Grammatical aspect and agreement in Amharic: a brief overview

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abstract

Amharic has two kinds of verb form aspectuals– the well-known (canonical) aspectuals such as the perfective and imperfective, and less known verb form aspectuals such as the iterative, repetitive etc,. The canonical aspects are the forms which are available across the whole Semitic linguistic family. They are expressed by a templatic morphology. The second class of aspectual forms, however, appear to be specific to this language. They are explicitly morphologically marked like in European languages; either as prefixes or by particles.

In this paper, I will present a brief overview on the relationship between these two classes of aspectual forms, and their impact on the agreement morphology. I will point out that the traditional aspectual classifications implemented in the Semitic languages are not sufficient to fully explicate the verbal aspects of Amharic. The existence of some specific verbal aspects such as prospective and retrospective aspects that haven't been recognized in the rest of Semitic literature. Secondly, I want to demonstrate that some of the verbal aspects that have been encoded as root-pattern paradigm in other Semitic languages, such as the imperfective, have grammaticalized to prefixes in Amharic.

1 Grammatical aspect

In the transitional Amharic grammar, aspects were not recognized as independent syntactic categories. They are represented as tense. Fantaye (1957); Yimam (1987); Titove (1976) and many others describe the Amharic verbal inflections markers of tense such as the future, present, recent past and remote past, etc,. But, latter on, linguists studying other works in other Semitic languages, specially that of Arabic, have attributed the root-templatic patterns to aspectual categories and classify the verbal paradigm into Perfective and Imperfective. This classification has remained the standard analysis the verb forms not just for Amharic, but for the whole Semitic linguistic family in general. The perfective-imperfective are attributed to the root-pattern paradigms of the verbs. The root-pattern paradigm refers the vowel and consonant patterns of the verbs.

The verbs in Semitic languages have invariant root structures and variable vowel patterns. The root structures represent the core semantics of the verb while the variable vowel patterns stand for grammatical derivations to other different categories, and also grammatical inflections. The roots are made of consonant clusters numbering one to five; typically three, occurring in a con-

stant relative order. The vowels representing inflections and derivations are like forks inserted in-between the consonant constants. Look at the following Amharic and Arabic examples:

Language	root	perfect	imperfect
Arabic	ktb	kataba = 'he wrote'	yaktubu = 'he writes/is writing'
	žls	žalasa = 'he sat'	yažlisu = 'he sits/is sitting'
Amharic	sbr	səb̂ərə = 'he broke'	yɨsəbral = 'he breaks'
	sr	sər̂a 'he worked'	yɨsər̂al = 'he works'

The consonants are known as "consonantal roots" while the vowels are called "patterns" or "schemes"or "templates". The whole system is known as "root-pattern-structure", "root-template" or just "templatic" Dillmann and Bezold (2005); Leslau (1967, 1968, 1995).

A typical perfective verb has a pattern[1] of C_1ə$\hat{C}_2$əC_3 while a typical imperfective would have C_1əC_2C_3 pattern. In Amharic, the perfective forms and the imperfective forms are different, in addition to the root-pattern templates, by a number of other characteristics. The subject agreement markers are different in the two aspectual forms both in form and in position. Perfective forms have subject agreement markers exclusively as suffixes while the imperatives might have suffixes as well as pre-fixes. This is true of across all the Semitic languages. As the name "perfective" and "imperfective" implies, the two forms are also distinct in the aspectual interpretation.

One of my objectives is to show that the relationship between the verb forms (root-patterns) and the syntactic features of aspect is not one to one. I want to demonstrate that while it is true that imperfective forms always give out imperfective interpretation, perfective template (ablaut) don't always convey perfective meaning. I will entertain two lines of analysis for the failure of the perfective form to denote perfective aspect. One is the kind of analysis advocated in the Slavic literature; to take the forms for granted and attempt to find out the causes for the failure of the semantics (interpretation). In that kind of approach, tools such as *coercions* could be raised as responsible agents for the lose of perfective aspectual interpretation of the perfective forms. There is not one-to-one correspondence between perfective form and perfective aspect.

In the Arabic literature, it is customary to assign specific syntactico-semantic features for each of the vowels. The first vowel into perfective forms is usually taken to mark aspect-tense feature.

But, in Amharic literature, it is not common to attribute specific morphs-semantic features to each of the vowels. Rather, linguists generally attribute the whole paradigm to either the perfective or imperfective form. The other more recent trend that have been quite commonly used is the past-non-past distinction. Some linguists have argued that the aspectual distinctions of prefect & imperfect corresponds to the temporal distinctions of past and non-past respectively. The traditional perfect-imperfect dichotomy is not sufficient to characterize the aspectual paradigms in the language. I will demonstrate even areas where the perfective form turns out to be in imperfective aspect. Let me start from describing the well-established aspectual paradigms—perfectives and imperfectives— and how they are supposed to work.

[1] I will put a dot on top of the consonant as $\hat{C}$ for marking gemination. Gemination is sometimes represented as double consonants in Amharic literature. But, that is not an accurate representation as it could give the impression that there are actually two consonants while the fact is rather a single consonant pronounced for a longer time.

Like any other Semitic verbal paradigm, the core lexical meaning is carried by the consonantal roots while the vowels implicate the aspect (and possibility some other features). It is only through the combination of the root-constants and the vowel variables that a well-formed verb could be built—-neither the consonants nor the vowels can make a well-formed verb by themselves.

1.1 The Canonical Aspectuals

1.1.1 The perfective paradigm

The perfective paradigm is the citation form of the verbs. The perfective is consists of the root constants which are typically three consonants and two or more vowels distributed between the consonants. As already mentioned above, prototypical Amharic (true to all of the Semitic languages too) verb has three consonantal templates. These prototypical three root verbs have vowel slots. The first two slots are commonly filled by the same vowel, the schwa *ə*, in in the perfective form. Therefore, the typical pattern of a typical triradical verb in the perfective looks: $C_1əC_2əC_3$–. The middle consonant is usually geminated. Since gemination doesn't introduce a separate consonant; for it simply elongates the production time of the existing consonant, I don't consider germination as important part of the verbal paradigm. I will simply mark the geminated consonant with an inverted breve ; and keep gemination out the picture for the most part.

Regarding the subject agreements, there are two ways of thinking about it. We can either think of it as a suffix where the subject agreement elements are attached to the last consonant of the template which doesn't leave slot at the end. That is the template can be assumed as CəCəC. That is the most common assumption. The other way of thinking about it is to assume a lot at the end of the last consonant too; but fill that slot with the default form: CəCəCə–and then modify the last vowel in accordance with the kinds of subjects. Both of the strategies seem to work equally well.

triradicals:

(1) mək̂ər-ə-at[2]
advise-3msgS-3fsgO
'he advised her'

(2) mək̂ər-əčč-at
advise-3fsgS-3fsgO
'she advised her'

(3) mək̂ər-u-at
advise-3pl-3fsgO
'They advised her'

Even if three root verbs are the most common kinds of verbs in the language, there are also verbs with one, two, four, and five roots. The number of vowels depends on the number slots that the consonants open up. In the perfective form, the number of vowels is generally equal to

[2] 1 = first person, 2 = second person, 3 = third person, acc = accusative, aux = auxiliary, def = definite, f = feminine, m = masculine, O = Object, pl = plural, pros = prospective, S = Subject, sg = singular.

the number of consonants—one root verb has a single vowel variable; a two root verb has two vowels and so on.

mono & bi-radicals

(4) a. ša = he wanted
b. bəÎa = he ate
c. məf'a = he came
d. samə = he kissed

The pattern of the quad-radicals is the same to that of the triradicals except that they have four roots. The pattern of the quad radicals in the perfective form looks: $C_1əC_2əC_3əC_4$

quadradicals

(5) a. məsək̂ər-ə = he witnessed
b. məsək̂ər-u = they witness
c. məsək̂ər-əč = she witnessed

As above examples show, there is neither a suffix nor a prefix for marking perfective aspect in Amharic. it is rather just the pattern of the verbal paradigms that is deemed to denote the aspect.

But, in the bi-radical forms, there are also some verbs that don't adhere to the typical CvC pattern of the aspectual form. Some of these verbs atypically start by vowels.

(6) a. ayə = he saw
b. ač'ə = he nominated
c. ašə = he massaged

The relationships the roots and the patterns are readily clear in the quad-radicals and the triradicals. Diachronic and derivational evidences demonstrate that mono and bi-radical verbs are ones who lost their first consonantal roots. Mono-radical and bi-radical verbs, as recent works demonstrate, are actually verbs that lost their other roots diachronically. Evidences from earlier data sources, older written texts, and the nominal derivations attest, the bi-radicals and mono-radicals were also triradicals. As Baye has extensively argues, the lose of one of their roots for the bi-radicals and two of their roots has costed these verbs the power of flexibility in meaning that the regular triradicals manifest.They are not regular in their derivations. Their number is also limited; in comparison to the triradicals. Therefore, I will use only the triradicals for the demonstrations.

Having their last vowel slot filled, the perfective forms are complete verbs. Unlike the imperfective forms that require some kind of auxiliary to function as the finite verb (as the sole predicate of the clause) of a clause, perfectives don't require any other material to function as main (finite) verb of a clause. Indeed, the perfective form of the verbs is the most frequently used form of the verbs.

1.1.2 imperfective paradigm

Imperfective forms are different from the perfective forms not only in the their templatic (ablaut) paradigm but also in interpretation and the position of the agreement affixes. ON the verbal template, the difference is on the kinds and positions of the vowels. A typical three root Amharic verb appears in a $C_1əC_2C_3$ format in the imperfective form. That is, in the root-and pattern paradigm, the main difference between the perfective and imperfectives lies on the slot between the second and the third consonants. The middle slot is filled by *ə* in the perfective form while it remains unfilled in the imperfective forms. In some classes of verbs the empty slot gets filled with another vowel: *ɨ*. Therefore, the choice is either remaining unfilled or replacing the middle vowel *ə* with a high middle vowel *ɨ*. *ɨ* is actually very weak vowel in word medieval positions. Its availability is not readily clear. It seems to vary from dialect to dialect or speed of speech. The imperfective forms have varies interpretations: from habitual to future–some people mark the package all their different interpretation as ”non-past”

- mono-radicals:

  (7) yɨ-ša-al-Ø
  3msg-*want*-aux-*3*msgS
  ‘He wants.’

- bi-radicals

  (8) yɨ-mət’-al-Ø
  3msg-come-aux-3msg
  ‘he comes (will come)’

  (9) tɨ-mət’-al-əčč
  *3*fsg-*come*-aux-*3*fsg
  ‘she comes (will come)’

  (10) yɨ-mət’-al-u
  *3*pl-*come*-aux-*3*plS
  ‘They (will) come.’

- triradicals

  (11) tɨ-ləbs-al-əč
  2-wear-aux-*3*fsgS
  ‘She wears (will swear).’

- quad-radicals

  (12) yɨ-məkr-at-al-Ø
  *3*msg-*advise*-*3*fsgO-aux-*3*msgS
  ‘He advises (will advise) her.’

  (13) tɨ-məsəkr-al-əh
  2s-witness-aux-*2*msgS

'You (will) witness.'

For the quad-radicals, the imperfective pattern leaves the third slot unfilled (or filled by *i*) forming a pattern: $C_1əC_2əC_3C4\_$

The second important property of the imperfective forms is on the position of the subject agreement markers. Unlike perfectives which encode the subject agreement marker as suffixes, imperfectives have both prefixes and suffixes co-referencing the subject . The prefixes seem to carry person feature while the suffixes carry number (and gender) feature(s). But, the feature composition of the prefixes is not always clear. Some of them seem to carry a full ϕ features; and some of them seem to code gender and person only.

Another important characteristic of imperfectives, would be their connections with auxiliaries. The verbs in imperfect forms don't serve as the sole predicates of root clauses. Auxiliaries of various sort are necessary to make the clause complete. This property of the imperfectives makes them similar to what is largely known by Subjunctive mood in Romance and other languages. There is a clear distinction, however, between imperfective aspect and subjunctive mood in interpretation. The imperfectives denote the incompleteness or the unreleased-ness of the event while subjectives seem to denote a different modality, like order or command.

A third distinction between perfectives and imperfectives would be on the gemination of the roots. In perfective forms, the middle vowels of all the verb classes geminate while in the imperfectives only certain classes of verbs geminate their middle consonant. Gemination of the middle consonant of triadic roots is across the board in the perfective while restricted to certain classes of verbs in the imperfective.

Leslau classifies imperfectives into simple and compound. Simple imperfectives are the imperfectives of the lexical verbs with no combinations with auxiliaries whereas compound imperfectives are the one with auxiliaries. Simple imperfectives, that is, the imperfective forms with no addition of auxiliaries generally have limited distribution. They appear either with negative markers or in subordinate clauses. Their interpretation is either present habitual or future. (Leslau 1995:pp 301).

- negation:

(14) a[3]-yɨ-məkr-at-m
Neg–3msgS-advise–3fsgO-Neg
'he doesn't advise her'
'he will not advise her'

- subordinate:

(15) [silə-m-yɨ-mərk-at] tɨ-wəd-əw-all-əčc
[Since-ø–3msgS-advise–3fs] 3fsS-love–3msO-aux–3fsgS
'She loves him for he advises her'

To summarize, even if there emerge a few counter arguments on the centrality of the root-

[3]The negation marker prefix is *al* in the perfective environment. In most of the cases, another item *mm* is also suffixed on the verbs, with the negation prefix. For a reason unclear to me, the marker appears as *a* in imperfective prefixes except the first person singular imperfective prefix.

pattern structure in determining the grammar of the verbs, Heath (2003); Bat-El (2003) [4], Benmamoun (1999, 2000, 2007)[5], the system has remained the standard view across Semitic, specifically for aspectual derivations. Perfective forms are taken to represent perfective aspect while the imperfective represent imperfective aspect.

1.2 Secondary Aspectuals

The perfective and the imperfective aspects are what Yimam (2006) calls "the canonical" aspects. He has identified four further sub-aspctuals: *prospective, inceptive, progressive* and*completive*. Prospective aspect is marked by morphological marker *li* . The morpheme prefixes on the imperfective form of the verbs and indicates the imminence of the event. This marker has been taken as a clausal marker (a complementizer) as well as aspectual marker, in different works– Manahlot (1977).

(16) li-yi-məkr-at nəw
pro–3msgS-advise–3fsgO is
'he is to advise her'
'he is about to advise her'

The second aspectual that Baye identified is the *inceptive* aspect. The inceptive aspect doesn't have a specific morphological marker. It is represented by a modal auxiliary *ğəmmərə* which marks the beginning of the event. Like the prospective, the inceptive builds on top of the imperfective form of the verb.

(17) yi-məkr-at ğəmmərə
3msg-advise–3fsgO start
'he started to advise her'

The other two aspectuals are progressive and completive. The progressive aspect shows that the action is in progress. it is marked by a prefix *iyyə* . The progressive is the only secondary aspectual that builds on top of the perfective forms of the verb. The completive aspect, on the other, is an aspect that runs on special kinds of verb known in Ethiopian linguistics as *gerund*. But, actually they are not like the gerunds in English. They are coverb which need to appear with other finite to form a complete sentence. They are gerund-like mainly because they coreference the subject using the possessive suffixes rather rather than regular subject agreement markers.

(18) iyyə-məkər-ə-at nəw
prog-advise–3msgS–3fsgO is
'he is advising her'

(19) məkr-o-at mət't'a
asvise–3ms.poss–3fsgO came.3msgS
'he came after advising her'

[4]Heath argues agains root-based approach for derivation. Her objective is to develop a uniform derivation across languages

[5]He argues against the underived status of imperfective verb forms. His story is crucial form my study because I am looking at imperfectives too

The completive aspect is the one represented in the coverb. The event of the finite verb precedes after the completion of the event of the coverb. The relationship between the coverb and the main verb in the above example looks very similar to the relationship between past perfect and past tense predicates in English:

Finishing his work on time, he went to visit his parents

In addition to the interpretation differences, there are also other instances that the coverb constructions are different from what we represent as progressive aspect. One of the crucial differences among these structures is the kind of auxiliary they take.

I want to demonstrate that the canonical aspectuals are instances of what Travis calls the "inner aspect" while the secondary aspectuals are that of the "outer aspect".

Yimam (2006) has identified a second class of aspectuals in Amharic which he calls secondary aspectual. They are secondary because they seem to derive from the primary(canonical) aspectuals. They are built by adding some additional material on top of the canonical aspect bases. Their stem is either perfective or imperfective verb form. Yimam has identified four of them–prospective, inceptive, progressive and completive.

Prospective : prospective aspect "shows an imminent or intended action".This aspect is marked by a verbal prefix *li*. The prefix attaches to the imperfective form of the verbs. The prefix has a complementizer property. Like all other cases with the imperfective bases, verbs prefixed by the prospective aspect marker cannot end a sentence. They have to take the tense auxiliaries, or appear as complements of raising/control verbs.

(20) Yosef məkinaitun li-t'əgn-at mokərə
Josef car.Fem.Def.Acc li-fix-3fsgO tried.3msgS
'Josef tried to fix the car'

(21) Yosef məkina-it-u-n li-t'əgn-at nəw
Josef car-f-def-acc pr-fix.3fsgO is
'Josef is about to fix the car'

The prospective aspect marker prefix has a complementizer like function. It, however, embeds smaller clauses (infinitives) than the regular complementizers. Compare the following examples.

(22) *Yosef məkina-it-u-n Aster li-ti-t'əgn-(at) fəlləg-ə
Josef car-f-def-acc Aster pros-fix-(3fsgO) want-3msgS
'Josef wanted that Aster fixed the car'(intended)

(23) *Yosef məkina-it-u-n Aster li-ti-t'əgn-(at) mokər-ə
Josef car-f-def-acc Aster pros-fix-(3fsgO) try-3msgS
'Josef tried that Aster fixed the car"

(24) Yosef məkina-it-u-n li-t'əgn-at fəlləgə
Josef car-f-def-acc pros-fix-3fsgO want-3msgS
'Josef wanted to fix the car"

(25) Yosef məkina-it-u-n li-t'əgn-at mokərə
Josef car-f-def-acc pros-*fix*-*3*fsgO *tried*-*3*msgS
'Josef tried to fix the car"

If prospective aspect marker is considered a complementizer, it must be complementizer of infinite clauses. Clauses marked with it doesn't license lexical DP subjects, as shown in the above examples. Only PRO is licensed.

Inceptive : denotes the beginning of an event. Unlike prospectiv, the inceptive aspect has no dedicated marker. Rather, the aspectual is marked using the imperfective form of the verbs and by taking a specific, inceptive auxiliary, *jəmmər*.

(26) Yosef məkinaitun yɨ-t'əgn-at jəmmər
Josef car.Fem.Def.Acc 3mS-fix-*3*fsgO *start*
'Josef started to fix the car'

Progressive : specifies an event in progress. The progressive aspect in Amharic is marked by an *ɨyyə*-prefix on the perfective form of the verbs. The progressive aspect, semantically imperfective, builds on top of the perfective base. The standard tense auxiliaries such as *nəw* & *nəbbər* appear with the progressive aspect denoting present and past progressives respectively.

(27) Yosef məkinaitun ɨyyə-t'əgn-ə nəw
Josef car.Fem.Def.Acc Prog-fix-*3*msgS *is*
'Josef is fixing the car'

(28) Yosef məkinaitun ɨyyə-t'əgn-ə nəbbər
Josef car.Fem.Def.Acc Prog-fix-*3*msgS *was*
'Josef was fixing the car'

Completive : the completive aspect is distinct from the rest of the aspectuals because it is indicated by the coverbs. While showing the completion of an event, like a completion event would, its identification with the coverbs(also called "gerunds" in some circles) give a semantics of very close to the perfect (present and past) morphology of English. The coverbs have a perfective verb base. But, they are distinct in their agreement and a number of other properties. Either auxiliaries or lexical verbs can take the coverbs as their complements.

(29) Yosef məkinaitun t'əgn-o-all
Josef car.Fem.Def.Acc fix-*3*msgS.*Ger*-aux
'Josef has fixed the car'

(30) Yosef məkinaitun t'əgn-o nəbbər
Josef car.Fem.Def.Acc fix-*3*msgS.*Ger was*
'Josef had fixed the car'

(31) Yosef məkinaitun t'əgn-o məṭ'a
Josef car.Fem.Def.Acc fix-*3*msgS.*Ger come*.*3*msgS
' Yosef came after fixing the car' ('Fixing the car, Josef came')

There are also some other aspectuals that Yimam doesn‘t mention in his paper.

Habitual : This is the most widely used form of the imperfective verb forms. They denote the habitual occurring of a certain event. Like the inceptive, there is no dedicated morphology to mark the habitual aspect. The imperfective form of the verbs by default gives habitual interpretation, with the same manner to the inceptive. The difference between the inceptives and habituals lies on the kinds of auxiliaries they take.While the inceptive takes the inceptive auxiliary (or, can be called aspectual verb) *jəmmər*, the habitual interpretation is available with the regular tense auxiliaries such as *nəbər* for the past habitual and *all* for the present habitual.

(32) Yosef məkina yi-t'əgn nəbbər
Josef car 3m-fix was
'Josef used to fix a car' (he was a mechanic)

(33) Yosef məkina yi-t'əgn-al
Josef car 3m-fix-aux
'Josef fixes cars' (he is a mechanic)

2 Agreement

2.1 Object agreement

Let's start from the object agreement markers because they are the simple ones. They are simple because their distribution is not affected by the verbal aspect. They are consistent across all kinds of verb forms.

Table 1: Object Agreement markers

Features	form	examples
1:sg	–ñ	məkə̂r-u-ñ
1:pl	–ɨnn	məkə̂r-u-ɨnn
2:masc	–h	məkə̂r-u-h
2:fem	–š	məkə̂r-u-š
2:pl	–ačhu	məkə̂r–u-ačhu
3:mas	–w	məkə̂r-u-wt
3:fem	–at	məkə̂r-u-at
3:pl	ačəw	məkə̂r-u-ačəw

(34) məkə̂r-u-ñ
*advise-3*plS-*1*sgO
'They advised me'

Comparing the form of the object agreement markers with the subject agreement markers in the perfective form of the verbs, some of them are similar in form. For the second person feminine, and the second person plural, they are the same:

(35) məkə̂r-š-at
advise-2fsgS-3fsgO
'You(fem) advised her'

(36) məkə̂r-əčč-š
advise-3fsgS-3fsgO
'She advised you'

Consider the second person feminine markerš in (35) and (36). It appears in the same form even if it is a subject marker in the first and an object marker in the second. That means, if nobody has noticed them before, some of the object markers are the same elements to the subject markers[6].

2.2 Subject Agreement

As already mentioned above, the form and position of the agreement markers varies in accordance with the aspectuals of the verbs. The agreement markers, both the subject and the object, suffix to the verb in the perfective form; and attache both in the pre-and pos verbal positions in the imperfective form.

Table 2: Subject agreement in the imperfective(habitual) and perfective forms

Subject Pronoun	habitual form	perfective form
1:sg	ɨ-məkr-at	məkə̂r-u-at
1:pl	ɨnn-məkr-at	məkə̂r-n-at
2:masc	tɨ-məkr-at	məkə̂r-k-at
2:fem	tɨ-məkr-i-at	məkə̂r-š-at
2:pl	tɨ-məkr-u-at	məkə̂r-ačhu-at
3:mas	yɨ-məkr-at	məkə̂r-ə-at
3:fem	tɨ-məkr-at	məkə̂r-əčč-at
3:pl	yɨ-məkr-u-at	məkə̂r-u-at

(37) yɨ-məkr-at nəbbər(Habitual)
3msgS-advise-3fsgO was
'He used to advise her'

(38) məkə̂r-ə-at(Perfective)
advise-3msgS-3fsgO
'He advised her'

As the table and the examples show the position of the subject agreement markers is consistently post-verbal in the perfectives; while it is both post and pre-verbal in the imperfectives.

[6]This seems to undermine Kramer's treatment of the object agreement markers as clitics; completely different items; contra to the subject agreement elements

Table 3: Subject Agreement markers

Features	form	examples
1:sg	–hu	məkə̂r-hu-at
1:pl	–ɨnn	məkə̂r-ɨnn-at
2:masc	–h	məkə̂r-h-at
2:fem	–š	məkə̂r-u-š
2:pl	–ačhu	məkə̂r-ačhu-at
3:masc	–ə	məkə̂r-ə-at
3:fem	–əč	məkə̂r-əč-at
3:pl	–u	məkə̂r-u-at

Subject agreement markers in the perfectives

(39) məkə̂r-u-at
*advise-1*sgS-*3*fsgO
'I advised her'

Compare this table with the 2; the following subject agreement markers are the same to the subject agreement markers as are for the object.

- 1pl = ɨnn
- 2masc = h
- 2fem = š
- 2pl = ač

Subject agreement markers in the imperfectives As already mentioned in the above sections, one of the characteristics that the imperfective forms are different from the perfective forms, the traditional Semitic linguistics has it, for the reason that they have prefixes contra to the perfective forms which have exclusively suffixal markers. There is a general consensus on this point. The disagreement is rather on the nature of these prefixes. Among the linguists working on Arabic for example, there seems to exist some debate if the prefixes carry tense-aspect information, in addition to the subject agreement features. R. Bahloul 1994, for example, argues that the vowel of the prefix *ya* in the imperfective verb *ya-ktubu* denotes tense-aspect feature. Benmamoun 1992, 2000, on the other hand rejects the presence of tense and aspect categories in the prefixes. She also attributes the subject agreement features solely to the suffix (last) vowels. In Amharic linguistics, on the other hand, there seems a consensus on the relationship between the prefixes and the subjects. The difference of view lies more on subtle issues as what features these prefixes exactly carry. Baye, for instance, states that the prefixes carry only the person feature of the subject. Leslau (1995) and Demeke (2003) , on the other hand, assume that the prefixes carry all the phi-features of the subject. There is no much explicit debate, on the issue though. These authors mention the issue, almost always, by passing. Let us look at the forms of these prefixes. The fact of the matter is, pointing the exact feature that the prefixes carry is a bit difficult task. Some of the prefixes seem to carry person in one context, while gender in another context. Take the verbal form: *tɨ-mət'a nəbbər* is ambiguous between

she used to come where the *tɨ* prefix is denoting 3fs; and *you used to come*, the prefix denoting 2ms.What is the feature composition of the *tɨ* prefix then?

Let us look at a bit more examples to see how the prefixes are correlated with the phi-features: we will restrict our test to the habituals.

Person	number&gender	verb form
1st	sg	ɨ-məkr-at
	pl	ɨnnɨ-məkr-at
2nd	masc	tɨ-məkr-at
	fem	tɨ-məkr-i-at
	pl	tɨ-məkr-u-at
3rd	mas	yɨ-məkr-at
	fem	tɨ-məkr-at
	pl	yɨ-məkr-u-at

Look at the table. Suffixes marking number and gender appear only at few instances: 2fs; and 3(2)pl. In the rest of the cases, the person, number and gender distinctions are made by the prefixes. The first person prefixes are distinct–*ɨ* and *ɨnnɨ* for singular and plural respectively. If Baye's claim is right, that the prefixes contain only the person feature, e plural and singular would have been indistinguishable. Given the unreliable nature of the *ə* and *ɨ* vowels in the language, there is there also a possibility that the plural prefix could be related with *ɨnnə* morpheme. *ɨnnə* functions as a plural marker of pronouns and p roper names. *They*, is for example, the plural form of *he* which is formed by prefixing the *ɨnnə* morpheme.

ɨssu = he
ɨnnə-ɨssu = they

With proper names, it functions as Associative plural marker. It marks "X and other people associated with X" Daniel (2005).

(40) ɨnnə-Yosef
´Josef and his associates'

There is no problem in there; the person and number features are coded clearly. There are only two kinds of prefixes in the 2nd and 3rd person–*tɨ* & *yɨ*. Again, the plurals of the 2nd and 3rd person can be identified by the suffix: *u*. From this, we can say that the plural marking is dependent on the person feature because, its form varies from 1st person to 2nd and 3rd. It is, however, possible to assume that the plurals in the 2nd and 3rd are exclusively identified by the same suffix. This, on the other hand, suggests that the person feature is not always determinant of the plural inflection b/c the form of the suffixes is consistent in the 2nd and third. The first person plural marker is also distinct from the other one for it appears as a prefix. In general, first person markers are exclusively prefixes. Therefore, one can also deduce from that that person affects the positions of the markers. This, however, doesn't hold all the way b/c we know that second and third person markers can be both prefixes and suffixes.

In the second and third person, the number feature is exclusively a suffix: *u* for both persons. Looking at the second person agreement, the gender feature seems exclusively the *i* suffix. Now, the final problem lies on the two prefixes: *yɨ* and *tɨ*, what do they mark? *yɨ* is available only to in the third person paradigm. It prefixes with the 3ms subject and the 3pl subject. Since we

already filtered out the plural morpheme to be *u* suffix, we can approximate the number feature of the 3ms to the empty slot; keeping the number feature of the 3rd person paradigms to the suffix. Now, compare just the 3rd person paradigms. we have *tɨ* on the feminine; and *yɨ* on the masculine and plural. We have already ruled out the number feature from *yɨ*. We are left with two features; gender and person. Now, add one fact about Amharic. That is, masculine gender is never gets morphologically marked: it is always the absence of the feminine gender considered as masculine. Since masculine gender never gets morphologically marked, we can rule out the masculine gender feature of *yɨ*. Taking the fact that the masculine gender never gets marked in the language, and the fact that it doesn't mark number, we can say that *yɨ* carries 3rd person feature only.

The identification of the third person masculine singular can also be easy: it can be taken as the default, the most under specified form. If we take assumption, we are then led to believe that the *yɨ* prefix of the masc is the default (masc) form. Therefore, it is the other marker *tɨ* which carries real distinctive feature. Then, what it the feature specification of the *tɨ* prefix?

The feature specification of the *tɨ*-prefix is a puzzle. The prefix seems to mark second person in the second paradigm because it appears across the board; plus number and gender are explicitly suffixed. The puzzle comes on its appearance on the third person paradigm as feminine gender marker. indeed, gender would have been indistinguishable for third person subjects if *tɨ* didn't appear. then, the question is: is it a person marker as the second person paradigms suggest, or a number marker as the third person paradigm suggest?

Two hypothesis:

1. it is a feminine gender marker–because it makes a distinction b/n the third person masculine and fem
2. it is person marker: probably second person–because it appears on all of the second person forms

Both of the hypothesis fail because: while the fem gender feature of the prefix seems evident in the third person, the fact that it also prefixes on the singular masculine of the second person make it impossible to assign the fem feature to. Again, taking it as a second person marker also fails because it appears as fem gender marker in the 3rd person. Therefore, it seems that the feature specification of the prefix is not specified.

There is no good solution for this problem. As I have already states, most linguists would like to think of the prefix as a gender marker for it makes gender distinction on the third person subjects. Baye thinks it as a second person marker. It is problematic for both sides. Baye's proposal wrongly predicts that gender would be indistinguishable in the third person paradigms while Leslau's point wrongly predicts that 3ms would not take the prefix. For Baye, one solution would be to think of *yɨ* as a masculine so that the distinction would be attributed to it rather than *tɨ*. But, still for him, its appearance on the third person paradigms doesn't at all give sense if it is 2nd person marker.

For Leslau, the solution would be to think of In my view, taking it as a gender marker gives more sense than as a person marker mainly because its appearance on the third paradigms would be illicit if it was just second person, even person and gender. There are at least three ways out of this trap:

The first approach is to consider its appearance on the 2ms agreement as some kind of unproductive, diachronically frozen item where it lacks the productive 2ms feature.

The second approach would be to consider its appearance with the second person masculine subject as rather a result of phonological *t* epenthesis. *t* ephenthesis is attested in the language. But, I am not sure if this is the right phonological configuration where the ephenthesis happens. So far, all the available evidence suggest that *t* ephenthesis is restricted to positions where roots are diachronicall lost. One of the bi-radical word we looked at above, *bəla* (eat) for example, was originally *bələʕ* . Since Amharic has no glottal sounds, the final root gets deleted. Whenever this verb is nominalized, *t* gets ephenthasized in place of the deleted root: *məblat* (eating). This is a story developed in Baye 1988 with independent evidences. But this doesn't predict the insertion of the consonant with the prefixes as its insertion is attributed to historical lose of consonantal roots. But, there is a second phonological analysis that could open an avenue to look at the appearance of *t* with the second person masculine subject. That is: Broselow(1984) analysis of *t*- epenthesis in Amharic. According to her, *t* is just the default consonant in Amharic which epenthesizes wherever there is a skeletal gap. Still, her story is not different from Baye's for they both assume the consonant to epenthsize in case of skeletal (root) requirements. it is unclear to me how the prefixes could have skeletal gaps since they don't seem to have skeletal templates (template-and pattern structure is restricted to lexical categories so far as I know. I haven't seen any work that develops pattern and skeleton for the functional elements). Baker (2008) suggested some items.

What is interesting about the prefix on the 2ms and 3fs subjects that the clause never gets ambiguous in real life communication. Because the 2ms is used with addressee; directly. if there is a feminine object as topic in the conversation, the meaning goes to that topic. otherwise, the addressee assumes the information addresses himself. I don't have any solution of the problem yet. But, considering at all the possible avenues of analysis, I come to believe that a serious investigations of the environments where the *t* sound inserts in the language might shade a light. I am keeping the challenge for future works. Rather, I am more interested to the aspectual-values of these prefixes might encode. In Amharic linguistics tradition, these prefixes are anonymously attributed to subject agreement. Still remains a question if these prefixes could carry temporal-aspectual information. I am not going to address the issue here.

Baker (2012), Abbott (2005), Yimam (2006) have argued that the process is different from what we all think of.

2.3 Auxiliaries

Yimam (2006) has a list of auxiliaries in Amharic: modals in one side; existential in the other. He has about five modal auxiliaries:*jəmmər* ('begin'), *hon* ('become'), *nor* ('exist'), *čal*('can'), *k'ərr* ('remain'); and three existential auxiliaries:*nə* ('be'), *all* ('exist'), *nəbbər*('existed/was').

The existential auxiliaries seem to appear exclusively in a perfective form. First, their form: *nə* and *all* are mono-radicals. Therefore, it is not possible to see if their template is in perfective or imperfective form. But, *nəbbər* has two consonantal roots; and its templatic form is evidently a perfective one. The other reason to think of them as perfective forms is because of the fact that they don't take prefixes. The existential auxiliaries can agree with the subject. This agreement inflection can never appear as a prefix.

(41) a. təmari nəčč
student is.Fem
'she is a student'
b. *təmari ti-nəčč

Baye suggests that the auxiliaries do not belong to any of the aspectual types–"auxiliaries, as functional elements, are not subject to such characterization".

The modals, on the other hand, look and behave like regular lexical verbs. They clearly have both the perfective and imperfective forms.

(42) Aster təñt-a k'ərr-əčč
Aster sleep-3fs remain-3fsgS
´Aster remained asleep'

If Yimam's reasoning that functional elements lack aspectual forms, then, for the fact that this class of auxiliaries clearly have aspectual form, suggests that their status as a functional elements is questionable.

They also look very much to what is known by light verbs in a other languages. The *k'əf̂* auxiliary, for instance, is very much comparable to the English light verbs *happen* as in phrases *I happen to like wine*.

The reason why Baye takes *k'ər* as auxiliary is mainly because it could be replaced by the regular auxiliaries such as *all*.

(43) Aster təñɨt-a all-əčč(cf. (42))
Aster sleep-3fsgS Aux-3fsgS
'Aster is asleep'

k'ər is restricted to gerund forms; a form accepting all the lexical verbs. But, one crucial feature that puts the modal *k'ər* from the regular lexical verbs is that the regular verbs introduce a sequence of events in the gerund form.

(44) Aster təñt-a tənəsačč
'Aster wake up after sleeping'

There are two events in the above sentence. She first slept; then waked up. Such a sequence of events is not available for *k'ər*

(45) Aster təñt-a k'ər-əčč
Aster slept-3fsg remain-3fsgS
'Aster remained asleep'

The absence of sequence of events in the gerund suggests that *k'ər* is indeed an auxiliary of some kind; rather than a full verb.

Regarding the aspectual verb *jəmmar*, Baye assumed it as auxiliary whenever it fails to agree with the subject. In case it agrees with the subject, he take it as a standard lexical verb.

(46) Aster sɨra jəm̂ər-əč
Aster work start-3fsgS
'Aster started work'

This one is clearly a case of lexical verb.

(47) Aster tɨ-mət'a jəmmər
Aster 3fs-come begin
'Aster begin to come'

Notice the agreement here. It appears only as a prefix on the main verb. But, what is not clear to me is why the agreement fails whenever it is functioning as an auxiliary.

The auxiliaries don't take perfective verbs as their complements–they always appear with the verb forms which cannot by themselves complete the clause. They appear with the progressive, prospective, gerund and the like verb forms. The selection relationship between the auxiliaries and the kinds of aspectuals is a bit complicated. Not every auxiliary is compatible with the every type of aspectual.

(48) tɨ-məkr-at jəmər/-alləč/ *nəw/nəbbər/*čalləč/*norəč (habitual)
3fsS-advise-3fsgO begin/exist/is/was/can/exist
'She was/is/start to advise her'

(49) ɨyyə-məkkər-əč-at nəbbər/nəw/*-alləč/*kərrəč/*čaləč/norəč/*honəč (progressive)
prog-advise-3fsgS-3fsgO was/is/-exist/remain/can/exist/become
'She is/was advising her'

(50) təñit-a-kərr-əč/nəbbər/alləč /nəbbər/*nəw/*honəč/*jəmər (gerund)
sleep-3fsgS remain-3fsgS/was/exist /is /become
'She remained/is/was asleep'

(51) lɨ-tɨ-məkr-at čalləč/*jəmmər/nəw/*alləč/nəbbər/??norəč (prospective)
pro-3fsgS-advise-3fsgO can.3fsS /begin/is/exist/was/exist
'She managed/is about to advise her'

(52) astəmari honəč/nəbbər-əč/*alləč*/*čalləč/*k'əf̂əč/nəč (predicative/lexical)
teacher become/was-3fsgS/exist/can/remain/is
'She become/was/is a teacher'

An in depth investigation of the relationship between the verbal aspectuals and the auxiliaries is beyond the scope the current paper. Since my objective is offering the general overview of the grammatical aspectuals, I am not going to engage in any of the specific issues.

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