

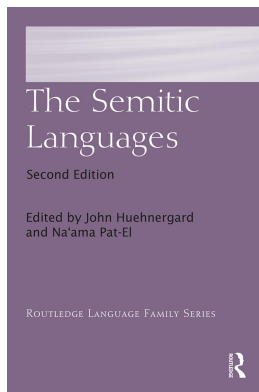
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CHAPTER 8

TIGRINYA¹

Maria Bulakh

1 INTRODUCTION

Tigrinya (self-name *tigrinjña* or *k'wank'wa habəfa*) is an Ethio-Semitic language, classified in Hetzron (1972: 7) as belonging, together with Geez and Tigre, to the North Ethio-Semitic group. As argued in Bulakh and Kogan (2010), however, North Ethio-Semitic is not a genetic group: its main features (preservation of bare PCL in the main clause, productive “broken” plural, etc.) are retentions from the common Ethio-Semitic stock (but cf. §7 on some lexical innovations), and the three languages, left after splitting-off of Proto-South-Ethio-Semitic from Ethio-Semitic, must have developed independently, although in close contact. For a map of the area of speakers, see Map 8.1.



MAP 8.1 THE TIGRINYA SPEECH AREA

Source: Adapted from Meyer (2016).

The number of Tigrinya speakers was estimated at 10,000,000 in Voigt (2011b: 1172). There are more than 4,300,000 native speakers in Ethiopia, most in Tigray region (2007 Census of Ethiopia, see Central Statistical Agency 2009) and more than 2,500,000 native speakers in Eritrea. Tigrinya is the working language of Tigray government in Ethiopia and one of the three working languages of the Eritrean government. Tigrinya is to some extent preserved in Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas in Israel, Europe and the USA. Most Tigrinya speakers are Christians.

Tigrinya dialectology is in a rudimentary state. Northern (Eritrean) and southern dialects are distinguished. The latter are marked by a considerable number of innovative features likely developed under the influence of Amharic and/or neighboring Oromo (Voigt 2006, 2009, Fitzgerald 2006, Tsehaye Kiros Mengesha 2009).

There are also two varieties of standard language: the Eritrean (based on the Tigrinya variety of Hamasen) and the Ethiopian (Tigray) Tigrinya. The most conspicuous differences lie in the domain of orthography and lexicon (Voigt 2011b).

2 WRITING SYSTEM

Tigrinya employs the Ethiopian syllabary (see Chapter 6, §2), with some additional graphemes to denote the sounds absent from Geez (see Table 8.1).

Modern written Tigrinya has developed rigid orthographic rules which strive for one-to-one correspondence between the sounds and their graphic representations. Unlike in Amharic and medieval Geez, the first order graphemes are consistently used to denote Cə sequence, even with guttural consonants (ሐ ከə, አ ላə, etc.). The historical phonetic processes have made redundant in modern languages some graphemes of the Ethiopic syllabary, such as ሠ, ፀ, ኀ, ኁ, since the respective consonants have merged with other phonemes. In an earlier stage of written Tigrinya, the redundant graphemes were to some extent employed as variants of other graphemes (ሠ/ሰ s, ኀ/ሐ h, ኁ/ከ x and ኁ/ከጐ x^w), especially in Geezisms: ብዙ-ጌን/ብዙ-ሓን *bizuhan* ‘majority’. In modern Tigrinya orthography, the redundant graphemes are usually avoided. The sound ሐ’ is normally written as አ in modern Eritrean Tigrinya, and as ፀ in modern Ethiopian Tigrinya.

TABLE 8.1 TIGRINYA SYMBOLS ABSENT FROM GEEZ

	ə	u	i	a	e	i	o
ʃ	ሸ	ሹ	ሺ	ሻ	ሼ	ሽ	ሾ
x'	ቆ	ቆ	ቆ	ቆ	ቆ	ቆ	ቆ
v	ሸ	ሹ	ሺ	ሻ	ሼ	ሽ	ሾ
ʒ	ቆ	ቆ	ቆ	ቆ	ቆ	ቆ	ቆ
ɲ	ኀ	ኁ	ኂ	ኃ	ኄ	ኅ	ኆ
x	ኀ	ኁ	ኂ	ኃ	ኄ	ኅ	ኆ
ʒ	ኀ	ኁ	ኂ	ኃ	ኄ	ኅ	ኆ
ɖ	ፀ	ፀ	ፀ	ፀ	ፀ	ፀ	ፀ
ʒ'	ፀ	ፀ	ፀ	ፀ	ፀ	ፀ	ፀ
x ^w	ፀ	–	ፀ	ፀ	ፀ	ፀ	–
x ^w	ኁ	–	ኁ	ኁ	ኁ	ኁ	–

3 PHONOLOGY

3.1 Consonants

The consonantal system of Tigrinya is given in Table 8.2 (consonants with limited distribution appear in parentheses). Tigrinya is one of the few modern Ethio-Semitic languages (together with Tigre and Argobba of T'ollaha) which have preserved most of the proto-Ethio-Semitic guttural consonants (only **x* has merged with **h* into *h*). As elsewhere in Ethio-Semitic, the triad “voiced-voiceless-glottalized” is prominent in Tigrinya.

The consonants *p* and *v* occur in loan words mostly from European languages, while *ḫ* is restricted to Geezisms, ultimately going back to Greek borrowings: *program* ‘program’ (< Eng. *program*), *junivarsiti* ‘university’ (< Eng. *university*), *p'arak'lit'os* ‘Paraclete, Feast of the Paraclete’ (< Geez *p'ara:k'lit'os*). According to Tsehaye Teferra (1979: 13, 22), some speakers replace *p* and *v* by *b*.

Innovative phonemes mostly result from palatalization of sibilants (**s* > *f*, **z* > *ʒ*/*ǰ*, **ʂ* > *ʃ*). Although the phonemic status of the palatal consonants is confirmed by minimal pairs (such as *ṣ'iwa* ‘speech’ vs. *ʃ'iwa* ‘freeborn, noble’), free variation between palatalized and non-palatalized consonants (most frequently between *s* and *f*) is often observed. Palatalization can be triggered by adjacent back vowels or the presence of labials, labiovelars or the lateral approximant *l* (Voigt 1988), or by front vowels or the palatal approximant *j*: *sim/fim* ‘name’, *haddis/haddif* ‘new’, *hindʒidʒ*, *hinziʒ*, *hinziʒ* ‘scarab beetle’, *ʃət'ə* (root *ʃt'*) ‘to sell’. Palatalization of *s* results in fricative *f*, while the parallel process of palatalization of *z* into *ʒ* is blurred by a synchronic merger between *ʒ* and *ǰ*. In the modern language, *ʒ* usually appears as a free variant of *ǰ* (*ǰʒagna* ‘hero’, alongside less common *ʒagna*); rarer are cases where *ʒ* is the default realization (*mənʒərbəb* ‘gutter’, alongside less acceptable *məndʒərbəb*).

The unvoiced affricate *ʃ*, on the contrary, is perceived by the informants as distinct from *f*. It is restricted to unadapted loans from Amharic, Italian, or English: *luʃi* ‘light’ < Ital. *luce* (in many other borrowings, original *ʃ* has been replaced by *f*: cf. *ʒoranʃi* ‘orange’ < Ital. *oranci*, *kəʃʃənə* ‘to cook’ < Ital. *cucina*, *marʃa* ‘march’ < Ital. *marcia*, *dolʃi* ‘cake’ < Ital. *dolce*, etc.). In Th. Kane’s dictionary, free variation between *ʃ* and *f* is often

TABLE 8.2 TIGRINYA CONSONANTS

	LABIALS		ALVEOLARS		PALATALS		VELARS/ UVULARS		LABIOVELARS		GUTTURALS		
											PHARYNGEALS	LARYNGEALS	
Plosives	(p)	b (p')	t	d	t'		k	g	k'	k ^w	g ^w	k ^w	ʔ
Nasals		m		n		(ɲ)							
Trill				r									
Fricatives	f	(v)	s	z	ʃ	(ʒ)					ħ	ʕ	h
Affricates					ʦ'	(ʧ)	ʤ	ʧ'					
Approximants		w				j							
Lateral Approximant				l									

recorded for the loan words with original *f*' (as in *məfəm/məfəm* 'moreover, however' < Amharic *məfəm*). However, in the speech of my informant Təsfaldət Hədgəmbəs, *f*' is always distinct from *f*: some of Kane's examples are rejected by him (*miʃu?* 'comfortable' rather than *miʃuʔ/miʃuʔ* adduced in Kane 2000: 408, 425), while in other cases variants with *f*' are discarded as Amharisms opposed to indigenous Tigrinya lexemes with *f*: *dinnif* 'potato' (vs. Amharic *dinnif*), *ʃiggir* 'problem' (vs. Amharic *ʃiggir*). It is difficult to say whether *f* in the latter group results from palatalization in autochthonous lexemes or from a shift *f*' > *f* in adapted borrowings.

The examples for palatalization of alveolar plosives and velars are not numerous: *ginʃir/gintir* 'a kind of pneumonia', *ʃamt'ək'o/ʃamtʃ'ək'o* 'to crush', *k'ək'ihə/ʃ'əʃ'hə* 'to shell, husk corn', *k'ədədə/ʃ'ədədə* 'to tear, rip'.

There is no indigenous palatalization of *n* in Tigrinya. The consonant *n* is restricted to Amharic and Italian loans (including the suffix *-ənnə* borrowed from Amharic): *fələnamo* 'carpenter' < Ital. *falegnamo*; *harbənnə* 'patriot' < Amharic *arbənnə*, *k'ij̄n gizat* 'colony' < Amharic *k'ij̄n gizat* (according to Tesfay Tewolde Yohannes 2002: 28, *n* is unpronounceable for many native speakers; in some texts, *n* is rendered with the combination *jn*).

Palatalization of *l* is unknown in Tigrinya.

Labiovelars occur mostly before *a*, *i* (*k'inat* 'war', *ʒakk'warits'u* 'he made a shortcut'), while in other positions they usually shift to velars, triggering labialization of the vowels *ə* and *i* (see §3.3): *k'orit's'u* {*k'wərits'u*} 'he cut'.

The consonants *k*, *k'*, *k^w*, *k^w'*, *b* are subject to spirantization in post-vocalic position, when non-geminated: *zikrət* [zixrət] 'memory', *zəkakirəm* [zəxaxirəm] 'they remembered one another' vs. *zəkkiru* [zəkkiru] 'he remembered' (only spirantization of velars is reflected in the standard orthography). The conditions for spirantization vary across Tigrinya dialects, and there is a tendency to phonologization of the originally allophonic opposition between spirantized and non-spirantized velars (Fitzgerald 2006).

3.2 Vowels

The proto-Ethio-Semitic seven-vowel system is well preserved in Tigrinya (see Table 8.3). The only significant change is loss of length opposition: the Proto-Ethio-Semitic **a* and **a:* have shifted to *ə* and *a*, respectively (in Ethiopian studies, half open central *ə* is usually transcribed as *ä*). While *ə* and *i* continue Semitic short vowels (**a* and **i/u*, respectively), the rest of the vowels go back to long vowels or diphthongs (*i* < **i:*, *u* < **u:*, *e* < **aj*, *o* < **aw*, *a* < **a:*). The opposition between historically short and long vowels is significant for some morphological phenomena, such as the choice between patterns of internal plural (§4.2.2.1).

TABLE 8.3 TIGRINYA VOWELS

i	i	u
e	ə	o
	a	

The opposition between *i* and *i*, *e* and *ə* is neutralized in word-final position (Buckley 1994: 5). Word-internally, these sounds are perceived as distinct from each other. Some minimal pairs – admittedly, extremely rare – exist: *kidan* ‘testament’ vs. *kidan* ‘dress’, *zema* ‘church chant’ vs. *zəma* ‘brother-in-law’. Kane’s dictionary contains many lexemes in which *i* and *i*, *e* and *ə* are presented as free variants: *bəggiʃ/bəggiʃ* ‘sheep’, *mes/məs* ‘hydromel’. In the speech of my informants, usually one variant – *bəggiʃ*, *mes* – was preferred, while the other was rejected (or acknowledged as rarer). Furthermore, word-internal *i* and *ə* are often assimilated to round vowels or to labiovelars (§3.3), whereas *i* and *e* are not. Thus, *i* and *i*, *e* and *ə* are to be treated as distinct phonemes, despite the conspicuous weakening of opposition between them (at least in one Tigrinya dialect, spoken in the region of Wajerat, total merger between these phonemes has occurred, with the resulting five-vowel phonemic system; see Tsehaye Kiros Mengesha 2009).

The central vowels *i* and *ə* are rounded in contact with *w*: *wisəd* [wusət] ‘take!’, *ʔaj-wəsədə-n* [ʔajwəsədən] ‘he did not take’.

As elsewhere in Ethio-Semitic, the vowel *i* often alternates with zero if this does not violate the rules of syllabic structure (§3.4): *k’olʃu/k’oliʃu* {k’olaʃu} ‘children’. Minimal pairs for opposition between *i* and zero are extremely rare: (*zi-*)*ṭ’əhafna* ‘(that) we wrote’ vs. *ṭ’əhafina* ‘our writer’.

3.3 Phonemic alternations

The voiced consonants shift to unvoiced word-finally: *zəməd* [zəmət] ‘relative’. Word-internally, both regressive assimilation of voiced consonants to the following unvoiced ones and progressive assimilation of unvoiced consonants to the preceding voiced or glottalized consonants can be observed: {təzkar} *təskar* ‘commemorative banquet’, but {fərədti} *fərəddi* ‘judges’, {mələwət’ta} *mələwətt’a* ‘replacement’.

Labiovelars shift to velars if not before *i* or *a*. Their loss of the labial element triggers the vocalic changes *ə > o*, *i > u*. These changes are obligatory within the verbal base if the relevant vowels are adjacent to the labiovelars: {k^wəlifu} *kolifu* ‘he interrupted’, {mik^wlaf} *muklaf* ‘to interrupt’, {jisigg^wim} *jisuggum* ‘he goes ahead’, {səgg^wim} *soggum* ‘go ahead!’. The same shifts are also possible in the vicinity of a surfacing labiovelar: {təsək^wira} *təsok^wira* ‘she was pierced’. Distant assimilation is also often observed in roots containing underlying labiovelars: *zoriḱ’ul/zəriḱ’u* ‘it leaked’, {ʔak^wṭs’ilti} *ʔak^wṭs’ulti* ‘leaves’. The shift from labiovelar to velar within the verbal stem is also sometimes observed before *i* or *a*: {səgg^wimu} *soggimu* ‘he went ahead’ (cf. {misigg^wam} *misugg^wam* ‘to go ahead’), *ṭ’omik’a* ‘she squeezed’. Labiovelars are sometimes preserved before a consonant: *ʔag^wdilə* ‘I subtracted’, {jidək^wso} *jidok^wso* ‘he grinds it’ (cf. {jidəkk^wis} *jidokk^wus* ‘he grinds’).

While in some roots the underlying labiovelar surfaces in certain verb forms or derivatives (*k’orəṭs’ə* ‘to cut’ vs. *ʔakk^warəṭs’ə* ‘to cause to cut to pieces; to break off’), in other cases its presence is only shown by the interaction of the labialization and the morphological pattern: *ṭ’omik’ə* ‘I squeezed’, *ʔajṭ’omok’ən* ‘he did not squeeze’, *mutṣ’mak’* ‘to squeeze’ (root {ṭmk^w}). In fact, the above-mentioned alternations between rounded/non-rounded vowels and velar/labiovelar consonants can be described as exponents of the suprasegmental feature {labialization +} attributed to some roots.

Distant vocalic regressive assimilation of *ə* or *i* to the rounded vowels *o*, *u* is also observed: {səlus} *solus* ‘Tuesday’, {ṭ’ələt} *ṭ’olot* ‘prayer’ (cf. Tsehaye Teferra 1979:

39). In speech of my informant Təsəfaldət Hədgəmbəs, regressive vocalic assimilation is consistently applied to the verbal paradigm: *jigəbra* ‘they (F) do’ vs. *jigəbru* ‘they (M) do’, *sitərani* ‘protect (FPL) me!’ vs. *sitoruni* ‘protect (MPL) me!’.

The rules for vocalic changes in the vicinity of gutturals, historically phonemically conditioned, have become morphophonemic rules in Tigrinya. Thus, the shift $\text{ə} > a$ | H_ is observed in the verbs with initial and second root guttural ($\{\text{həlifu}\}$ *həlifu* ‘he passed’), but in the verbs with final root guttural it occurs only in some morphological positions word-internally (*səmiʕə* ‘I heard’, *səmiʕəjj-o* ‘I heard him’, *ʔaj-səmʕə-n* ‘he did not hear’, but *ʔaj-səmʕa-nni-n* ‘he did not hear me’). The similar shift $\text{ə} > a$ | _HC/# is observed in all verbs containing gutturals ($\{\text{nigzəʔ}\}$ *nigzəʔ* ‘let us buy!’). The rule of vocalic assimilation across gutturals ($\text{ə} > i$ | _HV (V ≠ a, ə), $i > \text{ə}$ | _Ha/ə) is observed in the verbs with medial guttural ($\{\text{jisəʕʕil}\}$ *jisəʕʕil* ‘he draws’, $\{\text{siʕəl}\}$ *saʕal* ‘draw!’). In the prefix of PCL, this rule results in free alternation between *i*, *ə*, or *a*: $\{\text{jiharris}\}$ *jiharris/jəharris/jaharris* ‘he ploughs’. The shift from *ə* to *i* in a penultimate syllable before final Ha/ə ($\text{ə} > i$ | _Ha/ə#), with subsequent syncope of *i* in open syllable (§3.2), leads to a specific conjugation of verbs with final guttural: $\{\text{ʔaj-bələʕə-n}\}$ *ʔajbələʕən* ‘he did not eat’.

On free alternation between palatal consonants and their non-palatal fricative correlates in some roots cf. §3.1.

3.4 Syllabic structure and stress

According to Tsehaye Teferra (1979: 40–1), primary stress usually falls on the final syllable in bisyllabic words, and on the penultimate syllable in multisyllabic words: *zəməd* [zəmət] ‘relative’, *ʔakeba* [ʔaʕəβa] ‘meeting’. However, this rule is not consistently observed in the speech of my informants (cf. *kətəma* [kətəma] ‘city’, *məngisti* [məngisti] ‘government’).

Tigrinya allows the following syllable structures: CVC, CV, sometimes also CCV(C). Word-final clusters are not allowed and in the nominal domain are regularly avoided by adding a final *i*: $\{\text{midr}\}$ *midri* ‘earth’, $\{\text{wərḥ}\}$ *wərḥi* ‘moon’. Word-initial clusters are restricted to biconsonantal combinations with second sonant: $\{\text{biləʕ}\}$ *blaʕ* ‘eat!’. Other word-initial and word-final clusters are limited to a few borrowings: *sport* ‘sport’ (< Eng. *sport*). Open syllables with the vowel *i* often lose the vowel if this does not create disallowed clusters: $\{\text{gəzaʔom}\}$ *gəziʔom/gəzʔom* ‘their house’.

4 MORPHOLOGY

4.1 Pronouns and related entities

4.1.1 Independent pronouns

Independent pronouns of the 1st person preserve their Proto-Ethio-Semitic forms, whereas the rest are formed by the base *niss-* (< **nafs-* ‘soul’) with argument indexes (as shown in Table 8.4). The polite forms (usually used to address or refer to elderly people) are historically plural forms. The direct reflexes of Proto-Ethio-Semitic 2nd person pronouns (MSG *ʔanta/ʔatta*, FSG *ʔanti/ʔatti*, MPL *ʔantum/ʔattum*, FPL *ʔantin/ʔattin*) are used only as forms of marked address: *ʔanti nissiki-mmo haggizi-nni* 2FSG 2FSG-indeed help.IMP:2FSG-OBJ.1SG ‘oh, will you (FSG) please help me’.

TABLE 8.4 INDEPENDENT PRONOUNS

	SINGULAR	PLURAL	POLITE
1	<i>ʔanə</i>	<i>niḥna</i>	
2MASC	<i>nissika</i>	<i>nissikatikum (nissatikum)</i>	<i>nissikum</i>
2FEM	<i>nissiki</i>	<i>nissikatkin (nissatkin)</i>	<i>nissikin</i>
3MASC	<i>nissu</i>	<i>nissatom</i>	<i>nissom</i>
3FEM	<i>nissa</i>	<i>nissatən</i>	<i>nissən</i>

TABLE 8.5 ARGUMENT INDEXES AND OBJECT INDEXES²

	ARGUMENT (POSSESSIVE) INDEXES (ATTACHED TO NOUNS OR PREPOSITIONS)		OBJECT INDEXES (ATTACHED TO VERBS)	
	SINGULAR	PLURAL	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1	<i>-əj</i>	<i>-na</i>	<i>-ni</i>	<i>-na</i>
2MASC	<i>-ka</i>	<i>-kum (-atku/-katku)</i>	<i>-ka</i>	<i>-kum (-katku)</i>
2FEM	<i>-ki</i>	<i>-kin (-atkin/-katkin)</i>	<i>-ki</i>	<i>-kin (-katkin)</i>
3MASC	<i>-u</i>	<i>-om (-atom)</i>	<i>-o</i>	<i>-om (-atom)</i>
3FEM	<i>-a</i>	<i>-ən (-atən)</i>	<i>-a</i>	<i>-ən (-atən)</i>

4.1.2 Argument indexes and object indexes

Argument indexes and object indexes (see Table 8.5) are attached to nouns and verbs, respectively, to encode pronominal possessor and object, respectively. Argument indexes are also used with prepositions. Plural forms are often combined with a special plural suffix *-at-* (or, in the 2nd person, *-kat-*), probably related to the nominal plural suffix *-at* (< **-a:t*), discussed in §4.2.2.2, as well as to the element *-af(f)*- in the Amharic plural argument and object indexes *-affiḥu* (2PL), *-affəw* (3PL), on which see Chapter 9, Table 9.7.

Combinations of the possessive marker *nat-* and of the allative preposition *ni-* (before indexes *niʔa-* or *niʕa-*) with argument indexes function as independent possessive pronouns and object pronouns, respectively: *nat-əj* POSS-1SG ‘mine’, *niʔa-j* OBJ-1SG ‘me’.

Argument indexes preceded by applicative marker *-l-* (*-əll-*) are attached to verbs, in which case they refer to benefactive, recipient, malefactive, locative, ablative, instrumental or temporal arguments/adjuncts (which, if overtly present in the clause, are marked in such cases as direct objects. See further Nazareth Amlesom Kifle 2011).

Attachment of object or applicative indexes to a verbal base is accompanied by morphophonological changes both in the base of the verb and in the index itself. On the changes in the verbal base, see §4.4.3. Here, the changes in the object indexes and some insertions between the verbal base and the object indexes are discussed.

Object indexes with initial consonants are attached to verbal bases with consonantal *Auslaut* by means of a binding vowel *-ə-* (with PCL and PCS: *tinəgr-ə-nni* tell.PCL:2MSG-ə-OBJ.1SG ‘you (MSG) tell me’; the binding vowel is optional before 2nd person indexes attached to PCS) or *-i-* (with 3FSG OSC). The initial consonant of the object index is geminated (*nəgirkā-nni* tell.NSC:2MSG-OBJ.1SG ‘you (MSG) told me’, *nəgiru-nni* tell.NSC:3MSG-OBJ.1SG

‘he told me’) unless it follows a vowel *-u* or *-a* belonging to a plural 2/3 subject index or to the singular 1 subject index (*tinəgru-ni* tell.PCL:2MPL-OBJ.1SG ‘you (MPL) tell me’, *jinəgra-ni* tell.PCL:3FPL-OBJ.1SG ‘they (F) tell me’, *nəgirkumu-ni* tell.NSC:2MPL-OBJ.1SG ‘you (MPL) told me’, *zi-nəgərku-ka* REL-tell.OSC:1SG-OBJ.2MSG ‘what I told you (MSG)’).

Object indexes with initial vowels are attached to verbal forms with vocalic *Auslaut* by means of a consonantal insertion (unless the final vowel of the verb is dropped or changed to a semivowel; §4.4.3). Thus, indexes with initial vowel are attached to the 3FSG NSC form by means of insertion of *-tt-* (*nəgira-tt-o* tell.NSC:3FSG-*tt*-OBJ.3MSG ‘she told him’), to the plural feminine subject indexes ending in *-a-* by means of insertion of *-ʔ-* (*nigəra-ʔ-o* tell.IMP:2FPL-ʔ-OBJ.3MSG ‘tell (FPL) him!’), *nəgirkina-ʔ-o* tell.NSC:2FPL-ʔ-OBJ.3MSG ‘you (FPL) told him’),³ and to the subject indexes *-ka-*, *-na* and the NSC 1SG index *-ə-*, by means of insertion of *-jj-* (*nəgira-jj-o* tell.NSC:1SG-*jj*-OBJ.3MSG ‘I told him’, *ʔaj-nəgərka-jj-o-n* NEG-tell.OSC:2MSG-*jj*-OBJ.3MSG-CIRC ‘you (MSG) did not tell him’).

The applicative marker *-l-*, when followed by a vowel, is geminated in the same positions as the initial consonant of object indexes⁴ (*nəgirka-ll-u* tell.NSC:2MSG-APPL-3MSG ‘you (MSG) told about him’, *ki-tnəgr-əll-u ʔiyy-a* GOAL-tell.PCL:3FSG-APPL-3MSG COP-3FSG ‘she will tell about him’, but *nəgirkumu-l-u* tell.NSC:2MPL-APPL-3MSG ‘you (MPL) told about him’, *nəgirkina-l-u* tell.NSC:2FPL-APPL-3MSG ‘you (FPL) told about him’).

The choice of plural object/argument indexes can be used to express respect, usually in mentioning or addressing a person advanced in years:

ʕidmiʔ-ən *səbʕa* *ʕamət* *ʔijj-u*
age-POSS.3POL.F seventy year COP-3MSG
‘She (polite) is seventy years old’.

4.1.3 Demonstratives

Tigrinya has two sets of demonstratives: proximal and distant (Table 8.6). For each set, the basic (“short”) form can be expanded into “long” form by means of the corresponding 3rd person argument indexes. In some dialects, the MSG long forms are subject to some further modifications: *ʔizi-ʔ-u/ʔiti-ʔ-u* can be contracted to *ʔiz-u/ʔit-u* or *ʔiz-uj/ʔit-uj* (the latter probably a result of metathesis from *ʔizi-j-u/ʔiti-j-u* < *ʔizi-ʔ-u/ʔiti-ʔ-u*).

TABLE 8.6 DEMONSTRATIVES

PROXIMAL	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
	SHORT	LONG	SHORT	LONG
MASC	<i>ʔizi</i>	<i>ʔiziʔu</i>	<i>ʔizom</i>	<i>ʔiziʔom/ʔiziʔatom</i>
FEM	<i>ʔiza</i>	<i>ʔiziʔa</i>	<i>ʔizən</i>	<i>ʔiziʔən/ʔiziʔatən</i>
DISTAL	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
	SHORT	LONG	SHORT	LONG
MASC	<i>ʔiti</i>	<i>ʔitiʔu</i>	<i>ʔitom</i>	<i>ʔitiʔom/ʔitiʔatom</i>
FEM	<i>ʔita</i>	<i>ʔitiʔa</i>	<i>ʔitən</i>	<i>ʔitiʔən/ʔitiʔatən</i>

If a demonstrative follows another word, the initial syllable *ʔi-* is usually omitted: *ʔizi gəza* DEM.MSG house ‘this house’ vs. *ʔab-zi gəza* LOC-DEM.MSG house ‘in this house’.

Plural forms of demonstratives can be used as polite forms. The short forms of the distal demonstrative can also be used as the definite article (§5.3).

4.1.4 Interrogatives

Interrogative pronouns include *mən* ‘who’, *ʔintaj* ‘what; what kind of’, *ʔintawaj* ‘which, what kind of’, *ʔajjənaj/ʔajjən* ‘which’. The element *-aj* (< **ʔaj* ‘which’) is combined with various prepositions to form question words of location, direction, etc.: *ʔabəj* ‘where (locative)’, *nabəj* ‘where (allative)’, *kindəj* ‘how much’, etc. The interrogative of time is *məʔaz* ‘when’.

4.2 Nominals

Due to the process of substantivization, the distinction between nouns and adjectives is blurred. Prototypical adjectives are inflected for gender and number (opposition in gender usually exists only in singular forms); prototypical nouns are inflected for number only.

4.2.1 Gender

Tigrinya has two genders: masculine and feminine. Masculine is unmarked. Feminine is often unmarked on primary nouns, but is regularly expressed by the reflex of the common Semitic feminine marker *-t* (*-ti* after consonants) in agent nouns and some adjectives. In adjectives with the pattern $C_1\text{ə}C_2(C_2)iC_3$, the feminine is usually formed by means of apophony (the pattern $C_1\text{ə}C_2(C_2)aC_3$): *bərrik* ‘high’ (MSG) – *bərrak* (FSG).

With some animate nouns, gender is determined by the biological sex: *ʔabbo* ‘father’ (M), *ʔaddə* ‘mother’ (F). Other animate nouns can refer to either male or female objects and condition gender agreement, respectively: *ʔiti k’olʕa* ART:MSG child ‘the child, the little boy’ ~ *ʔita k’olʕa* ART:FSG child ‘the little girl’. Some inanimate nouns have permanent gender: *məret* ‘earth’ (M), *bahri* ‘sea’ (M), *ṭ’əhaj* ‘sun’ (F), *məkkina* ‘car’ (F). Many inanimate nouns allow both masculine and feminine agreement (the latter usually adds the semantics of diminutive): *ʔizi t’awla* ‘this table’ ~ *ʔiza t’awla* ‘this (small) table’, *ʔizi ʔimni* ‘this stone’ ~ *ʔiza ʔimni* ‘this (small) stone’.

4.2.2 Number

4.2.2.1 Internal (“broken”) plural

One of the peculiar features shared by Tigrinya with Geez and Tigre within Ethio-Semitic is the employment of the so-called internal or “broken” plural: marking of the plural by a special pattern combined with the consonants of the singular form. The most widely used plural patterns applied to nouns with tri- and quadriconsonantal singular forms are shown in Table 8.7. Some of the Tigrinya plural patterns have parallels in other North Ethio-Semitic languages and elsewhere in Semitic ($\text{ʔa}C_1C_2aC_3$ < * $\text{ʔa}C_1C_2a:C_3$, $C_1\text{ə}C_2aC_3iC_4$ < * $C_1aC_2a:C_3iC_4$), while others must belong to Ethio-Semitic innovations ($\text{ʔa}C_1C_2iC_3ti$, with a parallel in Geez; $C_1\text{ə}C_2\text{ə}C_3C_3iC_4$, often a variant of $C_1\text{ə}C_2aC_3iC_4$,

TABLE 8.7 NOUN PLURAL PATTERNS

PLURAL PATTERNS	ASSOCIATED SINGULAR PATTERNS	EXAMPLES
$\text{ʔaC}_1\text{C}_2\text{aC}_3$	$\text{C}_1\text{iC}_2\text{C}_3\text{i}$, $\text{C}_1\text{əC}_2\text{əC}_3$	<i>ʔimmi</i> ‘stone’ ~ PL <i>ʔaʔman</i> , <i>gərab</i> ‘tree’ ~ PL <i>ʔagrab</i>
$\text{ʔaC}_1\text{C}_2\text{iC}_3\text{ti}$	$\text{C}_1\text{əC}_2\text{C}_3\text{i}$	<i>bək’li</i> ‘mule’ ~ PL <i>ʔabk’ilti</i>
$\text{ʔaC}_1\text{aC}_2\text{iC}_3$	$\text{C}_1\text{əC}_2\text{C}_3\text{i}$, $\text{C}_1\text{iC}_2\text{C}_3\text{i}$	<i>bək’li</i> ‘mule’ ~ PL <i>ʔabak’il</i> , <i>nihbi</i> ‘bee’ ~ PL <i>ʔanahib</i>
$\text{ʔaC}_1\text{aC}_2\text{iC}_3\text{ti}$	$\text{C}_1\text{əC}_2\text{C}_3\text{i}$	<i>bək’li</i> ‘mule’ ~ PL <i>ʔabak’ilti</i>
$\text{C}_1\text{əC}_2\text{aC}_3\text{iC}_4$	various types of bisyllabic	<i>kənfər</i> ‘lip’ ~ PL <i>kənaʔfir</i> , <i>ʔindʒal</i> ‘cup’ ~ PL <i>ʔənaʒil</i>
$\text{C}_1\text{əC}_2\text{əC}_3\text{C}_3\text{iC}_4$	quadriradicals	<i>kənfər</i> ‘lip’ ~ PL <i>kənaʔfir</i>

with a parallel in Tigre; a minor pattern $\text{ʔaC}_1\text{C}_2\text{uC}_3$ with parallels in Geez and Tigre; see Ratcliffe 1998: 186–8).

Among the rare patterns one should mention $\text{ʔaC}_1\text{C}_2\text{uC}_3$ (as in *ʕarki* {ʕərək} ‘friend’ ~ PL *ʔaʕruk*, *halək’a* ‘commander’ ~ PL *ʔahluk*).

When the plural quadriradical patterns are applied to singular patterns with historically long vowels (*i*, *e*, *a*, *u*, *o*), the vowels of the plural are usually modified (Palmer 1955): *t’ərmuz* ‘bottle’ ~ PL *t’əramuz*, *zənbil* ‘palm-leaf basket’ ~ PL *zənbil*, *wəngel* ‘Gospel’ ~ PL *wənaʒil* (modifications of the pattern $\text{C}_1\text{əC}_2\text{aC}_3\text{iC}_4$), *wanʔff’il* ‘young baboon’ ~ PL *wanəʔff’il* (modification of the pattern $\text{C}_1\text{əC}_2\text{əC}_3\text{C}_3\text{iC}_4$). This does not include singular patterns with *a* in the second syllable: *zəkta* ‘orphan’ ~ PL *zəkatin*.

The labialization rules of alternation between velars/labiovelars, *i/u* and *ə/o* (§3.3) are operative in the application of plural patterns: *mənkub* {mənk^wib} ‘shoulder’ ~ PL *mənakub* ($\text{C}_1\text{əC}_2\text{aC}_3\text{iC}_4$), *dənk’oro* ‘stupid; deaf’ ~ PL *dənak’ur(ti)* {dənak^wir(ti)}.

The internal plural of biconsonantal nouns is formed by expanding the consonantal structure to triconsonantal by means of additional consonants *w*, *t*, or *j*: *ʔid* ‘hand, arm’ ~ PL *ʔaʔdaw*, *ʔis’or* ‘arms (military)’ ~ PL *ʔats’war*, *t’ub* ‘breast’ ~ PL *ʔat’bat*, *bet* ‘house’ ~ PL *ʔabjat* (all in the pattern $\text{ʔaC}_1\text{C}_2\text{aC}_3$).

If the pattern of a triconsonantal noun contains a historically long vowel (*i*, *e*, *a*, *u*, *o*), a quadriconsonantal plural pattern is usually chosen, with an additional consonant emerging instead of the vowel in question (*j* can be used instead of a front vowel, and *w* instead of any vowel). The vowel of the first syllable in the plural either follows the vowel of the pattern or repeats the vowel of the singular form: *ziban* ‘back’ ~ PL *zibawinti*, *birur* ‘silver’ ~ PL *bərawir/birawir* (pattern $\text{C}_1\text{əC}_2\text{aC}_3\text{iC}_4\text{(ti)}$).

If the singular form has *a*, *u* or *o* in the *Auslaut*, the plural pattern $\text{C}_1\text{əC}_2\text{aC}_3\text{iC}_4$ is realized as $\text{C}_1\text{əC}_2\text{aC}_3\text{u}$ (presumably < * $\text{C}_1\text{əC}_2\text{aC}_3\text{iw}$), with variant form $\text{C}_1\text{əC}_2\text{aC}_3\text{C}_3\text{u}$: *wət’ot’o* ‘goat more than a year old’ ~ PL *wət’at’u*, *gawna* ‘male baboon’ ~ PL *gəwannu*. The vowel in the first syllable of the singular pattern is often copied into the plural pattern: *ʔant’a* ‘bag’ ~ PL *ʔanat’u*, *t’awla* ‘table’ ~ PL *t’əwalu/t’awalu*, *dibəla* ‘billy goat’ ~ PL *dibalu*.

If the singular form ends in a non-epenthetic front vowel, the plural pattern $\text{C}_1\text{əC}_2\text{aC}_3\text{iC}_4$ is realized as $\text{C}_1\text{əC}_2\text{aC}_3\text{i}$ (presumably < * $\text{C}_1\text{əC}_2\text{aC}_3\text{ij}$), with a variant form $\text{C}_1\text{əC}_2\text{əC}_3\text{C}_3\text{i}$: *sərre* ‘trousers’ ~ PL *səraril/sərərri*.

If the singular form contains a geminated consonant, it can function as a sequence of two root consonants, triggering the choice of a quadriradical plural pattern: *dinnif* ‘potato’ ~ PL *dənanif*, *t’əbbək* ‘lizard’ ~ PL *t’əbabik*. Sometimes the middle non-geminated consonant is reduplicated in the plural pattern: *təmən* ‘snake’ ~ PL *təməmin*.

4.2.2.2 External plural

The external plural marker is usually *-at* (*-tat* after vowels), historically derivable from the Semitic plural feminine marker **-a:t*, but synchronically employed both with masculine and feminine nouns: *k^wank^wa* ‘language’ ~ PL *k^wank^wa-tat*, *səb* ‘man’ ~ PL *səb-at*. The epenthetic ending *-i* appearing word-finally after a consonantal cluster (§3.4) can be dropped or preserved (usually as *i*) before the plural ending: *wədd-i* ‘boy’ ~ PL *wədd-at*, *t^s’ifr-i* ‘finger-nail’ ~ PL *t^s’ifr-i-tat*.

Tigrinya possesses several other external plural markers: *-an*, *-o*, *-ot*. The suffix *-an* is restricted to Geezisms with certain patterns (mostly $C_1iC_2(C_2)uC_3$, $C_1aC_2iC_3$, and adjectives in *-awi*) and neologisms of the same structure: *mihur* ‘scholar’ ~ PL *mihuran* (< Geez *mihur*), *t^s’adik* ‘righteous’ ~ PL *t^s’adk’-an* (< Geez *t^s’a:dik*), *ʔadhari* ‘one who delays s.th.’ ~ PL *ʔadharij-an*, *ʕifəlawi* ‘infantile’ ~ PL *ʕifəlawj-an* (the final *i* shift to *j* before the plural ending). The suffix *-o* appears with some nominals formed after the pattern $C_1aC_2(C_2)aC_3i/ C_1aC_2(C_2)aC_3aj$ (ousting the final *-i/-aj*): *fəradi* ‘judge’ ~ PL *fərado*, *dərafaj* ‘singer’ ~ PL *dərafo*. The suffix *-ot* is limited to some nouns ending in *-a*, *-aj*, or *-awaj*, ousting these elements: *gojt-a* ‘lord’ ~ PL *gojt-ot*, *wat’-a* ‘minstrel’ ~ PL *wat’-ot*, *ʕakel-aj* ‘left-handed’ ~ PL *ʕakel-ot*, *dahr-awaj/dahrəw-aj* ‘subsequent’ ~ PL *dahr-ot/dahrəw-ot*.

A productive plural suffix *-ti*, used with agent nouns ending in $-aC_3i$ (§4.2.3), triggers the change *a > ə* in the penultimate syllable: *halafi* ‘responsible official, chief’ ~ PL *haləfii*, *tət’əkk’ami* ‘user’ ~ PL *tət’əkk’əmti*. Historically this morpheme goes back to the suffix of the plural pattern $*C_1aC_2aC_3t$ associated with the singular pattern of agent noun $*C_1aC_2a:C_3i$ (cf. Ratcliffe 1998: 170–1 on this correlation in Geez).

4.2.3 Nominal derivative patterns

Deverbal derivation is mostly realized by consonantal-vocalic patterns. Monosyllabic Semitic patterns yield bisyllabic $C_1aC_2C_3i$ (< $*C_1aC_2C_3-$) and $C_1iC_2C_3i$ (< $*C_1uC_2C_3-$, $*C_1iC_2C_3-$) due to the prohibition of word-final clusters (see §3.4): *darfi* ‘song’ < *dərəfə* ‘to sing secular songs’, *tirfi* ‘remainder’ < *tərəfə* ‘to remain’. The most common bisyllabic patterns without external affixes, derived from the basic stem, are $C_1aC_2aC_3$, $C_1iC_2aC_3$, $C_1aC_2aC_3$, $C_1iC_2aC_3$: *kəsət* ‘diligence’ < *kəsətə* ‘to be diligent’, *kibəd* ‘weight’ < *kəbədə* ‘to be heavy’, *dənab* ‘penalty’ < *dənəbə* ‘to penalize’, *t’igab* ‘satiety’ < *t’əgəbə* ‘to be satiated’. Some patterns with gemination of the second root consonant are used for derivations from the basic stem: $C_1iC_2C_2aC_3$ (*t^s’irrab* ‘chip, splinter’ < *t^s’ərəbə* ‘to hack, to work with wood’), $C_1iC_2C_2iC_3$ (*diffi?* ‘push, shove’ < *dəf?ə* ‘to shove’).

The most commonly used patterns with suffixes are $C_1iC_2C_3o$ (*wisdo* ‘amount taken’ < *wəsədə* ‘to take’), $C_1iC_2C_3a$ (*ʕilba* ‘landing’ < *ʕaləbə* ‘to alight (bird), to land (plane)'), $C_1aC_2aC_3a$ (*wək’əsa* ‘reproach’ < *wək’əsə* ‘to reproach’), $C_1iC_2C_3ət$ (*wirsət* ‘confiscation’ < *wərəsə* ‘to confiscate’), $C_1aC_2aC_3o$ (*mək’əlo* ‘part, portion’ < *mək’ələ* ‘to divide’), $C_1iC_2C_3an$ (*t’ilmən* ‘betrayal’ < *t’ələmə* ‘to fail to keep one’s word’), $C_1aC_2C_3ənna$ (*dirk’inna* ‘dryness’ < *dərək’ə* ‘to be dry’), $C_1aC_2aC_3ito$ (*dənənito* ‘one who goes about with bowed head’ < *dənənə* ‘to bow, incline the head’), $C_1iC_2C_2iC_3at$ (*firriyat* ‘product’ < *fərəyə* ‘to bear fruit’), $C_1iC_2C_2iC_3it$ (*wits’i’it* ‘result’ < *wəts’ə* ‘to go out’).

Several derivative patterns employ prefix *mə-* (agent nouns with the same prefix are treated further in this section): $məC_1C_2aC_3$, $məC_1C_2aC_3ti$ (*mədfən* ‘kind of trap or noose, pit, pitfall’ < *dəfənə* ‘to cover up’, *məgrəfi* ‘whip’ < *gərəfə* ‘to whip’). Another productive pattern with prefix *ti* $tiC_1C_2iC_3ti$ (*tšizirti* ‘disappearance’ < *tšəzərə* ‘to disappear from view’).

Most of the aforementioned patterns are used to derive abstract nouns, sometimes with further lexically determined semantic shifts. Only some of them are regularly used with specific meanings. Thus, words with patterns $C_1iC_2C_2aC_3$ and $C_1iC_2C_2iC_3$ usually designate result, product of action, whereas $m\acute{a}C_1C_2\acute{a}C_3$ is often used to form names of instrument. There are also two special patterns – $\acute{?}aC_1C_1aC_2iC_3a$ and $\acute{?}aC_1C_1\acute{a}C_2aC_2iC_3a$ – which are used exclusively with the meaning ‘manner of action’ (*\acute{?}aggabira* ‘manner of doing’ < *g\acute{a}b\acute{a}r\acute{a}* ‘to do’). The pattern $m\acute{a}C_1C_2\acute{a}C_3i$ is used to form nouns of place, instrument, cause, etc. (*m\acute{a}ks\acute{a}si* ‘reason for accusing; court’ < *k\acute{a}s\acute{a}s\acute{a}* ‘to accuse’). Finally, the pattern $C_1\acute{a}C_2aC_3i$ is used to form *nomina agentis* from the basic stem (*k\acute{a}sari* ‘bankrupt’ < *k\acute{a}s\acute{a}r\acute{a}* ‘to go bankrupt’).

Derivatives from non-basic stems as well as from quadriradical verbs employ some of the above-mentioned patterns with corresponding adjustments. Thus, the pattern of agent noun $C_1\acute{a}C_2aC_3i$ is regularly applied to any derived stem: the agent noun is derived from the base of osc by means of changing the penultimate vowel to *-a-* and adding a final *-i* (*m\acute{a}wwasi* ‘beginner’ < *m\acute{a}ww\acute{a}s\acute{a}* ‘to begin’, *t\acute{a}f\acute{a}ttani* ‘one who is tested or examined’ < *t\acute{a}f\acute{a}tt\acute{a}n\acute{a}* ‘to be tested’, *\acute{?}at\acute{t}s’\acute{a}babak’i* ‘decorator’ < *\acute{?}at\acute{t}s’\acute{a}bab\acute{a}k’\acute{a}* ‘to embellish’). In the same way the pattern $m\acute{a}C_1C_2\acute{a}C_3i$, when applied to derived stems, can be reinterpreted as the circumfix *m\acute{a}- . . . -i* (*m\acute{a}f\acute{a}tt\acute{a}f\acute{i}* ‘means or reason for searching; instrument for searching’ < *f\acute{a}tt\acute{a}f\acute{a}* ‘to search’, *m\acute{a}gg\acute{a}d\acute{a}mi* ‘place for lying down’ < *t\acute{a}gg\acute{a}d\acute{a}m\acute{a}* ‘to lie down’).

The most common patterns used for derivation of adjectives from the basic stem are shown in Table 8.8.

Suffixes are widely used in denominal derivation. The most commonly used suffixes with abstract meaning are *-(i)nn\acute{a}t* and *-ta*, the latter mostly used with lexical elements of compound verbs (*\acute{?}alet-inn\acute{a}t* ‘racism’ < *\acute{?}alet* ‘race, kind’, *suk’-ta* ‘silence’ < *suk’b\acute{a}l\acute{a}* ‘to be silent’). Denominal adjectives can be formed with the suffixes *-(\acute{a})\acute{?}na/-(\acute{a})\acute{?}na* (< Amharic; *t’\acute{a}nk’\acute{a}\acute{?}na* ‘quarrelsome’ < *t’\acute{a}nk’i* ‘source of enmity’), *-awi* (< Geez; *k’ir\acute{t}s’awi* ‘formal, structural’ < *k’ir\acute{t}s’i* ‘shape, form, structure’), *-aj* (*ham\acute{a}daj* ‘ashen, ash-colored, earth-colored’ < *ham\acute{a}d* ‘earth’), *-am* (*sa\acute{?}ram* ‘grassy’ < *sa\acute{?}ri* ‘grass’).

The prefix *z\acute{a}j-* (going back to relativizer *zi-* preceding the negative marker *\acute{?}aj-*) is used to form antonyms: *z\acute{a}j-higgus* ‘unhappy’ < *higgus* ‘happy’.

Other morphological derivative means in the nominal domain include compounding and a number of affixes borrowed from Geez.

4.3 Numerals

With the exception of ‘one’ (M *had\acute{a}* vs. F *hanti*), cardinal numerals in Tigrinya are not inflected for gender: *kilitt\acute{a}* ‘two’, *s\acute{a}l\acute{a}st\acute{a}* ‘three’, *\acute{?}arba\acute{?}t\acute{a}* ‘four’, *hammu\acute{?}t\acute{a}* ‘five’,

TABLE 8.8 DERIVATION OF ADJECTIVES

MASCULINE	FEMININE	EXAMPLE	SOURCE
$C_1iC_2uC_3$	$C_1iC_2iC_3ti$	<i>\acute{t}’iruy</i> ‘clean’	<i>\acute{t}’\acute{a}r\acute{a}y\acute{a}</i> ‘to be clean’
$C_1\acute{a}C_2iC_3$	$C_1\acute{a}C_2C_2aC_3$	<i>k\acute{a}rir</i> ‘hard and round’	<i>k\acute{a}r\acute{a}r\acute{a}</i> ‘to be hard and round (stone)’
$C_1\acute{a}C_2C_2iC_3$	$C_1\acute{a}C_2C_2aC_3$	<i>\acute{t}’\acute{a}bbib</i> ‘narrow’	<i>\acute{t}’\acute{a}b\acute{a}b\acute{a}</i> ‘to be narrow’
$C_1iC_2C_2aC_3$		<i>\acute{?}immak</i> ‘ugly’	<i>\acute{?}am\acute{a}k’\acute{a}</i> ‘to be bad, ugly’
$C_1\acute{a}C_2aC_3$		<i>k\acute{a}nad</i> ‘short (person)’	<i>k\acute{a}n\acute{a}d\acute{a}</i> ‘to be short, not to grow’
$C_1\acute{a}C_2C_2aC_3$		<i>d\acute{a}ffar</i> ‘bold, daring’	<i>d\acute{a}f\acute{a}r\acute{a}</i> ‘to be bold, daring’
$C_1\acute{a}C_2\acute{a}C_3$		<i>s\acute{a}n\acute{a}f</i> ‘lazy’	<i>s\acute{a}n\acute{a}f\acute{a}</i> ‘to be lazy’

fiḏiftə/fuddufitə ‘six’, *foḃḥattə/foḥattə* ‘seven’, *fommontə/fomməntə* ‘eight’, *tifḥattə* ‘nine’, *ḥassərtə* ‘ten’. The second decade is formed by the numeral *ḥassərtə* ‘ten’ (optionally attaching a final -w) followed by the single number: *ḥassərtə(w) ḥadə* ‘eleven’, *ḥassərtə(w) kilittə* ‘twelve’, etc.

The tens are *ḥisra* ‘twenty’, *səlasa* ‘thirty’, *ḥarbaḥa* ‘forty’, *ḥamsa* ‘fifty’, *sissa* ‘sixty’, *səḃḥa* ‘seventy’, *səmanja* ‘eighty’, *təsfa* ‘ninety’. Complex numerals after 20 are names of tens and single numbers connected with the conjunction *-(i)n*. . . *-(i)n* ‘and’: *ḥisra-n ḥadə-n* ‘twenty-one’, etc.

The ordinal numeral for ‘first’ is either *məḏəmmərija* (< Amharic *məḏəmmərija* ‘beginning; first’) or *fəlməjj/fəlməjj* (F *fəlməjjiti/fəlməjjiti*). The ordinal numeral for ‘second’ is either *kalʔaj* (F *kalʔajiti*) or *kilittəjna* (undoubtedly under the influence of the Amharic suffix *-əjjna* used *inter alia* to form ordinal numerals). For the rest of ordinal numerals of the first decade the pattern $C_1aC_2C_3aj$ (F $C_1aC_2C_3ajiti$) is used: *salsaj* ‘third’, F *salsajiti*, etc. The ordinal numerals above ten are formed with the element *məbbəl*: *məbbəl ḥassərtə kilittə* ‘twelfth’ (for the second decade, the suffix *-əjjna* can alternatively be employed to form ordinal numerals).

4.4 Verbs

The classical Semitic triconsonantal verbal roots preserve their prominence in Tigrinya, despite the growing importance of quadriradical and quinqueradical verbs as well as of compound verbs (consisting of an indeclinable lexical part and of the auxiliary, typically the verb *bələ* ‘to say’). The number of biconsonantal verbs is insignificant, but they belong to the core vocabulary (*ḥazə* ‘to take’, *ḥabə* ‘to give’, *bələ* ‘to say’).

4.4.1 TAM categories and their exponents

Like all Ethio-Semitic languages, Tigrinya distinguishes between the three basic conjugational paradigms which employ three distinct bases and two sets of subject indexes: (old) suffix conjugation (OSC), long prefix conjugation (PCL), and short prefix conjugation (PCS). PCL is the exponent of the imperfective, PCS of the jussive, whereas OSC is used with the meaning of perfective, but limited to the morphosyntactic contexts of negation and subordinate forms. A fourth base (with a special set of subject indexes) was originally used to form converbs only (subordinate verbal forms used in adverbial function; cf. Haspelmath 1995), but innovative employment of converbs as sentence heads has led to the emergence of a new verbal category. Originally this category was in opposition to OSC as the exponent of resultative (Voigt 1977: 143), but in the modern spoken language it has ousted OSC from the non-negated main sentences, taking over its perfective meaning.⁵ The present chapter will distinguish between the converb proper and the innovative category with perfective meaning which formally coincides with the paradigm of a converb; the latter will be referred to as new suffix conjugation (NSC, in opposition to old suffix conjugation, OSC).

As in Proto-Ethio-Semitic, the non-negated imperative employs the base of PCS but lacks the personal prefixes, whereas prohibition is expressed by negated forms of PCS.

4.4.2 Subject indexes

In Tables 8.9–8.13, the paradigms of OSC, NSC/converb, PCL, PCS and imperative are given for the basic stem (sample verb *nəgərə* ‘to say’).⁶

TABLE 8.9 OLD SUFFIX CONJUGATION (osc)

	<i>SINGULAR</i>	<i>PLURAL</i>
1	<i>nəgərku</i>	<i>nəgərna</i>
2MASC	<i>nəgərka</i>	<i>nəgərku</i>
2FEM	<i>nəgərki</i>	<i>nəgərkin</i>
3MASC	<i>nəgərə</i>	<i>nəgəru</i>
3FEM	<i>nəgərat</i>	<i>nəgəra</i>

TABLE 8.10 NEW SUFFIX CONJUGATION (nsc)/CONVERB

	<i>SINGULAR</i>	<i>PLURAL</i>
1	<i>nəgirə</i>	<i>nəgirna</i>
2MASC	<i>nəgirka</i>	<i>nəgirkum</i>
2FEM	<i>nəgirki</i>	<i>nəgirkin</i>
3MASC	<i>nəgiru</i>	<i>nəgiron</i>
3FEM	<i>nəgira</i>	<i>nəgirən</i>

TABLE 8.11 LONG PREFIX CONJUGATION (pcl)

	<i>SINGULAR</i>	<i>PLURAL</i>
1	<i>ʔinəggir⁷</i>	<i>ninəggir</i>
2MASC	<i>tinəggir</i>	<i>tinəgru</i>
2FEM	<i>tinəgri</i>	<i>tinəgra</i>
3MASC	<i>jinəggir</i>	<i>jinəgru</i>
3FEM	<i>tinəggir</i>	<i>jinəgra</i>

TABLE 8.12 SHORT PREFIX CONJUGATION (pcs)⁸

	<i>SINGULAR</i>	<i>PLURAL</i>
1	<i>ʔingər</i>	<i>ningər</i>
2MASC	<i>tingər</i>	<i>tingəru</i>
2FEM	<i>tingəri</i>	<i>tingəra</i>
3MASC	<i>jingər</i>	<i>jingəru</i>
3FEM	<i>tingər</i>	<i>jingəra</i>

TABLE 8.13 IMPERATIVE

	<i>SINGULAR</i>	<i>PLURAL</i>
MASC	<i>nigər</i>	<i>nigəru</i>
FEM	<i>nigəri</i>	<i>nigəra</i>

TABLE 8.14 COPULA *ʔIJJU*

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1	<i>ʔijjə</i>	<i>ʔina</i>
2MASC	<i>ʔika</i>	<i>ʔikum</i>
2FEM	<i>ʔiki</i>	<i>ʔikin</i>
3MASC	<i>ʔijju</i>	<i>ʔijjom</i>
3FEM	<i>ʔijja</i>	<i>ʔijjən</i>

Plural subject indexes are also used to express respect (see also §§4.1.2, 4.1.3):

ʔabbo-ka *ʔabəj* *jinəbru*
 father-POSS.2MSG where live.PCL.3POL.M
 ‘Where does your father live?’

The equative copula *ʔijju* (Table 8.14) takes the same set of subject indexes as the NSC (the base is *ʔijj-* before consonants and *ʔi-* before vowels).

The copula can be merged with the preceding word by means of the omission of the initial *ʔ-* or *ʔi(j)-/ʔi-*: *dəhan d-ika* well Q-COP.2MSG ‘How are you?’ (Lit. ‘Are you well?’), *roma ts ‘ibbik ti kətəma-jja* Rome good-FSG city-COP.3FSG ‘Rome is a beautiful city’.

4.4.3 Verbal bases and subject indexes before object and applicative indexes

Before object and applicative indexes, the base of the PCL of the basic stem has the shape $C_1\alpha C_2C_3$:- *jinəgr-o* ‘he tells him’.

Before an object/applicative index with initial vowel, the OSC 3MSG subject index *-ə* is dropped, and the vowels *-i*, *-u* belonging to the subject indexes are changed to *-ij*, *-iw* ($\{ʔaj-nəgərə-o-n\}$ *ʔajnəgəron* ‘he did not tell him’, $\{ʔaj-nəgərku-o-n\}$ *ʔajnəgərkiwon* ‘I did not tell him’).

The final consonant of the verbal bases of PCS and 3FSG OSC is geminated before an object index with initial vowel: *jingərr-a* ‘let him tell her!’, *ʔaj-nəgərətt-o-n* ‘she did not tell him’. The base of PCS of verbs with final gutturals attaches object indexes with initial vowels by means of the insertion *-ajj-*: *ʔaj-tifrih-ajj-o* NEG-fear.PCS:2MSG-*ajj*-OBJ.3MSG ‘do not be afraid of him!’.

Subject indexes *-om*, *-kum*, *-ən*, *-kin* before object/applicative indexes have the forms *-omu-* (*nəgiromu-ni* ‘they (M) told me’), *-kumu-* (*ʔajnəgərkumu-ni-n* ‘you (MPL) did not tell me’), *-əna-* (*nəgirəna-ni* ‘they (F) told me’), *-kina-* (*nəgirkina-ni* ‘you (FPL) told me’). The object/applicative indexes with initial vowels are attached to these forms according to the same rules as outlined above and in §4.1.2 (*-kina-*, *-əna-* may be further reduced to *-kin(i)-*, *-ən(i)-*): *nəgirom* ‘they (M) told’ vs. *nəgiromiw-o* ‘they (M) told him’, *zi-rəkəbkum* ‘what you (MPL) have found’ vs. *zi-rəkəbkumiw-o* ‘what you (MPL) have found’, *nəgirən* ‘they (F) told’ vs. *nəgirəna-ʔ-o/nəgirəni-ʔ-o/nəgirən-ʔ-o* ‘they (F) told him’. The word-internal forms of the subject indexes *-omu-*, *-kumu-*, *-kina-* are more archaic than the word-final forms: the presence of the vowels *-u* (< *u:), *-a* (< *a:) is confirmed by comparative evidence from other Semitic languages (see, e.g., Goldenberg 2012: 88–9), including Geez (cf. Geez subject indexes of 2MPL *-kimu*, 2FPL *-kina-*, the latter found before object indexes only).

4.4.4 Verbal stems

As in most Ethio-Semitic languages, verbal stems of triradical verbs are formed by four sets of bases, labeled A (osc base $C_1\text{ə}C_2\text{ə}C_3$), B (osc base $C_1\text{ə}C_2C_2\text{ə}C_3$), C (osc base $C_1\text{ə}C_2\text{ə}C_3$), D (osc base $C_1\text{ə}C_2\text{ə}C_2\text{ə}C_3\text{ə}$), which can be expanded with a number of derivative prefixes ($\text{ʔ}a-$, $t\text{-}$, $\text{ʔ}aC-$, where C indicates gemination of the first consonant of the root), hence the stems can be conveniently labeled as 0A, $\text{ʔ}a$ -A, $t\text{-}$ A, etc. The stems 0B and 0C (comparable to “intensive” and “conative” stems elsewhere in Semitic) have lost their original derivative functions, and synchronically non-derived triradical verbs are distributed between 0A, 0B and 0C.¹⁰ The principal derivative functions of other stems are summed up in Table 8.15, where for each stem 3MSG forms of sample verbs are adduced.

4.4.5 Non-finite verbal forms

The only non-finite verbal form in Tigrinya is infinitive, with the pattern $miC_1C_2aC_3$ for the basic stem (on the infinitival patterns used with various stems, see Table 8.15). The function of participles is taken over by the relativized verbal forms, marked by the relativizer $z(i)$:- $z-im\text{ə}t\text{s}t\text{s} \text{'i}ʔ$ REL-COME.PCL:3MSG ‘who comes (M)’. The allomorph $\text{ʔ}i$ - appears before t -prefixes of derived stems and before the subject indexes starting with t - and n - and triggers the gemination of the first consonant of the prefix: $\text{ʔ}i-ttim\text{ə}t\text{s}t\text{s} \text{'i}ʔ$ REL-COME.PCL:3MSG ‘who comes (F)’.

4.5 Adpositions/adverbs

4.5.1 Adpositions

Adpositions are mostly prepositions and precede the first constituent of the noun phrase:

$\text{ʔ}ab \text{ na}j \text{ ʔ}abbo\text{ʔ}-u \text{ dukk}^{\text{ʔ}an}$ LOC GEN father-POSS.3MSG shop ‘in his father’s shop’.

Prepositions can attach argument indexes (see Table 8.5), before which the base of the preposition is often changed: mis ‘with’ ~ $mis\text{ʔ}-u$ COM-3MSG ‘with him’, $mis\text{-}j$ COM-1SG ‘with me’.

Examples of compound prepositions include nab ‘towards’ (< ni - ‘towards’ + $\text{ʔ}ab$ - ‘in’), kab ‘from’ (< $*ki$ - ‘from’, $\text{ʔ}ab$ - ‘in’). Prepositions are sometimes derived from fossilized prepositional phrases: $bi\text{-}z\text{-}\text{ə}j$ INS-REL-NEG ‘without’, $bi\text{-}za\text{'}ba$ INS-ISSUE ‘about’.

Some prepositions are derived from verbal roots by means of nominal patterns: $k\text{'idmi}$ ‘in front of’, $tihti$ ‘below’. Some of them can be used as adverbs as well: $wift\text{'i}$ ‘in, inside of; inside’, $w\text{ə}t\text{s} \text{'a}ʔi$ ‘out of; outside, abroad’.

Circumpositions are rare: $bi\text{-}\dots\text{-gize}$ ‘during the time of’, $bi\text{-}\dots\text{-mikniyat}$ ‘because of’.

4.5.2 Adverbs

Non-derived adverbs are rare: $hidʒi$ ‘now’, $timali$ ‘yesterday’. Adverbs derived from verbal roots can take nominal patterns (see also §4.5.1): $k\text{'idmit}$ ‘in front’, $tahtay$ ‘downstairs’. Some adverbs go back to prepositional phrases: $\text{ʔ}ab\text{-}zi$ LOC-DEM.3MSG ‘here’, $dihri\text{ʔ}-u$ after-3MSG ‘afterwards’, $bi\text{-}t\text{'a}ʕmi$ INS-taste ‘very’.

Nominals indicating time can be used as adverbial phrases: $mi/\text{ə}t$ ‘evening; in the evening’, ʕarbi ‘Friday; on Friday’. Adverbials of time indicating periodicity can be formed

TABLE 8.15 VERB STEM FORMS AND FUNCTIONS

	OSC	PCL	PCS	CONFERB/NSC	INFINITIVE	TYPICAL SEMANTICS
0A Ex.: 'to declare'	$C_1\text{əC}_2\text{əC}_3\text{ə}$ <i>gələb'ə</i>	$\text{j}iC_1\text{əC}_2iC_3$ <i>jigəllis'</i>	$\text{j}iC_1C_2C_3$ <i>jigləb'</i>	$C_1\text{əC}_2iC_3u$ <i>gələb'u</i>	$\text{miC}_1C_2\text{əC}_3$ <i>migləb'</i>	non-derived
0B Ex.: 'to try'	$C_1\text{əC}_2C_2\text{əC}_3\text{ə}$ <i>fətlənə</i>	$\text{j}iC_1iC_2iC_3$ <i>jifittin</i>	$\text{j}iC_1\text{əC}_2C_2iC_3$ <i>jifittin</i>	$C_1\text{əC}_2C_2iC_3u$ <i>fəttinu</i>	$\text{miC}_1iC_2C_2\text{əC}_3$ <i>mifittan</i>	non-derived
0C Ex.: 'to miss, be nostalgic'	$C_1\text{əC}_2\text{əC}_3\text{ə}$ <i>nəfək'ə</i>	$\text{j}iC_1\text{əC}_2iC_3$ <i>jinafik'</i>	$\text{j}iC_1\text{əC}_2iC_3$ <i>jinafik'</i>	$C_1\text{əC}_2iC_3u$ <i>nəfik'u</i>	$\text{miC}_1(i)C_2\text{əC}_3$ <i>minfək'</i>	non-derived
0D Ex.: 'to carve a little'	$C_1\text{əC}_2\text{əC}_2\text{əC}_3\text{ə}$ <i>k'ərarəb'ə</i>	$\text{j}iC_1\text{əC}_2\text{əC}_2iC_3$ <i>jik'əraris'</i>	$\text{j}iC_1\text{əC}_2\text{əC}_2iC_3$ <i>jik'əraris'</i>	$C_1\text{əC}_2\text{əC}_2iC_3u$ <i>k'əraris'u</i>	$\text{miC}_1iC_2iC_2\text{əC}_3$ <i>miik'irirats'</i>	iterative, attenuative and related meanings
<i>ʔa-A</i> Ex.: 'to tire'	$ʔ\text{əC}_1C_2\text{əC}_3\text{ə}$ <i>ʔadkəmə</i>	$\text{y}\text{əC}_1iC_2C_2iC_3$ <i>ʔadikim</i>	$\text{y}\text{əC}_1C_2iC_3$ <i>ʔadkim</i>	$ʔ\text{əC}_1C_2iC_3u$ <i>ʔadkimu</i>	$\text{miC}_1C_2\text{əC}_3$ <i>midkam</i>	causative to 0A
<i>ʔa-B</i> Ex.: 'to cause distress'	$ʔ\text{əC}_1\text{əC}_2C_2\text{əC}_3\text{ə}$ <i>ʔəfəggərə</i>	$\text{j}\text{əC}_1\text{əC}_2iC_3$ <i>ʔəfəggir</i>	$\text{j}\text{əC}_1\text{əC}_2iC_3$ <i>ʔəfəggir</i>	$ʔ\text{əC}_1\text{əC}_2C_2iC_3u$ <i>ʔəfəggiru</i>	$\text{miC}_1iC_2C_2\text{əC}_3$ <i>mifəggar</i>	causative to 0B
<i>ʔa-C</i> Ex.: 'to bring together, to confront with each other'	$ʔ\text{əC}_1\text{əC}_2\text{əC}_3\text{ə}$ <i>ʔadarəgə</i>	$\text{j}\text{əC}_1\text{əC}_2iC_3$ <i>ʔadarig</i>	$\text{j}\text{əC}_1\text{əC}_2iC_3$ <i>ʔadarig</i>	$ʔ\text{əC}_1\text{əC}_2iC_3u$ <i>ʔadarigu</i>	$\text{miC}_1C_2\text{əC}_3$ <i>midrag</i>	causative to 0C
<i>ʔa-D</i> Ex.: 'to make crumble here and there'	$ʔ\text{əC}_1\text{əC}_2\text{əC}_2\text{əC}_3\text{ə}^{\text{H}}$ <i>ʔəfərarəwə</i>	$\text{j}\text{əC}_1\text{əC}_2\text{əC}_2iC_3$ <i>ʔəfəraris</i>	$\text{j}\text{əC}_1\text{əC}_2\text{əC}_2iC_3$ <i>ʔəfəraris</i>	$ʔ\text{əC}_1\text{əC}_2\text{əC}_2iC_3u$ <i>ʔəfərarisu</i>	$\text{miC}_1iC_2iC_2\text{əC}_3$ <i>mifiriras</i>	causative to 0D/iterative or attenuative to <i>ʔa-C</i>
<i>tə-A</i> Ex.: 'to be stolen'	$\text{t}\text{əC}_1\text{əC}_2C_2\text{əC}_3\text{ə}/\text{t}\text{əC}_1\text{əC}_2\text{əC}_3\text{ə}$ <i>təsək'ə/təsərak'ə</i>	$\text{j}iC_1iC_2C_2\text{əC}_3$ <i>jisirək'</i>	$\text{j}iC_1C_1\text{əC}_2\text{əC}_3$ <i>jissərak'</i>	$\text{t}\text{əC}_1\text{əC}_2iC_3u$ <i>təsək'u</i>	$\text{miC}_1C_2\text{əC}_3$ <i>misrak'</i>	passive/reflexive, usually to 0A or to <i>ʔa-A</i>

<i>tə-B</i>	$təC_1əC_2əC_3ə$	<i>jijibbar</i>	$jiC_1iC_2iC_3$	$jiC_1C_2əC_3əC_3$	$təC_1əC_2iC_3u$	$miC_1iC_2aC_3$	passive/reflexive, usually to 0B or <i>?a-B</i>
Ex.: 'to be frightened'	<i>təjəbbərə</i>	<i>jijibbar</i>	<i>jijibbar</i>	<i>jijibbar</i>	<i>təjəbbiru</i>	<i>mijibbar</i>	
<i>tə-C</i>	$təC_1aC_2əC_3ə$	$jiC_1C_2aC_3əC_3$	$jiC_1C_2aC_3əC_3$	$yiC_1C_2aC_3əC_3$	$təC_1aC_2iC_3u$	$miC_1C_2iC_3aC_3$	reciprocal; passive/ reflexive to 0C
Ex.: 'to meet each other'	<i>tərakəbə</i>	<i>jirrakəb</i>	<i>jirrakəb</i>	<i>jirrakəb</i>	<i>tərakibu</i>	<i>mirrakəb</i>	
<i>tə-D</i>	$təC_1əC_2aC_3əC_3ə$	$jiC_1C_2əC_3aC_3əC_3$	$jiC_1C_2əC_3aC_3əC_3$	$jiC_1C_2əC_3aC_3əC_3$	$təC_1əC_2aC_3iC_3u$	$miC_1C_2iC_3iC_2aC_3$	passive/reflexive to 0D; reciprocal; iterative to <i>tə-A, tə-B, tə-C</i>
Ex.: 'to go to and fro'	<i>təmələləsə</i>	<i>jimmələləs</i>	<i>jimmələləs</i>	<i>jimmələləs</i>	<i>təmələlisu</i>	<i>mimmələləs</i>	
<i>?aC-C</i>	$?əC_1C_2aC_3əC_3ə$	$jəC_1C_2aC_3iC_3$	$jəC_1C_2aC_3iC_3$	$jəC_1C_2aC_3iC_3$	$?əC_1C_2aC_3iC_3u$	$miC_1C_2iC_3aC_3$	adjective; causative to <i>tə-C</i>
Ex.: 'to cause, allow to speak'	<i>?əzzarəbə</i>	<i>jəzzarib</i>	<i>jəzzarib</i>	<i>jəzzarib</i>	<i>?əzzaribu</i>	<i>mizzarib</i>	
<i>?aC-D</i>	$?əC_1C_2əC_3aC_3əC_3ə$	$jəC_1C_2əC_3aC_3iC_3$	$jəC_1C_2əC_3aC_3iC_3$	$jəC_1C_2əC_3aC_3iC_3$	$?əC_1C_2əC_3aC_3iC_3u$	$miC_1C_2iC_3iC_2aC_3$	adjective; causative to <i>tə-D</i>
Ex.: 'to cause to compete'	<i>?əkkədədəmə</i>	<i>jəkkədədəm</i>	<i>jəkkədədəm</i>	<i>jəkkədədəm</i>	<i>?əkkədədəmu</i>	<i>mikkədədəm</i>	

by reduplication or by the adjectival suffix *-awi*: *ʕarbi* ‘every Friday’, *mifətawi* ‘every evening’.

5 SYNTAX

In the domain of syntax Tigrinya is characterized by two major innovations shared by other modern Ethio-Semitic languages: shift from right-branching to left-branching syntax, and wide use of cleft sentences. There is no formal opposition between verbal and non-verbal predication: the inflected copula *ʔijju* (§4.4.2) takes over the syntactic properties of a verbal head in clauses with non-verbal predication.

5.1 Sentential and phrasal word order

Tigrinya, like other Semitic languages, is a pro-drop language:

tʕibah *nab* *gəza-ka* *kəm-gafa* *k-imətsʕiʔ* *ʔijjə*
 tomorrow ALL house-POSS.2MSG like-guest GOAL-come.PCL:1SG COP:1SG
 ‘Tomorrow I will come to you as a guest.’

The left-branching syntax is displayed, at the sentential level, by the SOV word order:

jonas *hijab* *ni-gʷal* *ʕark-u* *gəziʔu-ll-a*
 Yonas present ALL-daughter friend-POSS.3MSG buy.NSC:3MSG-APPL-3FSG
 ‘Yonas bought a present for his friend’s daughter.’

At the phrasal level, the dependent constituent usually precedes the head:

sənəf *səb*
 lazy man
 ‘A lazy man’.

ʔiziʔən *ʕabbaj* *səbəjti*
 DEM.POL.F old.FSG woman
 ‘This old woman’.

ʔab *wətsʕaʔi* *z-irikkəba* *fʕənafir-u*
 LOC abroad REL-be.situated.PCL:3FPL branch.PL-POSS.3MSG
 ‘Its branches (filials) which are situated abroad.’

Demonstratives precede the head noun, but can optionally be repeated after it (a feature shared with the neighboring Tigre).

ʔiza *tikal*
 DEM.FSG factory
 ‘This factory’.

ʔizi *səbʔay-zi*
 DEM.MSG man-DEM.MSG
 ‘This man’.

Attributive possession is expressed by several syntactic constructions (see Voigt 2003). The asyndetic construction (with an exact parallel in Tigre, both corresponding to the synthetic construction in Geez, on which see Chapter 6, §5.2) is formed by the mere juxtaposition of the possessor and possessee, with the rigid word order “head-dependent”:

halafi maʔkəl t'ixna barəntu
 head center health Barentu
 ‘The head of the health center of Barentu’.

The construction with genitive marker *nay* allows both “head-dependent” and “dependent-head” word order:

naj bet maʔsərti haləfti
 GEN house imprisonment head.PL
 ‘The heads of the prison’.

tarik naj bahli-n limdi-n
 history GEN culture-and custom-and
 ‘The history of culture and custom’.

In modern spoken Tigrinya, the head of the genitive marker *nay* can be additionally marked by the possessive marker agreeing with the dependent constituent:

naj jowhannis sabba-j-u
 GEN Yohannes grandmother-POSS.3MSG
 ‘Yohannes’s grandmother’.

5.2 Types of predication

The clauses with equative or attributive predication are formed with the copula *ʔijju* (cf. §4.4.2). The negative osc forms of the verb *konə* ‘to be’ serve as its negative counterpart.

ʔiziʔom sabi səbʔay ʔabbəhago-j ʔijj-om
 DEM.POL.M old.MSG man grandfather-POSS.1SG COP-3POL.M
 ‘This old man is my grandfather.’

naj jowhannis məmhir nifuʕ ʔijju
 GEN Yohannes teacher clever.MSG COP:3MSG
 ‘Yohannes’s teacher is clever.’

ʔiziʔa gʷal ts'ibbiʕ ti ʔaj-konət-in
 DEM.FSG girl good.FSG NEG-be.OSC:3FSG-CIRC
 ‘This girl is not pretty.’

Existence is expressed by the locative copular verb *ʔallo* (negative *ʔallən*), which takes the osc subject indexes:

ʔab mongo-na sərək ti ʔalləwu
 LOC among-1PL thief.PL LOC.OSC:3MPL
 ‘There are thieves among us.’

ʔab ʕaləm z-əygagə səb ʔallən
 LOC world REL-NEG:ERR.PCL:3MSG man LOC:NEG
 ‘There is no man without fault in the world.’

Predicative possession is expressed by the locative copular verb whose subject index is co-referent with the possessee, and object index with the possessor:

ʔanə hafti ʔallati-nni
 1SG sister be.OSC:3FSG-OBJ.1SG
 ‘I have a sister.’

For the negation of predicative possession, a special negative possessive copula *ʔəbillun* is employed:

ʔanə səbəjti ʔəbilləjin
 1SG wife NEG.POSS:1SG
 ‘I have no wife.’

Cleft sentences are widely used, with the equative copula, which agrees in gender, person and number with the subject of the sentence, placed after the focused constituent or at the end of the sentence. The verbal predicate is relativized unless it is marked for NSC (NSC is incompatible with the relativizer; see §5.5):

bəʕalbet-əj ts 'ibah ʔijj-u z-ikəjjid
 husband-POSS.1SG tomorrow COP-3MSG REL-go.PCL:3MSG
 ‘It is tomorrow that my husband is going away.’

ʔizi bahli ʔizi kab k'ədəm zi-ts 'ənħə-ju
 DEM.MSG tradition DEM.MSG ABL formerly REL-remain-COP:3MSG
 ‘It is since earlier times that this tradition has lasted.’

habtom wəddi-na kəʔa likkiʕ naj ʔabbo-j
 Habtom son-POSS.1PL also exactly GEN father-POSS.1SG
bahri-n t'əbaj-in ʔijju wəsidu
 nature-and temperament-and COP:3MSG take.NSC:3MSG
 ‘It is exactly the nature and temperament of my father that our son Habtom has taken.’

5.3 Definiteness

The short forms of the distal demonstratives are used as definite article: *hagər* ‘country’ – *ʔita hagər* ‘the country’. Indefiniteness is usually unmarked, but the numeral *hadə* ‘one’ can be used to express this meaning: *hadə zanta* ‘a story’.

As many other Ethio-Semitic languages, Tigrinya is characterized by differential object marking, sensitive to the definiteness of the object. While indefinite object is unmarked, the definite object is usually preceded by the allative preposition *ni-* (which also serves to mark indirect objects) and coindexed on the verb:

məkkina yimərrih ʔallo
 car lead.PCL:3MSG be.OSC:3MSG
 ‘He is driving a car.’

nəzi *borsa* *ki-tts'or-o* *ʔallo-kka*
 ALL:DEM.MSG bag GOAL-carry.PCL:3MSG-OBJ.3MSG be.OSC:3MSG-OBJ.2MSG
 'You (MSG) have to carry this bag.'

5.4 Synthetic/analytic

In the verbal domain, synthetic morphological means are reserved to express basic aspectual opposition (perfective vs. imperfective) and jussive/imperative mood. Subject and object indexes are also attached synthetically (see §§4.4.2, 4.1.2). Analytical constructions serve to express future tense, combinations of tense and Aktionsart, as well as modality. Thus, PCL with the locative copular verb *ʔallo* serves to express durative in the present tense, and PCL with the NSC of *nəbərə* in the past tense:

ʔanə *bun* *ʔisətti* *ʔalloku*
 1SG coffee drink.PCL:1SG be.OSC:1SG
 'I am drinking coffee.'

k'əs *ʔilom* *yisiḥik'u* *nerom*
 be.quiet say.CVB:3MPL laugh.PCL:3MPL be.NSC:3MPL
 'They were quietly laughing.'

The construction “*ki-* + PCL + copula *ʔijju*” is used to express future tense:

koləl *ʔilə* *k-imilləs* *ʔijjə*
 walk.around say.CVB:1SG GOAL-return.PCL:1SG COP:1SG
 'After going for a walk I will come back.'

In the nominal morphology, synthetic forms are reserved for the expression of number and gender, as well as for argument indexes which are used to indicate pronominal possessors (§4.1.2). Possessive relations between nominals are expressed analytically or asyndetically (§5.1).

Competition between synthetic and analytical forms is observed in the formation of the ordinal numerals: the synthetic forms are reserved for the first decade, the analytic forms employing the element *məbbəl* are used with the ordinal numerals above 20, whereas in the second decade, both analytic and synthetic forms are acceptable (§4.3).

5.5 Subordination

Unlike Geez and Tigre, modern Tigrinya does not employ PCS to express the goal and complement of volition verbs (these functions are fulfilled by the goal conjunction *ki-* followed by PCL). Subordinate PCS is therefore rare (Meyer 2016: 174–5). It can be used in concessive clauses or other types of subordinated clauses to express uncertainty:

fih *ʔikkʷa* *jikfəl* *k-ik'itsts'aś* *ʔijju*
 thousand even pay.PCS:3MSG GOAL-be.punished.PCL:3MSG COP:3MSG
 'Even if he pays one thousand, he will be punished.'

maj jiznəb ʔaj-jiznəb ʔajfəllit'-in
 water rain.PCS:3MSG NEG-rain.PCS:3MSG NEG:know.PCL:1SG-CIRC
 'I do not know whether it is going to rain or not.'

NSC is consistently replaced by OSC in many types of subordinate clauses. The incompatibility of NSC with most subordinated conjunctions as well as with the relativizer *zi-* is obviously a retention of the original converbial properties of NSC. Among the few subordinating conjunctions allowing NSC one should mention *ʔintə* 'if':

tʰibəh maj ʔintə harimu ʔajməts'ʔ-in ʔijjə
 tomorrow water if strike.NSC:3MSG NEG:come.PCL:1SG-CIRC COP:1SG
 'If it rains tomorrow, I won't come.'

Relative clauses are introduced by relativizer *zi-* (see §4.4.5). Simple NSC forms are replaced with OSC in relative clauses:

ʔita kərtət ʔila z-əʕbəjət-inni ʔaddə-j
 ART:FSG wander say.CVB:3FSG REL-bring.up.OSC:3FSG-OBJ.1SG mother-POSS.1SG
 'My mother, who brought me up wandering here and there'.

Analytic constructions are admitted in relative clauses. Relativizer is attached to both auxiliary and main verb (except the involved NSC forms, which remain unmarked):

ʔiti bi-təməharo z-ikkajəd z-əllo nit'fət-at
 ART:MSG INS-student.PL REL-be.conducted.PCL:3MSG REL-be.OSC:3MSG activity-PL
 'The activities carried out by students'.

Some other subordinate conjunctions (such as the complementizer *kəm-*) demand relativized verbal forms:

ʔab kitabət hits'an-at ʔiwin ʕabi gəsgas
 LOC vaccination baby-PL and big.MSG progress
kəm ʔittəməzɡəbə ʔiti habəreta jəriddiʔ
 COMP REL:be.registered.OSC:3MSG ART:MSG information announce.PCL:3MSG
 'The information also announces that big progress is registered in the sphere of infant vaccination.'

Complementation is often realized by means of infinitives (Shimelis Mazengia 2015: 235–59):

ʔab bahti məskərəm z-irikkəb bank ʔabajt-in nigd-in
 LOC first.day Məskərəm REL-be.situated.PCL:3MSG bank house.PL-and trade-and
ni-ʔagəlgəlti z-ikəwwin k'idmi hidət ʔawarih ʔastat
 ALL-customer.PL REL-be.PCL:3MSG before a.few month.PL approximately

mi?t-in hamsa-n zi-konu sədja-tat mik'rab-u yifillət'
 hundred-and fifty-and REL-be.OSC:3MPL chair-PL offer.INF-POSS.3MSG be.known.PCL:3MSG
 'It is known that a few months ago the Bank of Houses and Trade, located at
 I Məskərəm (street), provided its customers with ca. 150 chairs.'

Converbs are widely used to form adverbial subordinate clauses:

ʔanə nab dukkʷan kəjdə bani ʕaddigə
 1SG ALL shop go.CVB:1SG bread buy.NSC:1SG
 'Having gone to a shop, I bought some bread.'

6 LEXICON

In the 100-word Swadesh list, 33 terms are retentions from Proto-Semitic, such as *kullu* 'every, all' (< PS **kull-*), *sətəjə* 'to drink' (< PS **ʕij*); 28 terms belong to common Ethio-Semitic innovations, such as *bəlfə* 'to eat', *k'əjih* 'red', among which five terms are early Cushitic borrowings, such as *ʕasa* 'fish', *dəməna* 'cloud' (see further Kogan 2015: 433–53). Of the remaining terms, some have parallels both in Ethio-Semitic and elsewhere in Semitic (*ʕabi* 'big', *t'ub* 'breast', *kisad* 'neck', negative circumfix *ʔaj- . . . -n*), some are shared by neighboring Ethio-Semitic languages (such as *nəwih* 'long', cf. Geez *nawix* id.; *k'orbət* 'skin', cf. Amharic *k'wərbət* id.; *milhas* 'tongue', cf. Amharic *milas* id.). Of special interest are the few candidates for common North Ethio-Semitic innovations, that is, Tigrinya lexemes whose basic status is shared with Tigre and Geez cognates only: *t'əʕda* 'white' (cf. Geez *t'əʕada*; Tigre *t'əʕada*: id.), *ʕabi* 'big' (cf. Geez *ʕabij*, Tigre *ʕabi*, whose parallels elsewhere in Semitic have the meaning 'thick'). There are also some specific Tigrinya innovations (such as *gərab* 'tree', *fəlat'ə* 'to know', *dəkk'əsə* 'to sleep'). Three terms from the 100-word list are likely Amharisms: *səb* 'person', *ʔafinʕ'a* 'nose', *k'ət'əlja* 'green'.

Vocabulary pertaining to culture and technology contains some borrowings from Amharic: *mirriʕʕ'a* 'elections' (< Amharic *mirʕ'a*), *ʔaggəbab* 'propriety' (< Amharic *aggəbab*). As in Amharic, Geezisms are widely used in neologisms, often calques of European terms: *ri?s-ə t'ihuf* self-CST written 'autograph' (the element *-ə* as the marker of the head in these constructions is also borrowed from Geez), *niwam* 'hibernation' (< Geez *niwa:m* 'sleep').

As other Ethio-Semitic languages, Tigrinya contains a considerable number of Arabisms (Leslau 1956). The influx of Arabisms must have increased since Arabic was promoted to one of the working languages of the Eritrean government. Some examples of Arabisms: *ħalal* 'licit, legitimate' (Arb. *ħala:l-*), *taʕlim* 'training' (< Arb. *taʕli:m-*), *fəʕələ* 'to fail' (< Arb. *fəʕila*).

Among the European languages, the influence of Italian is most conspicuous: *dʒələto* 'ice cream' (Ital. *gelato*), *gʷanti* 'glove' (Ital. *guanti*).

The modern language employs numerous Anglicisms (English functions today as a working language of the Eritrean government, alongside Tigrinya and Arabic): *stratedʒi* 'strategy' (Eng. *strategy*), *dajrəktər* 'director' (Eng. *director*), *farmasi* 'pharmacy' (Eng. *pharmacy*).

7 SAMPLE TEXT

The following is a passage from *nizitəʃaskərə nihadə mənʔisəy ziriʔi hadə zanta* (*A Story of a Conscript*) by Gəbrəjəsus Haylu (reproduced after Ghirmay Negash 1999: 215), a novel depicting the fate of a group of Eritrean conscript soldiers sent by the Italian colonial government to fight Libyan insurgents.

ʔo ts'əllim ʃaskər ʔeritra ʔiz-om ki-twagʔ-om
VOC black.MSG soldier Eritrea DEM-MPL GOAL-fight.PCL:2MSG-OBJ.3MPL

ʔi-ttidəlli z-əllə-ka gʷas-ot ʔijjom
REL-want.PCL:2MSG REL-be.OSC-2MSG herdsman-PL COP:3MPL

ʔimbər kaliʔ ʔaj-kon-u-n
but other.MSG NEG-be.OSC-3MPL-CIRC

‘Oh, black soldier of Eritrea! Those whom you are going to fight are nothing else but herdsmen.’

ts'əʃadu mikʷan-om giddi
white.PL be.INF-POSS.3MPL perhaps

jəfirriha-kka jikəwwin ʔintəkənə kəma-na
frighten.PCL:3MSG-OBJ.2MSG be.PCL:3MSG if like-POSS.1PL

ʔaj-kon-u-n mədfiʃ jəbill-om
NEG-be.OSC-3MPL-CIRC canon POSS.NEG-3MPL

‘Even if it may scare you that they are white, they are not like us. They have no cannons.’

bizuħ t'ijjit jəbill-om kəma-na mənəts'ir jəbill-om
much.MSG bullet POSS.NEG-3MPL like-POSS.1PL binocular POSS.NEG-3MPL

kəma-na rikit jəbill-om
like-POSS.1PL rocket POSS.NEG-3MPL

‘they do not have enough bullets, they do not have binoculars and rockets such as we have.’

nihna t'iraj ʔina nifuʃ-at ts'əʃadu nihna t'aljan gojt-ot-ka
1PL only COP:1PL clever-PL white.PL 1PL Italians lord-PL-POSS.2MSG
‘It is only us who are clever white people – we, the Italians, your lords.’

hiʒzi kəʃa bəl-o ʔaj-tifrihajj-o
now also say.IMP:2MSG-OBJ.3MSG NEG-fear.PCS:2MSG-OBJ.3MSG
‘Now, too, do not be afraid of him.’

ʔat'al ʔagmal ʔaha ʔaʔdug ʔabagiʃ ʔintə rəkəb-na kabʔ-ən
goat.PL camel.PL cow.PL donkey.PL sheep.PL if find.OSC-1PL from-3FPL

ħarid-ka ki-tbəlliʃ ki-nhibə-kka ʔina
slaughter.CVB-2MSG GOAL-eat.PCL:2MSG GOAL-give.PCL:1PL-OBJ.2MSG COP:1PL

‘If we find goats, camels, cows, donkeys, or sheep, we shall give you so that you can slaughter and eat from their number.’

gin wərk'i ʔimmo birur wəj kaliʔ niʔ-u z-iməssil ʔak'ha
 but gold indeed silver or other.MSG ALL-3MSG REL-resemble.PCL:3MSG thing

zi-haz-o wəjluʔ-u
 REL-take.OSC:3MSG-OBJ.3MSG INTERJ-3MSG
 'But woe to him who takes gold, silver, or similar things!'

hamsa-n hammuʃtə-n kurbaz ʔab
 fifty-and five-and whip LOC

k'idmi kull-om bi-t'iray mək'əmməff'iʔ-u k-ilimt'it'-o ʔijjə
 before every-3MPL LOC-naked bottom-POSS.3MSG GOAL-lash.PCL:1SG-OBJ.3MSG COP:1SG
 'I will give him fifty-five strokes of whip in front of everybody on his naked bottom.'

hiʒzi kəʃa səmiʃ-kumu-ni-do kull-u ʔak'ha ʔanə ʔijjə wannaʔ-u
 now also hear.NSC-2MPL-OBJ.1SG-Q every-3MSG thing 1SG COP:1SG chief-POSS.3MSG
 'Now, too, have you heard me? I am the head of everything.'

NOTES

- 1 The work on this chapter has been supported by Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR), grant #17-06-00391. I am deeply grateful to my informants Təsfaldət Hədgəmbəs (my main informant for the present chapter, native speaker of Tigrinya, 32 years old, born in ʃAddigrat, resident of Asmara), Səməra Bits'uʃ ʔAmlak (native speaker of Tigrinya, 31 years old, born in Addis Ababa, later moved to Asmara where he lived from 1999 to 2007, at present lives in Russian Federation), and Nətsʔərə ʔAb Gəbrə Kidan (native speaker of Tigrinya, 28 years old, born in vicinity of Asmara, at present resident of Germany). Warm thanks go to Ms. Magdalena Krzyżanowska, who provided me with some important materials on Tigrinya.
- 2 The plural object forms in parentheses, adduced in Leslau (1941: 49, 52; Tsehaye Teferra 1979: 228, 233), are not used by Təsfaldət Hədgəmbəs, who perceives most of them as expressions of respect.
- 3 In speech of Təsfaldət Hədgəmbəs, the insertion of ʔ is accompanied with regressive vocalic assimilation across the guttural and further distant vocalic assimilation: {sik'əla-ʔ-o} *sik'olo-ʔ-o* put.up.IMP:2FPL-ʔ-OBJ.3MSG 'put (FPL) it up!'
- 4 Leslau (1941: 57, mostly confirmed in the course of work with Təsfaldət Hədgəmbəs). According to Tsehaye Teferra (1979: 228-32, 274), the applicative marker is always geminated intervocalically.
- 5 In written Tigrinya, osc forms are still employed with main non-negated verbs, mostly in narrative texts.
- 6 Although the osc has lost its prominence as the main exponent of perfective in modern Tigrinya, we preserve here the use of 3MSG osc as citation form, with its roots in a well-established Semitic tradition.
- 7 In speech of Nətsʔərə ʔAb Gəbrə Kidan, this form is *jinəggir* (fully coinciding with 3MSG). The same form sporadically occurs in the speech of Səməra Bits'uʃ ʔAmlak and Təsfaldət Hədgəmbəs, usually in analytic forms.

- 8 The 2nd person forms are used only with a negative marker.
- 9 Side by side with the innovative form *zi-rəkəbkumm-o*.
- 10 However, one still finds 0A and 0B pairs which demonstrate the original function of 0B as transitivity-raising morpheme: *məl?ə* ‘to fill (intransitive, transitive)’ – *məlli?ə* ‘to supplement, to append, to augment, to fill up’.
- 11 In the stems of D type with prefixes, the vowel after the first consonant can be *a*:
 ?aC₁əC₂aC₂əC₃ə/?aC₁aC₂aC₂əC₃ə.

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