1 Introduction

Empirical Focus: a particular morpheme that attaches to verbs in Amharic (Ethiosemitic; SOV)
- This morpheme co-varies in form with the phi-features of an internal argument of the verb
- Referred to henceforth as the object marker

(1) Almaz doro wát'-u-n bäll-atʃf･4w
    Almaz chicken stew-DEF-ACC eat.PF-3FS.S-3MS.O
    Almaz ate chicken stew.¹

(2) Aster doro-wa-n arräd-átʃf･at
    Aster chicken-DEF.F-ACC butcher.PF-3FS.S-3FS.O
    Aster butchered the hen. (Yabe 2001:2)

The Puzzle: is the complicated behavior of object markers best accounted for by analyzing them as…
- the reflex of object agreement (realization of a bundle of phi-features on some functional head) or as…
- doubled clitics (pronoun-like morphemes that may move to be close to the verb)?

Goals:
- to argue that object markers are best analyzed as doubled clitics (cf. Mullen 1986, Yabe 2001)
- along the way: to build up a substantial body of empirical generalizations about the object marker

The Puzzle in a Broader Perspective: a case study in how to distinguish clitic doubling from agreement in
general using multiple diagnostics (counterpart to recent work on the diagnostics themselves; cf. Preminger 2009).

2 Background

What is the difference between ‘agreement’ and ‘clitic doubling’?
- In much descriptive literature, agreement is used as a cover term for both (see e.g., discussion in Woolford 2003)

- Focus today: there are distinct theories of agreement and of clitic doubling that make falsifiable (and
different!) predictions about their behavior

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Gloss abbreviations: 1 - first person, 2 - second person, 3 - third person, ACC - accusative case, DEF - definite marker, F - feminine, IMPF - imperfect, M - masculine, O - object marker, PF - perfect, S - subject agreement, Examples without any attributed source are from my own fieldwork.
2.1 Theories of Agreement and Clitic Doubling

Theory of Agreement: Minimalist Agree


- A functional head with unvalued phi-features (T for subject agreement, v for object agreement; the ‘probe’) searches downwards into its c-command domain for a DP with valued phi-features (the ‘goal’).

(3)  
\[ v [\_\varphi] \rightarrow v [\text{val} \varphi] \]

- When the probe finds a DP with valued phi-features, they enter into the Agree relation.
- The DP values the phi-features on the probe, and the probe assigns Case to the DP (nominative for T, accusative for v).
- The valued phi-features on the functional head are realized at PF as the agreement marker (cf. the proposals in Legate 2008).

Theory of Clitic Doubling

- It is difficult to designate a currently conventional analysis of the phenomenon.
  - The details of implementation vary (e.g., whether the clitic is moved or base-generated, whether the clitic heads its own projection)

- For present purposes, it is sufficient to define clitic doubling as the attachment of some kind of pronoun-like head to the verbal complex whose features co-vary with those of a non-subject argument.

- Many analyses of clitic doubling capture the pronoun-like behavior of the clitic by saying the clitics are Determiners (D heads) that move to a position close to the verb.
  - Aka the ‘big DP’ hypothesis (Torrego 1988, Uriagereka 1995; see also Anagnostopoulou 2004:Ch.4 for a variant)

- Fundamental differences from agreement
  - The clitic is a D, not a bundle of phi-features on a functional head
  - Clitic doubling does not involve the valuation of phi-features
  - Clitic doubling is not necessarily associated with Case assignment

These differences will suffice to distinguish clitic doubling from agreement in Amharic.

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2 The agreement morpheme may be affixed or cliticized to its host. Note, then, that agreement morphemes may be clitics in the morphophonological sense, viz. dependent elements that seem less dependent than affixes but more dependent than ‘words.’ However, agreement morphemes are distinct from doubled clitics which come about through a very different process.
2.2 Previous Work on the Amharic Object Marker

  - In most cases, though, the term ‘agreement’ seems to be being used in its cover term sense and without any particular theoretical commitment.
- Mullen 1986 and Yabe 2001 both argue that the object markers are doubled clitics, but their arguments do not rely on the falsifiable predictions of a theory-based approach.\(^3\)
  - Today: I unpack and strengthen their arguments in addition to developing new reasons to treat the object markers as doubled clitics.

3 Evidence

Preview: three different types of evidence that the object marker is not agreement:
- morphophonology
- interaction with Case
- distribution

3.1 Morphophonological Evidence

Agreement morphemes are the realization of phi-features on functional heads.
- The realization of those phi-features may thus vary depending on other features that the functional head itself has e.g., a past tense feature on T.

It is of course quite common for subject agreement morphemes to vary formally depending on tense cross-linguistically.
- Even in a very impoverished agreement system like English, subject agreement is null in the past tense, but -s in the 3\(^{rd}\) person singular present tense.\(^4\)

In Amharic, subject agreement varies depending on aspect (perfect or imperfect), so it is plausible that Asp bears the phi-features involved in subject agreement.

(4) | Perfect | Imperfect |
--- | --- | --- |
| a. säbbär-ku | i-säbr |
| break.PF-1S | 1S-break.IMPF |
| b. säbbär-ih | ti-säbr |
| break.PF-2MS | 2MS-break.IMPF |
| c. säbbär-ä | yi-säbr |
| break.PF-3MS | 3MS-break.IMPF |

\(^3\) See also Halefom 1994 where the object markers are classified as clitics but there is no discussion of doubling per se.
\(^4\) Technically, the T and the Agr morphemes have fused into a single node that is then realized as e.g., -s or \(\emptyset\) depending on the tense feature. See Halle 1997.
Object Markers: do Amharic object markers vary in this way?  No!

- The form of the object marker is completely invariant (Mullen 1986) across all verb forms.
  - Even though the object marker is part of the same complex head as subject agreement…

(5)  Almaz doro wät'-u-n bäll-atório
      Almaz chicken stew-DEF-ACC eat.PF-3FS.S-3MS.O
      Almaz ate chicken stew.

  … it does not vary based on aspect (or any other component of that complex head).

The object marker varies in form only according to the phi-features of the argument with which it is associated.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 1: Object Marker Paradigm</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1st Person</td>
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<td>2nd Person</td>
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<td>3rd Person</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd person polite</td>
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<td>3rd person polite</td>
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Object Markers as D’s: the object marker thus seems more akin to pronominals (i.e., D heads; Postal 1969) than a bundle of phi features on a verbal functional head.

- Predicted by a clitic doubling analysis where the clitic is a D head

Object markers are also like D’s in that they are formally similar to definite determiners.

(6)  -w 3rd masculine singular object marker
      -h/-w  masculine singular definite determiner

  - See similar parallels in Uriagereka 1995 for Romance; Anagnostopoulou 2004:212 for Greek.

The object marker also shares parts of its paradigm with the paradigm for pronominal possessors (my, ber, our, etc; Yabe 2001).

(7)  a. bet-e  ‘house-my’  my house
    b. bák’lo-h  ‘mule-your,M’  your mule
    c. tämari-yatóʃinté  ‘student-our’  our student  (Leslau 1995:50ff.)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 2: Pronominal Possessor Paradigm</th>
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<tr>
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The object marker and the pronominal possessor are formally identical for five out of eight slots of their respective paradigms (indicated by graying out).

Moreover, the 3MS forms, while not identical, are strikingly similar.

If the pronominal possessors are analyzed as D heads (cf. Lyons 1986, Giorgi and Longobardi 1991), then the syncretism here is easily explained.

- Both pronominal possessors and object markers would be the realization of a D with phi-features.\(^5\)

For the Sake of Completeness: the object markers do not formally resemble the subject agreement morphemes.

- For example, the object marker and the imperfect agreement morphemes are clearly distinct.

\[\text{Table 3: Object Marker vs. Imperfect Subject Agreement} \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Singular Object Marker</th>
<th>Singular Imperfect Subject Agreement</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1(^{st}) Person</td>
<td>-ññ</td>
<td>i-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2(^{nd}) Person</td>
<td>-h (masc.)</td>
<td>-f (fem.) tı- (masc.) ti...i (fem.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3(^{rd}) Person</td>
<td>-w, -t after u or o (masc.)</td>
<td>-at (fem.) yi- (masc.), ti- (fem.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reinforces the idea that the object marker is more closely formally connected to pronouns and determiners than other agreement morphemes.

Conclusions:

- The morphophonological form of the object marker does not vary with anything at all except the phi-features of the argument with which it is associated.
  
  = evidence that the object marker is not agreement

- The object marker is most similar in terms of morphophonology to determiners and pronominal possessors
  
  = evidence that object marker is a doubled clitic, esp. under the ‘big DP’ hypothesis.

\[\text{3.2 Case} \]

Agreement and Case in Minimalism: a tight relationship

- When \(v\) enters into an Agree relation with a DP, it necessarily values the Case feature on the DP as accusative.

\[\begin{align*}
  vP & \\
  v \quad [\quad \varphi \quad] & \\
  VP \quad \rightarrow \quad & \\
  V \quad \left[\quad val \varphi \quad\right] \quad \rightarrow \quad & \\
  vP \quad [\quad val \varphi \quad] \quad VP \quad \rightarrow \quad & \\
  V \quad \left[\quad val \varphi \quad\right] \quad \rightarrow \quad & \\
  \text{DP} \quad \left[\quad val \varphi \quad\right] \quad \text{AGREE} \quad \rightarrow \quad & \\
  \text{DP} \quad [\quad ACC \text{ Case}\quad] \quad \rightarrow \quad & 
\end{align*}\]

\[^5\text{This idea can be straightforwardly fleshed out under the theory of Distributed Morphology (Halle and Marantz 1993; more specifically, Late Insertion and the Subset Principle). Roughly, there would be a single (underspecified) morphophonological realization of the feature bundle [D, phi-features] for all cells of the paradigm where the possessor and the object marker are identical. Feel free to ask about the details of this in the question period.}\]
This theory leads to three falsifiable predictions, all of which are not borne out in Amharic.

**First Two Predictions:** accusative case is required in order to participate in object agreement

(9) Prediction 1: Every DP that participates in object agreement will receive accusative Case.
Prediction 2: Any DP that does not receive accusative Case cannot participate in object agreement.

Both of the predictions are falsified by the fact that non-direct objects can be referenced by the object marker (cf. Demeke 2003: Ch.3).

(10) Aster doro-wa-n lā-Girma sārt’-ātʃ[ʃ]-ιw
Aster cHicken-DEF,F-ACC to-Girma give.PF-3FS.S-3MS.O
Aster gave the hen to Girma. (Yabe 2001:2)

(11) ine kā-set́iyya-wa and mās’haf gāzza-hw-at
I from-woman-DEF,F a book buy.PF-1S.S-3FS.O
I bought a book from the woman. (Mullen 1986:260)

Similar examples can be constructed with the objects of the predicates *wait for*, *accept from*, *conceal from*, *buy from*, *steal from*, *come out of*, *flow out of*, and *come to* (Leslau 1995:416–417, Cohen 1970:145).

*PPs which are internal arguments of the predicate can be referenced by the object marker, regardless of whether they receive accusative case*

= evidence that the object marker is not agreement (cf. Woolford 2003 on how PPs don’t participate in agreement).

**Prediction 3:** in order to be assigned accusative Case, a direct object must enter into an Agree relation with $v$ and thus be referenced by an object marker.

This prediction is falsified by three facts (*contra* Yabe 2007).

- Fact 1: object markers are largely optional.

(12) Almaz bet-u-n ayy-ātʃ[ʃ]
Almaz house-DEF-ACC see.PF-3FS.S
Almaz saw the house.

- Fact 2: an accusative case-marked direct object is grammatical even when the verb has an object marker for a different argument.

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6 I am setting aside here the use of object markers after the preposition-like verbal markers -bb- and -ll- to represent malefactives and benefactives, respectively (among other types of arguments). See the thorough description in Leslau 1995:424ff and discussion in Yabe 2007.

7 In many analyses of Romance clitic doubling, doubled clitics for datives are treated differently than doubled clitics for direct objects (see e.g., Uriagereka 1995). This is supported by the fact that dative and direct object clitics are two formally distinct series in most Romance languages. However, there is no formal distinction in Amharic (there is just one object marker series), and some accounts of clitic doubling do conflate indirect object and direct object clitics (see e.g., Bleam 1999, Sportiche 1996). Even if the datives and other non-direct objects are discarded though, the agreement analysis still makes incorrect predictions.
Aster gave the hen to Girma. (Yabe 2001:2)

- Fact 3: in certain cases, it is **ungrammatical** to have an object marker reference an argument that has accusative case.

**Conclusion**: accusative case is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for being referenced by an object marker.

- There is no such tight connection between doubled clitics and accusative Case/case in the account of clitic doubling sketched above, so there is no problem with these facts.

### 3.3 Distribution

The distribution of the object marker in Amharic is very similar to the distribution of doubled clitics in other languages (Mullen 1986, Yabe 2001). The object marker is...

- generally optional (see above)
- triggers an (as yet) poorly-understood semantic effect or some kind of emphasis on the argument which it references or some tighter connection between them (Haile 1970; see also Demeke 2003)
- licensed only for definite and/or specific arguments (Yabe 2001; Haile 1970)

Aster butchered a chicken. (Yabe 2001:3)

- obligatory when the direct object has been pro dropped

This pattern of facts is very similar to one of the most well-known cases of clitic doubling: River Plate Spanish (see e.g., Jaeggli 1982), where clitic doubling is...

- optional for full DP direct objects
- triggers a poorly-understood semantic effect of “closeness” between the verb and the object
- obligatory for dropped pronominal objects
- conditioned by the specificity of the object

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8 There are at least two other constructions in which object marking is obligatory in Amharic: possessive sentences (*Almaz bar-3FS.O a car*) and experiencer predicates (*Almaz is-tired.3FS.O*). The possessive sentences are particularly interesting given the connections between possessive DPs and clitic doubled DPs (see fn. 4). See Yabe 2002ab and Ahland 2009 for discussion and description.
(17) **River Plate Spanish**

a. (Lo) vimos a Guille  
   (3MS) saw Guille  
   We saw Guille. (Jaeggli 1982:14)

b. *(Lo) vi  
   3MS saw  
   I saw him. (Jaeggli 1982:14)

In the interest of analyzing empirically similar phenomena in a similar way, this is clearly evidence in favor of the object marker being a doubled clitic.

It is clear from large-scale typological studies like Corbett (2006) that agreement as a phenomenon does not share this behavior.

- Agreement is not canonically optional (Corbett 2006:14-15)
- Agreement does not canonically have any semantic effects (Corbett 2006:26-27)
- Agreement is not canonically conditioned by any feature of the controller of the agreement (Corbett 2006:26)

Nevertheless, there are exceptions to the canonical behavior noted in the Corbett, e.g.

- agreement can be conditioned by definiteness/specificity (Rural Palestinian Arabic: 200-201)
- agreement can be associated with information structure (Tsez:197-199)
- agreement is optional (Ngan’gityemerri: 14-15)\(^9\)

It is not impossible that Amharic object markers would be a typologically unusual sort of agreement, but the chance of all of these non-canonical properties occurring at once in the same language seems low.

**Gaining Precision:** An even more precise argument can be made using part of the same set of facts by appealing to a diagnostic developed by Preminger (2009).

(18) **Preminger’s Diagnostic**

Given a scenario where the relation R between a morpheme M and the corresponding full noun phrase X is broken -- but the result is still a grammatical utterance -- the proposed diagnostic supplies a conclusion about R as follows:

a. M shows up with default phi-features (rather than the features of X) → R is Agree
b. M disappears entirely → R is clitic doubling

The diagnostic begins by setting up a scenario where the agreement or clitic doubling relation is broken.

- This occurs if the morpheme and its corresponding full noun are not in a local enough relationship (e.g., another DP intervenes between them; aka defective intervention: Chomsky 2000, 2001)

- In some languages, this causes the morpheme in question to surface in default form (Icelandic) = agreement.
  - The unvalued phi-features are given a default value since they cannot be valued through Agree.
In other languages, the morpheme in question simply does not appear in the structure (Basque) = clitic doubling.
  - Instead of there being phi-features left stranded, there is simply no generation of a clitic

Back to Amharic: It is difficult to import Preminger's diagnostic wholesale into Amharic since the locality conditions on object markers are still under investigation.

However, in Amharic, the relation between the object marker and the DP it refers to is only capable of being established if the DP is definite/specific.

(19) *Almaț lam ayy-ātʃ [-(*at)]
    Almaț cow see.PF-3FS.[(*-3FS.O)]
    Almaț saw a cow.

The question now becomes: how can (19) be repaired?
  - If a default object marker is grammatical, then object markers are object agreement.
  - If the absence of an object marker is grammatical, then the object marker is clitic doubling.

Results: a default object marker (third person masculine singular) is ungrammatical.

(20) Almaț lam ayy-ātʃ [-(*iwa)]
    Almaț cow see.PF-3FS.[(*3MS.O)]
    Almaț saw a cow.

Leaving out the object marker entirely, though, is perfectly grammatical.

(21) Almaț lam ayy-ātʃ
    Almaț cow see.PF-3FS.S
    Almaț saw a cow.

Thus, the object marker is a doubled clitic by Preminger's diagnostic, and not the reflex of an Agree relation.

An Important Detail: default agreement is not null in Amharic (otherwise we could not tell whether there was default agreement in (21)).

Evidence from infinitival subjects:

(22) wiha mā-k'or'tāb Almaż-in dāss yi-l-at- all water INF-save Almaż-ACC happy 3MS.S-make-3FS.O AUX.3MS.S
    Saving water makes Almaż happy

Conclusions:
  - The distribution of the object marker is very similar to the distribution of doubled clitics in River Plate Spanish.
    = evidence for object markers being doubled clitics
  - This result can be strengthened using a diagnostic developed in Preminger 2009 and according to this diagnostic, Amharic object markers are in fact doubled clitics.
4 Conclusion

I have argued that object markers in Amharic are doubled clitics.

- Used (mostly) arguments based on the different predictions of a theory of agreement and a theory of clitic doubling
- Considered evidence from
  - the morphophonological form of the object marker
  - the interaction (or rather, lack of interaction) of the object marker with Case
  - the distribution of the object marker
- Amharic as a test case for distinguishing agreement and clitic doubling

Empirical Extensions:
- possessors and experiencer predicates (obligatory object markers)
- other Ethio-Semitic languages (Chaha: Banksira 2000)
- object markers in Bantu languages (see e.g., Riedel 2009)

Theoretical Extensions:
- How exactly should clitic doubling in Amharic be analyzed?
- Can Amharic help resolve some of the debates in the field about clitic doubling?

References
Corbett, Greville. 2006. Agreement. Cambridge: CUP.


Yabe, Tomoyuki. 2007. The morphosyntax of complex verbal expressions in the Horn of Africa. Doctoral dissertation, CUNY.
