

**Didier MORIN, a review article of: Elias, David L., *The Tigre Language of Ginda', Eritrea, Short Grammar and Texts*, 2014, Brill, Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics, 75, 292 p. ISBN 978-90-04-27119-7.**

Thanks to David L. Elias we have a new monograph of the Tigre language, the northernmost component of the Ethiopian Semitic spoken in Eritrea and in Eastern Sudan. After a methodological introduction, the author presents the phonology, the morphology and syntax of the variety spoken in Ginda', a town on the road from Asmara to Massawa. The grammar ends with a chapter dedicated to lexicography and language contact, before a collection of short texts (Appendix I) and a short glossary (Appendix II). An exhaustive bibliography and a subject index end the book.

D.L. Elias is right when he refers to Littmann, Leslau and Raz, "the three names which dominate the scholarly study of the Tigre language" (p. 3). It is especially interesting to compare the latter's Grammar and Elias's one since the question rises: "To which dialect of Tigre does correspond the Tigre of Ginda'?", knowing that the term "Tigre of Ginda'" was suggested to the author by Saleh Mahmud, a specialist of the Tigre dialects. D.L. Elias does not provide a final answer (p. 2) when he gives two examples of phonetic variations which, he says, show that the Tigre of Ginda' diverges from the variety spoken in the Sanhit (*Sänhit*) district, not to say the Mansa' dialect in which the Tigre language is written. Beyond a comparison of Elias's data and Raz's description, the present Grammar offers an opportunity to compare the relevancy of the two conceptions of the "dialect", i.e. the Anglo-American one for which any spoken variety according to sociological or geographic factors may be called "dialect" and the French one which refers to diachrony when evaluating the variations in a language which differences are part and parcel of the same language in an historical perspective.

In our opinion the so-called dialect of Ginda' is a variety of the already described Mansa' dialect spoken in the Keren area with some specificities which are not sufficient to consider it as separate dialect of Tigre. A hierarchy with two levels is proposed here for the Tigre language which dialects are identified according to their geographical distribution and inside which "parlers" (i.e. variations in the way of speaking which do not hinder mutual understanding) are identified. The Tigre of Ginda' is a "parler" inside the Tigre of *Sänhit*, the Tigre dialect of the highlands of Eritrea.

In his introduction (p. 1), Elias notes that Ginda' is located in an "extremely complex" multilingual area without providing more details. When writing that "most Tigre speakers are Muslims" the author does not mention the numerous conversions of Christians to Islam during the Mahdi uprising at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Along with this religious and cultural change, the linguistic factor (Beja, Saho and Afar) explain the diversity and variations found in Tigre. When

Elias makes the hypothesis that the Tigre of Ginda' could be "a previously unidentified variety of Tigre" he does not consider the role of these three Cushitic languages which coexisted prior to the expansion of the Semitic languages in Africa. Beja, Afar and Saho were somewhat separated by the Tigre but they were still spoken on the coast up to the Eritrean plateau. One example of this heritage is found (p. 129) with adverb *marrā* "very", which, the author says, is "not documented elsewhere in Tigre". It is a loan to Northern Saho: *marrā tiné* "for long time", from verb *mar* "to be, to stay, to dwell". E.g. from an unpublished folktale: *dummuu kee furtat fantadde gi'a maraa<sup>1</sup> tine* "for long there was a dispute between the Cat and the Mouse".

The name of the town itself offers another clue of this complex situation. Toponymy is known to be conservative. *Ginda'* is the Northern Saho name of *Calotropis procera*, "the Apple of Sodom" (Afar *gala'*)<sup>2</sup>. Interestingly, it is Afar *gala'* with this meaning which is found in Vergari (2003: 89) as in Reinisch (1890: 153), but *ginda'*, although not translated, is in Elias's data (see pages 174, 216, 267, etc.) and described as a "bush" which gives its name to the town. The Samhar district which encompasses the Samhar coastal plain *stricto sensu* for unknown times has been characterized by the coexistence of Afar, Saho, Tigre-speaking populations along with Arab-speaking groups as the Rashayda and other minor communities using Arabic as a *lingua franca*. Reinisch's informant, the so-called "king of Bôri" spoke Afar and Tigre when another translated Saho and Tigre. The absence of any reference to Beni-Amer<sup>3</sup> and Beja in the book is quite surprising when their influence on the phonetics and morphology of Tigre of the lowlands, but not only, is remarkable. This heterogeneity explains the numerous variants inside each dialect of Tigre. The reader will get the confirmation that if not absolutely identical to the Mansa' dialect spoken in Keren, the Tigre of Ginda' described by Elias shares more features with the latter than with the Tigre of the Samhar coastal plain and other varieties of the Lowlands.

PHONOLOGY. The consonants do not differ from the rest of Tigre as a whole. One notes the presence of the three ejectives /tʃ/, /sʃ/, /čʃ/ which are only found in Mansa'. Another feature common to Mansa' is the free realization of fricative /ʃ/ as a glottal stop [ʔ], when in the varieties of Tigre spoken by former Beja-speakers this change is compulsory. In the study of vowel variations, one will find Raz's observation made about Mansa'.

MORPHOLOGY (NOUN AND ADJECTIVE). The different paradigms of the personal pronouns (p. 35, 38, 41) show that the Tigre of Ginda' is not divergent from

<sup>1</sup> Final length [marā] is intensive : for a very long time. Without intensity Northern Saho opposes masc. *-ak (marak yiné)* and fem. *már-a tiné* (Morin 2003: 138).

<sup>2</sup> According to our field-works in the 70's. This etymology is given by W. Smidt ("Ginda'", *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, II: 803).

<sup>3</sup> *Beni 'āmar* is the name given to the Tigre dialects used by former Beja-speaking populations.

the other dialects sharing the same pronominal system. Minor variations are noted but they are not sufficient to isolate the Tigre of Gindaʿ from the Mansaʿ dialect (even if Gindaʿ is not part of the *rorā* Mansaʿ “the Mansaʿ plateau” properly). We are invited to keep this position since the author (see p. 231) writes: “It is important to note, then, that the dialect recorded in the present study may better be called an idiolect, and it may reflect more borrowing from Arabic than other speakers of Tigre of Gindaʿ [...]” This applies to the list of nouns where Elias analyzes the base forms and gender (p. 46–63). Other sections dedicated to definiteness (p. 54), derived nouns (p. 55–57), adjectives (p. 58–65) are nearly identical to Raz’s observations.

**MORPHOLOGY (VERB).** In this fourth chapter (p. 65–122), the author provides a detailed description of the verbal system where the reader will recognize the characteristics of the Mansaʿ dialect (see Raz, *op. cit.*). The verb can be simple, derived or in composition with an auxiliary (*kōna*, *halla*). Four types of verbs are identified (Raz, *op. cit.*, 52), of which three are derived stems. Type A, unmarked, transitive or intransitive: *sabra* “to break”, *kabra* “to be honoured”. Type B which has or has not coexisting verbs of type A: *kabbara* “to give news”. Type C. triradicals with intensive meaning: *sābara* “to break in pieces” (from *sabra*). Type D expressing the frequentative or conative: *sabābara* “to break thoroughly”. The derivation (with prefixes) opposes the passive: *tə-mazzana* “to be weighed”; the causative: *ʔa-garrama* “to beautify”; the causative of intransitive verbs of *tə-* formation: *ʔat-gassa* “to make sit” (from *təgassa* “to sit down”), or the causative reciprocal: *ʔat-gādaba* “to cause to fight each other” (from *təgādaba* “to fight each other”); the factitive (or “double” causative): *ʔatta-qtala* “to cause to be killed” (from type A *qatla* “to kill”). Verbs conjugated for person, number and gender have four inflexion (e. g. *mazzana* “to weigh”): perfect *mazzanko* “I weighed”; imperfect: *ʔəməzzən* “I weigh”; jussive: *təməzno*; imperative (2 sg.): *məzzən*. Negation of the copula (*ʾikon*) is expressed by the prefix *ʔi-*: *ʔi-sarqa* “he did not steal”. Here, Elias notes that the form *ʾikonini* is only found in Gindaʿ. Again, this useful indication is not sufficient to isolate the verbal system from the Mansaʿ dialect as described by Raz.

**ADVERBS, PREPOSITIONS, AND CONJUNCTIONS.** In this fifth chapter (p. 123–155), the author provides a list which, for the brunt of its components, are found in Raz’s description. Some items (*ənsar* “to here”) illustrates some peculiarities of the Tigre of Gindaʿ when others (the ubiquitous *lākin*, *tabʿan*) can be easily explained by the growing Arabic influence<sup>4</sup>.

**SYNTAX.** In this chapter (p. 157–227), Elias gives many instances which confirm that the variety of Gindaʿ is isomorphic of Mansaʿ with the same dominant SOV order, with subordinate clauses preceding the main clause. Changes in this order occur in complex or long sentences as in Mansaʿ (see Raz: 95). Among

<sup>4</sup> The author writes p. 150 that *lākin* is not documented elsewhere in Tigre!

others, one notes that the genitive particle *nay*<sup>5</sup> (p. 159) is also found in Mansa<sup>6</sup> when it is not used in the other Tigre varieties spoken in the Lowlands. The copula (masc. *tu*, fem. *ta*) with preposition *əgəl* and jussive is also used to express futurity: *ʔəgəl nəmazzən tu* “we will weigh”.

To conclude, thanks to a new corpus, Elias increases notably the published data and enlarges what we know about Tigre of the highlands of Eritrea.

### Bibliography

*The following references quoted in the review are proposed in addition to the exhaustive bibliography found in Elias's Grammar.*

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**Arkadiusz PŁONKA, a review article of: *Perspectives on Arabic Linguistics XXIV–XXV*, éd. Samira Farwaneh, Hamid Ouali, 2014, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company.**

L’ouvrage de la série *Perspectives on Arabic Linguistics*, édité par Samira Farwaneh et Hamid Ouali, contient les articles présentés durant deux symposiums (XXIV<sup>e</sup> et XXV<sup>e</sup>) sur la linguistique arabe, qui ont eu lieu en avril 2010 à l’Université du Texas et en mars 2011 à l’Université d’Arizona. Un article du XXIII<sup>e</sup> symposium qui s’est tenu à l’Université de Wisconsin en avril 2009 y est ajouté. L’ouvrage est divisé en deux parties, précédées d’une introduction et suivies d’un *index rerum* d’une page. Les textes sont écrits par des chercheurs américains, des linguistes des universités de La Mecque, de York (GB) et des Émirats arabes unis.

La première partie (118 pages) est consacrée à la phonologie et, dans une moindre mesure, à la morphologie. Elle comporte quatre contributions, bien que dans l’introduction il en soit mentionné cinq (: IX), et débute par l’analyse comparative, intitulée «Geminate representation in Arabic». Stuart Davis et Marwa Ragheb s’y focalisent sur le poids moraique des consonnes géminées en

<sup>5</sup> Possibly a loan to Beja *na-i* «thing-of».