“Prepositions” as Case Morphemes Inserted at PF in Amharic*

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1 INTRODUCTION

Empirical Focus: morphemes described as “prepositions” in Amharic (Ethiosemitic)

(1) a. kä-bet-u
    from-house-DEF
    ‘from the house’

b. bä-bisiklet
    by-bicycle
    ‘by bicycle’ (Ayalew 2006:76)

c. wädä sinima bet
    to cinema house
    ‘to the movies’ (Appleyard 1996:40)

d. lä-Girma
    to-Girma
    ‘to Girma’

The Puzzle: Amharic is a prototypical head-final language – it even has a separate set of postpositions.

• Are the prepositions some kind of typological anomaly?
• Or are they a somewhat different phenomenon that is masquerading as prepositions?

We argue for the latter interpretation, specifically, that the “prepositions” are best analyzed as semantic case markers inserted post-syntactically (at PF).

• This renders Amharic typologically typical.
• It also has the added benefit of accounting for the unusual distribution of the “prepositions” within DPs, e.g., their placement between the verb of a relative clause and its complement.

(2) sär-af[tʃæw-in  läämmitʃær里斯-u-t  särratän-otʃtʃ
    work-their-ACC  to-finish-3PL-DEF  worker-PL
    ‘to the workers who have finished their work’ (Leslau 1995:89)

The Puzzle in a Broader Perspective: case study in how to distinguish prepositions and semantic case markers; support for the idea that semantic case is a partially post-syntactic phenomenon (McFadden 2004)

Preview
Section 2: A Closer Look at the Puzzle
Section 3: Prepositions as Case Markers
Section 4: The Analysis of Semantic Case

2 A CLOSER LOOK AT THE PUZZLE

Amharic is a well-behaved head-final (OV) language (Greenberg 1966, Dryer 2007, etc.).

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• It has SOV word order and is rigidly verb final.

(3)  $\text{Almaz } \text{bet-u-n } \text{ayy-átʃʃ}$
    $\begin{array}{l}
    \text{Almaz } \text{house-DEF-ACC see-3FS} \\
    \text{‘Almaz saw the house.’}
    \end{array}$ $\text{S > O > V}$

• Lexical verbs precede auxiliaries.

(4)  $\text{bā-t’iŋt } \text{gize } \text{bā-māk’a } \text{bi'r } \text{yi-s'ʃ-u } \text{nābbār}$
    $\begin{array}{l}
    \text{in-ancient time with-reed pen 3PL-write-3PL AUX} \\
    \text{‘In ancient times, they wrote with reed pens.’ (Leslau 1995:316)}
    \end{array}$ $\text{V > Aux}$

• Embedded clauses precede main clauses

(5)  $\text{[innat-u } \text{ii-dā-mot-ātʃʃ]} \text{tinatinna sāmml-a}$
    $\begin{array}{l}
    \text{mother-his that-die-3FS yesterday hear-3MS} \\
    \text{‘He heard yesterday that his mother died.’ (Leslau 1995:743)}
    \end{array}$ $\text{Embedded > Root}$

• It has a sentence-final question particle ($\text{wāy }$; Leslau 1995:769)
• Genitivess precede nouns (Leslau 1995:191-192)
• Manner adverbs precede verbs (Leslau 1995:368)

It fits neatly with this picture that Amharic has postpositions.

(6)  $\text{mās’haf-u } [\text{t’arāp’p’eza-w } \text{sir}] \text{nāw}$
    $\begin{array}{l}
    \text{book-DEF table-DEF under is} \\
    \text{‘The book is under the table.’ (Leslau 1995:625)}
    \end{array}$

(7)  $\text{libs-otʃʃ} \text{[sat’in } \text{wiʃ’t]} \text{natʃʃfāw}$
    $\begin{array}{l}
    \text{clothes-PL box inside are} \\
    \text{‘The clothes are inside the box.’ (Ayalew 2006:81)}
    \end{array}$

• However, it also has prepositions, as we saw above.

(8)  $\text{Tom } [\text{lā-gubiŋŋit}] \text{[wādā } \text{ityop’p’iya] hed-ā}$
    $\begin{array}{l}
    \text{Tom for-visit to Ethiopia go-3MS} \\
    \text{‘Tom went to Ethiopia for a visit.’ (Ayalew 2006:79)}
    \end{array}$

Typologically, OV + prepositions is the rarest kind of mixed word order, found in only 10 of 1033 languages surveyed in WALS (Feature 95).

Moreover, those 10 languages are not typical OV languages (Dryer 2005), unlike Amharic.\footnote{The ten languages are Neo-Aramic, Tigre, Iraqw, Persian, Kurdish, Tajik, Tobelo, Sorbian, Pāri and Mangarrayi.}\footnote{Gloss abbreviations: 1 – first person; 2 – second person; 3 – third person, ACC – accusative, AUX – auxiliary, DEF – definite marker, F – feminine, INF – infinitive, M – masculine, NOM – nominative, PASS – passive, PL – plural, S – singular.}

• Two are OVS, one of the rarest word orders (9 out of 1228 languages; Feature 81)
• Six of them can place prepositional phrases after the verb (ungrammatical in Amharic).
In 9 out of 10, the genitive follows the noun at least optionally (ungrammatical in Amharic).
In 9 out of 10, at least one or more NP internal element (adjective, numeral, relative clause, genitive) can follow the noun (ungrammatical in Amharic).

Upshot: Amharic is apparently a rare language among rare languages.

Moreover: the mixed word order OV + prepositions is potentially problematic for theoretical approaches to mixed word order.

Postpositions in a VO language (38 of 1033 languages) can be accounted for relatively straightforwardly by leftward movement of DP within PP... but not an option for OV + prepositions.
Similarly, some interpretations of the Final-over-Final Constraint (Biberauer et al. 2007, etc) allow for head final PPs inside head initial VPs…
…but not for head initial PPs inside head final VPs (= Amharic!).

In short, the prepositions in Amharic are typologically anomalous and difficult to account for theoretically.

We propose instead:

(9) “Prepositions” are semantic case markers, marking nouns as standing in a specific semantic relation to the predicate (e.g., instrumental, locative, ablative, etc.).

The remainder of the talk: further evidence, and how it works!

3 Prepositions are Case Markers, Not Adpositions

The morphological realization of structural Case is fairly basic in Amharic (see e.g., Mark’s plenary talk!).

• Nominative is unmarked.
• Accusative is marked on definite/specific direct objects by the suffix/enclitic –n.³

(10) Almaz∅ bet-u-n ayy-äťʃʃ ( = (3))
    Almaz-NOM house-DEF-ACC see-3FS
    ‘Almaz saw the house.’

In this section, we compare the morphosyntactic properties of the “prepositions” to those of the accusative case marker and the postpositions.

In every respect, the “prepositions” pattern like the accusative case marker and not like the postpositions – a potentially surprising result if the prepositions are simple adpositions in the syntax.

Preview: three different classes of evidence

• morphophonology (independent word or clitic/affix?; see Zwicky 1985)
• morphosyntactic distribution
• availability of repetition/concord within the DP

³ Interestingly, dative marking displays the properties of both structural and semantic case. It has the distribution of a semantic case marker, but dative PPs can be indexed by object agreement.
3.1 Morphophonological Evidence

The accusative case marker is a suffix/enclitic.
- It is prosodically too small to be its own word (just a consonant) and never occurs in isolation.
- It can undergo morphophonological processes due to the properties of the noun, e.g., epenthesis.

(11) a. Girma-n  
    Girma-ACC
b. Almaz-in  
    Almaz-ACC

- It cannot scope over two conjoined DPs; it must be repeated on each conjunct (Miller 1992)

(12) a. gäbäre-w-in  
    farmer-DEF-ACC
    inna mämhir-u-n  
    teacher-DEF-ACC
    ‘the farmer and the teacher (acc.)’

    c. *gäbare-w-in  
    farmer-DEF
    inna mëmhir-u

Postpositions also occur immediately to the right of a noun, like the accusative case marker.

(13) mäs’haflu  
    book-DEF
    [t’äräp’p’ezalw  
    table-DEF
    sɨɨ ɨɨ  r]  
    under   is
    ‘The book is under the table.’ (Leslau 1995:625)

However, postpositions are morphophonologically independent from the noun -- they are full words.
- They are prosodically large, consisting of one or more heavy syllables (e.g., lay ‘upon’, at’āgab ‘near’, bāhwala ‘behind’).
- They do not trigger or undergo any morphophonological processes related to the noun.

Amharic avoids vowel hiatus within words -- one of the offending vowels is deleted.

(14) gwadäñña + atʃtʃaw  
    friend   their
    =   gwadännatʃtʃaw
    friend-their   (Appleyard 1996:24)

Vowel Deletion

However, deletion cannot occur when a V-final noun precedes a V-initial postposition.

(15) a. Addis Abäba  
    Addis Ababa
    at’āgab  
    near
b. *Addis Abäbat’āgab  
    near Addis Ababa

No Deletion

- A postposition can also scope over a conjoined DP.

(16) [t’äräp’p’ezalw  
    table-DEF
    inna alga-w ]  
    bed-DEF
    lay  
    ‘on the bed and the table’
• Postpositions can also be conjoined themselves.

(17) Almaz-in bet-u wist’-inna wif’t fj ayyä-hw-at
    Almaz-ACC house-DEF in-and out see-1S-3FS

How do prepositions compare? They are like the case marker!
• They are prosodically smaller than postpositions – at most two light syllables (wäda), the majority one light syllable or less (kä, bä, ī)
• They trigger morphophonological processes, including vowel deletion

(18) Vowel Deletion
    lä + antä = lantä
    to you (m.s.) (Leslau 1995:597)

(19) Demonstrative Allomorphy
    a. yih bet           b. bā-zzih bet
    this house           in-this house (Appleyard 1996:33-34)

• They cannot scope over conjoined DPs, and must repeat on each conjunct

(20) a. kā-gābāre-w inna kā-māmhir-u b. * kā-[gābāre-w inna māmhir-u]
    from-farmer-DEF and from-farmer-DEF
    ‘from the farmer and the teacher’

• They cannot be conjoined themselves

(21) *wäda-nna kā-bet-u hed-ku
    to-and from-house-DEF go-1S
    Intended: I went to and from the house. (Tremblay and Kabbaj 1990:172)

Conclusion: “Prepositions” are exactly like case markers wrt morphophonology and quite different from postpositions.

3.2 Distributional Evidence

Postpositions have a very straightforward distribution.
• They always appear to the right of the noun (which is the last element in the DP).

(22) mās’haf-u [t’ārāp’p’ezə-w sír] nāw
    book-DEF table-DEF under is
    ‘The book is under the table.’ (Leslau 1995:625)

(23) mās’haf-u [ti’llik’-u t’ārāp’p’ezə sír] nāw
    book-DEF big-DEF table under is
    ‘The book is under the big table.’
On the noun if the noun is the only element in DP

(25) a. bet-u-n ‘house-DEF-ACC’ ‘the house.ACC’
    b. kä-bet-u ‘from-house-DEF’ ‘from the house’

On the adjective if there is one

(26) a. tillik'-u-n bet big-DEF-ACC house from-big-DEF house
    ‘the house.ACC’ ‘from the big house’

On the finite verbal complex in the relative clause

(27) k‘äyy mäkina yä-gäzza-w-ın astämari red car C-buy-DEF-ACC teacher
    ‘the teacher who bought a red car’

(28) k‘äyy mäkina lā-gäzza-w astämari red car for-buy-DEF teacher
    ‘for the teacher who bought a red car’

- There is a deletion operation in Amharic that deletes the second element in a Prep-
  Complementizer or Prep-Prep sequence: lä-yä-gäzza-w → lä-gäzza-w

On a possessor

(29) yä-Girma-n wändimm of-Girma-ACC brother ‘Girma’s brother.ACC’

(30) lā-Girma wändimm to-Girma brother ‘to Girma’s brother’

- Haplology occurs again: lā-yä-Girma → lā-Girma
• On a verbal noun

(31) agär-i-h mä-k’rät-u-n bì-tì-wädd…
    country-your INF-stay-DEF-ACC if-2S-want…
    ‘If you want to stay in your country…’ (Leslau 1995:395)

(32) mist-u-n bä-mä-gdäl tä-kässä-sä
    wife-his-ACC against-INF-kill PASS-acuse-3MS
    ‘He was accused of murdering his wife.’ (Leslau 1995:400)

Omitted for purposes of space (and for preventing data overload), but also the same distribution…
• Sequences of adjectives
• Stacked relative clauses
• Relative clause + adjective sequences
• Conjoined relative clauses
• Conjoined adjectives

Conclusion: The “prepositions” have the same (remarkably intricate!) distribution within DP as the accusative case marker. They have much less distributional similarity with postpositions.

3.3 Availability of Repetition/Concord

• Accusative case markers can optionally be repeated on the second adjective in a DP, and so can prepositions (Tremblay and Kabbaj 1990).

(33) a. tinni-f-u-n k’onjo-w(-in) bet b. kä-tinni-f-u (kä-)k’onjo-w bet
    small-DEF-ACC pretty-DEF(-ACC) house from-small-DEF (from-)pretty-DEF house
    ‘the small, pretty house. ACC’ ‘from the small, pretty house’

  o In our analysis of the prepositions as case markers, this is simply two instances of the same process: case concord (cf. Nikanne 1993 on semantic case in Finnish).

• Postpositions cannot be repeated.

(34) a. *tinni-f-u wist’ k’onjo-w bet wist’
    small-DEF inside pretty-DEF house inside
    Intended meaning: ‘inside the small, pretty house’

  b. *tinni-f-u wist’ k’onjo-w wist’ bet wist’
    small-DEF inside pretty-DEF inside house inside

  c. *tinni-f-u wist’ k’onjo-w wist’ bet

Conclusion: Once again, the prepositions pattern like case markers and the postpositions do not.
Section Conclusion:
- With respect to their morphophonology, their complex morphosyntactic distribution and their ability to participate in concord, prepositions behave exactly like the accusative case marker.
- In all these same respects, prepositions differ from postpositions.
- We conclude that the prepositions are best analyzed as case markers, and not adpositions.

4 The Analysis of Semantic Case

4.1 The Basics of the Analysis

Now that it is (we hope) clear that the “prepositions” are case markers, the question naturally arises…

(35) How is semantic case represented grammatically?


(36) \[ KP \]

\[ kā-Girma \] ‘from Girma’

\[ K \quad \text{DP} \]

\[ kā- \quad \text{Girma} \]

- Good: \( kā- \) is represented in the syntax, so that it can be interpreted semantically at LF.
- Not Good: this approach moves the problem of disharmonic word order in Amharic to a different category.
  - It is just as problematic to have head initial KPs in an otherwise head final language as to have head initial PPs.

A Better Answer to (35):
- In the syntax, there is a null P (meaning e.g., ‘from’) that governs the DP (Emonds 1985, 1987, Guerssel 1992, Nikanne 1993, McFadden 2004).

(37) Syntax:

\[ PP \]

\[ \text{DP} \quad P \]

\[ Girma \quad \emptyset \]

[+ABLATIVE]

  - P[+ABLATIVE] triggers the insertion of \( kā- \).

(38) PF: \[ [kā-Girma] \]
Fundamental Advantages

- The word order problem is solved by saying that the null P is a postposition, like all overt P’s in the language.
- The information that semantic case expresses is still present in the syntax, so that it can be interpreted at LF.
- Having a null P in the syntax is supported by the fact that DPs with semantic case markers (“prepositions”) have the same syntactic distribution as DPs with postpositions (cf. McFadden 2004).
  - This is why the semantic case markers have been analyzed as prepositions within the Amharic literature!

(39)  
\[ \text{Almaz [bet wist’] gäbb-atfj} \]  
\[ \text{Almaz house in enter-3FS} \]  
\'Almaz went inside the house.’

\[ \text{b. Almaz [bä-bet] gäbb-atfj} \]  
\[ \text{Almaz via-house enter-3FS} \]  
\'Almaz entered via the house’

- Further confirmation for this approach comes from the complicated distribution of the case markers, e.g., attached within a relative clause between the verb and its complements.

(40)  
\[ \text{k'äyy mäkina lā-gäzza-w astämari} \]  
\[ \text{red car for-buy-DEF teacher} \]  
\'for the teacher who bought a red car’

- This order cannot be derived by any natural combination of syntactic movements: any such derivation would involve extracting elements out of a relative clause modifier, a strong island.
- This order can be derived using a post-syntactic operation – the question to be explored now is how exactly.

4.2 Insertion of Case Markers Post-Syntactically

Two Starting Assumptions

- Morphological operations occur post-syntactically on the PF branch (Distributed Morphology)

(41)

\[ \text{Morphology} \rightarrow \text{Syntax} \rightarrow \text{PF} \rightarrow \text{LF} \]

- Case morphemes are inserted post-syntactically (McFadden 2004, Marantz 1991)

Question: how exactly does the post-syntactic insertion of case markers happen in Amharic?

(42)  
The case marker attaches to the highest full word (stem+affixes/clitics) in the DP.
  - Full word = Morphological Word (Embick and Noyer 2001; potentially complex head not dominated by further head projection) – M-Word henceforth
  - Highest defined in terms of c-command
(43) **Insertion Rule (F = case marker, X = DP)**
If feature F is to be inserted within constituent X, then attach F to the M-Word Z such that Z c-
commands all the other M-Words in X.\(^4\)

How does this cover the data?

When there is a single M-Word in the DP, the case marker trivially attaches to that M-Word.

(44) kä-[bet-u]\_MWd
from-house-DEF
‘from the house’

When there is more than one M-Word, the preposition attaches to the highest M-Word.

- As in the adjective case, assuming that AP is higher than NP (Cinque 1994).

(45) kä-[tillik]\_MWd bet
from-big house
from a big house

(46)
```
    DP
     D    FP
      AP    F
          Highest M-Word → tillik'
                         F    NP
                              bet
```

- **Prediction:** the case marker will attach obligatorily to the leftmost (=highest) adjective in a sequence of adjectives. True!

(47) kä-tinnif-u (kä-)[onjo-w] bet
from-small-DEF (from-)[pretty-DEF house
‘from the small, pretty house’

- Also works for DPs with possessors, assuming uncontroversially that the possessor is higher than the possessum.

(48) lā-[Girma]\_MWd wändimm
to-Girma brother
‘to Girma’s brother’

\(^4\) It is crucial in this approach that morphological operations apply cyclically from the bottom up, so that the M-Words are formed (‘put together’) by the time the case marker is inserted. This may raise some interesting questions about cyclicity and the timing of the insertion of the case marker relative to linearization. Feel free to bring this up in the question period!
The insertion rule in (43) is also able to cover the more unusual case where the preposition does not attach to
the leftmost M-Word (but still the highest), as in the verbal noun examples.

\[(49)\]
\[
\begin{array}{lllll}
\text{mistu} & \text{n} & \text{bä} & \text{[mä-gdäl]} & \text{MWd} \\
\text{wife-his-ACC} & \text{against-INF-kill} & \text{PASS-accuse-3MS} \\
\text{'He was accused of murdering his wife.' (Leslau 1995:400)}
\end{array}
\]

- The verb raises to combine with head-final nominalizer mä-.
- The resulting M-Word (complex head mä-gdäl) is the highest M-Word and is what the preposition
  attaches to.

\[(50)\]
\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{nP} \\
\text{VP} \\
\text{DP}
\end{array} \quad \leftrightarrow \quad \text{Highest M-Word}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{mistun} \\
\text{mä-} \\
\text{gdal}
\end{array}
\]

So far, so good!

Relative Clause Refinement: in relative clauses in Amharic, we assume that the verb moves to C to combine
with the complementizer.\(^5\)

\[(51)\]
\[
\text{käyy mäkina yä-gäzza astämari} \\
\text{red car C-buy teacher} \\
\text{'a teacher who bought a red car'}
\]

\[(52)\]
\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{CP} \\
\text{TP} \\
\ldots \text{tv} \ldots \\
\text{C} \\
\text{C} \\
\text{V}
\end{array} \quad \leftrightarrow \quad \text{V attached to C in relative clause}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{yä-} \quad \text{gäzza}
\end{array}
\]

The case marker attaches to the resulting M-Word yä-gäzza, with deletion of yä-.

\[(53)\]
\[
\text{käyy mäkina lä-gäzza astämari} \\
\text{red car for-buy teacher} \\
\text{‘for a teacher who bought a red car’}
\]

But, the M-Word yä-gäzza (C+V) does not c-command the M-Word astämari ‘teacher’ (N) – it's too far buried
within the relative clause.

We assume that the relative clause asymmetrically c-commands the NP (similar to how APs do), but then
astämari ‘teacher’ also does not c-command yä-gäzza C+V …

- …therefore, there is no highest M-Word in DPs like (52)!

\(^5\) There is also some evidence from ellipsis that the verb raises to a functional projection higher than the subject. Feel
free to ask about this.
How is this problem handled? what seems to be happening is…

- the insertion rule finds the highest phrase that contains an M-Word in the DP
- and then attaches the case marker to the highest M-Word in that phrase

In (53), CP is the highest phrase (we assume it c-commands NP), and the highest M-Word within CP is yä-gäzza.

(54) Insertion Rule, Augmented from (43) (F = case marker, X = DP)

a. If feature F is to be inserted within constituent X, then attach F to the M-Word Z such that Z c-commands the other M-Words.
b. If there is no asymmetric c-command relationship between the M-Words in X, find the highest phrase YP in X. Attach F to the M-Word Z within YP such that Z c-commands the other M-Words in YP.

Prediction: if any other head moves to C, the preposition will still attach to M-Word in C (since C is the highest M-Word within relative clause). Borne out for auxiliaries!

(55) lidiʒ-oṭʃ-u-n bāhāyl yī-gār bānābbār-ā-w astāmari
child-PL-DEF-ACC severely 3MS-beat C-AUX-3MS-DEF teacher
‘the teacher who used to beat the children severely’ (Leslau 1995:87)

(56) t’äftāw sīlā-nābbār-u sōst nāgā-oṭʃıf
lost about-were-3PL. three thing-PL
‘about three things that were lost’ (Leslau 1995:90)

The analysis covers the data and makes correct predictions, but how can it be connected to current theories of post-syntactic insertion?

The Nature of Insertion: Morphemes and features inserted post-syntactically are known as dissociated or ornamental (Embick 1997, 1998; McFadden 2004; Embick and Noyer 2007, inter alia).

The mechanisms for insertion remain under-researched -- generally, the morpheme or feature is inserted locally to the node that has triggered insertion…

- either adjoined to that node, resulting in head adjunction (Embick 1998, Embick and Noyer 2007)
- or as a sister to that node, resulting in a new projection above of the triggered node (McFadden 2004)

However, in Amharic, it is not helpful to insert the case marker local to the triggering node (= null P).

- It will be too high in the structure to appear e.g., within a relative clause.
- (Does it undergo some kind of PF movement from a high position? Not of a recognizable kind, although suggestions gladly taken.)

Instead, it seems most natural to describe the case marker as inserted directly by the rule above: attached to the highest M-Word in the DP.

- Makes intuitive sense: must put case marker in DP somewhere, stick it on highest complete morphological unit

How general is this rule?

- Also applies to accusative case markers in Amharic, which have the same distribution as the semantic case markers
• Perhaps case markers across languages are generally inserted by some type of rule that determines where they attach in the DP (as opposed to being inserted on/near a triggering head)…
• …but the details of the rule almost assuredly vary, pending further study of the morphosyntax of case markers cross-linguistically!

**Upshot:** if case markers are inserted post-syntactically, their complicated distribution can be neatly captured by the PF rule in (54)…
• …even if the rule is an unconventional approach to feature insertion.

**General Takeaway:** semantic case = null P in the syntax, case marker inserted post-syntactically by rule in (54)

### 5 Conclusion

We have argued that so-called “prepositions” in Amharic are in fact semantic case markers. This re-analysis…
• solves severe word order problems in the language
• explains the affinity between “prepositions” and case markers (and the lack of affinity between “prepositions” and postpositions)
• provides a way to understand the complicated distribution of the “prepositions” using a PF insertion rule

**Extensions:**
• The role of cyclicity in inserting the case markers (do phases play a role? how does this work connect to Kramer 2009?)
• The relationship between null and overt P’s in Amharic (postpositions can co-occur with “prepositions”)
• The morphosyntax of semantic case markers in other Ethiosemitic languages, genetically related languages (Berber: Guerssel 1992) and beyond

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