Some special features of Ethio-Semitic syntax and morphology

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The modern Ethio-Semitic languages have a rich morphology and a very complicated syntax characterized by SOV word order, by the position of all the qualifiers before the qualified element and of all subordinate clauses before the main sentence. This leads to the use of very long and complex sentences in the written language. But there are also many other interesting traits of syntax and morphology, in particular in Amharic. In my presentation I will discuss some of these features that seem to me of interest for general linguistics.

1. Inalienable possessions and appurtenance: Nouns indicating inalienable possessions such as the body and its parts, the name, the soul, psychological and intellectual characteristics and the like, when used as subject or direct object cause an increase in the number of verb arguments by the addition of a pronoun marking the owner. As appurtenance are designated special morphological and syntactic means for marking persons connected by close ties of familiarity or class.

2. Abstract noun suffix -nnet: The Amharic suffix -nnet used for creating abstract nouns may be attached to all speech parts with the exception of verbs and prepositions. This will be explained by its function as a transformation of copula sentences.

3. Cleft sentence and degrees of topicalization: The cleft sentence has a very important function in the organization of discourse and variations in the position of its subject (i. e. the topic) suggest the relative importance of the given information.