

Object Markers Without Reference in Amharic

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Abstract

Amharic exhibits an unusual phenomenon - object marking on intransitive verbs - which triggers a number of seemingly disparate semantic effects, unrelated to object marking. I characterize these effects, and discuss the possibility of an underlying modal semantics which unifies the majority of usages.

1 Object Markers in Odd Places

This paper aims to document and understand the behaviour of one of Amharic's more idiosyncratic verbal constructions, in which a 3rd person object marker affixes to an *intransitive* verb:

- | | | | | | |
|-----|----|---|-----|----|--|
| (1) | a. | Context: A child left home without his father's permission. | (2) | a. | yimät'atal |
| | b. | yimät'al | | b. | yi- mät'- at- |
| | c. | yi- mät'- al | | | FUT.SUBJ.3MS return OBJ.3FS |
| | | FUT.SUBJ.3MS return- FUT | | | al |
| | | He will return. | | c. | "He is going to return (and when he does, so help him!)" |

Amharic, like other Semitic languages (Arad 2006) exhibits a number of valency shifting operations. For example, templatic morphology can make verbs causative (mämtat → mamtat; *eat* → *feed*).

However, while the bolded morpheme in (2) is an object marker with respect to its morphological and phonological characteristics, appearing in the same part of intransitive verbs as object markers do on transitive verbs, there is no object to which it refers.

(2) provides an example of the non-referential use of the morpheme *at*: it affixes to an intransitive verb, and does not refer to any argument in the sentence. For this reason, we refer to such morphemes as Object Markers Without Reference (OMWR).

OMWRs appear in conjunction with, and acts as indicators of, a variety of speech acts. The goal of this paper is to characterize the semantics and pragmatics of OMWR. We first review the facts regarding the syntactic and morphological distribution of intransitive object marking (section 2.1), before discussing its semantics and the conditions in which it is used.

2 The Data

The data in this paper was obtained by elicitation with six native Amharic speakers, with ages ranging from 20 to 60, of which four were male and two female.

Typically, Amharic object markers are infixed to the matrix verb, and agree in number (singular, plural), person (1st, 2nd, 3rd) and gender (masculine or feminine) with the object to which they refer. Amharic gender is neither entirelyly grammatical nor entirelyly semantic (Kramer 2014b). It is indicated by the morphology of the definite determiner (masculine *u* and feminine *wa*). If a noun has a referent of unknown gender or is without natural gender then it takes a masculine determiner, except for a set of around 30 nouns which are default feminine. Otherwise, gender is determined semantically, by the nature of the referent.

An example of Amharic object marking is as follows:

- (3) a. yimätawal
 b. yi- mät- aw- al
 FUT.SUBJ.3MS hit OBJ.3MS FUT
 c. “He will hit him.”
- (4) a. yimätatal
 b. yi- mät- at- al
 FUT.SUBJ.3MS hit OBJ.3FS FUT
 c. “He will hit her.”

(Kramer 2011) notes:

“Object markers are only licensed for definite and/or specific arguments, although the exact generalization here is still under investigation (Yabe 2001; see Haile 1970 again for relevant discussion). When present, it triggers a poorly-understood semantic effect of focus or some kind of emphasis on the argument which it references (Haile 1970; see also Demeke 2003).”

This semantic effect of emphasis is typical of clitic doubling more generally (Gutiérrez-Rexach 1999; Leonetti 2008), which is a likely candidate for the syntactic status of the Amharic object marker (Kramer 2011).

By contrast to the standard use of object markers, the key feature of OMWR is the appearance of an object marker on an *intransitive* verb, where the object marker does not have a valency shifting effect, and does not refer to any object, implicit or otherwise.

2.1 The Distribution of OMWR

We begin with a brief survey of the distribution of OMWR, prior to a discussion of its semantics in section (3). The most noteworthy restriction on OMWR is that the object marker must be 3rd person singular.

3rd singular object markers of either grammatical gender (masculine or feminine) are used as OMWRs, as shown in (5) and (6), irrespective of the gender of the speaker or subject. However, the gender of the OMWR matters for the semantics of the construction, and it is not always the case that either is felicitous in a given context.

- (5) a. yizämbawal
 b. yi- zämba- w- al
 FUT.3MS rain OBJ.3MS FUT
 c. “It’s raining a lot!”

- (6) a. yimät'atal
 b. yi- mät'- at- al
 FUT.SUBJ.3MS return OBJ.3FS FUT
 “He will return (and when he does...)”

Beyond these restrictions, the distribution of OMWR allows for most tenses, voices and syntactic environments. The following cases exhibit some of this variety.

Past tense:

- (7) a. met'at a
 b. met' at a
 came her exclamation
 c. “You’ve come back, I see.”

Passive:

- (8) a. yimettatal
 b. yi- mett at al
 FUT.2ND.MS hit.PASSIVE her FUTURE
 c. You are going to get hit.

Interrogative:

- (9) a. sak'at adäl?
 b. sak'- at adäl
 laugh.PAST.SUBJECT.3MS INTERROGATIVE
 c. “He will laugh, right?”

Negation:

- (10) a. athedatim
 b. at- hed- at- im
 NEG go.2ms OBJ.3FS NEG
 c. “You are not going to leave.”

Conditional:

- (11) a. tisik'at äna yigudzahal
 b. ti- sik'- at äna yi- gud5- ah- al
 FUT.SUBJ.2MS laugh OBJ.3FS and FUT regret OBJ.2MS fut
 c. “If you laugh, you will be sorry.”
 d. (n.b. Amharic experience verbs, e.g. “regret”, “be warm” express the experiencer as an object - this is unrelated to OMWR.)

OMWR can even occur with optionally transitive verbs, in conditions where agreement between the object marker and an object is impossible due to gender. For instance, in a context where one person has lost the computer charger of a friend, their friend could either say “tamatawale.” (“You will bring it”, masculine OMWR) or “tamataale.” (“You will bring one.”, feminine OMWR). Since computer chargers are typically masculine in gender, using the masculine marker suggests that there is a definite charger - the one that was lost - that the friend must bring. However, using the feminine marker only suggests that *some* charger will be brought - the object marker is not in agreement with any definite object. This sort of indefinite reference is possible in Amharic with no object marking at all, e.g. “tamatale” (“You will bring something.”).

3 The Meaning of OMWR

To our knowledge, the only previous documentation of OMWR is (Leslau 1995):

“While normally the object suffix pronouns are used with transitive verbs, they are also occasionally used with intransitive verbs. They then express special emotions depending on the context.” (p420)

This brief characterization of the semantics only mentions the possibility of using a masculine object marker, and is vague, not specifying who experiences the emotion. As we will show, it encompasses only a small part of the semantic effects associated with the construction. We propose to analyze the phenomenon as being divided into two broad camps. One is a usage associated with both genders of OMWR; this usage presupposes some speaker oriented bouletic or epistemic non-optimality associated with the verbal event. The other is an intensive usage associated only with the masculine.

OMWR occurs in (at least) the following speech acts, obtained from elicitation with native speakers - we survey these to give a sense of the contexts in which it appears:

3.1 Feminine OMWR

Warnings A typical use associated with the feminine OMWR is a *warning* speech act, where a figure of authority (often a parent or teacher) warns their interlocutor that an event will happen as the consequence of some action. The action which will lead to this event can either be left implicit or included with a conditional construction. We characterize warnings as requiring that the matrix verb be in the 2nd person (and thus addressed directly to the subject) and that the event in question be preventable. In such warning speech acts, OMWRs are judged to be felicitous but not obligatory.

For instance, (12) could be issued in a context where a parent is warning their child that if they are not careful when playing, they will fall down and hurt themselves:

- (12) a. tiwedgatale
 b. ti- wedg -at -ale
 SUBJ.2MS fall OBJ.3FS FUT
 c. “You’re going to fall.”

With an explicit conditional antecedent, this becomes:

- (13) a. kaltätänäkäk’h tiwädgatale

- b. k- al- tātānāk’āk’- h ti- wädg -at -ale
 IF not be-careful subj.2ms subj.2ms fall OBJ.3FS FUT
 c. “If you’re not careful, you’ll fall.”

The warning can also be embedding into the past, with the sense “The event happened, just like I warned.”. In such cases, it is understood that the speaker previously committed a warning speech act like (13):

- (14) a. yihw wäddakat
 b. yihw wäddä- k -at
 EXCLAM fall SUBJ.2MS OBJ.3FS
 c. “See, you fell (like I warned you)!”

Dares Another speech act in which OMWRs may appear are *dares*. In particular, an Amharic construction used specifically for dares is “wend + [verb]”, translating literally to: “being a man, [verb].”. Feminine OMWR may, but need not, co-occur with this construction. For instance:

- (15) a. wänd timät’atale
 b. wänd ti- mät’- at -ale
 MAN fut.subj.3ms return OBJ.3FS FUT
 c. “If you’re a man, you will come over here.”
 d. Paraphrase: I dare you to come over here.

The contexts in which such *dare* speech acts are made are ones in which the subject, on performing the specified action, incurs, or risks incurring, a negative outcome. For instance, one would not use this construction to “dare” someone to pass the butter at dinner. Thus (15) carries the implication that if the interlocutor does come over, there will be some consequence, e.g. starting a fight with the speaker.

Contention Another use of the feminine OMWR expresses *contention* on the part of the subject. For instance, (16) would be said to tease the subjects of the sentence, in a situation where they either didn’t want to kiss, or didn’t expect to.

- (16) a. tisasamatatjhu
 b. ti- sasam- al- at atjhu
 FUT.SUBJ.2MS KISS.MUTUAL FUT OBJ.3FS SUBJ.2P
 c. “You two *are* going to kiss.”

It is worth noting that *contention* looks a lot like *verum* focus in languages like English, such as in (17), or indeed the English translation of (16).

- (17) I *will* buy the book!

However, the feminine OMWR would not be used in many cases where *verum* focus would. For instance, (18) is infelicitous.

- (18) a. ? yizāmbatal

- b. yi- zämb- at- al
 FUT.3MS rain OBJ.3FS FUT
 c. “It *is* raining.”

3.1.1 Masculine OMWR

The masculine OMWR can be used in plain declaratives with an intensive meaning. This intensive effect of OMWR arises only with the masculine 3rd person object marker, and was characterized as a modern colloquial usage by all our consultants. (19) is an example:

- (19) a. yizämbawal
 b. yi- zämba- w- al
 FUT.3MS rain OBJ.3MS FUT
 c. “It’s raining a lot!”

This intensification was judged by some of the consultants to only be felicitous for verbs which would have allowed gradation by other means. For instance, one consultant ruled out the intensive use of the masculine OMWR for *break*, on the grounds that something cannot “break a lot”, but allowed it for the frequentative form of *break* (translated into English as “shatter”), with the meaning: “shatter completely”. Other consultants, however, judged the intensive to be felicitous in almost all cases, by coercing the event structure of the verb. For instance, “yimetawal” was taken to mean “He regularly/constantly leaves” (where “yimetal” means: “he leaves”).

Exclamations (Leslau 1995) documents usages of the masculine OMWR which, in his words, convey anger or emotion. On further examination, it appears that utterances such as (20), supplied by Leslau, require a context in which the action violates some norm. For instance, two contexts suggested by consultants for (20) were 1) that the subject could be a waiter who was currently at work or 2) that the subject could be sitting down by a tree in order to escape the heat, but by a tree which provided little shade. In the first context type, sitting down is non-optimal deontically, while in the second, it is non-optimal as a strategy.

- (20) a. hed äna tak’amätäw
 b. hed äna ta- k’amät- ew
 go.PAST.3MS and PAST.PASS.3MS sat OBJ.3MS
 c. “He went and sat down!”

Rhetorical Questions Rhetorical usages of the masculine OMWR are also documented in (Leslau 1995). These exclamations take the syntactic form of a question, but can be uttered rhetorically, by a speaker to themselves, and take place in situations where the speaker is highlighting their frustration or confusion with an event.

A particular particle associated with these is “mänun”, which explicitly marks that a question is rhetorical. In particular, “mänun” is used for rhetorical questions of the form “How/why P?”. Masculine OMWR may, but again need not, co-occur with the “mänun” construction. The OMWR may occur on verbs with either animate or inanimate subjects:

- (21) a. s’ahay saynor libsu mänun däraqiw

- b. s'ahay saynor libs- u mänun dārāk'i- w
sun absent clothing the EXCLAM DRY.PAST.3MS OBJ.3MS
- c. “How could the clothes dry when there is no sun?” (Amharic and English from Leslau 1995)

- (22)
- a. digisu iyale mänun tengahut
 - b. digis- u iyale mänun tengahu- t
party the exists EXCLAM SLEEP.PAST.SUBJ.3MS OBJ.3MS
 - c. “How can I sleep when it’s so loud?” (Amharic and English from Leslau 1995)

Wishes One syntactic construction associated with wishes is shown in (23):

- (23)
- a. bimotkiw
 - b. bi- motk- iw
with die.INF OBJ.3MS
 - c. “May he die.” (Amharic and English from Leslau 1995)

The wishes in which OMWR appears seem to be associated with outcomes that are not optimal from the perspective of the speaker. For this reason, masculine OMWR would not appear with (23) in a context where the subject’s death was the best possible outcome, from the speaker’s perspective.

Though this may seem counterintuitive, there are situations in which one wishes for a non-optimal outcome. For instance, suppose there is a party that I don’t want to go to. I know that the most likely way for it to be canceled is for it to rain. But if it rains, the clothes I’m drying outside will get wet. In this situation, I could say: “I hope it rains.” even though the optimal outcome would be for it neither to rain nor for the party to go ahead. In this case, the wish is for an outcome which is non-optimal, but good enough and reasonably probable.

My claim is that Amharic wishes with OMWR are made in precisely these situations. An illustrative example is (24):

- (24)
- a. bätämätahiw
 - b. bi- tä- mäta- hi- w
with PASS hit SUBJ.2MS OBJ.3MS
 - c. “May you be hit.” (Amharic and English from Leslau 1995)

The suggested context for this utterance was a parent referring to their child, who is misbehaving. The parent knows that the child will learn a lesson if they annoy another child enough to get hit, but doesn’t see this as optimal, assuming that their child being hit is not a desirable outcome for the parent.

3.2 A Semantics for OMWR

Can a semantics be given to the appearance of object markers on intransitive verbs (OMWR) which accounts for its distribution with respect to the cases discussed above? Furthermore, can this semantics account for the distribution of gender?

I first consider the intensive effect of OMWR (which I term usage 1), which is specific to the masculine marker. On usage 1, the OMWR can be characterized as a modifier applying to gradable events and intensifying them, much like English “a lot”.

The intensive usage of the OMWR can be putatively related to the use of the masculine determiner suffix “w”, with which it is syncretic. In Amharic, this masculine determiner may be used as an augmentative.

For instance, *zimbū* connotes a large fly while *zimb^wa* connotes a small one. This augmentation and diminution depends on the default gender of the noun in question. Thus, a noun which is default masculine is diminished with the feminine article, and a default feminine noun is augmented with the masculine.

This nominal intensification can also take place on the cognate objects of certain verbs. For instance, (25) can mean to laugh a loud laugh, as a result of the masculine definite object marker (which is not an OMWR) augmenting the cognate object of “laugh”.

- (25) a. yisak’äw
 b. sak’ äw
 LAUGH.PAST.3MS OBJ.3MS
 c. “He laughed a loud laugh.”

On the basis of the connection to nominal augmentation, we can draw the following hypothesis, (26), the veracity of which is left open for future work:

- (26) There exists a cross-categorial morpheme *w* which can intensify either nouns or events.

Of the cases of OMWR reviewed above, the intensive effect triggered by the masculine OMWR stands out as separate for several reasons:

- It is exclusive to modern colloquial language
- It appears to have a gradable semantics
- It bears a clear relation to the definite determiner, to which it is syncretic

As such, we propose to treat it separately (but see section 3.3 for a discussion of its relation to other uses of OMWR). Excepting usage 1, a property of the contexts in which OMWR is used is that the matrix verb represents an outcome which is in some way non-optimal. With this in mind, we posit that the distribution of OMWR in the speech acts we have surveyed is the result of an underlying semantics defined in (27):

- (27) Usage 2: $[[P+OMWR]] = [[P]]$, with the pragmatic presupposition of $\Box^{MB,O-}(P)$, for a realistic modal base MB and a contextually determined ordering source O.

In other words, OMWR (in usage 2) is a sentential operator which does not modify the proposition P, but creates a presupposition that the sentence is not optimal according to some ordering of realistic possible worlds. As discussed below, $\Box^{MB,O-}(P)$ projects over negation, and can be backgrounded without redundancy, suggesting that it is a presupposition rather than at-issue content or a conventional implicature (see Potts 2005). In particular, we treat it as a *pragmatic presupposition*; on hearing a sentence with OMWR, the listener accommodates to the presupposition by assuming a context which is consistent with it. As such, the role of the OMWR is to facilitate certain sorts of inferences about the speech act being made, as we shall see below.

The question remains of how this ordering source is specified, which I propose relates to the gender of the OMWR, in the following way:

- (28) The ordering source is bouletic or epistemic. For the masculine OMWR, the ordering source is determined relative to the speaker, while for the feminine OMWR, the ordering source is determined relative to the subject of the sentence.

That is to say, the masculine OMWR is used in cases where the proposition expressed by the sentence is not optimal relative to the speaker’s knowledge/desires/plans while the feminine is used when the proposition is not optimal relative to the *subject’s* knowledge/desires/plans.

The semantics for OMWR proposed in (27) and (28) is unusual, in that it introduces a modal which is not explicitly present. As well as this, it leaves the ordering source contextually unspecified to a degree, between being epistemic or bouletic. It is worth remarking on the choice of $\Box\neg(P)$ as the presupposition triggered by an OMWR as opposed to $\neg\Box(P)$, another way of encoding the notion of modal “non-optimality”. $\Box\neg$ is strictly stronger than $\neg\Box$, but this strength appears to be justified by cases involving a bouletic ordering source. In such cases, $\neg\Box(P)$ merely entails that the speaker (or subject, depending on the gender of the OMWR) is indifferent to P, while $\Box\neg$ entails that P is *never* true in a world consistent with the agent’s wishes. This second meaning seems to be right for OMWR; for instance, OMWR is used in dares and warnings, where the context requires that P is unwanted by the subject, and not merely that the agent is indifferent.

We now consider the evidence for (27) and (28), explaining why the proposed semantics for OMWRs explains its use in the speech acts discussed above, when the proposition and the context are jointly taken into account. In all the cases surveyed, the OMWR is not necessary to achieve the illocutionary act in question, but simply aids the listener in reaching the intended interpretation.

Warnings A key premise of a warning is that the event being warned about will be non-optimal for the subject (and perhaps, but not necessarily, for the speaker), since otherwise the warning would not be necessary. For instance, if a parent warns a child to be careful lest they fall, falling must contextually be considered a bad outcome. It is worth noting here that falling may not itself be the non-optimal outcome, but may stand in a direct causal relation to something which is, e.g. hurting oneself.

Confirming this intuition in Amharic, consultants noted that warnings of this sort were infelicitous (as in English) when it was difficult to construct a context in which the event was non-optimal for the subject, such as with the following:

- (29) a. ? tisik’atale
 b. ti- sik’ -at -ale
 SUBJ.2MS laugh OBJ.3FS FUT
 c. “You’re going to laugh”.

As regards hypothesis (28), consultants noted that OMWRs on warnings were feminine. Presented with the masculine OMWR in this context, consultants remarked that this seemed marked, owing to the superiority of the feminine in this context. This is consistent with (28), since the non-optimality always pertains at least to the subject, and hence the ordering source should be relativized to the subject.

This raises the possibility that the masculine OMWR is indeterminate as to the agent which supplies the ordering source, and only the feminine specifies that the subject is the supplier. On

this account, using the masculine instead of the feminine would only be pragmatically infelicitous. This would derive from a process of Gricean reasoning on the assumption that cooperative speakers avoid ambiguity, and would therefore prefer the feminine in cases where it is more informative. This potentially accounts for consultants' judgments that the masculine is possible but marked. However, finding a situation in which there is an independent reason why the feminine cannot be used, in order to test whether the masculine merely implies the speaker determines the ordering source, is difficult.

Under negation, we observe that the presuppositional content projects, as in (30):

- (30) a. athedatim
 b. at-hed-at- im
 NEG go OBJ.3FS NEG
 c. Reading 1: "You will *not* go. (There will be a bad consequence if you go.)"
 d. Reading 2: "(Unless you do something) you will not go."

On reading 1, the negation scopes over the OMWR, so that we obtain $\neg\text{OMWR}(P)$, and then the presupposition $\Box\neg(P)$ projects over the negation.

This derivation raises the question of whether OMWR can scope over the negation (i.e. $\text{OMWR}(\neg(P))$) - this seems plausible since both the OMWR and the negation are morphologically attached to the verb. Supporting this, there is a reading of "athedatim" which acts as a warning that if some implicit or explicit antecedent is not met, the subject will not go.

This interpretation of "athedatim" can be explained with OMWR scoping over negation, as in $\text{OMWR}(\neg(P))$. In this order, hypotheses (27) and (28) create a presupposition of $\Box\neg\neg(P)$, which equals $\Box(P)$. Assuming a bouletic ordering source in this context, presupposing that the subject wants to go is a very natural thing to do, since it is in precisely such a context that informing them that they will not (or will not unless some condition is fulfilled) is relevant.

Note that if the presupposition had been $\neg\Box(P)$, as discussed in (3.2), we would obtain in this case $\neg\Box\neg(P)=\diamond(P)$, which with a bouletic ordering source would merely indicate the subject's indifference.

We also note that warnings can project out of questions, lending evidence to the claim that the modal meaning is presuppositional. For instance, (31) can be paraphrased as: "Have you fallen?", with the context being that there was previously a warning that this would happen, as in (13):

- (31) a. widdakat ende
 b. widdä- k- at ende
 fall.PAST OBJ.3FS INTEROG
 c. "Have you fallen, (like I warned would happen?)"

In this case, the effect of the OMWR is more than just to presuppose that the subject did not want, or did not expect to fall, but also to presuppose that the speaker previously warned them, or that it was in the common ground that the event of falling was likely.

As evidenced for the cases of contention discussed below, encoding this information semantically into the presuppositional content in hypothesis (27) would narrow the scope of the proposed semantics too far. As such, we will restrict ourselves to a weaker claim, that given the presupposition encoded by the OMWR, the listener may infer from (31) not just that the speaker considers falling

to be a bad outcome for the subject, but that a previous warning was issued. This leaves open the question of how (31) comes to indicate that a previous warning had taken place.

In cases where the antecedent is made explicit, as in (13), the matrix verb of the antecedent may also have a feminine OMWR¹ (see (32)), which is reported to increase the strength of the illocutionary effect. This is understandable, since contexts in which a consequence is unwanted entail that the antecedent should also be unwanted. For instance, if it is bad for me to fall, and lack of care leads to my falling, then it is bad for me not to be careful. Note that this requires the content $\Box\neg P$ to project out of the antecedent, as we would expect it to.

- (32) a. kaltätänäkäk’hat tiwädgatale
 b. k- al- tätänäk’äk’- h -at ti- wädg- -at ale
 IF not be-careful OBJ.3MS subj.2ms subj.2ms fall OBJ.3MS FUT
 c. “If you’re not careful, you’ll fall.”

While we characterized warnings as being addressed to the subject of the matrix verb, similar 3rd person cases appear as well in Amharic, where the speaker is either speaking to themselves or a third person. An instance of such a warning is the original example of OMWR provided, repeated here as (33):

- (33) a. yimät’atal
 b. yi- mät’- at- al
 FUT.SUBJ.3MS return OBJ.3FS FUT
 ‘He *had better* return.’
 c. Context: A child left home without his father’s permission.

Though I categorize this as a warning, it is worth noting that it is not addressed to the person being warned, and in fact, (6) can be said to oneself.

Here, the speaker uses OMWR to encode, in addition to their belief that the child will return, the presupposition that returning will be non-optimal for the child. This is appropriate given the context where the parent plans to punish the child on their return.

Further evidence that $\Box\neg P$ is not at issue (but rather presupposed) is that responding “no” to claim like (33) does not target $\Box\neg P$. For instance, if someone says (33), denying this is a denial of the claim that the subject will return, not a denial that it will be bad for them to return.

Dares As discussed above, dares take place in contexts where the speaker wishes to communicate that if the subject performs the relevant action, the speaker will ensure a negative consequence for the subject. As such, the OMWR is a natural way to intensify the force of the dare, by presupposing the non-optimality of performing the action for the subject. However, we note that OMWR on its own does not trigger a dare - that is, other contextual factors must be in place that establish an utterance as a dare speech act, on top of which the OMWR can be used.

For example, saying (34) creates a presupposition for the interlocutor that the act of their coming over will be bouletically non-optimal:

- (34) a. wänd timät’atale

¹Consultants’ judgements varied on whether conditionals could have an OMWR on the antecedent without having one on the consequent.

- b. wänd ti- mät'- at -ale
 MAN fut.subj.3ms return OBJ.3FS FUT
- c. “Since you’re a man, you will come over here.”
- d. Paraphrase: I dare you to come over here.

On hypothesis (28), it is also natural that the OMWR should be feminine in dares, as indeed it is, since the speaker wishes to convey not that the act is non-optimal for him/herself, but rather than it is non-optimal for the subject.

Contention In the cases of OMWR which we identify as exhibiting contention, such as (16), we observed that the subject either does not want, or does not expect, the event in question to take place. For instance, (16) suggests that the subjects do not want to kiss, or do not expect to.

On the proposed semantics for OMWR, the presupposition triggered by the feminine OMWR is of epistemic or bouletic non-optimality for the subject. This explains why feminine OMWR can be used in situations where a speaker wants to express contention on the part of the subject, since not wanting, or not expecting to do something correspond to bouletic and epistemic non-optimality respectively. This provides an explanation for the infelicity of (18), where it is the interlocutor who considers rain unlikely, not the subject of the verb.

Exclamations Exclamations in which the masculine OMWR appear require a context in which the event is non-optimal for the speaker. For instance, (37) would be infelicitous in contexts where the speaker was not surprised by the event.

Accordingly, we find that in situations where the event in question is expected, the use of the OMWR to effect this meaning is not appropriate. For instance, we consider the following two scenarios:

- (35) John goes to a serious play and laughs during it.
- (36) John goes to a comedy show and laughs during it.

We then consider the situation in which John’s friend says (37) about John, in reference to this event:

- (37) a. sakäw
- b. “He laughed!”

This is judged felicitous in the first case, where laughing is inappropriate, but not the second, where one would think the subject would expect or want to laugh.

In the case of exclamations, the presuppositional content can be backgrounded explicitly, without creating redundancy. For instance, (38), from (Leslau 1995):

- (38) a. addis abäba attihid sinniläw tassär äнна arräfëw
- b. addis abäba at -tihid sinnilä -w tassär äнна arräfë-
 Addis Ababa NEG go.INF tell.SUBJ.1MS OBJ.3MS jail.PASS.SUBJ.3MS and did
 w
 OBJ.3MS
- c. “We told him not to go, but he went and landed himself in jail!”

Rhetorical Questions As noted above, rhetorical questions, particularly those associated with “männun”, are uttered in contexts where the speaker considers the event in question to be bouletically non-optimal from their perspective. For instance, in saying “Why dry the clothes, given that there’s no sun?”, the context of the rhetorical question must be that the speaker does not think that it is worth drying the clothes. Similarly in (22), sleeping is futile because of the noise. For this reason, the use of OMWR helps to clarify the illocutionary force of the rhetorical question. Note also that the content $\Box\neg P$ projects out of the question, another feature of presupposition.

Wishes As observed above, the key feature of the wishes in which OMWR is used is that the event of the verb is in some way non-optimal for the speaker. For instance (as a further example to cases (23) and (24)) consultants suggested a typical context for (39)² to be the following: a young person enters a room, and on seeing an older person stand up, utters (39).

Consultants explained that the force of this utterance is to convey that the interlocutor should not have to stand. Since one would not have to give up one’s seat to a dead person, (39) conveys that the speaker considers worlds in which they themselves are dead (and thus the interlocutor remains sitting) to be preferable to worlds in which they are alive and the interlocutor stands. The hyperbolic nature of this utterance seems to be a mark of respect for the older interlocutor.

- (39) a. bimotk -u -t
 b. bi- motk -u -t
 with die.INF SUBJ.1MS OBJ.3MS
 c. “May I die.”

Given that this preference for dying over the interlocutor standing is the intended meaning of (39), what the OMWR adds is a further presupposition that worlds in which the speaker dies are considered non-optimal by the speaker. This adds force to (39): the speaker would rather die than have their interlocutor stand, and that’s true even though they would rather not die at all!

3.2.1 The Status of the Content of OMWR

The diagnosis of the meaning of OMWR as not at-issue seems secure, given its ability to project out of interrogatives as well as out of antecedents and negation. However, the possibility remains that it is expressive content (see Potts 2007) rather than a presupposition. One reason to consider this is repeatability, the potential to use OMWR on more than one verb in the sentence, in cases where an auxiliary construction is used for the matrix verb. For instance, (38), an example provided by (Leslau 1995) and modified below in (40) allows for an OMWR both on the light verb “arräfe” (do) and on the content verb “tassäre” (be jailed).

- (40) a. addis abäba attihid sinniläw tassäriw ännä arräfëw
 b. addis abäba at -tihad sinnilä -w tassäri-w ännä arräfë-
 Addis Ababa NEG go.INF tell.SUBJ.1MS OBJ.3MS jail.PASS.SUBJ.3MS and did
 w
 OBJ.3MS
 c. “We told him not to go, but he went and landed himself in jail!”

²Note that in (39), the object marker is “t” rather than “w”: this is a result of a regular process in Amharic verbal morphophonology where the masculine 3rd person object marker /w/ becomes /t/ when proceeding /u/.

This is identified by Potts (2007) as a typical feature of expressive content. Further investigating the type of non-at-issue meaning involved in OMWR is a task left for future work. Consultants noted that the repetition of OMWR had the effect of strengthening the force of the utterance, comparable to how repetition of swears (e.g. “Why is your damn dog not on its damn leash?”) intensifies their effect.

3.2.2 Further Evidence for Hypothesis (28)

Hypothesis (28) predicts that the female OMWR will be infelicitous when the subject of the verb is not animate. Note by contrast that this is not a prediction for the masculine OMWR.

We see this prediction upheld in the distribution of feminine OMWR. For instance, (41) appears to be infelicitous, or requires anthropomorphization of the car:

- (41) a. ? kaltänk’āsak’āsk mīkiniw yīgiddjatal
 b. k- al- tǎnk’āsak’ās- k mīkini- w yi- giddj- at- al
 if NEG move. SUBJ.2MS car DEF.MASC SUBJ.3MS hit.PASS OBJ.3FS FUT
 c. “If you don’t move, your car will be hit.”

This is explained by hypothesis (28), since the feminine OMWR requires an animate subject according to which we can supply an ordering source. Meanwhile, the masculine OMWR can have an inanimate subject (see 21), since the ordering source depends on the speaker, who is always animate.

Our theory also predicts that while (41) is infelicitous, modifying the sentence to “If you don’t move, you will be hit.” should be acceptable since the subject, now animate, can be used to specify the ordering source. This is indeed the case, as shown in (42):

- (42) a. ? kaltänk’āsak’āsk tīgiddjatale
 b. k- al- tǎnk’āsak’ās- k ti- giddj- at- ale
 if NEG move. SUBJ.2MS SUBJ.2MS hit.PASS OBJ.3FS FUT
 c. “If you don’t move, you will be hit.”

Similarly, our theory correctly predicts the infelicity of (43)

- (43) a. yizāmbatal
 b. yi- zāmb- at- al
 FUT.3MS rain OBJ.3FS FUT

(43) is infelicitous because the expletive subject of “rain”, a weather verb, cannot be used to supply an ordering source. By contrast, (5) is perfectly felicitous as an expression of surprise that it rained (or an intensive in usage 1).

3.3 Speculative Diachrony of OMWR

While the semantics proposed in (27) and (28) does well at explaining the distribution of uses of OMWR, the reason that a former object marker should have acquired this meaning is puzzling. Though no clear synchronic explanation is forthcoming, a speculative diachronic conjecture is that

the object marker, which is most likely a doubled clitic (see Kramer 2014a) became (at least in certain dialects) reanalyzed as a sentential operator which operates on propositions.

There are several reasons to think that this took place in the Gojjam dialect of Amharic. Firstly, this region was associated with heavy use of OMWR by all the Amharic speakers consulted (who were mainly from Addis Ababa). Secondly, there is evidence that the object marker morphemes are not category D, the category they inhabit according to the doubled clitic analysis of (Kramer 2014a).

Kramer notes that “when a DP is definite and contains a relative clause, the definite determiner attaches to the verb within the relative clause – see (44). However, if the verb within the relative clause has an object marker, there is no determiner.”. For instance:

- (44) a. yänäggärat(#u) (Standard Amharic)
 b. yä -näggär -at
 REL-CLAUSE tell her
 c. the one who told her

As noted by (Kramer 2014a), only the object marker, and not the definite determiner, surfaces in relative clause DPs like (46). (Kramer 2014a) further notes that this is easily explained on the assumption that both the object marker and the determiner share category D, and on the secondary assumption that a morphological rule barring haplology deletes the second of two Ds.

In Gojjam Amharic, it has been observed by (Leslau 1995) that the determiner and object marker can appear simultaneously, unlike the case of (44) discussed above. Following Kramer’s reasoning, this suggests that object markers are no longer of the same syntactic category as definite determiners in Gojjam Amharic:

- (45) a. yänäggäratu (Gojjam Amharic)
 b. yä -näggär -at -u
 REL-CLAUSE tell her the
 c. the one who told her

This reanalysis of the object marker, if indeed this is the case, may have been precipitated by reduced use of definite determiners on nouns in Gojjam Amharic. (Marcos 1973) notes that Gojjam Amharic uses an indirect object marker, namely *ya* (which in this dialect replaces the standard *la*) in place of both the direct object marker *n* and definite determiner. Marcos (1973) gives the following example:

- (46) a. yäbet likäbbaw (Gojjam Amharic)
 b. yä bet likäbb aw
 GEN house INFINITIVE paint it
 c. “that I may paint the house”

To summarize, we conjecture, in the absence of conclusive evidence, that OMWR may have originated in Gojjam, with the reanalysis of doubled clitics as verbal operators. The hypothesis is that once these morphemes no longer served the function of object marking, they were analyzed as having a semantic function (perhaps related to the cross-linguistically attested semantics of doubled clitics) and were generalized to intransitive verbs. For here, their use was adopted into dialects which still have doubled clitics, but exclusively on intransitive verbs where the doubled clitic interpretation is not available.

4 Conclusions

I have attempted to establish the following claims:

- The infixation of a 3rd person singular object marker of either gender on intransitive verbs does not transitivize the verb, but rather changes its semantics.
- The semantics of OMWR can be divided into two cases:
 - Usage 1 (only masculine): Intensification of gradable predicate
 - Usage 2: A presupposition of $\Box(\neg P)$, when P is asserted in a sentence with a matrix verb with OMWR

This phenomenon is noteworthy on account of the presence of a modal in the semantics which is both contextually flexible in its ordering source and not expressed explicitly. As discussed in (3.3), the diachrony of OMWR, in relation to actual verbal object markers (analyzed as doubled clitics by Kramer 2014a) is unclear. Are the semantic effects noted cross-linguistically for clitic doubling in any way related to the effects of OMWR? Is OMWR in origin a dialectal variant, given that consultants associate heavy usage of OMWR (often without semantic content) with the Gojjam region of Ethiopia. These are questions left open for future work.

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