

Gender in Amharic

Zelealem Leyew

Addis Ababa University - Ethiopia

The relationship between language and gender has attracted much attention in recent years as it has become a reality that some languages reflect male and female inequality in their grammar. The pragmatic analysis of some African languages reveals that women have restricted languages that make them different from men. In these languages, it is customary that women, for instance, do not address their husbands and their immediate family by name. Amharic, the major lingua-franca of Ethiopia and the official language of the federal government, is one such African language.

In this paper, I argue that masculine gender is more prominent than feminine gender in the grammar and pragmatics of Amharic and hence the language is one of the sexiest languages. The personal and demonstrative pronouns, proper nouns and other sections of the grammar reflect a male-biased grammar. The base form for the 2PL and 3PL is the 2MS and 3MS, respectively. Masculine gender markers assume not only nouns with + MALE feature but also plural nouns with neutral gender. From the pragmatic analysis of Amharic, it is evident that any noun with \pm ANIMATE feature is encoded as male in the verb. Furthermore, the grammatical and semantic analysis of Amharic shows that the masculine gender conveys augmentativeness while the feminine diminutiveness. All these and other grammatical and socio-pragmatic features mirror a male-dominated society. In languages like Amharic, gender is not only a biologically construct phenomenon but also a grammatically and pragmatically construct feature.