

Endalew Assefa

Descriptive Grammar of Ezha

A Gurage Language of Ethiopia (Ethio-Semitic)



Aethiopistische Forschungen 87

Harrassowitz Verlag

Aethiopistische Forschungen
Band 87

Aethiopistische Forschungen

Begründet von

Ernst Hammerschmidt

Fortgeführt von

Siegbert Uhlig

Herausgegeben von

Alessandro Bausi

Band 87

2022

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

Endalew Assefa

Descriptive Grammar of Ezha

A Gurage Language of Ethiopia (Ethio-Semitic)

2022

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

Titelvignette: Adelheid Kordes

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen
Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet
über <https://dnb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche
Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the internet
at <https://dnb.de>.

For further information about our publishing program consult our
website <https://www.harrassowitz-verlag.de>

© Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden 2022

This work, including all of its parts, is protected by copyright.
Any use beyond the limits of copyright law without the permission
of the publisher is forbidden and subject to penalty. This applies
particularly to reproductions, translations, microfilms and storage
and processing in electronic systems.

Printed on permanent/durable paper.

Typesetting and layout: Francesca Panini

Printing and binding: Memminger MedienCentrum AG

Printed in Germany

ISSN 0170-3196

ISBN 978-3-447-11843-9

eISSN 2749-0017

eISBN 978-3-447-39281-5

Table of Contents

List of Tables.....	xi
List of Figures	xv
Acknowledgements	xvii
Symbols and Abbreviations.....	xix
Preamble.....	xxi
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1. The Language Area	1
1.2. Classification of Gurage Languages.....	2
1.3. Brief Survey of Related Literature	5
1.4. The Language Data	8
1.5. Methodology and Procedures	8
Chapter 2: Phonetics/Phonology	11
2.1. Identification of Phonemes.....	11
2.1.1. Consonants.....	11
2.1.2. Vowels	14
2.1.3. Minimal and Near Minimal Pairs.....	14
2.1.3.1. Consonants.....	14
2.1.3.2. Vowels	17
2.2. Distribution of Phonemes.....	17
2.2.1. Consonant Distribution	17
2.2.2. Vowel Distribution.....	23
2.3. Clusters of Phonemes	25
2.3.1. Sonorant–Obstruent Sequences.....	25
2.3.2. Obstruent–Sonorant Sequences.....	26
2.3.3. Sonorant–Sonorant Sequences	26
2.3.4. Obstruent–Obstruent Sequences	26
2.4. Gemination.....	28
2.5. Phonotactic Constraints.....	30
2.6. Syllable Structure	30
2.7. Phonological/Morphophonemic Processes	32
2.7.1. Assimilation	32

2.7.1.1. Homorganic Nasal Assimilation	32
2.7.1.2. Total Assimilation of <i>t</i>	35
2.7.1.3. Total assimilation of <i>r</i>	38
2.7.1.4. Palatalization.....	38
2.7.2. Labialization	42
2.7.3. Non-Assimilative Palatalization.....	43
2.7.4. Depalatalization	44
2.7.5. Vowel Fronting	44
2.7.6. Vowel Deletion	46
2.7.7. Deletion of a Glide and a Vowel	47
2.7.8. Epenthesis	48
2.7.8.1. Vowel Insertion.....	48
2.7.8.2. Glide Insertion	49
2.7.9. Spirantization or Fricativization.....	50
Chapter 3: Minor Word Classes	53
3.1. Pronouns.....	53
3.1.1. Personal Pronouns.....	54
3.1.2. Interrogative Pronouns.....	57
3.1.3. Indefinite Pronouns.....	61
3.1.4. Reflexive Pronouns.....	62
3.1.5. Reciprocal Pronouns	64
3.1.6. Selective Pronouns.....	64
3.1.7. Pronouns of Totality.....	65
3.1.8. Pronouns of Isolation/Emphatic Pronouns	66
3.2. Determiners.....	67
3.2.1. Demonstratives	67
3.2.2. Quantifiers	69
3.2.2.1. Cardinal Numerals	69
3.2.2.2. Ordinal Numerals.....	73
3.2.3. Non-Numeral Quantifiers.....	73
3.3. Adpositions	74
Chapter 4: Major Word Classes and their Grammatical Categories	77
4.1. Noun.....	77
4.1.1. Simple Nouns.....	78
4.1.2. Derived Nouns	80
4.1.2.1. Abstract Nouns.....	81
4.1.2.2. Verbal Nouns	81
4.1.2.3. Associative Agent Nouns.....	82
4.1.2.4. Agent Nouns	82

4.1.2.5. Result Nouns.....	83
4.1.2.6. Instrumental Nouns.....	83
4.1.2.7. Language Names.....	84
4.1.3. Compound Nouns.....	84
4.1.3.1. Exocentric Compounds.....	85
4.1.3.2. Endocentric Compounds.....	86
4.1.4. Noun Inflection.....	87
4.1.4.1. Number.....	87
4.1.4.2. Gender.....	92
4.1.4.3. Definiteness.....	93
4.1.4.4. Case.....	98
4.2. Adjectives.....	109
4.2.1. Simple Adjectives.....	110
4.2.2. Derived Adjectives.....	111
4.2.3. Compound Adjectives.....	112
4.2.4. Semantic Sub-Classes of Adjectives.....	112
4.2.5. Inflection of Adjectives.....	113
4.2.6. Use of Adjectives.....	115
4.2.6.1. Attributive Use.....	116
4.2.6.2. Predicative Use.....	116
4.3. Verbs.....	116
4.3.1. Ezha Verb Types.....	117
4.3.2. Base Formation.....	118
4.3.2.1. Type-A Verbal Bases.....	119
4.3.2.2. Type-B Verbal Bases.....	121
4.3.2.3. Type-C Verbal Bases.....	123
4.3.2.4. Irregular Verbal Bases.....	124
4.3.3. Stem Derivation.....	128
4.3.3.1. Simple Stem Derivation.....	128
4.3.3.2. Complex Stem Derivation.....	130
4.3.3.3. Compound Verbs.....	135
4.3.4. Verbal Inflection.....	137
4.3.4.1. Subject Agreement.....	138
4.3.4.2. Object Agreement.....	141
4.3.4.3. Applicatives.....	145
4.3.4.4. Aspect, Tense, and Mood.....	149
4.3.4.5. Negation.....	158
4.3.4.6. The Impersonal.....	160
4.3.4.7. Converbs.....	162

4.3.4.8. Copular and Existential Verbs.....	165
4.4. Adverbs	175
4.4.1. Simple Adverbs.....	175
4.4.2. Derived Adverbs	176
4.4.3. Compound Adverbs	178
4.4.4. Semantic Sub-Classes of Adverbs.....	179
4.4.4.1. Adverbs of Time	179
4.4.4.2. Adverbs of Frequency	180
4.4.4.3. Adverbs of Manner	180
4.4.4.4. Adverbs of Place	180
4.4.5. Adverbs in Use.....	180
Chapter 5: Phrasal Categories.....	183
5.1. Noun Phrase	183
5.2. Adpositional Phrase.....	193
5.3. Adjective Phrase.....	195
5.4. Adverb Phrase	196
5.5. Verb Phrase	197
5.5.1. Complementation.....	198
5.5.1.1. Verb Phrases Headed by Transitive Verbs.....	198
5.5.1.2. Verb Phrases Headed by Intransitive Verbs.....	200
5.5.1.3. Verb Phrases Headed by Copular and Existential Verbs.....	201
5.5.2. Modification.....	202
5.5.3. Verb Argument Structures	206
5.5.3.1. Argument Structure of One Place (Intransitive and Non-Personal) Verbal Predicates.....	206
5.5.3.2. Argument Structure of Two Place (Monotransitive) Verbal Predicates.....	208
5.5.3.3. Argument Structure of Three Place (Ditransitive) Verbal Predicates.....	212
Chapter 6: Clausal Syntax	219
6.1. Clausal Types	219
6.1.1. Simple Declarative Clauses.....	219
6.1.2. Interrogative Clauses.....	222
6.1.2.1. Polar Interrogatives	222
6.1.2.2. Content Interrogatives.....	225
6.1.3. Subordinate Clauses.....	227
6.1.3.1. Conditionals	228
6.1.3.2. Purpose/Reason Clauses.....	230
6.1.3.3. Temporal Clauses.....	231
6.1.3.4. Relative Clauses.....	232

6.1.4. Clauses Involving Converbs.....	237
6.1.5. Clauses Involving Verbal Nouns.....	240
6.1.6. Complement Clauses.....	241
6.2. Clausal Comparison	242
6.3. Focus Marking	244
6.3.1. Morphological Focus Marking.....	244
6.3.2. Syntactic Focus Marking.....	248
6.4. Topicalization.....	249
Appendices	251
Appendix 1: Verbal Conjugations	251
Appendix 2: Greetings.....	257
Appendix 3: Narrative Texts	262
Appendix 4: Sample Ezha–English Word List	271
References	279

List of Tables

Table 1: Consonants of Ezha	12
Table 2: Vowels of Ezha	14
Table 3: Word-final consonant clusters in Ezha	28
Table 4: Geminate and non-geminate occurrence of consonants in Ezha	29
Table 5: Major syllable types in Ezha	31
Table 6: Personal pronouns in Ezha	54
Table 7: Personal pronouns marked for accusative, dative, and genitive cases	55
Table 8: Personal pronouns marked for ablative case in Ezha.....	56
Table 9: Possessive pronominal suffixes in Ezha	57
Table 10: Interrogatives in Ezha.....	58
Table 11: Indefinite pronouns in Ezha.....	61
Table 12: Reflexive pronouns in Ezha.....	63
Table 13: Reciprocal pronouns in Ezha.....	64
Table 14: Selective pronouns in Ezha	65
Table 15: Pronouns of totality in Ezha	65
Table 16: Ezha pronouns of isolation	66
Table 17: Demonstratives in Ezha.....	67
Table 18: Basic cardinal numerals in Ezha.....	70
Table 19: The teens in Ezha	70
Table 20: The decades in Ezha	71
Table 21: Ezha ordinal numerals derived from the basic cardinals	73
Table 22: Adpositions in Ezha.....	75
Table 23: Major patterns for Ezha simple nouns	78
Table 24: Count and mass nouns in Ezha	79
Table 25: Kinship terms in Ezha	79
Table 26: Proper nouns in Ezha.....	80
Table 27: Ezha exocentric compounds	86
Table 28: Endocentric compounds in Ezha	87
Table 29: Suppletive singular and plural nouns in Ezha.....	88
Table 30: Internally modified plural nouns in Ezha	88
Table 31: Lexical gender distinction in Ezha	92

Table 32: Major patterns of Ezha simple adjectives	110
Table 33: Simple adjectives with verbal correlates in Ezha.....	111
Table 34: Adjectival derivational suffixes in Ezha.....	111
Table 35: Compound adjectives in Ezha	112
Table 36: Ezha adjectives in different semantic fields.....	113
Table 37: Some reduplicative plural adjectives in Ezha	114
Table 38: Ezha verb types based on the number of root consonants	117
Table 39: Base patterns of tri- and quadriconsonantal verbs in Ezha	119
Table 40: Sample type-A, type-B, and type-C verbs in Ezha	119
Table 41: Base patterns of Ezha monoconsonantal verbs.....	125
Table 42: Base formation of Ezha biconsonantal verbs with a <i>CVC</i> pattern	126
Table 43: Base formation of Ezha biconsonantal verbs with a terminal vowel	126
Table 44: Base formation of Ezha biconsonantal verbs with an initial vowel	127
Table 45: Ezha compound verbs with <i>bar-</i> ‘say’ and <i>amənnə-</i> ‘make’	135
Table 46: Ezha compound verbs with ideophones borrowed from Amharic	136
Table 47: Ezha compound verbs involving reduplicated ideophones.....	136
Table 48: Ezha compound verbs that only use <i>bar-</i> ‘say’ as a second element	137
Table 49: Subject agreement affixes in Ezha.....	138
Table 50: Ezha perfective verbal conjugation	139
Table 51: Imperfective and jussive conjugations in Ezha.....	140
Table 52: Imperative conjugations in Ezha	141
Table 53: Object agreement suffixes in Ezha	142
Table 54: Paradigm of 2MS object suffixes attached to perfectives and imperfectives	143
Table 55: Paradigm of the 1S object suffix attached to perfective verbs.....	144
Table 56: Paradigm of the 3MS object suffix attached to perfective verbs	145
Table 57: The benefactive suffixes in Ezha.....	146
Table 58: Paradigm of a 3MS perfective verb with benefactive suffixes	146
Table 59: The malefactive allomorphs in Ezha	148
Table 60: Paradigm of a perfective verb with malefactive suffixes.....	148
Table 61: Conjugation of the Ezha <i>t</i> -converb.....	163
Table 62: The present copula in Ezha.....	166
Table 63: The past tense copula in Ezha.....	167
Table 64: Copula in the future tenses in Ezha	168
Table 65: Ezha copular negation in the past, present, and future tenses	169
Table 66: The Ezha verb of existence in the present tense	171
Table 67: The Ezha verb of existence in the future tenses.....	173
Table 68: The present negative verb of existence in Ezha.....	174
Table 69: The negative verb of existence in the past and future tenses	174
Table 70: Ezha simple adverbs.....	176

Table 71: Ezha time adverbs derived from quantifiers	176
Table 72: Ezha adverbs of place.....	177
Table 73: Ezha time adverbs derived from place adverbs	177
Table 74: Reduplicative time adverbs in Ezha	178
Table 75: Compound adverbs in Ezha.....	179
Table 76: Subordinators in Ezha	228

List of Figures

Fig. 1 Geographical location of Ezha and surrounding languages.....	2
Fig. 2 Genealogical classification of Ethio-Semitic.....	4

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I thank the almighty God for granting me health, wisdom, and tolerance so that I could accomplish this work.

Next, my heart-felt thank goes to Ronny Meyer (my mentor) who assisted me in several ways including offering relevant reading materials, providing me with highly constructive comments and suggestions during our lively discussions so that I could go on to the right track, assisting me through editorial and data checking endeavors, and giving me technical assistance in compiling the final version of this work.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to Aaron Rubin for his invaluable assistance; he exerted ample time and energy to rigorously edit the book, which was of tremendous value in reshaping the book. In genuine terms, had it not been for Aaron Rubin's careful editing, data cleaning (through frequent correspondence with me), and restructuring, this work would not have come to its present appearance.

My sincere thanks go to Orin Gensler who has meticulously proofread and edited this book. Truly speaking, he has significantly transformed the manuscript in terms of language.

My informants also deserve my intense gratitude. I am particularly grateful to Tilahun Woldie, Desta Gizyatu, Lemma Zeleke, Ningane Abza, Belachew Shume, Abera Zemerga, and Tsehay Abza for their cooperation and strong sense of solidarity during my fieldwork; I really consider them as the backbones of the study. I am especially thankful to Tsehay Abza for her unreserved assistance in data cleaning while preparing the book for publication.

I am highly indebted to Girma Awgichew for investing part of his busy time to read and comment on this work; I am really grateful to him as I have benefited a great deal from his feedback.

My heart-felt thank also goes to my wife, Gojjam Mulu, who played a great role in terms of boosting my morale and commitment through psychological empowerment in addition to fulfilling double responsibility by virtue of relieving me from certain assignments pertaining to our home and family so that I could effectively accomplish this work.

I would also like to thank the NORHED Project (a project collaboratively run by Addis Ababa University of Ethiopia and Universitetet I Oslo of Norway), which is working on linguistic capacity building in Ethiopia; the project covered the required amount of money meant for the editorial work of this book.

Finally, my gratitude is due to Francesca Panini, at the Hiob Ludolf Centre for Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies of Universität Hamburg, who meticulously edited the volume and transformed it, especially in terms of structure. She humbly offered a great editorial contribution so that the volume fits with the standards of the series. I am also grateful to Harrassowitz Verlag, who covered the print costs for the volume.

Symbols and Abbreviations

1, 2, 3	first, second, and third person	IP	impersonal
Ø	zero morpheme	IPFV	imperfective
*	ungrammatical	IRR	irrealis conditional
//	phonemic	JUSS	jussive
[]	phonetic	LAB	labialized
→	becomes	lit.	literally
↗	rising intonation	LOC	locative
~	reduplicated morpheme	M	masculine
ABL	ablative	MAL	malefactive/instrumental
ACC	accusative	n.	noun
adv	adverb	NEG	negative
adj	adjective	NOM	nominative
ASS	associative	Oj	object
AUX	auxiliary	p.	postposition
BEN	benefactive	PAL	palatalized
CAUS	causative	PASS	passive
CVM	<i>m</i> -converb	PFV	perfective
CVT	<i>t</i> -converb	PL	plural
COM	comitative	POSS	possession
COMP	complementizer	PRES	present
conj.	conjunction	pron.	pronoun
COP	copula	PURP	purpose
CM	clause marker	quant.	quantifier
DAT	dative	REC	reciprocal
DEF	definite	REDUP	reduplication
DEM	demonstrative	REAL	realis conditional
DFUT	definite future	REL	relativizer
DISJ	disjunctive	S	singular
ej	ejective	Sj	subject
F	feminine	SIM	similative
FOC	focus	TEMP	temporal
GEN	genitive	v.	verb
ID	ideophone	vd	voiced
IFUT	indefinite future	vl	voiceless
IMP	imperative	VN	verbal noun
intr.	interrogative	VOC	vocative
INT	intensifier		

Preamble

As is well known, Ethiopia is a country in which many languages are spoken, most of which remain undescribed or under-described. Ezha (ጃጃ), a Semitic language that is spoken in the Gurage Zone, is one of these many under-described languages. Some BA and MA students at Addis Ababa University have tried to describe aspects of the language's phonology and morphology. Besides this, there have been numerous comparative studies on different Gurage languages, including data from Ezha (see 1.3). However, there has been no in-depth grammatical description of the language.

Nowadays, most Ezha speakers are bilingual in Amharic, the majority language, and many even prefer to use it instead of their native language. The influence of Amharic threatens the Ezha language with the loss of many of its original features. As such, the current researcher has taken the initiative to describe the language's grammar as a whole, with a view to recording the language's original features before it is too late.

This work is not only the first comprehensive description of Ezha, but it also counts among the very few comprehensive grammatical descriptions made of any Gurage languages. Thus, its publication should be a welcome addition to the slowly growing collection of Ethio-Semitic grammars in general and Gurage grammars and studies in particular.

The general objective of this work is to offer an in-depth grammatical description of the Ezha language. It is aimed to identify and describe the phonemes and the phonemic systems of the language, provide a thorough morphological description, and offer an in-depth description of its syntax.

With the aforementioned objectives in mind, it is strongly believed that this work can be significant in several ways. The benefits include contributing to the better understanding of Ezha grammar for both native speakers and non-native linguists; playing an essential role in documenting the language with its own special features; giving the language an increased chance of survival, as well as increased range of functions and usage by its speakers; and serving as a reference for interested individuals conducting research on the grammar of other Ethiopian languages that are not yet well described.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Taking the absence of any prior in-depth grammatical description on the Ezha language as an impetus, this study aims to provide a descriptive account of the language's entire grammar. The study focused mainly on elicitation to gather the required data, which was supplemented by the recording of free narratives. To this end, the phonology, morphology, and syntax of Ezha have been presented in the language's own terms. That is, the analyses are made with great care so as not to impose particular theoretical assumptions on the target language, hence, avoiding the occurrence of a theory-internal problem.

1.1. The Language Area

Gurage languages are spoken in the Gurage Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region (SNNPR) of Ethiopia. The languages are also spoken in some other parts of the country, by those Gurage and their descendants who left their homeland for different reasons, such as trading and education.

Ezha, one of the Gurage languages used in the Gurage Zone, is spoken primarily in the Ezha administrative district (*woreda*), whose principal town is Agenna (often also spelled Agena in foreign transcriptions). Most of its speakers are Orthodox Christians, though some are Muslims, and very few are Protestants. The majority of the Ezha people are rural farmers who cultivate *enset* (*Ensete ventricosum*), also known as false banana, while urban speakers are mostly merchants. The area where Ezha is spoken is bordered mainly by areas in which other Gurage languages are spoken, namely Muher to the north-east, Chaha to the south-west, and Gumer to the south, as shown in Fig. 1 below.



Fig. 1 Geographical location of Ezha and surrounding languages.

In terms of population size, the 2007 Ethiopian population and housing census presented only the entire Gurage population as an undifferentiated whole; it does not indicate the number of Ezha people in isolation. According to the Ethiopian Central Statistical Agency,¹ the total Gurage population numbers 1,860,000 with rural dwellers outnumbering urban dwellers; 1,075,000 live in rural areas, whereas 785,000 of the total population reside in urban sites. The census also indicated that there were just under 85,000 people living in the Ezha *woreda*. However, this number does not correlate exactly with the number of Ezha speakers; it simply gives us a rough estimation of how many Ezha speakers there would be. According to that same census, nearly 96% of the district's inhabitants lived in a rural environment rather than an urban one.

1.2. Classification of Gurage Languages

Whether all the different Gurage varieties are all really distinct languages or whether some are variants of a single language is still the subject of some de-

¹ Central Statistical Agency 2008.

bate, and the issue requires more comprehensive study. In this regard, different scholars have posed their own arguments. For instance, Ullendorff stated that Gurage is generally referred to as a ‘dialect cluster’.² Leslau considered the Gurage varieties as twelve dialects, which he classified based on their vocabulary and morphology.³ These twelve are Chaha, Ezha, Inor (which he called Ennemor), Endegegn, Gyeta, Muher, Masqan, Kistane (which he called Soddo), Dobbi (which he called Gogot), Silt’i, Wolane, and Zay. On the other hand, Hetzron and Bender contend that some of the Gurage varieties, such as Kistane, Dobbi, Muher, and Masqan, are distinct languages, whereas others, like Eastern Gurage, Central Western Gurage, and Peripheral Western Gurage, are dialect clusters, since their respective dialects are mutually intelligible.⁴ Meyer holds that assuming the various Gurage varieties to constitute a single dialect cluster is not valid, since there are substantial differences among them.⁵ Hudson recognizes eight Gurage languages, some of which have distinct dialects; in fact, he classifies Ezha as a dialect of Chaha.⁶ Bearing all of this in mind, the term *language* will still be used throughout this book to refer to the different varieties of Gurage, including for Ezha, though with the acknowledgement that Ezha is closely related to Chaha.

What are called ‘Gurage languages’ are actually the languages of small speech islands interspersed among Cushitic languages. All of the languages spoken by Gurage people are called by the same generic term ‘Gurage’, though Gurage is not really a meaningful linguistic term. It should rather be used to refer only to a speech community (or communities) in a certain region of south-central Ethiopia speaking Ethio-Semitic languages surrounded by Cushitic speaking people.⁷

The sub-classification of the different Gurage languages is also debated by various scholars. Leslau, for example, argues for considering Muher, Dobbi, and Masqan to be part of Western Gurage.⁸ However, according to Hetzron and Bender, Masqan is part of the Western Gurage, whereas Muher, Dobbi, and Kistane are members of the Northern Gurage.⁹ These two scholars also point out that some of the Eastern Gurage languages are closer to Harari than to other Gurage languages, and that Kistane and Dobbi are closer to Gafat (a language

2 Ullendorff 1955.

3 Leslau 1969a.

4 Hetzron and Bender 1976.

5 Meyer 2011.

6 Hudson 2013.

7 Hetzron and Bender 1976.

8 Leslau 1969a.

9 Hetzron 1972; Hetzron 1977; Hetzron and Bender 1976.

which is now extinct) than to other Gurage languages. In an important recent study, Hudson also summarizes the work of earlier scholars on classification.¹⁰

The Ezha language belongs to the Central Western group of Gurage languages, and is thus closely related to Chaha, Gumer, and Gura. According to Völlmin, Ezha is mutually intelligible with Gumer and Chaha, whereas Meyer contends that Central Western Gurage generally constitutes a dialect continuum.¹¹ The following genealogical tree of the Ethio-Semitic language family, adopted from Hetzron,¹² depicts Ezha and its neighboring Gurage languages.

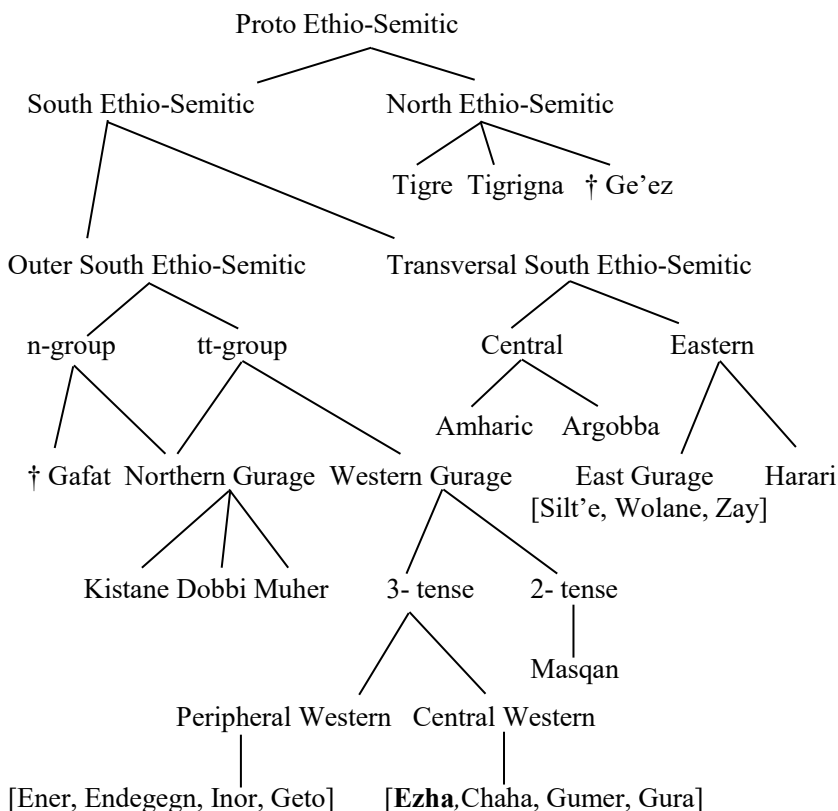


Fig. 2 Genealogical classification of Ethio-Semitic.

¹⁰ Hudson 2013.

¹¹ Völlmin 2017; Meyer 2019.

¹² Hetzron 1977.

1.3. Brief Survey of Related Literature

There has been a lot of previous work on the Gurage languages, though the majority have been comparative in nature. In this section, those previous studies which dealt with the Ezha language in one way or another are briefly reviewed.

Polotsky made some remarks on the grammar of Ezha,¹³ focusing on phonological and morphological topics. Polotsky himself stated that the data were from Chaha, though he acknowledged that his informants spoke the Ezha variety as well; in fact, his ‘Chaha’ data are taken from Ezha. This can be deduced by the fact that Polotsky’s data exhibit gemination, which is present in Ezha, but not in Chaha.

Ullendorff compared the phonology of the Gurage languages with the phonology of other Ethio-Semitic languages.¹⁴ According to him, there are twenty-nine consonants and seven vowels that constitute the phonemic inventory of the Gurage languages. In addition to the plain consonants, he has identified labialized as well as palatalized velars.

Leslau made many enormously important contributions to the study of Gurage languages. Leslau described the different jussive patterns of type-A verbs in Ezha.¹⁵ Accordingly, he pointed out that there are five possible jussive patterns for the type-A verbs. These are $j\partial-C_1iC_2C_3$, $j\partial-C_1C_2\partial C_3$, $j\partial-C_1C_2iC_3$, $j\partial-C_1iC_2C_2\partial C_3$, and $j\partial-C_1iC_2C_2iC_3$. According to Leslau’s analysis, although the majority of the verbs have only one pattern, there are some verbs which can have two or even three jussive patterns. The present study, however, has identified only one jussive pattern for any given verb (see 4.3.2). Gemination of root consonants is also not attested in the jussive/imperative for type-A verbs.

Leslau published a collection of 110 riddles in Ezha, together with linguistic and cultural annotations and free translations into English.¹⁶ Some of the riddles consist of simple sentences and some others of compound sentences. Most of the riddles consist of a single question which requires a single answer. However, there are cases where a riddle employs more than a sentence requiring a single answer. Most but not all of the riddles have a verb. If a riddle has a verb, the verb has to add a final *-m* in the perfective form except that this *-m* may be elided for the purpose of rhyming when there exist two or more rhyming sentences within a riddle. Nine Ezha folktales appear in Leslau’s volume *Gurage Folklore*, and another in his article ‘*Äsät*, the Soul of the Gurage’;¹⁷ all of these texts in-

13 Polotsky 1938; 1951.

14 Ullendorff 1955.

15 Leslau 1967.

16 Leslau 1969–1970.

17 Leslau 1982; 1969b.

clude annotations and translations. In 1979 Leslau published a three-volume comparative dictionary of the Gurage languages.¹⁸ In the introduction to the first volume,¹⁹ Leslau presents some remarks on the geographical distribution and main linguistic features of the Gurage languages in general. In the main part of this volume, he provides, individually, the vocabularies of twelve Gurage languages (including Ezha) with English translations. The second volume is an English–Gurage dictionary, while the third is a comparative and etymological dictionary of all the words included in the first two volumes.²⁰

Hetzron worked out the genealogical status of Ethio-Semitic languages on the basis of their verb morphology and independent pronouns.²¹ Hetzron carried out a remarkable work specifically on the study of the Gurage languages, in which he provided a historical survey of the classification of the Gurage languages.²² He also included comparative grammatical notes on the different Gurage languages, focusing on phonological, morphological, and syntactic features. Finally, he presented different texts in the languages along with English translations.

Wudie Worku made an attempt to describe the phonology of Ezha.²³ The writer tried to identify the phonemes of the language, and described a few morphophonemic processes operating in the language, such as assimilation, vowel deletion, and epenthesis.

Tsehay Abza first presented a general phonological survey of Ezha,²⁴ and then described how nouns inflect for various grammatical notions. She also described the derivation of nouns in the language, indicating that nouns can be derived from nouns, adjectives, and verbs.

Fekede Menuta made a brief phonological survey of Ezha.²⁵ He also examined the inflectional and derivational properties of Ezha nouns, adjectives, and verbs, along with some of their morpho-syntactic features. Fekede also identified some words that belong to the adverb category. He also addressed two of the functional categories in the language (pronouns and numerals) and tried to show how they behave morphosyntactically. Fekede gave a descriptive account of verbal derivation in Ezha.²⁶ The author first subcategorized the verbs of the language on the basis of two criteria (number of root consonants and gemination

18 Leslau 1979a; 1979b; 1979c.

19 Leslau 1979a.

20 Leslau 1979b; 1979c.

21 Hetzron 1975.

22 Hetzron 1977.

23 Wudie Worku 1987.

24 Tsehay Abza 2001.

25 Fekede Menuta 2002.

26 Fekede Menuta 2002.

of penultimate root consonants) and then described how the different verbal stems can be derived. He classified the derivational operations into two, namely, simple derivations (passive, causative, adjunctive, intensive/frequentative, and reciprocal stems) and complex derivations (frequentative-passive, frequentative-reciprocal, frequentative-causative, reciprocal causative, and causative-frequentative-reciprocal stems). Fekede identified the different pronouns of Ezha (personal pronouns, reflexive pronouns, reciprocal pronouns, interrogative pronouns, indefinite pronouns, selective pronouns, etc.) and described their internal structures.²⁷ The author shows that the second and third person pronouns are gender sensitive, and that the personal pronouns inflect for case.

Tsehay compared and contrasted the different morphological features of nouns in the three Gurage languages:²⁸ Kistane, Ezha, and Muher. Her primary concern was to determine the extent to which the three languages are similar to (or divergent from) one another. Based on her in-depth comparison, she concluded that Muher and Ezha share many features, while Kistane is more divergent. Additionally, she opined that Kistane is more conservative in preserving archaic forms, while Muher and Ezha appear to be more innovative.

The present researcher wrote his MA thesis on Ezha nominal functors in 2008, which was published in 2010. The author first identified all the functional categories of Ezha nouns, and then described their morphosyntactic functions. Finally, he showed the syntactic derivation of the functors from the perspective of the Minimalist Program.

Meyer offered a concise description of grammatical features in the Gurage languages, including Ezha.²⁹ The author pointed out that it is not valid to hypothesize that Gurage represents a single language or dialect cluster. He remarked that the various Gurage languages show a good deal of differences, though there are also a number of similarities among them. Finally, the author concluded that the genetic classification of Gurage languages established so far is only a premature approximation, and so further investigation and reclassification is needed.

Aweke Tsegaye concerned himself with the form and use of deictic expressions in Ezha.³⁰ The author identified and described the various ways of indicating deixis in Ezha, including spatial, temporal, person, and social deixis.

Despite the fact that the various works reviewed above have addressed aspects of Ezha grammar, none of them comes close to being a comprehensive

27 Fekede Menuta 2006.

28 Tsehay Abza 2008.

29 Meyer 2011.

30 Aweke Tsegaye 2012.

grammatical description of the language. Thus, the present study is a meaningful undertaking, as it provides a detailed and comprehensive descriptive account of the Ezha language, complementing and extending the aforementioned fragmentary works.

1.4. The Language Data

Given the small size of the speech community, the Ezha language does not exhibit dialectal variation. Thus, this grammar represents the language spoken by all inhabitants of Ezha administrative district (*woreda*) whose native language is Ezha. The data presented in this study were gathered during three field trips to Agenna. The first fieldwork trip was conducted from November 10 to December 25, 2011. During this fieldwork, data related to phonetics/phonology and nominal morphology were collected. The second fieldwork trip was undertaken from October 15 to November 20, 2012, in order to gather data on verb morphology and syntax. The third fieldwork trip lasted from November 15 to December 10, 2013. During this time, additional data pertaining syntax were gathered. This final field trip was also used to verify and correct data that had been obtained previously.

The researcher had three primary informants in Agenna, all male, who provided him with the necessary data. These were Desta Gizyatu (29 years old), Belachew Shume (32 years old), and Ningane Abza (57 years old). All of the informants were native speakers of Ezha. All were also bilingual in Amharic, which was used as the working language for data collection. In addition to the aforementioned individuals whom the researcher consulted almost always during his fieldwork, there were other informants who provided data on occasional basis. These include Tsehay Abza (35 years old, female), Tilahun Woldie (30 years old, male), Lemma Zeleke (28 years old, male), and Abera Zemerga (32 years old, male), all of whom were well versed in the working language, Amharic, and native speakers of Ezha.

1.5. Methodology and Procedures

This study was conducted mainly through direct elicitation of data from native speakers of the language. The researcher prepared word lists, systematic word paradigms, phrases, and clauses, all of which were intended to lead to an understanding of the different grammatical features under investigation. In addition, texts were recorded in order to augment the elicited data and verify its accuracy. The data gathered from the informants were then transcribed into IPA, using narrow transcription, and given corresponding English translations. In situations where a single morphological form may signal different grammatical functions,