

North vs. South Ethiopian Semitic¹

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The traditional classification of Ethio-Semitic into a Northern branch (with Classical Ethiopic, Tigre and Tigrinya) and a Southern branch (with Amharic and all other languages) was introduced by M. Cohen and R. Hetzron. Here their reasons for this bifurcation are critically scrutinized point by point, the result being that hardly any argument stands up to closer examination. In the light of this, the hitherto generally accepted two-branch division of Ethio-Semitic will have to be abandoned.

1. M. Cohen's views on the classification of Ethiopian Semitic

It seems to be a foregone conclusion in Ethio-Semitic studies to organize this particular branch of the Semitic languages, whose speakers are found in Ethiopia, Eritrea and also in the adjacent areas of Sudan, into a Southern and a Northern group. M. Cohen (1931) was, I believe, the first to endorse this classification fully, as the title of his work clearly indicates: *Études d'éthiopien méridional*. In this particular work Cohen cites a number of features which distinguish the „ensemble (dialectal) septentrional“ (p. 41) from Amharic.

	North ES	Amharic (South ES)
I.	preservation of laryngeals	loss of laryngeals
II.	“l'emploi relativement restreint des prépalatales“, i.e. relatively restricted use of the prepalatals	“usage important des prépalatales, qui jouent un rôle dans la morphologie“, i.e. important usage of the prepalatals which play a role in the morphology
III.	“la gémination de l'avant-dernière radicale à tous les imparfaits de verbes“, i.e. gemination of the penultimate radical in all verbal imperfects	“non-gémination de la seconde radicale de l'imparfait au verbe simple“, i.e. non-gemination of the second radical of the imperfect in the simple verb

1 Former versions of this contribution were presented in 2006 at the 5th WOCAL (World Congress on African Linguistics) in Addis Abeba and in 2007 at the 35th NACAL (North American Conference on Afro-Asiatic Linguistics) – to the memory of R. Hetzron, in San Antonio.

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IV.	Gender distinction in the plural-forms of verbs and pronouns	“élimination des distinctions de genre au pluriel des verbes et pronoms“, i.e. elimination of the gender distinction in the plural forms of verbs and pronouns
V.	Distinction of a transitive (<i>säbärä</i>) and intransitive type (<i>gäbrä</i>) in the perfect of the basic stem	“refection générale de la conjugaison au parfait sur le type du parfait actif“, i.e. general remodelling of the conjugation in the perfect tense on the perfect active
VI.	“la non-gémation au parfait“, i.e. non-gemination in the perfect tense of the basic stem	“avec, partout, gémation de la consonne avant-dernière radicale“ in the perfect tense
VII.	-	“usage, qui n’est connu ailleurs qu’en gouragué, du factitif en <i>-as</i> “, i.e. use of a factitive in <i>-as</i> unknown elsewhere except Gurage
VIII.	-	“composition du verbe avec l’auxiliaire <i>-al</i> qui se joint étroitement à l’imparfait et au gérondif“, i.e. composition of the verb with the auxiliary <i>-al</i> which is closely joined in the imperfect and converb (<i>gerund</i>).

I would like to add a few critical remarks concerning these points.

I. The loss of the laryngeals is gradual; in Harari we still find *h*, which reflects older *ħ* (e.g., *ħači* ‘back of the body’ < Ge‘ez *ħaq^we*) as well as *h* (e.g. *ħal* ‘there is’ < Ge‘ez *hallo / halläwä*). Even in Old Amharic we still find traces of the laryngeal *h*, as possibly in *ħand* alongside of *and* ‘in order to’ (Podolsky: *Historical* 1991:29). The precondition is that *h* is not derived from *k* because in Amharic Classical Ethiopic *k* becomes *h* regularly, e.g. *honä* < Class. Ethiopic *konä* ‘to be, become’. Due to *k-* ‘in order that’ in Tigrinya, Amharic *h-* will be derivable from *k-*. Compare those cases represented in writing by *k³* and *h/h* in the older Amharic of Ludolf (e.g. his *Grammatica* 1698), where nowadays *h* or \emptyset respectively are written, e.g. *yäk*, now *yäh* ‘this’ (o.c.:43), *zähätän*, now *zätän* ‘nine’ (o.c.:39).

II. Palatalized sounds (*č č ğ ñ š y ž*) do occur more frequently in Amharic than in Tigre and Tigrinya, but compare, e.g., the Tigrinya numerals from 5 up to 9, which contain – contrary to Amharic and Tigre – six (palatal) *š*: *ħammuštä* ‘5’, *šudduštä* ‘6’, *šoħšattä* ‘7’, *šommontä* ‘8’, *təššattä* ‘9’ (v. Ullendorff: *Semitic* 1955:134, Voigt: Labialization 1988). There is no morphological palatalization in Tigrinya, but it is found with one morpheme in Tigre, where the possessive suffix of the 1st sg. (*-y:e*) causes the palatalization of a dental final sound in a noun, e.g. *raʔas* ‘head’ – *raʔašše* ‘my head’. This feature is not attested with regular nouns in Amharic. Contrast this with grammatical palatalization in Amharic which is extremely productive. Here the last alveolar radical of a strong three- (and four-)

3 In Ludolf (*Grammatica* 1698:4) the pronunciation of the *k* is described as “ \aleph Hebr. \aleph Arabicum, \aleph Germanicum ante a.o.u. necnon Polonorum & Batavorum \aleph . At Anglis, Gallis & Italis valor est ignotus”, my translation: Hebrew *ħ*, Arabic *ħ* (equals) German *ch* before *a, o, u* as well as Polish and Dutch. But to the English, French and Italian the value of this sound ist unknown.

radical root is palatalized in several verbal and nominal forms, e.g. imperfect (present) 2nd f.sg. (-i): **təhed-i* > *təheğ(i)*⁴ ‘thou goest’ (*hedä* ‘he went’).

This criterion of palatalization is not well suited to be used in the classification of this particular group of languages since the increase in morphological palatalization is a gradual feature. Palatalization started in Tigre and Tigrinya, in Tigre (with its remarkable palatalization with the 1st sg. nominal suffix) and Tigrinya (with its remarkable palatalization in the numerals), and then continued to make its way South up to Amharic and other languages.

[III.] Amharic is distinguished from the North-Ethiopian languages by the non-lengthening of the penultimate radical in the imperfect tense of the simple basic stem (of tri-radical verbs: *yäsäb^ər* ‘he breaks’)⁵ – in contrast to the North-Ethiopian languages where this radical is usually lengthened (Ge‘ez / Tigr. *yäsäbbər*, Te. (*lə*)*sabbər*). However, the fact that consonantal length reduction already takes its beginning in the North seems to be ignored (e.g. Tigr. *yäsäbru* ‘they break’), see below.

[IV.] Although the m./f. distinction in the plural has been abandoned in Amharic, this is not the case in Gurage. Thus e.g. in Soddo (Kəstanəñña) the plural perfect endings are 3rd m. -*m(u-)*, f. -*ma*, 2nd m. -*kəm(u-)* / -*həm(u-)*, f. -*kəma* / -*həma*. In the imperfect and jussive the feminine forms of the 2nd and 3rd persons plural are characterized by a suffix -*a* (in contrast to the masc. -*m(u-)*). Similarly in the personal pronouns, the copula and the object suffixes (of the Ø-, L- and B-series) where in the plural (except for the 1st pl.) a clear distinction is made between the m. and f. forms (v. Goldenberg: Kəstanəñña 1968). According to the outline of the personal pronouns and possessive suffixes (in Hetzron: *Ethiopian* 1972:30, Id.: *Gunnän* 1977:58f.) this distinction also occurs in Soddo, Gogot, Muher, Mäsqañ, Əža and Ənnämor, but not in Zway and Wäläne, see also the copula forms in seven Gurage idioms, that show the same distinction (o.c.:80). Hetzron used the loss of the gender distinction in the plural when classifying Gurage because this abandonment supposedly only occurred in Transversal South Ethiopic. To this group belong Amharic, Argobba, Harari and Eastern Gurage (with Zway, Səlṭi, Ənnäqor and Wäläne). But Gafat, which does not belong to Transversal South Ethiopic, abandoned the gender distinction in the plural later and independently from Transversal South Ethiopic, as Hetzron maintains.

[V.] In Amharic, the differentiation, well known in Old Ethiopic, between transitive verbs (*säbärä* ‘he broke’) and ‘intransitive’ verbs (*läbsä* ‘he put on clothes’, *gäbrä* ‘he made’) of the simple basic stem is abolished: *säbbärä* (< **säbärä*), *läbbäsä* (< **läbäsä*), *gäbbärä* (< **gäbärä* < **gäbrä*).

However, one must not forget that in Tigre and Tigrinya, too, the distinction between these two types of verb does no longer exist. While in Tigre the ‘intransitive’ vocalization has prevailed (*sabrä*, *labsä*, *gabrä*), it was the ‘transitive’ vocalization that gained the upper hand in Tigrinya (*säbärä*, *läbäsä*, *gäbärä*).

[VI.] In contrast to Old Ethiopic, Tigre and Tigrinya we find in Amharic lengthening of the penultimate radical of the perfect tense in the basic stem (0₁: *säbbärä*), in the vowel

4 Final -i after a palatalized sound is reduced in some Amharic dialects.

5 In the transcription a distinction can be made between ə that has been inserted in accordance with ‘phonemic’ (syllable-structural) principles and a purely phonetically inserted ə.

lengthening stem (0₃: *barräkä* ‘he blessed’) and in the perfect of all derived verbal stems belonging to 0₁ and 0₃ (e.g., A₁: *ʔasäbbärä* and A₃: *ʔabarräkä*, T₁ and T₃). This particular feature has been taken over from the gemination stem 0₂ and its derivatives. This feature is not well suited for classificatory purposes because Gurage has preserved non-lengthening of the second radical in the negative forms of the perfect. I shall come back to this particular criterion.

[VII.] The As-stem in a causative function is only common in Amharic and Argobba. The cases that occur in Gurage and which M. Cohen has in mind are probably owing to Amharic influence. Those rare occurrences in Old Ethiopic, like *ʔasʔozäzä* ‘become cramped, make benumbed’, *ʔasʔorärä* ‘feel horror, disdain’, *ʔasʔokäwä* ‘howl, lament’, all of the type *ʔasCoCäCä*, and which Praetorius (*Grammatica* 1886:33) found worthy of attributing to them their own scheme (III 5.), do not fit into the mould of the Amharic As-stems. The intransitive meaning of these verbs has motivated Nöldeke (v. Dillmann: *Grammatik* 1899:147) to postulate a derivation from **ʔastä* (>*ʔas*). Be that as it may, the As-stem isogloss is only valid for separating out Amharic and Argobba as constituting one distinct dialect group.

[VIII.] It is simply not true that the combination of forms of the imperfect (3rd m.sg. *yäsäbr*) and the converb (gerund) respectively (3rd m.sg. *säbro*) with an auxiliary verb (3rd m.sg. *-al(l)*) is a typical feature of Amharic. However, this formation and similar ones can be found in many Ethio-Semitic languages among them the “Northern” Tigre and Tigrinya.

Amh.	Te. / Tña
<i>yäsäbr-al(l)</i>	Te. <i>sabbär həllä / hallä</i> Tña <i>yäsäbbär (ʔ)allo</i>
<i>säbro-al(l)</i>	Te. – Tña <i>säbiru (/säyru) (ʔa)llo</i>

2. R. Hetzron’s views on the classification of Ethiopian Semitic

A number of M. Cohen’s arguments were adopted by Hetzron (*Ethiopian Semitic* 1972) who argues from a more linguistically oriented platform in favour of a classificatory separation of South Ethio-Semitic from North Ethio-Semitic on the basis of the following morphological innovations. He stresses, rightly I think, that a genetic classification of language groups can only ensue through morphological innovations at a shared knot-point. Hetzron’s main arguments refer to the criteria laid down by M. Cohen under his headings III. and IV.

The first one refers to the distribution of consonant length in the perfect and imperfect forms in Northern and Southern Ethiopic languages.

In Ge‘ez consonant length is a feature of the B stem (0₂) as well as of the present tense forms. This results in ‘double’ consonant length for the present forms of the 0₂ stems, partly manifested in “quadriradicality”, i.e. four radicals, or palatality, respectively. To the development ***yäfäššäm* > **yäfäjäššäm* > *yäfeeššäm* see Voigt: Gemination (1990). The

new form is shown in bold. The arrows symbolize the two dimensions in which consonant lengthening has been present since Proto-Semitic times.⁶

↓

	Perfect	Imperfect (present)
0 ₁	<i>säbärä</i>	<i>yäsäbbär, yäsäbbäruu</i>
→ 0 ₂	<i>fäššämä</i>	<i>**yäfäššäm > yäfeššäm</i>

In the next step which opens the development to ‘South’ Ethiopic, palatality, i.e. the long *ee* vowel, spreads from the imperfect to the perfect:

	Perfect	Imperfect (present)
0 ₁	<i>säbärä</i>	<i>yäsäbbär, yäsäbbäruu</i>
0 ₂	<i>feššämä</i>	<i>yäfeššäm, -uu</i>

According to Hetzron in the next two steps lengthening in the imperfect of the basic (0₁) stem is abandoned and lengthening of the second consonant is introduced into the perfect form of the basic stem. This leads to the two new forms *säbbärä* (< *säbärä*) and *yäsäbr* (< *yäsäbbär*). In this connection I shall not comment further on the *ee* vowel in the perfect and imperfect (present) of the 0₂-stem. Its palatal nature triggers the palatalization of the first radical (*Cee* > *C’ä*), e.g. Ge‘ez *dämärä* ‘put in’ > **deemmärä* > **d’emmärä* > Woläne *ǧemmärä* / Zway *žimärä* > Amh. *ǧ/žämmärä* ‘begin, start’ (in case this etymology is correct, v. Leslau: *Etymological* 1979:317).

	Perfect	Imperfect (present)
0 ₁	<i>säbbärä</i>	<i>yäsäbr</i>
0 ₂	<i>feššämä</i> (> <i>fäššämä</i>)	<i>yäfeššäm</i> (> <i>yäfäššäm</i>)

The introduction of consonantal lengthening in the perfect and its abandonment in the imperfect are two different processes that should not be mentioned in one breath. Otherwise there is the danger of seeing the two processes causally connected, a danger Hetzron fell victim to as well (v.i.).

There appears to be no description of the Ethio-Semitic language-group available that – following Hetzron – does not start from a fundamental North-South bipartition. I shall only point to the most recent attempts: Hudson (Ethiopian 2000:80) and Girma (Ethio-Semitic 2001:69ff.). The latter goes as far as stating: “The division of Ethiopian Semitic into North and South Ethiopic is not a problem”. One can only assume that this geographical divisionary principle is felt to be “natural”; aren’t Northern and Southern Germany, Northern and Southern Italy (cf. “Mezzogiorno”), Northern and Southern France (cf. “Le Midi”), North and South Korea quite different from each other and consequently so must Northern and Southern Ethiopia be, which almost seems to place this bipartite division beyond any doubt.⁷ However, the linguistic evidence for this view is extremely sparse and

⁶ This feature of consonant lengthening in the imperfect (present) forms is well preserved in Akkadian and Ethiopic.

⁷ In his contribution to a discussion about a paper presented by Hetzron, Palmer (Genetic 1975:122) expresses quite a critical view concerning the North-South division of the Ethio-Semitic languages. However, of late he has not reiterated this view, as far as I know.

is mostly restricted to the alleged opposition of North ES *säbärä* – *yäsäbbär* versus South ES *säbbärä* – *yäsäbr*.

As we shall see further on, these forms do not in fact adequately reflect the reality on the ground. Thus the allegedly exclusively Northern Ethiopic form *säbärä* is not restricted to the North and the allegedly exclusively Southern Ethiopic form *yäsäbr* is not restricted to the South. Although Hetzron's arguments are more exhaustive than those of his followers who quote him quite uncritically, one must attribute some blame to Hetzron for propagating in such an extremely simplifying manner this very pronounced bisection of this linguistic group – against his better judgment. One only needs to mention the short exposé in Hetzron's *Gunnän-Gurage* (1977:18), where this misleading scheme is proposed again.⁸

	Northern prototype	Southern prototype
'he broke'	<i>säbärä</i>	<i>säbbärä</i>
'he breaks'	<i>yäsäbbär</i>	<i>yäsäbr</i>

In general one can say that this process is overemphasized in most linguistic works. Hetzron even goes so far as to claim "the features of the Imperfect" were "transferred" "to the Perfect" (1972:23). He offers this strange explanation: "Thus it is not surprising if the Cushitic speakers of this newly acquired language tried to level out irregularities in it" (l.c.). It is totally unacceptable to blame the Cushites for anything that lacks proper arguments.⁹ The assumption of a transfer of the imperfectal consonant length to the forms of the perfect is nothing but a graphic dalliance. An historic process of this nature is not at all conceivable.

Rundgren (*Erneuerung* 1963:69f.) has offered another explanation. In the loss of consonantal length in the imperfect he likes to see a loss of markedness that occurred when the marked imperfect **yäsäbbär* was replaced by the periphrastic *yäsäbbär all[ä]*. However, in such considerations the fact is not taken into account, that the O_1 -stem is indeed very frequently used but there is also an abundance of other stems that show no reduction in consonantal length. Apparently Rundgren also sees a connection with the new consonant length in the perfect (of O_1).

In my view the two processes are not related to each other and must be looked at separately.

3. Loss of consonantal lengthening

Loss of consonantal lengthening in the imperfect occurs already in Tigrinya and Tigre. This development starts with adding personal suffixes beginning with a vowel (here 3rd m. pl.), then both languages abandon consonant lengthening.

	Imperfect (present)
O_1	Tigre: <i>sabbär – sabrō</i> Tña: <i>yäsäbbär – yäsäbru</i>

⁸ At least attention is drawn to non-geminated forms (with suffix) in the North. It is unclear to me how a minor distinction like (North) *yäsäbbär* / *yäsäbru* vs. (South) *yäsäbr* / *yäsäbru* can have such strong classificatory power.

⁹ Contrary to the much reduced scheme that is generally the only one taken notice of, Hetzron himself has indeed drawn attention to the gradual character of the process in his commentary (in *Ethiopian* 1972:24).

When affixing object suffixes (here the 3rd m. sg.), in Tigrinya lengthening is abandoned in these circumstances; however, in Tigre more of a reinforcement process takes place in relation to the third radical:

		Imperfect (present)
0 ₁		Tigre: <i>sabbər – sabbərrō</i> Tña: <i>yəsəbbər – yəsəbro</i>

Presumably already in Classical Ethiopic there must have been a tendency to abandon consonantal lengthening when suffixes were attached. According to the traditional pronunciation of Ethiopic the second radical of strong triradical verbs is uniformly lengthened in the imperfect (present). The plural form *yənāddədū* with its variant *yənāddū* ‘they burn’ (Praetorius: *Grammatica* 1886:65) of the mediae geminatae verb (\sqrt{ndd}) clearly shows the optional abandonment of consonantal length when followed by vowel-initial suffixes. The spelling of two <d> in the form *yənāddədū* as well as in the corresponding singular form *yənāddəd* ‘he burns’ reveal that the first <d> was lengthened. But with *yənāddəd* no shortening to $^{\circ}yənādd$ can take place (so in today’s Amharic) because there is no vowel-initial suffix.

By regularizing the forms with personal as well as object suffixes the consonant lengthening is given up totally in the imperfect forms of the basic stem (0₁):

		Imperfect (present)
0 ₁		Amh.: <i>yəsəbr – yəsəbru</i> Kəst.: <i>yəsəbru – yəsəbrəmun</i> ¹⁰ Mäsč.: <i>yəsəbər – yəsəbro</i>

The development from (sg. 3rd m. – pl. 3rd m.) *yəsəbbər – yəsəbru* to *yəsəbr – yəsəbru* can hardly be seen as a decisive step. The forms to be considered as containing suffixes are those with personal suffixes (i.e. sg. 2nd f. and pl. except 1st), those with object suffixes and – more and more – also those with auxiliaries, which leaves only few non-suffixed or expanded forms remaining. This is the reason why forms with syllable-closing second radical (*.səb.r*) prevail. But it is nevertheless conspicuous that imperfectal consonant lengthening has been preserved in so many cases (as in 0₂, 0₃, 0₄ and with four-radical verbs).

The lengthening of the second radical (or penultimate radical, respectively) in the perfect paradigm can easily be explained. It is the adoption of consonantal lengthening displayed in all other stems with a strong penultimate radical. In fact, the perfect is generally characterized by this very lengthening of the penultimate radical, if the latter is strong.

	Perfect	
0 ₁	<i>səbbärä</i>	
0 ₂	<i>feṣṣämä</i>	

As to the imperfect forms of type B (0₂) consonant lengthening has generally been maintained – with the exception of Tigre where the imperfect forms of A and B have become identical in following the A-type:

¹⁰ These forms contain the main verb marker ...C-u / ...V-n.

	Perfect	Imperfect (present)
0 ₁ (A)	<i>faṣmā</i>	<i>faṣṣəm, faṣmō</i>
0 ₂ (B)	<i>wassakā</i>	<i>wassək, waskō</i>

Concerning this phenomenon, Tigrinya and the ‘South’ Ethiopic languages have chosen a different path. On the whole they have preserved the lengthening of the penultimate radical in the imperfect of the B-verbs. Hetzron has here attempted to describe the length of the ee-vowel as a gemination-preserving feature. This formulation is achronological. Seen historically the long ee-vowel was introduced into Ge‘ez to mark the present tense of the gemination stem (see Voigt: Gemination 1990). Later on this vowel was taken over into the perfect (v.s.) and was reduced in Tigrinya to shewa (*šwā*): > *yəfəṣṣəm*. In any case the persistence of consonantal lengthening in type B and related types is quite remarkable.

A further and in my view decisive factor in facilitating the abandonment of consonantal lengthening in the basic stem is the fact that the syllable structure of the pertinent forms of 0₁ is different from that of many other stems. For brevity’s sake I shall only present the Amharic reflexes:

	Imperfect (present)	Jussive	
0 ₁	<i>yəsäbr</i>	<i>yəsbär</i>	!
0 ₂	<i>yəfalläg</i>	=	=
0 ₃	<i>yəbarrək</i>	<i>yəbarək</i>	:
A ₁	<i>yakäbr</i>	<i>yakbär</i>	!
A ₂	<i>yabäddär</i>	=	=
At ₃	<i>yabbarrək</i>	<i>yabbarək</i>	:
T ₁	<i>yəssäbbär</i>	<i>yəssäbär</i>	:
T ₂	<i>yəffälläg</i>	<i>yəffäläg</i>	:
T ₃	<i>yəmmarräk</i>	<i>yəmmaräk</i>	:

The following occurrences can be distinguished:

- the forms are identical (=), here the forms with lengthening (0₂, A₂) have prevailed,
- the only difference lies in the lengthening (:) of the second radical in the imperfect in contrast with the non-lengthening in the jussive (of 0₃, At₃, T₁, T₂, T₃),
- imperfect and jussive have a different (!) syllable-structure (0₁, A₁).

It is noteworthy that the 0₁- and the A₁-stems show a similar syllable-structure.

	Imperfect (present)	Jussive
0 ₁	<i>yə.säbr. (yə.sä.bär)¹¹ / yə.säb.rV</i>	<i>yəs.bär. / yəs.bä.rV</i>
A ₁	<i>ya.käbr. (ya.kä.bär) / ya.käb.rV</i>	<i>yak.bär. / yak.bä.rV</i>
	<i>CV.1ä23. / CV.1ä2.3V</i>	<i>CV1.2ä3. / CV1.2ä.3V</i>

It is not at all due to chance that in both cases the imperfect shows no consonantal lengthening, although Old Ethiopic did.

11 The syllable-structure .CVC. (i.e. .2V3.) is only valid for verbs whose second and third radical, for phonetic reasons, cannot appear in a closed syllable, as e.g. in these two roots with *r* as their third radical.

	Imperfect (present)		Jussive	
	Cl. Ethiopic	Amharic	Class. Ethiopic	Amharic
0 ₁	<i>yäsäbbär,</i> <i>yäsäbru</i>	> <i>yäsäbr, -u</i>	<i>yäsbär,</i> <i>yälbäs</i> ¹²	= <i>yäsbär</i>
A ₁	<i>yākäbbär,</i> <i>yākäbru</i>	> <i>yākäbr, -u</i>	<i>yākbar</i>	= <i>yākbar</i>

It seems obvious that consonantal lengthening was abandoned in those stems where the differing syllable-structure clearly signalled the opposition to the jussive forms. Thus lengthening was simply no longer needed for marking out the jussive.

The converging of the two forms in the 0₂- and A₂-stems cannot be seen as proof that the preservation of the imperfect : jussive opposition was of no great import in Amharic. Here it was the sound change *Cē > C^jä* (with palatalization) / *Cä* (in many cases without palatalization) that has caused the convergence.

	Imperfect (present)		Jussive	
	Cl. Ethiopic	Amharic	Cl. Ethiopic	Amharic
0 ₂	<i>yäbēyyän</i>	> <i>yäbäyyän</i>	<i>yäbäyyän</i>	= <i>yäbäyyän</i>
A ₂	<i>yāmmēggäb</i>	> <i>yamäggäb</i>	<i>yāmmäggäb</i>	= <i>yamäggäb</i>

Old Ethiopic: *bäyyänä* ‘to discern, distinguish’, *amäggäbä*
‘to place in charge of’,

Amharic: *bäyyänä* ‘to give a verdict, make clear’, *amäggäbä*
‘to appoint s.o. to office’.

I consider the differing syllable-structure in the jussive contrasting with the imperfect of the two stems 0₁ and A₁ to be the decisive motive for the abandonment of consonantal lengthening in the imperfect. From the first member of the opposition impf. *yäläbbäs, yäläbsu*¹³ : jussive *yälbäs, -u* the form without consonantal lengthening *yäläbs, -u* can spring so easily because this does not affect the opposition in any way.

4. Preservation of the imperfectal consonantal lengthening

In contrast with Northern Tigre and Tigrinya where the penultimate radical has lost its lengthening in many stems, it is remarkably well preserved in the South. In Amharic – as stated above – only the length in the imperfect of 0₁ (and A₁) was given up. The reason for this was that the abandonment of imperfectal lengthening did in no way threaten its opposition to the jussive because of their differing syllable-structure. The preservation of lengthening in the other stems can be explained by the fact that their syllable-structures are by and large identical with that of the jussive.

In contrast, Hetzron would like us to see the lengthening of the penultimate radical in the 0₃ stem as a secondary feature. He even thinks, the introduction of lengthening the penultimate radical in the imperfect 0₃ stem is one of the main criteria for the strict separation of South- and North-Ethiopic. Hetzron does not comment on those numerous

12 In Amharic the intransitive type of Old Ethiopic has prevailed.

13 Because the jussive for the verb *säbärä* does not show the form *yäl2ä3*, the verb *läbsä* ‘to clothe s.o.’ with the jussive *yälbäs* will have to stand in its place.

other stems in Amharic that also show gemination. The introduction of gemination in these stems is less natural than its abandonment in only two stems (O₁ and A₁).

5. Hetzron’s misleading account

The development as portrayed by Hetzron, particularly in his shortened version, presents itself as it does by disregarding important data, although some facts are mentioned in the accompanying comment. His reduction to the following scheme (Hetzron: *Ethiopian* 1972:22), repeated many times over in the scholarly literature, is however misleading and partly simply wrong.¹⁴

	Northern		Southern	
	Perfect	Imperfect	Perfect	Imperfect
O ₁ (type A)	<i>säbärä</i>	<i>yäsäbbär</i>	<i>säbbärä</i>	<i>yäsäbär</i>

Here an opposition is constructed between North- and South-Ethio-Semitic that does not tally with the facts. Let me contrast this with my own much more complex scheme in which, apart from the positive perfect forms, also the negative forms (with *al-* / *an-*) of the 3rd m.sg. are shown, and where in the imperfect (present) not only do the forms of the 3rd m.sg. figure but also those of the 3rd m.pl. and the 3rd m.sg. plus object suffix. In order to emphasize the structure of the forms more prominently all forms have been parsed with junctures:

- a) “=” the closest juncture serving to mark the boundary of obligatory morphemes like =ä (3rd m.sg. perfect ending) and y= (imperfectal personal prefix of the 3rd m.sg.; *y=äsäbbär* is given here instead of the more correct form *y=äsäbbär=Ø*);
- b) “-” the less close juncture marking the boundary of optional morphemes, like object suffixes, e.g. -ō and -:ō respectively (object suffix of 3rd m. sg. with certain persons of the imperfect);
- c) “+” weak juncture serves to mark off the boundary of particles like the negative element *al+* / *an+*, which in some Gurage idioms requires the form *säbärä* but not *säbbärä*.

O ₁ (type A)	Northern	
	Perfect	Impf. (present)
G.	<i>sạ̈är=ä, gạ̈br=ä</i>	<i>y=äsäbbär, y=äsäbbär=ū, y=äsäbbär-ō</i>
Te.	<i>sabr=ā, gabr=ā</i>	<i>sabbär, sabr=ō, sabbär-rō</i>
Tigr.	<i>sạ̈är=ä, gạ̈är=ä</i>	<i>y=äsäbbär, y=äsạ̈br=ū, y=äsäbr-ō</i>

14 The forms of the B-type (O₂) (Northern) *fäššäma* / *yäfäššäm* : (Southern) *feṭṭämä* / *yäfeṭṭäm* are not represented in this scheme because, for the moment, they can be ignored concerning the preservation or adoption of consonantal lengthening, but v.s.

Southern		
Perfect ¹⁵	Impf. (present)	
<i>säbbär=ä</i> , (neg.) <i>al+säbbär=ä+mm</i>	<i>y=əsäbr</i> , <i>y=əsäbr=ū</i> , <i>y=əsäbr-äw</i>	Amh.
<i>säbbär=(o)</i> , (neg.) <i>al+säbär=ä</i>	<i>y=əsäbr=(u)</i>	Kəst.
<i>säbbär=ä</i> , (neg.) <i>an+säbär=ä</i>	<i>y=əsäbər</i>	Mäsq.

Quite clearly imperfect forms without lengthening of the second radical are documented both in the North as well as in the South. For this reason neither the adoption nor the abandonment of this consonant lengthening are suitable criteria for the classification of these languages. Concerning the adoption of consonantal lengthening in the perfect, the non-geminated negated perfect forms in some Gurage idioms indicate that there perfectal lengthening has only gradually been taken on, while in other Gurage idioms it was totally abandoned. In any case, the gradual expansion or restriction of consonantal lengthening within a linguistic grouping cannot be used as a feature assignable to a nodal point of linguistic fragmentation.

Thus the main points of Hetzron's argumentation, i.e. abandonment of gemination in the imperfect of the basic stem and introduction of gemination in the perfect of the basic stem as well as in the imperfect of O_3 , prove to be invalid. Contrary to Hetzron who sees imperfectal consonant lengthening in O_3 as secondary, I consider it in conjunction with a great number of similarly formed verbal stems (O_4 , four-radical verbs with different stems and five-radical verbs with different stems), all of which display consonantal lengthening in the imperfect (present), a feature they have adopted from Old Ethiopic.

6. Final remarks

The two other arguments that Hetzron puts forward for a separate classification of South Ethio-Semitic, i.e. the negative particle *al-* and the numeral for 'nine',¹⁶ cannot really be seen as main criteria for a strict separation of South Ethio-Semitic. In the South the negative particles applied to verbal forms are *al-* / *an-* / *a-* / etc. as opposed to the negative elements *i-* / *ay-* / *yä-* in the North. It should not be overlooked that the negative particle *al-* is also found in Ge'ez (*ʔalbō* 'there is not'), Tigre (e.g. *ʔalabū* 'id.' as opposed to *bū* 'there is') and Tigrinya (*yälbōn* 'id')¹⁷ and that *ay-* and *yä-* are attested in the Amharic negative forms *yälläm* 'id.' and *aydolläm* 'he ist not'.

¹⁵ Some perfect forms only occur in a restricted context, as with main verb markers.

¹⁶ What is meant here is the Old Ethiopic numeral *ta/əsʕattu* which Hetzron (Ethiopian 1972:29) and Hudson (Ethiopian 2000:80) wrongly derived from a root **ʔtsʕ* (instead of **ʔts¹ʕ*, i.e. vulgo *ʔtsʕ*). But perhaps this is only a *lapsus calami*.

¹⁷ These forms do not appear to be known, otherwise Hudson (Ethiopian 2000:80) would not continue

Concerning the rôle of the numeral ‘nine’, any valid analysis would require a comparative approach to the wider lexicons of the relevant languages, an approach Hetzron chooses not to take. Such a comparison would reveal the close connection of the vocabularies in the Ethio-Semitic languages, which in no way warrants any strict separation in two groups (v. Kogan 2005).

Thus there is no longer any argument for a strict genealogical separation into two language groups in Ethio-Semitic, a Northern and a Southern group. Above all, those many assumptions based nearly exclusively¹⁸ on the Hetzronian model of bifurcation were overinterpreted and led to the view according to which Ethio-Semitic could be traced back to two different waves of immigration out of Southern Arabia, happening at different times. This view now becomes untenable.¹⁹

insisting on the supposed opposition between North-Ethiopic *i-lay-* vis-a-vis South Ethiopic *al-*.

18 To the glottochronological approach of Fleming see Hetzron: *Gunnän* 1977:18f.

19 See Voigt: Ethio-Semitic 1995:443.

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