s) (i.e., deictic, quantifier, and genitive). Note that section 3.1.2 (pp. 211-217) analyzes adjectival phrase structures. Getahun shows that a noun phrase that functions as a complement, (a) prepositional phrase(s) serving as (a) modifier(s), and (a) specifier(s) may proceed the head adjective of an adjectival phrase.

Moreover, Section 3.1.3 (pp. 218-233) examines the Amharic verbal phrase structures. The analysis shows that a head of a verbal phrase can be preceded by a complement (e.g., noun phrases, prepositional phrases, adjectival phrases), a modifier (e.g., adverbial phrases, prepositional phrases, dependent clauses), and a specifier (i.e., quantifier).

Section 3.1.4 and 3.1.5 (pp. 234-249) discuss prepositional and adverbial phrases, respectively. The description shows that a complement of a prepositional phrase can be a noun phrase (when a preposition in a narrow sense is a head of a phrase) or a prepositional phrase (when a postposition is a head of a phrase). It is also mentioned that Amharic adverbial clauses do not take a complement but can have a modifier (usually a prepositional phrase) and a specifier (a quantifier).

Section 3.2 analyzes different types of sentence structures (e.g., simple sentences (pp. 255-257), complex sentences (pp. 258-268), independent clauses (pp. 269-270), dependent clauses (p. 271), active sentences (pp. 272-276), passive sentences (pp. 277-279), relative clauses (pp. 283-289), interrogative sentences (pp. 307-309), etc.).

The book entitled “Amharic Grammar: in a Simple Presentation, improved 2nd edition” is written by Getahun Amare, a professor of linguistics at Addis Ababa University and he is now teaching many courses including Amharic linguistics at the university. The publication of the book is important because it introduces Amharic grammar in particular and basic linguistics concepts in general to Amharic grammar teachers and students from beginner to advanced level in a simple way. Thus, with the target audiences of the book, the author has achieved plenty of objectives.

However, as with any work, one can find aspects to criticize. For example, the Amharic data are constructed examples and not taken from a discourse corpus. The treatment of phonetics is limited. Some up to

date previous works have not been properly consulted. In the next few paragraphs, I raise some points that need to be reconsidered.

In the phonetics subsection (pp. 1-18), there is no linguistic data that can illustrate the phonemic status of Amharic sounds. Since the intended target audiences of the book can be beginner Amharic learners (cf. p. x), the author should provide adequate data while establishing Amharic phonemes. Also, the author includes the voiced labiodental /v/ and excludes the labiovelars, /k^w/, /g^w/, /k^w/ from the phonemic inventory of the language (p.8) unlike some of other previous works (e.g., Baye (2017); Hudson (1997); Lesalu (1995)). It is very difficult to accept that Amharic has the sound /v/ without having the data. Moreover, despite the fact that Lesalu (1995) gives minimal pairs for labiovelars versus plain velars, Getahun rejects such sounds for an unconvincing reason (i.e., he states that the reason behind the exclusion of the labiovelars is pedagogical).

In the phonology subsection (pp.20-73), particularly in the syllable structures of Amharic (p.66), Getahun states that a syllable, in Amharic, can begin with a vowel. But I argue that a syllable needs a firm onset in the language and that in the case of an initial vowel, a glottal stop /ʔ/ would provide that requirement. Therefore, the main syllable structures of the language can be CV, CVC, or CVCC (cf. Edward 2019; Meyer 2011). Moreover, in imperative forms, Edward (2019: 206) and Meyer (2011) state that Amharic permits a two-member cluster of consonants at the word-initial position that can result in CCV syllables, in the case the sonority level of the second consonant is more sonorous than the first consonant, *bla* ‘eat(SG.M)!’. However, Getahun did not say a word on this point.

In the morphology section, Getahun did not address the lexical category of “specifier or determiner.” Baye, in the subsequent editions of his book entitled “Amharic grammar” (2017, 2008), adds the sixth word class called “specifier or determiner” that refers to place deixis (e.g., *ja* ‘that.M’, *jih* ‘this.M’, *jatʃif* ‘that.F’), genitive (e.g., *jəʔissua* > [*jəs^ws^wa*] ‘her’, *jəʔissu* ‘his’), and quantifiers (e.g., *hulət* ‘two’, *bizu* ‘many’, *bət’am* ‘very’). Although Getahun mentions Baye’s (2017) work in the list of his bibliography (p.18), he neither argues nor shares Baye’s classification of word classes; he does not comment on it. Besides, in chapter three (“syntax”), particularly in syntactic structures, Getahun uses the term specifier at the terminal node position where a lexical category of a word

is used (for instance, p. 209, e.g. 46a, b; p.240, e.g. 98b; p.241, e.g. 99a, b). This contradicts his classification of word classes where he did not consider specifiers as their own category.

I have also a reservation on the derivation of adjectives listed under example (98) (p.134) that are said to be formed through suffixation (i.e., -*a*). Instead, such adjectives are derived through root modifications, i.e., $C_1\emptyset/aC_2aC_3a$ for triradical adjectives (e.g., *dākama* ‘weak’ from the root *d-k-m*, *fakara* ‘rough’ from root *f-k-r*), and $C_1\emptyset C_2C_3aC_4a$ for quadric adjectives (e.g., *dāndana* ‘fat’ from the root *d-n-d-n*).

Some of the analyses of phrase structures in chapter three (“Syntax”) are problematic (e.g., structures under 69, 70, p.225; 76, p.229; 78, p.230; 108 and 109, p.247). Such structures violate the two putatively universal constituent principles, headedness principle and binary principle –every syntactic structure branches into two (cf. Radford 2004:40). For instance, when three specifiers –deictic, genitive, and quantifier co-occur in a single noun phrase structure, Getahun put them at the same hierarchical level which results in quaternary branching (e.g., 44, p.208). However, as clearly mentioned in Baye (2017: 255), such specifiers have hierarchical syntactic relations. First, a quantifier merges with a noun phrase to form a maximal noun phrase; then a genitive specifier merges with a maximal NP to form a very maximal NP; finally, a deictic specifier merges with a very maximal NP to form a very very maximal NP. This implies that the analyses of those structures that have ternary and quaternary branching have alternative structures that are consistent with headedness and binary principles. Moreover, Getahun shows that two or more modifiers (e.g., 76, p. 229) can have horizontal syntactic relations which lead to the violation of headedness and binary principles. Finally, in the analysis of the structure of a verbal phrase in which a di-transitive verb is a head, Getahun reveals that the direct object (i.e., NP) and the indirect object (PP) merges with the verb to form the minimal verbal phrase, which branches into three (e.g., 78, p.230). But the fact is that the direct object merges with the head, firstly and then followed by the indirect object to make the maximal projection (cf. Baye 2017: 271).

In conclusion, for Amharic readers, the book provides Amharic sound systems and patterns, inflectional and derivational morphology of the language, and phrases and sentences structures in a simple way. The description of the morphology section is unquestionably one of the

strongest points of the book. Finally, I found out that the book is a great contribution to Amharic language teaching.

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