

A New Grammar of Amharic in Italian

Graziano Savà

grsava@gmail.com

University of Naples *l'Orientale*

The University of Naples *l'Orientale*, and, in particular, what is nowadays called the Department of Asian, African and Mediterranean Studies, is one of the European academic institutions that have historically given Amharic courses. Teachers were also scholars and produced a variety of teaching materials. In this presentation I will introduce a new grammar of Amharic in Italian, which follows this tradition.

The teachers of Amharic in Naples were Afework Gebreyesus and Francesco Gallina, at the beginning of 1900, Luigi Fusella from 1936 to 1962, followed by Lanfranco Ricci for the remaining years of the 1960s until the 1980s. Ya'qob Beyene was the teacher in the 1990s and presently Amharic is taught by Gianfrancesco Lusini. Among the teaching materials that have been produced there are outstanding examples of didactical books, such as the dictionary and phrase book by Fusella and Girace (1937). However, there was no comprehensive teaching grammar published by a teacher of *l'Orientale*, with the exception was Afework Gebreyesus's grammar of Amharic (Afework Gebreyesus 1905). There is no information if this was used in class after Afework's teaching years or if Guidi's grammar (1924, reprinted in 1936) was adopted (Guidi was teaching Amharic in Rome).

According to my personal experience as a student of Amharic, at the beginning of the nineties at *l'Orientale*, Ya'qob Beyene still used Guidi's grammar as textbook, while Guidi's *Dizionario Italiano-Amarico* (1901) was the main dictionary. On the other hand, during my Erasmus year (1995-96) at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, David Appleyard used his then brand-new *Colloquial Amharic* (1995, second edition 2013) and Kane's *Amharic-English Dictionary* (1990). This gives an idea of the discrepancy of material used for teaching Amharic at two European Universities at that time.

At *l'Orientale*, Guidi's grammar and dictionary were discarded in the 2000s by the new teacher, Gianfrancesco Lusini, who started using Leslau's *Amharic Textbook* (1967), Appleyard (1995) and my grammar, Savà (2023), which is the subject of this presentation. As for the dictionaries, Lusini makes use of the *Concise Amharic Dictionary: Amharic-English English-Amharic* by Leslau (1976) for the literary texts and his two dictionaries *Vocabolario Amarico-Italiano* (Lusini 2020) and the *Vocabolario Italiano-Amarico* (compiled following the work by the late Professor Berhanu Abebe, Berhanu and Lusini (2014)) for the dialogues.

At a certain point, I felt the need for preparing a new didactical Italian grammar of Amharic, which would be the second of its kind from a scholar of the University of

Naples *l'Orientale* after Afework (1905). My objective was to produce a basic introductory and pedagogical grammar that suits the needs of university students as well as any Italian who has for some reason to do with Ethiopia. For them, I wanted to create a tool to approach the language in a simple and clear way, in spite of the clear difficulties Amharic poses to the layman.

In my presentation, I will discuss the genesis and characteristics of my *Grammatica Introduttiva della Lingua Amarica*, the reasons behind the transliteration and descriptive choices, the inclusion of cultural-based information and the content of the final wordlists. My hope is that this presentation will create a stimulating discussion about the solutions I adopted in the grammar, which might be rejected or included in a future common tool for teaching Amharic in Europe and beyond.

References

- Afework Gebreyesus (1905). *Grammatica della lingua amarica: Metodo pratico per l'insegnamento*. Arnaldo Forni: Bologna.
- Appleyard, D. L. (1995). *Colloquial Amharic*. Routledge: London/New York (second edition 2013).
- Berhanu, A. and Lusini G. (2014). *Vocabolario Italiano-Amarico*. Arada Books: Addis Ababa.
- Fusella, L. and Girace A. (1937). *Dizionario pratico e frasario per conversazione italiano-amarica*. Edizioni Istituto Universitario Orientale: Naples.
- Guidi, I. (1901). *Dizionario Italiano-Amarico*. Casa editrice italiana: Rome.
- Guidi, I. (1924). *Grammatica elementare della lingua amarica*. Riccardo Ricciardi: Naples (Reprinted by Istituto per l'Oriente in 1936).
- Kane, T. L. (1990). *Amharic-English Dictionary*. Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden.
- Leslau, W. (1967). *Amharic Textbook*. Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden.
- Leslau, W. (1976). *Concise Amharic Dictionary: Amharic-English English-Amharic*. Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden.
- Lusini, G. (2020). *Vocabolario Amarico-Italiano*. Arada Books: Addis Ababa.
- Savà, G. (2023). *Grammatica Introduttiva della Lingua Amarica*. UniorPress: Naples.