Contact-induced language change in selected Ethiopian Semitic Languages

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1 INTRODUCTION

This contribution is concerned with contact-induced language change processes in the Eastern Gurage varieties Zay and Wolane, and in Muher – a Gunnän-Gurage language of the Outer South Ethio-Semitic branch. The Transversal Ethio-Semitic language Amharic, the de facto Ethiopian lingua franca and main means of communication in administration and schools in the Gurage Zone, serves as main contact language. All these language belong to the Southern branch of Ethio-Semitic, i.e. they are genetically closely related (cf. Hetzron 1972: 119). In addition, data from the Highland East Cushitic language Oromo will also be considered.[1]

2 CONTACT-INDUCED LANGUAGE CHANGE IN ETHIO-SEMITIC LANGUAGES

Since Weinreich's (1953) seminal work on language contact, research in language contact phenomena and areality multiplied rapidly. In the Ethiopian contexts, early works deal with language change phenomena due to the contact between Semitic languages and Cushitic languages in Ethiopia (cf. Crass/Meyer 2008: 229f. for a research overview).

It is commonly agreed upon that the modern Ethio-Semitic languages changed their order of constituents from Common Semitic V(erb)-S(ubject)-O(bject) to SOV (cf. Thomason/ Kaufman 1988: 17f.). While the order of constituents in Ge'ez – the Classical Ethio-Semitic language with a relatively long written tradition – was still VSO (cf. example (1)), all other Ethio-Semitic languages are of the SOV type, as in the Amharic example (2).

(1)   *räkäb-ä[Verb]*   *josef[Subject]*   *mogäs-ä[Object]* …   GE'EZ
      find.PV-3sm   Joseph   grace-ACC

(2)   *josef[Subject]*   *mogäs[Object]*   … *agäɲɲä[Verb]*   AMHARIC
      Joseph   grace   find.PV.3sm

(3)   *joseef-i-s[Subject]*   *ajjaana[Object]*   … *argit-e[Verb]*   OROMO
      Joseph-NOM-EMP   grace   find-3sm.PV

      'Joseph found grace …' (Genesis 39,4)

Although it remains unclear what happened in detail, it is assumed that the modern Ethio-Semitic languages once also followed the VSO pattern but then adopted the Cushitic constituent order, as in the Oromo example (3). One trace for an older head-initial VSO pattern in the modern Ethio-Semitic languages is the existence of relational prefixes (also called 'prepositions'), as the prefix *bä-* in the Amharic example (4), which are typologically more common in head-initial VSO languages than in head-final SOV languages.

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(4)   *tullu   bä-mäkina   mätt'a.*   AMHARIC
        Tullu   INST-car   come.PV.3sm

(5)   *tulluu-n   konkolaataa-dhan   dhuf-e.*   OROMO
        Tullu-NOM   car-INST   come-3sm.PV

        'Tullu came by car.'

Cushitic languages which follow the pattern SOV, in contrast, make usually use of relational suffixes (also called 'postposition'), as the suffix *-dhan* in the Oromo example (5).

Lexicon and phonology of a language are frequently effected by language contact. In some cases, loanwords are incorporated without any observeable linguistic trace in the target language.

(6)   Source AMHARIC: *ənjära*   'pancake'
        Target MUHER: *ənjära*

In example (6), for instance, only socio-cultural information about the involved speaker communities can help to identify the words as borrowings. The pancake *ənjära*, which is made from teff, is a common food item in northern parts of Ethiopia while in most Gurage societies products of the ensete plant are more common (cf. Shack 1966: 52ff. and 1963; Simoons 1965). Therefore, one can conclude that the word for pancake as food item was borrowed into Muher from Amharic when contacts between the two groups became more intense.

In another borrowing situation, loanwords contain sounds or sound sequences which do not exist in the target language. In this case, three different scenarios of accommodation in the target language can be observed. First, the target language replaces uncommon or alien sounds or sound sequences by similar sounds from its own phoneme inventiory. In example (7), Oromo loanwords contain the alveolar implosive [ɗ] which did not exist in the Zay variety recorded by Leslau in 1954 (cf. Leslau 1999). The alveolar implosive in Oromo loanwords was, then, replaced by either the voiced alveolar stop [d] or the glottal stop in the target language Zay.

(7)   Source OROMO: (a) *tʃ'iɗa* 'feast'   (b) *deena* 'lunch'[2]
        Target ZAY: *tʃ'idä* 'wedding'   *ʔeenä* 'lunch'   Leslau (1999)

Furthermore, the Zay phonology does not permit the short vowel [a] word-finally (cf. Meyer 2005: 44ff.). Therefore, the final vowel of the Oromo loans in (7) is regularly replaced by the short mid-central vowel [ä] in Zay.

The loanword accommodation in examples (6) and (7) does not affect the phonology of the target language, i.e. no unfamiliar sounds will occur in the target language. Loanwords, in these cases, can be identified by either a comparison of the lexicon of the involved or by considering the socio-cultural setting of the involved speaker communities for a specific vocabulary (cf. Crass/Meyer 2005).

In a second scenario, the unfamiliar sounds in loanwords start to get incorporated into the target language yielding a situation in which these loanwords have two alternative

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[2]   The Oromo term for 'lunch, food' is *deena* in Arsi-Oromo, the direct neighbours to th Zay, but *diʔaana* or *dijaana* in other varieties of Oromo (cf. Gragg 1982: 123 for Wollegga Oromo).

pronunciations. As a result, an allophony of certain sounds evolves which is restricted to loanwords, e.g., *p~b, v~b, p'~b* or *s'~t'* in Wolane in (8).

(8)   Source AMHARIC: Target WOLANE:
       pappaya   *pappayä~babbayä*   'papaya'
       avokado   *avokado~abokato*   'avocado'
       p'app'as   *p'app'as~babbas*   'archbishop'
       s'älot   *s'älot~t'älot*   'prayer'

Note the the Amharic terms in (8) are also loanwords from other languages. However, these words spread into Wolane via Amharic but not through the original languages. The allophonic distribution of sounds in Wolane acquired a social connotation. The Amharic-like pronunciation of borrowings is connected with a higher eductional level and urbanity while the Wolane-like pronunciation usually has the implication of backwardness and rurality. The relationship of a certain type of pronunciation of allophonic sounds in loanwords to specific social groups is also found in other Ethio-Semitic languages.

In the third scenario, the allophony of sounds in loanwords is dissolved which might yield to the establishment of new phonemes in the target language. In the case of Zay, the Oromo loanwords mentioned in (7) nowadays occur with the alveolar implosive [ɗ].

(9)   Source OROMO: (a)   *tʃ'iɗa*   'feast'   (b)   *deena*   'lunch'
       Target ZAY: *tʃ'iɗä*   'wedding'   *deenä*   Meyer (2005)

In contrast to Leslau (1999), Meyer (2005: 30) only recorded the alveolar implosive but no [d] in the Oromo loanwords (cf. Meyer 2006: 818 for more examples). This leads to the conclusion that [ɗ] became a regular part of the phoneme inventory in Zay between 1954, the time of Leslau's field work on Zay and 1999 when Meyer gathered his data on Zay. Note that language contact with Oromo also triggered the incorporation of vowel lenght as a phonemic feature in Zay (cf. Meyer 2006: 819).

The phonological outcomes of loanword accommodation are also accompanied by changes in the conceptualization frame of the loanwords and by the reorganization of the lexicon and grammar of the involved languages. The conceptualization frame of loanwords is usually restricted to the specific contact situation in the target language, i.e., to the actual visible or experienceable referents in the contact situation. This is clearly observable in the terms for items exchanged by speakers of different languages at markets. Usually, these terms have a broader meaning or a variety of referents in the source language.

(10)   Source OROMO: *diima*   'red, redish cow'
       Target AMHARIC: *dima*   'redish cow'   *k'äj*   'red'
              WOLANE: *dima*   *buʃä*
              MUHER: *dima*   *bəʃʃa*

In Oromo, for instance, there exists a semantic relationship between the color term *diima* 'red' and the term for 'redish cow' while this relationship does not occur in the target languages Amharic, Wolane and Muher which borrowed the term *diima*, as shown in (10). In these languages, the loanword *diima* only denotes 'redish cow' while there exist another expression for 'red'. Thus, *diima* redish cow' is restricted to a specific contact situation in the target languages, here cattle trade. Source and target languages of loanwords can, therefore, be identified by comparing their semantics. If the semantics of a term is restricted to a specific referent in one language but has a number of denotata in another language, then most

probably the latter is the source language for borrowing. However, loanwords can become essential part of the lexicon in the target language, i.e., they can become part of complex conceptual frames yielding the conceptual reorganization of some parts of the lexicon. These processes can be best examplified by concepts related to 'coffee', e.g., *bunna* in Amharic or *bunä* in Zay which both denote 'coffee-drink, coffee-bean, coffee-plant'. Most probably the origin of the coffee plant is in Ethiopia (Kaye 1986, Pankhurst 1997). It was then distributed to Yemen and to other parts of the world by traders. When coffee was brought to Yemen, the Ethio-Semitic term for coffee was borrowed for denoting the raw coffee beans and the coffee plants but the coffee-drink, which was probably a Yemenitic invention, was given a separate name.

(11)   (a) *bunn*   'coffee-bean, coffee-plant'   ARABIC
        (b) *k'ahwa*   'coffee-drink'

Later, probably through Muslim traders from Yemen to Ethiopia, the coffee-drink was introduced into Muslim Ethiopian societies, which consequently, borrowed the term for 'coffee-drink' from Arabic.

(12)   (a) *buno*   'coffee-bean, coffee-plant'   MUHER/WOLANE
        (b) *k'ahwa / k'awä*   'coffee-drink'

The borrowing from Arabic triggered the semantic reorganization of the coffee lexicon in Muher (Maqorqor) and in Wolane as compared to Zay and Amharic. This reorganization in the nominal domain further spread to the verbal domain, in which Muher and Wolane have an additional verb *täʔawä(m)* 'drink coffee, drink something which is hot' which does not exist in Amharic or Zay.

(13)   *wuha /   bunna   t'ätt'a.*   AMHARIC
        water   coffee   drink:PV:3sm
(14)   *mäʃ /   bunä   sätʃ.*   ZAY
        water   coffee   drink:PV:3sm
        'He drank water/coffee.'

Consequently, Muher and Wolane use different verbs when denoting the action of drinking.

(15)   (a) *äga   sättʃä-m.*   (b) *k'awa   täʔaw-ä-m.*   MUHER
            water   drink:PV:3sm-DCM   coffee   drink:PV-3sm-DCM
(16)   (a) *mäj   sätʃe.*   (b) *k'awä   täk'aw-ä.*   WOLANE
            water   drink:PV:3sm   coffee   drink:PV-3sm
            'He drank water.'   'He drank coffee.'

The coffee example above differs from the previous types of borrowings because it is not a unilateral way of borrowing from a source to a target language but it involves bilateral stages of borrowing between speakers of different languages. Bilateral borrowing occurs in bilingual societies in which the second language (L2) takes over conceptual features from the first language (L1) of the speaking community, i.e., L2 becomes conceptunally reorganized according to L1. Another example for this process is the use of passive verbs derived by the prefix *tä-* by L1 Amharic in Addis Ababa viz-a-viz the L2 Amharic speakers in Welkite, the main administrative center of the Gurage Zone.

(17)   AMHARIC (L1 ADDIS ABABA)

    (a) *asfaw   tä-lak-ä.*   (b) *bərr   tä-lak-ä.*
         Asfaw   PAS-send:PV-3sm   money   PAS-send:PV-3sm
         'Asfaw was sent (off).'   'Money was send.'

(18)   AMHARIC (L2 WELKITE)

    (a) *asfaw tä-lak-ä.*   (b) **/?bərr   tä-lak-ä.*
         Asfaw   PAS-send:PV-3sm   money   PAS-send:PV-3sm

         'Asfaw was sent (off).'   'Money was sent.'

    (c) *bərr   lak-u-t.*
         money   send:PV-3p-o3sm
         'One sent money (lit. They (impersonal) sent money).'

In example (17), in which Amharic is spoken as L1, the (b) phrase with the inanimate subject *bərr* 'money' is perfectly correct but it is unacceptable or at least very uncommon in the Welkite L2-variety of Amharic, as seen in (18)b. Instead an impersonal construction in which the subject of the verb has no overt referent is used in Welkite Amharic (cf. (18)c). The reason for this, is probably that the L1 of the Welkite Amharic speakers is in most cases a Gunnän-Gurage language. Gunnän-Gurage languages also possess the derivational prefix *tä-*, as it occurs in Amharic, but it does not denote a passive but a medial-reflexive, in which the subject must possess the ability to fulfill the verbal action.

(19) (a) *asfaw   tä-lah-ä-m.*   (b) **bərr   tä-lah-ä-m.*   MUHER
          Asfaw   PAS-send:PV-3sm-DCM   money   PAS-send:PV-3sm-DCM
          'Asfaw was sent (off).'   'Money was sent.'

    *(*c) *bərr   lah-ʷ-i-m.*
         money   send:PV-IMPERSONAL-o3sm-DCM
         'One sent money.'

Example (19)b is unacceptable in Muher, which belongs to the Gunnän-Gurage languages, because its subject is animate and cannot fulfill the verbal action. Therefore, the impersonal form of the verb, as in (19)c, must be used to express the passive voice. This construction of the Gurage L1 was transferred into the Amharic L2 spoken in Welkite where it became norm. Consequently, Welkite-Amharic speakers and Addis Ababa-Amharic speakers use the same morpheme with a different conceptualization frame due to language contact.

A more obvious example for conceptual borrowing in Welkite-Amharic occurs in the welcome greeting formula. Gunnän-Gurage languages have a welcome greeting formula in which the verb for 'to come' is modified by a locative expression referring to the speaker.

(20) (a) *jä-bsa-bi!*   MUHER
         3sm-come:JUS-LOC:o1s
    (b) *jä-mt'ä-b-iɲ!*   WOLANE
         3sm-come:JUS-LOC-o1s
         'Welcome (lit. Let it come upon me)!'

This greeting formula is also frequent in the L2 Amharic variety of Welkite but never occurs in the L1 Amharic variety spoken in Addis Ababa.

(21) *ji-mt'a-b-əɲɲ!*   WELKITE-AMHARIC (L2)
      3sm-come:JUS-LOC-o1s
      'Welcome (lit. Let it come upon me)!'

      ənkʷan dähna mätt'a-h!   ADDIS ABABA-AMHARIC (L1)
      INTJ   well   come:PV-2sm
      'Welcome (m.)!'

3   CONCLUSION

The discussed examples of contact induced-language change in Amharic, Muher, Wolane and
Zay display various language contact situations which involve different degrees of
bilingualism. Sporadic contacts can be described by unilateral borrowings of concrete terms
from a source into a target language. This kind of contact is restricted to the lexicon of the
target language but does not affect the source language. Stable bilingualism yields bilateral
borrowings with effects on the phonology, syntax and the lexicon of the target languages. The
source language, too, can also be affected by transfered conceptualization patterns of the
target language yielding a modified variety spoken as a second language by native speakers of
the target language.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1, 2, 3	first, second, third person
ACC	accusative
DCM	declarative clause marker
INST	instrumental
INTJ	interjection
JUS	jussive mood
LOC	locative
m	masculine
NOM	nominative
o	object
p	plural
PAS	passive
PV	perfective aspect
s	singular

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