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ON THE ABSENCE OF RAISING CONSTRUCTIONS IN AMHARIC

Introduction

In this paper, we argue on the basis of a semantic analysis that there are no raising constructions in Amharic, contrary to the syntactic analysis of Baye (1990).

Baye notes that there is no explicit evidence of WH-movement in Amharic. In questions, WH-elements are always manifested *in situ*, as in the following examples.

1. a. kasa min yi-gāz-al?
Kasa what 3-buy/IMPERF-AUX
“What will Kasa buy?”
- b. man bāg yi-gāz-al?
who sheep 3-buy/IMPERF-AUX
“Who will buy a sheep?”

Moreover, there are no explicit relative pronouns in Amharic. The only explicit difference between relative clauses and simple clauses is the fact that relative clauses appear in a noun phrase under a complementizer. Compare the following examples.

2. a. fārās gāzz-a
horse buy/PERF-3SG^{sb}
“He bought a horse.”
- b. fārās yā-gāzz-a säw
horse COMP-buy/PERF-3SG^{sb} man
“a man who bought a horse”

On the other hand, Baye claims that Amharic does have raising constructions. However, he argues that the grammar of Amharic must differ significantly from the grammar of languages like English and Italian, because the raising constructions of Amharic involve raising out of finite clauses and out of noun phrases, and that raising out of finite clauses and noun phrases is the *only* kind of raising that is possible in Amharic. Since languages like English and French allow raising out of non-finite clauses but do not allow raising out of finite clauses or noun phrases (cf., Rizzi 1982), Baye's account of raising in Amharic leads him into a discussion of the grammatical parameters that might provide for such typological contrasts.

In this paper, however, we show that the contrasting word orders discussed by Baye have semantic interpretations that are incompatible with a raising account of their relationships. The only plausible example of raising in Amharic is the passive construction, which seems to be quite similar to the passive construction in languages like English.¹ This conclusion leads us into a discussion of the parameters that might provide for the absence of raising from non-finite clauses in languages like Amharic.

Raising from finite clauses

The verb *mäsl* "to seem like"

According to Baye the Amharic verb *mäsl-* means "to seem" and it is a raising predicate. In the following example, *mäsl-* appears with a tensed clause as its complement.

- | | | | | |
|----|------------|-------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 3. | säw-očč-u | bäg | yä-gäzz-u | yī-mäsl-al-ø |
| | man-PL-DET | sheep | COMP-buy/PERF-3PL ^{sb} | 3-seem/IMPERF-AUX-3SG ^{sb} |

"It seems that the men have bought a sheep."²

Baye assumes that in this sentence there is a phonologically-null pleonastic pronoun in subject position and that the matrix verb, *mäsl-*, is realized with a phonologically-null affix signaling the default values of subject/verb agreement; that is, 3rd person singular masculine. The verb of the embedded clause, *gäzz-* "to buy", agrees with the subject of its clause, *säw-očč-u* "the men", and therefore it is realized with the 3rd person plural agreement marker *-u*.

¹ The only other candidate for such an analysis is the subject post-posing that Baye describes as "an afterthought topic phonologically indicated by a prolonged pause separating it, the topic, from the rest of the clause" (1990, 78). We assume that this phenomenon is outside the scope of sentential grammar.

² Cf. example 14a. in Baye (1990)

In the following example, however, both the embedded verb and the matrix verb have plural agreement markers.

4. säw-očč-u bäg yä-gäzz-u yi-mäsl-al-u
 man-PL-DET sheep COMP-buy/PERF-3PL^{sb} 3-seem/IMPERF-AUX-3PL^{sb}
 “The men seem that (they) have bought a sheep.”³

Baye concludes that this example can be directly related to the previous example, the only difference being that in 4. the subject argument of the embedded clause has been raised to the subject position of the matrix clause, thus provoking the plural subject/verb agreement of *mäsl-*.

However, if *mäsl-* were indeed a raising predicate, then the sentences in examples 3. and 4. would mean the same thing – but they do not. The example in 3. has the meaning “*It seems like the men have bought a sheep.*”, while the example in 4. means “*The men seem like they have bought a sheep.*” That is, the sentence in 3. claims that there is something about the general situation that suggests that the men have bought a sheep, while the sentence in 4. claims that there is something about the men that suggests that they have bought a sheep. In short, the subject position of the matrix clause (with the verb *mäsl-*) and subject position of the embedded clause (with the verb *gäzz-*) are both theta-marked, and since syntactic movement does not create chains with more than one theta-marked position (cf. Chomsky 1981), these examples cannot be analysed as raising constructions.

It is notable that our interpretation of the sentence in 3. insists that the phonologically-null subject is not a *pleonastic* pronoun (i.e., a semantically superfluous element). Rather, this pronoun is construed deictically, referring to the general situation of the world as perceived by the speaker. This point will come up again in the analyses below.

The argument against a raising analysis has further support in the fact that the following example (apparently not noticed by Baye) is also quite acceptable in Amharic.

5. bäg-očč-u säw-iyäw yä-gäzza-ø-ččäw yi-mäsl-al-u
 sheep-PL-DET man- DET COMP-buy/PERF-3SG^{sb}-3PL^{ob} 3-seem/IMPERF-AUX-3PL^{sb}
 “The sheep seem like the man has bought them.”

This sentence claims that there is something about the sheep that suggests that the man has bought them. The reference of the subject argument of the matrix clause is the same as the reference of the object argument of the embedded clause, but this cannot be the result of raising. Not only do these positions have clearly

³ Cf., example 14b. in Baye (1990)

distinct thematic roles, they also have distinct Case assignments (i.e., Nominative versus Accusative). Yet it is commonly held that that syntactic movement does not create chains that have more than one Case position (Ibid).

The semantic interpretation of these examples thus demonstrates that *mäs/-* is not a raising predicate.

The verb *adärg* “to do, to affect”

Baye also discusses examples involving the passivized verb, *d-därräg-*, translated as “to be done”. Consider the following sentence.

6. säw-očč-u sira ind-i-sär-u yi-d-därräg-al-ø
 man-PL-DET work COMP-3-work/IMPERF-3PL^{sb} 3-PASS-do/IMPERF- AUX-3^{sb}
 “It will be done that the men work”⁴

Here again, Baye proposes that the subject position of the matrix clause is held by a phonologically-null pleonastic pronoun and that the matrix verb has a phonologically-null affix with the default agreement features (i.e., 3rd person singular).

According to Baye, the following sentence is derived from the same structure that underlies the sentence in 6.

7. säw-očč-u sira ind-i-sär-u yi-d-därräg-all-u
 man-PL-DET work COMP-3-work/IMPERF-3PL^{sb} 3-PASS-do/IMPERF - AUX-3PL^{sb}
 “The men will be made that (they) work.”⁵

In this example the matrix verb, *d-därräg-*, carries a 3rd person plural agreement marker, indicating that the noun phrase *säw-očč-u* now appears in the subject position of the matrix clause. Baye concludes that this phrase has been raised from the subject position of the embedded finite clause.

The following example, however, suggests another possibility.

8. aster säw-očč-u-n sira ind-i-sär-u t -adärg-äččäw-all-ačč
 Aster man-PL-DET-ACC work COMP-3-work/IMPERF-3PL^{sb} 3-do/IMPERF-3PL^{ob-}- AUX-3FSG^{sb}
 “Aster will affect the men (such) that they work.”

In this example, the matrix verb is in its active form, *adärg-*, and it carries a 3rd person feminine singular subject agreement marker, agreeing with the feminine subject, *aster*. Moreover, in this example, the matrix verb appears with

⁴ Cf., example 17a. in Baye (1990)

⁵ Cf., example 17b. in Baye (1990)

a 3rd person plural *object* marker (i.e., -äččāw) and the object phrase, *sāw-očč-u-n*, appears with an accusative case marker (i.e., -n). Since passivization in Amharic typically promotes accusative objects from object position to subject position, the sentence in 8. is a more likely source for the passive construction in 7. than is the sentence in 6.

To see this more clearly, consider the argument structure of the active verb *adärg-* more closely. The active verb has only two arguments; namely an Actor and a Patient (i.e., in 8., the subject *aster* and the object *sāw-očč-u-n* respectively), while the third complement (i.e., the embedded clause) is an adjunct describing the manner in which the Patient has been affected by the Actor. The passive verb, of course, has no explicit Actor argument, but it may be expected to retain the Patient argument of its active counterpart. Thus, the Patient argument in example 7. is the subject *sāw-očč-u* and the embedded clause is again an adjunct describing how this Patient argument is affected. The translation of 7. should be something like: “*The men will be affected (such) that they work.*”.

This account of the matter predicts that there should be an active counterpart to example 6. that includes an explicit Actor argument and, indeed, there is such a construction.

9. aster sāw-očč-u sira ind-i-sär-u t-adärgä-allä-č
 Aster man-PL-DET work COMP-3-work/IMPERF-3PL^{sb} 3F-do/IMPERF -AUX-3F^{sb}
 “Aster will affect it such that the men work.”

This sentence means that *aster* will affect *the general situation* such that the men will work. That is, the embedded clause is again an adjunct describing how the Patient argument is affected and the Patient argument in this sentence is a phonologically-null pronoun that is construed deictically, much like the pronoun subject of the sentence in example 3. discussed above. In short, neither this active sentence nor the passive counterpart to it in example 6. involves a pleonastic pronoun (a semantically superfluous pronoun), and the passive sentence in 6. may be better translated as “*It (the general situation) will be affected such that the men work.*”

Thus it would seem that none of these constructions involve a syntactic movement that raises an argument from within an embedded finite clause to a position in the matrix clause. On the other hand, of course, the classical analysis of the passive in generative syntax involves raising the Patient argument from object position to subject position. In this respect, the Amharic data seems to be parallel to the passive constructions of languages like English and French and a raising analysis cannot be ruled out. This point will be raised again in the discussion below.

Possessor Raising

The verb *ial-* “to say, to tell”

Baye also claims that it is possible to raise possessor arguments out of Amharic noun phrases. He begins with the following example.

- | | | | | |
|-----------|-------------|--------|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| 10. aster | s’ägur-wa | räžžim | nä-w | tä-bal-ä |
| Aster | hair-3FPOSS | long | be-3M ^{ob} | PASS-say/PERF-3M ^{sb} |
- “It is said that Aster’s hair is long.”⁶

Again there is a passive verb in the matrix clause (i.e., *tä-bal-ä* “to be said”). Again the subject is presumed to be a pleonastic pronoun, while the subject/verb agreement signals 3rd person singular.

Baye describes the subject of the embedded clause as a “genitive noun phrase” and he assigns it the structure shown in example 11.⁷

- | | |
|------------|----------------------------|
| 11. [aster | [s’ägur-wa]] _{NP} |
| Aster | hair-her |

The proper noun *aster* is said to be in the specifier position of noun phrase and the form *-wa* is said to be a “genitive affix” (p.79). It is notable that the proper noun *aster* is optional in this construction, as shown in 12.⁸

- | | | |
|---------------|--------|---------------------|
| 12. s’ägur-wa | räžžim | nä-w |
| hair-3FPOSS | long | be-3M ^{ob} |
- “Her hair is long.”

Furthermore, Baye points out a different nominal phrase with a preposition phrase in specifier position, as shown in 13.

- | | | | | |
|--------|-----------|-------------------------|--------|---------------------|
| 13. a. | [yä aster | [s’ägur]] _{NP} | | |
| | of Aster | hair | | |
| b. | yä aster | s’ägur | räžžim | nä-w |
| | of Aster | hair | long | be-3M ^{ob} |
- “Aster’s hair is long.”

⁶ Cf., example 21a. I in Baye (1990)

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Later, Baye describes the marker *-wa* as “a genitive pronominal affix” (p.80).

If the preposition *yä* is present, the possessor argument (here, *aster*) is obligatory and the presence of *yä* is incompatible with the presence of the affix *-wa*.

According to our informants, when the proper name *aster* is inserted in a sentence like the one in 12, it is understood as a topic, as shown in 14.⁹

14. *aster s'ägur-wa räžžim nä-w*
 Aster hair-3FPOSS long be-3M^{ob}
 “(As for) Aster, her hair is long.”

This interpretation suggests that the proper name (i.e., *aster*) is not in the specifier position of the noun phrase; rather it only has a relationship with the noun phrase because it is the antecedent of the “pronominal affix”.

Such a topic structure is possible in the sentence of example 10., resulting in an interpretation that translates as “(As for) Aster, it is said that her hair is long.” However, if *aster* is not a topic in this example, then our informants must understand it to be an argument of the matrix verb and the sentence is translated as “It is said of Aster that her hair is long.”

Baye compares the sentence in 10. with the following example.

15. *aster s'ägur-wa räžžim nä-w tä-bal-äčč*
 Aster hair-3FPOSS long be-3M^{ob} PASS-say/PERF-3F^{sb}
 “Aster is said that her hair is long.”¹⁰

Observing that the matrix verb has a feminine agreement marker, Baye argues that this sentence is derived from the one in 10. by raising *aster* from the specifier position of the subject noun phrase of the embedded clause to the matrix subject position. However, the sentence in example 15. does not have the same meaning as the one in example 10. Our informants translate 13. as “*Aster is told that her hair is long.*”

These distinct interpretations predict that there will be two distinct constructions with active verbs that are related to the passive constructions in 10. and 15. Such active constructions do exist in Amharic, as illustrated in 16. and 17.

16. *sisay aster s'ägur-wa räžžim nä-w 'al-ä*
 Sisay Aster hair-3FPOSS long be-3M^{ob} say/PERF-3M^{sb}
 “Sisay said of Aster that her hair is long.”

⁹ Baye (1990, 86) suggests that raising to subject position in Amharic “is triggered by pragmatic rather than syntactic requirements...in languages like Amharic, in which the subject is the leftmost constituent in a sentence, the subject is assigned the pragmatic function of topic”.

¹⁰ Cf., example 21a. ii in Baye (1990)

17. sisay aster-in s'ägur-wa räžžim nä-w 'al-ä
 Sisay Aster-ACC hair-3FPOSS long be-3M^{ob} say/PERF-3M^{sb}
 "Sisay told Aster that her hair is long."

In example 16., *aster* is an oblique case complement of the verb *ial-* "to say, to tell". Since it is not a direct object, *aster* does not appear in the subject position in the corresponding passive sentence in 10. In 17., however, *aster* is marked for accusative case, so in the corresponding passive sentence of 15., it does appear in subject position. In each case, the interpretation of the passive is straightforward.

Given these data with these interpretations, the Baye's raising analysis seems improbable.

The verb *mäsl* "to seem like"

As Baye points out, the verb *mäsl-* can also take gerundive complements. These are nominal constructions that are systematically related to verbal constructions through affixation, as in the following examples.

- | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 18. gdäl- | "to kill" | mä-gdäl- | "killing" |
| wdäd- | "to love" | mä-wdäd- | "loving" |
| fällg- | "to want" | mä-fälläg | "wanting" |

According to Baye, the gerundive nominal can appear with the same type of possessor argument that was discussed above, as illustrated in 19.

19. säw-očč-u bäg mä-gzat-aččw yī-mäsl-al-ø
 man-PL-DEF sheep GER-buy-3PLPOSS 3-seem/IMPERF-AUX-3SG^{sb}
 "It seems the men's buying sheep."¹¹

Baye's translation follows the gloss, but it is quite meaningless as an English sentence. According to our informants, the full noun phrase at the beginning of the Amharic sentence has a topic reading and the gerundive construction has a future or a progressive reading. Thus 19. would be better translated as follows: "(As for) the men, it (the situation) seems like they will buy / they are buying sheep."

Baye then proposes the following example to show that the "subject" of the gerundive construction can be raised to the subject position of the main clause.

¹¹ Cf., example 27. in Baye (1990)

20. säw-očč-u bäg mägzat-aččw yi-mäsl-all-u
man-PL-DEF sheep GER-buy-3PLPOSS 3-seem/IMPERF-AUX-3PL^{SB}
“The men seem their buying sheep.”¹²

Unfortunately, although Baye insists on the acceptability of this example, our informants strongly reject it.

Thus we have argued that a raising analysis fails to account for any of the constructions involving finite clauses or noun phrases discussed in Baye (1990). As we mentioned above, the only plausible example of raising in Amharic is the passive construction.

Why are raising constructions generally absent in the data of Amharic?

Perhaps it is not surprising that there is no raising from finite clauses or from noun phrases in Amharic, since there is no raising from these domains in languages such as English or French, where the study of raising constructions began. On the other hand, these languages apparently do allow raising from non-finite clauses; in particular from the subject position of clauses with infinitive verb forms, as in 21.

21. The men seem to have bought a sheep.

Why are there no examples of raising from non-finite clauses in Amharic?

The fact that there are no infinitive verb forms in Amharic is only part of the answer, for the situation is not so simple. Although there are no infinitives, there are some non-finite verb forms in Amharic. Consider again example 8., repeated here as 22.

22. aster säw-očč-u-n sira ind-i-sär-u t-adärg-äččäw-all-ačč
Aster man-PL-DET-ACC work COMP-3-work/IMPERF-3PL^{SB} 3F-do/IMPERF-3PL^{OB}-AUX-3FSG^B
“Aster will affect the men (such) that they work.”

We have argued elsewhere that in both Amharic and in Standard Arabic, the imperfect conjugation is not specified for tense (cf., Halefom and Lumsden 1999, Lumsden and Halefom 2003). The main argument for this hypothesis in Amharic is the fact that the imperfect conjugation cannot be the only verb form in a matrix clause; it must be supported by another verb that is conjugated in the perfective aspect. Typically, this support is provided by the auxiliary verb *all-* meaning “to

¹² Cf., example 26. in Baye (1990)

be, to exist”. Such is the case for the matrix verb *adärg-* in example 22. Without this auxiliary support, the example in 22. would be unacceptable. Crucially, the embedded clause in this example is also in the imperfect aspect, but this clause does not include an auxiliary verb conjugated in the perfective aspect.

Now consider the following pair of sentences.

23. a. säw-očč-u sira ind-i-sär-u tä-bal-ä
 man-PL-DET work COMP-3-work/IMPERF-3PL^{sb} PASS-say/PERF-3M^{sb}
 “It is said that the men work.”

b.* säw-očč-u sira ind-i-sär-u tä-bal-u
 man-PL-DET work COMP-3-work/IMPERF-3PL^{sb} PASS-say/PERF-3PL^{sb}

The examples in 23. have the same embedded clause as the example in 22., but the matrix verb is the passive verb *tä-bal-* “to be said”. The ungrammatical example in 23b., where the matrix verb has a plural agreement marker, is an attempt to raise the subject of this non-finite embedded clause to the subject position of the matrix clause (aiming for something like the English structure “The men are said to work.”). The ungrammatical status of this example demonstrates that raising out of non-finite complement clauses in Amharic is not possible. The absence of infinitival forms does not suffice to explain the lack of raising from embedded clauses in Amharic.

Another explanation appeals to Case theory. Since the imperfect conjugation typically appears with a lexical subject (eg., *säw-očč-u* in example 23a.), we may conclude that the subject position of the imperfect clause is Case-marked. With this conclusion in hand, we can say that raising is impossible in examples like 23b. because the subject position of the embedded clause is assigned Case and the subject position of the matrix clause is also assigned Case and these two Case-marked positions cannot be related by raising because that would create a chain with two Case-marked positions.

This raises another question, of course: why do non-finite clausal structures in Amharic have Case-marked subject positions? We suggest that this fact may be related to the templatic morphology of the language. Suppose that Case is assigned through Subject/Verb agreement. In Halefom (1994), it is argued that the Amharic verbal derivation combines the consonants of a verbal root with a syllabic template that defines the aspectual class of the expression. If this syllabic template includes the syllabic base for the morphology of Subject/verb agreement, it follows that Case assignment is obligatory.

Notice that this account of the matter allows for raising in the passive construction under the standard assumption that passive morphology suppresses the expression of the normal external argument of the verb (i.e., the Actor) and prevents Case assignment to the internal argument of the verb (i.e., the Patient).

Thus we conclude that the only example of NP raising in Amharic is found in the passive construction. There are no examples of raising from embedded clauses because all Amharic clausal structures have Case-marked subject positions. We suggest that this is so because of the nature of Amharic verbal morphology.

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