

AMHARIC

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1 INTRODUCTION

Amharic (*ʔamarijña*) is the main modern exponent of the Southern Ethio-Semitic branch and is to be associated with Argobba, Eastern Gurage and Harari. The term most probably derives from the region Amhara (*ʔamara*) in the northern and central highlands of Ethiopia (Map 9.1). Following a widely accepted study by Hetzron (1972), Amharic should not be considered a direct offspring of Gǝʕiz but rather a descendent of an early common Ethio-Semitic language.

According to the census from 2007, Amharic is spoken by approximately 20 million native speakers and additionally by a few million speakers as a second language. It serves



MAP 9.1 THE AMHARIC SPEECH AREA

Source: Adapted from Meyer (2016a).

as one of the official languages of Ethiopia and as *lingua franca*, and is also partially understood in the neighboring countries Eritrea and Djibouti, not to mention significant expatriate communities, such as in Washington, DC.

It is not easy to define a *terminus post quem* for the emergence of Amharic. Among the first written documents in Amharic are the “royal songs” (14th century or later). Amharic *ḥandimta* commentaries to liturgical literature in Giʿiz are attested from the 18th century onwards (cf. Meyer 2011a: 1179). Today there exists a large amount of literature in Amharic, including journalism and texts, in which Amharic is used as a scholarly meta-language.

Diachronically speaking, Old Amharic has specific features such as the retention of gutturals. Synchronically speaking, Amharic has dialectal varieties in at least the regions of Gondär, Godḡḡam, Wällo and Mänz. As always, sociolects and ideolects exist as well. (For an in-depth description of two varieties of the linguistically close Argobba, cf. Wetter 2010.)

On both the syntactic and the lexical level, Amharic is subject to a strong Cushitic substratum. Syntactically, the strict SOV order is striking. Many core elements of the Amharic vocabulary are of Cushitic origin, e.g., the word for “language,” *kʷankʷa*.

2 WRITING SYSTEM

Amharic is written in an (alpha-)syllabary, also called “Abugida” (cf. Daniels 1997), based on the writing system of Classical Ethiopic (Giʿiz; see Chapter 6), which in turn may have been influenced by the equally syllable-based Indian Devanāgarī system. In Amharic terminology, the syllable signs are referred to as *fidäl*. The consonants, listed here in their traditional order, are either followed by a vowel or schwa (unspecified short vowel or zero, depending on phonotactics), in seven different “orders.” As compared to Giʿiz, Amharic features a number of phonemic palatalized consonants. Moreover, most consonants can be labialized, for which purpose there exist further graphemes (diacritically marked syllabic signs). Table 9.1 provides an overview, with both IPA and traditional Semiti(c)st transcription. Some scholars nowadays choose to transcribe the vowel of the first order as *ə*, a method not adopted here. The latter vowel also occurs as an allophone of *i* when preceded by *j* and is transcribed as such in Meyer (2011) in forms such as *jəhid* ‘let him go’ (instead of *jihid*). After *w*, *ʊ* appears as an allophone of *i*, as in [woha] ‘water’. We will follow the tradition to transcribe the vowel of the first order as *ä*.

An unspecified short vowel in the word coda is generally disallowed (except in poetic recitation). The Amharic script does not mark gemination of consonants (even though consonantal length is phonemic), thus allowing for a certain number of written doublets (e.g., *ḥalä* ‘he said’ vs. *ḥallä* ‘he/it exists’). Here is a brief example, first transliterated, then transcribed:

ሰለረህ	ነው	ወደ	ኢትዮጵያ	የመጣሁት
<i>sə-lä-zi-h</i>	<i>nä-w</i>	<i>wä-dä</i>	<i>ḥi-t(ə)-jo-p'ə-ja</i>	<i>jä-mä-t'a-hu-t</i>
<i>sälä-zziḥ</i>	<i>n-äw</i>	<i>wädä</i>	<i>ḥit(ə)jopp'əja</i>	<i>jä-mätt'ahu-t</i>
because.of-this	COP-3MSG.OBJ	towards	Ethiopia	REL-come.SC.1SG-DEF
'It is therefore (that) I came to Ethiopia.' ≈ 'Therefore I came to Ethiopia.'				

TABLE 9.1 AMHARIC ALPHASYLLABARY/CHART OF AMHARIC FIDĀLS

IPA (& SEMITIC transliteration)	SEVEN ORDERS							LABIALIZED CONSONANTS				
	ä	u	i	a	e	i/Ø	o	wä/uä	wi/ui	wa/ua	we/ue	wi/u
h (<i>h</i>)	ሀ	ሁ	ሂ	ሃ	ሄ	ህ	ሆ					
l (<i>l</i>)	ለ	ሉ	ሊ	ላ	ሌ	ል	ሎ			ሊ		
h (<i>h</i>)	ሐ	ሑ	ሒ	ሓ	ሔ	ሕ	ሖ			ሒ		
m (<i>m</i>)	መ	ሙ	ሚ	ማ	ሜ	ም	ሞ			ሚ		
s (<i>s</i>)	ሠ	ሡ	ሢ	ሣ	ሤ	ሥ	ሦ			ሢ		
r (<i>r</i>)	ረ	ሩ	ሪ	ራ	ሪ	ር	ሮ			ሪ		
s (<i>s</i>)	ሰ	ሱ	ሲ	ሳ	ሴ	ስ	ሶ			ሲ		
ʃ (<i>š</i>)	ሸ	ሹ	ሺ	ሻ	ሼ	ሽ	ሾ			ሺ		
k' (<i>q</i> or <i>k</i>)	ቀ	ቁ	ቂ	ቃ	ቄ	ቅ	ቆ	ቈ	቉	ቊ	ቋ	ቌ
b (<i>b</i>)	በ	ቡ	ቢ	ባ	ቤ	ብ	ቦ			ቢ		
v (<i>v</i>)	ቨ	ቩ	ቪ	ቫ	ቼ	ች	ቾ			ቪ		
t (<i>t</i>)	ተ	ቱ	ቲ	ታ	ቴ	ት	ቸ			ታ		
ʈ (<i>č</i>)	ቸ	ቹ	ቺ	ቻ	ቼ	ች	ቾ			ቺ		
h (<i>h</i>)	ኀ	ኁ	ኂ	ኃ	ኄ	ኅ	ኆ	ኸ	ኹ	ኺ	ኻ	ኼ
n (<i>n</i>)	ነ	ኑ	ኒ	ና	ኔ	ኖ	ኦ			ኒ		
ɲ (<i>ñ</i>)	ኸ	ኹ	ኺ	ኻ	ኼ	ኽ	ኾ			ኺ		
Ø (<i>Ø</i> or <i>ʔ</i>)	አ	ኡ	ኢ	ኣ	ኤ	አ	ኦ			ኢ		
k (<i>k</i>)	ከ	ኩ	ኪ	ካ	ኬ	ክ	ኮ	ኰ	኱	ኲ	ኳ	ኴ
x (<i>ḫ</i>)	ኸ	ኹ	ኺ	ኻ	ኼ	ኽ	ኾ	ኰ	኱	ኲ	ኳ	ኴ
w (<i>w</i>)	ወ	ዐ	ዑ	ዓ	ዔ	ዕ	ዖ					
Ø (*ʕ)	ዐ	ዑ	ዓ	ዔ	ዕ	ዖ	ዘ					
z (<i>z</i>)	ዘ	ዐ	ዑ	ዓ	ዔ	ዕ	ዘ			ዘ		
ʒ (<i>ž</i>)	ዘ	ዐ	ዑ	ዓ	ዔ	ዕ	ዘ			ዘ		
j (<i>y</i>)	የ	ዐ	ዑ	ዓ	ዔ	ዕ	ዘ					
d (<i>d</i>)	ደ	ዐ	ዑ	ዓ	ዔ	ዕ	ዘ			ደ		
ɖ (<i>ḍ</i>)	ደ	ዐ	ዑ	ዓ	ዔ	ዕ	ዘ			ደ		
ɡ (<i>g</i>)	ገ	ገ	ገ	ገ	ገ	ገ	ገ	ገ	ገ	ገ	ገ	ገ
t' (<i>t'</i>)	ጠ	ጠ	ጠ	ጠ	ጠ	ጠ	ጠ			ጠ		
ʈ' (<i>č'</i>)	ጠ	ጠ	ጠ	ጠ	ጠ	ጠ	ጠ			ጠ		
p' (<i>p'</i>)	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ			ጸ		
s' (<i>s'</i>)	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ			ጸ		
s' (*t'; <i>d</i> or <i>š</i>)	ፈ	ፈ	ፈ	ፈ	ፈ	ፈ	ፈ					
f (<i>f</i>)	ፈ	ፈ	ፈ	ፈ	ፈ	ፈ	ፈ			ፈ		
p (<i>p</i>)	ፑ	ፑ	ፑ	ፑ	ፑ	ፑ	ፑ			ፑ		
	ä	u	i	a	e	i/Ø	o	wä/uä	wi/ui	wa/ua	we/ue	wi

Amharic orthography also features an elaborate punctuation system (which is no longer fully applied), including the following markers: ፡ word separator; ፡፡ full stop (period); ፡፡፡ comma, ፡፡፡ semicolon, ፡፡፡ colon (the latter three used interchangeably); and ፡- preface colon.

3 PHONOLOGY

3.1 Consonant phonemes

Amharic has 27 consonant phonemes (plus 4 marginal ones). Its phonological system reflects a number of consonantal mergers compared with Giʕiz, as well as a number of additions listed in Table 9.2.

Giʕiz *s* (ሰ) and *ś* [ʃ] (ሠ) phonemically merged in Amharic *s*
 Giʕiz *ṣ* [sʰ] (ረ) and *śʰ* [tʃʰ] (ረ) phonemically merged in Amharic *sʰ*
 Giʕiz *h* [h] (ሐ), *ḥ* [x] (ሐ), and *h* [h] (ሐ) phonemically merged in Amharic *h* or *Ø*
 Giʕiz *ʕ* (ሐ) and *ʔ* (ሐ) phonemically merged in Amharic *ʔ/Ø*
 an additional bilabial voiced fricative is Amharic *v* (ሐ)
 an additional velar voiceless fricative is Amharic *x* (ሐ)
 additional palatalized consonants are Amharic *ʒ* (ሐ), *ʃ* (ሐ), *ʃʰ* (ሐ), *ʃʰ* (ሐ) and *ʃʰ* (ሐ)
 the main additional labialized consonants in Amharic are the velars *kʷ* (ሐ), *gʷ* (ሐ) and
kʷ (ሐ)

The phonemic mergers have engendered a certain degree of orthographic variation and variability in modern Amharic (cf. Meyer 2016c). Still, historical orthography continues to be typically observed in words like **ንጉሥ** *nigus* (< Giʕiz *nigus*) ‘king’ or **ኃይል** *hajl* (< Giʕiz *xajl*) ‘power’.

3.2 Vowel phonemes

The Amharic vowel phonemes can be represented as follows in a triangle (cf. Meyer 2011: 1185 with further references; Table 9.3).

TABLE 9.2 AMHARIC CONSONANT PHONEMES

	BILABIAL	LABIO-DENTAL	ALVEOLAR	PALATAL(-ALVEOLAR)	VELAR	LABIOVELAR	GLOTTAL
Plosive	p b pʰ		t d tʰ		k g kʰ	kʷ gʷ kʷ	ʔ
Nasal	m		n	ɲ			
Trill			r				
Fricative		f v	s z sʰ	ʃ ʒ ʃʰ	x		h
Affricate				ʃʃ ɖʒ ʃʃʰ			
Approx.	w			ɟ			
Lateral							

TABLE 9.3 AMHARIC VOWEL PHONEMES

	FRONT	CENTRAL	BACK
High	i		u
High Central	e	i o	
Low Central		ä (ə) (see above)	
Low		a	

Allophones of central vowels occur, e.g., as a result of homorganic assimilation (cf. Meyer 2011: 1186 for details). Vowel length is not phonemic.

3.3 Syllable structure

Assuming that a glottal stop is phonetically present in the onset of syllables and words starting with *ʔ* (**h**, **o**), Amharic syllables, just as in other Semitic languages, can be classified in light/open (CV), heavy/closed (CVC) and superheavy/doubly closed syllables (CVCC). The word *ʔit(ə)jopp'əja* 'Ethiopia' (etymologically deriving from Greek 'burnt in the face'), for instance, would be syllabified *ʔi.tə.jop.p'ə.ja* or *ʔit.jop.p'ə.ja*. A superheavy syllable occurs, for instance, in the word *därg* 'council, committee' (name of the Ethiopian military junta from 1974 until 1987). Phonetically, but not structurally, word-initial CCVC syllables may be identified in imperative forms of the structure $C_1(i)C_2\check{a}C_3$, e.g., *d(i)räs* 'arrive' (MSG), or in loan words such as *kristijan* 'Christian', in case the sonority of C_2 is high (approximant: *w, j*; or liquid: *l, r*).

Unlike for instance in Chaha (another south Ethiopian Semitic language), the sonority of the involved root consonants does not affect syllable structure in Amharic. In the jussive of Chaha, the following scenario can be observed in Table 9.4 (cf. Leslau 1964).

3.4 Palatalization

Palatalization of alveolar consonants (except *r*) tends to occur before the high vowel *i* (and *e* of the converb conjugation), e.g., in the 2nd person feminine singular. Here is the pattern, juxtaposing the 2nd person masculine singular and feminine singular prefix conjugation (non-past) in Table 9.5.

TABLE 9.4 SYLLABLE STRUCTURE IN THE JUSSIVE OF CHAHA DEPENDING ON SONORITY

ROOT	RIISING SONORITY ($C_2 \rightarrow C_3$)	ROOT	FALLING SONORITY ($C_2 \rightarrow C_3$)
√g-f-r	<i>jägfir</i> 'let him release'	√s-r-t	<i>jäsirt</i> 'let him cauterise'
√k'-B-r	<i>jäk'βir</i> 'let him plant'	√t-r-x	<i>jätirx</i> 'let him make an incision'
√f-t'-m	<i>jäft'im</i> 'let him block'	√g-m-t'	<i>jägimt</i> 'let him chew off'

TABLE 9.5 PALATALIZATION OF ALVEOLAR CONSONANTS BEFORE *I* (2FSG)

ROOT	PC. 2MSG	PC. 2FSG	GLOSS
√s-b-r but	<i>tisäbr-alläh</i>	<i>tisäbrijalläf</i>	'destroy'
√w-s-d	<i>tiwäsd-alläh</i>	<i>tiwäsdʒ(ij)alläf</i>	'take'
√k-f-t	<i>tikäft-alläh</i>	<i>tikäffʃ(ij)alläf</i>	'open'
√b-l-t'	<i>tibält'-alläh</i>	<i>tibälfʃ(ij)alläf</i>	'exceed'
√m-l-s	<i>timällis-alläh</i>	<i>timälliʃ(ij)alläf</i>	'bring back'
√g-l-s'	<i>tigäls'-alläh</i>	<i>tigälfʃ(ij)alläf</i>	'explain'
√m-r-z	<i>timärriz-alläh</i>	<i>timärriz(ij)alläf</i>	'poison'
√l-m-n	<i>tilämmīn-alläh</i>	<i>tilämmīn(ij)alläf</i>	'beg'
√k-f-l	<i>tikäft-alläh</i>	<i>tikäfʃalläf</i>	'pay'

3.5 Assimilatory and dissimilatory processes

All consonants except the glottal stop can be geminated. Total assimilation occurs with the *t*-prefix in the passive, reflexive or reciprocal diatheses (*binyanim*) in the prefix conjugation of the verb, e.g., *täsäbbärä* ‘it broke/was broken’ vs. *jissäbbärall* (< **jitsäbbärall*) ‘it will be broken’ or *täsäbabbära* ‘it was smashed to pieces’ vs. *jissäbabbärall* (< **jitsäbabbärall*) ‘it is/will be smashed to pieces’. Phonetically, partial and total assimilation of consonants and vowels occur also in other environments (cf. Meyer 2011: 1186).

Comparable to a similar process in Akkadian place or instrument nouns, where an *m*-prefix dissimilates to *n*- when the following stem contains a labial (e.g., *ma-ṣkan-um* ‘deposit’ vs. *na-rkab-tum* ‘chariot’), Amharic place or instrument nouns, whose stems contain a labial root consonant, dissimilate the *mā*-prefix to *wā*- (Table 9.6).

This phenomenon is comparable to a similar process in Akkadian place or instrument nouns, where an *m*-prefix dissimilates to *n*- when the following stem contains a labial (e.g., *ma-ṣkan-um* ‘deposit’ vs. *na-rkab-tum* ‘chariot’, cf., e.g., Edzard 1992).

3.6 Loss of gutturals

Intervocally, historical gutturals tend to vanish in finite Amharic verb forms, but are retained in nominal forms as *h* or *ʔ*, e.g., *timhirt* ‘lesson’ vs. *tāmarä* ‘he learnt’, *mäs* ‘haf’ (< **mäs* ‘haf’) ‘book’ vs. *s’afä* ‘he wrote’, *dähna* (< **däxna*) ‘good, well’ vs. *danä* ‘he recovered’ and *siʔil* (< **siʕil*) ‘picture’ vs. *salä* ‘he painted’.

3.7 Vowel coalescence

In direct contact of *ä* + *i*, the vowel *ä* prevails, e.g., **jä-issu* GEN-3MSG > *jässu* ‘of him’. In direct contact of *ä* + *a*, however, the vowel *a* prevails, e.g., *jä-antä* GEN-2MSG > *jantä* ‘of you’.

4 MORPHOLOGY

As in other Semitic languages, the Amharic nominal and (even more so) verbal system is a prototypical representative of nonconcatenative morphology, i.e., a system of interdigitation of (proto-typically triradical) roots with vowels and affixes, through which the exact meaning of a noun or verb is determined. Exempt from this system are some elementary monosyllabic prepositions and postpositions, pronominal suffixes, demonstrative and interrogative elements, definiteness and relative markers, conjunctions, discourse markers, as well as a number of ideophones (used in connection with phrasal or quotative verbs, see §4.6.5).

TABLE 9.6 SUPRASEMENTAL DISSIMILATION BEFORE STEMS CONTAINING A LABIAL

ROOT	NON-DISSIMILATED PREFIX	ROOT	DISSIMILATED PREFIX
√k'-d-s	<i>mā-k'däs</i> ‘holy place’	√n-f-t	<i>wā-nfāt</i> ‘sieve’
√l-h-k'	<i>mā-lhik'</i> ‘anchor’	√t'-m-d	<i>wā-t'mäd</i> ‘trap’
√ʕ-f'-d	<i>ma-f'ed</i> ‘sickle’	√n-b-r	<i>wā-nbär</i> ‘chair’

4.1 Pronouns, copula and existential verb

As in other Semitic languages, one finds one set of independent pronouns and two nearly identical sets of dependent pronouns, suffixes on nouns (possessive) and verbs (object), respectively. First, here are the independent and suffixed possessive pronouns (Table 9.7).

While reflexivity and reciprocity are encoded in the verbal system (see §4.6.3), the element *ras* (plus possessive suffixes), literally ‘head’, which also etymologically underlies the independent pronouns of the 3rd person, is optionally used in this context.

Unlike in many other Semitic languages, the independent pronoun of the 3rd person does not serve as a copula. Instead, an element *n(ä)-* is used, with the set of the clitic object pronouns attached, e.g., *nä-jɲɲ* ‘I am’. Likewise, possession (of a possessed MSG) is expressed by *allä* ‘he/it exists’ + clitic object suffix, e.g., *allä-jɲɲ* ‘I have’ (EXIST.3MSG-1SG. DAT ‘it exists to me’) (see Table 9.8).

On verbs, the clitic object pronouns can also be preceded by the applicative prepositions *ll-* (benefactive) and *bb-* (malefactive – and also locative, and instrumental), e.g., *färrädä-ll-äɲɲ* ‘he judged in my favor’ vs. *färrädä-bb-äɲɲ* ‘he judged to my detriment’.

4.2 Demonstratives

Amharic features a proximal and a distal set of demonstrative pronouns (Table 9.9), in a free form and in a bound form (typically after prepositions).

TABLE 9.7 INDEPENDENT AND SUFFIXED POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS

	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
	INDEPENDENT	POSSESSIVE	INDEPENDENT	POSSESSIVE
1SG	<i>ʔəne</i>	<i>-e/-je</i> (after vowel)	<i>ʔəɲɲa</i>	<i>-aɣɣɪn</i>
2M	<i>ʔanta</i>	<i>-(i)h</i>	<i>ʔənnantä</i>	<i>-aɣɣɪh (< -aɣɣɪhu)</i>
2F	<i>ʔanɣi</i>	<i>-(i)f</i>	“	“
2POL	<i>ʔəsswo/ʔərswo</i>	<i>-wo</i>	“	“
3M	<i>ʔəssu/ʔərsu</i>	<i>-u/-w</i> (after vowel)	<i>ʔənnässu</i>	<i>-aɣɣäw</i>
3F	<i>ʔəsswa/ʔərswa</i>	<i>-wa</i>	“	“
3POL	<i>ʔəssaɣɣäw</i>	<i>-aɣɣäw</i>	“	“

TABLE 9.8 CLITIC OBJECT PRONOUNS ON *N(Ä)-* ‘TO BE’ (COPULA) AND *ʔALLÄ* ‘EXIST’

	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
	SINGULAR	PLURAL	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1SG	<i>nä-jɲɲ</i>	<i>nä-n</i>	<i>ʔallä-jɲɲ</i>	<i>ʔallä-n</i>
2M	<i>nä-h</i>	<i>n-aɣɣɪh (< n-aɣɣɪhu)</i>	<i>ʔallä-h</i>	<i>ʔall-aɣɣɪh (< -aɣɣɪhu)</i>
2F	<i>nä-f</i>	“	<i>ʔallä-f</i>	“
2POL	<i>nä-wot</i>	“	<i>ʔallä-wot</i>	“
3M	<i>n-äw</i>	<i>n-aɣɣäw</i>	<i>ʔallä-w</i>	<i>ʔall-aɣɣäw</i>
3F	<i>nä-ɣɣ/n-at</i>	“	<i>ʔallat</i>	“
3POL	<i>n-aɣɣäw</i>	“	<i>ʔall-aɣɣäw</i>	“

TABLE 9.9 AMHARIC DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS

	PROXIMAL		DISTAL	
	FREE	BOUND	FREE	BOUND
MSG	<i>jəh</i>	<i>-zzih</i>	<i>ja</i>	<i>-zzija</i>
FSG	<i>jəʃʃ(i)</i>	<i>-zzifʃ</i>	<i>jaʃʃ(i)</i>	<i>-zzijaʃʃ</i>
PL	<i>ʔənnəzzih</i>	<i>-nnäzzi</i>	<i>ʔənnəzzija</i>	<i>-nnäzzija</i>

4.3 Interrogatives

The most frequent Amharic interrogative pronouns are these:

<i>man</i>	‘who?’
<i>min</i>	‘what?’
<i>jät</i>	‘where, to which place?’
<i>mäʃʃe</i>	‘when?’
<i>ʔindämin</i>	‘how?’
<i>sint</i>	‘how much?’

With gemination of the last consonant and with the suffix *-mm*, the idea of indefiniteness is expressed, e.g., *mannimm* ‘whoever’, *minnimm* ‘whatever’.

4.4 Relatives

Just as in other Semitic languages, there are no relative pronouns in Amharic. Relativization is rather expressed by an element *jä-* before verbs in the suffix conjugation and its allomorph *jämm-* before verbs in the prefix conjugation, e.g., *jä-säbbärä* ‘(he) who broke’ or *jämm-isäbir* ‘(he) who breaks’. Many such verb phrases function as nominalized constructions. The same element *jä-* also serves as the genitive exponent, prefixed to the possessor, e.g., *jä-ʔalmaz bet* ‘Almaz’s house’ (GEN-Almaz house).

4.5 Nominals

4.5.1 Inflection

Nouns in Amharic can be marked for two genders in the singular (masculine and feminine) as well as for two numbers (singular and plural). While number is usually morphologically marked by the plural suffix *-offʃ*, gender is often inherent, mainly in animate nouns. There are no “states” as in other branches of Semitic (except for historical vocabulary borrowed from Giʕiz), but definiteness is marked by suffixes, *-u* (after vowel *-w*) with masculine nouns and *-wa* with feminine nouns. Some kinship terms have special (singulative) definite forms in the singular. The standard forms are found in Table 9.10.

Gender also surfaces in the form of agreement between subject and verbal predicate, e.g., *wäʃ-wa k’äjj n-at* (bird-DEF.F red COP-3FSG.OBJ) ‘the bird is red’ (see §5.1).

Adjectives, as well as some nouns borrowed from Giʕiz, may exhibit an internal (“broken”) plural (*ablaut*, intraflexion), e.g., *təllək’ > tələllək* ‘big’ or *nigus > nägäst* ‘king’ in

TABLE 9.10 GENDER, NUMBER AND DEFINITENESS IN AMHARIC

GENDER	SG INDF	SG DEF	PL INDF	PL DEF	GLOSS
M	<i>bet</i>	<i>bet-u</i>	<i>bet-offf</i>	<i>bet-offf-u</i>	‘house’
F	<i>wäf</i>	<i>wäf-wa</i>	<i>wäf-offf</i>	<i>wäf-offf-u</i>	‘bird’
M	<i>säw</i>	<i>säwijje-w</i>	<i>säw-offf</i>	<i>säw-offf-u</i>	‘man’
F	<i>set</i>	<i>setijjo-wa</i>	<i>set-offf</i>	<i>set-offf-u</i>	‘woman’

the expression *jä-?itjopp’aja nägusä nägäst* ‘the King of Kings of Ethiopia’ (GEN-Ethiopia king.CST king.PL), the title of Emperor Minilik II. Some nouns also feature an old plural ending *-an*, e.g., *kibur* > *kibur-an* ‘honored person(s)’. Adjectives agree in gender with their head noun (by default masculine), but not necessarily in number, i.e., a noun in the plural can be preceded by an adjective in the plural (marked by *-offf*) or in the singular.

Case is morphologically and syntactically marked. While there is a genitive exponent *jä-* prefixed to the possessor in a noun phrase, Amharic also features the nominative (unmarked) and the accusative, the latter marked on definite and sometimes generic nouns by the suffix *-n*. Typically, the accusative applies to the direct object, but it also occurs in the context of predicative, adverbial and focus constructions:

accusative:	<i>mäskot-u-n</i> window-DEF-ACC	<i>ziga</i> close.IMP.MSG		
	‘Close the window!’			
predicative:	<i>ʔissu-n</i> he-ACC	<i>b-ihon</i> if-be.PC.1SG	<i>ʔal-adärg-äw</i> NEG-do.PC.1SG-3MSG.OBJ	<i>näbbär</i> AUX.PST
	‘If I were him, I wouldn’t have done it.’			
adverbial:	<i>lidz-u</i> child-DEF	<i>ʔidzɟ-e-n</i> hand-1SG.POSS-ACC	<i>jazä-ʔn</i> take.SC.3MSG-1SG.OBJ	
	‘The child took me by the hand.’			
focus:	<i>ʔawnät-wa-n</i> truth-3FSG.POSS-ACC	<i>n-äw</i> COP-3MSG.OBJ		
	‘She is right.’			

4.5.2 Nominal patterns

The most productive nominal forms are the participle, the verbal noun (or infinitive), and the instrumental. Table 9.11 shows an illustration with the roots $\sqrt{s-b-r}$ ‘to break’ (type A; see §4.6.1 for root types) and $\sqrt{d_3-m-r}$ ‘to begin’ (type B) (consonants and vowels in parentheses apply to “type B” roots, in which gemination of the second radical is maintained throughout).

There is no clear-cut morphological boundary between substantives and adjectives, and not even between adjectives and adverbs (cf. Meyer 2011: 1189–90). Still, a number of further nominal patterns can be identified (in Table 9.12, the meaning of the root or base is indicated in parentheses after the gloss).

TABLE 9.11 AMHARIC BASIC NOMINAL PATTERNS

PARTICIPLE		VERBAL NOUN/INFINITIVE		INSTRUMENTAL	
Type A	Type B	Type A	Type B	Type A	Type B
/C ₁ äC ₂ (C ₂)äC ₃ -i/		/mä-C ₁ (ä)C ₂ (C ₂)äC ₃ /		/mäC ₁ (ä)C ₂ (C ₂)äC ₃ -iya/	
<i>sābari</i>	<i>ḏḡāmmari</i>	<i>māsbar</i>	<i>māḏḡāmmār</i>	<i>māsbarija</i>	<i>māḏḡāmmārija</i>

TABLE 9.12 AMHARIC NOMINAL PATTERNS (SAMPLE)

SEMANTICS	PATTERN	EXAMPLE	GLOSS
Abstract	/C ₁ iC ₂ äC ₃ /	<i>t'ibab</i>	'wisdom' ('be wise')
Abstract	/C ₁ iC ₂ C ₂ aC ₃ -e/	<i>wiffare</i>	'corpulence' ('become fat')
Abstract	/C ₁ iC ₂ C ₃ -ät/	<i>?iwnät</i>	'knowledge' ('be factual')
Participation	/C ₁ iC ₂ iC ₂ C ₂ iC ₃ /	<i>liwiwwit'</i>	'exchange' ('exchange')
Performance	/C ₁ äC ₂ äC ₃ -a/	<i>sābāka</i>	'sermon' ('preach')
Performance	/C ₁ iC ₂ aC ₃ /	<i>nibab</i>	'lecture' ('read')
Performance	/C ₁ iC ₂ C ₂ äC ₃ -a/	<i>filläga</i>	'search' ('want')
Various	suffix -(v)t	<i>miṇṇot</i>	'wish' ('wish')
Derivation	suffix -inna	<i>kristinna</i>	'Christianity' ('Christ')
Derivation	suffix -innät	<i>lidḡinnät</i>	'childhood' ('child')
Derivation	suffix -(i)ta	<i>dässita</i>	'joy' ('be glad')
Provenance	suffix -e	<i>godḏḡame</i>	'somebody from Godḏḡam'
Occupation	suffix -(t)äṇṇa	<i>färäsäṇṇa</i>	'knight' ('ride')
Instrument	prefix mv-	<i>mākḡäṭṭa</i>	'key' ('open')
Instrument	prefix wv-	<i>wänḡät</i>	'sieve' ('sift')
(roots containing a labial, cf. §3.5)			
Place	prefix mv-	<i>māk'abir</i>	'grave' ('bury')
Quality	suffix -äṇṇa	<i>hajläṇṇa</i>	'strong' ('force')
Quality	suffix -tāṇṇa	<i>alämtäṇṇa</i>	'secular' ('world')
Quality/agent	suffix -awi	<i>hajmanotawi</i>	'religious' ('belief')
Quality	suffix -am	<i>hābtam</i>	'rich' ('wealth')

Amharic also makes use of a large number of compound formations (Table 9.13) (not necessarily written together), some of which are morphosyntactically GiṢiz-based (the -ä suffix marking head = the construct state) and some of which are modern. In all cases, definiteness and the plural must be marked at the right edge of the compound (cf. also Kapeliuk 1994; Edzard 2009).

A morphosyntactically complex example of compounding is the following (gerund + finite verb in suffix conjugation): *wärrö* 'having raided' + *bälla* 'he consumed' > *wärröbälla* 'gangster'.

4.5.3 Numerals

Amharic uses a decimal system. Cardinal numbers function syntactically like adjectives. There is just one set of forms with no gender distinction. Ordinal numbers are formed by adding the -äṇṇa suffix to the cardinals, e.g., *?and* 'one' > *?andäṇṇa* 'first'. Here are the essential Amharic numbers in Table 9.14.

TABLE 9.13 AMHARIC COMPOUND FORMATIONS

Giʕiz-style	<i>balä</i> x (master.CST x)	<i>baläbet</i> master.CST.house	‘landlord’
Giʕiz-style	<i>betä</i> x (house.CST x)	<i>betä kristijan</i> house.CST Christian	‘church’
modern-Amharic-style	(GEN-)x y	<i>(jä-)bunna bet</i> (of-)coffee house	‘bar, café’
modern-Amharic-style	(GEN-)x y	<i>(jä-)mäkina nädgi</i> (of-)car driver	‘driver’
[<i>balä bet</i>]	‘landlord’		
[<i>balä bet</i>]-u	‘the landlord’		
[<i>balä bet</i>]-offʃ	‘landlords’		
[<i>balä bet</i>]-offʃ-u	‘the landlords’		
[<i>bunna bet</i>]	‘bar/café’		
[<i>bunna bet</i>]-u	‘the bar/café’		
[<i>bunna bet</i>]-offʃ	‘bars/café’s’		
[<i>bunna bet</i>]-offʃ-u	‘the bars/café’s’		

TABLE 9.14 AMHARIC NUMBERS

0		<i>Zero</i>
1	፩	<i>ʔand</i>
2	፪	<i>hulätt</i>
3	፫	<i>sost</i>
4	፬	<i>ʔaratt</i>
5	፭	<i>ʔammist</i>
6	፮	<i>siddist</i>
7	፯	<i>säbatt</i>
8	፰	<i>simmint</i>
9	፱	<i>zät ’äṇṇ</i>
10	፲	<i>ʔassir</i>
11	፳	<i>ʔasra and</i>
12	፳፪	<i>ʔasra hulätt</i>
13	፳፫	<i>ʔasra sost</i>
14	፳፬	<i>ʔasra aratt</i>
15	፳፭	<i>ʔasra ammist</i>
16	፳፮	<i>ʔasra siddist</i>
17	፳፯	<i>ʔasra säbatt</i>
18	፳፰	<i>ʔasra simmint</i>
19	፳፱	<i>ʔasra zät ’äṇṇ</i>
20	፴	<i>haja</i>
30	፵	<i>sälasa</i>
40	፶	<i>ʔarba</i>
50	፷	<i>hamsa</i>
60	፸	<i>silsa</i>
70	፹	<i>säba</i>
80	፺	<i>sämanja</i>
90	፻	<i>zät ’äna</i>
100	፺፩	<i>mäto</i>
1,000	፺፪	<i>ʃi</i>

4.6 Verbs

4.6.1 Root types

As in other Semitic languages, verbal roots are mostly triradical (e.g., $\sqrt{s-b-r}$: *säbbärä* ‘to break’), but quadri- (e.g., $\sqrt{m-s-k-r}$ *mäsäkkärä* ‘to testify’) and even quinquiradical roots (e.g., $\sqrt{w-š-n-g-r}$ *wäfänäggärä* ‘to interlace’) exist as well. Some biradical roots historically had medial *w* or *j*, e.g., $\sqrt{h-d}$: *hedä* ‘to go’ (< $\sqrt{k-j-d}$) or $\sqrt{k-m}$: *k’omä* ‘so stand up’ (< $\sqrt{k-w-m}$). Alternatively, a guttural C_2 may have dropped, as in $\sqrt{s-f}$: *s’afä* ‘to write’ (< $\sqrt{s-h-f}$), or a weak or guttural C_3 may have dropped, as in $\sqrt{k-r}$: *k’ärrä* ‘to be absent’ (< $\sqrt{k-r-j}$) or $\sqrt{s-m}$: *sämma* ‘to hear’ (< $\sqrt{s-m-ʕ}$).

Roots that are not of the middle-weak type can be classified into types, A, B and C. While the gemination of C_2 in the basic diathesis is common to all roots, roots of type B keep the gemination also in the prefix conjugation (e.g., *äḏämmärä* > *jiḏämmir* ‘to begin’) as opposed to type A, where this is not the case (e.g., *säbbärä* > *jisäbr* ‘to begin’). Roots of type C feature an *a* vowel and also keep the gemination in the prefix conjugation (e.g., *galläbä* > *jigallib* ‘to gallop’). The difference between types A and B is entirely lexical (type C has a different vocalic pattern). Attempts to find phonological (as in the case of the Chaha jussive) or other criteria have not been successful (cf. Hudson 1991).

4.6.2 Conjugations and TAM features

The Amharic verb appears in the following variants (also shown in Table 9.15):

- 1 A suffix conjugation, denoting the completed past.
- 2 A long prefix conjugation, denoting the incompleted non-past.
- 3 A jussive (short prefix conjugation, mostly 1st and 3rd person), which stands in complementary distribution with the imperative (2nd person); in Table 9.15, the imperative forms appear after the obsolete jussive forms of the 2nd person (in parentheses).
- 4 A conjugated converb/gerund (another suffix conjugation), denoting subordinate events.

Both the prefix conjugation (2) and the converb/gerund (4) surface in two variants. The simple converb can express a sequence of events before the event expressed by the main verb, or modify the main verb. While the simple long prefix conjugation (2) is restricted to subordinate clauses, the compound long prefix conjugation and the compound gerund, both suffixed with the auxiliary *ʔallä* ‘to exist’, appear in main clauses. The compound

TABLE 9.15 BASIC AMHARIC CONJUGATION PATTERNS

	SUFFIX CONJ.	PREFIX CONJ.	JUSSIVE/IMPERATIVE	CONVERB/GERUND
1SG	<i>säbbär-kʷ</i>	<i>ə-säbr- (-l-säbr)</i>	<i>lə-sbär</i>	<i>säbərre</i> (< <i>*säbrä-e</i>)
2MSG	<i>säbbär-k</i>	<i>tə-säbr</i>	<i>(təsbär)/säbär</i>	<i>säbrä-h</i>
2FSG	<i>säbbär-f</i>	<i>tə-säbr-i-</i>	<i>(təsbär-i)/säbär-i</i>	<i>säbrä-f</i>
3MSG	<i>säbbär-ä</i>	<i>jə-säbr-</i>	<i>jə-sbär</i>	<i>säbro</i> (< <i>*säbrä-u</i>)
3FSG	<i>säbbär-äff</i>	<i>tə-säbr-</i>	<i>tə-sbär</i>	<i>säbr-a</i> (< <i>*säbrä-a</i>)
1PL	<i>säbbär-ən</i>	<i>ənnə-säbr-</i>	<i>ʔənnə-sbär</i>	<i>säbrä-n</i>
2PL	<i>säbbär-äfffiḥ</i>	<i>tə-säbr-u-</i>	<i>(tə-sbär-u)/säbär-u</i>	<i>säbräfffiḥ</i> (< <i>*säbrä-äfffiḥu</i>)
3PL/POL	<i>säbbär-u</i>	<i>jə-säbr-u-</i>	<i>jə-sbär-u</i>	<i>säbrä-w</i>

prefix conjugation expresses the indicative (imperfective) and the compound converb/gerund the resultative perfect. The paradigms are listed in Table 9.16.

As copulas, Amharic makes use of verbs and other elements to expand its TAM possibilities: *näbbär-* for the past, *n(ä)-* with object suffixes for the present (see §4.1.), and *ǰallä* as an existential copula (also denoting the present, but conjugated in the suffix conjugation). For the future, the verb *honä* in the prefix conjugation is used.

4.6.3 Diatheses (stems)

Like other Semitic languages, Amharic disposes of a system of verbal prefixes to form various diatheses (stems) that express the concepts of passivity, reflexivity, reciprocity, intensity and causativity. Here are the relevant forms of the prefix and suffix conjugations, the jussive and the converb. As in other Semitic languages, it is practical to use a system of sigla to refer to the individual diatheses (Table 9.17).

TABLE 9.16 AMHARIC COMPOUND PREFIX CONJUGATION AND COMPOUND CONVERB/GERUND

	COMPOUND PREFIX CONJ.	COMPOUND CONVERB/GERUND
1SG	<i>ǰə-säbr-alläh^w</i>	<i>säbärre-j-alläh^w</i>
2MSG	<i>tə-säbr-alläh</i>	<i>säbrä-h-all</i>
2FSG	<i>tə-säbr-ij-alläf</i>	<i>säbrä-f-all</i>
3MSG	<i>jə-säbr-all</i>	<i>säbro^w-all</i>
3FSG	<i>tə-säbr-alläff</i>	<i>säbra-alläff</i>
1PL	<i>ǰənnə-säbr-allän</i>	<i>säbrä-n-all</i>
2PL	<i>tə-säbr-alläffuh</i>	<i>säbraffäh^w-all</i>
3PL/POL	<i>jə-säbr-allu</i>	<i>säbrä-w-all</i>

TABLE 9.17 T-, (ǰA)-, AND S-PREFIXES IN THE AMHARIC DIATHESES

SIGLUM	SUFFIX CONJ.	PREFIX CONJ.	JUSSIVE	CONVERB
G (A)	<i>C₁äC₂C₃äC₃ä</i>	<i>jäC₁äC₂C₃</i>	<i>jäC₁C₂äC₃</i>	<i>C₁äC₂C₃o</i>
G (B)	<i>C₁äC₂C₃äC₃ä</i>	<i>jäC₁äC₂C₃äC₃</i>	<i>jäC₁äC₂C₃äC₃</i>	<i>C₁äC₂C₃äC₃o</i>
G (C)	<i>C₁aC₂C₃äC₃ä</i>	<i>jäC₁aC₂C₃äC₃</i>	<i>jäC₁aC₂C₃</i>	<i>C₁aC₂C₃o</i>
tä- (A)	<i>tä-C₁äC₂C₃äC₃ä</i>	<i>jä-C₁-C₁äC₂C₃äC₃</i>	<i>jä-C₁-C₁äC₂äC₃</i>	<i>tä-C₁äC₂C₃o</i>
tä- (B)	<i>tä-C₁äC₂C₃äC₃ä</i>	<i>jä-C₁-C₁äC₂C₃äC₃</i>	<i>jä-C₁-C₁äC₂äC₃</i>	<i>tä-C₁äC₂C₃äC₃o</i>
tä- (C)	<i>tä-C₁aC₂C₃äC₃ä</i>	<i>jä-C₁-C₁aC₂C₃äC₃</i>	<i>jä-C₁-C₁aC₂äC₃</i>	<i>tä-C₁aC₂C₃o</i>
ǰa- (A)	<i>a-C₁äC₂C₃äC₃ä</i>	<i>jaC₁äC₂C₃</i>	<i>jaC₁C₂äC₃</i>	<i>ǰa-C₁äC₂C₃o</i>
ǰa- (B)	<i>a-C₁äC₂C₃äC₃ä</i>	<i>jaC₁äC₂C₃äC₃</i>	<i>jaC₁äC₂C₃äC₃</i>	<i>ǰa-C₁äC₂C₃äC₃o</i>
ǰa- (C)	<i>a-C₁aC₂C₃äC₃ä</i>	<i>jaC₁aC₂C₃äC₃</i>	<i>jaC₁aC₂C₃</i>	<i>ǰa-C₁aC₂C₃o</i>
ǰa-s- (A)	<i>ǰa-s-C₁äC₂C₃äC₃ä</i>	<i>ja-s-C₁äC₂C₃äC₃</i>	<i>ja-s-C₁äC₂C₃äC₃</i>	<i>ǰa-s-C₁äC₂C₃äC₃o</i>
ǰa-s- (B)	<i>ǰa-s-C₁äC₂C₃äC₃ä</i>	<i>ja-s-C₁äC₂C₃äC₃</i>	<i>ja-s-C₁äC₂C₃äC₃</i>	<i>ǰa-s-C₁äC₂C₃äC₃o</i>
ǰa-s- (C)	<i>ǰa-s-C₁aC₂C₃äC₃ä</i>	<i>ja-s-C₁aC₂C₃äC₃</i>	<i>ja-s-C₁aC₂C₃</i>	<i>ǰa-s-C₁aC₂C₃o</i>

SIGLUM	SUFFIX CONJ.	PREFIX CONJ.	JUSSIVE	CONVERB
*ʔa-t-	ʔa-C ₁ -C ₁ aC ₂ C ₂ äC ₃ ä	ja-C ₁ -C ₁ aC ₂ C ₂ iC ₃	ja-C ₁ -C ₁ aC ₂ C ₃	a-C ₁ -C ₁ aC ₂ C ₃ o
G-red.	C ₁ äC ₂ aC ₂ C ₂ äC ₃ ä	jiC ₁ äC ₂ aC ₂ C ₂ iC ₃	jiC ₁ äC ₂ aC ₂ C ₃	C ₁ äC ₂ aC ₂ C ₃ o
tä-red.	tä-C ₁ äC ₂ aC ₂ C ₂ äC ₃ ä	ji-C ₁ -C ₁ äC ₂ aC ₂ C ₂ äC ₃	ji-C ₁ -C ₁ äC ₂ aC ₂ äC ₃	tä-C ₁ äC ₂ aC ₂ C ₃ o
ʔa-red.	ʔa-C ₁ äC ₂ aC ₂ C ₂ äC ₃ ä	jaC ₁ äC ₂ aC ₂ C ₂ iC ₃	jaC ₁ äC ₂ aC ₂ C ₃	ʔa-C ₁ äC ₂ aC ₂ C ₃ o
ʔa-s-red.	ʔa-s-C ₁ äC ₂ aC ₂ C ₂ äC ₃ ä	ja-s-C ₁ äC ₂ aC ₂ C ₂ iC ₃	ja-s-C ₁ äC ₂ aC ₂ C ₃	ʔa-s-C ₁ äC ₂ aC ₂ C ₃ o
*ʔa-t-red.	ʔa-C ₁ -C ₁ äC ₂ aC ₂ C ₂ äC ₃ ä	ja-C ₁ -C ₁ äC ₂ aC ₂ C ₂ iC ₃	ja-C ₁ -C ₁ äC ₂ aC ₂ C ₃	ʔa-C ₁ -C ₁ äC ₂ aC ₂ C ₃ o

Note: red. = reduplicated.

The internal opposition system of the various Amharic diatheses, i.e., the way in which the various diatheses affect the semantics of the resulting verb forms, can be illustrated as follows:

G vs. tä- (passive, reflexive, reciprocal)

säbbärä ‘he/it broke’ vs. täsäbbärä ‘he/it was broken’

marräkä ‘he captured’ vs. tämarräkä ‘he was captured’

G vs. G-reduplicated (intensifying)

säbbärä ‘he broke’ vs. säbabbärä ‘he smashed to pieces’

näggärä ‘he talked’ vs. nägaggärä ‘he conversed’

G-reduplicated vs. tä-reduplicated (passive, intensifying)

säbabbärä ‘he smashed to pieces’ vs. täsäbabbärä ‘it was smashed to pieces’

G vs. a-/a-s- (causative)

bälla ‘he ate’ vs. ʔabälla ‘he fed’ (“gave to eat”)

t’ätt’a ‘he drank’ vs. ʔat’ätt’a ‘he gave to drink’;

ʔajjä ‘he saw’ vs. ʔasajjä ‘he showed’;

mälläsä ‘he returned (trans.)’ vs. ʔasmälläsä ‘he caused to return (trans.)’

tä-reduplicated vs. *a-t-reduplicated (causative, reciprocal)

täkassäsu ‘they accused each other’ vs. ʔakkassäsu ‘they sued each other’

4.6.4 Impersonal verbs

Impersonal verbs, or rather verbs with demoted subject, are quite widespread in Amharic (cf., e.g., Edzard 2016). Mostly, such experiencer constructions occur in the semantic realms of sensation, emotion, cognition, volition and perception. Examples include the following:

rabä-w	‘he is hungry’ (“it hungered him”)
t’ämma-w	‘he is thirsty’ (“it thirsted him”)
bärrädä-w	‘he feels cold/freezes’ (“it froze him”)
mok’ä-w	‘he feels hot’ (“it heated him”)
däkkämä-w	‘he is tired’ (“it tired him”)
ammämä-w	‘he got sick’ (“it made him sick”)

4.6.5 Phrasal verbs

Similar to conflated complements as in verb phrases like *to make love*, phrasal verbs express verbal ideas by juxtaposing an invariable element (ideophone, onomatopoeic, noun or other; cf. Meyer 2011: 1197) and one of the verbs *ʔalä* ‘to say’ and *ʔadärrägä* ‘to make’, often semantically bleached, which contains the grammatical information. Examples include *k’uffj’ alä* ‘to sit’, *zimm alä* ‘to be quiet’, *k’uffj’ ʔadärrägä* ‘to put down’ and *täsfa ʔadärrägä* ‘to hope’.

Appleyard (2012) demonstrates that constructions linking an invariable element with the conjugated verb ‘to say’, e.g., Bilin (Cushitic) *fuf j-ix^w* ‘he blew’ (*fuf* ‘he said’) constitute an areal feature in Ethiopia.

4.6.6 Negation

Verbal negation is expressed by the prefix *ʔal-* combined with the suffix *-(i)mm* in the suffix conjugation and the prefix *ʔa-* with the same suffix in the different prefix conjugations. In the simple prefix conjugation and in subordinate clauses, the prefix *ʔa-* alone is used (Table 9.18).

The existential verb *ʔallä* (morphologically suffix conjugation, but semantically denoting non-past) appears negated in the form *jällä-mm* ‘he/it does not exist’. The copula *n-äw* is negated as *ʔajdällä-mm* ‘he is not’.

4.6.7 Discourse markers

The suffixes *-mm* and *-ss* (the latter mostly in questions) serve to mark contrastive focus, e.g., *ʔine-mm dähna nä-jñ* ‘me too, I am fine’ (1SG-FOC good/well COP-1MSG.OBJ), *ʔirswo-ss ʔindämin nä-wot* ‘and you (POL), how are you?’ (2SG.POL-FOC how COP-2SG.POL).

4.7 Prepositions

Prepositions (relational prefixes) can be prefixed to both nouns and verbs, in the latter case also to an additional relative marker. Many prepositions are used together with postpositions (often grammaticalized nouns; cf. Yri 2005), thus forming circumpositions, a typical feature of SOV languages (see §5.1). Table 9.19 follows Meyer (2011: 1199).

In combination with the relative prefix, portmanteau morphemes emerge (§3.7), e.g., *bä- + jä- > bä*, as in *b-alläjä-w samint* (< **bä-jä-alläjä-w samint*) ‘last week’ (in-[REL]-pass.SC.3MSG-DEF week).

TABLE 9.18 VERBAL NEGATION IN AMHARIC

<i>ʔal-säbbärä-mm</i>	‘he did not break’ (NEG-break.SC.3MSG-NEG)
<i>ʔa-jsäbr-imm</i>	‘he does not break’ (NEG-break.PC.3MSG-NEG)
<i>s-a-jsäb</i>	‘when he does not break’ (if-NEG-break.PC.3MSG)
<i>ʔa-jisbär</i>	‘let him not break’ (NEG-break.JUSS.3MSG)

TABLE 9.19 AMHARIC PREPOSITIONS

<i>PREP.</i>	<i>BEFORE NOUN</i>	<i>BEFORE (RELATIVE) VERB</i>
<i>jä-</i>	of (GEN)	which, who (REL)
<i>l(ä)-</i>	for (addressee, beneficiary)	in order to
<i>kä</i>	from, with (comitative)	if (real condition)
<i>b(ä)-</i>	in, at, on, with, through, by, against (locative, instrumental, malefactive)	if (unreal condition), when (temporal)
<i>ʔənd(ä)-</i>	like	that (complementizer), just as
<i>sälä-</i>	because of	because
<i>ʔəsk(ä)-</i>	until, to	until
<i>bästä-</i>	towards (restricted use)	–
<i>s-</i>	–	while, when
<i>wädä(-)</i>	towards	–
<i>(j)alä(-)</i>	without	–

5 SYNTAX

5.1 Word order

In terms of the criteria established by Greenberg (1966), Amharic is a model SOV language. Strict SOV languages, like Amharic, typically have the following morphosyntactic traits:

- Postpositions (or circumpositions) are used instead of prepositions.
- A suffixed (post-specifying) definite article and object marker.
- Adjectives, genitives and relative clauses precede their head noun.
- The standard of comparison precedes the adjective.
- The auxiliary is positioned after the main verb.
- The position of the verb (including the copula) is sentence-final.

Already Leslau (1945) had demonstrated that these features in Amharic can clearly be attributed to a Cushitic substratum (cf. also Ferguson 1976: 75, Appleyard 1978, 2011).

Kapeliuk (2009) adduces further evidence confirming that a Cushitic substratum in Ethio-Semitic syntax is also discernible in the use of the gerund, the frequent replacement of adjectives by relative verbal clauses (cf. also Edzard 2001) and the use of synthetic verbal forms.

Here are some illustrative examples:

ad (i)	<i>ʔi-bet</i> in-house 'in the house'	<i>wist'</i> within	<i>bä-midir</i> at-earth 'on earth'	<i>laj</i> on	<i>kä-misa</i> from-lunch 'before lunch'	<i>bäfit</i> before
ad (ii)	<i>bet</i> house 'a house'	<i>bet-u</i> house-DEF 'the house' (subject)	<i>bet-u-n</i> house-DEF-ACC 'the house' (object)			

ad (iii)	<i>tillik' bet</i> big house 'a big house'	<i>tillik'-u bet</i> big-DEF house 'the big house' (subject)	<i>tillik'-u-n bet</i> big-DEF-ACC house 'the big house' (object)
	<i>jä-lidɕ bet</i> GEN-child house 'a child's house'	<i>jä-lidɕ-u bet</i> GEN-child-DEF house 'the house of the child'	
	<i>jä-mätt'a</i> REL-come.SC.3MSG 'a child that came'	<i>lidɕ</i> child	<i>jä-mätt'a-w</i> REL-come.SC.3MSG-DEF 'the child that came'
			<i>lidɕ</i> child

A possessive suffix to a noun-adjective phrase appears at the right edge, e.g., *tillik'-u bet-u* 'his big house' (big-DEF house-3MSG.POSS).

ad (iv)	<i>kä-Täsfaje</i> from-Täsfaye 'taller than Täsfaye'	<i>räzzim</i> tall	<i>kä-ss^wa</i> from-her	<i>k'onɕo</i> beautiful 'more beautiful than she'
ad (v)	<i>jäsäbr</i> break.PC.3MSG 'he breaks' (dependent)	<i>jäsäbr-all</i> break.PC.3MSG-AUX.3MSG 'he breaks' (independent)		
	<i>säbro</i> (dependent gerund) break.CVB.3MSG 'breaking, having broken'	<i>säbr^w-all</i> (independent "compound" gerund) break.CVB.3MSG-AUX.3MSG 'he has broken' (resultative)		
ad (vi)	<i>wiffa-w</i> dog-DEF	<i>lidɕ-u-n</i> child-DEF-ACC	<i>näkkäsä</i> bite.SC.3MSG	
	<i>lidɕ-u</i> child-DEF	<i>ʔitjopp'əjawi</i> Ethiopian	<i>n-äw</i> COP-3MSG.OBJ	
				'the child/boy is (an) Ethiopian'

5.2 Relative clauses and cleft sentences

Relative clauses, which in Amharic often take the role of adjectives and participles, also play a major role in Amharic. Instead of simple predication, e.g., *ʔabat-e mätt'a* 'my father came' (father-1SG.POSS come.SC.3MSG) it is often more idiomatic to use a cleft sentence (cf., e.g., Yri 2006): *jä-mätt'a-w ʔabat-e n-äw* 'it is my father who came.' ≈ 'my father came' (REL-come.SC.3MSG-DEF father-1SG.POSS COP-3MSG.OBJ) or (with the same meaning) *ʔabat-e n-äw jä-mätt'a-w* (father-1SG.POSS COP-3MSG.OBJ REL-come.SC.3MSG-DEF). The latter construction does not automatically imply increased focus. Adverbial phrases can be embedded in the same manner:

<i>jämmi-tinor-äw</i> REL-live.PC.2MSG-DEF	<i>ʔaddis ʔabäba</i> Addis Ababa	<i>n-äw</i> COP-3MSG.OBJ
		'It is in Addis Ababa that you live.' ≈ 'You live in Addis Ababa.'
(or: <i>ʔaddis ʔabäba näw jä-mmi-tinor-äw</i>)		

tinantinna n-äw j-ajjähuw-affäw
 yesterday COP-3MSG.OBJ REL-see.SC.1SG-3PL.OBJ/3SG.POL.OBJ
 'It is yesterday that I saw them/Him.' ≈ 'I saw them/Him yesterday.'

siläzzih n-äw wädä ?itijopp'ija jä-mätt'ahu-t
 therefore COP-3MSG.OBJ towards Ethiopia REL -come.SC.1SG-DEF
 'It is therefore I came to Ethiopia.' ≈ 'Therefore I came to Ethiopia.'

Negated relative phrases function as follows:

j-al-säbbärä ' (he) who did not break' (REL-NEG-break.SC.3MSG)
jämm-a-jsäbir ' (he) who does not break' (REL-NEG-break.PC.3MSG)

5.3 Converb constructions

Amharic converbs cover a wide range of usages, from marking a sequence of events and coincidence to adverbial use. While they usually agree with the sentence-final finite verb (though different-subject constructions exist as well), they can also be frozen in the 3rd person singular when used adverbially (cf., e.g., Edzard 2014). Here are a few examples:

- sequence of events
taksi t'ärtäw täsaffiräw kä-t'ik'it gize bä-h'ala migib bet
 taxi call.CVB.3PL get_in.CVB.3PL from-little time after food house
jidärsallu
 arrive.PC.3PL
 'they call a taxi, get in, and after a while they arrive at the restaurant'
 ('having called, a taxi, having gotten in, . . .')
- coincidence
lidṣ-u rot'o gäbba
 child-DEF run.CVB.3MSG come_in.SC.3MSG
 'the boy came running' ('the boy [he] running he came')
- adverbial use (manner)
däkmo wäddäk'ä
 be_exhausted.CVB.3MSG fall.SC.3MSG
 'he fell exhausted' ('[he] being exhausted he fell')
- lexicalized converb with agreement
?abrän ?innimät'allän
 be_together.CVB.1PL come.PC.1PL
 'we will come together' ('[we] being together we will come')
- lexicalized converb without agreement (frozen in 3MSG)
fäss'imo ?at'affu-t
 complete.CVB.3MSG destroy.SC.3PL-3MSG.OBJ
 'they completely destroyed it' ('[he] having completed they destroyed it')

5.4 Coordination and subordination

Nouns are coordinated by the suffix *-(i)nna*, e.g., *bal-inna mist* 'married couple' (husband and wife); they can also appear asyndetically, e.g., *?innat ?abbat* '[one pair of] parents'

(mother father). The disjunctive conjunctions are *wājim* and *wājiss* ‘or’, the latter one being used exclusively in questions.

Finite verbs are likewise coordinated by *-(i)nna*, e.g., *jibāla-nna jīt’ätt’a-ll* ‘he eats and (then he) drinks’ (eat.PC.3MSG-and drink.PC.3MSG-AUX.3MSG). An asyndetic construction *jibāla-ll jīt’ätt’a-ll* (eat.PC.3MSG-AUX.3MSG drink.PC.3MSG-AUX.3MSG) with the same meaning is also attested. The particles (*nägār*) *gin* and *indgi* ‘but, yet’ both serve to express adversative coordination.

Subordinated events appear in the gerund (§5.3) or in the simple prefix conjugation with a preposition:

zinab s-inor *ʔajār-u jik’äzäkk’iz-all*
rain when-live.PC.3MSG air-DEF be(come)_cold.PC.3MSG-AUX.3MSG
‘when it rains the air becomes cold’ (cf. Meyer 2016: 197).

The majority of prepositions, except *s-* (when, while), *bä-* (unreal condition), and *kä-* (real condition + perfective) (cf. Meyer 2011: 1201–2), in the function of conjunctions require the relative prefix *jä(mm)-*:

t’änkiro silä-mm-isära *bizu jikkäffäl-äw-all*
hard because-REL-work.PC.3MSG much be_paid.PC.3MSG-3MSG.OBJ-AUX.3MSG
‘because he works hard he gets paid a lot’ (cf. Leslau 1995: 307).

6 LEXICON

6.1 The Semitic stock

Amharic shares a considerable number of triradical verbs and nouns, as well as pronouns, prepositions and particles found across Semitic (for a statistical survey, cf. Appleyard 1979). As Leslau’s (1987: 765–813) index of Semitic roots clearly demonstrates, many common Semitic roots are also found in Giʕiz and hence have made their way into Amharic (without claiming that Amharic is a direct successor of Giʕiz). Akkadian *eblu*, Hebrew *hebel*, Arabic and Giʕiz *habl* etc. all correspond to Amharic *habl* ‘rope’ (with a weakened guttural). Some of these lemmata are loan words in South Semitic (as opposed to common Semitic roots). Often, other roots are used in Amharic (and other South Semitic languages) as compared with common Semitic, e.g., *bälla* ‘to eat’ (< common Semitic *balaf* ‘to swallow’), as opposed to common Semitic *ʔakala* ‘to eat’.

6.2 Cushitic loan words

There are ubiquitous traces of Cushitic lexical substratum in Ethio-Semitic (cf. Leslau 1945, 1952, Appleyard 1977). Appleyard (1977) identifies Cushitic loans in the following semantic fields:

- 1 “Man,” comprising general terms, kinship terms and parts of the body, e.g., Amharic *ʔaggot* ‘uncle’ < Bilin (Central Cushitic) *ʔäg*.
- 2 “The domestic environment,” comprising agricultural activities and implements, crops, domestic animals, food and its preparation and the [realm of the] house, e.g., Amharic *doro* ‘chicken’ < Saho-Afar (East-Cushitic) *dorho*.

- 3 “The natural environment,” comprising natural phenomena, flora, and fauna, e.g., *däga* ‘highlands’ < Bilin (Central Cushitic) *dag* ‘summit, above’.
- 4 “Social organization,” comprising law and government, economy, warfare and religion, e.g., *ṣat’e* ‘emperor’ < Kemant (Central Cushitic) *aṣena*.
- 5 “Grammatical items,” comprising pronouns, numerals, and particles, e.g., *ṣi(h)* ‘thousand’ < Bilin (Central Cushitic) *ṣix*.

6.3 Arabic loan words

Disregarding specifically Islamic vocabulary used by Muslims in Ethiopia, examples of Arabic loanwords generally used in Amharic are *hakim* ‘(medical) doctor’ (< *ḥaki:m*), *tarik* ‘history’ (< *taṣṛi:x*), *ḥisab* ‘bill’ (< *ḥisa:b*), *māk’ās* ‘scissors’ (< *miqass’*) and many other terms (cf. Leslau 1990, Zaborski 2003).

Some words reflect Arabic pronunciation, notably [*jä-ʔ*] *ingliz agär* ‘England’ ([GEN-] English land).

6.4 European (Italian and English) loan words

The lexical influence of European languages, mainly Italian and English – as well as lexical code-switching in general – is prominent in the whole Ethio-Semitic area (cf., e.g., Abraham Demoz 1963). Italian loan words in Amharic, which often carry a special semantic shade, can be tentatively subcategorized as follows (cf. Edzard 2003):

- 1 Persons, professions: *ṣimamma* ‘mom’, *mammo* ‘male baby’, *gutto* ‘little stout person’ (Ital. *gatto* ‘tomcat’), *listro* ‘shoe shine boy’ (Ital. *lustrò* ‘shoe crème’).
- 2 Vehicles, technique, building material: *fabrika* ‘factory’, *mākina* ‘car’ (Ital. *macchina*), *gomma* ‘rubber, tyre’, *bukko* ‘hole in tyre’ (Ital. *buco*), *bonda* ‘iron fixation’, *targa* ‘name tag’ (Ital. *targa* ‘tag’), *tubbo* ‘[lead] pipe’ (Ital. *tubo*), *ṣantenna* ‘antenna’, *siminto* ‘concrete’ (Ital. *cemento*).
- 3 Appliances, furniture, tools, instruments, further items: *banko* ‘bar table’, *baṣṣo* ‘bathtub’, *t’rumba* ‘trumpet’, *pakko* ‘packet [of cigarettes]’, *pippa* ‘pipe’, *kandella* ‘cigarette lighter’, *samuna* ‘soap’ (Ital. *sapone*), *karta* ‘map’, *gazet’a* ‘newspaper’.
- 4 Clothing, fabrics: *proba* ‘fitting-on [at the tailor]’ (Ital. *prova*), *kabba* ‘coat’ (Ital. *cabba*), *kolleta* ‘collar’ (Ital. *colletto*), *lino* ‘linen’.
- 5 Fruits, groceries, dishes, beverages, luxuries (“Genußmittel”): *marmälata* ‘jam’, *furno* ‘bread [of European style]’ (Ital. *forno* ‘furnace’), *formadžo* ‘cheese’, *sälat’a* ‘salad’, *bira* ‘beer’, *sigara* ‘cigar’, *fäkolata* ‘chocolate’, *mastika* ‘chewing gum’ (Ital. *mastice*).
- 6 Measures, abstract terms, institutions, other terms: *litro* ‘liter’, *muzik’a* ‘music’, *nota* ‘note’, *ṣarma* ‘sign’ (Ital. *arma* ‘weapon’), *formula* ‘formula’, *firma* ‘signature’ (from which noun the root √f-r-m *färrämä* ‘to sign’ is extrapolated), *fina* ‘direction’ (Ital. *fine* ‘purpose’), *polätika* ‘politics’, *posta* ‘post’, *ṣinfluwenza* ‘influenza’ (Ital. *influenza*).

Place names at the Horn of Africa have often been transmitted in Italian orthography, for instance *Ucciali* (Amharic *Wit’ale*) and *Mogadiscio* (Somali *Muk’dishu*). Also, some Italian terms have gained the status of Amharic proper names, notably *märkato*, the big market in Addis Ababa (*mercato*) and *pijassa*, the inner city of Addis Ababa (*piazza*). Some country names in Ethio-Semitic equally reflect Italian pronunciation, e.g., *rusija* ‘Russia’ and, of course, *it’alja* ‘Italy’ itself.

The numerous English loan words in Amharic official vocabulary include terms such as *ripablik* ‘republic’, *juniversiti* ‘university’, *ʔembasi* ‘embassy’, *administrefin* ‘administration’ and others. English pronunciation appears also in the word for “German” and “Germany” [*jä-]džärmän ʔagär* ‘Germany’ ([GEN-]German land).

7 SAMPLE TEXTS

- 1 Treaty of Wičale (“Ucciali”) between Italy and Ethiopia, §17.

የኢትዮጵያ	ንጉሠ	ነገሣት	ከኤውሮጳ	ነገሥታት	
<i>jä-ʔitjopp’ija</i>	<i>nigusä</i>	<i>nägäst</i>	<i>kä-ʔewropp’a</i>	<i>nägästat</i>	
GEN-Ethiopia	king.CST	king.PL	with.GEN-Europe	government.PL	
ለሚፈልጉት		ጉዳይ	ሁሉ	በኢጣልያ	መንግሥት
<i>lä-mm-ifälligu-t</i>		<i>guddaj</i>	<i>hullu</i>	<i>bä-ʔit’alja</i>	<i>mängist</i>
for-REL-want.3POL-3MSG.OBJ		thing	all	in.GEN-Italy	government
ኢጋጃንነት	መላላክ	ይቻላቸዋል ።			
<i>ʔaggazinnät</i>	<i>mällalak</i>	<i>jijfäfal-atfjäfäw-all.</i>			
help	communicate.INF	be possible.3MSG-3POL.OBJ-AUX.3MSG			

‘The King of Kings of Ethiopia has the option to communicate with the help of the Government of Italy for all [international] affairs that he wants with Governments of Europe.’

- 2 Haile Selassie (cf. Kapeliuk 1999: 15–16).

ዚህ	ባለፈውና	ባሁኑ	ዘመን	የኢትዮጵያ		
<i>bä-zzih</i>	<i>b-alläfä-w-inna</i>	<i>b-ahun-u</i>	<i>zämän</i>	<i>jä-ʔitjopp'ija</i>		
in-DEM.MSG	in.REL-pass.SC.3MSG-DEF-and	in-now-DEF	time	GEN-Ethiopia		
ሕዝብ	ከተራው	ሰው	አንስቶ	እስከ	ንጉሠ	
<i>hizb</i>	<i>kä-tära-w</i>	<i>säw</i>	<i>ʔansito</i>	<i>ʔiskä</i>	<i>nigusä</i>	
people	from-ordinary-DEF	man	start.CVB.MSG	until	king.CST	
ነገሥቱ፤	ለጊዜው	በኀዘን	ባሕር	እንዲሰጥም		
<i>nägäst-u,</i>	<i>lä-gize-w</i>	<i>bä-hazän</i>	<i>bahr</i>	<i>ind-isät'm</i>		
king.PL-3MSG.POSS	for-time-DEF	in.GEN-sadness	sea	COMP-sink.PC.3MSG		
የኢጣልያ	ሕዝብ	እስከ	ንጉሡ	ለጊዜው	በደስታ	ባሕር
<i>jä-it'alja</i>	<i>hizb</i>	<i>iskä</i>	<i>nigus-u</i>	<i>lä-gize-w</i>	<i>bä-dässita</i>	<i>bahr</i>
GEN-Italy	people	until	king-3MSG.POSS	for-time-DEF	in.GEN-joy	sea
እንዲዋኝ	ያደረግህበት			ምክንያት		
<i>ind-iwän</i>	<i>j-adärräghi-bbä-t-in</i>			<i>miknäjat</i>		
COMP-swim.PC.3MSG	REL-do.SC.2MSG-APPL-3MSG.OBJ-ACC			reason		
አንተ	ብቻ	ታውቀዋለህ		እንጂ	ፍጡር	
<i>ʔantä</i>	<i>bijfä</i>	<i>tawk'-äw-alläh</i>		<i>ʔindži</i>	<i>fit'ur</i>	
you.2MSG	only	know.PC.2MSG-3MSG.OBJ-AUX.2MSG		but	creature	
ተመራምሮ	ለማወቅ	የማይችለው				
<i>tämäramro</i>	<i>lä-mawäk'</i>	<i>jämm-a-jijfil-äw</i>				
investigate.CVB.3MSG	for-know.INF	REL-NEG-can.PC.3MSG-3MSG.OBJ				

ረቂቅ	ምስጢር	ነው።
<i>rāk'ik'</i>	<i>mist'ir</i>	<i>n-äw.</i>
subtle	secret	COP-3MSG.OBJ

‘It is a subtle secret which a creature, even after much exploring, cannot know but which You alone do know: why in the immediate past as well as now You have made the Ethiopian people, from the ordinary man to the Emperor, sink in a sea of distress for a time, and why You have made the Italian people up to its king swim in a sea of joy for a time.’

- 3 Bərhanu Zärihun, *Maḥabbäl* (‘The Wave’), p. 11, l. 7–21 (adapted from Krzyżanowska 2016: 83f).

ለሥጋቱ	ብዙ	ምክንያቶች	ነበሩት።
lä-sigat-u	bizu	miknjatoff	näbbär-u-t.
for-anxiety-POSS.3MSG	many	reason.PL	AUX.PST-3PL-3MSG.OBJ
ሥራ	የለውም።	እንዴት	ይኖራል? [. . .]
sira	jällä-wi-mm.	indet	jinor-all?
job	COP.NOT_EXIST.3MSG-3MSG.OBJ-NEG	how	live.3MSG.PC-AUX.NPST.3MSG
ይኖርበት	የነበረው	ቤት	ሌላ ሰው
jinori-bb-ät	jä-näbbärä-w	bet	lela säw
live.3MSG.PC-APL-3MSG.OBJ	REL-AUX.SC.3MSG-DEF	house	other man
እንደተከራየው	ጓደኞቹ	አይተው	
indä-täkäräjjä-w	g ^w addäñnoff-u	ajtäw	
COMP-rent.SC.3MSG-3MSG.OBJ	friend.PL-POSS.3MSG	see.CVB.3PL	
ነገረውታል። [. . .]	ጓደኞቹ		
nägräw-it-all.	g ^w addäñnoff-u		
tell.CVB.3PL-3MSG.OBJ-AUX.NPST.3MSG	friend.PL-POSS.3MSG		
ካላስጠጉት	በስተቀር	ሌላ	መግቢያ
kal-ast'ägg-u-t	bästäk'är	lela	mägbija
if.NEG-approach.SC.3PL-3MSG.OBJ	unless	other	entrance
የለውም።	እርግጥ	አፍ	አውጥተው
jällä-wi-mm.	irgəṭ	af	awt'itäw
COP.NOT_EXIST.3MSG-3MSG.OBJ-NEG	of_course	mouth	bring_out.CVB.3PL
እምቢ	አይሉት	ይሆናል።	ከልብ
imbi	a-jlu-t	jihon-all.	kä-libb
no	NEG-say.3PL.IPFV-3MSG.OBJ	be.PC.3SG-AUX.NPST.3MSG	from-heart
ፈቃደኞች	ስለ	መሆናቸው	እርግጠኛ
fäk'adäñnoff	silä	mähon-afṣäw	irgit'äñna
volunteer.PL	about	be.VN-POSS.3PL	sure
			አይደለም
			ajdällä-mm
			COP.NOT BE.3MSG-NEG

‘He had lots of reasons for his concern. He doesn’t have work. How is he going to live? [. . .] His friends have seen that somebody else rented the house where he used to live and told him so [. . .]. Unless his friends take him in, he has no place to stay. Of course, they may not openly refuse him. He is not sure whether their offer will be sincere.’

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