

Research Abstracts

Selected abstracts of research projects in social sciences and humanities
at Mekelle University¹

Biographic research: A study program as part of the research project of the TPLF/EPRDF-DERG civil war of 1974-1991

The objectives of this biographic research are: (1) to analyze the role of individuals in the struggle; (2) document the ups & downs during the struggle; (3) assess the economic, political & military significance of the struggle.

Mekelle University made an agreement with the TPLF to launch a general historical study of the struggle period of the organization in the seventeen years from 1974 to 1991. Accordingly, the Department in consultation with the university top management has established a group of researchers and collected private proposals to launch the project. The Department agreed to begin with biographic research to be conducted by the 2001 (E.C.) graduating students of the Department. Based on this agreement 33 graduating students study the life history/biography of 33 TPLF fighters from all walks of life. (Project co-ordinator at MU since the beginning of the project: Department of History and Cultural Studies).

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Did the silver and gold of the Aksumites originate in Tigray?

The Aksumite kingdom is known, among others, for its coinage, and the export of gold. Until today, however, it is not known where the silver for the coins came from, as no silver mining is known from the Aksumite realm. In Ethiopian Studies it is also “common knowledge” that Tigray does not possess gold deposits, and usually one believes the claim of the Aksumites (recorded by Cosmas Indicopleustes) that they had to import gold exclusively from remote regions outside their realm, which could only be reached by several months travel. These territories are often identified with Wellega or Beni Shangul, where important gold deposits are known since long. However, a preliminary ethnohistorical research undertaken by the researcher Wolbert Smidt in 2008 in collaboration with Habtom Gebremedhin from BOFED Mekelle (presented at the German Archaeological Institute Cairo in April 2010 and Vienna University in June 2010) confirmed the presence of traditional peasants’ gold mining in rivers and other areas in Tigray, for example in Tembén. In 2011 an

¹ Abstracts submitted in January 2011 by the Research and Community Service Council of the College of Social Sciences and Languages (CSSL) and individual researchers. These abstracts are only showing a small extract of ongoing research projects. We hope to be able to publish much more in the coming issues and kindly encourage project leaders for submissions.

agreement has been concluded between Mekelle University and Vienna University, that a small-scale ethnohistorical, numismatic and geological research carried out in collaboration of the two universities should document the traditional usage of such mining areas (including possible oral traditions) and make a metallurgic analysis of samples in order to identify the origin of metal supply for the Aksumite coinage. The researcher Wolbert Smidt (Mekelle University) is responsible for organising the local documentation, and the researcher Wolfgang Hahn (Vienna University) for organising the metallurgical analysis of the samples and analyze the implications for numismatics. (Local project co-ordinator at MU: Wolbert Smidt, Department of History and Cultural Studies).

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History of Hungarian-Ethiopian Relations

For several historical reasons there was a relatively unusual interest in Hungary into Ethiopia, i.e. in comparison to other Eastern and Central European countries. Besides this dozens of Hungarians visited or even settled in Ethiopia in the last 150 years. Their life and work in Ethiopia were and is more or less (but rather more) unknown to the wide international Ethiopianist research as Hungarian is not a world language.

The first 70 years (roughly between 1867 and 1941) of the Hungarian-Ethiopian relations have been described in the PhD thesis of Szélinger Balázs, which was published in Hungarian language at the University of Szeged. One chapter of it, translated into English, was published in *Aethiopica*, Hamburg ("Hungary and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935-1936"). Since then constantly further material has been collected to continue this research and extend its scope to the next period, after World War II, with special regard to the *Derg* era when dozens of Hungarian doctors, architects and other intellectuals were working in Ethiopia in the framework of socialist cooperation. (Investigator: Szélinger Balázs, Department of History and Cultural Studies).

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Mental Health, Self-Esteem and Social Support of Children in “Difficult Circumstances” in Abba Gebremichael Daughter’s Village, Mekelle

Children in difficult circumstances are those who experience separation from parents, peers, and society and who are orphaned and vulnerable. Directly or indirectly, these conditions affect their mental health, social competence, self-esteem/-worth. Coming to the academic arena, they are significantly disadvantaged. Investigating the mental health, self-esteem and social cohesion conditions of children in difficult circumstances shall pave the way for the health and fully functioning individuals. Without having a healthy society,

capitalizing the economic development of a country is unthinkable. Mental health includes satisfying life, social support, self-worth, maintaining interpersonal and social relations, and acquiring appropriate behaviors. A successful and satisfying childhood period leads to the development of socially acceptable behaviors, and positive self-esteem. These are determinants in order to live up to societal expectations and become competent enough academically. The societal capacity to ensure the welfare of its members by avoiding the disparities and extreme polarizations plays significant roles for the mental health of the children. The children's self-esteem influences their academic and later career success. These bring about emotional and social competence of the individuals thereby enhancing and building the capacity of the nation.

This research is therefore to be conducted to achieve the following objectives: (a) to assess the mental health conditions of the children in difficult circumstances, (b) to find out the social cohesion and capacity they have, (c) to assess their self-esteem, and (d) to explain the relationships of their mental health, social cohesion and self-esteem in academic achievement. After identifying and finding out their problems, corrective and supportive measures such as life and social skills, self-esteem and other skills development trainings will be offered. (Principal Investigator: Mulu Temere, Department of Psychology, Mekelle University).

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An exploration of the use of Irob language and its maintenance among the students of Irob-Saho community in the Tigray regional state

The Ethiopian constitution guarantees the right and equality of all languages in the country. Article 39, and sub-article 2, states, "Every Nation, Nationality and people in Ethiopia has the right to speak, to write and to develop its own language; to express, to develop and to promote its culture; and to preserve its history." The government also strongly argues that people should learn in their own mother tongue. In line with this, the College of Social Sciences and Languages has designed Language, Culture, Society and Development as one of its thematic areas. One of the rationales behind this thematic area is to ensure the use and maintenance of endangered languages and this study is directly related to this thematic area.

It is believed that if children are taught in another language other than their first or mother-tongue, it is likely for them to shift to the dominant language and then ultimately their first language declines. Learning through a dominant language does have extremely negative consequences particularly for the use and maintenance of minority children's first language. They learn a dominant language at the cost of the mother tongue which is displaced, and later often replaced by the dominant language.

Despite this very fact, in the Ethiopian context, not all languages are used as a medium of instruction and not all languages have the writing system.

Irobiñña is one of these languages. Till recently, the Irob language has no its own writing system and the community have been learning in Tigriñña starting from grade one up to grade eight and their language is not even given as a course in the school life of the children. Then a question arises: Will the different medium of instruction lead to different language use and further language shift? To answer this question, a comprehensive study needs to be conducted to explore the relationship between medium of instruction, language use and language maintenance among the target community.

Thus, the aim of this study is to investigate the impact of the use of Tigriñña language as a medium of instruction in Irob *wereda* on the use and maintenance of the Irob language among the students of the target community. The study will mainly employ quantitative research methods to obtain the benefits of both types of research and then to ensure the greatest possible detail regarding the topic. This is because data collected through different techniques are likely to produce more valid and reliable findings than data from one source only. The data will be collected sequentially in two stages: the first stage is a self report questionnaire to collect quantitative data, while in the second stage a focus group will be interviewed to collect qualitative data. Finally, the study is expected to predict whether the target language is maintained or not and the result will definitely help both the speakers and policy makers to take their own measure accordingly. (Principal Investigator / Project Coordinator: Gebre Hishe – Mesfin Eyob, Melkamu Abate, Department of Foreign languages, Mekelle University).

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Modeling land use optimization at Lake Hashenge watershed in the Northern Highlands of Ethiopia. A geo-information and earth observation based approach

The general objective of this research is to study the optimized combination of land allocation to different land uses (grazing lands, cultivated lands (rain fed and /or irrigated farming) and area closure for minimized soil erosion and sediment yield and maximized people's net income in the Hashenge watershed located in the Northern Highlands of Ethiopia. Specific objectives include: Mapping and characterizing the quality of current agricultural resources and farming practices of the Hashenge watershed; model the variation in sediment yield and freshwater inflows in the watershed/Hashenge lake associated with regional hydrologic processes due to changes in land use and land cover; developing different land use optimization scenarios in the Hashenge watershed for both ecological and farmers economical benefits using a multi-objective Linear Programming (LP) optimization modeling and GIS. (Principal Investigator: Biadgilgn Demissie, Department of Geography & Environmental Studies, Mekelle University).