# MORPHOLOGY AND SYNTAX

## Noun

In contrast to Tigrinya and Tigre, gender is not formally marked. Nouns are treated as masculine or feminine for reasons of natural gender or by convention; thus, *färäs* 'horse' is masculine, but *baqlo* 'mule' is feminine. Inanimate objects are usually treated as masculine, but there are exceptions. Words like *ləj* 'child', can be made more specific by the addition of *wənd* 'male', or *set* 'female': *wənd ləj* 'boy'. Gender is specifically marked in the affixed definite article, the demonstratives and the second and third persons of the verb. The Semitic feminine ending *-t* reappears in certain words, e.g. *mušərrit* 'bride' (*mušərra* 'bridegroom').

The concept of gender merges in Amharic with that of dimension, giving rise to an opposition between normal size/masculine and diminutive/feminine. Thus, concord fluctuates: a noun which takes 'masculine' concord when the referent is of normal dimensions may take 'feminine' concord when departure from the norm is to be stressed; cf. *yih bet tälləq nəw* 'this house is big', but *yih bet bäṭam tənnəš nəč* 'this house is very small'.

Conversely, nouns like *ṣähay* 'sun', *čäräqa* 'moon', *kokäb* 'star', which normally take feminine/diminutive concord, acquire masculine status when unusual size is stressed; cf. *kokäb wəṭṭač* 'a star came out', but *talaq kokäb kä.sämay wädäqä* 'a great star fell from heaven' (Revelation 8.10).

### DEFINITE ARTICLE

*-u/-w* identifies a singular noun as masculine; the feminine affix is *-wa/-itu*: e.g. *bet* 'house', *bet**u*** 'the house'; *lam* 'cow', *lam**wa*** 'the cow'.

### NUMBER

The plural affix is *-očč*, which takes the definite article: e.g. *bet.očč.u* 'the houses'. There are some traces of a broken plural. The numeral *and* 'one' can be used as an indefinite article. The accusative is marked by *-n*: e.g. *innatwa.**n** ayyəč* 'she saw her mother'.

Genitive: the particle *yä* precedes the noun: e.g. *y**ä**.Yohannəs innat* 'John's mother'; *y**ä**.Ityopya häzb* 'the people of Ethiopia'. Further examples: *yä.däbub Afrika yä.tor awroplan* 'a South African warplane'; *yä.wədajən-nät.na yä.təbəbbər səməmmənnät* 'a treaty (*səməmmənnät*) of friendship and cooperation' (*-na* is the connective 'and').

*yä* is not used after prepositions: *b.abbat.e bet wəṣṭ* 'in my father's house' instead of *\*bä yä . . . .*

Other case relationships are expressed with the help of prefixes, circumfixes, and affixes: *see* **Postpositions**, etc., below.

## Adjective

The attributive adjective precedes the noun and is formally unmarked: e.g. *təlləq bet* 'big house'. If the noun is definite, the article is affixed to the adjective: e.g. *təlləqu bet* 'the big house'; and similarly for the case ending in *-n*. The adjective may take the plural marker: e.g. *addis.očč bet.očč* 'new houses'.

The possessive marker *yä* precedes the attributive adjective: *yä ḳonjo set* 'of the beautiful woman'.

### COMPARATIVE

*kä* or *tä* precedes the word compared: e.g. **kä**.*Gondar Addis Ababa təlləq näw* 'Addis Abbeba is bigger than Gondar.'

## Pronoun

The independent personal pronouns with copula and enclitic markers:

|   |   | *Singular* |  | *Plural* |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 |  | əne näññ | -ññ | əñña nän | -n |
| 2 | masc. | antä näh | -h | ənnantä naččəhu | -ččəhu |
|   | fem. | anči näš | -š |  |  |
| 3 | masc. | əssu näw | -w/-t | ənnässu naččäw | -ččäw |
|   | fem. | əsswa näčč | -t |  |  |

The enclitic markers are shown in characteristic form without the linking vowels that usually precede them. They are used as the object pronouns of transitive verbs: e.g. *Bä.gäbäya ayyu.t* 'They saw him/her at market'; and may be anticipated by a noun or the relevant pronoun in the accusative case: e.g. *əssu.n ayyu.(t)* 'they saw him'. Some additional examples: *ayyä.hu.t* 'I saw him/it'; *ayyä.hu.w.at* 'I saw her'; *ayyä.hu.w.aččə hu* 'I saw you (pl.)'; *ayyä.ññ* 'he saw me'; *ayyä.ččə hu* 'he saw you (pl.)'.

There are respectful forms for independent second and third persons: second *ərswo*; third *əssaččäw*.

### POSSESSION

This may be expressed by the affixed personal markers: sing. 1 *-e*, 2 *-əh/š*, 3 *-u/wai*; pl. 1 *-aččən*, 2 *-aččəh*, 3 *-aččäw*: e.g. *bete* 'my house'; *betaččən* 'our house'.

'To have' is expressed in Amharic by means of the verb *allä* 'there is'; the

past tense is *näbbärä*. In this construction *allä* is conjugated in concord with the possessed object, and to these inflections the pronominal enclitic identifying the possessor by person, gender, and number is added. Thus, the form *all.ä.ññ* indicates that a masc. sing. object (*-ä-*) is (*all-*) to-me (*ññ*), i.e. 'I have a (masculine singular object)'. The form *all.äččə.ññ* identifies the possessed object as feminine. Similarly, *all.u.ññ*: 'I have (plural object)'. Cf. *all.ä.w* 'he has' (masculine singular object), *all.äččə.w* 'he has' (feminine singular object), *all.u.t* (for plural object). *allä* is negated by *yälläm*: *yäll.ä.ññ.əm* 'I do not have' (masculine singular object). Past tense (affirmative): *näbbär.ä.ññ* 'I had' (masc. sing. obj.).

### DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUN/ADJECTIVE
'This': masc. *yəh*, fem. *yəčč*, pl. *ənnäzzih*; 'that': masc. *ya*, fem. *yačč*, pl. *ənnäzziya*.

### INTERROGATIVE PRONOUN
*man* 'who?'; *mən(dən)* 'what?'

### RELATIVE PRONOUN
*See* relative clause in **Verb**, below.

## Verb

Roots are mainly two-, three-, or four-radical, the majority being triliterals. A few verbs have five radicals, and there is one monoradical – *ša* 'to want'. The citation form is, as customary in Semitic languages, the third person masculine past tense (more accurately, perfective): e.g. *mätta* 'he came', *fällägä* 'he wanted'. A typical triliteral perfective is conjugated as follows:

> singular 3 masc. *fällägä*, fem. *fällägäčč*; 2 masc. *fällägh*, fem. *fällägš*; 1 *fälläghu*;
> plural 3 common, *fällägu*; 2 common, *fällägaččəhu*; 1 common, *fällägən*.

### IMPERFECTIVE, OR PRESENT-FUTURE FORM
The stem is modulated by prefix and affix to provide this form, which is not predictable from the perfective form. There are two patterns, which hinge on differing treatment of the geminated second radical: that is to say, if **1, 2, 3** are the radicals, **1ä22ä3** may yield *yə1ä23al* or *yə1ä22ə3al* as present-future form: thus, *fällägä* yields *yəFäLLəGal*; but *säbbärä* yields *yəSäBRal*.

This is, in fact, a composite form. The *-al* component is a shortened form of the existential verb *allä*, and the pronominal object is therefore infixed between the stem and the *-al* component: cf. some examples with **FäLLäGä**:

> *əFäLLəGä.w.allähu* 'I want him/it': *-w-* is the third person masculine pronominal object, and *ə...hu* is the present-future circumfix for first-person singular.

*təFäLLəGə.ññ.alläh* 'you (masc. sing.) want me': *-ññ-* is the first person pronominal object, *tə...h* is the second person singular masculine circumfix.

The prefixes in this verbal form are the familiar Semitic series: sing. 3 *yə-/tə-*, 2 *tə-*, 1 *ə-*; pl. 3 *yə-*, 2 *tə-*, 1 *ənnə-*; and the affixes are forms of the existential verb + personal markers.

Biliterals are conjugated essentially as triliterals: e.g. *qomä* 'he stood'; *qomku* 'I stood'; *yəqomal* 'he stands'; *əqomallähu* 'I stand'.

Amharic has an imperative mood used only in the second person singular, and a jussive, used in the first and third person singular and plural and in second plural. The verbal noun takes the prefix *mä-*: e.g. *mäfalläg* 'wanting'; *mähed* 'going'. These forms can take the personal affixes: e.g. *kä.mähede bäfit* 'before I went' (for the form *kä...bäfit*, *see* **Postpositions**, etc., below).

GERUND

The base patterns are: **1ä23**, or **1ä22ə3**: the gerund takes personal affixes similar to the possessive series: *fälləgo* 'wanting...he ...'; *fälləgän* 'wanting...we...', e.g. *Betun šəṭo yət agər məhed yəfälləgal?* 'Having sold his house, to which country does he want to go?' *fälləgä.š.aččäw* 'you (fem.) having wanted them...'.

DERIVED STEMS

(a) *-a* prefixed to base stem changes intransitive to transitive: e.g. *moqä* 'he was warm'; *amoqä* 'he warmed sth. up';

(b) *-tä-* passive of transitive, e.g. *anäbbäbä* 'he read': *tänabbäbä* 'it was read';

(c) *as-*: causative, e.g. *wässädä* 'he took'; *aswässädä* 'he had sth. taken'.

THE SHORT IMPERFECTIVE FORM

This is the present-future form minus the *-allä* component. It is used, e.g. in subordinate temporal and causal clauses introduced by such pre-posited relational conjunctions as *sə-*, *lə-*, *bə-*, *əndə-*, etc. (with juncture sandhi). That is to say, the short imperfective stem cannot be used by itself; it must be preceded by one of the relational affixes. Examples: *Almaz simäṭṭa wädä bet əhedallähu* 'When A. comes, I'll go home'; *Yohannəs mäṣhafun sifälläg* 'when John was looking for the book'. And in negative: *baburu sa.y.mättä* 'the train not coming' = 'before the train comes'.

A conditional form is made by prefixing the relational particle *b(ə/i)* to the short imperfective: *bi.mäṭa, ə.hed.allähu* 'if he comes, I'll go'; *gize bi.nor.ä.ññ* 'if I had time'. The corresponding negative form is *b.ay.nor.ä.ññ*.

Volition/intention is expressed by the relational affix *l(ə/i)* + short imperfective: e.g. *mäṣhaf li.yanäb yəfälləgal* 'he wants to read a book'.

### NEGATION

For the perfective, the circumfix *al...m* is used: e.g. **alfällägäm** 'he didn't want'; **alfälläghum** 'I didn't want'. The circumfix for the imperfective negative is: *aC...m*, where C varies: cf. **ayfälləgəm** 'he doesn't want'; **anfälləgəm** 'we don't want'. With infixed pronoun object: *alfälləgäwəm* 'I don't want it'; *ayfälləgaččəhum* 'he doesn't want you (pl.)'.

### RELATIVE CLAUSES

These are treated as qualifiers preceding the headword: *yä-* introduces a relative clause in the perfective; *yämmə-* in the imperfective. Cf. **yämäṭṭaw** *säw* 'the man (*säw*) who came'; **yämäṭṭut säwočč** 'the men who came'; *gänzäb* **yäṭäffabbat säw** 'the man who lost his money'; **yämmənorəbbat bet yəhäw** 'This is the house in which I live.'

In a negative relative clause the *-əm* component of the negating circumfix is dropped: *yämm.al.fäll ə ggäw mäṣhaf* 'the book I don't want'.

## Prepositions and postpositions

Circumfix: e.g.

*bä* 'in': *bä.kätäma* 'in the city';
*kä* 'from': *Kä.yät mäṭṭa* 'From where has he come?';
*wädä* 'towards, to': *kä.gära wädä ḳäññ* 'from left to right';
*kä...bəhwala* 'after': *Kä.hullu bəhwala mäṭṭa* 'He came after all the others';
*bä...mäkakäl* 'among, between': *bä.säwočč mäkakäl* 'among people';
*lä...silə* 'for, on behalf of': *lä.ageru silə motä* 'to die for one's country'.

Also *bä...lay* 'on', *bä...wəsṭ* 'inside'; *kä...bäfit* 'before', etc.

## Word order

SOV; OSV is permissible.