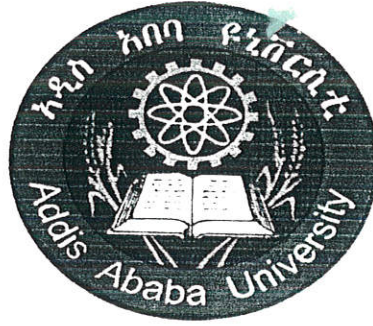




ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS AND
PHILOLOGY

LEXICAL SEMANTICS OVER THE HISTORY OF
AMHARIC

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JUNE 2009
ADDIS ABABA

LEXICAL SEMANTICS OVER THE HISTORY OF AMHARIC

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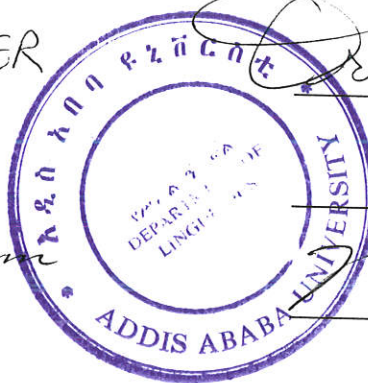
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Table of contents

	Pages
Acknowledgements	
List of Abbreviations	
Abstract	
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Background of the study.....	1
1.2 Statement of the problem.....	2
1.3 Objective of the study.....	2
1.4 Significance of the study.....	3
1.5 The present study.....	3
1.6 Scope of the study.....	3
1.7 Research methodology and procedure.....	3
CHAPTER TWO.....	7
Review of previous works and related literature	7
2.1 Review of previous works on the semantics of Amharic.....	7
2.2 Review of related literature.....	9
2.2.1 Basics.....	9
2.3 The nature and definition of semantic change.....	10
2.3.1 Preliminary note.....	10
2.3.2 Denotative and connotative meaning.....	11
2.4 Semantic change defined.....	12
2.5 Historical sketch.....	13
2.6 Causes of semantic change.....	14
2.6.1 Linguistic factors	15
2.6.1.1. Ellipsis.....	15
2.6.1.2. Differentiation of synonyms.....	16

2.6.1.3. Grammaticalization.....	16
2.6.2 Extralinguistic causes of semantic change.....	17
2.6.2.1 Historical causes.....	17
2.6.2.2 Social causes.....	18
2.6.2.3 The need for a new label.....	18
2.6.2.4 Psychological causes.....	18
2.7 Categories of semantic change	19
2.7.1 Broadening.....	20
2.7.2 Narrowing.....	20
2.7.3 Amelioration.....	20
2.7.4 Pejoration	20
2.7.5 Metaphoricization.....	21
2.7.6 Metonymicization.....	21
2.8 Classification of semantic change.....	22
2.9 General tendencies in semantic change.....	24
2.10 Diachronic and synchronic meaning changes.....	27
2.11 Approaches to the study of semantic change.....	27
2.11.1. The sociohistorical approach.....	26
2.11.2. The cognitive approach.....	28
CHAPTER THREE.....	29
Data analysis and discussion of results.....	29
3.1. Taboo expressions and meaning change.....	29
3.2. Elliptical changes.....	32
3.3. Pejoration.....	35
3.4. Amelioration.....	35
3.5. Generalization.....	37
3.6. Specialization.....	38
3.7. Grammaticalization.....	39
3.8. Mataphoricization.....	41
3.8.1. Concrete to abstract.....	42
3.8.2. Anthropomorphic metaphors.....	43

3.8.3. Animal metaphors.....	44
3.8.4. Synaesthetic metaphors.....	45
3.8.5. Sensory modality to mental or emotion verb	46
3.9 Metonymicization	47
3.10 Differentiation of synonyms.....	50
3.11 Precision of meaning.....	51
CHAPTER FOUR.....	53
Summary and conclusion.....	53
4.1 Summary and conclusion.....	53
4.2 Recommendation	54
References.....	55
Dictionaries.....	58

List of Abbreviations, Acronyms and Symbols

>	'becomes'
→	'becomes' or better 'is assigned the new meaning'
OE	Old English
ModE	Modern English
ME	Middle English
DTD	Desta Teklewold's Dictionary
ID	Isenberg's Dictionary
ARD	Armbruster's Dictionary
AR	An Amharic Reader
M	Unit of meaning
S	Sense
‘	Pharyngeal
’	Glottal stop

Abstract

The major purpose of this study is to investigate the semantic development of Amharic words. Attention is given to investigating factors that have triggered the changes, analyzing and classifying the findings based on the taxonomies of semantic change, and exploring possible 'laws' that govern the changes.

The semantic behavior of the words under study is compared in the older and the newer dictionaries to achieve the foregoing objectives. The results of the study show that a multiplicity of factors have led to change in the semantics of Amharic words. Various kinds of meaning changes are identified on the basis of the different factors and association mechanisms that underlie the words.

Words have changed their meanings pejoratively, *aškär* 'boy or girl' > 'servant'; amelioratively, *zega* 'beggar' > 'citizen'; metaphorically, *ðmmārta* 'leaping' > 'progress'; metonymically, *c'ðnk'ðllat* 'brain' > 'skull'. Meanings have also undergone specialization, *ðs* 'plant' > 'drug'; generalization, *wäyzäro* 'queen' > 'a title for any married woman'; and semantic bleaching *fit* 'face' > temporal (past or future). In addition to these general tendencies, some specific tendencies are also seen in "person body-parts" *andäbät* 'palate' > 'speech-producing organs'.

Metaphor is found to be by far the most pervasive force in many of these changes.

This discussion of semantic change suggests that most of the meaning changes come under the overriding principle: concrete meaning becomes abstract.

The study had to confront two basic problems: the acute lack of an etymological dictionary of Amharic, and the absence of a systematic classification of the historical stages of the language. Scholars should give serious attention to both of these problems.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Everything in the universe is in a perpetual state of change, a fact commented on by philosophers and linguists through the ages. In the words of the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus “Everything rolls on, nothing stays still”; the famous Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure stated that “Time changes all things; there is no reason why language should escape this universal law.” (quoted in Aitchison 1987:1-2). Language, like everything else, joins this general flux.

The Amharic language is no exception to this universal and fundamental fact of change. Its different formal aspects such as phonology, morphology, syntax—and semantics—are subject to change with the passage of time. According to an on-line source (Wikipedia), “Every word has a variety of senses and connotations which can be added, removed, or altered over time to the extent that cognates across space and time have very different meanings.”

Amharic words have been changing their meaning throughout the history of the language. It is, therefore, the purpose of this research to examine, analyze, and explain the meaning changes of words that have occurred over the history of the language.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Studies conducted so far on the Amharic language suggest that many of its formal aspects such as phonology, morphology, syntax, etc. are relatively well-studied synchronically. These formal aspects of the language, however, often have not received a satisfactory treatment diachronically.

Considering this gap in the study of Amharic language, the present research focuses on studying the historical development of lexical items in the course of time. The recent years of Amharic have witnessed huge changes in the social, economic, political structures of the country, as well as in the demographic make-up of Amharic-speaking peoples. This paper is an attempt to exhibit the historical shift from older to modern Amharic in semantics—thus, semantic change.

1.3 Objective of the study

The general objective of the study is to demonstrate how words in the Amharic language have changed their meaning in the course of time. More specifically, the following points will be addressed:

- A) to figure out the variety of meaning changes that occur in the Amharic words examined
- B) to investigate the possible factors that caused or triggered the changes
- C) to analyze and classify the findings based on known taxonomies of semantic change
- D) to examine the kinds of meanings change which have taken place specifically as a result of the process of grammaticalization ('Semantic bleachings')
- E) to determine how and to what extent lexical semantic change in Amharic fits into known cross-linguistic patterns of semantic change

1.4 Significance of the Study

1. It will help in establishing and assessing the reliability of **cognates**; cognates are not always identical in meaning, but what kind of semantic flexibility actually occurs?
2. It may give help to lexicographers and etymologists who are engaged in the preparation of materials on the Amharic language.
3. It will contribute to our general knowledge of diachronic semantics.
4. It will serve as a source material for future research on the language.
5. It will enrich our understanding of the history of the language and of the resources for semantic development that Amharic had at its disposal.

1.5 The Present Study

The goal of the present research is to investigate semantic change, outlining the process of change, and attempting to explain it. The scope of the study can be seen from two perspectives: time and corpus. The time covers from the 14th century to the present. The texts that are relevant for the study include praise poems, religious documents, literary works, letters, and a few other genres, but above all, dictionaries.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study is confined to investigating the lexical semantics of Amharic from the 14th century up to the present time. Although the formal aspects of the words also changed, this paper is concerned only with the semantic aspect of the words.

1.7 Research methodology and procedure

There are two basic ways to find out what a language used to be like.

1. Where possible, evidence directly from written records
2. In the absence of written records, reconstruct aspects of an earlier stage of a language by comparing languages that are descended from it.

In this study, however, I adopt the first method since Amharic is one of the few languages in Africa with a relatively long written tradition.

A) Text sampling

Among the various texts and dictionaries written between the 14th century and 20th century, the researcher has selected the following. The choice is made so as to include texts conveying linguistic information that reflects different periods.

1. **Royal songs of the 14th c.--16th c.**, which were written in praise of the deeds of Emperor Amda Seyon (1314- 1344), and his successors: Dawit I (1380 -140). Yishak (1412 -1427), Zera Yakob (1433-1467), Be'deMariam (1468-1478), Gelawdewos (1540-1559).
2. **The archaic Amharic forms** which were collected and published by Getachew Haile in 1966. These archaic forms were collected from two manuscripts which date back to the 16th and 17th centuries and mirror the Amharic of those periods.

From the 17th to the 19th century, Amharic was almost unused as a written language due to the emergence of the so-called Era of the Princes (or *Zämänä mäsaḥint*), already mentioned above. Amharic texts from this period are not known, since the chronicles and other spiritual and secular works were written in Ge'ez.

3. Literary works of the 19th century

Yonas Admasu et al. have identified four literary works that could best represent the Amharic literature of the 19th c. These are:

- a) *yä at'e Tewodros tarik* by Alek'a WoldeMariam
- b) *mäs'hafä c'äwata sḍgawi wä mänfäsawi*, by Alek'a Zeneb (of Ethiopia)
- c) *yat'e Tewodros tarik* by an unknown writer
- d) A letter written to Antoine d' Abbadie by Däbtära Asgahegne

Among those, the researcher has examined only two for the purposes of this study: the chronicle of Tewodros II by Woldä Mariam, and *Mäs'hafä c'äwata sḍgawi wä mänfäsawi* by Alek'a Zeneb (of Ethiopia).

4. An Amharic Reader by Major J. I. Eadie, D.S. (1924)

This reader is a collection of stories, descriptive essays, recipes, proclamations, poetry, letters, etc. It is a highly valuable collection, as it reflects the kind of Amharic which existed 87 years ago.

5. An Amharic chrestomathy by Edward Ullendorff (1965)

This is a book roughly in the same category as Eadie's Amharic Reader. It, too, is a collection of Amharic selections including fables, letters and so on. Coming some forty years later than Eadie's Amharic Reader, Ullendorff's Amharic Chrestomathy covers a wider time span and provides a useful contrast.

These works contain valuable linguistic information on the different periods of the Amharic language. Moreover, the choice of the texts included here is not fully arbitrary. Care has been taken to select appropriate texts that typify the respective time periods. In addition, in each text, the justification for focusing on some particular word (and not others) is the semantic peculiarity it exhibits as compared with present-day Amharic.

B. Data Gathering

Primarily, the study is a dictionary-based analysis of semantic change supplemented by frequent consultation of the above-mentioned texts and anecdotal information. Appropriate dictionaries were consulted to compare the older and the modern meanings of words. In particular, I used the following dictionaries:

1. *Seu Lexicon Amharico – Latinum* (mazgäbä k'alat bä amhargñña), which was produced by Hiob Ludolf in 1698. [LD]
2. *Dictionary of the Amharic language (English ↔ Amharic)* by C. W. Isenberg (London, 1841) [ID]
3. *English – Amharic Vocabulary* by C. H. Armbruster (Cambridge, 1910) [ARB]
4. *Addis yä amariñña mägäbä k'alat*, by Desta Teklāwold, 1969. [DTD]
5. *Addis yä amariñña mägäbä k'alat*, by the Academy of Ethiopian Languages, 2008.

The data were analyzed by comparing the corresponding entries in older and newer dictionaries. The researcher also took special note of words in today's Amharic which seemed likely to reflect recent meaning changes, and made such words one focus of historical study, comparing their current meaning with the meaning(s) found in older dictionaries.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Previous Works and Related Literature

2.1 Review of Previous Works on the Semantics of Amharic

I could not find much material on the history of the Amharic language in general and very little on lexical semantics in particular. But the following works deserve special consideration.

The first and most important work on Amharic vocabulary is an article entitled “Toward a history of the Amharic vocabulary” (1964) by Wolf Leslau. His work aims at examining the history of Amharic vocabulary by comparing earlier materials with contemporary Amharic. To this end, he used C.H. Armbruster’s *English-Amharic vocabulary* (Cambridge, 1910) and compared it with the Amharic of his own time. For example:

Gloss	Armbruster’s lexeme	Leslau’s lexeme
‘bandage’	<i>masäriya</i>	<i>fašša</i>
‘clothes brush’	<i>mät’rägiya</i>	<i>yä-lōbs bruš</i>
‘towel’	<i>madräk’iya</i>	<i>fot’a</i>
‘veil’	<i>mäšäffäñña</i>	<i>aynä rōgb</i>

His finding is that the Amharic of his time is more precise in meaning, whereas the expressions of Armbruster’s Amharic are semantically more ambiguous. Besides, Leslau’s Amharic uses nominal patterns different from those of Armbruster’s Amharic. The above examples show cases of **specialization**, although Leslau says nothing about this.

The second work on old Amharic is a published article by Getachew Haile, under the title “Archaic Amharic Forms” (1966). Getachew investigates the linguistic information

contained in two manuscripts labeled as manuscript A and manuscript B that he got from a certain däbtära. Manuscript A and manuscript B represent 16th-century and 17th-century Amharic respectively. His work displays many archaic forms including many words that do not exist at all in present-day Amharic. For example:

Gloss	Words in Manuscripts	Present – day Amharic
‘to jump’	<i>haff alä</i> →	not used
‘peasant, farmer’	<i>bäḥaläge</i> →	<i>baläge</i> ‘rude, impolite’

Here, the meaning change from ‘farmer’ to ‘rude or impolite’ constitutes a case of **pejoration**.

Another scholar, Z. Polacek, published an article entitled “Diachronic Analysis of Amharic vocabulary on the Basis of V.R. Prutky’s manuscript” (1973). The manuscript on which the analysis is based dates back to the middle of the 18th century. The article is concerned with diachronic shifts in both the external (formal) and the internal (semantic) aspects of the words. The writer concludes that the semantics seems to exhibit a substantially higher degree of stability, whereas the formal aspect of the words is marked by important changes. Polacek may, however, have failed to sufficiently appreciate the social milieu which existed during the second half of the 18th century. At this particular time, the Era of the Princes, the country adopted a closed-door policy. This conservative isolationism may have acted to retard the pace of semantic change in Amharic. This is because semantics, above all other aspects of language, reacts strongly to extralinguistic impulses.

A relatively recent work on old Amharic is the article by Renate Richter entitled “Some Linguistic Peculiarities of Old Amharic Texts” (1997). In this article, the writer discusses some distinctive features of the Royal Songs of the 14th-16th centuries, in terms of orthography, morphology, syntax and vocabulary. With regard to vocabulary, the article shows that old Amharic made use of some lexemes which either do not occur in Modern Amharic or whose meaning has changed.

Old Amharic	Gloss	Modern Amharic
<i>ank'äs's'</i>	'door, gate, entrance' →	'article, paragraph, clause'
<i>k'ðrnðb</i>	'pupil (of the eye)' →	<i>k'ðndðb</i> 'eyelid' (rn > nd)
<i>mädalðw</i>	'balance, scales' changes to <i>mizan</i>	

The change from 'pupil' to 'eyelid' is an instance of **metonymy**, although the writer never mentions this.

2.2 Review of Related Literature

2.2.1 Basics

In the previous section it was remarked that nothing is perfectly static. This view of change is reflected in Sapir (1921: 171): "Every word, every grammatical element, every locution, every sound and accent is a slowly changing configuration, molded by the invisible and impersonal drift that is the life of language".

Historical linguistics is devoted to establishing facts of language change. Within historical linguistics, the study of meaning change with the passage of time is known as historical or diachronic semantics. Semantic change is one of the most important phenomena that occur during a language's life time. Change in the meanings of words is as common as changes in their form.

Another important point is that the study of meaning change should not be confused with etymology. The former articulates and seeks to explain the fact of meaning or sense development; the latter focuses on the origin of words. However, for the genuine reconstruction of the origin of words, historical semantics is often crucial.

2.3 The Nature and Definition of Semantic Change

2.3.1 Preliminary Note

Compared to other aspects of language, meaning seems to be the least resistant to change. Anttila gives a valuable explanation about how and why the lexicon is more susceptible to change than the other aspects of language, as follows:

The more elements and relations there are within a system, the more complex it is, and such a system is, a priori, more likely to change than a simpler one. This applies very well to lexicon in contrast to morphology. In mechanical terms: the more complex a machine is, the more likely it is to break down. (Anttila 1972: 136)

Anttila's argument emphasizes that the vocabulary is the most flexible part of the language; more specifically, the semantic aspect responds highly to the social, political, economical, and other changes which take place in a society. The complex nature of the lexicon (consisting as it does of a large number of elements and relations) contributes in making the vocabulary least resistant to change.

2.3.2 Denotative and Connotative Meaning

According to Palmer (1976: 34) denotative meaning is what a word stands for or refers to in the real world. Hence, this kind of meaning is concerned with the factual information conveyed by a word. However, this is not the only kind of meaning that we use in our communication.

Connotative meaning, on the other hand, refers to the emotive or evaluative meaning of a word (Geeraerts 1997: 18). It includes the various feelings, emotions and attitudes which are associated with the word or with its denotational meaning. For example, Amharic *set* 'woman' connotes 'weak'. People may then change names to either avoid or enhance such connotations. This opens up a path to euphemistic, pejorative, and ameliorative shifts of meaning.

2.4 Semantic Change Defined

Scholars in the field of historical linguistics have defined semantic change in various ways. The following definitions are selected and presented for discussion as they are crystal-clear and comprehensive in revealing the nature of meaning change.

James Matisoff in his monograph *Variational Semantics in Tibeto-Burman* discusses the concept and the process of semantic change as follows (1978:173):

An etymon E (an etymological word) has shifted in meaning through time if at one stage in the language's history, S1, it used to mean "M1, but not M2," while at a later stage in the language's history, S2, it came to mean "M2 but not M1". His approach to the process of semantic change takes semantic vagueness as an essential intermediate stage. The whole concept is schematized as follow.

Time (T):	T1	T2
Form (F):	F1	F1
Meaning (M):	M1	M2

This proposition about the nature of semantic change is termed the "**immediate mutation**" view of meaning change. However, this has been criticized for failing to suggest a period in which M1 and M2 coexist as polysemous variants. This is quite plausible from the perspective of the transition problem of language change in general. It is not the case that linguistic innovations enter the language and spread through the speech community instantaneously. Thus, in semantic innovation, the new meaning does not displace the older one immediately. Instead, the two meanings coexist for some time.

An alternative model: The "polysemous" view of semantic change

This alternative approach states that "[In semantic change] the two meanings share significant semantic features and that for a new meaning of a form to spread within the community, [...] there must not be a radical departure from the original meaning of the form" (Wilkins 1996:269). He represents this view as:

Time (T):	T1	T2	T3
Form (F):	F1	F1	F1
Meaning (M):	M1	M1 & M2	M2
Features:	p,q,r	p,q,r & q,r,s	q,r,s

This approach to the nature of semantic change creates a situation whereby the two meanings (the original and the innovated) coexist polysemously. Synchronic polysemy, then, has a paramount importance in the investigation of meaning change. As Geeraerts (1997:7) states, “Synchronic polysemy, roughly, is a reflection of diachronic semantic change”. Thus, the presence of many senses in a given word serves as a *prima facie* reason to believe that the word has undergone a meaning change.

In much of the literature, semantic change and lexical change are treated interchangeably. For example, Jeffers and Lehiste (1979:126) treat the two concepts equivalently.

The general notion of lexical change, however, encompasses borrowing, word formation processes and other morphological and phonological factors in addition to meaning change. This thesis, therefore, treats semantic change as a subpart of lexical change.

In this thesis, meaning is conceived as a reciprocal relationship between name and sense. Thus semantic change can occur in either of two ways: when a new name is attached to a sense (name transfer) or when a new sense is attached to a name (sense transfer) (Ullmann 1957:171).

At this point it is reasonable to pose the question ‘When exactly do we say that a semantic change has taken place?’ Regarding this, Stern in his classic monograph *Meaning and Change of Meaning* (1931:167) states some principles for delimiting the notion of semantic change. These include the involvement of a habitual modification of the inherited older semantic range of a word and the involvement of a fairly large group of speakers. This rule-like formulation presupposes the recurrent use of the word with its new sense by a fairly large group of speakers. This, eventually, leads to the change becoming an integral part of the language’s system.

2.5 Historical Sketch (History of Semantic Change)

Knowing the past throws light on the present and can enable us to glimpse the future. Hence, in this section, I will give a brief overview of the different views of meaning change from ancient times up to the present.

The idea that words can change their meanings over time was a strange notion in antiquity. Some instances of figures of speech were identified, but they were not seen as meaning changes but as deviations from the “true” meaning of the words.

Even the classical debate about the relation between words and their meanings (a natural bond versus a conventional relation; see Plato’s *Cratylus*) did not take into account the concept of change of meaning.

In the field of literature, there is a tradition of ‘poetic license’ which gives a writer the right to create an intentional distortion in form and meaning of words so as to strengthen his or her theme. This results in various traditional figures of speech such as metaphor, hyperbole, litotes, synecdoche, etc. Waldron (1979: 14) explains further that “By the recognition of these tropes [figures of speech], the classical rhetoricians acknowledged that words change their meaning ad hoc, in response to the intention of the writer, and they also distinguished the various logical connections between new and old meanings of the same word”.

Aristotle (384-322 BC) in his *Poetics* (The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy) outlined four basic ways in which word meaning may be transferred. These are:

- A) The name of a species is transferred to the genus
- B) The name of a genus is transferred to the species
- C) The name of a species is transferred to another species
- D) Transfer according to analogy

But these transfers are merely occasional instances of changes of meaning, observed at a particular time and context.

With the advent of modern semasiology in Germany in the early 19th century, diachronic semantics took a major step forward.

Waldron (1979:115) tells us that from about 1825 onwards, classical scholars began to perceive affinities between the figures of speech so carefully differentiated in traditional rhetoric, on the one hand, and permanent meaning change on the other. They then began to describe meaning change in terms of the figures of speech.

In the late 19th century, a further step was achieved. In 1883 the French classical philologist Michel Bréal gave a scientific basis to the study of meaning. He called it Semantics (from the Greek verb *sēmainein* 'to signify'), that is, the 'science of meaning'. It was intended to study the laws governing changes in meaning, the choice of new expressions, the birth and death of idioms, all of which had been left in the dark until then. Semantics was thus originally established as a historical discipline.

This period marked the beginning of the systematization of semantic changes in accordance with the various logical processes involved between the original and the new meaning, and the classification of changes into extension, restriction and transfer. Thereafter, the focus shifted to investigating the causes of meaning change and classifying them according to logical, psychological, social and other criteria.

Most recently, the emphasis has been on formulating generalizations about the different instances of semantic change in individual languages and across languages (Dasher and Traugott 2005:1).

2.6 Causes of Semantic Change

A multiplicity of factors contribute to change, and particularly to linguistic change. This is due to the fact that language, as Aitchison (1983:168) points out, "is both a social and a mental phenomenon in which sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic factors are likely to be inextricably entwined". Some scholars such as Lehmann (1962:198) contend that a linguist's job should properly be restricted to establishing the fact of change, leaving its explanation to the anthropologist. But like many linguists I do not share this view. This is because exploring the general factors underlying meaning change has indisputable value in the process of

relating the same words in different stages of a language's history and in uncovering particular, concrete instances of meaning change.

The presence of a chain of causation in almost every change of meaning poses a major difficulty in the attempt to answer the idealized question 'What was *the* cause of a word's changing its meaning?' In light of this problem of the indeterminate nature of causality, we need to appeal to multiple explanations. In this section, therefore, I will present a discussion of the various internal (linguistic) and external (extralinguistic) causes that can trigger semantic changes.

2.6.1 Linguistic Factors

Linguistic factors (internal causes) are causes that act within the linguistic system. These appear to be relatively understudied and thus less is known about them. Ellipsis, Differentiation of Synonyms and Semantic bleaching (in the process of grammaticalization) come under the purview of linguistic reasons for meaning change.

2.6.1.1 Ellipsis

In semantics, some meaning changes occur as a result of the constant recurrence of the vocabulary units in particular contexts (collocations). This happens due to the force of 'contagion'. Contagion, according to Bréal (1964:200), has the effect of communicating to a word the meaning of its linguistic surroundings. This means that the meaning of one word can be transposed to another adjacent word since the words appear in collocation. Ellipsis is one of the commonest forms in which this situation is reflected. In a phrase made up of two words, if one is omitted, its meaning is typically retained by its partner. This latter element alone can then suffice to convey the meaning of the entire expression. Geeraerts (1997:227) also rightly argues that pragmatics is a determinative factor in ellipsis in addition to formal contiguity. According to him ellipsis happens for reasons of economy of expression. Some examples given by Ullmann and Waldron (except for the last) are:

<i>private</i>	for	<i>private soldier</i>
<i>general</i>	"	<i>general officer</i>
<i>bill</i>	"	<i>bill of exchange</i>
<i>plane</i>	"	<i>airplane</i>

<i>pool</i>	“	<i>swimming pool</i>
<i>put to sea</i>	“	<i>put a ship to sea</i>
<i>traffic</i>	“	<i>traffic policeman</i> ([tɒɾafɪk] a common case of ellipsis in Ethiopia)

2.6.1.2 Differentiation of synonyms

Bréal (1964:27) describes ‘the law of differentiation of synonyms’ as the process in which words which should be synonyms, and which were so in the past, have acquired a different meaning and are no longer interchangeable. For example, in Old English the word *tide* used to be a synonym for *time*. Later *tide* was confined only to the ‘shifting waters’, and *time* became the general word.

2.6.1.3 Grammaticalization

Grammaticalization is a process which prototypically changes a lexical item (a word) with independent meaning into a grammatical morpheme. Although this process involves phonetic reduction, the loss of morphological inflection, and semantic bleaching, this thesis is concerned only with the property of semantic bleaching.¹ Campbell (2004:296-297) describes the semantic aspect of grammaticalization as follows: “Semantic bleaching in grammaticalization [is] a shift from more lexical meaning to more grammatical content. The types of semantic changes involved in grammaticalization are primarily narrowing, sometimes coupled with metaphor, metonymy, and others”.

The gist of the matter is that semantic change (bleaching), which comes as a result of grammaticalization, transposes a lexical element (a word) into a nonlexical element. Thus a new meaning develops in the linguistic system. Moreover, the direction of the change tends very strongly to be from concrete to abstract. That is, the process of semantic bleaching reveals a general tendency to unidirectionality, in which change in the opposite direction is rare and unexpected (Trask 1996:146). Thus, as indicated earlier, semantic bleaching can be treated as part and parcel of semantic change in general. For example, English “will” originally meant “want to” (cf. “will-power”), but it has undergone grammaticalization and becomes future marker.

2.6.2 Extralinguistic causes of semantic change

The domain encompassed by external factors of semantic change can be summarized as follows: “Various changes in the life of the speech community, changes in economic and social structure, changes of ideas, scientific concepts, ways of life, and other spheres of human activities as reflected in word meaning” (www.wikipedia.org.com).

Extralinguistic causes are the reflections of the strong correlation that exists between language and the development of the human mind as it is observed in scientific, political, and cultural changes. These factors can affect the structural features of a language. Moreover, since a word symbolizes or represents a notion, it can also change with the progress of human consciousness.

Antoine Meillet (the great French Indo-Europeanist), cited in Ullmann (1962:197-200), has identified three causes accounting for semantic change: **Linguistic causes**, **historical causes**, and **social causes**. Ullmann termed this the *Meillet Theory*.

A brief review of the latter two causes (historical and social) is presented below; the linguistic causes have already been discussed above.

2.6.2.1 Historical causes

In this case, the sense of a given word (the *signifié*, or ‘thing-meant’) is modified along with the development of culture. But the linguistic object itself (*signifiant*) remains unchanged (conservative).

The English word *pen* (derived from Latin *pet- ‘to fly’) originally meant ‘feather’, which was formerly used as a writing instrument. Cultural development in the English-speaking community transformed this function, so that feathers ceased to be used in writing. However, the form remained unaltered; it now means only ‘writing instrument’, not ‘feather’ or ‘quill’.

2.6.2.2 Social causes

In the course of social interaction in a specific community, a word that is used in ordinary language can come to be used in the terminology of a limited group as in the context of a trade, a craft, a profession, etc. Consequently, the word acquires a more restricted sense. Due to this situation, a general word is given a special meaning in a restricted context. Thus, specialization of meaning occurs.

On the other hand, when words from limited-group vocabulary come into common use, they often extend their sense. In this process, the word gradually loses its significance in specialized contexts and comes to be used in more general senses, so that we can speak of generalization of meaning. Specialization and generalization of meaning are thus two socially conditioned tendencies working in opposite directions. For example, Latin *cubare* 'to lie down' became French *couver* 'to hatch'.

2.6.2.3 The need for a new label

The need to find a new name is one of the fundamental causes accounting for meaning change. Mostly, people tend to alter the meaning of an old word when they need a new name to denote a new object, or idea resulting from scientific and technological discoveries. So the older word may be adjusted to accommodate the newly introduced notion or object (Waldron 1979:178). For instance, in Amharic, the word *mädäb* 'platform' came to mean 'social class' as a result of the introduction of the contemporary socialist ideology (or Communism).

2.6.2.4 Psychological causes

Stephen Ullmann (1962:200-207) gives a detailed discussion of two important psychological causes: emotive factors and taboo influence, which have bearing on some meaning changes.

1. Emotive factors: this phenomenon was expounded by Hans Sperber. He investigated the role of emotional factors in the process of semantic change by employing the insights of contemporary psychoanalysis. As Sperber puts it, as quoted in Ullmann (1962:201):

If we are intensely interested in a subject, we tend to talk frequently about it; we shall even refer to it when speaking of totally different matters. Such subjects are ever present to our minds and will therefore suggest similies and metaphors

for the description of other experiences [as] they will become 'centers of expansion'.

This implies that metaphors tend to be generated from these emotional centers. Moreover, it shows the existence of a strong correlation between the interest which a subject commands and the metaphors inspired by it. Thus, the prevalence of metaphors based on a given subject is a concomitant of the speakers' intense interest in that subject. This is because the community epitomizes its fears, its aspirations, and its ideas by conceptualizing them in terms of the subjects which it is most interested in. This in turn will tend to generate new metaphors, in many varied walks of life, based on such culturally "favored" subjects.

2. Taboo influence

The term taboo, in linguistics, signifies a word which is forbidden, offensive or embarrassing. It puts a restriction on using the names of persons, things or animals.

In the majority of cases, a euphemism comes into the language to substitute for the tabooed word. Waldron (1979:118) describes the impact of taboo on the process of semantic change as follows: "The factor of linguistic taboo, the reluctance to use certain words because of their unpleasant associations, leads to euphemism, that is, the replacement of them by less highly charged, because less particular, forms of speech". He further explains that the replacement of taboos by euphemism does not in itself constitute change of meaning, but it frequently happens that the substitute-term takes on a more precise or exclusive reference to the unpleasant fact, as it becomes more familiar in the euphemistic use and less familiar in its original sense.

2.7 Categories of Semantic Change

Types of semantic changes are established on the basis of a comparison between the earlier and the newer meaning of words. This comparison may be based on the logical relation between the earlier and the later meanings, on the psychological association at work or on some other features.

The classic works of M. Bréal, Gustaf Stern and Stephen Ullmann present a traditional standard set of meaning changes. The more recent works of Traugott (2006) and Cambell (2004) single out six such standard types of semantic changes. What follows is a summary of these categories of semantic change as presented by Traugott (2006:124-125) in the *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*.

2.7.1 Broadening (also referred to as generalization, widening, extension, or schematization)

A relatively restricted meaning becomes more general; for example, Late OE *docga* 'dog of a powerful breed' > 'generic dog'. Thus, the word comes to be used in more contexts than before the change, thereby increasing the range of its meaning.

2.7.2 Narrowing (also referred to as restriction or specialization)

A relatively general meaning becomes more specific; for example, OE *deor* 'animal' > *deer*; OE *hund* 'generic dog' > *hound* 'hunting dog'.

This is the opposite of broadening of meaning. In this process, the range of meanings is decreased as the word is confined to more restricted contexts. For example, *meat* originally meant 'food' of any kind (in general), but later narrowed its meaning to 'meat' ('food of flesh'). *Girl* in ME meant 'child or young person of either sex', but in ModE it has narrowed its referent to 'female child, young woman'. The word *queen* originally meant 'wife, woman', but is now restricted to the king's wife or female sovereign.

2.7.3 Amelioration (also referred to as melioration or elevation)

Meanings become more positive. For example, Latin *nescius* 'ignorant' > 'foolish' > English *nice*. So amelioration is the process of meaning change in which a word's meaning improves or becomes elevated, coming to represent something more favorable than it originally referred to. *Cnight* in ME meant 'boy, servant', but was ameliorated in its meaning and came to be *knight* 'noble soldier'.

2.7.4 Pejoration: meanings become more negative. For example, OE *selig* 'blessed' > *silly*; ME *huswif* 'housewife' > *hussy* (pejorative) (alongside *housewife*, which survives in its original meaning); *cur* 'dog' > a term of contempt (for both dogs and humans).

As the examples illustrate, in pejoration a word's meaning worsens or degenerates, coming to represent something less favorable than it originally did.

2.7.5 Metaphor: one concept is transferred, projected or 'mapped' onto another concept that is in a different conceptual domain but that has some resemblance to the first concept. The essence of metaphor is the understanding or experiencing of one kind of thing in terms of another kind of thing, where there exists some point of similarity between them. For example, *mouse* > 'input device', and *crane* at a construction site has its name by comparison to the long-necked bird of the same name. Similarity of shape is the point of resemblance in both these examples.

Metaphorical extension is a natural process that can be undergone by any word. We often do not even think of it as meaning change. For example, the word *illuminate* originally meant (and means) 'to light up', but has been extended metaphorically to mean 'to clarify', 'to edify'. These meanings seem so natural as to be an integral part of the word's semantics.

2.7.6 Metonymy: one word is associated with another by contiguity, either physical or conceptual. Often-cited examples involve reference to perceived real-world contiguity; for example, the material that the object is made of is extended to the object itself, as in Greek *papyrus* 'papyrus plant' (used as material for writing on) > *paper*. Metonymic associations include the form for the function, cause for effect, color for a plant, and part for whole (sometimes termed **synecdoche**). Traugott treats part for whole (synecdoche) as a subtype of metonymy; but other scholars (e.g. Campbell 2004) present it as a separate category of its own. Campbell defines synecdoche as "involv[ing] a part to whole relationship, where a term with more comprehensive meaning is used to refer to a less comprehensive meaning or vice-versa; that is, a part (or quality) is used to refer to the whole" (Campbell 2004:259). In this thesis I have employed metonymy since metonymic associations, unlike to other sense relations, lead to meaning changes, which is the object of this study.

2.8 Classification of Semantic Change

In the previous section, an attempt has been made to show the great variety of factors that can act to bring about meaning change. In addition, there is inevitably some overlapping and intersecting among the categories of semantic change. The interplay of these and other factors makes it difficult to develop any clearcut classification of semantic changes; Ullmann (1951:185) stresses that "the variety of forces at work in meaning change is virtually infinite, to the extent that classification becomes a very hard job". Nevertheless, scholars through the ages have continued to try to create a systematic and scientific classification of meaning change, starting from Aristotle down to the present. Ullmann proposes various approaches to classification (ibid:186): Logico-Rhetorical, Eclectic, Empirical, and (what he calls) Genetic. The last term has two subtypes: causal classification and functional classification. Here, I will be concerned with functional classification since this approach, in contrast to the others, is comprehensive in dealing with causes of semantic change (psychological, social, etc.) and has a thorough scientific basis. This approach, first expounded by Ullmann (1959), was later modified by Dirk Geeraerts (1983). In this thesis, Geeraert's approach is followed as it encompasses recent advances in the study of lexical meaning change and has a relatively higher explanatory value than Ullmann's scheme. A brief overview of this approach is given below, as presented by Geeraerts in his article "Reclassifying Semantic Change" (1983) and his book *Diachronic Prototype Semantics* (1997).

The classification of semantic change proposed by Geeraerts is based on a fourfold division of functional causes of meaning change in terms of two factors comprising two axes: conceptual vs. formal, and expressive vs. efficiency. As can be seen below, along the vertical axis, causes relating to the conceptual content of language are set off against causes involving language in its formal aspects. Along the horizontal axis, expressive needs are distinguished from principles of efficiency. With regard to efficiency, as Geeraerts explains (1983:237), the principles of formal efficiency are concerned with the optimal relation between *signifiant* and *signifié*, while principles of conceptual efficiency guide the optimalization of conceptual organization as such. With regard to expressivity, formal expressivity involves the expressive value of the linguistic forms, while conceptual expressivity deals with the basic function of language, that is, the expression of ideas or

feelings. This 2 x 2 factorial analysis arguably goes beyond a mere classification, as it also analyzes how semantic changes come about.

In Geeraert's proposal, an expressive need, either on the formal or on the conceptual level, is taken as one functional factor in semantic change. These expressive needs are achieved at the conceptual level using efficiency principles (metaphor and metonymy) and at the formal level employing the corresponding formal efficiency principles (ellipsis, popular etymology and avoidance of homonymic clashes).

This proposal, based on the associative network of language, is presented by Geeraerts as having great explanatory power. In this thesis, meaning changes in Amharic will be classified according to this classification scheme.

Classification of Semantic Changes: A Functional Approach

	Expressive Factors	Efficiency Principles
On the level of (Cognitive or Emotive) Conceptual Content	Introducing New Concepts - Objective changes in the world - Subjective changes in one's knowledge of/ attitude towards the world	Prototypical transfers, more particularly - Metaphor (similarity relations) - Metonymy (contiguity relationships)
On the Formal Level	Introducing new word forms with new social or stylistical expressive value	a) Avoidance of homonymic clashes ("one form, one meaning") b) Ellipsis (economy of expression) c) Popular etymology (transparency)

2.9 General Tendencies in Semantic Change

M. Bréal, who is considered the father of modern semantics, believed that the new science of semantics should try to establish laws governing changes in meaning. Concretely, he was able to identify the 'laws of differentiation of synonyms'. However, some scholars are pessimistic about the predictability and regularity of semantic change. For instance, Anttila (1972:117) states that "It has not been possible to formulate truly general laws of semantic change, because the latter is often so intimately bound up with the historical causes". Anttila may be right in asserting the unpredictable impact of historical circumstances in the attempt to formulate general principles of meaning change. Lehmann (1973:208) also asserts that "general principles have not been determined for semantic change except in small sets like kinship terms". From these quotes it is clear that semantic change is often thought to be largely random and not susceptible to linguistic analysis.

On the other hand, other prominent scholars have attempted to identify some broad tendencies. Bloomfield (1933:429), for instance, shows that "refined and abstract meanings largely grow out of more concrete meanings". James Matisoff emphasizes the self-evident fact that semantic change is the rule in languages' history, not the exception. Gustaf Stern in his monograph 'Meaning and change of Meaning' (1931:187) formulates an often-cited semantic law which concerns the development of English adverbs having the sense 'rapidly' into the sense 'immediately' before 1400, though not after.

Recently, particularly the work of Traugott and other scholars has nullified the older view that meaning change is unsystematic and unpredictable. They have discerned a marked degree of regularity and predictability in lexical change, especially cross-linguistically. "When we trace the histories of lexemes cross-linguistically, we in fact repeatedly find evidence for unidirectional changes" (Traugott and Dasher 2005:1).

This section has provided a review of some of the general tendencies and principles that have been used to explain general mechanisms of meaning development. The thesis will seek to give particular emphasis to this aspect of the diachronic semantics of Amharic.

In the pursuit of how meaning change comes about, many linguists recognize that semantic change arises through a stage of polysemy, in which a word has more than one meaning.

Campbell (2004:266) writes that “The word starts out with an original meaning, then acquires additional, multiple meanings, and then [often] the original sense is lost, leaving only the newer meaning”. Thus the polysemous situation is the key link in the process of meaning change.

Traugott (1985:159-161) introduces an important organizing principle for finding regularities in semantic change. The principle, named Kronasser’s law after the man who first developed it, is that more concrete terms almost always develop into more abstract ones, while change in the other direction is highly unusual. This principle tends to be a general organizing force and as such reconciles many of the contradictory-looking processes of meaning change. For example, generalization and restriction, or amelioration and pejoration, which in one sense are opposites, are partly harmonized and subsumed under this rule.

Moreover, Traugott takes space as a source of more abstract terms and demonstrates the following shifts from spatial to temporal and other terms. (My review here is partial in that it excludes those tendencies that do not involve lexical items.)

- a) Spatial $\longrightarrow$ Temporal: the shift from spatial to temporal is unidirectional.

In English, the time indicators *before* and *after* started out as spatial terms, in the sense “in front of” and “in back of”.

- b) Spatial $\longrightarrow$ Mental Verb: mental verbs refer to verbs that are used to express understanding, deducing, and so on. Cross-linguistically, originally spatial words show a strong tendency to become ‘mental verbs’.

For example, Latin *ducere* “lead” > *deduce*

Latin *tendere* “stretch” > *intend*

Latin *sub+ponere* “put under” > *suppose*

Japan *kokoro* “heart, mind” + *sasu* “to point” > *kokorozasu* “intend to do”

Japan *omou* “think” + *tatsu* “stand up” > *omoitatsu* “resolve/plan to do”

- c) Spatial $\longrightarrow$ Speech Act Verb

Speech Act Verbs are verbs like *promise*, *command*, *state*, etc. In the appropriate context, they convey speech-act force in addition to naming the action being performed. These verbs often originate from spatial terms.

Examples: Latin particle (*ad*, *com*) + *mittere* “send” > *admit*, *commit* (oneself)

Latin *adserere* “join oneself to” > *assert*

In addition to Traugott’s general tendency, Wilkins (1996:273-274) in “*Natural Tendencies of Semantic Change*” identifies and formulates a number of more specific natural tendencies involving many different “person-parts” (his term for body-parts). There are five of these:

1. It is a natural tendency for a term for a visible person-part to shift to refer to the visible whole of which it is a part, but the reverse change is not natural
(e.g. ‘navel’ → ‘belly’ → ‘trunk’ → ‘body’ → ‘person’).
2. It is [a] natural tendency for a person-part term to shift to refer to a spatially contiguous person part within the same whole
(e.g. ‘belly’ ↔ ‘chest’; ‘skull’ ↔ ‘brain’).
3. Where the waist provides a midline, it is a natural tendency for terms referring to parts of the upper body to shift to refer to parts of the lower body and vice versa
(e.g. ‘elbow’ ↔ ‘knee’; ‘uvula’ → ‘clitoris’; ‘anus’ ↔ ‘mouth’).
4. It is a natural tendency for the term for an animal part to shift to refer to a person part
(e.g. ‘snout’ → ‘nose’; ‘beak’ → ‘face’).
5. It is a natural tendency for a term for a verbal action involving the use of a particular person part to shift to refer to that person part
(e.g. ‘walk’ → ‘leg’; ‘hold’ → ‘hand’).

Moreover, Wilkins recognizes a unidirectional law of meaning change in synecdoche in the semantic domain ‘parts of a person’: a term referring to a visible part comes to refer to the visible whole of which it is an immediate and spatially and/or functionally integral part. The reverse is not natural; a term for a visible whole does not change to refer to a visible part. The productive direction of change is thus: visible part > visible whole (ibid: 275).

2.10 Diachronic and Synchronic “Meaning” Changes

The meanings of words can change over the course of time owing to various reasons. A word may acquire a new sense or its original sense may be altered entirely. This constitutes a ‘true’ diachronic change of meaning. However, there are also synchronic processes of the lexicon that lead to synchronic polysemy and metaphoric extension. But as Sweetser states in Traugott (1986:539), these processes may shed light on the historical processes. Thus, they have to be viewed side by side with those occurring in diachrony.

It is not always easy to clearly separate these two kinds of change. On the one hand, synchronic meaning variation is often the germ of a diachronic change. On the other hand, synchronic variation in meaning may itself have existed indefinitely far back in a language’s history so that no real “diachronic change” ever occurred. This was sometimes a very practical problem for me in writing this thesis.

2.11 Approaches to the Study of Semantic Change

Different kinds of models have been proposed to explain meaning changes. Among these, the philological/sociohistorical approach, the prototype approach, and the cognitive approach have been dominant in the study of semantic change. In this thesis, it will suffice to consider only the sociohistorical and the cognitive models.

2.11.1 The Sociohistorical Approach

This view of semantic change was developed in the 19th century. According to Traugott (1985:158), the primary focus of this approach is investigating individual changes which arose from particular situations. It identifies general tendencies such as generalization, specialization, pejoration, amelioration, metaphoricization, and metonymicization and so on, but does not seek to uncover any rigorous pattern or direction in the process of meaning changes. The idiosyncratic nature of processes like generalization and specialization, pejoration and amelioration seems very natural under this approach, with no obvious need to go beyond the idiosyncrasies.

2.11.2 The Cognitive Approach

The emphasis of this model is the conceptual structure and the mental life of the language user as reflected in causation, time, understanding, and so forth. It focuses on various meaning changes resulting from these cognitive processes. This approach seeks to establish regularity in meaning change by focusing on shifts from one semantic domain to another. Here the most salient organizing principle in achieving regularity in meaning change is that the concrete meanings acquire abstract senses. This principle is found to be effective in resolving or neutralizing some of the contradictory processes observed in the sociohistorical approach. Thus it can be said that the two models, sociohistorical and cognitive, can complement each other (ibid: 159).

I will, therefore, employ a combination of the two approaches in interpreting and analyzing the Amharic data in the next chapter. An attempt will be made to formulate some general tendencies in the development of the meanings of Amharic words with the help of these two models

CHAPTER THREE

Data Analysis and Discussion of Results

In this section I will discuss semantic change in Amharic. The data analysis and interpretation are based on the discussion in the previous chapter.

3.1 Taboo expressions and meaning change

Taboo expressions are used almost in all languages. They usually occur in the sphere of sexual activities, diseases, parts of the body, animal names and in other domains according to the culture of the particular linguistic community. As indicated in the previous section, taboo expressions are fertile areas for meaning change. In Amharic taboos exist in the realm of sexual activities, names of animals and diseases, some parts of the body, etc. The following presents a discussion of taboo replacement by euphemism in the Amharic language.

a) Taboos on animal names

People often believe that a name is an integral part of an animal, human, etc. The use of its name, therefore, may attract the creature itself, which can have fatal or harmful consequences. To avoid this, speakers employ a harmless substitute, a euphemism. Among Amharic speakers, there is a tendency to use *əngəda* lit. 'stranger' for *gundan* 'ant' ; *yä mōdru* lit. 'of the earth' for *əbab* 'snake'. The euphemistic expression *wäizäryt* 'the lady' is used for *ayətl* 'rat'; *läglaggaw* lit. 'one which is young' is used for *näbər* 'tiger'.

The change from tabooed animal names to euphemistic substitutes involves an adjustment in meaning. Accordingly, the speakers attempt to lessen or avoid the harmful effects of mentioning the tabooed names. The reference remains the same, but the referent is conceptualized differently.

b) The euphemism of decency and propriety

It is a general human tendency to avoid direct reference to unpleasant subjects. Some of these unpleasant subjects and their euphemistic terms are discussed below as they occur in Amharic.

Names of physical defects, illnesses and death

Tabooed word

Euphemistic phrases

a) <i>k'it'ṭṭā</i> 'syphilis'	<i>yä abalzär bḍšṣṭa</i> lit. 'disease of the genitals'
b) <i>'ḍwwḍr</i> 'blind'	<i>mayät yätäsanäw</i> lit. 'one who cannot see'
c) <i>dänk'oro</i> 'deaf'	<i>mäsmat yätäsanäw</i> lit. 'one who cannot hear'
d) <i>k'um't'ṭnna</i> 'leprosy'	<i>yäsḍga däwe</i> lit. 'disease of the flesh'
e) <i>motä</i> 'He died'	<i>arräfä</i> 'He rested', <i>alläfä</i> 'He passed', <i>täläyyä</i> 'He departed'
f) <i>gäbäre</i> 'peasant'	<i>arsoaddär</i> lit. 'one who makes his living by farming'
g) <i>zällan</i> 'nomad'	<i>arbḍtoaddär</i> 'one who makes his living by breeding cattle'

In polite society, words such as *k'it'ṭṭā* 'syphilis', *'ḍwwḍr* 'blind', and so on are avoided since such expressions could hurt the feelings of the hearer. Hence, as shown above, they are substituted by the so-called euphemism of decency to seek new and indirect names for things and actions.

The substitutes are verbose as compared to the more precise tabooed words, but they lessen the unpleasant feeling attached to the referent. Ameliorative meaning change thus takes place (connotative meaning becomes more positive).

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Names of physical defects, illnesses and death

Tabooed word	Euphemistic phrases
a) <i>k'it't'ðñ</i> 'syphilis'	<i>yä abalzär bðššðta</i> lit. 'disease of the genitals'
b) <i>'ðwwðr</i> 'blind'	<i>mayät yätäsanäw</i> lit. 'one who cannot see'
c) <i>dänk'oro</i> 'deaf'	<i>mäsmat yätäsanäw</i> lit. 'one who cannot hear'
d) <i>k'umt't'ðnna</i> 'leprosy'	<i>yäsðga dawe</i> lit. 'disease of the flesh'
e) <i>motä</i> 'He died'	<i>arräfä</i> 'He rested', <i>alläfä</i> 'He passed', <i>täläyyä</i> 'He departed'
f) <i>gäbäre</i> 'peasant'	<i>arsoaddär</i> lit. 'one who makes his living by farming'
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The substitutes are verbose as compared to the more precise tabooed words, but they lessen the unpleasant feeling attached to the referent. Ameliorative meaning change thus takes place (connotative meaning becomes more positive).

c) Names of some criminal actions

The names of some criminal actions such as cheating, stealing and killing are often avoided for the sake of delicacy. Thus in Amharic, *yä 'ôğğ amäl* lit. 'character of the hand' is used for 'theft'; *fît maya* lit. 'for face watching' is used for *gubbo* 'bribe' and *bä 'ôğğu säw t'äffa* lit. 'a person disappeared in his hand' is used for *gäddälä* 'He killed'. Direct mention of the criminal actions is thus avoided and they are replaced by the roundabout expressions. Then an adjustment in the connotative meanings of the substitutes takes place.

d) Taboo of propriety

Another group of words affected by the taboo of propriety include sexual activities, names of some parts of the body, and their functions.

Taboo of propriety

1. *k'it'* 'buttock, anus'

2. *ôms* 'vagina'

3. *k'ula* 'penis'

substitutes

mäk'k'ämäc'a 'seat'

yäset böllöt lit. 'genital of woman'

yäwänd böllöt lit. 'genital of man'

The euphemistic change of 'seat' to 'buttock' does not come out of the blue. Instead, it occurs through the process of metonymy: there is a direct connection between *k'it'* 'buttock' and *mäk'k'ämäc'a* 'seat'. One function of *k'it'* is to serve as a seat while *mäk'k'ämäc'a* is an item of furniture for sitting on. The transfer of meaning occurs due to this contiguity.

This brief selection demonstrates the semantic changes that arise in response to various taboo subjects. Mostly a precise (but socially unacceptable) word is replaced by a more verbose expression which is socially acceptable.

In all cases (in the given data), amelioration of connotative meaning occurs. Metonymy and metaphor can also play their own role when a euphemism substitutes for a tabooed word. In most cases the euphemistic term becomes the (or an) ordinary term for the thing in question, in addition to retaining its original denotation.

3.2 Elliptical Changes

In the passage of time, it often happens that a phrase made up of two words loses one word; however, the surviving word absorbs the entire meaning. This phenomenon occurs because the contiguity of the two words imposes a strong association between the two words in a phrase. Thus, when one word is omitted, the meaning is transferred to its surviving partner. The following phrases in Amharic have undergone elliptical changes.

- 1) *yä-bet 'əḱ'a* 'of house objects, things, etc.' → *'əḱ'a* 'household, things, etc.'
- 2) *adänzaž 'əs* 'a herb that stupefies' → *'əs* 'drugs'

'əs is the ordinary Ge'ez (and Semitic) word for 'tree, plant'. In today's Amharic, however, this word has come to refer predominantly to *adänzaž 'əs* 'a herb that stupefies' through the process of specialization (this will be discussed under specialization later). This two-word phrase is very common in modern society so that a desire for economy could plausibly motivate an elliptical shortening. Indeed, the word *adänzaž* is now frequently deleted by ellipsis, but its meaning survives as part of the meaning of the surviving word *'əs*. The latter word is seldom used now in its original meaning "plant", so that the new sense "drugs" (the result of ellipsis) has become its common meaning. This process, whereby the sense of a contiguous word *adänzaž* 'that deadens (of drug)' is transferred to its neighbor *'əs* 'plant' through ellipsis, is what M. Bréal (1964:200) described as 'contagion': one word becomes 'infected' with the sense of another with which it is frequently in contact.

3.3 Pejoration

As indicated in the literature section, in the process of pejoration, a neutral or positive meaning becomes more negative. In Amharic, the meanings of many words have deteriorated due to various factors.

Social prejudice against certain occupations, and groups of people, for instance, has deformed the meaning of the following words.

Words denoting occupations

Pejorative Meaning

- a) 'azmari 'singer' → 'one who insults, abuses others' [DTD: *mōlasāñña*, p. 181]
(DTD p. 181)

'azmari, which once only meant 'singer, minstrel', has acquired a negative sense 'a sharp-tongued person'. The mechanism at work in this change is that of metonymic association. Singers ('azmariwočč) in their lyrics praise those people who give them money and insult others (who refuse to give them money).

- b) baläge 'peasant' → 'rude, impolite, ill-mannered'
(LD p. 35)

baläge was originally a term used to mean 'peasant'. It was also used to refer to someone from the countryside. But in present-day Amharic, it means 'rude, impolite' person. This pejorative meaning, which is the result of speakers' prejudice against the peasants, reveals the contempt in which peasants were held.

- c) näfl'äñña 'rifleman, musketeer' → derogatory term used (outside the Amhara region) in referring to the Amhara people
(AR p. 242)

This pejorative change of meaning may be explained by referring to a historical incident which occurred during the regime of Emperor Menelik II. His soldiers (*näfl'äññočč*) subdued the people of the southern and eastern parts of Ethiopia so as to make the people of the area submit to the Emperor and to unify the country.

After this historical event, the people began to develop negative attitudes and hatred towards the soldiers (*näfl'äññočč*) who had controlled them by force.

Since the soldiers were from the northern part (particularly from the Amhara area), the people generalized this extreme hatred to the entire Amhara ethnic group. So *näfl'äñña* now does not mean a 'rifleman', but is purely a derogatory term referring to a person from

Amhara as oppressor, aggressor, harsh, etc. The original meaning of the word has deteriorated owing to this historical context.

In this change, synecdoche (part for whole) has played a part in causing the word *näft'ännä* to acquire its present sense.

Other source words

Pejorative Meaning

- d) *t'òk'ur* 'black, dark (skin)' → 'slave', 'Negro' [LD *šank'òlla*, p. 92]
(LD p. 92)

t'òk'ur 'black', which originally only meant 'dark (skin)', became an insult in the course of time. Hence, blackness in skin is pejorated so that it conveys a connotation of slavery.

Interestingly, in the U.S., "black" has become an ameliorated term for Negro.

(Genseler, p.c)

- e) *aškär* 'boy or girl' (ID p. 122) → 'servant, domestic'

aškär once meant 'boy or girl' but has come to mean 'servant, domestic'. This shows that children, like the above social groups, can be the object of prejudice. The original positive meaning survives in Gondar and Gojjam dialects.

- f) *k'äws* 'confusion, disagreement' → 'mad, touched (slightly crazy)'
(DTD p. 1137)

The word was originally used to express disagreement (in ideas) with others. Now, the word is used pejoratively to mean 'mad'.

- g) *musònnä* 'damage, decay' → 'corruption, theft, using the public wealth for personal interest'
(DTD p. 822)

- h) *däbbärä* 'arrange in order, found a monastery, make something honourable' (DTD p. 334) → 'dreary, abhorrent, dismal'

- i) *däddäb* 'piece of meat which remains on the skin (after an animal is killed and skinned)' → 'idiot, stupid, obtuse'

(DTD p. 333)

The last two cases (h, and i) are pretty clearly pejorative developments; however, I was not able to establish the connection that links the old meaning (a neutral one) and the new meaning (the pejorative one). It might be homonymy: one word with two unrelated senses.

3.4 Amelioration

In this section, I will discuss words which show amelioration (improvement) in their meaning. This is the opposite of pejoration.

Words (with negative sense)

Ameliorated (more positive sense)

1) *zega* 'beggar, poor' → 'citizen, national (n.)'
(LD p. 79)

In Ludolf's dictionary, the word *zega* meant 'beggar'. In the 19th century, this word also began to mean 'serf, bondsman', someone who is under the harsh control of the ruler. At that time, *zegōnnāt* seems to have meant 'subjection (submission)' to the powerful ruler. In present-day Amharic, however, *zega* refers to a person who has full rights as a citizen. Hence, *zega* now is neither 'beggar' nor 'subject'.

2) *mōrħo* (*mōrkoñña*) 'slave' → 'captive, prisoner'
(LD p. 11)

In earlier times, the cognate word *māmarāk* had the extremely negative sense of being a captive slave; a captive in battle was routinely subject to enslavement by the victors. In modern times, however, this sense of captive slavery is greatly weakened. A captive now is simply a person who is kept in prison.

Although it is not possible to say the word has acquired a truly positive sense, one cannot deny the improvement that the modern sense shows as compared to its previous meaning. The ascendancy of human rights and the emergence of other humanitarian movements have contributed to the better treatment of captives in the modern era.

- 3) *gäräd* 'female servant, slave' → 'one who works in someone's house on a monthly salary'
(DTD p. 483)

In this case, the meaning of *gäräd* is improved since the more negative sense 'female slave' has given way to 'salaried house worker'.

- 4) *lat'te* 'rude, ill-mannered, shameless, brazen, one who farts' (DTD p. 713) → 'one who is unmarried'

The meaning of *lat'te* is ameliorated since it has now come to represent something much more favorable than it originally referred to.

- 5) *lōḡ* 'boy, servant' → 'honorific title', as in *lōḡ* Iyasu II (former king of Ethiopia)

- 6) *lōḡagäräd* 'servant girl' → 'adolescent (female), virgin, who is not yet married'
(DTD p. 438)

The previous meaning of *lōḡagäräd* was associated with the state of being a servant. In the later development, however, this unfavorable meaning is avoided and the word has taken on a neutral (hence ameliorated) sense, which is 'adolescent (female), virgin, who is not yet married'.

- 7) *baldäräba* 'a servant whose business is to introduce another, and to act as middleman' (ID p. 84) → 'colleague, friend'

3.5 Generalization

In generalization, a word comes to be applied to a wider variety of things (thereby increasing in scope) and thus it tells us less about the things referred to.

Words (having specific meanings)

Generalization of Meaning

a) *kätäma* 'the camp of the king or a prince' → 'any city, town'
(ID p. 142)

b) *amba gännän* lit. a 'person who becomes strong in a village' (DTD p. 302) → 'dictator, a self-appointed ruler'

c) *môrt* 'crop, product (of farm)' → 'any product from farm, factory and so on'

d) *sänäd* 'receipt' → 'document, any written record, evidence'
(AR p. 140)

e) *däbr* 'mountain, monastery' → 'church'
(DTD p. 334)

Here the meaning 'mountain' was extended by metonymy to 'monastery (on a mountain)', which was then generalized to 'church'.

f) *korädda* 'young married female, adolescent' (DTD p. 771) → 'any girl who reaches the age of puberty'

g) *budôn* 'team (in *gänna* game)' → 'any group of people working together'
(DTD p. 156)

h) *šōkučča* 'a kind of finger game' → 'competition, struggle, rivalry'
(DTD p. 1222)

i) *guba'e* 'gathering (for preaching)' → 'conference, assembly, meeting'
(LD p. 96)

j) *wäyzäro* 'queen, the wife of a king' → 'lady, a title for any married woman'
(LD p. 72)

3.6 Specialization

When a relatively general meaning becomes more specific in the course of time, this is termed specialization of meaning. Here are some examples that illustrate this phenomenon in Amharic.

List of words (having general meaning)

Their restricted meaning in present-day Amharic

1) *däwe* 'sickness, disease, illness' → 'skin disease'
(LD p. 84, ID p. 167)

2) *bəllət* 'part of the body in general' → 'genitals'
(ID p. 84)

(cf. English *member* in the sense 'penis'; similarly German *Glied* in the same two senses)

3) *šämmätä* 'to trade, negotiate, buy and sell, traffic' (ID p. 64) → this word has undergone specialization in two stages. These are:

a) 'to trade' > 'buy or sell grain or other cereals'

b) 'buying and selling of grain' > 'only buying mostly for grain'

4) *s'ota* 'clan, group' (DTD p. 97) → 'gender (female and male)'
 Also 'series, order, etc.' (LD p. 97)

5) *g^wadd* 'colleague, intimate friend' → 'revolutionary, fighter, or a person who is a
 (DTD p. 302) member of the socialist or communist party,
 the smallest army unit'

6) *c'igär* 'hair that grows from the skin of people → 'hair that grows around the
 (especially on their head) and animals' (LD p. 95) sex organs and the armpits'

7) *mädäb* 'stand (at the market), stall for → 'person (in grammar)', 'social class
 merchandise, platform' (in Communism)'

8) '*äs*' 'herb, plant' (AR p. 47), (DTD p. 950) → 'drug', lit. 'plant that is
 addictive', like *c'at*

This last development (plant → drug) was discussed under Ellipsis in section 3.2 above.

3.7 Grammaticalization

Grammaticalization is a process whereby a formerly independent word takes on a grammatical function. The meaning of a grammaticalized word undergoes a process termed semantic bleaching; the semantics of the grammaticalized word is thereby 'weakened'.

1. Spatial becomes Temporal (Spatial → Temporal)

- *fit* 'face (of human), front' → 'before, formerly, previously'
- *h^wala* 'behind, in the back' → 'later, afterwards'

This takes the following path: body part → space → time

Here grammaticalization (body-part > space) seems to be followed by a further metaphorical transfer which led the spatial item to become temporal as well.

Interestingly, *fit* 'face' can be used temporally to denote either past or future, as the following examples show.

a) *bä-fit* 'at the face' → PAST

Ex: *bä-fit agännäw nābār*

'I used to meet him formerly' (lit. 'in face, in front')

b) *fit* → FUTURE

Ex: *fätānaw yä-fit-ačč-ən'əhud yə-ğğämmāral*

'The exam will begin next Sunday' (lit. 'Sunday of our face', i.e. 'Sunday facing us')

c) *bä-h^wala* 'at the back, behind' → 'afterwards' FUTURE

Ex: *bä-h^wala əmāt'allāhu*

'I will come later' (lit. 'at the back')

2. Noun → Postposition

- a) *bä...fit* 'in (the) face' → 'in front of'
- b) *bä...ğārba* 'in (the) back' → 'at the back of'
- c) *bä...əgədr* 'in (the) leg' → 'in place of'
- d) *bä...bet* 'in (the) house' → 'according to'

3. Noun → Preposition

- a) *bä-wannanāt* 'having priority, primarily' comes from *wanna-nāt* 'principality'

4. *h^wala* 'back, behind' → connective

Ex: *yā mattōsāra kāhonä h^w ala lämōn māt't'əh?*

'If you do not work, then, why did you come?'

Here, *h^w ala* does not mean 'behind or later' but is a logical connective.

5. Preposition → Adverb

bāt'am 'with taste, sweetness' (Ge'ez) > 'completely, fully' (ID p. 94) > 'very'

6. *ras* 'head' > reflexive pronoun as in *ras-u* 'himself'

This is attested in many languages in which some body-part noun (body, head, belly, bone, person or even 'soul') plus possessive comes to be a reflexive pronoun.

7. *bä- mākakkäl* 'at the center' → 'between'

3.8. Metaphoricization

In the process of metaphoricization, one concept is understood in terms of its partial similarity with another concept. This is an extremely common phenomenon all over the world, and is an important mechanism which leads many words to change their meaning. In this section, four kinds of metaphoric transfers are treated, namely Concrete becomes Abstract, Anthropomorphic metaphor, Animal metaphor, and Synaesthetic metaphor, as presented in Ullmann (1962:214-215).

The discussion is based on the explanations by Ullmann (1962) and Geeraerts (1997), as mentioned in chapter 2 (above).

The point is that a sense S_1 has some common feature with another sense S_2 which belongs to a different conceptual domain. In the course of time, it can happen that the name n_1 pertaining to S_1 will be felt as an adequate designation for S_2 . Then the transfer of the name n_1 to sense S_2 can take place. This can occur irrespective of whether S_2 did or did not already have its own n_2 .

For example, '*əmmārta*, which originally meant 'leaping, a sort of jumping' (LD p. 11), has now come to denote 'progress, development'. The physical sense of leaping has been

transferred to the abstract sense ‘progress’, due to the common feature of forward motion shared by the two concepts.

3.8.1. Concrete to Abstract

Words and their older meanings in Amharic Their meaning in contemporary Amharic

- 1) *c’āk’k’onä* ‘step on, trample (physically)’ → ‘oppress, be cruel, repress, domineer’
(DTD p. 617)
- 2) *c’änäggäfä* ‘miscarried’ → ‘aborted (plan)’, as in *yä c’änngafä abiyot*
(DTD P. 711) ‘short lived revolution’
- 3) *läwr* ‘exchange, alternation, trade, substitution, commerce, traffic’ → ‘change in political system or the replacement of one government by another’
(ID p. 34)
- 4) *k’äläbbäsä* ‘turn down (the collar)’ → ‘to impede, to hinder; impeding the progress of any situation’
- 5) *māwak’ər* ‘poles in the structure of a roof’ → the ‘organizational structure of an institution’
(DTD p. 453)
- 6) *t’öru* ‘clear, pure, clean, good, nice’ → ‘agreed, ok, let it be, fine’..
(DTD p. 387)

A number of such meaning-transfers have been very prominent in politics and the media in the last few years.

- 1) *nək’ännak’e* from *näk’ännäk’ä*, → ‘inspire, provoke’
which meant ‘shake, churn’

- 2) *ōrmōḡḡa* 'to go forth' → 'advancement'
- 3) *bāt'ābbātā* 'stir up, rouse (for things & objects)' → 'disturb, agitate, upset'
(ID p. 94)
- 4) *fāndata* 'explosion, bursting, blowing up' → 'young person who is insolent, arrogant, refractory'
- 5) *šāfan* 'cover (of book), casing' → 'reason, cause'
(DTD p. 1233)
- 6) *zāggābā* 'gather, collect, accumulate (for things and objects)' (DTD p. 487) → 'collecting, recording (information), and gathering news (for media)'
- 7) *at'lānak'k'ārā* from *t'ānak'k'ārā*, which means 'collect, accumulate' (for things and objects) (DTD p. 572) → 'compose, assemble, prepare' for news, articles and reports
- 8) *tārāgaggātā* 'trample, trample down' → 'confirm, prove, affirm'
- 9) *tāk'k'wāmā* 'point at, point out' → 'give a hint, inform on, tip off'
(DTD p. 582)
- 10) *ammäläkkātā* 'show, denote' → 'inform, notify, apply, enlighten'
(ID p. 18)
- 11) *asämmärā* 'draw a line' → 'emphasize'

3.8.2. Anthropomorphic Metaphors

Sometimes parts of the human bodies are named after animals, a process which Ullmann calls ‘anthropomorphic metaphor’. This use of animal body parts for human body parts may originally have begun pejoratively, or as a means of joking. Over the course of time, however, these may come to permanently name the human body part. This is a rather rare phenomenon in Amharic. Here are some examples.

<u>Animals Body Part</u>		<u>Become Human Body Part</u>
1) <i>wärč</i> ‘front leg of animals’	→	‘arm (of humans)’
2) <i>mōnc’ōr</i> ‘lip (the upper part)’ mostly for animals	→	‘lips’ in Gondar dialect (mostly) pejorative
3) <i>ğälla</i> in my dialect, it refers to the genitals (male) of a donkey	→	‘genitals (male for humans)’ but derogatory

3.8.3. Animal Metaphors

In Amharic, many animal names are transferred to the human sphere humorously, pejoratively, ironically, or offensively. This is due to the similarity in (perceived) behavior and appearance between the animal and the sense in the human sphere.

<u>Names of Animals</u>		<u>Sense in the human sphere</u>
a) <i>ğḍb</i> ‘hyena’	→	‘glutton, corpulent’
b) <i>čab</i> ‘snake’	→	‘spiteful, evil, wicked’
c) <i>anbässa</i> ‘lion’	→	‘bold, fearless’
d) <i>wušša</i> ‘dog’	→	‘wanton, promiscuous’
e) <i>asama</i> ‘pig’	→	‘big eater, glutton’

- | | | | |
|----|------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| f) | <i>bäg</i> 'sheep' | → | 'innocent, kind, foolish' |
| g) | <i>tola</i> 'ape' | → | 'shrewd, tricky, clever' |
| h) | <i>ahäyya</i> 'donkey' | → | 'stupid, unintelligent' |

In the Anthropomorphic metaphor section, I presented cases where parts of the human body are named after animal body parts. Conversely, many expressions referring to the human body and its parts are applied to inanimate objects. This process is common all over the world. Hence the following Amharic words are transferred to the inanimate objects.

**List of expressions referring to
inanimate objects**

Gloss

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. <i>yä- täräp'p'eza</i> 'ögör | 'the leg of a table' |
| 2. <i>yä- tärara</i> 'anat | 'the summit of a mountain'
(from 'anat 'top of the head') |
| 3. <i>yä- wašša af</i> | 'the mouth of a cave' |
| 4. <i>yä- bōrōlle angät</i> | 'the neck of a flask' |
| 5. <i>yä- sämay hod</i> | 'the belly of the sky' (= the sky itself) |

This process also shows, as expected, that a word may acquire one or more figurative senses (which radiate from the central sense) without losing its original meaning.

3.8.4 Synaesthetic Metaphors

This kind of metaphor deals with the transposition of terms from one sensory modality to another. Some Amharic terms for touching, tasting, and smelling can come to name terms for the other senses. This transfer is possible by the force of metonymy (since one sensory modality "touches" another which is within the shared domain of sense perception).

1. Taste → Sound

a) *t'afac* 'tasty, delicious' → *t'afac muzik'a* 'sweet music' (delicious)

Thus **taste** (for food and drinks) is used for music (**sound**).

2. Touch → sound

a) *šakara* 'rough' → *šakara dðms* 'rough sound/voice'

b) *läslassa* 'soft' → *läslassa dðms* 'soft voice'

c) *k'äzk'azza* 'cold' → *k'äzk'azza dðms* 'cold voice'

d) *muk* 'hot, warm' → *mok'k' yalä muzik'a* 'hot music'

3. Sight → smell

k'onğo 'pretty' → *k'onğo mä'aza*, lit. 'pretty odor'

k'onğo bunna, lit. 'pretty coffee'

To take just one example, speakers use *šakara dðms* 'rough voice' because they perceive some kind of similarity between *šakara* 'rough' (sense of touch) and the quality of certain voices. The same explanation works for the other examples given above.

3.8.5 Sensory modality to mental or emotion verb

a) *ayyä* 'look at, see' → 'understand'

b) *sämma* 'hear' → 'undersand'

c) *märara* 'sour, bitter' → *märara hazän* 'extreme (bitter) sadness'

As these examples show, this kind of transfer seems intuitively to be especially 'natural'. Indeed, such developments are extremely common throughout the world.

3.9 Metonymicization

In this process, names are transferred from one meaning to another due to a contiguity of the meanings. The kinds of associations that may exist between the meanings, and between the possible domains of contiguity, are of various kinds (temporal, spatial, causal, etc.).

Below I have categorized the metonymic changes occurring in Amharic based on the kinds of association underlying them.

1. Metonymic transfers based on spatial relations

a) *c'ənk'əllat* 'brain' → 'skull, head'
LD (P.95)

A term for 'brain' *c'ənk'əllat* is used here to refer to a spatially contiguous part 'skull', with further metonymic transfer to 'head'.

b) *k'ərndəb* 'pupil' (eye) → *k'əndəb* 'eyelid'
(rn > nd)

c) *murt* 'buttock' → 'genitals (of male)' but derogative
(LD p. 12)

The older meaning of *murt*, that is, 'buttock' survives in Gondar and Gojjam dialects.

d) *kätäma* 'town' → 'inhabitants'

This happens when the word *kätäma* 'town' is used to refer to the people living in it. It is a metonymic change based on spatial relations since the name of the place is used for the people occupying it.

e) *betämängəst* 'palace' → the 'government' [of Ethiopia]

f) *wämbär* lit. 'chair' → 'judge'

g) *zäbt'əyya* 'police station' (AR p. 146) → 'prison'

The association between the two senses is obvious in this case. Police stations usually have a small 'prison', i.e a jail. This in turn was extended to a prison of any sort.

2. Part for whole

This metonymic transfer involves a part to whole relationship. Here are some transfers of this kind involving body parts:

- a) *k'int'or* 'clitoris' → 'vulva, vagina'
- b) *k'w'olot* 'testicles' → 'genitals (of male)'
- c) *'andäbät* 'roof of the mouth, palate' → 'speech-producing organs'

In the above three cases (a, b, c), a term for a visible person part shifts to the visible whole of which it is a part. A lack of clear boundaries in the non-linguistic world, or a lack of attention to boundaries, often helps to account for these changes, as in (a-c) above.

3. Place names

- a) *'arbamönc* 'forty springs' → name of a town

The name *'arbamönc* 'forty springs' denotes a town in the southern part of Ethiopia. This occurs due to the presence of forty natural springs in some section of the town. These natural springs give a peculiar feature to the town. This is how the term *'arbamönc* was transferred from its original sphere and came to name the town.

- b) *iököl döngay*, lit. 'implanted stone' → name of a town around
Gondar, which has such a stone

It may seem odd to think of a proper name as a case of metonymy, but it is essentially just the reverse of a commonly accepted type of metonymic change: the use of a

place-name to name a typical product of that place (e.g. *champagne*). With '*arbamōnc*', a typical feature of the place is used to generate the place-name.

4. The material that the object is made of for the object

In the following data, the name of the material that the object is made of is transferred to the name of the object.

a) *koso* 'name of a tree from which anthelmintic medicine is made' → 'anthelmintic medicine (against tapeworm)'
LD (P.66)

b) *sōnbul* 'an aromatic wood' → 'kind of perfume having good smell'
LD (P.26)

c) *suf* 'wool' → 'woolens'

5. Metonymy based on temporal and causal relations

a) *dollätä* from *dulätta*, which means
'discussion, meeting, assembly' → 'conspiracy, plot, intrigue'
AR p. 51)

The development from 'discussion' to 'conspiracy' is clear: At a certain point in time, some meetings may result in conspiracy. This situation may occur repeatedly, so that people begin to associate meetings with conspiracy. As a result, *dollätä*, which is the name of the cause (in this case, 'meeting'), comes also to denote the result, that is, 'conspiracy'.

b) *addämä* 'invite to a meal, visit, feast' → 'to plot, strike, conspire'
(ID p. 133)

The explanation given for *dollätta* also works here. An association is created between 'invitation to a feast' and 'plotting' at some point in time due to some incidental events (notably, people may plot under the cover of a feast). Then, *addämä* is transferred to refer to

the sense 'to plot', which thus is seen as the result of the invitation to a feast. In modern Amharic, *m'addäm* means 'to strike', a further semantic extension.

c) *t'äbba* 'become day, dawn' → 'starts, begins (a new month, year, era, summer)'
This transfer of meaning involves temporal relations between the two senses; *t'äbba* 'dawn' (the beginning of the day) is shifted to mean 'beginning of a new month or year'.

6) Complex cases: metonymy plus extension

- a) *t'unča* 'muscle' → 'power'
- b) *mōlas* 'tongue' → 'language'
- c) *mizan* 'scale, balance' → 'justice'

The "metonymy" in these cases arguably involves a meaning shift from a thing x to an abstract concept that often closely involves x. Thus power often involves muscles; justice (in the marketplace) can involve scales; language involves the tongue. The abstract concept is then extended so that it no longer necessarily involves a connection with the original object x.

3.10 Differentiation of Synonyms

Words which are (apparently) synonyms can acquire different meanings in the course of time. Here are some Amharic examples which illustrate the phenomenon. The examples are all taken from Armbruster's English-to-Amharic dictionary; the Amharic synonyms are presented in this dictionary as possible equivalent translations of a single English term.

Synonymous words in Armbruster's Amharic

Differentiated meaning in Present-day Amharic

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------|--|
| 1. <i>addäbabay, čōlot</i> | 'court' | <i>addäbabay</i> 'public place'; <i>čōlot</i> 'court (of law)' |
| 2. <i>hotel, lukanda</i> | 'hotel' | <i>lukanda</i> 'butchery'; <i>hotel</i> 'hotel' |
| 3. <i>addaraš, betämängōst</i> | 'palace' | <i>addaraš</i> 'hall'; <i>betämängōst</i> 'palace' |

Note in passing that *hotel*, *lukanda* are both borrowed words (cf. Italian *locanda* ‘inn’), which apparently underwent differentiation after being borrowed into Amharic.

3.11. Precision of Meaning

Some words and expressions which were originally ambiguous in meaning become more precise in the passage of time. Many of the expressions in the three older dictionaries I used (Armbruster, Isenberg, and Desta T/Wold) are apparently ambiguous. This ambiguity may be attributed to an overuse of descriptive, instrumental expressions and verbosity in expressing things and events. In present-day Amharic, however, speakers often use words and expressions more precisely and economically.

The following data demonstrate how meanings have become more precise in present-day Amharic as compared to the more ambiguous meanings in the past. Note that here we do not consider change in the meaning of a word, but rather change in the word(s) used to express a meaning.

<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Older Amharic term (ambiguous)</u>	<u>Modern Amharic term (precise)</u>
1. ‘barber’	<i>lac</i> ‘one who shaves’	→ <i>s’ägur astäkakay</i>
2. ‘plan’	<i>ser’at</i> ‘procedure’	→ <i>’ök’k’äd</i>
3. ‘bandage’	<i>masäriya</i> ‘anything serving to bind’	→ <i>fašša</i>
4. ‘breakfast’	<i>yät’äwat mäsä</i> ‘a morning lunch’	→ <i>k’urs</i>
5. ‘private’	<i>kälkäl</i> ‘anything forbidden’	→ <i>yägäl</i>
6. ‘reward’	<i>dämoz</i> ‘salary’	→ <i>šallomat</i>

7. 'expense' *yätäsätt'ä gänzäb* 'money that is given' → *wäc'*

8. 'cigarette' *bäwäräk'ät yätät'äk'allälä tōmbaho* → *sigara*
lit. 'tobacco that is wrapped in paper'

Here the older meanings are not only more ambiguous but appear 'unnecessarily' descriptive. The modern meanings are clearer and more precise. Some of these present-day Amharic expressions are also descriptive, but in a way that provides specific information which serves to disambiguate the term (cf. 'barber'). Interestingly, two of the words are borrowings: *fäšša* (< Italian *fascia*) and *sigara*. Introduction of a foreign word with a narrowly delimited meaning is one possible path to reducing ambiguity.

CHAPTER FOUR

Summary and Conclusions

4.1 Summary and Conclusions

In this thesis, I have shown the nature and process of semantic change by comparing the older Amharic with present-day Amharic, as well as giving instances of synchronic semantic change.

A variety of factors, sometimes working together, can lead to change in the semantics of words. Different kinds of meaning changes have been identified on the basis of the various factors and association mechanisms that underlie the change. The following table summarizes and exemplifies the nature and the types of the major meaning changes in Amharic which I observed in my research.

Besides, the thesis is an indicative of the fact that semantic change is systematic and regular. The semantic changes documented above in Amharic show at least the following specific tendencies apart from what I have just summarized above.

1. Spatial come to refer to mental

Ex. *'ammäläkätä* 'point at' → 'inform'

2. A body- part term shifts to refer to a spatially contiguous body-part within the same whole.

Ex. *c'ənk'əllat* 'brain' → 'skull'

3. A term for an animal part shifts to refer to a person part.

Ex. *wärč* 'front leg of animals' → 'hand (for humans)'

4. Terms referring to the part come to refer to the whole.

Ex. *k'ənt'ədr* 'clitoris' → 'vagina'

5. Spatial terms become temporal terms.

Ex. *fit* 'face, front' → 'before'

Moreover, many words which were ambiguous in their meanings have become more precise in present-day Amharic.

	Word	Old meaning	Present-day meaning	Type of change
1	<i>mōrt</i>	'crop, product (of farm)	any 'product from farm, factory, etc.'	Generalization
2	<i>zega</i>	'beggar, poor'	'citizen'	Amelioration
3	<i>c'igär</i>	'hair'	'hair of the sex organs and the armpits'	Specialization
4	<i>baläge</i>	'farmer'	'rude, impolite'	Pejoration
5	<i>'andäbät</i>	the 'palate'	'speech- producing organs'	Metonymy
6	<i>bät'am</i>	'with sweetness'	'very'	Grammaticalization
7	<i>tärägagät'ä</i>	'trampled down'	'proved'	Metaphoricization

4.2 Recommendations

On the basis of the data analysis, the conclusion, and the problems I observed, I would like to make the following recommendations:

1. A systematic classification of the historical stages of Amharic is badly needed. This might consist of the chronological order of **ancient**, **middle**, **early**, and **modern** Amharic, with the respective periods defined in a fairly precise way. Linguists and historians should work together on this.
2. There is an acute lack of an etymological dictionary of Amharic. The Academy of Ethiopian Languages and other concerned individuals should make the creation of such a dictionary a priority.
3. Dictionaries, in general, should be updated on a regular basis. Lexicographers, understanding the changing nature of words, should update their dictionaries in as timely a way as possible. This will be especially feasible for on-line dictionaries.
4. The Department of Linguistics and Philology should seriously consider an introductory semantics course during the first year of the MA academic program. This will make it possible for students to consider semantics in their theses, thus creating studies which will enrich the field of semantics (both synchronic and diachronic).

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Declaration

This thesis is my original work and all source of materials used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

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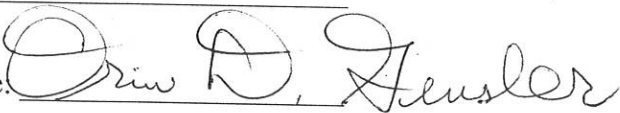
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Approval

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as university advisor.

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