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Evidentiality, Absolute Present and Factitivity in Neo-Ethiopic Historiography

Abstract

Historiographical writings in the modern languages of Ethiopia – Amharic and Tigrinya – contain some special linguistic features not found usually in other genres of texts. These are in particular: the enclitic particle *-ya* in Tigrinya, and in Amharic, the use of the present perfect for marking the punctual present and of the factitive stem when referring to the Emperor. The particle *-ya* is used as a means of conveying evidentiality, i.e. the writer's own assessment of the epistemic validity of his statement. The present perfect is used in Amharic in royal proclamations, instead of the compound imperfect, to avoid ambiguity between present and future, inherent in the time range of the latter. The Amharic factitive stem serves as one of the means of enhancing royal superiority above all other humans by using verb forms which indicate that the Emperor makes others do things unworthy of himself.

Until the middle of the 19th century the imposing corpus of Ethiopian local historiography, so thoroughly and knowledgeably explored by Prof. Joanna Mantel-Niećko during her academic carrier, was written exclusively in Gəʿəz. It was only at the time of *aṣe* Tewodros that Amharic came to be used as the language of the royal chronicles.¹ But even then the switch from a tongue dead for approximately one thousand years to the spoken idiom was not fully accomplished and the author of the chronicle of *aṣe*

¹ *Chronique de Théodros II (1852–1868)*, [ed. & trad. par] Casimir Mondon-Vidailliet, Paris: E. Guilmoto, 1904, (henceforth: CHRTa), and a different text *Y-aṣe Tewodros tarik*, ed. Luigi Fusella, Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1959, (henceforth: CHRTb).

Johannes IV reverted once again to the old medium² to be replaced by Amharic only in the chronicle of *aṣe Menilek*,³ and later in the autobiography of Haylä Səllase which may be considered as the equivalent of a chronicle of his rule up to the Italian occupation.⁴ It is true that the text of the Gəʿəz chronicles, whose authors were, without any possible doubt, speakers of Amharic, underwent some influence from that language both in its lexicon⁵ and grammar,⁶ but still Gəʿəz served as the only regular tool for writing history until some 150 years ago. At the end of the 19th century was also composed the first known history in Tigrinya.⁷ Considering the special character of historical writings in matters such as authenticity of sources, the need of absolute accuracy in formulating imperial demands and promises, or the rendering of due honor to the imperial status of the objects of narration, it may be interesting to note that in the Neo-Ethiopian languages there are some special linguistic means to this end.

Evidentiality

Evidentiality is a linguistic category which allows the speaker to express his own assessment of the epistemic validity of his statement by referring to his source of information, i.e. by indicating whether he has witnessed the event in person or has learned it from another eyewitness, or by hearsay or by some other procedure.⁸ All the languages may render this modality either by lexical means – e.g. in English, by using adverbs

² *A Chronicle of Emperor Yohannes IV (1872-1889)*, ed. Bairu Tafla, (ÄthForsch, 1), Wiesbaden: F. Steiner Verlag, 1977.

³ Gäbrä Səllase, *Tarikä-zämän zä-Dagmawi Mənilək*, Addis Abäba: Bərhan-ənnä Sälam, 1959 E.C. (henceforth: GSDM).

⁴ Haylä Səllase, *Həywäte-nna yä-Ityoppya ərməğğa*, Addis Abäba: Bərhan-ənnä Sälam, 1965 E.C.; (henceforth: HSHI). English translation by E. Ullendorff, *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress, 1892-1937*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.

⁵ Stefan Strelcyn, 'Matériaux pour l'étude de l'ancien amharique', in: *Proceedings of the Second International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Manchester, July 1963* = *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 9:1 (1964), pp. 257-264.

⁶ Witold Brzuski, 'L'influence de la langue amharique sur l'emploi des verbes auxiliaires *nabara* et *hal-lawä* dans les textes des chroniques royales écrites en guèze', *AfrBull*, 12 (1970), pp. 27-31; and recently Stefan Weninger, *Das Verbalsystem des Altäthiopischen: eine Untersuchung seiner Verwendung und Funktion unter Berücksichtigung des Interferenzproblems*, Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 2001, pp. 279-282 *et passim*.

⁷ Fesseha Giyorgis, *Storia d'Etiopia*, a cura di Yaqob Beyene, Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1987; (henceforth: FGSE).

⁸ In the last 20 years and especially since the 1990's we witness a steady growth of interest in problems of evidentiality in typological linguistics. Evidentiality, which was earlier known to the orientlists under the term "inference" and was mainly defined on the base of the Turkish use of the past in *-miş*, is now investigated in other languages of Central Asia, in the Balkans, and in many Native American and Australian languages. From among the numerous works consulted we may mention as particularly relevant to our discussion on the theoretical level: Talmy Givón, 'Evidentiality and Epistemic space', *Studies in Language*, 6 (1982), pp. 23-49, and: Gilbert Lazard, 'Le médiatif: considérations théoriques et application à l'Iranien', in: *Evidentiality: Turkic, Iranian and Neighbouring Languages*, ed. by Lars Johansson & Bo Utas, Berlin & New York: Mouton & De Gruyter, 2000, pp. 209-228.

such as *reportedly* or *apparently* or by clauses such as *it is said, one says that* etc. – but there are many languages which use special grammatical means for this purpose. Most commonly the notion of evidentiality is associated with the verbal system but other possibilities exist. In certain languages a similar function is rendered, for instance, by special complementizers or by particles.⁹ The reader may wonder how such linguistic category, originally understood as marking the opposition between knowledge which the speaker has acquired directly and what he has learned indirectly from another person, fits into written historical texts which are the object of the present study. But a more refined definition, doubtless resulting from the accumulation of additional data from many recently investigated languages, such as the following: “[l’opposition] n’est pas entre des formes exprimant une connaissance directe et d’autres évoquant une connaissance indirecte, mais entre des formes qui n’indiquent rien quant à la source d’information et d’autres qui y réfèrent sans la spécifier”,¹⁰ may safely be applied also to historiographical material. In the latter the alleged eyewitness who provides the evidential foundation of the statement in live conversation, is simply replaced by a reference to the sources of the narrative, either written or oral.

Among the historiographical works in Neo-Ethiopic mentioned above the Tigrinya text, written by Fesseha Giyorgis (and translated into Italian by Yaqob Beyene),¹¹ clearly stands out, as far as evidentiality is concerned, thanks to the author’s care to state quite often the nature of his sources. Thus, after the traditional invocatory formula, the beginning of this manuscript of 166 pages, which is mainly centered on the history of the relations between the province of Tigray and the Amharas, reads: “We are starting to write the history of Ethiopia. About the ancient history of Ethiopia which Ethiopian professors (*liqawānti*) and elders knowing the oral tradition (*fālaṭṭi qəyya šəmagəllātat*) relate, about some old cities and about certain chiefs” (FGSE 1/2-7). This opening and the general spirit of FGSE differs from that of the three Amharic chronicles (CHRTa, CHRTb, GSDM) where usually there is no mention of documentation and whose authors seem to express themselves *ex cathedra*, which, at least in the case of Gäbrä Səllase, could be justified by his position as emperor Menilek’s *ṣāḥafe təʾəzaz* or Minister of the Pen. Fesseha Giyorgis, on the other hand, unless he relates episodes which he considers common knowledge, such as, for instance, the biblical part of the story of queen of Sheba (FGSE 23), tends to indicate his sources or to stress whether he was an ocular witness of the event or has learned about it from others. It seems that only

⁹ See respectively, Givón, *op. cit.*, pp. 26–31 on Kinya Ruanda, and Gunilla Gren-Eklund, ‘Evidentiality and Typology: grammatical functions of particles in Burmese and the early stages of Indo-European languages’, in: *Evidentiality: Turkic...*, pp. 367–381.

¹⁰ Lazard, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

¹¹ On the manuscript and the author see the introduction by Yaqob Beyene, pp. VII–XII, and Lanfranco Ricci, ‘Letterature dell’Etiopia’, in: *Storia delle letterature d’Oriente*, diretta da O. Botto, vol. I, Milano: F. Vallardi, 1969, p. 885–887.

when he relates facts which are well established on historical grounds, he doesn't resort to any substantiating device.¹²

Hence the countless occurrences of the expressions *yäblu* – '[people] say', *yäbbähal* – 'it is said', or *yämässäl* – 'it seems'. Concerning events which occurred during his lifetime or close to it, the author may specifically support the epistemic accuracy of his statement by providing the circumstances in which he learned its content, for instance when starting to describe *aše* Tewodros's character he writes:

ʔässu ʔab Gʷändär ʔab ʔanda ʔabunä ʔAbyäzgi ʔanna-tämahrä ʔabäyä, nəʔay zə-mäharu-ni mämharäy gʷändärtay näbäru ʔammo, ʔab hədä bet tāmharti näbäru. məʔanti zuy wəst-u-n gədam-u-n yäfältə-wo näbäru (FGSE 76/5-8) – 'He [Tewodros] grew up in Gondär, studying at the house of Abunä Abyäzgi; my teacher who taught me was a Gondärene and consequently they were at the same school. Therefore He knew him inside out'; or describing the flourishing situation in Tigray before its wreckage by Agäw incursions and by *dägiyat Wäbe*, he refers to the testimony of a man from Mänsa^c:

ʔətu mänsa^catäy ʔənkä nəʔəstoy dəʔa näbärku ʔəmbär bəzə^cba-ʔom ʔənt-innagär gäle ʔamätat ba^cl-äy säma^cku-wo (FGSE 54/18-55/1) – 'That man from Mänsa^c, even though I was little, I heard him myself for several years speaking about Him [Wäbe]'.^c

In certain events the author himself was an active participant, for instance while travelling in the retinue of Ras Makʷännən he records:

ʔAdwa məs ʔatona qädäm ʔə-nnəfält-a zə-näbärna zäkirna sämbädna (FGSE 125/17-18) – 'When we entered ʔAdwa, remembering it as we used to know it, we were frightened', and his testimony carries the evidential accuracy of an eyewitness.

A special turn to which the author sometimes resorts is represented by the term *qəyya* which, according to the translation of Yaʕqob B e y e n e, corresponds to 'oral tradition, belonging to oral tradition'.¹³ It seems that this term is used when the author specifically reports a tradition which he couldn't check himself and which, in his eyes, might be exaggerated, for instance while describing a locality called Mäzbär:

ʔəntä ʔətu ʔab təqə ʔAksum z-ällo Mäzbär gən ših ʔəkʷkʷa bə^cal qəyya ʔəntä kona ʔanä ʔay-räʔeku-wo-n (FGSE 6/18-19) – 'But as for Mäzbär which is near Aksum, although it belongs to oral tradition, I have not seen it', or he seems to allude that there still are many traditions but he won't quote them all. Thus he summarizes the paragraph about a location known as Gʷelo Mäkäda where there allegedly are many archeological remains going back to the queen of Sheba:

¹² This special determination on behalf of the author to enhance the authenticity of his sources could be attributed to a natural tendency to be accurate, or to his psychological insecurity as a person who, not being a professional historian, composes a historical text. But, considering that he himself translated from Arabic into Tigrinya a History of the Arabs (see *Introduction*, note 3) there is also a possibility that he was influenced by the method of the Arab historians which consists in quoting as many of their predecessors as possible to add support, sanctified by tradition, to their narration.

¹³ Thomas L. K a n e in his *Tigrinya – English Dictionary*, 2 vols, Springfield. Dunwoody Press 2000, translates: 'legend, ancient tradition, story, tale epic, wonder, marvelous happening'.

ʔatom sǎb ʕaddi bǎzaʕba Gʷelo Mǎkāda bǎzuḥ qǎyya yǎnnagǎru ʔǎyyatom (FGSE 15/16-17) – ‘The locals relate many oral tradition[s] about Gʷ. M.’.

Or, while reporting about *raʔsi* Mikael he concludes:

nay raʔsi Mikaʔel sǎḥtan nǎ-mǎgnan sǎw z-iṣǎwǎ-yo qǎyya bǎzuḥ ʔǎyyu, ʔǎntǎ konǎ nǎḥna rǎrǎʔsu ṭǎray ʔina zǎ-ṣǎḥafna (FGSE 60/4-5) – ‘As for magnifying *raʔsi* Mikael’s rule, there are many traditions which people tell; we, however, it is only some main (points) that we have written’.

There are in all twenty cases of *qǎyya* in the whole text and its use stops in the middle of the text, at the time of *aṣe* Tewodros, perhaps because at this stage the information supplied becomes better documented, the author being alive at that time.

The special expressions mentioned till now cannot be treated as evidential in the proper sense of the term. They may be defined as stylistic or lexical means used to an evidential end but they lack the generic-abstract dimension which would confer upon them the status of a grammatical element. There is, however, in the text a special enclitic particle, the particle *-ya*, which seems to corresponds to what the linguistic term of evidentiality implies. According to the dictionaries, when attached to a quotation, *-ya* means ‘it seems that, one says that’¹⁴ while in his Italian translation Yaqob Beyene almost invariably renders it by putting the verb of the sentence in the conditional of doubt.¹⁵ There are 175 occurrences of this particle in our text, which is quite a considerable number – more than one per page – and they usually come in the vicinity of the verb *yǎblu*, *bǎlu*, or the like. Since, according to the dictionaries, it is also found with proverbs, we may suggest that it renders the general notion of something that people say, without specifying exactly who provides the information. It refers to a source other than the author himself, or to some reliable informant whom he quotes by name, or to a group of professionals, such as the *liqawǎnti* or *fǎlaṭṭi qǎyya*. It is also different from the great bulk of the historical information which is unmarked as to its source, because consisting of facts whose veracity is basically accepted. It seems that *-ya* signals the less reliable piece of information whose source is hearsay.¹⁶ Usually it is attached to the final verb of a sentence or, less frequently, to the first word of the sentence, if it is a noun. The particle may be repeated in every sentence referring to the same theme, until the subject is exhausted, and thus seems to build an embedded paragraph. Its usage sometimes refers to what seems to have existed but is no more, for instance while describing a certain place:

¹⁴ Kane, *op. cit.*, and Wolf Leslau, who indicates; “used frequently with proverbs”, *Documents Tigrigna (éthiopien septentrional): grammaire et textes*, (Collection linguistique publié par La Société linguistique de Paris, 48), Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1941, p. 151.

¹⁵ This seems to be the best way to render the special nuance of *-ya* in Italian, where it refers to the statement itself rather than to the source of information: “In proposizioni indipendenti il presente [del condizionale] serve ad esprimere dubbio o incertezza o possibilità o ad attenuare delle affermazione per riguardo a chi ascolta, o per limitarne la portata”, S. Battaglia & V. Pernicone, *La grammatica italiana*, Torino: Loescher, 1951, p. 374.

¹⁶ On the role of hearsay in history see: Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, p. 4 *et passim*.

qädām mädäyayäbo näbüro-ya. dāhar gən ʾətu mädäyayäbo-ʾu wäy färäsä-ya wäy ʾəfräsəw-o-ya. wəst-u wəqro ʾəyyu-ya. mægfaḥ-u haḡär ʾəyyu-ya. may wəst-u ʾalləwo-ya. lomi gən nab-ʾu məʾəṭay a-yəkkäʾal-ən (FGSE 16/12-15) – ‘[It is said that] in the past there was a staircase. But [it is said that] later this staircase either collapsed or was destroyed. [It is said that] there is a cave; and that its extent is huge. [It is said that] there is water inside. But today it is impossible to go inside it’.

Or, referring to the actual social status of an ethnic group, he writes:

šəḥ ʾəkkʷa sərəḥtāññatat ʾəntä konu barot käm-zäy məkʷanom z-ihəbbər səm ʾəyyu. ʾəziʾatom ʾənkä bə-zämān Sälomon näbüru-ya (FGSE 160/1-3) – ‘Although they are workers, their name indicates that they are not slaves. [It is said] they were at the time of king Solomon (building the temple in Jerusalem)’.

More often this particle is used when the author, within the narration of an episode which, according to his estimate, is considered common knowledge, adds some details, sometimes anecdotal, which he supposes are not as well known. Thus he quotes the people of a certain locality in Tigray telling that Holy Mary came to their place on her way to Egypt and then adds:

säb Däbrä Sina käm-zuy yəblu. ḥadä gize ʾab bäräka Däbrä Sina ʾənnäy Maryam məs wädd-ən Yosef-ən Sälome-n täṭaṭʾu-ya..... ʿalläba-ʾen nə-nəfas wəhibän bälbäl ʾabbäla-lom-ya. ʾənkabʾ tu Yosef... nabʾ-atom täšämmärä-ya (FGSE 30/6-13) – ‘The people of Däbrä Sina say thus: apparently once, Holy Mary with the child, Saint Joseph and Salome, were lost in the desert. ... (Joseph started looking after them everywhere. Finally Holy Mary climbed on a hill) and [it is said that] letting a piece of cloth fly in the wind She agitated it. Then [it is said that] Josef (seeing the fluttering cloth) joined them’.

And another example, this time qualified as *qəyya*, about *raʾsi* Mikael:

bəzaʾəba mo-tom ʾənkä käm-zuy yəblu: fälaṭi-ya mot-ka ab Määdab ʾəyyu bilu-wom näbüär. ʾəntä nəssom Määdab z-ibbähal səm ḥadä bota käm-z-ällo ʾa-yəfäḷu-n näbüru-ya. ʾənkab tuy mäʿalti nab rəḥuq ʾagär wäšiʾom täšəwwəʿu-ya. təz ʾabbilom səm ʾəzu mäkan ʾəzuy məntay yəbbähal bilomṭäyyäqu-ya. Määdab yəbbähal bilom mäläsu-lom-ya (FGSE 60/7-13) ‘And about His death they say thus: [It is said that] a soothsayer had said to Him “Your death is in Määdab”. As to Him, [it is said that] He didn’t know that there was such a place. Then one day [it is said that] having gone out He was invited to a far place. [It is said that] having remembered, he asked ‘What is the name of this place called’. [It is said that] they answered Him “Määdab”’.

There are other anecdotes which would be too long to quote *verbatim*, such as the one about *ḥaşäy* Ləbnä Dəngəl who, having escaped from Ahmad Graññ to an *ʾamba* in Tigray and suffering from hunger, sent a boy to buy bread from a local woman; the woman asks for more money than the boy was given so he climbs back to ask permission of the king; than goes back down but the woman in the meantime has doubled the price so he climbs again and again and every time the sum becomes higher. Finally he buys the bread for an exorbitant price but in meantime *ḥaşäy* Ləbnä Dəngəl dies of hunger (FGSI 45).

It seems that the particle *-ya* in Tigrinya may be compared to the kind of evidential called “Quotative” found in some native languages of the Americas which indicates that a statement pronounced is based on hearsay i.e. that it “has been heard from someone else and is not made on the speaker’s own authority”,¹⁷ and that the speaker doesn’t assume responsibility for the information conveyed.¹⁸ However, in the Amerindian languages quoted this kind of evidentiality constitutes only one aspect of a whole system of data-source marking, whereas in Tigrinya it only designates one case, leaving the rest of the language with no other grammatical means as to the indication of the source of information.

Absolute Present

The royal proclamations (*awaḡ*) which are quoted in the historical Amharic texts have a special and fixed form, irrespective of the period in which they were proclaimed. The only difference seems to be their length. In CHRTa they are particularly short and may amount to one word only, for instance *kätät* – ‘assemble!’ as an order of mobilization, whereas a similar order in HSHI, referring to the general mobilization after the Italian invasion, occupies almost three pages of the text (HSHI 192-195). However, the change in length applies only to the period of Haylä Səllase, because during Menilek’s reign the proclamations were still very short and concise. Yet, whatever the length, their basic linguistic characteristics remain the same. They are always in the singular, they contain one or more imperative forms and, quite often, are assorted with a promise or a threat, which is formulated in the first person. Here are a few examples:

b-alläh ərga gäzi-h əne näññ (GSDM 154/28) – ‘Wherever you are, calm down, I am your ruler’; *yä-and sammənt sənq-əh-n yaz tənkarra bäqlo tənkarra agasäs tənkarra färäs yəzäh bä-märrahu-h tägwaz* (CHRTb 21/17-19) – ‘Take one week’s provisions and, having taken a strong mule, a strong pack animal, a strong horse, depart to where I lead you’;

gəba! al-gäba-mm y-alh lä-wänd əḡḡ-nna əgr-u-n lä-set-mm tut-wa-n əqʷärṭallähu (CHRTb 13/11-12) – ‘Submit! If you don’t submit I shall cut the men’s hands and feet and the women’s breasts’;

y-al-qʷäräbh ətäla-h-allähu (CHRTa 10/11-12) – ‘You who won’t receive the holy communion, I’ll hate you!’;

Wällo kä-aše Yohannəs addäbabay lä-rəkbä kahənat y-al-tägäññäh šumät y-alläh bä-šumät-əh märet y-alläh bä-märet-əh əqät-əh-allähu (GSDM 86/27-87/2) – ‘If you don’t present yourself in Wällo for the *rəkbä kahənat* (a religious ceremony), I’ll punish you in your office if you have an office and in your land, if you have land’, etc.

¹⁷ Kenneth W. Whistler, ‘Evidentials in Patwin’, in: *Evidentiality: The Linguistic Coding of Epistemology*, ed. by Wallace L. Chafe & Johanna Nichols, (Advances in Discourse Processes, 20), Norwood. Ablex, 1986, p. 64.

¹⁸ David J. Weber, ‘Information perspective, profile and patterns in Quechua’, *ibid.*, 137–155.

The same pattern is repeated in the proclamations of Haylā Səllase, the main difference being that he supplies far more details and explains the circumstances which brought him to proclaim what is being proclaimed.

From the point of view of the tenses used in the main clauses of the proclamations, there seems to be an anomaly,¹⁹ as compared with other kinds of texts: sometimes the compound gerund is used for marking the present tense where we would expect the compound imperfect, for instance:

bä-yyä-abbat-əh gəba sätəčče-h-allähu. abbat yä-lela-h əne-n däğğ tana abbat-əh əne nänñ (GSDM 54/21-22) – ‘Return to your father’s [property], I give [it] to you (lit. I have given you). If you have no father seek my favour, I am your father’;

ə-säfar-əmm əyy-amättah lä-mm-ttəgäbäyayyā-w nägär yä-zämäčə-w gize əsti-yalq dräs qärät a-ttənnäkkə-mm mərre-h-allähu (HSHI 194/5-6) – ‘Until the campaign is finished you won’t be liable to tax on the things which you bring to the camp for making business, I dispense you’;

läğ-e-n Täfäri-n kə-əgziabher gara bəyy-aččəhw-allähu (HSHI 6/18-19) – ‘I entrust to you with God my son Täfäri’.

As a matter of fact, like the other Semitic languages which have only one verb form for the present and the future,²⁰ namely the compound imperfect, Amharic has a serious problem, when wanting to render an event which occurs at a specific point of the present and is synchronous with the act of speech, which I shall call the *absolute present*. The compound imperfect may always be interpreted as a future, even if additional means, such as the adverbs *now*, *instantly*, etc. are used, e.g.:

bäsänbät sərə kə-zzih qädmo kəlkəl näw, ahun-əmm bə-sänbät sə-ttəsära yä-tägännäh təqqättalläh (HSHI 25/20-22) – ‘Hitherto work on Saturday was forbidden. But now, if you are found working on Saturday, you will be punished’.

Consequently, in order to clearly distinguish between what is still potential and lies in the domain of the future, and what is being realized at the moment of speech, Amharic turns to a past tense which is closest to the present, that is to the compound gerund which basically designates a past event which has some relevance to the moment of speech.²¹ In the case of a royal proclamation the exact indication of the moment in which an order or a decree is enacted is crucial therefore it cannot be indicated by the compound imperfect which can always be interpreted as a vague promise for the future. In the absence of an

¹⁹ I deal with the tense of the main verbs only because only in them it is independent of any secondary considerations, such as the presence of conjunctions, which demand a specific tense, and the like.

²⁰ Notably in Classical Arabic and in Biblical Hebrew. There is a large body of literature on this subject, cf. for instance Carl Brockelmann, *Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen*, Berlin: Reuther & Richard, 1913, vol. 2, p. 154.

²¹ For the use of the compound gerund see: Olga Kapeliuk, ‘Encore sur *rässahu* et *räsəččallähu*’, *RSE*, 25 (1971–72), pp. 78–89.

absolute present, the language resorts to the compound gerund which also adds to these expressions a certain nuance of solemnity.²²

The opposition between the compound imperfect and the compound gerund is further illustrated in the following few examples:

lä-zämäčä kä-tazzäh bäh^wala wäslätäh kä-zämäčä-w yä-qärräh b-agär šum wäy bä-käsaš äyyä-täyazh bä-räst-äh-nna bä-gänzäb-äh b-akal-äh-ämm təqqäṭṭalläh; lä-käsaš-u-mm kä-gänzäb-äh siso-w-n märrəqqe-llät-allähu (HSHI 194/29-31) – ‘But, after being called for the *zämäčä*, if you abscond and stay away, having been caught by the *agär šum* or by an accuser, you will be punished in your property, your money and your body; and to the accuser I grant one third of your money’;

kä-and abbat kä-qəddus Märqos kä-andit ənnat kä-Əskəndərəya haymanot al-əhon-əmm yämmə-ttəl säw kä-krəstyan täläy; dägmo-mm mäšhaf alläññ ləkkärakkär yämmə-ttəl gubae ənnsät-äh-allän (GSDM 86/6-9) – ‘You, the man who says “I won’t be of one father, of Saint Mark, of one mother, of the creed of Alexandria”, depart from Christianity; but to the one who says “I have a book let me discuss” we allow you [to hold] a synod (in the future)’;

əndärasennät-u-n lä-däggač Gərmame sätəččallähu (GSDM 72/8-9) – ‘I give (by this) the position of deputy to *däggač Gərmame*’.

In the example which follows the two verbal forms are used side by side; the first case, which is not part of the proclamation but rather the narration preceding it, the future connotation of the compound imperfect is clear, whereas the second occurrence in the proclamation itself, consists of the compound gerund and corresponds to the very moment of speech:

aše Tewodros yä-Šäwa-n säw yä-geta-h-n yä-Sahlä Səllase lağ Darge-n əsät-äh-allähu əyy-alu täsfä əyyä-säṭṭu aq^wäytäw-ət näbbär... Kä-bəzu zämän bäh^wala yä-Šäwa säw yä-getah-n lağ Darge-n sätəččäh-allähu bäläw awağ näggäru (GSDM 51/29-33) – ‘*aše Tewodros* had kept waiting the people of *Šäwa* giving them hope, saying “I shall give you *Darge*, son of your master *Sahlä Səllase*”... Much time later he pronounced a proclamation saying: “People of *Šäwa*, I give you *Darge* your master’s son”’.

Now, there may be cases where the compound imperfect should be interpreted as present, as, for instance, the verb *yəššal-äh-all* in the following example:

araš əräš näggade-mm näggəd. šafta wəmbade täw gəba yəššal-äh-all tüzziḥ qädäm yä-bäddälk-äw q^wanəgga yä-qorräṭh näfs yä-güddälh mərre-h-allähu (CHRTb 23/3-5)

²² The use of the compound gerund to mark an absolute present is not limited to the royal proclamations. It is used in solemn promises and declarations in general, as well as in cases where there is a need to express absolute present with punctual verbs. For instance it is used at the opening of a news broadcast on the radio and TV when the speaker announces: *ahun zəna-w-n gəmmərənall* – ‘Now we are starting (lit. we have started) the news’. It even has its effect on the use of the English present perfect by Amharic speakers if to judge from a letter accompanying a brochure I’ve received which reads: “We have sent to you this brochure”, but meaning “we are sending...”, cf. Olga Kapeliuk, ‘Reflections on the Ethio-Semitic Gerund’, in: *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: Papers of the XIIIth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Kyoto, 12–17 December 1997*, ed. by Katsuyoshi Fukui & al., Kyoto 1997, pp. 492–498 (here 496–497).

– ‘Farmer plow, merchant trade. Outlaw, robber, give up, submit, it suits you better. You who harmed before, who cut the tendon, who killed a living being, I forgive you’.

But there is a difference between such verbs as ‘it suits you better’, which designate a state or prolonged action, and punctual verbs such as ‘to give’ whose action is accomplished at the moment of its performance. Speakers of Slavonic languages such as Polish or Russian are familiar with this phenomenon. In their language there is no possibility to use the present tense with a perfective verb and only imperfective verbs have a present tense.

Factitivity

Another special linguistic characteristic of historical texts in Amharic is the interplay between the personal pronouns *arswo* and *arsaččāw* used for referring in the third person to important personalities and I think I have shown in the past how the authors of chronicles use the opposition between them in grading their allegiance and respect.²³

There is yet another grammatical means for enhancing the magnitude of the imperial office – the factitive verbal stem. Amharic uses the stem with the prefix *as-* with a transitive verb to express an action performed by intermediary of another person.²⁴ In history books written in the West expressions such as, for instance: “In 762 al-Manṣūr ... laid the foundation stone of his new capital Baghdad”,²⁵ are the normal way to express what in Amharic necessitates a factitive stem of the verb, otherwise it might be interpreted as *lèse-majesté*, the emperor not being supposed to lay stones. Thus, an action of the emperor which has a stately significance, whenever possible, will be in the factitive stem, even though the intermediary is not mentioned.

The actions connected with the imperial office are many and the most frequently mentioned deal with military operations, with punitive actions, with constructing or destroying, with protocol, and the like. Not all the verbs can receive the *as-* prefix while with some the stem it is particularly frequent, but the general tendency is clear. Here are a few examples:

bä-hädar 21 qän Tamo-n amba-w-n askäbbäbäw tor säddäw Zoma-n Wäččo-n assäbbäru-t (GSDM 80/14-15) – ‘On 21 of *hädar* he made surround *amba* Tamo, he sent an army and made destroy Zoma and Wäččo’;

[there is a shortage of water and the soldiers] *wäha-w-n b-agäññä gize ändä käbt äyyä-gäbba s-iṭäṭṭa äyyä-wäṭṭa kä-dar si-mot b-iyäyu askäläkkälu-t nägus-u* (CHRTa 15/17-19) – ‘When the king saw that when they found water they entered like cattle and drank and while going out were dying on the bank, he made forbid it’;

²³ Olga Kapeliuk, ‘The evolution of *arswo* and *arsaččāw* as sociolinguistic variants’, in: *New Trends in Ethiopian Studies: Papers of the 12th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Michigan State University, 5–10 September 1994*, ed. by Harold Golden Marcus, Lawrenceville 1994, vol. 1, pp. 1270–1274.

²⁴ Wolf Leslau, *Reference Grammar of Amharic*, Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1995, p. 481.

²⁵ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, New York: Macmillan, 1951, p. 292.

lam-u-n bäre-w-n əyyä-marräku yasdäbäddäbu-t ġämmär (GSDM 56/3-4) – ‘While capturing cows and oxen he started to make exterminate them’;

bä-mäčärräša bä-təqit nägär asrāw wädiyaw asgäddälə-wo (CHRTb 26/4-5) – ‘Finally, having imprisoned him for a thing of no importance, shortly after He made him be executed’;

abuna Sälama-n täältäw yä-dänk^wan-u-n zuriya bä-šoh asaṭṭärāw bä-näft zäb asṭäbbäqu-waččäw (CHRTa 25/3-5) – ‘Having quarreled with *abuna* Sälama, He made surround the environs of the tent with thorny shrubs and made Him guard by sentry with rifles’;

awaḡ asnäggäru əndih bälāw (CHRTb 11/2) – ‘He made proclaim a decree saying...’;

bä-zziḥ-mm gize nəgusä nägäst-u-mm azzažočč-u-n asṭärru (GSDM 212/28) – ‘At this moment the emperor made call the commanders’.

It is interesting to note, however, that in the autobiography of Haylä Səllase in many cases the synthetic factitive verbal form has been replaced by an analytic construction with the verb *adärrägä* to the same effect:

yä-kätüt awaḡ... ənd-innäggär adärrägu (HSHI 192/16-17) – ‘We made proclaim the decree of mobilization’;

lä-mäṭṭäbabäqiya yämm-ihonu wättaddäročč kä-yyä-dänb-u bä-q^wəṭər wädä Addis Abäba ənd-imäṭu adrəgän näbbär (HSHI 190/23-24) – ‘We made come to Addis Abäba a certain number of soldiers from every body of troops as a means of protection’.

Another way of expressing a similar notion in HSHI is the use of the passive form of the verb when the person performing the act is not mentioned:

yä-däbrä Bizän abba Amdä Maryam ənd-imäṭu täṣafä-llaččäw (HSHI 143/2-3) – ‘It was written (to him) that the abuna of *däbrä* Bizän should come’;

It is not impossible that Haylä Səllase was influenced by French, the language in which he was educated, when departing from the natural Amharic way of rendering factitivity.

*

We have seen a few special means which, with the passage from Gəʿəz to modern Neo-Ethiopic, allowed to introduce more accurate and exact expressions into Ethiopian historical writings.