

Embedded direct speech and shifting indexicals in Semitic

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Ethio-Semitic languages, notably Amharic, and marginally also Akkadian, Arabic and further Central Semitic languages, embed direct speech, including imperatives, or rather use direct speech in syntactical context, where most other languages would normally use subordinate clauses. A typical Amharic example is the following: respectively, are the following:

b-assər dəq̄iqa wəst̄ əməṭallāhu alä
in-ten minute within come.IPFV.1SG say.PF.3SG.M
'he said (that) he would come in ten minutes'
(“in ten minutes I will come he said”)

Typologically, the phenomenon is also attested in Slavonic, notably in Slovenian, e.g.:

Mama pravi, da jo dobro poslušaj!
mother says that herwell listen.IMP.2SG
'Mother says you should listen to her carefully'
(“Mother says that listen! to her carefully”)

Things can get more complicated, especially with regard to the use of person in pronouns, depending on the complexity of the embedded phrase, thus leading to the phenomenon of shifting indexicals. In this paper, I attempt both a descriptive and a formal analysis of this phenomenon.

References

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