

Introduction

This work attempts to answer a very general question concerning how various aspects within the sphere of interpersonal relations are expressed in the Amharic language. The assumption that social relationships are reflected in communication and, in particular, in forms of address, in which the members of a given society articulate the ways of reciprocal perception serve as the basis for the research. Thus, the subject of the analysis presented here are the ways of address understood as pragmatic expressions, which include the grammatical and lexical elements used by Amharic language speakers in a variety of speech situations. They carry information about the mode of perceiving both the listener and the person referred to by the speaker and they specify the degree and character of social distance between the interlocutors. In my research I was interested in the interpretation of the communal features of both direct and indirect participants of a speech act on the basis of the linguistic elements they consciously employed. This led the study towards unearthing an internal conceptualization, particular for this language, that structures the sphere of interpersonal relations in Amharic. Another aim was to establish how socio-economic, political and cultural factors determine and transform the formation, the grammar and the lexis as well as the functional distribution of the forms of address. Such an approach places the study in the fields of sociolinguistics and linguistic pragmatics. To the best of my knowledge this question, of primary importance from the pragmatic point of view, has not been investigated so far in research on the Amharic language.

Focus on the twentieth century is justified by the fact that in the history of Ethiopia it was the time of fundamental political as well as social transformations. In the analysis of the language material, particular atten-

tion is paid to the changes that took place under the influence of internal and external historical factors, with the aim to reveal tendencies and their nature. The study therefore encompasses synchronic as well as diachronic elements. Such an approach sheds light on the history of a language and its development.

Search for language-internal conceptualization explains the decision to limit the analysis to Amharic. Reference to some other language would require examination of that language according to the criteria adopted in this work. Applying a comparative method would involve looking for common forms of address in at least two different languages. A comparative analysis universalizes and tends towards finding characteristics of different phenomena independent of linguistic structures or social relations in which the structures function. In this sense it does not allow one to grasp those mechanisms that regulate verbal communication in a way specific for a particular language. My aim was to find characteristics typical of a given culture at a given time and to provide a consistent study of one language at different stages of its historical transformation.

I am aware of the fact that translating Amharic utterances into English is a comparison in itself but this limitation is a consequence of the very nature of inter-lingual communication. Understanding any conceptualization in a language different than the analysed one must make use of interpretative operations in two different languages employing the conceptual system of the language of description at the risk of misrepresenting the picture of reality of the analysed language. The difficulty of rendering in English the Amharic possessive pronoun *Is yenē* 'my' in collocation with forms of address may serve as an example here. In English it was not possible to find a similar way of mutual perception, which would include familiarity as well as respect and affection. The pronoun in question functions in Amharic both in respectful and non-respectful address without diminishing the honorific level of an utterance. In order to minimize the unavoidable difficulties equivalent forms were used, which limits translation to the function of representing individual elements of an utterance in a literal manner. To avoid ethnocentrism I also use Amharic labels once the term has been introduced, which may cause certain difficulties for readers specializing in languages other than Amharic.

Particular effort was made to present grammatical and lexical elements that refer to the sphere of interpersonal relations in their sociolinguistic context, hence the comprehensive descriptions, which, it is believed, allow for a better understanding of basic concepts. As the language material plays the principal role in this analysis it makes it possible to come closer to understanding the immanent structure of the language. Extracting meanings from the context and their subsequent verification gives way to closer interpretation of their semantic representation. This, in turn, facilitates a more exact understanding of the reality where concepts function and leads to a better knowledge of the social structure and changes in interpersonal relations. It also helps to comprehend the ways in which language absorbs new impulses.

In collecting language material I adopted criteria that allowed for the gathering of utterances which refer to different aspects of the life of an individual and his or her place in a society. I started with strictly formal situations such as contacts taking place between the authorities and the people of Ethiopia, through official contacts with superiors at work and with strangers, up to more intimate relations among relatives and friends. It was important for the situations and communicates to be natural. The frequency of a given linguistic phenomenon was less important than the fact of its appearance. Due to a wider accessibility of contemporary sources I have concentrated on the sources from the last decade, which included novels, films, newspapers and magazines, television and radio programmes, interviews and questionnaires with Ethiopians as well as personal observations, i.e. very different uses of 'language'. The great diversity of the contemporary materials has not allowed me to find their historical counterparts, which I could investigate to a similar degree. Due to this fact, the historical texts served mainly as a point of reference that helped to record those changes which I found important for registering the tendencies of communicative transformations in the Ethiopian society.

The research and method of interpretation have been influenced by a sociolinguistic analysis of the Amharic, which include two papers by Joanna Mantel-Niećko (1975; 1998): one describing the forms of address used by citizens of Addis Ababa in the mid-20th century and the other one presenting the language-internal system of concepts referring to the Ethi-

opian state, to those in authority and to its people. The same problem has been approached from a different perspective in Susan Hoben's (1972) doctoral dissertation. Concentrating on the forms of address in Amharic she paid attention to the situational constraints of their usage and indicated how it influenced a semantic analysis. The research was conducted on a representative cross-section of the Amharic society living in the region of Menz in the second half of the 60s and also took into account the Ethiopian society of this period as a whole. This work provides a wide array of forms of address of the analysed period, which I used as a point of reference for the contemporary language material.

Works by Olga Kapeliuk (1980) and Renate Richter (1983; 1986) have cast light on the word-formation of the communist period in Ethiopian history. Aregga Hayle-Mikaël's doctoral dissertation (1986), in which the author registers changes in the forms of address in the official documents from the periods before and after the revolution, served as a source of information for comparison and understanding the direction of socio-political transformations seen from the historical perspective.

Baye Yimam's (1997) comparative study of the pragmatics of greetings, felicitations and condolences in Amharic against the background of other Ethiopian languages is the latest work that has been a source of inspiration. The subject of this study is expressive speech acts as a reflection of social behavior, their structure and pragmatics. The aim of Baye's article is to present the features distinguishing this region with respect to its cultural uniformity. The results of this Ethiopian scholar's research confirmed my observations as to the existence of a stable system of values that is reflected in the Amharic language. The interpretation of social phenomena presented in the works of Donald Levine (1972) and Helen Pankhurst (1992) has enriched my understanding of this value system that lies at the foundation of personal relationships and the behavior of members of Ethiopian society.

My perception of the communicative reality of Ethiopians was strongly influenced by Romuald Huszcza's work on honorifics (Huszcza 1997). Taking his viewpoint on this phenomenon helped me to see more clearly the mechanisms which shape the sphere of interpersonal relations in Amharic. However, it was the empirical research that became of primary

concern to me. Theoretical investigations in the fields of speech acts, semantics or pragmatics have not been my aim and have served only as a necessary basis for my analysis. I shall here call upon the works of John Austin, John Searle, Renata Grzegorzczkova, Walter Ong, Ernest Gellner, Erving Goffman and Robert Taylor, which greatly affected my view.

The following work is the result of empirical research on the twentieth century Amharic language which searches for a conceptual system in the sphere of human perception reflected in the ways of address. The analysis of natural communicative units was based on the cognitive inference from the information contained in the utterances deliberately and consciously employed by speakers.

The American transliteration version, which is based on the Romanization Guide: Transliteration system for Amharic BGN/PC GN. 1967 System has been used throughout the book. I have to apologize here for the fact that such an approach results in a different spelling of well known historical names, which the reader may find sometimes strange.