Topics in the Syntax of Tigrinya

Gioia Cacchioli
Université de Genève
Département de Linguistique
Rue De-Candolle 2
1205 Geneva
Switzerland

gioia.cacchioli@unige.ch

ORCID: 0000-0002-1387-8942

Jason Overfelt
Oakland University
Department of Linguistics
117 Fitzgerald House
614 Pioneer Drive
Rochester, Michigan 48309
USA

overfelt@oakland.edu

ORCID: 0000-0003-2244-561X

Abstract: This chapter offers a selective, analytically oriented investigation of key aspects of Tigrinya syntax. Rather than providing a comprehensive grammatical description, it focuses on phenomena that are particularly informative for both descriptive and theoretical study. Combining general overviews with targeted phenomena, the chapter examines properties of the nominal, verbal, and clausal domains. These include double determination, object marking, prepositions, verb raising, clause types, information structure, and negation. Through these analyses the chapter aims to clarify central patterns in Tigrinya syntax, and to situate the language within broader investigations in syntactic theory, typology, and Semitic linguistics.

Keywords: Tigrinya, Ethio-semitic, Syntax, Morphology

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1 Introduction

1.1 Goal of the Chapter

This chapter investigates selected topics in the syntax of Tigrinya, an Ethio-semitic language spoken primarily in Eritrea and northern Ethiopia. We do not aim to provide an exhaustive grammatical account of the language, which has been described elsewhere in varying levels of detail (Conti Rossini 1940, Leslau 1941, Mason 1996, Gebregziabher 2013, Kogan 1997, 2005, Tsehaye 2009, Nazareth 2011, Tesfay 2016, Bulakh 2019, Niguss 2021). Rather, the chapter adopts a selective and analytically oriented perspective, concentrating on aspects of Tigrinya syntax that are particularly revealing from both descriptive and theoretical standpoints. The goal is to elucidate patterns that are central to understanding the structure of the language while simultaneously engaging with issues of broader linguistic relevance that inform ongoing debates in syntactic theory and typology.

The structure of the chapter is based on a combination of general overview and focused analysis. Each section first outlines some grammatical properties of Tigrinya, highlighting salient features of its nominal, verbal, and clausal systems and then turns to a series of focused investigations that illustrate how the language poses distinctive empirical and analytical challenges. Among the topics addressed are the grammatical status of double demonstratives, object markers and prepositions, the morphosyntactic evidence for verb raising, the range and structure of clause types, and negation. By combining general description with targeted case studies, the chapter also seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the language's syntactic architecture and its place within the Ethio-semitic and wider Afro-asiatic contexts.

The chapter is structured as follows: Section 2 focuses on the nominal domain and discusses double determination, possessive constructions, and prepositions. Section 3 turns to the verbal domain, examining tense and aspect constructions, verb raising and transitivity alternations. Section 4 addresses the clausal domain and analyzes information-structural properties, question formation, clause-typing phenomena and sentential negation. A brief conclusion closes the chapter.

Before turning to the following section, we briefly situate Tigrinya in its ethnographic context and offer some background on our language consultants.

1.2 Ethnographic Information

Tigrinya is an Ethio-semitic language belonging to the Eastern Ethiopic branch of the South Semitic language family. It is closely related to languages such as Amharic and Tigré and more distantly related to Arabic and Hebrew. Tigrinya is written from left to right with the *Gəʕəz* abugida, a syllabic writing system in which more than thirty consonants are annotated for and seven vowel

diacritics (called "orders" (Leslau 1941, Mason 1996)) are combined in a single glyph known as *fidɛl* 'syllograph' (Nazareth 2011).

There are approximately 10 million speakers of Tigrinya worldwide. The language is spoken predominantly in central Eritrea (2.5 million speakers) and in the northern region of Tigray in Ethiopia (4.3 million speakers) on the Horn of Africa (Bulakh 2019:175).

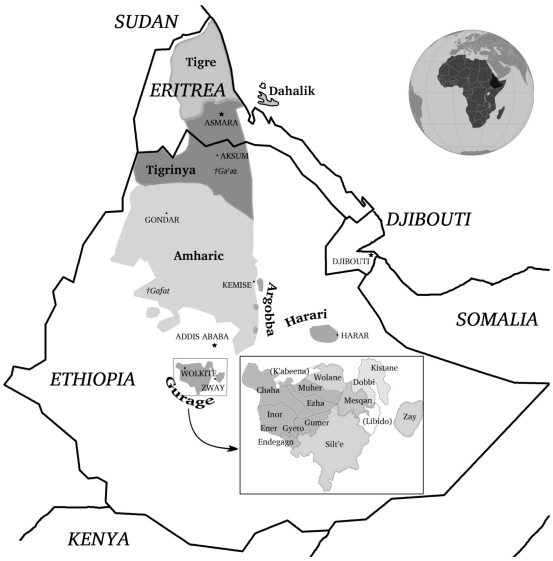

Figure 1: Distribution of Tigrinya speakers (adapted from The Semitic Languages (Weninger (2011)); credit: Ronny Meyer)

While the language has faced various degrees of minoritization through periods of colonization and occupation, Tigrinya currently serves as a national language of Eritrea and one of the official languages of Ethiopia. Within Tigrinya speaking regions, it is a language of instruction in primary school as well as in secondary and post-secondary education. Although the language is not officially classified as an endangered language, Tigrinya is under-resourced and faces threats from more dominant languages including Amharic and English.

There are several regional varieties of Tigrinya between Ethiopia and Eritrea. At least a Northern (Eritrean) and a Southern (Ethiopian) dialect have been recognized in the literature (Goldenberg 2013:17). At present, there has been very little research conducted on dialectal variation in Tigirnya with the notable exceptions of Tsehaye 2009 and Niguss 2021. The features of the Southern dialects of Ethiopia have been described as innovations that developed under the influence of Amharic and the Cushitic language Oromo, both of which also serve as official languages of Ethiopia alongside Afar and Somali. However, Eritrean Tigrinya in the north has likewise been influenced by other languages, mainly Cushitic. Moreover, oral Tigrinya allows for considerable variation among speakers (Shlomo 1980:240). The Italian colonization of Eritrea in 1890 intro-

duced many loanwords into the language, such as *armadio* "cabinet", *kamcha* (from *camicia*) "shirt" and *gazeta* (from *gazzetta*) "newspaper". Despite the fact that Tigrinya is extremely understudied in linguistics, and the Ethio-Semitic branch as a whole has been largely neglected, its literary output has expanded steadily, with particularly strong growth since the 1990s (Goldenberg 2013).

Unless otherwise noted, the data presented in this paper were collected by the authors through individual interviews with five native Tigrinya-speaking consultants. Four of the consultants are from the Debub, Gash-Barka, and Maekel regions of Eritrea. Three of these speakers are proficient in French and have been living in Geneva since the 2010s. The fourth, who is proficient in English, resides in the United States. The fifth consultant, who is also proficient in English, is from Mekelle in the Tigray region of Ethiopia and currently resides in Addis Ababa. While we observed some regional linguistic variation among our consultants, we focus here on phenomena that appear to be largely consistent across these speakers.

Finally, we would point out that there is significant variation with regard to the transliteration and transcription practices, as well as glossing conventions, that are adopted by researchers of Tigrinya. We have chosen to reproduce data from the literature as faithfully as possible and would direct the reader to individual works for further information regarding transcriptions. In order to account for this variation and offset possible confusion, we have modified glosses to adhere as closely as we are able to the Leipzig Glossing Rules while remaining faithful to the analytical choices made by previous researchers. We will make note of any deviations from these norms with footnotes that accompany their occurrence.

2 The Nominal Domain

2.1 Basic facts about the nominal domain

The nominal domain is Tigrinya is head-final with some exceptions related to prepositions and demonstratives, which will be discussed below. Thus, the noun typically appears in a final position within a nominal constituent and is preceded by any complements and modifiers. The canonical order of nominal modifiers is illustrated in the following example:

(1) a. strong-QUANT short-DEM REL POSS weak-QUANT ADJ N long-DEM

b. kul-än ʔɨt-än Yonas z-i-g^{w}asɨy-än naj ḥaw-u
all-3FP DET-FP Yonas.M REL-SM.3MS-tend.IPFV-OM.3FP GEN brother-POSS.3MS
bɨzuḥ-at sɨbuḥ-at ʔaṭal
many-PL fat-PL goat.FPL
'all the many fat goats of his brother that Yonas tends'

(adapted from Nazareth 2011:18-19)

Word-order within a nominal constituent is variable on the basis of syntactic, semantic, and information-structural properties (Nazareth 2011, Cacchioli in preparation).

Nominal constituents in Tigrinya are inflected for number and gender. Singular nouns are unmarked, whereas plural nouns are either marked with suffixes such as *-(t)at* and *-ti*, among others, or are affected by a stem-internal phonological change, known as the "Broken Plural" in Semitic literature (Bulakh 2019:184). Instances of both are illustrated in (2).

(2) a. dɨmu, dɨmu**tat**
'cat, cats'

b. ʔanbɛsa, **ʔanabɛs**
'lion, lions'

Masculine and feminine are the genders in Tigrinya. Animate nouns have inherent semantic gender, inanimate nouns have a very flexible grammatical gender that depends on regional variation or sometimes even individual variation (see Nazareth 2011).

Distal demonstratives serve the role of definite articles and appear before the noun they qualify. Proximal demonstratives also exist and are used to refer to something close to the speaker. Tigrinya demonstratives are illustrated in (3) an (4).

(3) a. (i) **ʔɨt-i** wɛdi
DIST-MS boy
'the/that boy'

(ii) **ʔɨt-om** ʔawɛdat
DIST-MP boy.PL
'the/those boys'

b. (i) **ʔɨt-a** g^{w}al
DIST-FS girl
'the/that girl'

(ii) **ʔɨt-ɛn** ʔawɛlɨd
DIST-FP girl.PL
'the/those girls'

(4) a. (i) **ʔɨz-i** wɛdi
PROX-MS boy
'this boy'

(ii) **ʔɨz-om** ʔawɛdat
PROX-MS boy.PL
'these boys'

b. (i) **ʔɨz-a** g^{w}al
PROX-FS girl
'this girl'

(ii) **ʔɨz-ɛn** ʔawɛlɨd
PROX-FP girl.PL
'these girls'

Both distal and proximal deictic demonstratives can substitute the entire determiner phrase, thus appearing without a lexical noun, as shown below.

(5) ʔɨz-i/ʔɨt-i dɛljɨ-ɛ
PROX-MS/DIST-MS want.GER-SM.1S
'I want this/that.'

(6) ʔɨt-i!
DIST-MS
'That one!'

(from Nazareth (2011:29,(20c)))

Tigrinya does not have a dedicated marker for noun indefiniteness. Nevertheless, the numeral *ħade* 'one' (*ħanti* for feminine nouns) mark indefinite nouns when these are specific (Nazareth

2011, Overfelt 2022). With the exception of *ħade/ħanti*, numerals in Tigrinya are not inflected for gender. When they appear in a phrase together with adjectives, they consistently precede the adjectives.

Adjectives are commonly inflected for either gender or number. Masculine singular forms are either unmarked or derived through a particular vowel template (Bulakh 2019). Feminine singular adjectives are marked with the suffix *-ti*, as in (7b). Plural adjectives, regardless of the gender of their host noun, commonly carry the plural suffix found on the host noun, as shown in (8).

(7) a. ʔɨt-i mɛsħaʁ zanɨta
DIST-MS funny story
'the funny story'

b. nɨfɨʔ-**ti** g^{w}al
clever-FS girl.F
'a clever girl' (Nazareth 2011:37, (33b))

(8) a. nɨfɨʔ-**at** säb-at
clever-PL person-PL
'clever people'

b. ʔabäy-**ti** mäṣḥaf-ti
big-PL book-PL
'big books' (Nazareth 2011:37–38, (34))

Finally, Tigrinya employs a series of proforms for subject and non-subject nominal constituents. As shown in 1 these forms fully inflect for the person, number, and gender of the nominal they cross-reference.

	Subject	**Non-subject**
3MS	nɨss-u	nɨʕaʔ-u
3MP	nɨss-atom	nɨʕaʔ-atom
3FS	nɨss-a	nɨʕaʔ-a
3FP	nɨss-atən	nɨʕaʔ-atən
2MS	nɨss-xa	nɨʕa-xa
2MP	nɨss-xatkum	nɨʕa-xatkum
2FS	nɨss-xi	nɨʕa-xi
2FP	nɨss-xatkɨn	nɨʕa-xatkɨn
1S	ʔanɛ	nɨʕa-j
1P	nɨħna	nɨʕa-na

Table 1: Free nominal proforms for non-subject grammatical roles.

For further discussion of other issues relating to nominal constituents, we would direct the reader to Nazareth 2011, Gebregziabher 2013 and Tesfay 2016.

2.2 Double Determination

In Tigrinya, when the speaker wants to emphasize the distance or proximity of the noun being qualified, demonstratives can surface in a reduplicated configuration. In such cases, the demonstrative appears twice within the noun phrase with the second element realized in what has been described as its "full" (Mason 1996) or "long" (Nazareth 2011) form.

(9) ʔiz-a gɛza **ʔizi-a** kab-ta gɛza **ʔiti-a** ti-ʕabi
PROX-FS car.FS PROX.LONG-FS from-DIST-FS car.FS DIST.LONG-FS SM.3FS-be_big.IPFV
'This house (here) is bigger than that house (there).'

This long form is characterized by the insertion of an [i] vowel. The short form of the demonstrative is restricted to prenominal position, whereas the long form displays greater positional flexibility, being able to occur either prenominally or postnominally (Nazareth 2011). The doubling of demonstratives thus results from the co-occurrence of two formally distinct elements, each associated with a specific morphosyntactic position and discourse function.

Within the literature, the prenominal demonstrative in such constructions is sometimes referred to as a deictic article (Esayas 2003), reflecting its determiner-like distribution and its contribution to definiteness rather than pure deixis. This is shown in (9) above, where a prenominal deictic article co-occurs with a postnominal demonstrative in its long form, yielding an emphatic interpretation with respect to spatial contrast. A similar pattern is observed when the deictic article appears together with a postnominal subject pronoun, which is likewise analyzed as a demonstrative by Esayas (2003), as in (10).

(10) ʔit-om sɛb-at **nɨss-om** habɨtam-at ʔijj-om
ART-MP man.P DEM-3MP rich-PL be-SM.3MP
'Those people are rich.' (adapted from Esayas (2003:42, (19b)))

Crucially, however, not all combinations of these elements are permitted. It is not possible for both the deictic article and the demonstrative to appear in prenominal position, nor can they both occur postnominally. More generally, successive co-occurrence of two demonstrative-like elements in the same structural position is excluded. Esayas (2003:43) argues that this restriction follows from licensing conditions internal to the noun phrase: when a demonstrative intervenes, the noun is prevented from licensing the prenominal deictic article. This analysis suggests that the observed distribution is not merely linear but structurally constrained.

At first glance, the Tigrinya pattern bears some resemblance to Standard Arabic, where double determination is also attested. In Standard Arabic, however, the co-occurrence of demonstratives and determiners is not optional and does not serve an emphatic function; rather, it is obligatory. This is also possible in some spoken varieties, such as Levantine Arabic. Demonstratives must appear together with definite determiners, as shown in (11) for Standard Arabic.

(11) ʔuħibb-u **hað-a** **l-**kitāb-a
IPFV.love-SM.1S DEM-MS DET.S-book.MS-ACC
'I love this book.'

From a typological perspective, the Tigrinya construction is perhaps more closely comparable to certain Romance patterns. For instance, French contrasts forms such as *ceci/celui-ci* 'this one' and *cela/celui-là* 'that one', while Italian allows constructions like *questo X qui/quel X là* 'this X here/that X there' (Conti Rossini 1940). In both languages, the presence of an additional deictic element contributes a subtle but perceptible emphasis on proximity or distance.

The pattern exemplified in (9) raises a broader theoretical question concerning the syntax of determiners and demonstratives in Tigrinya. Although Tigrinya is generally classified as a head-final language, demonstratives may appear both prenominally and postnominally within the noun phrase. A comparable asymmetry is found in Italian: despite its head-initial character, determiners in certain constructions can surface both before and after the noun. These cross-linguistic parallels suggest that the placement of demonstratives and determiners cannot be straightforwardly derived from head-directionality alone, but instead reflects more articulated internal structure within the nominal domain.

This leads to the question of how prenominal and postnominal determiners and demonstratives should be structurally represented. Since these elements can co-occur, they cannot occupy the same syntactic position. One influential line of analysis proposes that definite articles may function either as determiners or as quantifiers (a.o. Shlonsky 1991), while demonstratives are generated in a higher position, typically the specifier of a determiner phrase (Giusti 1997, Bernstein 1997, Brugè 2002). Within the Ethio-Semitic family, Baker & Kramer (2014) argue that in Amharic demonstratives occupy the specifier of DP. For Tigrinya specifically, Esayas (2003) proposes that deictic articles are determiners positioned higher than demonstratives. An alternative possibility is that prenominal and postnominal demonstratives correspond to distinct structural positions, such as the specifier and the head of the determiner phrase, respectively.

All of these approaches, however, face a common challenge: they must account for how the noun is able to surface linearly between two determiner-like elements, namely the short and long form. Explaining this ordering requires either additional movement operations or a more articulated nominal spine than is usually assumed. As such, double determination in Tigrinya poses a non-trivial problem for existing models of DP structure.

Further descriptive details and more comprehensive analyses of double determination in Tigrinya are provided in Esayas (2003) and Nazareth (2011).

2.3 Possessive Constructions

There are several grammatical strategies for indicating possessive modification of nominals in Tigrinya. These roughly fall into two descriptive categories that we refer to as prenominal and postnominal possession, adopting terminology from Gebregziabher (2013).

Prenominal possession constructions are so-called for aligning the possessor nominal before the possessed noun. These are exemplified by examples like those below, which employ the genitive preposition *naj* 'of' to introduce the possessors as part of a prepositional phrase.

(12) **nay täsfay** mäṣḥaf
GEN Tesfay book
'book of Tesfay' (Nazareth 2011:33, (26))

(13) ʔɨt-i **naj-t-i** **məmhɨr** məs'ħaf
DET-MS NAY-DET-MS teacher book
'the teacher's book' (Gebregziabher 2013:116, (37a))

While the canonical position for these possessor PPs is prenominal, Nazareth (2011) observes that they can in principle appear immediately following the possessed noun. The result, shown below, is an information-structurally marked configuration in which the possessor is "emphasized".

(14) məts'ħaf **naj təsfaj**
book GEN Tesfay
'book of Tesfay'

The possessor in the prenominal strategy can also be expressed through bound suffixal morphology. In the examples below, the element *nat-* carries an indexical suffix expressing the agreement-features of the possessor.

(15) **naj-ka** mäs'ɨhaf
GEN-2MS book
'your.MS book' (Esayas 2003:48, (24b))

(16) ʔɨt-i **nat-a** mäṣḥaf
DET-3MS PRO-POSS.3MFS book
'(the) her book' (Nazareth 2011:37, (32))

(17) **nat-u** məs'ħaf
NAY-3MS book
'his book' (Gebregziabher 2013:54, (10a))

While the details vary, Esayas (2003), Nazareth (2011), Gebregziabher (2013), and Tesfay (2016) all propose that the forms in (15)–(17) are generated by suffixing a pronominal possessive form to the genitive preposition *naj* found in the previous examples. Indeed, as Table 2 illustrates, the resulting forms with the possessive suffixes show an essentially perfect overlap with the agreement

markers that are observed on independent subject proforms that were presented in Table 1.

3MS	nat-u
3MP	nat-atom
3FS	nat-a
3FP	nat-atən
2MS	nat-ka
2MP	nat-atkum
2FS	nat-ki
2FP	nat-atkɨn
1S	nat-əj
1P	nat-na

Table 2: Suffixal possessor forms in Tigrinya.

For Esayas (2003), Nazareth (2011), and Tesfay (2016) the agreement suffixes are treated as possessive pronouns that index the possessor and that are affixed to the genitive preposition. For Gebregziabher (2013), the agreement suffix serves as the pronominal possessor.

In any case, something must be said regarding the surface form of the genitive preposition, which may have either [t] or [j] as a final consonant. Esayas (2003:48, fn.14) and Tesfay (2016:64) observe that the consonant mutation reflects dialectal differences, the latter suggesting that the Eritrean dialect employs the *t*-final form and the Tigray dialect employs the *j*-final. Nazareth (2011:33) further points out that it is possible that this [t] may be analyzed as an epenthetic consonant to avoid a instance of semivowel-vowel hiatus. Alternatively, this consonant may represent a reduced form of the distal deictic demonstrative *ʔɨt* that was discussed in section 2.1. This latter option might lead one to expect that there are forms constructed with the proximal demonstrative *ʔɨz-*, resulting in forms such as *naz-u*. We are not aware of any attestations of such forms.

Postnominal possession constructions, in which the possessor follows the possessed nominal, similarly alternative between paraphrastic and affixal forms. Affixal forms draw from the same morphological sequence presented in Table 2 to suffix a possessive morpheme to the possessed noun.

(18) ʔɨt-a ʔadä-**ka**
ART-3FS mother-POSS.2MS
'the your(MS) mother' (adapted from Esayas 2003:52, (28c))

(19) mäṣḥaf-**u**
book-POSS.3MS
'his book' (Nazareth 2011:34, (28a))

As example (18) shows, the suffixal possessor on the noun can occur with an overt demonstrative. However, as Nazareth (2011:35) observes, the prenominal and postnominal suffixal possessor

strategies are in complementary distribution; see (20).

(20) *__nat-u__ mäts'ħaf-__u__
GEN-POSS.3MS book-POSS.3MS

To the extent that a possessor can be doubly expressed in the language, the following example from Nazareth (2011) appears to present the most promising case.

(21) (ni-tesfaj) mäts'ħaf-u
OBJ-Tesfay book-POSS.3MS
'Tesfay's book'
Lit. 'the book to Tesfay' (adpated from Nazareth 2011:35, (30a))

Notably, the possessor in this example is not marked with the genitive preposition *naj*. It is instead marked with the prefix *n(i)-*, which is ambiguous between an objective case marker and a preposition (Nazareth 2011, Overfelt 2022). Understanding these constructions presents an opportunity for future research.

Most interesting, perhaps, are the periphrastic postnominal possessor constructions that we find in the following examples. Descriptively, the phrasal possessor appears following the possessed phrasal nominal.

(22) mäts'ħaf **täsfay**
book Tesfay
'Tesfay's book' (Nazareth 2011:36, (31))

(23) ʔɨt-a ħafti **ʔɨt-i** **məmhɨr**
DET-FS sister DET-MS teacher
'the sister of the teacher' (Gebregziabher 2013:254, (68b))

The alternation between these examples and the prepositional genitive constructions above resembles the characteristic alternation between possessive frames in other Semitic languages. The following examples taken from Shlonsky 2004:1467 illustrate the alternation between the prepositional "free state" in the (a) variants and the genitive "construct state" in the (b) variants.

(24) *Hebrew*

a. ha-dira šel **ha-sar**
the-apartment of the-minister
'the minister's apartment'

b. dirat **ha-sar**
apartment the-minister
'the minister's apartment'

(25) *Moroccan Arabic*

a. d-dar dyal **l-wazir**
the-apartment of the-minister
'the minister's apartment'

b. dar **l-wazir**
apartment the-minister
'the minister's apartment'

On the basis of several similarities, Gebregziabher (2013:ch.4) and Tesfay (2016) argue that periphrastic prenominal possessive constructions in Tigrinya are indeed instantiations of the Semitic construct state. First, like we find with familiar construct state languages, the possessee nominal precedes the possessor. Second, the relationship between the possessee nominal and the possessor cannot be marked with the genitive preposition of the free state. Thus, when compared to the prenominal possessive constructions above, we find that, in Tigrinya, the genitive preposition *naj* is prohibited in the postnominal possessives.

(26) a. (*naj) weddi (*naj) yəwjanɨs
NAY son NAY John
'John's son'

b. nay jəwhanɨs məs'ħaf
NAY John book
'John's book' (Gebregziabher 2013:190–191, (15)–(16))

There are, however, some notable differences between more familiar instances of the construct state and the constructions we find in Tigrinya. As Nazareth (2011) points out, periphrastic postnominal possessor constructions present putative exceptions to the otherwise strongly head-final nature of the language. While this may be taken to suggest that these constructions are better treated as Noun-Noun compounds, examples from (23) above show that full nominal phrases can be placed in apposition. Additionally, in the Hebrew data above, we see that the possessed nominal takes on a particular morphophonological form in the construct state: *dira* > *dirat*. While we do not observe a similar alternation in Tigrinya, the Moroccan Arabic facts reveal that this is not a ubiquitous property of the construct state. Although, Nazareth (2011) observes that allomorphy of this type is observable in certain forms that are candidates for treatment as compounds, such as in (27):

(27) a. **bet**
house

b. **betä** mängɨsti
house.CS government
'parliment' (Nazareth 2011:36)

Gebregziabher (2013:ch.4) also proposes on the basis of the following data that the two possessive frames in Tigrinya—the free state and the construct state—grammatically encode alienability of possession. It is claimed that alienable possession is encoded by the free state, while the construct state encodes inalienable possession. The following examples are offered as demonstration:

(28) *Alienable possession in the Tigrinya possessive constructions*

a. **nəj-ħagos gəza** məts'ħaf
GEN-Hagos house
'the house of Hagos'

b. *gəza **ħagos**
house Hagos
'Hagos's house' (Gebregziabher 2013:52, (8b))

(29) *Inalienable possession in the Tigrinya possessive constructions*

a. ***nəj-ħagos** ħafti
GEN-Hagos sister
'the sister of Hagos'

b. gəħafti **ħagos**
sister Hagos
'Hagos's sister' (Gebregziabher 2013:52, (7b))

This is a contrast that is not found in more familiar construct state languages. It is, however, similar to the contrast that exists between English possessive constructions, whereby the prepositional possessive only awkwardly expresses alienable possession: *the* {*sister/#bicycle*} *of Jackie*. For the sake of completeness, we would also point out that data like (22) from Nazareth (2011) suggest that the Tigrinya judgements reported here may not be universal or may be less categorical than stated.

One last notable property of the canonical construct state is the "definiteness spreading" that can be observed in the following Hebrew data from Ritter (1991).

(30) *Hebrew definiteness spreading*

a. (*ha-)bejt **ha-mora**
(the-)house the-teacher
'*a/the house of the teacher'

b. (*ha-)bejt **mora**
(the-)house teacher
'a/*the house of a teacher'

Descriptively, the definiteness of the possessor nominal, *mora* 'teacher' in the examples above, indicates the definiteness value for the possessed nominal *bejt* 'house' that heads the construction.

Thus, while the possessor cannot be marked with the definite article, the presence or absence of the definite article on the possessee determines the definiteness of the entire complex.

Gebregziabher (2013:196–198) points out that we do not observe the same behavior in Tigrinya. The examples in (31) demonstrate that the definiteness of the postnominal possessor *(ʔɨtom) ħarəstot* '(those) farmers' does not determine the definiteness of the entire nominal, which is an indefinite expression in these cases.

(31) a. ʔansti ħarəstot
wife.PL farmer.PL
'wives of farmers'

b. ʔansti ʔɨt-om ħarəstot
wife.PL DET-MP farmer.PL
'(*the) wives of the farmers' (Gebregziabher 2013:196–197, (24a–b))

Unlike Hebrew, Tigrinya allows the possessed head noun to be specified with its own demonstrative. As in the examples in (32), this element determines the definiteness of the entire construction independent of the postnominal possessor.

(32) a. ʔɨt-ən ʔansti ħarəstot
DET-FP wife.PL farmer.PL
'the wives of (*the) farmers'

b. ʔɨt-ən ʔansti ʔɨt-om ħarəstot
DET-FP wife.PL DET-MP farmer.PL
'the wives of the farmers' (Gebregziabher 2013:197, (24c–d))

We refer to the reader to Gebregziabher 2013:ch.4 for further discussion and analysis of these constructions.

2.4 Prepositions

There is a relatively short list of highly polysemous prepositions in Tigrinya. We would recommend the reader to Nazareth 2011:ch.6.3 for an extensive discussion of their semantic contribution. From a morphosyntactic perspective, prepositions come in three descriptive types. Prepositions that are composed of a mono-consonantal stem procliticize to their associated nominal. This is possible both for bare nouns in (33) and nouns modified by demonstratives, as in (34).[1]

(33) a. **nɨ-ʔertɨra** käyid-u ʔal-o
DIR-Eritrea go.PERF.S-SM.3MS BE.PRES-SM.3MS
'He has gone to Eritrea.' (Nazareth 2011:165, (163c))

[1]The abbreviation PERF.S is an adaptation from Nazareth (2011) for the "simple perfective" verb form, which is historically referred to as the "gerundive". See section 3.1. The abbreviations SM and OM have been adopted to gloss the verbal agreement markers that respectively index the subject and object of a predicate.

b. Saba n-ät-i ʕɨtro **bɨ-saʕri** däbiʔ-a-to
Saba OBJ-DET-MS jar INS-grass seal.PERF.S-SM.3FS-OM.3MS
'Saba sealed the jar with grass.' (Nazareth 2011:184, (186a))

(34) a. ʔɨt-a gʷal **n=ət-i** **wədi** dəbdabe hib-a
that-FS girl DIR=that-MS boy letter give.GER-SM.3FS
'The girl gave a letter to the boy.' (Overfelt 2022:136, (4))

b. ʔɨt-ən dəbdabe-tat tɨmali **b=ɨt-a** **səbajti** tə-tsʼɨħif-ən
that-FS letter-PL yesterday INS=that-FS woman INTR-write.GER-SM.3FS
'The letters were written by the woman yesterday.'

Prepositions with bi-consonantal stems are slightly more restricted in their distribution. When followed by a bare nominal, as in (35), these prepositions do not undergo cliticization with the noun. However, contraction with the demonstrative of a specified noun, as in (36), is possible.

(35) a. **mɨs** dɨm-ay jɨ-tsʼawet
with cat-POSS.1S SM.1S-play.IPFV
'I play with my cat.'

b. **nab** bɛt-a tɨ-xɛjɨd
to home-POSS.3FS SM.3FS-go.IPFV
'She goes home.'

c. **kab** ʔertra mɛtsʼ i-u
from Eritrea come.GER-SM.3MS
'He comes from Eritrea.' (adapted from Cacchioli (2023:235, (2)))

(36) a. **mɨs**-t-a məmħir mesʼiʔ-u
with-DET-FS teacher come.PERF-SM.3MS
'He came with the teacher.' (Gebregziabher 2013:171, (12a))

b. Saba **kab**-t-i ṣaḽi ṣəbḽi wäsid-a
Saba ABL-DET-MS pot stew take.PERF.S-SM.3FS
'Saba took stew from the pot.' (Nazareth 2011:179, (180))

Prepositions in Tigrinya, as well as in the closely related languages Tigré and Amharic, are interesting for counter-exemplifying Greenberg's (1963) Universal 4:

(37) *Greenberg's Universal 4*
With overwhelmingly greater than chance frequency, languages with normal SOV order are post-positional.

This typological pattern is clearly reflected in the languages of World Atlas of Language Structures (Dryer & Haspelmath 2013). Of those languages that show both SOV word order and have a preference regarding the alignment of adpositions, we observe an overwhelming trend towards having postpositions. This is illustrated in Table 3, where less 3% of SOV languages—including the Ethiosemitic languages Tigrinya, Tigré, and Amharic—have prepositions.

	Prepositions	Inpositions	Postpositions
SOV	11 (2.8%)	2 (<1%)	374 (97%)
SVO	301 (90%)	0 (0%)	33 (10%)

Table 3: World Atlas of Language Structures counts for languages based on predominant word order (81A) and ordering of adpositions (85A).

For Baker & Kramer (2014), these facts offer initial motivation for an alternative analysis of Amharic prepositions. They argue that prepositions are in fact better analyzed as case morphemes that reflect the case assigned by phonologically null postpositions. Besides fitting the typological picture in Table 3, there are several facts that support this analysis. Baker & Kramer (2014) demonstrate that Amharic prepositions fail to display the morphophonological and syntactic properties observed of overt postpositions that can be found in the language. Instead, Amharic prepositions display the morphophonological and syntactic properties of other known case markers. Similar claims regarding Amharic prepositions have also appeared in Tremblay & Kabbaj 1990 and Ouhalla 2004.

The status of prepositions in Tigrinya remains unsettled. Gebregziabher (2013:ch.3) undertakes a detailed investigation of the genitive marker *naj*, concluding that it is neither a preposition nor a case marker. He concludes instead that *naj* is in fact a linker of the kind that den Dikken (2007) proposes for the possessive and relative marker *jä-* in Amharic. Part of the argumentation involves showing that *naj* does not necessarily show the characteristic properties of other prepositions. However, unlike the investigation of Amharic by Baker & Kramer (2014), there is no direct comparison of Tigrinya prepositions with a "known" case marker. As Gebregziabher (2013:ch.3) notes, this project remains for future research.

We might, therefore, consider what is perhaps one of the more compelling arguments that Baker & Kramer (2014) offer for treating Amharic prepositions as case markers. The distribution of these elements is variable, being described in part on the basis of morphophonological factors. This is intended to capture the fact that, with nominals modified by a relative clause, the preposition surfaces on the final verbal element of the relative clause, not in a position preceding the nominal. The example below illustrates precisely this kind of construction.

(38) *Amharic relative clause with intraposed preposition*

sɨr-atʃtʃäw-ɨn **lä**-tʃ'ärräs-u-t särratäññ-otʃtʃ
work-their-ACC to-finish-3P-DEF worker-PL

'to the workers who have finished their work'

(Baker & Kramer 2014:142, (3); attributed to Leslau 1995)

Notably, similar constructions, such as (39b) are not possible in Tigrinya. Prepositions are uni-

formly placed in a position that precedes the noun and all modifiers, including relative clauses.

(39) a. ʔɨt-a səbajti **mɨs**=t-a zi-ʕadəg-ət-a mətsʼħaf
that-FS woman INS=that-FS REL-buy.PRF-SM.3FS-OM.3FS book
kəjd-a
leave.GER-SM.3FS
'The woman left with the book that she bought.'

b. *ʔɨt-a səbajti ʔɨt-a **mɨs**=(zɨ)-ʕadəg-ət-a mətsʼħaf
that-FS woman that-FS INS=REL-buy.PRF-SM.3FS-OM.3FS book
kɛjd-a
leave.PRF-SM.3FS
'The woman left with the book that she bought.'

Having said that, it is possible to find preposition-like elements attached to the verb of other types of embedded clauses, including those presented below.

(40) *Temporal adverbial clause*

gənɛt [səgɛn **mɨs**-kəd-ət] kɛjd-a
Genet Segen INS-leave.PRF-SM.3FS leave.GER-SM.3FS

'Genet left after Segen left.'

(41) *Reason-clause*

[**sɨləzɨ**-dɛqɛm-ku] nab ʕarat kɛid-ɛ
COMP-be_tired.PFV-SM.1S DIR bed go.GER-SM.1S

'I went to bed because I was tired.'

(42) *Complement of factive verbs*

kɛmzɨ-fɛt-wa jɨ-ʔɛmɨn
COMP-SM.3MS-like.IPFV-OM.3FS SM.3MS-admit.IPFV

'He admits that he likes her.'

In example (40) we see the element *mɨs*, which commonly serves as an instrumental preposition, prefixed to the verb of an embedded temporal clause. Regarding the examples in (41) and (42), it is not unreasonable to suppose that the morphemes *kɛmzɨ-* and *sɨlɛzɨ-*, glossed here as complementizers, are in fact bi-morphemic. Both forms contain the sequence *zɨ-*, which serves as the relative clause marker, as well as the forms *kɛm* and *sɨlə*, which serve various roles as prepositions in the language. This is an idea that has been proposed previously by Nazareth (2011) and that van Urk (2024) and Cacchioli (in preparation) actively pursue. We return to a discussion of this idea later in section 4.4.1. How these facts inform an analysis of prepositions in Tigrinya is left to future research.

3 The Verbal Domain

3.1 Basic facts about the verbal domain

As a Semitic language, Tigrinya exhibits non-concatenative root morphology, in which words are formed from a combination of (tri)consonantal roots that contribute the semantic core. Vowel templates are transfixed into words to contribute inflectional alternations that express syntactic category as well as inflectional information. Table 4 illustrates how a tri-consonantal form /*sbr*/ 'break' is verbalized and marked for aspect and mood with various vowel patterns and agreement paradigms.

Within Semitic linguistics, verbs are traditionally classified into two main aspects/tenses: perfective and imperfective. In perfective verb forms subject-agreement morphology (person, number and gender) appears as a suffix, whereas in the imperfective subject-agreement morphology generally appears as a prefix in singular forms and as a prefix and a suffix in plural forms. Unlike other Semitic languages, Tigrinya possesses a third aspect/tense known as the "gerundive". Like the perfective, the gerundive also shows subject morphology as suffixes, but the forms follow different paradigms. It is believed that this conjugation was introduced into the language through contact with Cushitic languages (Appleyard 2015). Verbs also carry suffixes that index certain object and oblique arguments. These elements will be discussed in more detail in sections 3.2 and 3.5.

The subject-marking paradigms of the perfective, imperfective, and gerundive conjugations for the tri-consonantal root /*sbr*/ 'break' are shown in Table 4.[2]

Subject	Imperfective	Gerundive	Perfective
SM.3MS	**jɨ**-säbbɨr	säbir-**u**	säbär-**ä**
SM.3MP	**jɨ**-säbɨr-**u**	säbir-**om**	säbär-**u**
SM.3FS	**tɨ**-säbbɨr	säbir-**a**	säbär-**ät**
SM.3FP	**jɨ**-säbɨr-**a**	säbir-**än**	säbär-**a**
SM.2MS	**tɨ**-säbbɨr	säbir-**ka**	säbär-**ka**
SM.2MP	**tɨ**-säbɨr-**u**	säbir-**kum**	säbär-**kum**
SM.2FS	**tɨ**-säbɨr-**i**	säbir-**ki**	säbär-**ki**
SM.2FP	**tɨ**-säbɨr-**a**	säbir-**kɨn**	säbär-**kɨn**
SM.1S	**jɨ**-säbbɨr	säbir-**ä**	säbär-**ku**
SM.1P	**nɨ**-säbbɨr	säbir-**na**	säbär-**na**

Table 4: Subject marker paradigms by aspectual verb form in Tigrinya

The imperfective expresses present habitual tense. The perfective is used in narratives to express

[2]It is worth pointing out that the terms presented in Table 4 could be considered misnomers (Nazareth 2011). In the literature, some authors use *imperfect* and *perfect* rather than *imperfective* and *perfective* (Conti Rossini 1940, Leslau 1941, Mason 1996) and *new suffixal conjugation* (Bulakh 2019) and *gerund* (Demeke 2003) rather than *gerundive*. For the sake of convention, in this chapter we adopt the terms imperfective, perfective and gerundive.

distant past or present perfect (Nazareth 2011). However, unlike other Semitic languages, the function of expressing perfectivity in root clauses is accomplished by the gerundive form in affirmative contexts, despite its original use in subordinate clauses to express anteriority or posteriority with respect to the matrix verb. In non-affirmative and non-root clauses the perfective is used in place of the gerundive verb form. Complex-tense constructions involving these verbal forms and auxiliaries will be discussed in section 3.3 below.

We would direct the reader to Nazareth 2011 and Tesfay 2016 for further discussion of the properties of verbs and their domains in Tigrinya.

3.2 Object Marking

Verbs in Tigrinya may carry morphological markers that index their direct objects. A relevant example is provided below:

(43) ʔɨt-en ʔanəʃti **n=ət-a** **məts'ħaf** ʔanbib-ən-**a**
that-FP women ACC=that-FS book read.GER-SM.3FP-OM.3FS
'The women read the book.'

The form of the object marker varies with the person, number, and gender features of the object. Table 5 presents these forms, which notably show significant overlap with the subject markers of the gerundive verb form in Table 4 and the possessor agreement forms in Table 2.

3MS	-o
3MP	-om
3FS	-a
3FP	-in
2MS	-ka
2MP	-kum
2FS	-ki
2FP	-kin
1S	-ni
1P	-na

Table 5: Object-marking morphology in Tigrinya

The markers that cross-reference the object arguments of a predicate are obligatory when possible (Kievit & Kievit 2009, Nazareth 2011, Gebregziabher 2021). This obligation arises when an internal argument is definite, in which case that argument is also marked with the differential object marker prefix *n(ɨ)-*. Indefinite objects are not cross-referenced by object markers. This pattern is illustrated in (44).[3]

[3]Note that separate processes of consonant epenthesis, assimilation, re-syllabification, and coalescence may pre-

(44) a. ʔit-i səbʔaj **n=ət-a dəbdabe** ts'iħif-u-**wa**
that-MS man that-FS letter write.GER-SM.3MS-OM.3FS
'The man wrote the letter.'

b. ʔit-i səbʔaj **dəbdabe** ts'iħif-u
that-MS man that-FS letter write.GER-SM.3MS
'The man wrote a letter.' (Overfelt 2022:138–139, (9))

For any single clause, only a single object marker is possible. This is so even in the case that there are multiple arguments that are candidates for indexing with an object marker. Thus, in the ditransitive constructions in (45), either of the definite objects can be indexed by the object marker, but not both of them.

(45) a. ʔit-a g^{w}al n=ət-i wədi n=ət-a debdabe
that-FS girl ACC=that-MS boy ACC=that-FS letter
hib-a-**to/ta**
give.GER-SM.3FS-OM.3MS/OM.3FS
'The girl gave the boy the letter.'

b. *ʔit-a g^{w}al n=ət-i wədi n=əta debdabe
that-FS girl ACC=that-MS boy ACC=that-FS letter
hib-a-**to-ta**
give.GER-SM.3FS-OM.3MS-OM.3FS
Intended: 'The girl gave the boy the letter.'

Object markers in Tigrinya are are also restricted to appearing only on main verbs. The contrast in (46) demonstrates that object markers cannot appear on auxiliary verbs. This is so regardless of whether object marking is also found on the main verb.

(46) a. ʔit-i səbʔaj n=ət-a dəbdabe ts'iħif-u-**wa** ʔall-o
that-MS man that-FS letter write.GER-SM.3MS-OM.3FS AUX.NPST-SM.3MS
'The man has written the letter.'

b. *ʔit-i səbʔaj n=ət-a dəbdabe ts'iħif-u-(**wa**)
that-MS man that-FS letter write.GER-SM.3MS-OM.3FS
ʔall-o-**wa**
AUX.NPST-SM.3MS-OM.3FS
'The man has written the letter.'

The term "object marker" is used here as a theoretically neutral term. Such markers have variably been treated as true agreement morphemes, comparable to subject agreement morphology, and as pronominal clitics of the type familiar in Romance languages. In a detailed investigation of Amharic Kramer (2014) and Baker & Kramer (2018) conclude that object markers in that lan-

serve the CV(C) phonotactics of the language by altering the shape of the object marker on the basis of the subject marking found on the verb; see Buckley 1994 and Bulakh 2019.

guage are clitics that double an internal argument.[4] This analysis offers an understanding of several properties of object markers in Amharic and Tigrinya as well. For instance, an argument cross-referenced by an object marker receives a not-well-understood "emphatic" interpretation, which Nazareth (2011) likens to contrastive focus. Object markers also do not show the type of morphological variance that is found with subject markers. Recall from Table 4 that there are different morphological series for subject markers as a function of the aspectual form of a verb. Object markers, on the other hand, always come from the same morphological series listed in Table 5. Also unlike agreement morphemes, there is no default form to surface in the case that contentful object marking is not possible, such as with indefinite nominals (Preminger 2014). As shown previously in (44b), no object marker is realized when the direct object is indefinite.

For Gebregziabher (2021), however, Tigrinya object markers are more similar to agreement morphemes than they are to pronominal clitics. Unlike both Amharic and Tigrinya object markers, known pronominal clitics are not typically limited to one per clause. While multiple arguments can be cross-referenced by distinct clitics, we saw that this is not the case for object markers in Tigrinya; recall (45b). Additionally, Tigrinya object markers are different from those in Amharic on the basis of their obligatoriness when they are possible. That is, like true agreement morphemes, it was noted that they are required to appear when they are able to index a definite object.

One of the more compelling reasons for distinguishing object markers in Tigrinya from pronominal clitics is that clitics are not typically required to attach to the verbal stem. Clitics commonly undergo "clitic-climbing" that sees them appear on auxiliary verbs. Example (46b) showed that this is not possible in Tigrinya. There are, however, environments in which the object marker of certain types of predicates index what appears to be an argument of an embedded clause. These include various intensional predicates, including bouletic and pseudo-modal predicates, as well as factive predicates.

(47) ʔit-i məmħir **n=ət-om** **təmharo** ni=ki-xəjd-u
that-FS teacher ACC=that-MP students ACC=SUBJ-leave.IPFV-SM.3MP
ji-dilj-**om**
SM.3FS-want.IPFV-OM.3MP
'The teacher wants the students to read the book.'

(48) **ʔit-a** **səbəjti** ki-ti-xəjid ji-gibbaʔ-**a**
that-FS woman.F SBJV-SM.3FS-leave.IPFV S.3MS-need.IPFV-OM.3FS
'The woman needs to leave.'

[4]These works supplant Baker (2012), where it is argued that Amharic object markers are agreement morphemes.

(49) **ʔit-a** **səbajti** n=ət-om təmharo kəmzɨ-rəxab-ət-om
that-FS woman ACC=that-MP student.PL COMP-meet.PRF-SM.3FS-OM.3MP
rəsiʕ-om-**wa**
forget.GER-SM.3MS-OM.3FS
'They forgot that the woman met the students.'

Examples of this type could in principle be understood as instances of clitic climbing. As such, constructions of this type potentially contribute to our understanding of the nature of object markers in Tigrinya. It is, however, possible that alternative mechanisms are at play in these examples. Overfelt & Cacchioli (under review) argue that examples (48) and (49) arise via long-distance agreement relationships between the matrix predicate and an embedded argument, making object marking an agreement morpheme. Overfelt (submitted) argues that (47) similarly arises via an agreement relationship, but one that is fed by promotion of the embedded subject to a matrix object. To the extent that such examples are better treated as instantiations of agreement, then they display a phenomenon that Carstens (2011) refers to as "hyperagreement". The term refers to instances in which a single nominal constituent controls agreement marking on multiple predicates. This type of behavior contrasts notably with languages like English and calls into question claims regarding the universality of the behavior of nominal constituents across languages (e.g., the Activity Condition, Chomsky 2001).

We believe that more work will be necessary to settle the issue regarding object markers in Tigrinya. Crucial to the analytical choice between pronominal clitics and agreement markers will be an articulated analysis that derives the distribution of these morphemes. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, the verbal markers for oblique and applicative objects that are discussed extensively in Nazareth (2011), as well as in section 3.5 below, have not been subjected to the same kind of investigation. We suspect that a better understanding of these elements may also offer insights into the issue.

3.3 Tense and Aspect

Tigrinya combines imperfective and gerundive verb forms with tensed auxiliaries to construct complex tense–aspect clauses. The auxiliary *ʔallo* and its past counterpart *nɛiru* are used to express the present and past progressive, respectively, when combined with an imperfective verb form, as illustrated in (50).

(50) a. ʔinʤɛra ni-bɛlʕ **ʔall-ɛna**
injera SM.1P-eat.IPFV AUX.PRES-SM.1P
'We are eating injera.'

b. ʔinʤɛra ni-bɛlʕ **nɐir-na**
injera SM.1P-eat.IPFV AUX.PAST-SM.1P
'We were eating injera.'

Note that the auxiliary agrees with the grammatical subject of the sentence, which happens to be silent in this example, just as the main verb does. A mismatch in subject agreement between the verb and the auxiliary, as well as default 3MS agreement, is not possible, as illustrated in the examples below. In (51a), both the verb and the auxiliary display 3FS agreement with the grammatical subject *ħanti sɛbɛjiti* 'the woman'. The ungrammaticality of (51b) follows from the auxiliary's failure to match the subject's ϕ-features, despite correct 3FS agreement on the verb. In (51c), ungrammaticality arises because neither the verb nor the auxiliary exhibits agreement with the grammatical subject.

(51) a. ħanti sɛbɛjiti may ti-sɛti **ʔall-a**
one.FS woman water SM.3FS-drink.IPFV AUX.PRES-SM.3FS
'A woman is drinking water.'

b. *ħanti sɛbɛjiti may ti-sɛti **ʔall-o**
one.FS woman water SM.3FS-drink.IPFV AUX.PRES-SM.3MS
'A woman is drinking water.'

c. *ħanti sɛbɛjiti may ji-sɛti **ʔall-o**
one.FS woman water SM.3MS-drink.IPFV AUX.PRES-SM.3MS
'A woman is drinking water.'

The auxiliary *ʔallo* and its past counterpart *nɛiru* are used to express the present and past perfect, respectively when combined with a gerundive verb form, as illustrated in (52).

(52) a. kab gɛza wɛtsʼi-a **ʔall-a**
from house leave.GER-SM.3FS AUX.PRES-SM.3FS
'She has left the house.'

b. kab gɛza wɛtsʼi-a **nɛir-a**
from house leave.GER-SM.3FS AUX.PAST-SM.3FS
'She had left the house.'

An important point for the syntactic analysis of Tigrinya clause structure is that the grammar imposes a constraint allowing only a single auxiliary per clause—auxiliaries are claimed to occupy the T° head in Tigrinya (Tesfay 2016) and in Amharic (Kramer 2023). Constructions containing a string of multiple auxiliaries, common in languages like English (e.g., *She might have been leaving the house*), do not occur. This is demonstrated int h example below, where the the modal auxiliary /kwn/ 'might cannot co-occur with an additional tense auxiliary.

(53) a. *ʔit-a səbəjti ti-xəjjid **ti-xəwwin** **ʔi-jja**
that-FS woman.F SM.3FS-leave.IPFV SM.3FS-IPFV.might AUX.PRES-SM.3FS
Intended: 'The woman might be leaving.'

b. *ʔɨt-om k'oləʕu jɨ-nbɨb-u **jɨ-xon-u**
that-MP children SM.3MP-read.IPFV-SM.3MP SM.3MP-might.PRES-SM.3MP
nəjjr-om
AUX.PAST-SM.3MP
Intended: 'The children were possibly reading.'

Presumably, this restriction could be derived from a requirement for the lexical verb in Tigrinya to undergo a process of raising. If the verb raises into some higher inflectional or aspectual phrase, this could have the effect of precluding additional auxiliaries that would otherwise occupy those positions. In the following subsection, we offer some evidence that lexical verbs in Tigrinya do in fact raise into higher functional projections on the verbal spine.

3.4 Verb-Raising

Following the work of McCarthy (1993), it is common in the study of Semitic languages to treat the roots of lexical items as consonantal templates. For example an underlying root /*ktb*/ has its syntactic category and inflection determined by an interpolated vocalic template. For relevant discussion as it pertains Tigrinya, we would point the reader to Buckley 2003 and Godfrey 2011.

In many analyses of Semitic languages, which are frequently couched within the framework of Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz 1993), that vocalic template is taken to be realized in structurally higher functional projections on the verbal spine of a clause. Within this perspective, it is typical to suppose that head-movement of the verbal root through the structure derives the appropriate verb form, such as imperfective or perfective. This raises the question of whether there is empirical evidence that would support that claim that verbs in Tigrinya raise into higher aspectual and tense projections.

A substantial body of work on Arabic and Hebrew argues that, unlike perfective forms, imperfective verb forms do not raise to T° (contra Ouhalla (1994)). This claim is typically motivated by the observation that the imperfective behaves in several respects like a (Romance-style) participle and lacks independent tense specification; as a result, tense must be provided by an auxiliary or by the clausal environment (a.o. Shlonsky 1997, Benmamoun 2000, Hallman 2015, Alqassas 2019). Under this view, imperfective forms remain within the lower verbal domain.

The question is more complicated for Tigrinya. As we discuss in more detail in section 4, the language is strongly head-final. This means that any putative verb-raising would be string-vacuous in most, if not all instances. Nonetheless, Tesfay (2016) and Cacchioli (2023) propose that the imperfective verb raises into an aspectual layer of the clause but not beyond it. In contrast, Overfelt (2009) argues that perfective verbs raise as high as the complementizer domain, while Cacchioli (in preparation) proposes such verbs reach a lower inflectional layer, namely a projection of tense. Both authors further claim that the gerundive form behaves differently and does not

undergo verb raising at all. These competing analyses crucially rely on evidence from subordinate clause formation.

As will be discussed in more detail in section 4.4.1, relative clauses in Tigrinya are introduced by the relative marker *z(ɨ)-*, which is prefixed to a verbal element of the embedded clause. In the following example we can observe the relativizing prefix on a perfective verb form.

(54) ʔɨt-a ʔɨt-i sɛbʔay **zɨ-ts'ɨħaf-Ø-a** dɛbdabɛ nɨwaħ
DEM-FS DEM-MS man REL-write.PFV-SM.3MS-OM.3FS letter.FS long.FS
ʔɨ-jja
COP.PRES-SM.3FS
'The letter that the man wrote is long.'

Interestingly, the relativizing prefix is discriminating with regard to the aspectual form of the embedded verb. A gerundive verb, as in (55a) below, does not make a suitable host for the relativizing prefix. Instead, it is necessary to provide an auxiliary, as in (55b), to serve this purpose.

(55) a. *ʔɨt-a ʔɨt-i sɛbʔay **zɨ-ts'ɛħif-u-wa** dɛbdabɛ nɨwaħ
DEM-FS DEM-MS man REL-write.GER-SM.3MS-OM.3FS letter.FS long.FS
ʔɨ-jja
AUX.PRES-SM.3FS
'The letter that the man wrote is long.'

b. ʔɨt-a ʔɨt-i sɛbʔay **ts'ɨħif-u-wa** **z-ɛ-llo**
DEM-FS DEM-MS man write.GER-SM.3MS-OM.3FS REL-AUX.PRES-SM.3MS
dɛbdabɛ nɨwaħ ʔɨ-jja
letter.FS long.FS AUX.PRES-SM.3FS
'The letter that the man wrote is long.'

This pattern is similar in many respects to instances of auxiliary-insertion that can be observed in languages such as English. When verbal forms that do not undergo raising cannot provide a host for verbal morphology, as with English main verbs, a pleonastic auxiliary is inserted as a sort of repair strategy (Chomsky 1957, et seq.). Moreover, this strategy is employed only as a last resort, such that auxiliary-insertion is not licensed when raising is otherwise possible. We observe the same in Tigrinya; perfective verb forms must host relativizing verb forms and do not allow the insertion of an auxiliary, as shown in (56):

(56) *ʔɨt-a ʔɨt-i sɛbʔay **ts'ɨħaf-Ø-a** **zɨ-nəbər-ə** dɛbdabɛ
DEM-FS DEM-MS man write.PFV-SM.3MS-OM.3FS REL-AUX.PAST-SM.3MS letter.FS
nɨwaħ ʔɨ-jja
long.FS AUX.PRES-SM.3FS
'The letter that the man wrote is long.'

This is in fact a more general property of morphological prefixes that mark subordinate clauses, as opposed to an idiosyncrasy of relative clauses. The prefix *sɨləzɨ-*, which introduces reason-

clauses, shows the same restrictions. This element can prefix to a perfective verb form in (57), in which case an auxiliary is precluded. In contrast, the gerundive verb for in (58) again fails to host this prefix and requires the insertion of an auxiliary.

(57) a. ʔiti səbʔaj n=ət-a dəbdabe **sɨləzɨ-ts'əħaf-ø-a**
that-MS man ACC=that-FS letter COMP-write.PFV-SM.3MS-OM.3FS
'because the man had written the letter'

b. *ʔiti səbʔaj n=ət-a dəbdabe **ts'əħaf-ø-a**
that-MS man ACC=that-FS letter write.PFV-SM.3MS-OM.3FS
sɨləzɨ-nəbər-ə
COMP-AUX.PAST-SM.3MS
Intended: 'because the man had written the letter'

(58) a. *ʔit-i səbʔaj n=ət-a dəbdabe **sɨləzɨ-ts'ɨħif-u-wa**
that-MS man ACC=that-FS letter COMP-write.GER-SM.3MS-OM.3FS
'because the man wrote the letter'

b. ʔit-i səbʔaj n=ət-a dəbdabe **ts'ɨħif-u-wa**
that-MS man ACC-that-FS letter write.GER-SM.3MS-OM.3FS
sɨləzɨ-nəbər-ə
COMP-AUX.NPST-SM.3MS
Intended: 'because the man wrote the letter'

Accepting the analogy to the process of auxiliary-insertion, these facts can collectively be understood as evidence for verb raising in Tigrinya. Assuming that clause-typing morphemes like the relativizer *zɨ-* and *sɨləzɨ-* are generated high in the clause, presumably as complementizers, then movement of a verb into this projection could serve to provide a morphological host for these bound morphemes. By hypothesis, this movement is possible for perfective verbs, which precludes the insertion of an auxiliary. The requirement for an auxiliary with a gerundive verb can then be made to follow from the claim that verbs in this particular aspectual form do not undergo raising. In the absence of a suitable morphological host, auxiliary-insertion serves as a repair strategy.

Arguments to this effect are made by both Overfelt (2009) and Cacchioli (in preparation). Interestingly, Baker & Kramer (2014) interpret the distribution of the Amharic relativizer as evidence for verb raising in that languageas well. In as far as the facts and argumentation presented for Tigrinya are compelling, Cacchioli (in preparation) draws attention to some complications for this type of analysis. The first is related to the distribution of these clause-typing morphemes, which can be reduplicated, partially or wholly, on multiple verbal elements in certain contexts. This calls into question their treatment as complementizers. Related to this is the fact that the generalization promoted here does not so easily extend to clauses with imperfective verb forms. Auxiliaries in these contexts are optional for providing a host for clause-typing morphology. Following Cacchioli (in preparation) one might pursue the idea that imperfective clauses are structurally more complex

than with other aspectual forms. Reconciling the analysis presented here with these additional data presents a clear opportunity for future research.

3.5 Valency Alternations

Tigrinya employs several means for grammaticality indicating alternations in the valency of predicate. These include both valency decreasing and valency increasing devices.

3.5.1 Argument Structure

The verbal prefix *tə-* serves as a multi-purpose detransitivizer (Nazareth 2011). The prefixation of this morpheme to transitive predicates derives passive and inchoative forms, as in (59).

(59) a. *Active transitive*

Yonas n-ät-a ṭɨrmuz säbir-u-wa
Yonas OBJ-DET-FS bottle break.PERF.S-SM.3MS-OM.3FS
'Yonas broke the bottle.'

b. *Passive/Inchoative unaccusative*

ʔɨt-a ṭɨrmuz **tä**-säbir-a
DET-FS bottle INTR-break.PERF.S-SM.3MS
'The bottle broke / The bottle was broken.' (Nazareth 2011:56, (55))

From a descriptive standpoint, the prefixation of *tə-* coincides with the demotion of the agent and the promotion of the theme to grammatical subject. These alternations are reflected in the agreement markers on the verb and the absence of differential object marking on the theme. Nazareth (2011) observes that the detransitivized variant in (59b) is ambiguous between an inchoative and a passive interpretation in which there is an implicit agent. As in (60), the demoted agent can be optionally expressed with a prepositional phrase to disambiguate the interpretation.

(60) ʔɨt-a t'ɨrmuz **bɨ=jonas** səbir-a
that-FS bottle INS-Jonas break.GER-SM.3MS
'The bottle was broken by Jonas.'

In addition to passives and inchoatives, the *tə-* prefix also serves to mark reflexive and reciprocal predicates like those shown below:

(61) *Reflexive predicate*

ʔɨt-a qolʕ-a tä-ḥaṣib-a
DET-FS child INTR-wash.PERF.S-SM.3FS
'The child has been washed. / The child washed herself.' (Nazareth 2011:57, (58a))

(62) *Reciprocal predicate*

ʔɨt-om ʔaḥwat ni-ḥadḥid-om tä-ḥalaliy-om
DET-MP brother.PL OBJ-RECP-MP INTR-care.PERF.S-SM.3MP

'The siblings cared for each other.' (Nazareth 2011:27, (18b))

With respect to the utility of the detransitivizing morpheme *tə-*, Tigrinya is similar to many languages for using a single morphophonological form to mark the predicate types listed above. Such facts have been analyzed by treating the relevant morphology as an "anticausative" morpheme that instantiates the grammatical category Voice (e.g., Kratzer 1996, Alexiadou et al. 2015). This is an idea proposed by Tesfay (2016) and one that has been pursued in some detail by Sokol (2025), who builds on Kastner 2020 to suggest that *tə-* in Tigrinya is the realization of Voice specifically for predicates that do not realize an otherwise expected external argument.

This approach has the desirable property of offering a means for understanding the distribution of *tə-* with intransitive predicates. Nazareth (2011) observes that unergative predicates can be *tə-*marked, but at least some non-inchoative unaccusatives cannot be. The following examples are offered as illustrations:

(63) *Unergative predicate marked with detransitivizing* tə-

ʔɨt-i qolʕa tä-goyyiy-u
DET-MS child INTR-run.PERF.S-SM.3MS

'The child was chased/run after.' (Nazareth 2011:267, (272b))

(64) *Non-inchoative unaccusative predicate marked with detransitivizing* tə-

* ʔɨt-a säbäyti tä-ṭäfiʔ-a
DET-FS woman INTR-disappear.PERF.S-SM.3FS

'The woman was disappeared.' (Nazareth 2011:266, (271b))

The appearance of *tə-* on unergative predicates can be seen to indicate the suppression of the expected external argument to produce a familiar impersonal passive construction (Perlmutter 1978). The inability for *tə-* to appear on non-inchoative unaccusative predicates could be made to reflect the fact that these predicts do not expect an external argument.

There are, however, several predicates that are classified as unaccusatives in Nazareth 2011 and that are noted to be compatible with the *tə-*prefix. A relevant example is provided in (65).[5]

[5]The abbreviation AM glosses verbal markers that index oblique and applicative arguments. These are discussed in more detail later in this section.

(65) *Non-inchoative unaccusative predicate marked with detransitivizing* tə-

tä-mäyit-u-wa/la
INTR-die.PERF.S-SM.3MS-OM.3FS/AM.3FS
'It has been died for her.' (Nazareth 2011:295)

Such examples present a challenge to the treatment of *tə-* that was outlined above. As a non-inchoative unaccusative, there would presumably be no expected external argument to be suppressed. With that said, it is worth acknowledging that we are not aware of an established battery of diagnostics for determining the argument structure of intransitive predicates. Although we would note that both Nazareth (2011) and Sokol (2025) offer relevant considerations. To the extent that it can be established that *tə-* can detransitivize non-inchoative unaccusative predicates, this finding may require that we expand our conceptions of what counts as an external argument. Such an approach might admit the existence of event arguments that might be suppressed by the detransitivizing morpheme (e.g., Pylkkänen 2008, Deal 2009).

In as far as an approach along these lines is viable, it also offers a way for understanding the prefixal causative morpheme *ʔa-* in Tigrinya. As Sokol (2025) also points out, this morpheme could represent yet another instantiation of Voice in a predicate that is asked to accommodate one additional argument, as in the pair of examples below:

(66) a. binyam säb qätil-u
Binyam man kill.PRF-SM.3MS
'Binyam has killed a man.'

b. binyam **nɨ=häww-u** säb **ʔa**-qtil-u
Binyam DIR=brother-POSS.3MS man CAUS-kill-SM.3MS
'Binyam made his brother kill a man.' (Tesfay 2016:125, (10a–b))

Altogether, considering the detransitivizing prefix *tə-* and causativizing prefix *ʔa-* as an instantiation of the same grammatical category leads to the expectation that they are in complementary distribution within a single predicate. In fact, we are not aware of any such attested forms in the language. However, while such forms may not be overtly observable in Tigrinya, forms involving a co-occurrence of the causative and passive morpheme have been proposed for the indirect causative in Amharic, the so-called "causative of the passive". We would direct the reader to Bezza (2011) and Desalegn (2019) for discussion.

3.5.2 Applicatives

Tigrinya also employs a dedicated series of morphological markers for introducing and cross-referencing non-core, oblique arguments of a predicate. Tesfay (2010) and Nazareth (2011) refer to these morphemes and their associated arguments as "applicative" arguments (e.g., Marantz 1984).

(67) Yonas **n-ät-i** **ṭawla** mäṣḥaf ʔanbir-u-**lu**
Yonas OBJ-DET-MS table book place.PERF.S-SM.3MS-AM.3FS
'Yonas placed a book on the table.' (Nazareth 2011:110, (123b))

The entire morphological series for these applicative markers is presented in Table 6. The reader might observe the agreement found here once again shows essentially perfect overlap with the free pronominal morphemes. It is, therefore, possible to think of these applicative markers as the suffix *-l-* plus agreement.

3MS	-lu
3MP	-lom
3FS	-la
3FP	-lən
2MS	-lka
2MP	-lkum
2FS	-ka
2FP	-lkɨn
1S	-ləj
1P	-lna

Table 6: Applicative-marking morphology in Tigrinya

Graham & Harbour (2020) demonstrate that these applicative markers show many of the properties that we observed for the core object markers investigated in section 3.2. Applicative marking is gated by the definiteness and differential object marking. Thus, applicative markers cannot cross-reference bare indefinite nominals, as shown in (68):

(68) a. ət-a sɛbɛyiti **n-ɛt-i** **wəddi** ət-a dəmmu ʕadig-atə-**lu**
the-FS woman OBJ-the-MS boy the-FS cat buy.PAST-SM.3FS-AM.3MS
'The woman bought the boy the cat.' (Graham & Harbour 2020:3, (12))

b. *ət-a sɛbɛyiti **wəddi** ət-a dəmmu ʕadig-atə-**lu**
the-FS woman boy the-FS cat buy.PAST-SM.3FS-AM.3MS
'The woman bought a boy a cat.' (Graham & Harbour 2020:5, (19a))

Applicative markers are also restricted to appearing on main verbs and always follow any suffixal subject marking, as the examples above also demonstrate. There are additionally co-occurrence restrictions on core object and applicative markers. Only a single applicative marker is permitted in any single clause and they are in complementary distribution with core object markers:

(69) *ət-i sɛbʔay n-ɛt-a gwal ət-i xɛlbi ʔadig-u-**wo-la**
the-MS man OBJ-the-FS girl the-MS dog buy.PAST-SM.3MS-OM.3MS-AM.3FS
'The man bought the girl the dog.' (Graham & Harbour 2020:4, (16))

The range of semantic roles that can be treated as applicative arguments of a predicate are

extensively discussed in Nazareth 2011. The applicative marker cross-references arguments that may receive either a benefactive or malefactive interpretation, typically on the basis of the context.

(70) ʔɨt-i säbʔay **n-ät-a** **säbayti** därho šäyṭ-u-**la**
DET-MS man OBJ-DET-FS woman chicken sell.PERF.S-SM.3MS-AM.3FS
'The man sold a chicken to/for/on the woman.' (Nazareth 2011:120, (130b))

It is not clear, on the basis of available evidence, whether this difference in interpretation is a truth-conditional contribution of the utterance or if it is conveyed as an implicature.

Other types of semantic roles that can be encoded with applicative marking on a predicate include recipients, locatives, sources, paths, instrumentals, and comitatives. Interestingly, these roles are typically able to alternate between applicative encoding and prepositional marking. A pair of relevant examples are offered below:

(71) *Locative argument alternation*

a. **n-ät-i** **sedeq̄a** məṣḥaf ʔanbir-u-**lu**
OBJ-DET-MS desk book put.PERF.S-SM.3MS-AM.3MS
'He put a book on the desk.'

b. **ʔab-t-i** **sedeq̄a** məṣḥaf ʔanbir-u
LOC-DET-MS desk book put.PERF.S-SM.3MS
'He put a book on the desk.' (Nazareth 2011:257, (261))

(72) *Instrumental argument alternation*

a. Saba n-ät-i ʕɨtro **bɨ-saʕri** däbiʔ-a-to
Saba OBJ-DET-MS jar INS-grass seal.PERF.S-SM.3FS-OM.3MS
'Saba sealed the jar with grass.' (Nazareth 2011:184, (186a))

b. Saba **n-ät-i** **saʕri** ʕɨtro däbi-a-**tlu**
Saba OBJ-DET-MS jar grass seal.PERF.S-SM.3FS-AM.3MS
'Saba sealed the jar with grass.' (Nazareth 2011:185, (187a))

It is also worth observing that, for at least some predicates, certain non-core arguments can be cross-referenced by either an applicative marker or a core object marker.

(73) a. **n-ät-i** **gänzäb** məṣḥaf gäziʔ-u-**lu**
OBJ-DET-MS money buy.PERF.S-SM.3MS-AM.3MS
'He bought a book with the money.'

b. **n-ät-i** **gänzäb** məṣḥaf gäziʔ-u-**wo**
OBJ-DET-MS money buy.PERF.S-SM.3MS-OM.3MS
'He bought a book with the money.' (Nazareth 2011:127, (135))

Nazareth (2011:127) explains that the difference in interpretation of these examples pivots on the notion of "affectedness" with respect to the nominal *gänzäb* 'money'. With applicative marking in example (73b), the cross-referenced nominal receives a simple instrumental interpretation. When cross-referenced by core object marking in (73a), the expression conveys that the money was

exhausted in the purchase. Here, too, the available evidence does not allow us to say confidently how this informational content is conveyed.

To the best of our knowledge, the only focused investigation of applicative markers and their alternation with prepositional constructions in Tigrinya is conducted by Nazareth (2011) within the framework of Lexical-Functional Grammar. It is, however, clear that analyses of the phenomenon explored in this section have a significant potential for theoretical import. This includes contributions to debates between lexicalist and derivational theories of how argument structures are encoded and whether valency alternations take place in the lexicon or the syntax.

4 The Clausal Domain

4.1 Basic facts about the clausal domain

Clauses in Tigrinya are strongly head-final, presenting default Subject-Object-Verb word order. The canonical order of the major constituents of a clause is illustrated below in (74) with an accompanying example.

(74) a. SBJ DEF-OBJ ADV INDF-OBJ V AUX

b. ʔɨt-i təmaharaj bɨqɨlt'uf məts'ħaf jɨ-nbɨb-a
that-MS student quickly book SM.3MS-read.IPFV-OM.3MS
ʔall-o
AUX.NPST-SM.3MS
'The student is quickly reading a book.'

Note that Tigrinya is a pro-drop language, permitting the omission of contextually salient and discourse-linked subjects and objects. Use of the overt pronouns that were introduced in Table 1 presupposes the existence of a contrastive entity in the domain of discourse.

Tigrinya is a nominative-accusative language with respect to both case and agreement. We see this in the causative-inchoative alternation that is repeated below:

(75) a. *Active transitive*

Yonas n-ät-a ṭɨrmuz säbir-u-wa
Yonas OBJ-DET-FS bottle break.PERF.S-SM.3MS-OM.3FS
'Yonas broke the bottle.'

b. *Passive/Inchoative unaccusative*

ʔɨt-a ṭɨrmuz tä-säbir-a
DET-FS bottle INTR-break.PERF.S-SM.3MS
'The bottle broke / The bottle was broken.' (Nazareth 2011:56, (55))

The subjects of transitive and intransitive predicates are morphologically unmarked for nominative

case. Objects, on the other hand, are differentially marked with the prefix *nɨ-*, which is commonly identified as case marker (Weldu 2004, Kievit & Kievit 2009, Overfelt 2022). Differential object marking pivots on the definiteness and specificity as well as the relative prominence of a nominal constituent (Nazareth 2011); compare the definite object of (75a) with the indefinite object of (74b). Additionally, the subjects of transitive and intransitive predicates both control the same series of subject marker morphemes on the verbs (see Table 4). A separate series of object markers are controlled by objects (see Table 5 and section 3.2).

Within a clause, word-order is variable on the basis of syntactic, semantic, and information-structural factors. Definite arguments that are differentially marked with accusative case typically undergo an application of Object Shift. Thus, the placement of the object in (74b) differs from the example in (76), where the default word-order sees the definite direct object placed in a position that precedes a predicate-modifying adverbial.

(76) ʔɨt-i təmaharaj **n=ət-a** **məts'ħaf** biqɨlt'uf jɨ-nbɨb-a
that-MS student ACC=DIST-FS book quickly SM.3MS-read.IPFV-OM.3MS
ʔall-o
AUX.NPST-SM.3MS
'The student is quickly reading a book.'

The major constituents of a clause may also be displaced to a clause-initial position. As a generalization, clause-initial elements are interpreted as topics, representing information that is established in the discourse.

(77) a. **n=ət-a** **məts'haf** ʔɨt-ən ʔanəsti ʔanbib-ən-a
ACC=DIST-FS book DIST-FP women read.GER-SM.3FP-OM.3FS
'As for the the books, the women read them.'

b. **ʔɨt-a** **məts'haf** ʔɨt-ən ʔanəsti ʔanbib-ən-a
DIST-FS book DIST-FP women read.GER-SM.3FP-OM.3FS
'As for the the books, the women read them.'

For reasons that are not entirely well-understood, differential object marking becomes optional on objects that are highly topical or discourse-linked, as in (77b).

We would direct the reader to Tesfay 2016, Spadine 2020, Overfelt submitted, Cacchioli & Overfelt in preperation, Cacchioli in preparation for further discussion of Tigrinya clausal syntax.

4.2 Clefts and Fronted Copulas

Tigrinya, like other Ethio-semitic languages, makes extensive use of cleft constructions as a strategy for encoding focus. These constructions are characterized by the presence of a verbal form prefixed with the relative marker *z(ɨ)-* and the copular element *ʔɨjju*, which surfaces immediately to the right of the focalized constituent within the clause. As illustrated below, a wide range of

syntactic categories can be focalized in cleft constructions, including subjects (78), direct objects (79), and prepositional phrases (80).

(78) nɨssu **ʔɨ-jju** n-ɨt-i ʔanbɛsa zɨ-qɛtɛl-Ø-o
he FOC-SM.3MS DOM-DEM-MS lion REL-kill.PFV-SM.3M-OM.3MS
'It is he who killed the lion.'

(79) a. ħanti tɛxɨli **ʔɨ-jjɛ** z-ɨ-gɛzɨʔ z-ɛll-ɛxu
one.FS plant.FS FOC-SM.1S REL-SM.1S-buy.IPFV REL-AUX.PRES-SM.1S
'It is a plant that I am buying.'

b. ħanti tɛxɨli **ʔɨ-na** nɨ-gɛzɨʔ z-ɛll-ɨna
one.FS plant.FS FOC-SM.1P SM.1P-buy.IPFV REL-AUX.PRES-SM.1P
'It is a plant that we are buying.'

(80) ʔab tsʾɨdɨja **ʔɨ-jju** ʕɨmbaba-tat z-ɨ-ʕɛmbɨb-u
LOC spring FOC-SM.3MS flower.M-P REL-SM.3MP-blossom.IPFV-SM.3MP
'It is in spring that flowers blossom.'

A noteworthy property of these constructions is that the copula *ʔɨjju* agrees in person, number, and gender with the subject of the relative clause introduced by *z(ɨ)-*. In the case of (80), the copula surfaces with default 3MS agreement, a pattern that can be attributed to the fact that the focalized constituent is a prepositional phrase, which lacks inherent ϕ-features capable of triggering agreement. This agreement pattern supports the view that *ʔɨjju* is syntactically integrated into the clausal structure rather than being a purely discourse-level particle.

Importantly, the copula *ʔɨjju* is not restricted to cleft constructions. It also functions as a general focus marker in a variety of non-cleft contexts. Previous work has argued that this element encodes narrow focus (Zellou 2010) as well as verum focus (Cacchioli 2024). When *ʔɨjju* appears immediately adjacent to a focalized constituent, it yields a narrow focus interpretation. When it appears in clause-final position, *ʔɨjju* contributes an emphatic or assertive interpretation, reinforcing the truth of the proposition in a manner comparable to emphatic *do* in English, thus triggering verum focus, as shown in (81d).

(81) a. ħarmaz riɛj-ɛ
elephant.MS see.GER-SM.1S
'I saw an elephant.'

b. ħarmaz **ʔɨ-jjɛ** riɛj-ɛ
elephant.MS FOC-SM.1S see.GER-SM.1S
'I saw AN ELEPHANT (not a giraffe).'

c. ħarmaz tʾraj **ʔɨ-jjɛ** riɛj-ɛ
elephant.MS only FOC-SM.1S see.GER-SM.1S
'I only saw AN ELEPHANT (not a giraffe).'

d. ħarmaz riɛj-ɛ **ʔɨ-jjɛ**
elephant.MS see.GER-SM.1S VER-SM.1S
'I did see an elephant.'

These patterns indicate that *ʔɨjju* is sensitive both to syntactic position and to information-structural configuration. Its interpretation varies systematically depending on whether it is right-adjacent to a constituent or occurs at the right edge of the clause.

The broader theoretical issue raised by these facts concerns the categorial status and syntactic position of *ʔɨjju*. In particular, it is unclear whether this element should be analyzed as a verbal copula, a complementizer-like element, or a dedicated focus head. Cacchioli (2024), adopting a head-initial approach to head-finality, proposes that *ʔɨjju* is a focus marker generated within the complementizer domain, specifically in the head of a Focus projection (Jackendoff 1972, among others). This analysis captures the dual behavior of *ʔɨjju* as both an agreement-bearing element and a focus marker

Beyond *ʔɨjju*, Tigrinya possesses other focus-sensitive particles, including the polar particle *do*, discussed in section 4.3.2, as well as the additive particle *wɨn* and the exclusive particle *gin*. These non-inflecting particles appear in various positions within an utterance. However, they are always encliticized to the constituent that they have semantic scope over, which also receives a pitch accent indicating contrastive focus. The examples below provide illustrative examples.[6]

(82) gənɛt n=ət-a məts'ħaf ʔanbib-a-ta **səgɛn wɨn** n=ət-a
Genet ACC-that-FS book read.GER-SM.3FS-OM.3FS Segen ADD ACC-that-FS
məts'ħaf ʔanbib-a-ta
book read.GER-SM.3FS-OM.3FS
'GENET read the book and also SEGEN read the book.'

(83) salam n=et-i məskot sɛbir-a-to **n=ət-i mənbər gɨn**
Salam ACC-that-MS window break.GER-SM.3FS-OM.3MS ACC-that-MS chair EXC
ʔaj-sɛbir-a-to-n
NEG-break.GER-SM.3FS-OM.3MS-NEG
Selam broke the WINDOW, but she didn't break the CHAIR.

The precise semantic contribution of these particles remains less well-understood and requires further empirical investigation.

[6]We gloss the additive particle *wɨn* as ADD and the exclusive particle *gɨn* as EXC.

4.3 Question Formation

4.3.1 *Wh*-Questions

Tigrinya forms constituent questions by means of a dedicated set of interrogative proforms, listed in Table 7 together with their English equivalents. These items cover the core argument and adjunct categories, including person, thing, manner, place, time, and reason.

Interrogative proform	Translation
mɛn	who
ʔɨntaj	what
ʔajɛnaj	which
mɛʕas	when
ʔabɛj	where
kɛmɛj	how
nimɨntaj/sɨlɛmɨntaj	why

Table 7: Interrogative proforms in Tigrinya.

These proforms are used to form both matrix and embedded constituent questions. In simple matrix questions, the proform typically appears in the canonical argument or adjunct position associated with its grammatical role, as illustrated in (84) and (85). In these examples, the proforms surface *in situ*, without any apparent displacement to the left periphery or otherwise.

(84) nɨsxa **ʔɨntay** rɨʔi-ka?
you.MS what see.GER-SM.2MS
'What did you see?'

(85) ħafti-ka **kɛmɛj** ʔall-a?
sister-POSS.2MS how BE.PRES-SM.3FS
'How is your sister?'

In the case of an embedded constituent questions, as shown in (86) and (87), the interrogative proform appears within the embedded clause introduced by the complementizer-like element *kɛmz(ɨ)-*, again occupying the canonical position of the interrogated grammatical role.

(86) ʔaman **ʔɨntay** kɛmzɨ-bɛli-ku ħatit-u-ni
Aman what COMP-say.PFV-SM.1S ask.GER-SM.3MS-OM.1S
'Aman asked me what I said.'

(87) **ʔabɛj** (nissu) nab bet tɨmɨhɨrti kɛmz-ɨ-xɛjjɨd ninɛbs-ɛi
where he to school COMP-SM.3MS-go.IPFV self-POSS.1S
ħatit-ɛ-ja
ask.GER-SM.1S-OM.3FS
'I wondered (lit. asked myself) where he goes to school.'

The usual question asked about languages with in-situ strategies for constituent question formation is whether there are constraints on the interpretation of in-situ interrogative proforms. As famously demonstrated by Huang (1982), even in an language like Mandarin, there are systematic constraints on where in-situ interrogative proforms can appear. Gebregziabher & Duguine (2024) observe that similar facts are observed in Tigrinya. The examples below present constituent question constructions in which different grammatical roles of an embedded adjunct clause are interrogated.

(88) selam [yared **ni-mən** siləzi-rəxəb-ə] təħag^{w}is-a?
Selam Yared ACC-who COMP-find.PFV-SM.3MS be_happy.GER-SM.3FS
'Who is the person such that Selam is happy because Yared found that person?'
(Gebregziabher & Duguine 2024:278, (42))

(89) ??selam [yared **məʕas** siləzi-rəxəb-∅-o] təħag^{w}is-a?
Selam Yared when COMP-find.PFV-SM.3MS-OM.3MS be_happy.GER-SM.3FS
'What is the time such that Selam is happy because Yared found him at that time?'
(Gebregziabher & Duguine 2024:279, (46a))

(90) *bɨnjam [**mən** siləzi-xəd-ə] ħariq-u?
Biniam who COMP-leave.PFV-SM.3MS be_angry.GER-SM.3MS
'Who is the person such that Binyam is angry because that person left?'

Like Mandarin, the constraints on in-situ interrogative proforms are sensitive to the grammatical role of the interrogated constituent. While objects of an embedded adjunct clause can be interrogated (88), adjuncts (89) and subjects (90) cannot. The reader should consult Gebregziabher & Duguine 2024 for more details and in-depth discussion.

Gebregziabher & Duguine (2024) also observe that Tigrinya permits interrogative proforms to surface in clause-initial position. The authors provide the examples in (91a)–(91c), where the same constituent question is realized with different word orders.

(91) a. Selam **ni-mən** riʔ-a?
Selam ACC-who see.GER-3FSG.S
'Who did Selam see?' (Gebregziabher & Duguine 2024:2, (2b))

b. **ni-mən** riʔ-a Selam?
ACC-who see.GER-3FSG.S Selam
'Who did Selam see?' (Gebregziabher & Duguine 2024:2, (3b))

c. **ni-mən** Selam riʔ-a?
ACC-who Selam see.GER-3FSG.S
'Who did Selam see?' (Gebregziabher & Duguine 2024:2, (4))

On the basis of facts such as those in (91b) and (91c), Gebregziabher & Duguine (2024) argue that Tigrinya optionally employs overt *wh*-movement. Specifically, they propose that in (91b) the interrogative proform *nimən* undergoes movement to a clause-initial position, followed by T-

to-C movement of the verb *riʔa* 'see'. In (91c), by contrast, the proform still moves to the left periphery, but the verb remains in T°, yielding a different surface order. The authors support this movement-based analysis by appealing to diagnostics such as long-distance dependencies, reconstruction effects, and sensitivity to island constraints.

While these arguments are suggestive, the availability of multiple surface positions for interrogative proforms in Tigrinya does not in itself necessitate a *wh*-movement analysis. An alternative possibility is that Tigrinya is fundamentally a *wh*-in-situ language that allows *wh*-scrambling of interrogative proforms. Such a pattern is well attested in languages like Japanese and Korean, which are also SOV and permit interrogative proforms to scramble to the left periphery without employing genuine *wh*-movement (Grewendorf & Sabel 1999, Beck & Kim 1997, Law 2010). A similar analysis has been proposed for Xining Mandarin Chinese (an SVO, *wh*-in-situ language) where interrogative proforms have been argued to undergo scrambling rather than true *wh*-movement (Bell 2019).

Under this alternative view, the word orders in (91b) and (91c) could be derived without invoking *wh*-movement to the left-periphery of the clause. For instance, the OVS order in (91b) could in principle involve right dislocation of the subject rather than fronting of the *wh*-phrase. More likely is that the object and verb together undergo an instance of predicate-fronting. Consequently, while the data clearly show that Tigrinya allows a degree of positional flexibility for interrogative proforms, further evidence is required to determine whether this flexibility should be analyzed in terms of true *wh*-movement or clause-internal scrambling.

4.3.2 Polar Questions

To express a polar (yes/no) question, Tigrinya speakers may simply use a declarative clause with rising intonation. In such cases, the linear order of constituents remains unchanged, and the interrogative force is conveyed exclusively through prosodic means. This strategy is comparable to that found in English and does not involve any overt interrogative morphology.

(92) Tɛsfai mɛtsʾħafti ji-nbɨb?
Tesfay book.PL SM.3MS-read.IPFV
'Tesfay reads books?'

In addition to intonational marking, Tigrinya also makes use of a dedicated interrogative particle, *do*, which constitutes a productive and morphosyntactically explicit strategy for forming polar questions. The particle *do* most commonly appears in clause-final position, as illustrated in (93). In this position, it scopes over the entire clause and yields a neutral yes/no interpretation.

(93) Tɛsfai mɛtsʾħafti jɨ-nbɨb **do**?
Tesfay book.MP SM.3MS-read.IPFV Q
'Does Tesfay read books?'

Importantly, the particle *do* is focus-sensitive. Rather than being a simple clause-typing particle, it is systematically positioned to the right of the constituent that is interpreted as focalized. As a result, sentences such as (93) are compatible with a broad focus interpretation, but they may also receive a narrower focus reading, for instance with focus on the verb *jɨnbɨb* 'read'. Under such a reading, the question conveys a contrastive implication, roughly paraphrasable as 'Does Tesfay read books (as opposed to doing something else with them)?'.

The particle *do* can appear in several clause-internal positions, each correlating with focus on a different constituent. As shown in (94), *do* may follow the object or the subject, thereby focalizing these elements. Crucially, however, *do* is categorically excluded from clause-initial position, regardless of the intended focus interpretation.[7]

(94) a. Tɛsfai mɛtsʾħafti **do** jɨ-nbɨb?
Tesfay book.MP Q SM.3MS-read.IPFV
'Does Tesfay read BOOKS?'

b. Tɛsfai **do** mɛtsʾħafti jɨ-nbɨb?
Tesfay Q book.MP SM.3MS-read.IPFV
'Does TESFAY read books?'

c. ***do** Tɛsfai mɛtsʾħafti jɨ-nbɨb?
Q Tesfay book.MP SM.3MS-read.IPFV
'Does Tesfay read books?'

Given these properties, *do* can be analyzed as a focus particle, parallel in important respects to the element *ʔɨjju* discussed in Section 4.2. The two focus markers can co-occur within the same clause, although their co-occurrence is subject to speaker variation in acceptability. When both elements are present, *do* surfaces as a prefix on *ʔɨjju*. The sentences in (95) illustrate the possible orders and corresponding interpretations.

(95) a. Tɛsfai mɛtsʾħafti jɨ-nbɨb **d-ɨ-jju**?
Tesfay book.MP SM.3MS-read.IPFV Q-VER-SM.3MS
'DOES Tesfay read books?'

b. Tɛsfai mɛtsʾħafti **d-ɨ-jju** jɨ-nbɨb?
Tesfay book.MP Q-FOC-SM.3MS SM.3MS-read.IPFV
'Does Tesfay read BOOKS?'

c. Tɛsfai **d-ɨ-jju** mɛtsʾħafti jɨ-nbɨb?
Tesfay Q-FOC-SM.3MS book.MP SM.3MS-read.IPFV
'Does TESFAY read books?'

[7] As noted, some degree of speaker-dependent variation in acceptability is attested for the intermediate positions.

d. ***d-ɨ-jju** Tɛsfai mɛtsʼħafti ji-nbɨb?
Q-FOC-SM.3MS Tesfay book.MP SM.3MS-read.IPFV
'Does Tesfay read books?'

Semantically, the constructions in (95) give rise to interpretations that are broadly comparable to those in (93) and (94), including broad, subject, and object focus readings. Nevertheless, the precise interpretive contribution of the combined form *dɨjju* remains to be fully understood, and finer distinctions in emphasis or discourse presupposition may be at play.

Finally, the particle *do* is not restricted to matrix clauses but also appears in embedded polar questions, as shown in (96).

(96) Tɛsfai kɛmzɨ-wɛtsʼ-ɛ ʔaman ħatit-u **do**
Tesfay COMP-leave.PFV-SM.3MS Aman ask.GER-SM.3MS Q
'Aman asked if Tesfay left.'

Taken together, these data raise several theoretical questions concerning the syntactic status and structural position of *do*, as well as its interaction with the focus marker *ʔɨjju*. In particular, it remains to be determined whether *do* should be analyzed as a focus head, a clause-typing operator, or a hybrid element, and under what conditions its occurrence requires or licenses the presence of *ʔɨjju*. Addressing these questions will require a more detailed investigation of the left periphery and the syntax–information structure interface in Tigrinya.

4.4 Clause Typing Phenomena

4.4.1 Relative Clauses

All types of relative clauses in Tigrinya—including subject and object relatives, as well as restrictive, non-restrictive, and free relatives—are introduced by the element *z(ɨ)-*. This element has been traditionally identified in descriptive grammars as a relative marker (see Leslau 1941, Mason 1996, Kogan 1997). Within the theoretical literature it has been identified as a complementizer (Overfelt 2009). In restrictive relative clauses, which are typically prenominal in Tigrinya (Palmer 1962), the relative clause appears between the demonstrative and the head noun, as illustrated below for both object and subject relatives.

(97) *Object Relative Clauses*

ʔɨt-i **lomi nɨgɨho zɨ-gɛzaʔɨ-ka-jo** bun ji-dɛli
DEM-MS today morning ZI-buy.PFV-SM.2MS-OM.3MS coffee SM.1S-want.IPFV
allɛ-xu
BE.PRES-SM.1S

'I want the coffee that you bought this morning.'

(98) *Subject Relative Clauses*

ʔɨt-a **zɨ-rɛʔa-ku-ja** lam t'ɛfiʔ-a
DEM-FS ZI-see.PFV-SM.1S-OM.3FS cow disappear.GER-SM.3FS
'The cow that I saw has disappeared.'

A salient property of Tigrinya relative clauses is the behavior of *z(ɨ)-* in periphrastic tense constructions, where the lexical verb is accompanied by an auxiliary. In such cases, the prefix *z(ɨ)-* is obligatorily realized on both the lexical verb and the auxiliary, resulting in two overt occurrences of the same morpheme within a single relative clause, as shown in (99) and (100).

(99) ʔɨt-i ʔanɛ **z**-ɨ-nbeb-o **z**-ɛll-ɛxu mɛts'ħaf ʔazɛnagaʔi
DEM.MS I ZI-SM.1S-read.IPFV-OM.3MS ZI-AUX.PRES-SM.1S book.MS amusing
ʔɨ-jju
AUX.PRES-SM.3MS
'The book that I am reading is amusing.'

(100) ʔɨt-i ʃekolata **z**-ɨ-bɛlʕ **z**-ɛll-o wɛdi Tɛklɛ
DEM-MS chocolate.FS ZI-SM.3MS-eat.IPFV ZI-AUX.PRES-SM.3MS boy Tekle.MS
jɨ-bhal
SM.3MS-call.IPFV
'The boy who is eating chocolate is called Tekle.'

The obligatory doubling of *z(ɨ)-* in periphrastic constructions has led some researchers to argue that this element should not be analyzed as a relative marker nor as a complementizer per se, but rather as the morphological reflex of successive-cyclic $\overline{A}$-movement (Cacchioli 2023). On this view, each occurrence of *z(ɨ)-* corresponds to an intermediate landing site of the relativized element as it moves through the clausal spine. This interpretation gains further support from the fact that the same prefix surfaces in a range of constructions that have independently been argued to involve $\overline{A}$-movement.

One such construction is comparative clauses, where *z(ɨ)-* appears on the embedded verb, as illustrated below.

(101) Ruth' kab-t-i **zɨ-ħasɛb-kɨ-wo** nɨlaʕɨli mɛsħaʁ ʔɨ-jja
Ruth.FS from-DEM-MS ZI-think.PFV-SM.1S-OM.3MS more funny BE.PRES-SM.3FS
'Ruth is funnier than I thought.'

Beyond relative clauses, comparative clauses, and noun clausal complements, *z(ɨ)-* is also employed in the formation of complement clauses and adverbial clauses more generally. These constructions will be discussed in Sections 4.4.2 and 4.4.3, respectively. Taken together, the wide distribution of *z(ɨ)-* across different clause types could suggest that its function in Tigrinya is not limited to relativization, but instead reflects a more general mechanism associated with operator dependencies in the language.

4.4.2 Complement Clauses

Complement clauses in Tigrinya can be introduced either by the verbal prefix *kɛmz(ɨ)-*, attached to the embedded predicate, or by the head-final free morpheme *ʔilu*. The two strategies overlap partially in distribution but differ both syntactically and semantically. This section discusses each in turn, beginning with *kɛmz(ɨ)-*.

The prefix *kɛmz(ɨ)-* occurs with a wide range of matrix predicates, including factive verbs, cognitive non-factive verbs, fiction verbs, perception verbs, and verbs of saying (Cacchioli in preparation). Representative examples are given below.

(102) *Factive verbs*

kɛmz-ɨ-fɛt-wa ji-ʔɛmin
KƐMZɨ-SM.3MS-like.IPFV-OM.3FS SM.3MS-admit.IPFV
'He admits that he likes her.'

(103) *Verbs of saying*

ʔɨt-i mɛskot **kɛmz**-ɛj-Ø-kifɛt gɛlitsʼ-ɛ
DEM-MS window KƐMZɨ-NEG-SM.3MS-open.IPFV explain.GER-SM.1S
'I explained that the window doesn't open.'

(104) *Perception verbs*

mɛmhir **kɛmzɨ**-kon-ɨt sɛmiʕ-ɛ
teacher KƐMZɨ-become.PFV-SM.3FS hear.GER-SM.1S
'I heard that she became a teacher.'

In much of the literature on Tigrinya, *kɛmz(ɨ)-* is treated as a single, mono-morphemic complementizer (see Leslau 1941, Mason 1996, Kogan 1997, Tesfay 2016, Spadine 2020). However, several authors have observed that this element is more plausibly analyzed as bi-morphemic, consisting of the particle *kɛm* and the prefix *z(ɨ)-* (Overfelt 2009, Nazareth 2011, Bulakh 2019, van Urk 2024). Building on these observations, Cacchioli (2024) argues explicitly for a decompositional analysis of *kɛmz(ɨ)-*.

One argument for this view comes from the fact that *kɛm* is an independently attested lexical element in the language, meaning 'like', as illustrated in (105) and (106). In addition, other preposition-like elements are known to introduce subordinate clauses in Tigrinya, systematically requiring the embedded predicate to be marked by *z(ɨ)-*; these constructions will be discussed in detail in Section 4.4.3.

(105) ʔɨt-om sɛbʔut **kɛm** ʔɨnisɨsa-tat ji-mɛlalɛs-u
DEM-3P men like animal-P SM.3MP-behave.IPFV-SM.3MP
'Those men behave like animals.'

(106) Ruṯ **kɛm**-ay tɛmaharit ʔi-jja
Ruth like-1S student.FS AUX.PRES-SM.3FS
'Ruth is a student like me.'

The prefix *kɛmz(ɨ)-* is not, however, the only strategy available for introducing complement clauses with cognitive non-factive verbs, fiction verbs, and verbs of saying. In precisely these contexts (and only in these contexts) a clause-final *ʔilu* may also be used, as shown below.

(107) *Cognitive Non-Factive verbs*

nsu wɛrqi jɨ-sɛrrɨx **ʔil-ɛ** jɨ-tʾɨrɨtʾr-o
he gold SM.3MS-steal.IPFV say-SM.1S SM.1S-suspect.IPFV-OM.3MS
'I suspect that he steals gold.'

(108) *Fiction verbs*

Tɛsfay ʔaman ʔab qɛlaj ħambis-u **ʔil-u** ħalim-u
Tesfay Aman LOC lake swim.GER-SM.3MS say-SM.3MS dream.GER-SM.3MS
'Tesfay dreamt that Aman swam in the lake.'

(109) *Verbs of saying*

dɛmamu ʔaʕɨwaf jɨ-bɛlʕ-u **ʔil-ɛ** ʔanbib-ɛ
cat.MP bird.MP SM.3MP-eat.IPFV-SM.3MP say-SM.1S read.GER-SM.1S
'I read that cats eat birds.'

The element *ʔɨlu* is etymologically derived from the root */bhl/* 'say' (Leslau 1941, Nazareth 2011). It always agrees with the grammatical subject of the matrix clause and surfaces between the matrix predicate and the embedded clause. Two competing analyses of *ʔilu* have been proposed in the literature. On the one hand, Nazareth (2011:169) analyzes *ʔilu* as a verb participating in a subordinating serial verb construction. On the other hand, Spadine (2020) argues that *ʔilu* is a complementizer, appearing either under a matrix predicate or in monoclausal constructions.

According to our consultants, sentences introduced by *kɛmz(ɨ)-* and *ʔilu* do not differ truth-conditionally. A more fine-grained analysis, however, reveals an important interpretive asymmetry. As argued by Spadine (2020), only *ʔilu*-clauses can give rise to indexical shift, whereas *kɛmz(ɨ)-* clauses cannot. This contrast is illustrated in the examples below.

(110) Kidane nɨ almaz **ʔanä nɨʕaki** **kɨmzɨ**-räʔay-ku-ki
Kidane.M DOM Almaz.F I ACC.2FS COMP-see-SM.1S-OM.2FS
nägar-u-wa
tell-SM.3MS-OM.3FS
'Kidane$_{i}$ told Almaz$_{j}$ that I$_{speaker/*k}$ saw you$_{addressee/*k}$.'
(adapted from Spadine (2020:101, (139)))

(111) Kidane nɨ almaz **ʔanä nɨʕaʔki** räʔay-ä-ki **ʔil-u**
Kidane.M DOM Almaz.F I ACC.2FS see-SM.1S-OM.2FS COMP-SM.3MS
nägar-u-wa
tell-SM.3MS-OM.3FS
'Kidane$_i$ told Almaz$_j$ that he$_{i/*k}$ saw her$_{j/*k}$.'

(adapted from Spadine (2020:102, (140)))

In (110), where the embedded clause is introduced by *kɛmz(ɨ)-*, the indexical pronouns *ʔanä* 'I' and *nɨʕa'ki* 'you' can only be interpreted with respect to the utterance context, referring to the actual speaker and addressee. In contrast, in (111), where the embedded clause is introduced by *ʔilu*, the same indexicals can, and in fact must, shift and be interpreted with respect to the attitude holder, namely *Kidane*.

This relationship between verbs of reporting, specifically with the meaning 'say', is cross-linguistically common. We would direct the reader to Major 2024 for further discussion and an alternative analytical option for elements such as *ʔil-*. We would also note that similar phenomena have been documented and analyzed for Amharic (Schlenker 2003).

Finally, perception verbs can embed clauses marked by either *kɛmz(ɨ)-* or the subjunctive prefix *k(ɨ)-*. The contrast between the two strategies is illustrated below.

(112) nɨsatom **kɛmzɨ-**Ø-tɛmɛrʕa-wu {***ʔil-ɛ**} rɨʔɛy-ɛ
they COMP-SM.3MP-marry.IPFV-SM.3MP say-SM.1S see.GER-SM.1S
'I saw that they got married.'

(113) nɨsatom **kɨ-**Ø-mɛrʕa-wu rɨʔɛj-ɛ-jom
they SBJV-SM.3MP-marry.IPFV-SM.3MP see.GER-SM.1S-OM.3MP
'I saw them getting married.'

As reflected in the English translations, the two constructions differ in interpretation. When the complement clause is introduced by *kɛmz(ɨ)-*, as in (112), the speaker reports an inferred or indirect perception: the event described in the embedded clause was not witnessed directly, but is instead concluded on the basis of indirect evidence. By contrast, when the complement clause is introduced by the subjunctive marker *k(ɨ)-*, as in (113), the speaker reports direct perception, having been present at the event. Thus, with perception verbs, *kɛmz(ɨ)-*-clauses encode inferential or indirect evidence, whereas *k(ɨ)*-clauses encode direct, first-hand evidence. Such facts strongly resemble those discussed, for example, by Moulton (2009) and warrant investigation in future research.

4.4.3 Adverbial Clauses

As mentioned earlier, in addition to complement clauses, the prefix *z(ɨ)-* also plays a central role in the formation of certain adverbial clauses in Tigrinya. These clauses are introduced by a set of preposition-like elements that frequently co-occurr with the prefix *z(ɨ)-*. Some of the most common

particles of this type are listed in Table 8. See Nazareth (2011) for a more exhaustive list.

ʔɨntɛ + *z(ɨ)-*	'if'	Conditional Clause
sɨlɛ ('for') + *z(ɨ)-*	'because'	Adverbial Clause
kɨsaʕ + *z(ɨ)-*	'until'	Adverbial Clause
kɨndi + *z(ɨ)-*	'instead'	Adverbial Clause

Table 8: Particles that require *z(ɨ)*-clauses.

Conditional clauses in Tigrinya can be formed using the prefix *z(ɨ)-*, though its use is optional. Alternative strategies without *z(ɨ)-* may convey similar meanings, as discussed in detail by Mason (1996). When *z(ɨ)-* is employed, it typically co-occurs with the particle *ʔɨntɛ* 'if'. Possible (or predictive) conditionals are formed by prefixing *z(ɨ)-* to a verb in the imperfective, as shown in (114).

(114) nɨssu **ʔɨntɛ z**-ɨ-xɛjjɨd, k-ɨ-bɛki ʔɨ-jjɛ
he if Zɨ-SM.3MS-leave.IPFV SBJV-SM.1S-cry.IPFV AUX.PRES-SM.1S
'If he leaves, I'll cry.'

Past counterfactual conditionals can be expressed by two distinct strategies. In the first, *z(ɨ)-* again attaches to an imperfective verb and co-occurs with *ʔɨntɛ*. In the second, a gerundive verb form precedes *ʔɨntɛ*, which is in turn followed by *z(ɨ)-* prefixed to the verb *konɛ* 'become'. These two strategies are illustrated below.

(115) gɨzie **ʔɨntɛ z**-ɨ-hɨlɨw-ɨni, ʕɛrɛfti mɨ-ked-ku
time.MS if Zɨ-SM.3MS-AUX.IPFV-OM.1S vacation NMZ-go.PFV-SM.1S
'If I had time, I would go on vacation.'

(116) gɨzie nɛir-u-ni **ʔɨntɛ zɨ**-xɛwun, ʕɛrɛfti
time.MS BE.GER-SM.3MS-OM.1S if Zɨ-become.SM.3MS vacation
mɨ-ked-ku
NMZ-go.PFV-SM.1S
'If I had time, I would go on vacation.'

Beyond conditional clauses, *z(ɨ)-* also appears in a range of adverbial clauses introduced by other preposition-like elements. Representative examples are given below.

(117) bɨzuħ **sɨlɛ z-**ɨ-zarɨb tɨ-fɛtwɨ-ni
a_lot for Zɨ-SM.3MS-talk.IPFV SM.3FS-like.IPFV-OM.1S
'She likes me because I talk a lot.'

(118) ʔɨt-i q^{w}olʕa kullu gɨzie **kɨsab z**-ɨ-sɨħɨʁ jɨ-bɛki
DEM-MS boy all time until Zɨ-SM.3MS-laugh.IPFV SM.3MS-cry.IPFV
'The child always cries until he laughs.'

(119) ʧ'ɨkolata **ʔab kɨndi zɨ**-bɛlʕɨ-ku ʃahi sɛtɛj-ɛ
chocolate instead ZI-eat.PFV-SM.1S tea drink.GER-SM.1S
'I drank tea instead of eating chocolate.'

Further discussion and a more comprehensive inventory of adverbial clause constructions in Tigrinya, especially with regard to their aspectual restrictions, can be found in Cacchioli (in preparation).

4.5 Sentential Negation

Sentential negation in Tigrinya is generally expressed by the circumfix *ʔaj-/-(ɨ)n*, which attaches to the verb. This circumfix consists of a prefix, *ʔaj-*, and a suffix, *-(ɨ)n*. Its use is illustrated by the pair of examples in (120).

(120) a. mɨs q^{w}olʕ-ay jɨ-ʦ'awɛt
with toddler-POSS.1S SM.1S-play.IPFV
'I play with my toddler.'

b. mɨs q^{w}olʕ-ay **ʔaj-**∅-ʦ'awɛtɨ**-n**
with toddler-POSS.1S NEG-SM.1S-play.IPFV-NEG
'I do not play with my toddler.'

Some clause types are negated solely by the prefix *ʔaj-*, with the suffix *-(ɨ)n* absent. This includes clauses introduced by the relative marker *z(ɨ)-*, as in (121), as well as imperative clauses, as in (122).

(121) ʔɨt-om ʔanɛ z-**ɛj**-∅-nbɛb-om mɛʦ'ħafti ʔab-t-i ʔarmadyo
DEM-MP I ZI-NEG-SM.1S-read.IPFV-OM.3MP book.MP PREP-DEM-MS cabinet
ʔall-ɛwo
AUX.PRES-SM.3MP
'The books that I do not read are in the cabinet.'

(122) a. tɨ-rɛʔajɛ-ni
SM.2MS-look.IMP-OM.1S
'Look at me!'

b. **ʔaj**-tɨ-rɛʔajɛ-ni
NEG-SM.2MS-look.IMP-OM.1S
'Don't look at me!'

Negative clauses marked with the prefix *k(ɨ)-* behave in two distinct ways: those overtly expressing future orientation take both *ʔaj-* and *-(ɨ)n*, as in (123), while all others take only *ʔaj-*.

(123) Tɛwɛldɛ ʔɨħmɨlti **ʔaj**-k-ɨ-bɛlʔɨ-**n** ʔɨ-jju
Tewelde vegetables NEG-SBJV-SM.3MS-eat.IPFV-NEG AUX.PRES-SM.3MS
'Tewelde will not eat vegetables.'

(124) ʔɨt-a sɛbɛjɨti k-**ɛj**-ti-xɛjjɨd dɛli-na
DEM-FS woman SBJV-NEG-SM.3FS-go.IPFV want.GER-SM.1P
'We wanted the woman not to leave.'

Yet another environment in which only *ʔaj-* appears is expletive negation. Expletive negation is a construction in which a negative marker appears in non-negative clauses (main or subordinate) without contributing the truth-conditional interpretation of the expression (Delfitto 2020:255); hence the term *expletive*, in the sense of 'vacuous' or 'null' (Cepeda & Déprez 2023:3). An example useing the Tigrinya verb /frh/ 'fear' is offered in (125).

(125) zɨnab k-**ɛj**-∅-zɛnib jɨ-fɛrɨh
rain.MS SBJV-NEG-SM.3MS-rain.IPFV SM.3MS-fear.IPFV
'I fear that it rains.'

With respect to the distribution of sentential negation, Tigrinya displays a pattern whereby negation generally appears on the lowest verbal element in a clause. This means that, in complex tense-aspect constructions, including the future-oriented construction in (126) below, sentential negation appears on the lexical verb, as opposed to the tensed auxiliary.

(126) a. Tɛwɛldɛ ʔɨħmɨlti **ʔaj**-k-ɨ-bɛlʔɨ-**n** ʔɨ-jju
Tewelde vegetables NEG-Kɨ-SM.3MS-eat.IPFV-NEG AUX.PRES-SM.3MS

b. *Tɛwɛldɛ ʔɨħmɨlti k-ɨ-bɛlʔ **ʔaj**-kon-ɛ-**n**
Tewelde vegetables SBJV-SM.3MS-eat.IPFV NEG-become.PFV-SM.3MS
'Tewelde will not eat vegetables.'

However, this generalization does not straightforwardly extend to complex tense-aspect constructions expressing progressive constructions, at least in the dialects of Tigrinya spoken in Eritrea. We have in fact observed for our Eritrean consultants, as well as Nazareth Kifle (p.c.), that negation seems to optionally appear on either the lexical verb or the tense auxiliary, as shown in (127).

(127) a. mɨs dɨm-ay jɨ-ʦ'awɛt **j**-ɛll-ɛxu-**n**
with cat-POSS.1S SM.1S-play.IPFV NEG-AUX.PRES-SM.1S-NEG
'I am not playing with my cat.'

b. mɨs dɨm-ay **ʔaj-**Ø-ʦ'awɛt-**n** ʔall-ɛxu
with cat-POSS.1S NEG-SM.1S-play.IPFV-NEG AUX.PRES-SM.1S
'I am not playing with my cat.'

c. *mɨs dɨm-ay **ʔaj-**Ø-ʦ'awɛt-**n** **j**-ɛll-ɛxu-**n**
with cat-POSS.1S NEG-SM.1S-play.IPFV-NEG NEG-AUX.PRES-SM.1S-NEG
'I am not playing with my cat.'

As illustrated by the examples above, progressive clauses therefore constitute a non-trivial exception to the otherwise regular distribution of negation in the language, and they raise important questions concerning the interaction between clause structure, auxiliary selection, and the syntactic

locus of *ʔaj-/-(ɨ)n*. We suspect that this may be taken to indicate that the progressive construction is more structurally complex than other verbal aspects (Cacchioli in preparation). Moreover, more systematic work is required to determine any differences in meaning.

The question that we take to be central for the investigation of the syntax of sentential negation in Tigrinya, and which clearly calls for further research, concerns the structural representation of *ʔaj-* and *-(ɨ)n*. It remains to be determined whether the two exponents of negation are base-generated in a single syntactic position and subsequently separated (by verb movement, by their own movement, etc.), or whether they are merged in distinct projections within the clausal architecture, with an asymmetrical structural relation between them (this second hypothesis is taken and argued for in Demeke (2003) and Cacchioli (in preparation)).

The empirical observation that *ʔaj-* can independently (i.e. without *-(ɨ)n*) negate a relative, an imperative and a *k(ɨ)*-clause suggests that it is the core negative operator, whereas *-(ɨ)n* may have a different syntactic and semantic status, for instance as a emphatic particle or as a polarity-sensitive element (Demeke 2003, Cacchioli in preparation). This analysis, however, immediately raises the further question of why *-(ɨ)n* is obligatory in certain clause types but systematically absent in others.

Finally, the circumfixal realization of negation in a head-final language such as Tigrinya is typologically and theoretically non-trivial, insofar as it involves a prefixal element in a language where suffixation would be expected, thereby posing additional challenges for morpho-syntactic analyses and head-directionality.

5 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined key domains of Tigrinya syntax and examined a set of phenomena that illuminate both the internal organization of the language and its relevance to broader theoretical issues. The observations made in this chapter underscore the value of Tigrinya as a source of empirical evidence for typological comparison and theoretical refinement, and they highlight the importance of future research on Ethio-semitic languages for advancing our understanding of syntactic variation.

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