

The diachronic origin(s) of the multifunctional equative morpheme *kämä* in Classical Ethiopic

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In Classical Ethiopic (Gə‘əz), a Semitic language, that was the dominant written language of the Ethiopian culture from the 4th to the 19th ct. and is still the ecclesiastical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the morpheme *kämä* shows a vast variety of functions. It is employed, just to mention the most important, as a preposition in equative constructions (1), as a conjunction in similes (2), as a conjunction in complement clauses (3) or even in final clauses (4).

This raises the question, whether *kämä* is, from a diachronic perspective, really just one word that gained a wide array of functions (as held, e.g. by Lepiński 1997:464 & 473), or if it has more than one source words that in the course of language history merged or became homonymous (as suggested already by Nöldeke 1886; see also Moscati 1964:121). Indeed, from the viewpoint of comparative Semitics, there are two different possible sources for *kämä*: Equative *kämä* could be connected with Hebrew *kə(mō)* ‘like’, Syriac *ʾak* ‘like’ or Arabic *ka-* ‘like’, while for finite *kämä* a connection with Akkadian *kīma* ‘in order that’, Hebrew *kī* ‘in order that’ and Arabic *kay* is possible. However, compelling phonological reasons for the total merger of the two possible etyma are missing. But, on the other side, from the viewpoint of areal typology a solution to the puzzle is offered by the fact that in the Ethiopian language area there are several non-cognate examples, where equative and final constructions are marked with the same morpheme (Y. Treis, p.c.; e.g. Leslau 2000:147, 166). The merger of the two Semitic etyma might have been greatly facilitated by areal diffusion in the Ethiopian area.

Examples

- (1) *ya'amməru kāmā 'abbay hagār yə'əti təkəkä G. kāmā 'ahatti 'əmännä 'ahgur=ä mängəst*
they.knew that big town she very G. like one.F of towns=CST kingdom
“They knew that Gibeon was a great city like one of the royal cities.” Jos. 10:4
- (2) *kāmā Krəstos şəggäwä=kəmu kāmā-hu 'antəmu-hi gəbäru*
as Christ showed.grace=you.PL so-PRN you.PL-also do.IMPT
“As Christ showed grace upon you, so also you must do!” Col. 3:13
- (3) *wä-'anä säma't=u kāmā fädfadä yafäkkərä=kəmu*
and-I witness=his that much he.loves=you.PL
“I am his witness, that he loves you very much.” Col. 4:13
- (4) *wä-wäş'a kāmā yəma'*
and-he.went.out that conquer.JUSS
“He went out to conquer.” Rev. 6:2

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