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1 Stress in Amharic

The stress/accent situation in Amharic has, in recent works, not been the subject of any investigation in its own right. The older grammars, however, pay more attention to stress, treating it in much greater depth than is the case with new publications.¹

In Armbruster's three volume work, stress is consistently marked in every word. In the perfect tense, stress comes either before the geminated consonant or on the long vowel: thus, in my transcription, *gäbba*, 'he entered'; *läqqämä*, 'he picked'; *mänäzzärä*, 'he changed'; *täsabä*, 'he was drawn'. This is also true in the case of *bäzza-bbäñ*, 'it is too much for me', though *bäzza-bbäñ* is also possible.

In general, the long vowels and the vowel before double consonants are stressed; here, the other forms of a verb already cited, *läqqämä*: *läqmoal*, *yäläq(ə)m*, *yäläqm-al*, *yälqäm*, *ləqäm*, *läqm^wo*, *mälqäm*, *läqami*. In the imperfect tense, the personal prefix never carries the tone, which is also the case with the weak verb *yälək*, 'he sends' (perf. *lakä*), but, in the jussive, *yäräf*, 'let him rest' (perf. *arräfä*), and *yängär*, 'let him say' (perf. *näggärä*), if the next syllable lacks double consonants, which always attracts the tone, as in *yälämləm*, 'let it be verdant' (perf. *lämällämä*). However, in two-syllable jussives of weak verbs with a long vowel in the second syllable, a conflict occurs between (1) the rule of stress falling on the first syllable and (2) the rule that long vowels or vowels before double consonants, respectively, attract stress. Thus as a kind of compromise a secondary accent is set: *yälək*, 'let him send' (*lakä*); *yasayy*, 'let him show' (*asayyä*); *yäbba*, 'let him be said' (*täbalä*). In *yägba*, 'let him enter' (*gäbba*), and *yäbla*, 'let him feed' (*abälla*), only the first syllable is stressed because the long final vowel shows a tendency to shorten.

¹ Cf. the in part extensive works of Armbruster 1908–1920; Guidi 1924; and Abraham 1942.

With the addition of heavy disyllabic personal suffixes, auxiliary verbs, and object suffixes, stress shifts to the right: *läqqämačč'uh*, 'you (pl.) picked' (without suffixes *läqqämä*); *əfalləg-alläw^b*, 'I am seeking' (*əfalləg*); *yəngär-äččäw*, 'let him tell them ('him', pol.)' (*yəngär*).

In R. C. Abraham's comprehensive grammar,² all words are listed only in transcription and not, as with Armbruster, in the original script as well. The transcription includes the marking of both stress and tone. Here—and for the first time—Amharic is described as a tone language, which, however, as distinct from West African languages, does not use tone to distinguish meaning, but rather to describe the 'rhythm of the whole sentence'. In *mängäd-ú-n ayä*, the article carries the main stress (ú), the first syllables of the two words the secondary stress (ä, a), and, in addition, the article carries high tone (ú), while all other syllables carry the unmarked low tone. In this example I have adapted Abraham's wholly different transcription (for instance his 'ay'ye') as my own.

The following applies to the perfect tense: *näggärä*, 'he said', with stress and high tone on the first syllable (but in context also *gäddälä*, 'he killed', if a high tone precedes); with an extension, *tárägg^wämä*, 'he translated', and *älläqqäqämä*, 'he helped to kick'. In the imperfect and jussive, high tone and stress tend to fall together: *yälläqqäm-all*, 'it will be picked' (just like the substantive *mättässäbya*, 'memorial'); *yälək-all*, 'he will send'; *yälqäm*, 'let him pick'. Negation attracts the stress (and the high tone): *ät-tälqäm*, 'do not pick'. Heavy (disyllabic) object suffixes usually carry the stress: *yälək-älläññ-all*, 'he will send to/for me'; *näggärh^w-äččäw*, 'I told them' (with a main stress and a high tone); *yämm-ifälləg-äw-ún yagäññ-äw-all*, 'he will get what he seeks' (with two main stresses and two high tones).

Abraham also introduces a so-called rising as well as a falling accent, which, in some circumstances, seem to occur together, see the rising tone in the question '*täwq-äl'läb*', 'do you know?'

Since Abraham, this complexity has not been taken into account. However the matter deserves further investigation.

In the introductory grammar by I. Guidi,³ stress is not consistently marked. But it is noticeable that the vowel is stressed before double consonants and a long vowel also carries stress. The jussive shows, as with Armbruster and Abraham, initial stress (*yəngär*). In contrast to Armbruster (*nəgär*) the imperative has final stress, *nəgär*, while Abraham (*nəgär*) marks both high tone and stress, combining the two. In the gerund (converb), the

² Abraham 1942.

³ Guidi 1924.

personal affix is stressed, *säbro*, whereby Armbruster lists *säbro* and Abraham combines both stress and high tone, *nágro*, ‘he having told’. I find this latter approach more promising.

However, these very promising approaches were not pursued any further, nor were they ever examined or criticized. In more recent publications, one generally finds only occasional relevant remarks concerning accentuation. Consistent marking of stress is not found at all. This notwithstanding, J. Hartmann’s description is relatively comprehensive;⁴ he also distinguishes between a main tone and a secondary tone, for instance *ändä-mm-ännəmmar*, ‘that we learn’, and *ändä-käffälä*, ‘that he has paid’. W. Leslau in his large grammar lists even fewer examples.⁵ Here again closed syllables (*yəməsäkkər*, *däffäräčč*) as well as open syllables (*samuna*, *aräng^wade*) are stressed. Ideally, a list of the individual cases that show the diverging evidence should be made.⁶

Nevertheless, the weak prominence of the stress is often commented upon. Thus in the volume *Language in Ethiopia* (1976), it is said, ‘stress in Amharic runs with an almost even distribution on each syllable’.⁷

Typically, speakers of English and German, languages where stress can change meaning, do not view the intonational aspect of spoken Amharic as a matter of accentuation.

2 A New Contribution

Coming from this angle the reflexions by H. Sande and A. Hedding concerning ‘Syllable weight in Amharic’ are of great interest.⁸ Strangely, they state that previous literature on Amharic stress is ‘almost non-existent’.⁹ As shown above, in a somewhat cursory manner, the literature on the subject is considerable and should have been consulted in order to place the approach of these authors in the history of the scholarship of this subject and also to discuss and justify their arguments. But this particular contribution seems

⁴ Hartmann 1980.

⁵ Leslau 1995.

⁶ Klingenheben 1966, 13 speaks of an oscillation of the stress.

⁷ Cowley et al. 1976, 77; similarly Cohen 1936, n. 4.

⁸ Sande and Hedding 2017. A previous version of this article was given in a talk at the LSA Annual Meeting, Minneapolis, 2–5 January 2014, under the title ‘Geminate and weight in Amharic’ (Sande and Hedding 2014). The examples show the same mistakes. The barely phonetic rendering *-offf* for the plural ending was replaced by the more accurate *-occ* (*-očč*).

⁹ Sande and Hedding 2014, 1; 2017, 71.

to be more concerned with linguistic theories, which are then illustrated by further examples from Fula, Ṣan‘āni Arabic, and Cahuilla.

As for the authors’ views on Amharic syllable weight, I shall only deal with two points. On the one hand, they suppose that there is ‘alternating odd number syllable stress’¹⁰ which can lead to the existence of verbal forms having three (!) stressed syllables. This ‘default stress pattern’¹¹ is, on the other hand, supposedly overridden by the stress on each closed syllable, which applies ‘without exception’. This—they maintain—leads to ‘multiple consecutive stressed syllables’,¹² as can be seen in verbal forms (see below), where seven syllables follow each other, of which five are stressed, interrupted by two unstressed syllables.¹³

It is not my intention to compare these two authors’ stress allocations systematically with those of the existing scholarly literature on the subject; rather, I wish to examine the Amharic examples on which their theories are based. It becomes apparent that only very simple words show the linguistically correct form. When dealing with more complicated words (particularly verbal forms) the number of mistakes increases (at times up to three in a single word).

In the following I quote the examples in the usual Ethiopistic form and ignore the syllabification given in Sande and Hedding’s article, which does not in any way dispute its relevance; similarly, I disregard the marking of feet, for instance *‘täräpeza’*,¹⁴ instead of *‘(t’ä.rä).(p’e.za)’*.¹⁵

The following mistakes are found in the Amharic examples of these authors. In the following, I add the correct forms, preceded by ‘>’, and give a more exact explanation:

– *mäwärad*, ‘to be embarrassed’ (two mistakes) > *mäwwaräd*, infinitive of T₃ *täwarrädä*;¹⁶

¹⁰ Sande and Hedding 2017, 71.

¹¹ Sande and Hedding 2014, 1.

¹² Sande and Hedding 2017, 72.

¹³ With so many stresses in one word M. Cohen seems to be proved right when saying, ‘On n’y peut noter aucun accent d’intensité ou de hauteur notable à des places déterminées’ (Cohen 1936, 63).

¹⁴ Other authors transcribe this word with a lengthened *p*, which could change the accentuation. Here, only the vowel of the stressed syllable is underlined.

¹⁵ Sande and Hedding 2017, 72.

¹⁶ Capitals stand for the prefixed stem-forming elements (where 0 = no such element), and the numbers indicate internal vocalization (3 with *a* after the first radical, 4 with repetition of the second radical).

- *māwwäräd*, ‘to embarrass’ (two mistakes) > *mawwaräd*, infinitive of At₃ *awwarrädä*, hence the causative of T₃ *tāwarrädä*;
- *asdakakälku*, ‘I arranged (my schedule)’ (three mistakes) > *astäkakkälku*, Ast₄ of *akkälä*;
- *yätäkäffätawən bər*, ‘the open door’ (three mistakes) > *yä-täkäffätä-w-ən bərr*, ‘the (-w-) door (acc. -ən) which (yä-) was opened’;
- *mäčuh*, ‘to yell’ > *mäčoh*, infinitive of *čohä*;
- *əyyäčuhä näw*, ‘he is yelling’ > *əyyä-čohä näw*;
- *bälläččəh^w*, ‘y’all ate’—this form has been transliterated from the written representation, the pronunciation is however *bälläččux*;¹⁷
- *əyyätättallallaččəh^w näw*, ‘you (pl.) are hating each other’ (three mistakes) > *əyyä-tätälallaččəh^w näw*, of T₄ *tätälalla* (with the mistake found in Kane’s dictionary)—this is the example with the five stressed syllables;¹⁸
- *lämmənnättämammänəbbät*, ‘to him in whom we believe’ (three mistakes) > *lä-mm-ənnättämammən-əbbät* (of At₄ *attämammänä*, impf. *yattämammən*)—also with five stressed syllables;
- *čärəswall*, ‘he finished’ (three mistakes) > *čärrəs^w-all*—both vowels of the verbal form and the consonant lengthening are incorrect, *-all* is the auxiliary verb;
- *čäräsäč*, ‘she finished’ (two mistakes) > O₂ *čärräsäč(č)*;
- *yisəbrəwall*, ‘he will break (sth)’ > *yə/isəbr-əw-all*;
- *tägaggärəwalləč*, ‘she will bake it’ (three mistakes) > *təgaggər-əw-alləč*, of O₃ *gaggärä*;
- *əfalləgatallabu*, ‘she needs me’ > *əfalləg-at-alləb^w*, ‘I seek her’, O₂ *fallägä*.

Thus—with the exception of the trivial *alä*, ‘he said’, and *allä*, ‘there is’—all their verbal forms in the perfect, gerund, and imperfect are incorrect. The only correct forms are the infinitives *mätträfräf*, ‘to overflow’ (from Tät *tätträfrärfä*, a somewhat opaque derivative of *räfrärfä*); *mäčämmär*, ‘to add an ingredient to sth’ (from O₂ *čämmärä*); and *mäsšqädädäm*, ‘to race’ (from Täš₄ *täsšqädädämä*).

As for the simple non-verbal nouns some of them are written correctly, like *tarəpeza*, ‘table’; *wəšša*, ‘dog’; *setočč*, ‘women’ (sing. *set*); *takač*, ‘lazy’; *gäna*, ‘still’; *gänna*, ‘Christmas’; as are some items in the list of adjectives taken from Leslau’s grammar.¹⁹ However there are also mistakes even among simple words:

¹⁷ Leslau 1995, 287.

¹⁸ Kane 1990, 2082.

¹⁹ Leslau 1995, 175.

- *qofiya*, ‘hat’ (three times) > *kofiy(y)a*;
- *sau*, ‘person’ (nine times) > *säw*;
- *täbbab*, ‘narrow’ > *täbbab*;
- *kallal*, ‘light’ (two mistakes) > *källal*;
- *saffi*, ‘wide’ > *säffi*;
- *saffi*, ‘wide (pl.)’ > *säfffi*;
- *kaččän*, ‘skinny’ (two mistakes) > *käččän*;
- *kačäččän*, ‘skinny’ (pl.) (two mistakes) > *käčäččän*;
- *kabbad*, ‘difficult’ > *käbbad*;
- *kabbad*, ‘difficult’ (pl.) > *käbbad*.

One can only conclude that the authors were not sufficiently familiar with the language they were dealing with. Nevertheless, my motive for highlighting these mistakes and for writing this short piece is not the identification of this fact, but to point out the systematic nature of these mistakes, which, initially, had also escaped my attention. An analysis of the examples allows us to categorize them into the following typical categories: (1) confusion of the two central vowels *ä* and *ə* (in their contribution written *ä* and *ɛ*); (2) confusion of *ä* and *a*; (3) confusion of *o* and *u*; (4) unsureness about consonantal lengthening.

The greatest difficulties of these authors arise when dealing with the central vowels (1–2). This is only partly due to the insufficient linguistic competence of the interviewers; the greater part is a consequence of the indigenously linguistic competence of the interviewee(s). The reason is that Oromo is, both sociolinguistically and in terms of language politics, the language nearest to Amharic, but, contrary to Amharic, it does not have central vowels. This explains the confusion between the two central vowels *ä* and *ə* and the replacement of *ä* by *a*, which can be seen as a typical substitution feature of Amharic-speaking Oromo. This lack of competence is restricted to phonetic realization only, which, to a certain extent, follows the patterns of Oromo, but which does not apply to the informants’ ability to express themselves in Amharic. It must be left to a future investigation to analyse the contrasting phonemic and accentual systems of the two languages, namely Ethiopian Semitic Amharic and Cushitic Oromo. Suffice it to say in this context that such speakers are not suitable as informants for the Amharic sound system.

3 On Adjectival Reduplication

In a further section, Sande and Hedding deal with adjectival reduplication in Amharic.²⁰ Several classes of the type $CVC_i:C_iVC$ (= $CVC:VC$) have the plural form $CV.C_i\grave{a}C_i:C_iVC$ (= $CVC_i\grave{a}C_i:VC$). The sequence *Ca* is thus inserted into the plural. This, by the way, is also the same mechanism used in the formation of the common reduplication stems of the verb. Thus from the basic stem O_1 *säbbärä*, ‘break’, one forms a reduplicated stem O_4 *säbabbärä*, ‘break somewhat’, ‘crack’, and, from the passive stem T_1 *täsäbbärä*, ‘be broken’, T_4 *täsäbabbärä*, ‘be broken somewhat’.

Specifically, we are dealing here with adjectives of the following nominal form:

- $C\grave{a}C:\grave{a}C$, for instance *rägğam*, ‘tall’, pl. *rägğäğğam*;²¹
- $C\grave{a}C:\grave{a}C$, such as *tälläq*, ‘big’, pl. *tälälläq*;
- $C\grave{a}C:aC$, for example *käbbad*, ‘difficult’, pl. *käbabbad*;
- $CaC:aC$, like *tallaq*, ‘older’, pl. *tälallaq*.

Most importantly, in the plural forms, both pertinent vowels of the singular are retained.

One has to add a further subtype: sing. *näčč*, ‘white’, pl. *näčäčč*. Here, we are dealing with a form $C\grave{a}C:[\grave{a}C]$ of a verb with a lost laryngeal as the third radical of the root. Thus, from the verb *nätta* ($\sqrt{nt\?}$),²² ‘be white’, the singular adjective **nätti?* is formed, palatalized **näččə?* > *näčč*, and in the plural **näčäččə?* > *näčäčč*.

However two adjectives of the form $C\grave{a}C:aC$, namely *täbbab*, ‘narrow’, and *qällal*, ‘light’, do not have this plural formation (one could surely find further examples). Obviously this occurs in the case of $C_2 = C_3$.²³

The fact that different adjectives do not display this same manner of formation is not due to an absence of consonantal lengthening.²⁴ There are

²⁰ Sande and Hedding 2017, 74–76.

²¹ In the case of an initial vowel, the underlying representation contains a glottal stop or aspirate (here transcribed *ʔ*, see Voigt 1986) that was eventually lost but which had already changed the *ä* vowel following the first radical to *a*, for instance **ʔäččər* > *aččər*, ‘short’.

²² Where *ʔ* represents the lost laryngeal.

²³ Cf. Leslau 1995, 176.

²⁴ Such an absence is implicit in the Introduction to the volume in which the study was published. Here, Paul Newman, the editor, comments extensively on the contribution under discussion (Newman 2017). For Amharic he underlines the significance of the opposition of moraic geminates and non-geminate consonant sequences, as supposedly found in *saffi* (better *säffi*) as against *qonğo*, whose plurals are different: *sa-*

numerous adjectives with gemination, like *dägg*, ‘kind’; *bäggo*, ‘good’; *lämmada*, ‘tame’; *təkkus*, ‘hot’; *qəddus*, ‘holy’; *bunnamma*, ‘brownish’ (with suffix *-(a)mma*); and many others that do not exhibit a reduplicated plural.

As is well known from other Semitic and Hamito-Semitic languages, broken plural forms pertain to certain nominal forms. The fact that *qonḡo*, ‘beautiful’, is not treated like *säffi*, ‘broad’, ‘wide’, is due to *qonḡo* not having the same features as *säffi*, features that are relevant in this case:

- triradicality (*qonḡo* has four radicals);
- lengthening of the second radical;
- a vowel *ə* or *a* in the second syllable.

The form *säffi* has the deep structure **säffəy*. There is, however, one feature which *säffi* and *qonḡo* share: the *ä*-vowel in the first syllable (the underlying syllable structure of *qonḡo* is *q^wän.ḡāw*).

Nevertheless *wäfram*, ‘fat’, ‘thick’, shows the plural form *wäfafram* (cf. *käbbad* which has the plural *käbabbad*), despite the fact that not all three conditions are fulfilled. This adjective has four radicals, but the consonantal sequence corresponds to the lengthened second radical in *käbbad*. Furthermore, in both cases, the vowel in the second syllable is *a*.

It is the morpheme type $CV_1C:V_2C$ (with $V_1 = ä, ə, a$, $V_2 = ə, a$) which allows this plural formation. The authors’ musings concerning a non-existent plural form *qonannḡo* from *qonḡo* are quite erroneous—and many unattested plural forms involving a sequence of three consonants could be invented. Nevertheless, this idea concerning the plural of *qonḡo* can be helpful in further analysis, because this adjective shows the structure **q^wänḡāw* of the four radical verb *q^wänäḡḡä*, ‘become beautiful’, which resembles the nominal form $CaC.CaC$ under review, assuming that the lengthened radical (CVC:VC) is replaced by a sequence of two radicals. One would expect something like *qonaḡḡo*—and indeed the plural form *qonaḡo* is attested, as I was kindly informed by my colleague Bayyä Yəmam (Addis Abäba). I would, however, in this case, assume an underlying lengthening of the affricate (*qonaḡḡo*). Compare the Təgrəñña plural form *qonaḡu* which has a final *u*, because broken plural forms of substantives have the vowel *ə* in the syllable following plural *a* (namely < **qonaḡəw*).

A further Amharic plural form is *qonäḡaḡḡət* (*qonaḡət*). This formation follows the broken plurals found in some substantives, such as *wäyḡäro*,

faffi (better *säfaffi*) vs *qonḡočč*. In the process, he fails to recognize that both forms display different nominal types.

‘lady’, pl. *wäyzazər(t)*, and *šəmagalle*, ‘old man’, pl. *šəmagagalle*. A particular feature of noun plural formation is the repetition of the penultimate, namely the third radical, in forms which have four radicals. Applied to *qonḡo*, which is formed from the four radical root $\sqrt{qnḡw}$, it results in *qonaḡət* or in *qonäḡaḡḡət* where *t* represents the weak fourth radical *w*.²⁵ An analysis of other such forms would be useful.

To conclude, nominal forms of the structure CVC:VC show peculiarities in their plural formation that do not, or only rarely, occur in other nominal forms. This begs the question of whether it is sufficient to state that ‘geminate codas, but not other codas, are moraic’.²⁶ Thus the question of whether CVC syllables are light ‘unless the coda is a geminate, CVG’,²⁷ remains unanswered.

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²⁵ One problem is the plural *mälkacam* of *mälkam*, ‘pretty’, and *wäfraram* of *wäfram*, ‘fat’, ‘thick’, with the four radical structure *CäCCaC* (= three radical nominal form *CäC:aC*) which does not follow the scheme under review.

²⁶ Sande and Hedding 2017, 70.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

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Summary

Contrary to the claim made in a recently published article, that literature on Amharic stress is 'almost non-existent', I present and quote from the works of Armbruster, Guidi, Abraham, and others, and discuss their concept of stress patterns in Amharic. However, my criticism mainly concerns the data base used in the aforementioned article which addresses the topic of syllable weight, and where an attempt is made to analyse stress in Amharic based on a large number of examples. In these examples, however, consonantal lengthening and the distinction between the central vowels *ə* and *ä* and *ā* and *a* are incorrectly represented in almost all verbal forms, infinitives, and adjectives. This is partly the result of the informants speaking Amharic as their second language, and partly due to the fieldworkers' incomplete knowledge of the language. This gives rise to many mistakes even amongst the simplest one- and two-syllable words. Ultimately this raises the question of whether those authors' linguistic conclusions on the moraic nature of codas can be regarded as safe since it is based on inaccurate data. I also apply my own analysis to Amharic reduplicated adjectival forms, which differs from the one proposed in the said article.