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Article

How to Start Teaching Amharic Verbs?

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Within the compass of this paper I would like to discuss a specific issue concerning the teaching of Amharic, though a fundamental one: how to start teaching Amharic verbs.[1] The teaching of Amharic verbs is part of a much greater question of Amharic pedagogy which needs to be addressed if we are to offer an efficient and meaningful course to learners. The issues that will be addressed, not necessarily in the order given below, are the following:

1) Should we teach grammar, including verbal forms, explicitly?

2) If so, how should we teach them?

3) Which tense-aspect form (perfective or imperfective) should be considered as the point of departure for teaching Amharic verbs?

4) Which approach to teaching grammar, inductive or deductive, should be adopted?

5) Should one cover only a single grammatical structure in one lesson, or two or more structures?

6) What kind of pedagogical activities should be involved in the teaching of Amharic verbs, and how should these activities be arranged?

According to Larsen-Freeman, grammar practice activities should have two main features: 'first, [they] should be meaningful and engaging. Second they should be focused'.[2] And I adhere to her conviction. The aim of my paper is to show how meaningfulness and focus can be applied to the teaching of the Amharic language and culture, and specifically to Amharic verbs. This paper comprises two interwoven parts: a practical one, which contains

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[2] Larsen-Freeman 2003, 117.

an exemplary unit of a course book that deals with the teaching of Amharic verbs, and a theoretical one, which gives a conceptual underpinning for the practical part.

My target group are university students who, to my mind, should be provided with some linguistic explanation.[3] In the university context, especially at linguistically-oriented departments, the language is not only a means, it is also an end in itself. However, this does not necessarily mean turning to the long-established approach of teaching explicit grammatical rules and then practising them. What I opt for is rather a communicative approach enriched with some use of metalanguage. The question remains as to what extent the students should be offered linguistic terminology and explanation. There are a few variables that need to be taken into consideration while deciding on the amount of metalanguage, such as the framework within which the course takes place, the learners' maturity, and their background.[4]

The majority of Amharic textbooks give due consideration to the teaching of verbs, but the activities they offer only allow the student to get familiar with the forms, in isolation from their meaning and context of use. With some notable exceptions, which I shall mention presently, Amharic textbooks adopt a highly form-oriented approach, neglecting the meaning and usage of the verbs that are taught. This is in accordance with the model provided by structural grammars where learners are instructed to pay attention to the grammatical form rather than to its function in a communicative context.[5]

Thus, Leslau's *Amharic Textbook* (1967) offers a wonderful description of how to conjugate Amharic verbs but does not give an opportunity to use them in a meaningful context. One can easily see how limited the vocabulary is in Leslau's book, and how distant the sentences are from people's everyday life and language use. For instance, in Lesson 34, Exercise B, learners are asked to convert the verbs in the basic stem into verbs in the *a*-stem in the perfect(ive) and imperfect(ive) agreeing with the pronoun in parentheses.[6] The purpose of the exercise is simply to manipulate the

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[3] Concerning the use of grammatical terminology in the classroom, two opposing standpoints are provided in Borg 1999, 96–98, with many bibliographical notes.
[4] Borg 1999, 98–99.
[5] Ellis 2006, 86.
[6] Leslau 1967, 385.

forms.[7] The prefix *a-* is treated in the abstract as being added to intransitive and transitive verbs, with no attention as to how the verb to which it is attached is used in real language. The activities that Leslau provides can engage and satisfy only a very linguistically-oriented student with an indefatigable enthusiasm for grammar.

Bezza Tesfaw Ayalew's *Let's Speak Amharic* (2005) is at the other extreme. Even though in the Preface he promises that his book 'integrates cultural information with linguistic information',[8] it is evident that grammar is his Achilles heel. He touches on verbs only in passing and would rather relegate all of them to the sphere of vocabulary. Thus, for instance, the perfective form is mentioned precisely on the occasion of teaching the imperfective form. The first form to be practised in his course book is a relative verb in a cleft construction in as many as six grammatical persons. Fortunately, these cleft constructions are taught as frozen lexical items, though quite complex and challenging for beginners.

I think Bezza Tesfaw's intention to invite 'students from the very beginning to communicate meaningfully in Amharic'[9] is precious; however, it is its implementation which falls short. Recent studies show that grammar—and the verbal system in particular—should be taught explicitly provided that it is done within a communicative approach.[10] Long says that '[i]nstruction which encourages a systematic, non-interfering focus on form produces a faster rate of learning and (probably) higher levels of ultimate S[econd] L[anguage] attainment than instruction with no focus on form'.[11] Furthermore, as Ellis argues, grammar instruction is needed to master a language and cannot be replaced by naturalistic learning.[12]

When we communicate, we focus on meaning and only secondarily on form (normally in our mother tongue we notice the form only if it is distorted). The same happens when we learn a foreign language: the form is always backgrounded while the meaning is foregrounded. That is why explicit teaching of forms is so essential because the form, just like the mean-

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[7]   In Long's terminology, this is the so-called *focus on formS* approach (to be distinguished from the *focus on form* approach) in which a set of language items, such as endings and functions, isolated from communicative activity, is gradually enlarged (Doughty and Williams 1998, 3). The aim of the *focus on formS* approach 'is the forms themselves' (Long 1991, 45).
[8]   Bezza Tesfaw Ayelew 2005, xv.
[9]   Ibid.
[10] Larsen-Freeman 2003, 90–91.
[11] Long 1991, 47
[12] Ellis 2006, 85–86.

ing, can be foregrounded, and the link between the form and the meaning can be made. Focus on forms in Leslau's fashion, however, is inefficient and unsatisfying because it does not allow students to use them meaningfully.

The next point to be explored is the following: which tense-aspect form (perfective or imperfective) should be considered as the point of departure for teaching Amharic verbs? The perfective form of the verb has traditionally been taught before any other verbal forms, with the exception of the copula and the verb of existence. I propose to continue the tradition and start teaching the Amharic verbal system from the perfective form. Another candidate for the first verbal form to teach would be the compound imperfective (or simple imperfective; see below), with which learners can introduce themselves.[13] In my opinion, at the beginning of the course it is perhaps necessary to teach beginners a few compound imperfective forms, but as lexical items and with a reduced paradigm (first, second, and third persons singular). However, the most useful verbal form with which to introduce students to the verbal system as a whole, and later on to the verbal paradigms, is the perfective.

Why is the perfective form preferred? One of the main principles of sequencing teaching material is to present a simpler and less demanding structure before a more complex or more demanding one.[14] The perfective form is simpler, both formally and conceptually, and therefore less demanding. If learners get the idea of the morphological structure of the verb, and of gemination in the perfective, it is a good starting point from which to proceed to the more complex imperfective form. Here, I refer to the 'imperfective form' without specifying whether, after teaching the perfective, it would be pedagogically more advisable to teach the simple imperfective or the compound imperfective. The majority of Amharic course books tend to introduce the compound imperfective before the simple imperfective. However, I can see an alternative way. The simple imperfective is, after all, simpler than the compound imperfective and yet it is not less useful. Furthermore, I have the impression that it actually occurs more often than the compound imperfective because it is needed for constructing subordinate clauses (in which Amharic abounds). To my mind, it can easily be introduced in the context of talking about imminent actions ('ልሄድ ነው·', 'I'm about to go') and in the

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[13] With the exception of talking about where one lives; for this one needs a cleft construction with simple imperfective.

[14] Graves 2000, 136. However, there are studies which do not back up this principle, which stems from a structural approach to language teaching (Long and Robinson 1998, 27).

context of talking about a past action which was being done during a certain part of the day ('**ሲ.ሠራ ዋለ**', 'he spent the day working').

Returning to the perfective, it is a formally and conceptually simpler form and, additionally, it provides the learner with the quickest and most immediate access to bilingual dictionaries, in which verbs are given in the perfective form. From that moment on, the teacher can accustom learners to using dictionaries. To start teaching Amharic verbs I propose a series of activities in which learners familiarize themselves with the main verbal classes. The aim is that, at the end of the teaching unit, learners will have the following skills:

1) They know the name of the form 'perfective' (or 'perfect') and that it is used in dictionaries for the basic entry or citation form of the verb (exercises in using the dictionary will follow in the classroom).

2) They know that it is used to talk about past events in narration, descriptions, and reports, just like the German *Präteritum* (*Erzähltempus*).

3) They know that there are eight main classes of verbs in Amharic and can distinguish them.

4) They can correctly geminate verbs.

5) They know some expressions referring to common activities.

6) They can talk and write about past activities (both domestic and recreational) in the third person singular masculine and feminine.

By the time the learners start dealing with verbs in the perfective, they should already know the verb **ነበረ**, 'be', 'exist', which will have been introduced in two contexts: as the past form of the copula and the past form of the verb of existence. Thus, the notion of the triradical verb will already be known to learners. Additionally, they will have already encountered a few other perfective verbs, for instance, when learning greetings. To whet the learners' appetite, engage them, and help them to remember the classes of verbs, in the beginning I propose a humorous activity with visual enhancement. The general topic of the unit is domestic and recreational activities, presented under the title '**ከዕለታት አንድ ቀን**', 'Once upon a time'. One can well imagine that it is difficult to come up with a reasonable topic within which simple, non-derived verbs can be introduced. Daily routines are not an option because there are necessarily too many derived verbs. That is why one has to make up a story with simple verbs. For reasons of space, only a sample of each exemplary exercise will be given here (for a full version of the unit please contact the author).

In Exercise 1, learners are asked to match nine pictures with an appropriate caption.[15] The teacher advises them to take nouns as a point of departure for their matching task as they already know the majority of them. As for the verbs, they may know some of them. The verbs represent, as we will see later on, the main classes of verbs. The idea behind the activity is that learners will associate a given class of verbs with one representative verb and that this representative will, in turn, be associated with a picture. The representative verb and the picture are to function as a mental hook. Learners compare their answers in pairs and then as a class.

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[15] This exercise was inspired by an activity, 'Manchmal geht halt alles schief …', contained in the course book *Aha! Neu* (Potapowicz and Tkaczyk 2009, 55) for Polish gymnasium students learning German.

መልመጃ 1

Match the pictures with the captions below.

የታደለ ቀን ጥሩ አልነበረም!

ታደለ ጎበዝ እና ታታሪ ልጅ ነው ፤ ሁሉንም ነገር ጥሩ አድርጎ በመሥራት ያምናል ፤ ግን ያለፈው ሳምንት ኃሙስ ቀኑ ለታደለ ጥሩ አልነበረም ።

Taddälä is a smart and diligent fellow. He believes in making everything right. But last Thursday was not a good day for him.
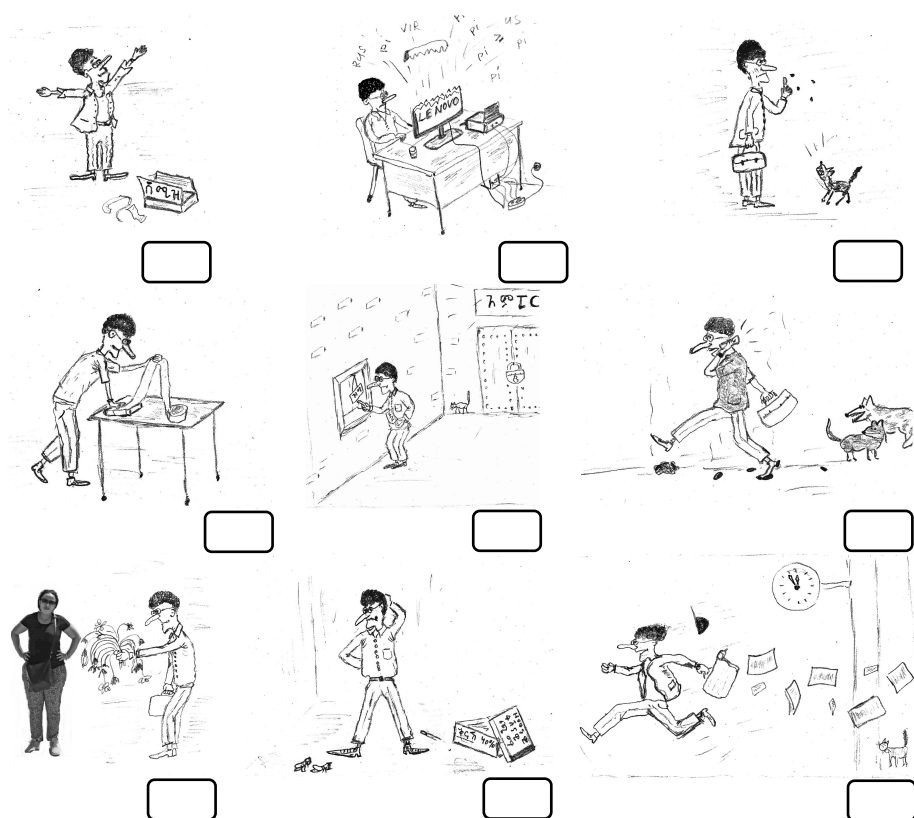
ሀ. ውሻውን ዳሰሰ ።	መ. ለፍቅረኛው አበባ ሰጠ ።	ሰ. ሹሚዙን ለበሰ ።
ለ. ወደ ሲኒማ ቤት ሄደ ።	ሠ. ለጓደኛው ኢ-ሜይል ላከ ።	ሸ. ወደ ቀጠሮው ቦታ ሮጠ ።
ሐ. ስጦታውን ጠቀለለ ።	ረ. አዲስ ጫማ ገዛ ።	ቀ. በመንገድ ላይ እየሄደ የውሻ አር ረገጠ ።

When all unknown words are clarified, learners move on to Exercise 2 in which they are prompted to discover for themselves the eight main classes of the Amharic verb. There are two main approaches to teaching grammar: inductive and deductive. In deductive teaching, the teacher presents a grammatical structure and then sets activities to practise it. In inductive teaching, learners have to work out the rule for themselves from the many examples they are exposed to.[16] The results of studies examining the question as to which of the two approaches proves more effective are inconclusive. The general advice is that, if learners are skilled in grammatical analysis, the inductive method is better. Additionally, '[s]imple rules may best be taught deductively, while more complex rules may best be taught inductively'.[17] Given that my target group are university students, who need to be trained in analytical skills, I have chosen to use the inductive approach to familiarize them with the verb classes.

In Exercise 2, learners are asked to divide the verbs from Exercise 1 into classes. They should pay attention to the number of consonants, the quality of vowels, and the gemination. They should arrive at what is contained in Table 2. Next, learners move on to the grammar box, called 'ሰዋስው', 'Grammar', and fill in the blanks; the first part concerns the number of classes while the second deals with gemination. Here, learners have a chance to familiarize themselves with some linguistic terms such as radicals, biradicals, and the like.

መልመጃ 2

Look at the verbs in Exercise 1. Divide them into classes. Take into account the number of consonants (radicals) and the quality of the vowels. Notice the gemination.

Example: **ለበሰ** has three consonants (is a triradical verb) with all the consonants having the vowel *ä*: CäCCäCä.

Table 1

CäCCäCä							

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[16] Ellis 2006, 97.
[17] Ellis 2006, 98.

Learners should arrive at the following table:

Table 2

CäCCäCä	CaCCäCä	CeCä	CaCä	CoCä	CäCCa	CäCCä	CäCäCCäCä
ለበሰ ፣ ረገጠ	ዳሰሰ	ሂደ	ላከ	ሮጠ	ገዛ	ሰጠ	ጠቀለለ

ሰዋስው

Based on your findings, complete the sentences with the following numbers (1) and words (2):

(1) **8, 5, 1, 2**

In Amharic there are … main classes of verbs. There are … class(es) of verbs consisting of three radicals, … class(es) of verbs consisting of two radicals, and … class(es) of verbs with four radicals (quadriradical verbs).

(2) **ሰጠ, ሂደ, ጠቀለለ, ላከ, ገዛ, ሮጠ, ለበሰ**

In the case of triradical verbs, e.g. ……, and quadriradical verbs, e.g. ……, the next-to-last radical is always geminated. In the biradical verbal classes …… and …… the last radical is geminated. The biradical verbal classes ……, ……, and …… have no gemination.

In Exercise 3, learners are asked to make and ask each other questions concerning Taddälä, the protagonist of the story in Exercise 1. Here they have an opportunity to use the verbs once again but now in a meaningful way. They may not know some of the interrogative pronouns and adverbs, which can then be explained by the teacher.

መልመጃ 3

Work in pairs. Make and answer the questions about ታደለ. Start like this:

ታደለ ምኑን …………? ታደለ ለፍቅረኛው ምን …………? ታደለ ወዴት …………?

In the next step, learners are made aware of the fact that they already know many verbs from previous units which they can now assign to the right class. For Exercise 4, I have taken verbs which learners have already

encountered in previous lessons. Exercise 5 focuses on pronunciation: learners pay attention to the geminated consonants and practise them.

መልመጃ 4

Look at the verbs that you have encountered in the previous units and put them into the correct column in Table 3 below:

ሰማ ፤ ዋለ ፤ ጸፈ ፤ መሸ ፤ ሰነበተ ፤ ቀነሰ ፤ ረሳ ፤ ሆነ ፤ ደመረ ፤ ቆየ ፤ ራቀ ፤ መጣ ፤ ቀረ ፤ በሰለ ፤

Table 3

CäCCäCä	CaCCäCä	CeCä	CaCä	CoCä	CäCCa	CäCCä	CäCäCCäCä

መልመጃ 5

Pronunciation. Repeat the verbs from Exercise 4 after the speaker, paying attention to the geminated consonants.

After Exercise 5 there is another grammar box. This time, the grammatical phenomenon is taught deductively, which means that the teacher presents the rules. The reason is that to figure out the subject suffix for third person singular masculine, learners would need to have either the first or the second persons. The grammar box focuses on the same verbs but learners look at them from another angle: as the perfective form of the third person singular masculine. Here, they are told that the perfective form is used for expressing the past tense.

The grammar explanation is followed by Exercise 6 in which learners have to complete sentences with the verbs from Exercise 4. The sentences concern the story of a person called Alämu. Because some of the sentences in Exercise 6 contain the coordinating conjunction እና, 'and', learners' attention is directed to this in a grammar box. Subsequently, they practise building complex sentences with the conjunction እና. Because at this stage they will know only a few phrases consisting of a verb plus a nominal or an adverbial phrase, they are given some ideas. In Exercise 7, they have to come up with two more phrases based on the exercises that they have already had.

ሰዋስው

All verbs in Exercise 4 are in the **perfective** form which consists of the **base** and the **subject suffix**.

For the majority of verbal classes the third singular masculine subject suffix is -*ä*.

ለበሰ *läbbäsä*, አዘዘ *azzäzä*, ዳበሰ *dabbäsä*

ሄደ *hedä*, ላከ *lakä*, ሮጠ *roṭä*

ጠቀለለ *ṭäqällälä*

For the verbal classes **ገዛ** and **ሰጠ** the third singular masculine subject suffix is **zero** (ø). Hence the third singular masculine perfective is just the same as the base.

The perfective form expresses simple past tense which is used in narrations and descriptions.

መልመጃ 6

Complete the sentences with the right verb from Exercise 4. Sometimes more than one verb is correct.

1) ትናንት ዓለሙ እቤት ………… ። ወደ ሥራ አልሄደም ።
2) እቤት ውስጥ ሲሠራ ………… ።
3) ከሰዓት በፊት በጣም ብዙ ሥራ ………… ።
4) ለሥራ ባልደረቦቼ እና ለአለቃው አንዳንድ ኢ-ሜይሎች ………… ።
5) ለንደኛው ረጅም ኢ-ሜይል ………… ።

ሰዋስው

ሀ. ከሰዓት በኋላ ዓለሙ ወደ ገበያ ሄደ **እና** ሃያ ኪሎ ጤፍ ገዛ ።   ሄደ**ና**

ለ. ማታ ዓለሙ ዘመዱን ጠየቀ **እና** በጊዜ ወደ ቤቱ ገባ ።   ጠየቀ**ና**

መልመጃ 7

Write four sentences about **አብርሃም** *using the conjunction* **እና**. *Here are some ideas:*

ለንደኛው ስልክ ደወለ ፣ ከውሻው ጋር ለሽርሽር ወጣ ፣ ቀጠሮ ያዘ ፣ ዘመድ ጠየቀ ፣

ሀ. …………

At this point I would like to draw your attention to one of the phrases: '**ከውሻው ጋር ለሽርሽር ወጣ**', 'he walked the dog' (lit. 'he went out for a walk with his dog'). '*Gassi gehen*' (German for 'walking the dog') is actually alien to Ethiopian culture; despite this I decided to include this phrase and other similar Western-culture-bound phrases. I cannot say much about this now, but the interesting and very important question as to whether Amharic teaching materials should reflect only Ethiopian culture or both Ethiopian and Western culture needs to be addressed. I think that my students should also be able to talk in Amharic about their own life experiences, about where they live, and, hence, they should be provided with Amharic vocabulary referring to their own way of life. This personalization of lesson content, absent from all Amharic course books, enables learners to engage in real communication. Furthermore, '[i]t makes language relevant to learners, makes communication activities meaningful, and also helps memorisation.'[18]

In Exercise 8, learners go back to Taddälä and his (mis)adventures. This time they are asked to match sentences with the pictures in Exercise 1. The sentences talk about what really happened to Taddälä and not about his intentions. This exercise is a preparation for the subsequent listening activity. The teacher draws learners' attention to key phrases, such as '**አጭር ሆነበት**, **ዝግ ነበር**, **ወረቀቶቹ ከቦርሳው ወደቁ**'.

መልመጃ 8

What happened to **ታደለ** *on Thursday? Match the sentences with the pictures in Exercise 1.*

1) የሽሚዙ እጅጌ አጭር ሆነበት ።
2) ሲኒማ ቤቱ ዝግ ነበር ።
3) ለፍቅረኛው የጠወለገ አበባ ሰጠ ።
4) ለንደኛው ኢ-ሜይል ከባዓይረስ ጋር ላከ ።
5) የገዛው ጫማ አንዱ ትልቅ ነበር ።
6) በመንገድ ላይ እየሄደ የውሻ አር ረገጠ ።
7) ወደ ቀጠሮው ቦታ ሲሮጥ ወረቀቶቹ ከቦርሳው ወደቁ ።
8) የጎረቤቱን ውሻ እየዳበሰ ሳለ ጣቱን ነከሰው ።
9) ስጦታውን በሽንት ቤት ወረቀት ጠቀለለው ።

In Exercise 9, learners look at the sentences in Exercise 8 and try to guess, in pairs, the sequence of events in which Taddälä was involved. Because it is actually difficult to give the chronological order of the events (it is, for instance, hard to guess whether Taddälä first bought shoes or wheth-

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[18] https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/personalisation, accessed on 1 March 2019.

er he first wrapped up the present), learners should be told that there are many possible answers.

መልመጃ 9

1) *In pairs try to guess the order of the events that happened to* ታደለ.

	ሀ.	ለ.	ሐ.	መ.	ሠ.	ረ.	ሰ.	ሸ.	ቀ.
እናንተ									
ሔርሜላ									

In the next part of the activity, learners listen to the conversation be-tween Taddälä's girlfriend Ḥermella and her friend, Beza, and the order of events given by Ḥermella. Some vocabulary should be taught before the listening task, but the key words that will enable the learners to sequence the events are ones they know from the previous exercise. In the appendix you can see the scripted dialogue (the script will not be given to the learn-ers).

2) ታደለ's *girlfriend,* ሔርሜላ, *tells her friend* ቤዛ *what happened to* ታደለ *on Thursday. Listen to their conversation and indicate the sequence of events according to* ሔርሜላ. *Compare it with your sequence.*

Transcript

ሔርሜላ ፦ ሃሎ ቤዛ እንዴት ነሽ?
ቤዛ ፦ በጣም ደኅና ነኝ! ምነው ትናንት ቀረሽ?
ሔርሜላ ፦ ትናንት ከታደለ ጋር ቀጠሮ ነበረኝ ። ትናንት ለታደለ ጥሩ ቀን አልነበረም እባክሽ!
ቤዛ ፦ ምን ሆነ?
ሔርሜላ ፦ ለታደለ ባለፈው የገዛነለት ሸሚዝ እኧጌው አጮር ሆነበት ።
ቤዛ ፦ አ … በጣም ያናድዳል!
ሔርሜላ ፦ ከዚያ ለጎደደኛው ኢ-ሜይል ከቫይረስ ጋር ላከ ።
ቤዛ ፦ በጣም ይገርማል!
ሔርሜላ ፦ ለኔ የገዛውን ስጦታ በሸንት ቤት ወረቀት ጠቀለለው ።

Now when learners have got used to the third person singular masculine form of the verbs, the teacher can introduce, for contrast, the third person singular feminine. This means that learners are first taught the unmarked form and then a more marked form. I suggest that learners focus only on these two forms. The reason is that, first of all, learners cannot keep much

information in their working memory. It is more effective if they can focus on a few forms rather than on a larger number of forms. Secondly, if the whole paradigm is introduced at once, the teacher will have trouble providing activities in which learners could use all the forms meaningfully. I am not saying that the entire paradigm should not be given: it is quite reasonable to do so, but only when the learners have grasped the general idea. So, the other grammatical persons can be introduced subsequently when the students have already had some practice with the verbs.

መልመጃ 10

Now read what ሔርሜላ did on that Thursday.

> ኃሙስ ዕለት ሔርሜላ ከሥራ ቀረች ፤ የአንድ ቀን ዕረፍት ወሰደች ። ከጥዋቱ አንድ ሰዓት ላይ ነቃች ። በመጀመሪያ ቁርስ በላች እና ቤቷን ጠረገች ። ከዚያ እንጀራ ጋገረች እና ለምሳ ወጥ ሠራች ። ቀጥላ ወደ ሱቅ ሄደች እና ለሰላሳ ገዛች ። በ11 ሰዓት ታደለ መጣ እና አበባ ሰጣት ። አበባው የመወለገ ስለነበረ ሔርሜላ ደንግጣ ጮኸች ። ትንሽ ከለፈለፈች በኋላ ታደለ ሌላ ያበባ ዝንጣፊ አመጣልሻለሁ ብሎ ቃል ገባላት ።

Learners read the text about Ḥermella and do Exercise 11. Here again the inductive approach to presenting grammar is employed. Learners are asked to complete the rule in the grammar box.

መልመጃ 11

Look at the verbs in Exercise 10 and add the feminine subject suffix to the following verbs:

3SM	ቀረ	ወሰደ	ነቃ	በላ	ሠራ	ጠረገ	ጋገረ	ሄደ	ገዛ	ጸፈ	ጮኸ	ለፈለፈ
3SF												

ሰዋስው

Based on Exercise 11, complete the sentence below.

The feminine subject suffix for **ወሰደ**, **ጋገረ**, **ሄደ**, **ጮኸ**, **ጸፈ**, and **ለፈለፈ** is ………… while for **ሠራ** and **ቀረ** it is ………… The suffix consonant is always geminated.

In Exercise 12, they practise pronouncing the verbs, paying attention to the geminated consonants in the stem and in the subject suffix. As it is the second pronunciation exercise it is slightly more challenging: learners have to indicate the geminated consonants.

መልመጃ 12

Pronunciation. Listen to the following verbs and mark gemination wherever appropriate.

ገዛች ፥ ገባች ፥ ቆየች ፥ ነቃች ፥ ቆመች ፥ ወሰደች ፥ ሳቀች ፥ ተኛች ፥ ቀረች ፥ ሮጠች ፥ ጠበቀች ፥

Exercise 13 is a speaking activity. Learners try to retell Ḥermella's day. It is important that they notice the words that show the chronology of events, such as **በመጀመሪያ**, 'in the beginning', 'first'; **ቀጥሎ**, 'next'; **ከዚያም**, 'after that'.

መልመጃ 13

Tell your partner what ሔርሜላ did on Thursday.

በመጀመሪያ .... በላች .... ጠረገች ። ከዚያ .... ጋገረች .... ሥራች ። ቀጥላ .... ሄደች .... ገዛች .... ላከች ።

Exercise 14 aims at working with vocabulary, more precisely with collocations. Collocations are items that frequently (or always) occur together. In our mental lexicon they are stored together and that is why they should be taught as one chunk of language. For instance, students learn that **ቀረ** goes together with the preposition **ከ** and a noun, that **ፈሙከ** goes with **ደንግጦ** and the like. Learners could also be encouraged to study vocabulary in this way rather than studying words in isolation.

መልመጃ 14

Complete the collocations with the verbs in the box. Then complete the sentences with the correct collocation using the right subject and possessive suffixes.

ቀረ ፥ ጋገረ ፥ ሥራ ፥ ጨመረ ፥ ጠበቀ

Magdalena Krzyżanowska

ሀ. ከትምህርት ቤት ቀረ ፤ መዓዛ ከትናንት ወዲያ ከትምህርት ቤት ቀረች ።

ለ. ወረፉ .... ፤ ዓለሙ የታክሲ .... ።

ሐ. ጨው .... ፤ ኤልያስ እሸርባው ውስጥ ሁለት ማንኪያ .... ።

መ. የቤት ሥራውን .... ፤ ብርቱካን የአማርኛ .... ።

ሠ. እንጀራ .... ፤ የቤት ሠራተኛዋ ብዙ .... ።

In my opinion students of Amharic should be given plenty of opportunities to speak the language in the classroom. I think that, besides listening, this is the most important skill in the context of Amharic. If learners will ever have a chance to communicate with Ethiopians, most of the time this will be oral communication. It is also argued by many second language teaching researchers that one of the factors which generate students' motivation and maintain this motivation is that they actually speak the language, that they can see that there is a reaction to their words. In Exercise 15 students work in pairs. One of them is student Ha and the other student Lä. They ask each other for the missing information. In this exercise learners also practise collocations.

መልመጃ 15

ሔርሜላ and ታደለ decided to spend Saturday separately. What did they do on that day? Ask your partner for the missing information. Ask like this:

ሁለት ሰዓት ላይ ሔርሜላ ምን አደረገች? ሁለት ሰዓት ላይ ሔርሜላ ......

ሁለት ሰዓት ላይ ታደለ ምን አደረገ?

ተማሪ ሀ

ቅዳሜ	ሔርሜላ	ታደለ
2:00		ከእንቅልፉ ነቃ
3:00	ሻወር ወሰደች	

ተማሪ ለ

ቅዳሜ	ሔርሜላ	ታደለ
2:00	ስፖርት ሠራች	
3:00		ወደ ሱቅ ሄደ

In Exercise 16 learners work on sentential temporal adverbs which indicate the temporal arrangement of events.

መልመጃ 16

Put the following short stories in the right order and tell them to your partner. Use the words in the box.

በመጀመሪያ ፤ ከዚያ ፤ ከዚያም ፤ በኋላ ፤ በመጨረሻም

Begin like this:

> በመጀመሪያ ሙሉወርቅ ወደ መማሪያ ክፍል ሄደች ። ከዚያ ቤተ መጻሕፍት
> ገባች ። ቀጥላ …

1) ሙሉወርቅ ቤተ መጻሕፍት ገባች ።
    ሙሉወርቅ ወደ ተማሪዎች መኛታ ክፍል ሄደች ።
    ሙሉወርቅ ወደ መማሪያ ክፍል ሄደች ።
    ሙሉወርቅ እራት በላች ።

In the final Exercise 17 learners are asked to compose a written text. With this activity they have a chance to use their knowledge of collocations and sentential adverbs, learnt in the previous exercises, to construct a text.

መልመጃ 17

Write what your friend or a family member did last week. Here are some more expressions:

> ወደ ስብሰባ ሄደ ፤ ለሽርሽር ወጣ ፤ ዘመድ ጠየቀ ፤ ወደ ሥርግ ሄደ ፤ ቤቱን
> ቀየረ ፤ ጓደኞቹን ጋበዘ ፤ ከከተማ ወጣ ፤ ወደ መዝናኛ ቦታ ሄደ ፤ ስፖርት
> ሠራ ፤ ፊልም አየ ፤ መጽሐፍ አነበበ

> ባለፈው ሳምንት …

The exemplary unit that I have presented follows the common grammatical syllabus in which the skeleton is assembled from (often more and more complex) grammatical items. Once the grammatical items are isolated and put into some reasonable teaching sequence, one tries to come up with a fitting context for them, a topic or a situation. For this, relevant vocabulary, notions, and functions are selected. The way I present the learning material follows the by-now classical approach known as PPP (presentation, practice, production), whereby the grammar item is first presented, then practised in controlled activities, and finally used in freer activities. This is one possible

scenario of how to facilitate student learning of any foreign language, including Amharic. My proposal here is a rather traditional one since, currently, other types of syllabi (non-grammatical) and another teaching/learning approach—Task-based Teaching and Learning—are in vogue. But before throwing oneself into the deep end of language pedagogy, I find it important to go beyond the focus on formS in teaching Amharic and offer students engaging and meaningful activities that will develop their communicative skills in this language.

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How to Start Teaching Amharic Verbs?

Summary

The Amharic verbal system—with its complexity in terms of form, meaning, and usage—poses a great challenge to both teacher and learner. Although the majority of Amharic textbooks give due consideration to the teaching of verbs, the activities that they offer only allow the student to get familiar with forms, in isolation from their meaning and context of use.

The aim of this paper is to propose a way of introducing learners to the Amharic verbal system while focusing on form in communicative interactions. I argue that the system can be introduced, traditionally, with the perfective form, and in contexts involving meaningful communication. I also suggest a more student-centred (inductive) approach to presenting and explaining grammar in general and to the verbal system in particular. My discussion is illustrated by an exemplary unit from a course book that targets two perfective forms, third singular masculine and third singular feminine.