PART I

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

SECTION A

Guides for the reader

1. Introduction

When a story-teller "knows how to tell a story", what linguistic knowledge is he or she employing to tell it? And when a story-teller "knows a story", what exactly is it he or she knows?

The main purpose of this study is to answer these two questions on the basis of narrative texts from Highland East Cushitic (HEC) languages, especially Gedeo.

It is assumed here that these two kinds of knowledge can be simulated by the generation of actual narratives from their minimal representations - a generation strictly controlled by rules. So, given the necessary set of linguistic rules, and given the necessary lexicon - what else is there in a person's data base which enables him or her to narrate a particular story? The representation of this particular knowledge will be called a narrative's "semantic frames roster" (SFR, to use Afroasiatic mnemonics). In its minimal form, a Semantic Frames Roster consists of a sequenced list of predicate frames, and it carries all and only those text signals which are not predictable. In this regard, the semantic frames roster differs from Rosenberg's "story data base" (SDB, 1979: 97). To display a Semantic Frames Roster on paper, charts are used - similar to music scores which also represent a fabric of complex simultaneous structures. Statistically, a minimal semantic frames roster has about 25% the size of the actual narrative. The signals in the semantic frames roster trigger various kinds of rules: text rules, pragmatic rules, morpho-syntactic rules, and phonological rules; and step by step they generate the actual surface form. Rule ordering is surprisingly free, which actually corresponds to the freedom a narrator experiences as he or she narrates a story.

Ideally, text rules of this kind should be valid not for one text alone, or one speaker alone, but for the language as a whole - and possibly beyond. Some narratives are therefore investigated in more than one surface variant, and the synthesis of texts in the Gedeo language is paralleled by syntheses of a few texts