

Grammaticalization of Body-Part Terms in Ethiosemitic

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Abstract

The main objective of this paper is identifying the possible instances of the processes of grammaticalization of body part terms in more than ten Ethiosemitic languages. Some of the body part terms found relevant are words for 'head', 'face', 'foot', 'sole', 'hand', 'stomach', 'back of the body', 'buttocks', 'rib', and 'soul'. These terms were found grammaticalizing into pronouns, adverbs, adpositional and circumpositional case markers, and further into circumpositional clausal subordinators. The grammaticalization paths taken could also be mentioned in this fashion: (body part) OBJECT > LOCATIVE > TEMPORAL > CONDITIONAL, CAUSAL, and ADVERSATIVE. Some of the instances seem to be peculiar: the Amharic preposition *wädä* 'to' (ALLATIVE) which derives from the word for 'hand'; the third person pronouns which derive from the words for 'stomach' (Argobba), 'soul' (Tigrinya), and 'head' (Amharic). With such peculiar instances and its focus on the genetic distribution of the grammaticalization of body part terms in a single family of languages, this study will likely be a contribution to grammaticalization studies of the topic under discussion.

1 Introduction

Grammatical morphemes (grams) evolve from lexical morphemes (lexemes). A grammaticalizing morpheme shifts from a category with large membership to a category with smaller and smaller membership; it becomes more and more schematic in meaning and shorter in length; and it also tends to be polyfunctional. This process of language change is termed grammaticalization. Grammaticalization studies, therefore, has its focus on the origin and evolution of grammatical categories (cf. Heine et al. 1991, Heine 1997, among many others). Body-part nouns rate among the most common inputs for grammaticalization. In their *World-Lexicon*, Heine and Kuteva have included about 16 body-part terms as source concepts in their discussion of "over 400 processes relating to the evolution of grammatical categories" (2002: 1). Body-part nouns grammaticalize mainly into adpositions (Heine et al. 1991: 123ff). In some cases, these nouns may also evolve into personal pronouns, and even numerals.

In his *Studies in Semitic Grammaticalization*, Rubin mentions some body-part nouns that have grammaticalized into reflexive, reciprocal, and independent personal pronouns in Semitic languages in general and in Ethiosemitic in particular (Rubin 2005: 19–24). What is largely ignored in Rubin's work, however, is the grammaticalization of body-part terms into adpositions (cf. Rubin 2005: 47–48). The other few studies on grammaticalization in Ethiopian languages do not specifically address the issue of body-part terms (see, for example, Łykowska 2003, 2006, 2009; Binyam 2008, Abinet 2010, Henok 2010, and Debela 2011). In the present work it will be shown that body-part nouns in Ethiosemitic languages grammaticalize into adpositions, adverbs, subordinators, and personal pronouns.

The following list represents a simplified outline of seventeen Ethiosemitic languages considered in the study (see Abinet 2010: 2, and the references cited therein): North Ethiosemitic: †Ge'ez, Tigre, Tigrinya; Transversal South Ethiosemitic: Amharic, Argobba, Harari, Silt'e, Wolane, Zay; Outer South Ethiosemitic: Chaha, Endegeñ, Dobbi, Inor, Mäsqañ, Muher, Kistane, †Gafat. The study is organized as follows: Section I presents the Introduction. Section II deals with the evolution of adpositions; Section III, with the formation of Personal Pronouns. A brief summary is given in Section IV.

2 Body-Part Terms > Adpositions

2.1 *Adpositions in Ethiosemitic*

Adpositions are mainly derived from nouns (N-adpositions) and verbs (V-adpositions). Our interest here is on the former type of adpositions. N-adpositions are derived mainly from nouns that denote either body parts or landmarks. Body-part terms form the most important source for the expression of spatial concepts (cf. Heine et al. 1991: 128). When head nouns in genitive constructions grammaticalize we get grammatical forms known as N-adpositions (Heine 1997: 59). The development of N-adpositions in Ethiosemitic languages can be seen within this framework.

One of the interesting cases of adpositions in Ethiosemitic is the shift made from prepositions to postpositions (through the intermediate stage of circumpositions). This has happened following the change of the basic word order from Semitic VSO to SOV (due to contact with the surrounding SOV languages). Apart from Ge'ez, all Ethiosemitic languages have shifted to a basic SOV word order. All the South Ethiosemitic languages have developed postpositions while preserving some of their former prepositions. Consequently, these