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Verbless Relative Clauses in Gəʿəz and their Equivalents in Amharic and Tigrinya¹

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1. Introductory Remarks

Relative constructions constitute a very prominent feature of Ethio-Semitic syntax. They are extremely frequently used, much more so than in other branches of Semitic or in the better known European languages. Thus, for instance, in contemporary written Amharic there is hardly a sentence without a relative form playing one of its multiple roles. A quick statistical survey of 30 pages from the Amharic novel *Fəqər əskä məqabər* by Haddis Alāmāyyāhu, perhaps the most admired work of modern Amharic literature, shows a total of 368 relative verbs, that is an average of 12.27 cases per page. A count in an English novel, equally renown and similar in style (Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*), produced an average of 4.8 per page; hence Amharic may use 250 % more relative forms than English in that kind of text; moreover, the use of the relative increases constantly with the passage of time. In a statistical study of ten texts published between 1880 and the beginning of the 1970's (Cotterell 1973: 80) the relative verb showed the highest increase among all subordinate verbal forms, from around 30 per one thousand words in 1880 to almost one hundred in the 1970's, that is three times more. In Tigrinya the situation is much the same.

But already in Gəʿəz the frequency of the relative constructions is impressive and their functions quite diversified (Praetorius 1886: 29–33; Dillmann 1907: 527–42 = § 200–03; Kapeliuk 2003a: 177–179; Kapeliuk 2003b). In addition to its basic function as a sentential adjectival noun modifier, its use also compensates for the paucity of morphological means for deriving adjectives and for the lack of productivity of the active participle in Gəʿəz. It also serves, in its correlative form, which externally is identical with the adjectival relative, as an extremely frequent factor of substantivization, both concrete and abstract².

There are a few general characteristics of the relative clause which distinguish it from other subordinate clauses: 1. It serves as a sentential modifier

¹ This paper was presented at the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies in Trondheim in July 2007.

² On concrete and abstract relativization see POLOTSKY 1944: 53–59.

of a noun and not of a verb, which is generally the case with subordinate clauses; consequently it tends to occupy the position of a modifier beside its head-noun and is often embedded within the main sentence. 2. Contrary to the ordinary subordinating conjunctions the relative marker of subordination (either a relative pronoun inflected for gender and number or an uninflected relative particle) has a double function: it indicates subordination and at the same time refers, anaphorically or cataphorically, to the head-noun it modifies. 3. In the absence of an overt head-noun the relative marker acts as its replacement and the relative clause is substantivized within a correlative construction.

During the evolution of the modern languages from Gəʕəz, or from a close sister language, there occurred dramatic changes in the structure of the Ethio-Semitic relative clause, though not in most of its functions. The subordinating element changed from a pronoun inflected according to the gender and number of the head-noun into an uninflected relative particle³. From the anaphoric reference of the relative pronoun placed mostly after its head-noun the reference became cataphoric with the passage of the modifier before the head-noun. The structure of the relative clause itself changed according to the modern word order and, what is relevant to our discussion, the covert predication with zero copula of the verbless clauses was replaced by a full verbal predicate with the copula, or the verb of existence, or some other verb.

As is well known verbless, or nominal sentences, as they are traditionally called – a term which will be also used in this paper – represent a prominent feature of the syntax in classical and in most modern Semitic languages, both in independent sentences and in subordination. Only in the two peripheral modern branches of Neo-Aramaic and Ethio-Semitic the nominal sentences disappeared following the introduction of a morphological copula⁴. By the way, nominal sentences with zero copula are less unusual than is commonly admitted even in European languages. Thus in Russian and some other Slavonic languages, they constitute the only means for constructing sentences with a noun, an adjective or a prepositional complex for predicate in the present. Even in Latin which normally uses a verb ‘to be’, nominal sentences are not infrequent in relative clauses, e.g.: *Utinam ita essem!* – *Optas quae facta* “I wish I was like that! – You wish what [is] done”; *Othonem, cui compositis rebus nulla spes, omne in turbidum consilio*

³ *Yä-* or *yämm-* according to the tense in Amharic, *zə* or *ʕə* according to the phonetic structure of the verb in Tigrinya.

⁴ Some Arabic dialects of the periphery, such as Uzbeki Arabic or the dialect spoken in Cyprus, also use the copula.

“Othon, for whom [there was] no hope in regular affairs and all the plans [were] in disorder”⁵.

At any rate in Gəʿəz the most typical and most frequent relative clauses are those which contain a verbal predicate and these have been described extensively in the extant literature. Nominal relative clauses have attracted less attention probably because they are less frequent and more limited in their function and scope but they also present some interest in syntactical and lexical terms.

2. Nominal Sentences and Relative Clauses in Gəʿəz

In Gəʿəz, and in Semitic in general (Cohen 1984: 151–232 and in particular 172–177, 185–187, 201–203; Dillmann 1907: 498–499 = § 194; Praetorius 1886: 159–161) nominal sentences appear on the surface as incomplete because of the absence of a positive copula or of a similar verb in the present tense in these languages. Normally, on the surface, they are composed only of a subject and of the predicative complement of a zero copula. It is only rarely that the nexus is explicit on the surface by a personal pronoun. When a nominal sentence is transformed into a relative clause there are two possible constructions: if the Gəʿəz relative clause has a subject of its own, which stands either in a possessive or an indirect relation to the head-noun, it is constructed as a normal verbless sentence (1), while in Amharic and Tigrinya translations a full verb is introduced:

1. G.⁶ *täqäbbäl-o sobe-ha bəʿəsi wäsiʾo ʾəm-mäqabər zä-ʾəkkuy ganen laʿle-bu*
(Mark 5/2) “Then He was met by a man stepping out from a grave,
in whom [there was a] **bad spirit**”

Am. *rəkus mänfäs yä-yazä-w säw* “a man possessed by an unclean spirit”

Ta. *rəkus mänfäs zə-ḥadär-o säbʾay* “a man inhabited by an unclean spirit”

But, more often, the head-noun itself, whatever its function in the main clause, serves as the subject of the relative clause. As a matter of fact, in most verbless relative clauses it is the only role the head-noun can play. That is the reason why we have stated that nominal relative clauses are more limited in their scope than the verbal ones. Moreover, the composition of nominal relative clauses is reduced, since its subject – the head-noun, which is already included in the main sentence – is replaced in it, anaphorically, by the relative element. Consequently all that is left in the relative clause is the relative pronoun as subject and the predicative complement of a zero copula

⁵ Quoted from TOURATIER (1980: 468, 475).

⁶ G. = Gəʿəz, Am. = Amharic, Ta. = Tigrinya, Ara. = Aramaic.

as the predicate. Yet in spite of the impression that in Gəʕz such constructions constitute one member sentences, in reality these are complete nominal sentences composed of a subject and a predicate. Here is an example (2) of such a concise construction in Gəʕz and its equivalent in Amharic in which the nexal link is overtly expressed by the verb of existence:

2. G. ʾammä rəʾayä-kkəmu dəgdugani-kkəmu ʾəm-däqq ʾällä biṣə-kkəmu (Daniel 1/10) “If he sees you [being] thinner than the children who [are] your peers”
 Am. *bä-ədme əndä ənnantä k-allu blaten-očč yələq fitaččəhu kəsto y-ayyā əndä-honä*

Moreover, quite often the head-noun is missing altogether from the main sentence, in which case the relative pronoun is transformed into a correlative (formally identical with the relative) pronoun (Kapeliuk 2003a) and replaces the head-noun (3). Consequently it is substantivized and the relative clause is transformed from an adjectival modifier of the head-noun into a substantivized component of the main sentence. Such expressions are sometimes lexicalized, as will be seen in what follows. Here is an example of a correlative clause acting as the subject of the main verb:

3. G. wä-nahu ʾällä ʾəm-wəstə ṣəḥaft yəbelu bəbäynati-homu (Matthew 9/3) “And behold, [those] who [are] from among the scribes said to one another”

Generally speaking Gəʕz nominal sentences may be classified into three types according to the nature of their predicate: 1. Relational – indicating the relation of the head-noun in space or time having an adverb or a preposition with its complement as predicate; 2. Equational – identifying the head-noun and containing a noun as its predicate; 3. Qualifying – specifying the head-noun’s characteristics and rendered by an adjective as its predicate (Cohen 1924: 75). The same applies to the nominal relative clauses. In the modern languages the relational relative clauses are normally provided with the verb of existence under its relative form: Amh. *y-allä*, Ta. *z-ällo* and the identifying and qualifying ones by the relative form of the copula: Amh. *yä-honä*, Ta. *zə-konä*. The situation of the nominal relative clauses in Gəʕz is further complicated by two phenomena: the tendency to lexicalize some relative complexes and the homonymity of the relative pronouns with the *nota genetivi*.

2.1 Relational Relative Clauses

The composition of a nominal relational relative clause is usually reduced to the relative pronoun as the subject and to a preposition with a simple or an

expanded complement or, more rarely an adverb, as the predicate. It may be used both adjectively (4) (5) and substantively (6) in which case the [cor]relative pronoun replaces the head-noun within the main sentence. In the modern languages the verb of existence is provided to complete the predicate:

4. G. *wä-yänässä^ə-a ḥəzb zä^ə-əm-babylon* (Dillmann 1866: 3/10) “And the people who [is] from Babel will carry her off”
5. G. *ḥuru hagärä zä-qädme-kkəmu* (Matthew 21/2) “Go to the village which [is] ahead of you”
Am. *bä-fit-aččəhu wäd-alläččəw mändär hidu*
Ta. *ab qädme-kum nab z-älla^ə addi kidu*
6. G. *lä-kkəmu täwəhbä ta^əməru məstir-a lä-mängəstä^ə ʾəgzi^əabher wä-lä-ʾällä-ssä^ə ʾaf^əa bä-məssale yəkəwwən-omu* (Mark 4/11) “It was given to you to know the secret of God’s kingdom but to [those] who [are] outside (=outsiders) it will be in parables”
Am. *bä-wəčč l-allut gən*
Ta. *n-ätom bə-wəša^əi z-älläwu gəna*

Basically the function of a prepositional complex is to complete a verb. It may, however, also modify a noun even without being relativized. In English we normally say *the book on the table is mine* and not *the book which is on the table is mine*, unless we want to stress some pragmatic aspect of the statement. But in Gəʿəz there is a clear tendency to relativize the prepositional complements, not only when the head-noun is missing, but also in adjectival constructions. This is a means for making explicit the function of the prepositional complex as a noun modifier. Sometimes it affords avoiding an ambiguous interpretation of the sentence. Without the relativization example (4) could erroneously be understood as “the people will carry her from Babel”. Actually, there are numerous examples in which an original verb complement is conceived in Gəʿəz as a head-noun modifier. This shows the predilection of this language for relative constructions in general. In example (7) what is a prepositional verb complement in the Aramaic original and in the translations into English or Tigrinya becomes a noun modifier in Gəʿəz:

7. G. *wä-yətha^wwək ʾarawit zä-taḥte-ha wä^ə-a^əwaf-ni zä-wəstä^ə ʾa^əsuqi-ha* (Daniel 4/11) “Let the animals flee from under it and the birds fly away out of its branches” (lit. “animals **which under it** and birds **which inside its branches**”)
Ara. ענפיה מן וצפריא תחתיה מן חיותא תנד
Ta. *ʾätän ʾənsəsa kab taḥti^ə-a ʾätän ʾa^əwaf-wwən kab čänafr-a yəhəddäma*

This tendency to relativize prepositional complexes is doubtless at the origin of some lexicalized expressions which provide the language with otherwise inexistent adjectives, substantives and adverbs such as: *zä-bä-ḥəbu* “hidden, secretly” (8), *zä-bä-ʾaman* “true, truly”, *zä-bä-rətu* “fair, fairly”, *zä-lä-däyn* “damnation” (9), *zä-lä-ʿaläm* “eternal”, *zä-bä-sämayat* “heavenly” (also *sämayawi*), *zä-məsle-hu* “companion, ally” (10) (11), *zä-ʾəm-ʾazmadi-hu* “a relative” (12) or *zä-ʾazmadi-hu* (17), and a few others:

8. G. *kämä ʾi-tastärəʾi lä-säbʾ kämä šomkä zä-ʾənbälä lä-abu-kä zä-bä-ḥəbu* (adjective) *wä-ʾabu-kä zä-γəreʾi zä-bä-ḥəbu* (substantive) *yä-ʿassəyā-kkä kəsütä* (Matthew 6/18) “That you won’t show to the people that you are fasting, but only to your hidden Father and your Father who sees **what** [is] **hidden** will reward you openly”
9. G. *wä-γəwäššəʾu ʾällä šännay-ä gäbru wəstä tənśaʾe ḥəywät wä-ʾällä-ssä ʾəkkuy-ä gäbru wəstä tənśaʾe zä-lä-däyn* (John 5/29) “And those who have done good will come out into the resurrection of life and those who have done wrong into the **resurrection of damnation**”
10. G. *wä-degänə-wwo səmʿon wä-ʾällä məsle-hu* (Mark 1/36) “And Simon and **his companions** pursued him”
11. G. *ʾəm-kämä ʾi-konä ʿədwä-kkəmu zä-məsle-kkəmu wəʾətu* (Luke 9/50) “As far as he is not your enemy, **he is your ally**”
12. G. *wä-nahu ʾelsabet-nni ʾəntä ʾəm-ʾazmad-ki γəʾəti-nni šänsät* (Luke 1/36) “And behold, also Elizabeth **who** [is] **your relative**, she too is pregnant”

In the modern languages this expressions are diversely translated but at least in one of them (13) the Gəʿəz form has been preserved:

13. G. *mənt-nu ḥer zä-ʾəm-gäbärku ḥəywät-ä zä-lä-ʿaläm bə-zä-ʾəwārres* (Matthew 19/16) “What good should I do that I may inherit **eternal life**”

Am. *yä-zä-lä-aläm-n ḥəywät ənd-agäññ*

Ta. *nay zä-lä-ʿaläm ḥəywät kə-räkkəb*

Cases of lexicalization are also frequent in constructions consisting of the pronouns *zä*, *ʾəntä* and *ʾällä* followed by a noun as will be seen in the following paragraph.

2.2 Identifying Relative Clauses

In verbless identifying relative clauses the predicate is a noun. If the relative clause has a subject of its own, which stands either in a possessive (14) (15) or indirect (1) relationship to the head-noun, the relative clause is composed

of two juxtaposed nominals, with only the relative pronoun separating them. The order of the components is dictated by pragmatic considerations:

14. G. *yäwta ʔəntä ʔəhatti* (predicate) *qəršät-a* (subject) *ʔi-täḥalləf ʔəm-ʔorit* (Matthew 5/18) “A iota, **whose stroke [is] one** (lit. ‘**who one stroke-her**’) will not be transgressed from the Law”
15. G. *wä-bäṣṣha hagärä samər ʔəntä səm-a* (subject) *sikar* (predicate) (John 4/4) “And he arrived at a town of Samaria **whose name [is] Sychar**”
 Am. *sikar wädä-mm-təbbal yä-sämarya kätäma mäṭṭa*
 Ta. *sikar nab ʔə-təbbəbal kätäma mäṣä*

It is interesting to note that in the expression: *whose name is ...* (15) where Amharic always introduces the verb *to be called*, in Tigrinya, beside a similar use, there are also cases in which, quite exceptionally, the Gəʕəz nominal relative clause is maintained, without or with a change of word order (16). This is one of the cases in which Tigrinya exhibits a somewhat more conservative approach to syntax than Amharic (Kapeliuk 1999: 17):

16. G. *wä-batti rəbqa ʔəḥwa zä-səm-u laba* (Genesis 24/29) “And Rebecca has a brother **whose name [is] Laban**”
 Ta. *rəbqa dəmma laban zä-səm-u ḥaw nəbär-a*

When the relative clause has no subject of its own the relative pronoun acts as its subject and the basic structure of the identifying clause is reduced to the relative pronoun and a noun as its predicate (or more exactly as the predicative complement of a zero copula), as in (2) or in (17) (although in the latter also the relational construction *ʔəm-ʔazmad-yä* as in (12) is possible):

17. G. *ʔamməḥu ʔandroniqon wä-yulyan ʔəllä ʔazmad-yä wä-täṣewəwun məsle-yä* (Romans 16/7) “Greet Andronicus and Julian **who [are] my relatives** and were exiled with me”

The identifying relative clauses, which are composed only of the relative pronoun for subject and of a noun for predicate, may be confounded, because of their structure, with the possessive pronouns *zä*, *ʔəntä* and *ʔəllä* used as *notæ genetivi*. These pronouns, besides their function as relative markers, replace in Gəʕəz the possessive complex (إضافة), under certain formal and semantic constraints, for instance when the *possessum* designates the material of which the possessor is made (18), or when it cannot be put in the construct state for formal reasons (19), or is separated from the possessor by another sentence component, or if the possessor is indicated by a proper name (20) etc. (Kapeliuk 2003a: 188–190); the pronouns may also be used without mentioning the possessor (21). They are also the source of many lexicalizations, sometimes used as modifiers (22) but mostly, without the head-noun, as free substantives (23):

18. G. *wä-gäbär läkä tabot-ä 'antä 'əṣ wä-rəbət* (Genesis 6/14) “And make yourself an ark of **wood** and square”
19. G. *wä-tägäb'u mäggabt wä-mäla'əkt wä-mäk^wannənt wä-ḥayalan zä-nəgus* (Daniel 3/3) “And the administrators and governors and judges and generals of [the] **king** assembled”
20. G. *wä-burəkt 'antä təmāṣṣə' mängəst bā-səmə 'əgzi'abḥer 'antä 'abu-nä dawit* (Mark 11/10) “And blessed is the **kingdom** of our father David which will come in the name of God”
21. G. *wä-dawit-nni nəgus wälädä sälonon-ha 'əmännä 'antä 'orya* (Matthew 1/6) “And King David begot Salomon from [the one = wife] of **Oriyah**”
22. G. *bä-betä səmə'on zä-lämṣ* (Mark 14/3) “In the house of Simon the **leper** (lit. ‘Simon of leprosy’)”
23. G. *wä-wärädä ḥabe-hu zä-ḥadäf* (Jonah 1/6) “And the **captain** (lit. ‘[the one] of oar’) went down to him”

However the possibility of confounding the two constructions is only apparent because in the deep structure they stand for two different syntactical constructions. The relative clause is exocentric with underlying predication whereas the possessive construction is endocentric with no predication at all. The absence of nexus in the latter may be ascertained by comparing its use beside a verbal relative clause (24), or a nominal relational relative clause (25). Moreover, in the identifying relative clauses an independent personal pronoun of the 3rd person may be introduced as the copula (Praetorius 1886: 159–161), in order to distinguish them from the possessive construction by rendering explicit the nexal link (26) (27) (28):

24. G. *wä-maryam 'antä ya'əqob zä-yanə'əs* (Mark 15/40) “And Mary [the mother] of **Jacob the younger** (= who is younger)”
25. G. *zə-wə'ətu 'iyäsus näbiyy zä-'əm-nazret zä-galila* (Matthew 21/11) “This is Jesus the prophet **who** [is] from Nazareth of Galilee”
26. G. *wəstā ḥagärä mənbarə 'antä wəstā ḥaql 'antä yə'əti kəbron* (Genesis 35/27) “In the town of Mamre which [is] in the field, **which** is Hebron”
27. G. *wä-bä-abbay 'älät zä-wə'ətu täfšametä bə'al* (John 7/37) “And on the great day **which** is the end of the feast”
28. G. *wä-yəbe 'abrəham lä-wäld-u zä-yələḥəq zä-wə'ətu mäggabi la'lä nəway-u* (Genesis 24/2) “And Abraham said to his oldest servant **who** is the administrator of his possessions”

Let’s add that in the modern languages only Amharic preserved the genetical use of the relative marker and that the coining of the lexicalized forms was discontinued both in Amharic and in Tigrinya.

2.3 Qualifying Relative Clauses

Qualifying verbless relative clauses normally have an adjective or a passive participle for predicate. Considering that the primary function of relativization is to transform a sentence into an adjectival modifier, basically if a noun is accompanied by an adjective the latter need not be relativized. But there are cases in Gəʿəz in which the relativization of the adjective is dictated by formal constraints, for instance when it has a subject of its own which stands in a possessive or an indirect relationship to the head-noun (29), or if the head-noun is provided with a complement causing some difficulty in juxtaposing to it the adjective (30) (31)⁷, or when the adjective is expanded, forming an entire sentence (32), or if it is opposed to the negative copula which renders explicit the nexal link between the adjective and the relative pronoun (37), or, often by assimilation, when it stands beside another relative clause (33):

29. G. *wä-məndabe lä-näfs-ä k^wəll-u säb^ʔ zä-^ʔəkkuy məgbar-u* (Romans 2/9)
“Affliction to all human soul **whose act[s are] bad**”
30. G. *tənsä^ʔ ʔəm-habe-yä wärqä-zī^ʔa-yä zä-nəṭuf wä-šəruy bä-^ʔəsat* (Revelation 3/18) “You will take from me my gold **which [is] purified and cleansed by fire**”
31. G. *ʔəhubä-kkəmu šədq-o lä-dawit zä-^ʔəmun* (Acts 13/34) “I shall give you David’s righteousness **which [is] truthful**”
32. G. *näfs ʔəntä həyawt wəstā may* (Leviticus 11/10) “[Every] creature **which [is] alive in the water**”
33. G. *mənt-nu-mmä wäša^ʔkəmu tər^ʔayu. bə^ʔəse-nu zä-rəssuy bä-qätäntä ʔalbas. nahu ʔəllä-ssä qätäntä yäləbbəsu wəstā ʔabyat-ä nägäst halləwu* (Matthew 11/8) “What did you go out to see? A man **who [is] dressed in fine clothes? Lo! [those] who wear fine clothes are in royal houses**”

But we also encounter sometimes adjectives relativized with no formal reason, preferably on their first occurrence (34). The form preceded by the pleonastic relative pronoun may alternate with the simple form in what has been described as a “more forcible and more elegant” (Dillmann 1907: 535 = § 202) stylistic variant (35). The presence of the verb *konä* in the negative construction in Gəʿəz constitutes an irrefutable proof of the underlying nexal relationship between the head-noun and the adjective (36). In the translation of these specific examples into the modern languages there is no trace of the relative marker before the adjective in the positive, but in the negative Amharic has a negated relative copula. Interestingly enough, in Tigrinya there is no ne-

⁷ In the expression *šədq-o lä-dawit ʔəmun* the adjective *ʔəmun* would refer to David and not to his righteousness.

gated copula in this case, but the adjective itself is negated and relativized thus maintaining the verbless structure of the sentence in the more conservative vein mentioned à propos example (16):

34. G. *la^clä rə^əs-u lä-wə^ətu harge zä-həyaw* (Leviticus 16/21) “On the head of that **goat which** [is] **alive**”
35. G. *ahadu ʾəm-nəbiyat ʾallä qädämt tänsə^əa ... wä-bo ʾallä yäblu-kä ʾahadu ʾəm-nəbiyat qädämt tänsə^əa* (Luke 9/8, 9/19) “One of the prophets **who** [are] **ancient** came back to life ... And there are those who say of you: one of the **ancient** prophets came back to life”
 Am. *kä-[yä]-qäddämu-t* (relative verb= **who preceded**) *nəbiyat and-u ... kä-[yä]-qäddämu-t nəbiyat and-u*
 Ta. *kab-tom qäddamot* (adjective = **ancient[s]**) *nəbiyat-si ... kab-tom qäddamot nəbiyat-si*
36. G. *wä-ʾəmännä ʾənsəsa zä-nəsub ʾabə məsle-kkä ... wä-ʾəmännä k^wall-u ʾənsəsa zä-i-konä nəsub ... wä-ʾəmännä ʾa^cwaf nəsubhan wä-zä-i-konä nəsubha wä-ʾəmännä ʾənsəsa nəsub* (Genesis 7/2, 7/8) “Bring with you from the animal[s] **which** [are] **pure** ... and from all the animals **which aren’t pure** ... and from **pure** birds and from [those] **which aren’t pure** and from **pure** animals”
 Am. *kä-nəsub* (adjective) *ənsəsa bullu ... nəsub k[yä]-al-honä ənsəsa-mm* etc.
 Ta. *kab k^wallu nəsub ʾənsəsa ... kab k^wallu z-äy-nəsub ʾənsəsa*
- And yet Amharic and Tigrinya texts abound in adjectives relativized by adding the relative copula *yä-honä* and *zə-konä* respectively, independently of the Gəʿəz source (37) as well as in contemporary writings (38) (39)
37. G. *wä-ʾəmzə ʿadi nəś-o diyablos wəstä däbr nəwwah təqqä* (Matthew 4/8) “And then the devil carried Him again on a very **high** mountain”
 Am. *əjjəg räjjəm wädä-[yä]-honä tärara wässädä-w*
38. Am. *and qän ... wəb yä-honä dərsät əndä-mm-ttəşaf təsfa alläññ* “I hope that one day you will write a (lit. ‘**which is**’) **beautiful** essay”
39. Ta. *ʾəstratəjika^{wi} zə-konä məret ʾertra* “The (lit. ‘**which is**’) **strategic** land of Eritrea”

It has been suggested (Leslau 1995: 203–204) that these constructions have a pragmatic purpose and serve for emphasis. However, certain Ethiopian writers use them so often that it is doubtful if they convey any emphasis at all (Kapeliuk 2005: 361–364). Rather, this could be considered as yet another symptom of the impact on Gəʿəz of the Cushitic substrate, probably of Agaw, which literally swarms with relative constructions (Kapeliuk 2004). It cannot be excluded that the general tendency of Gəʿəz to relativize, including the prepositional complexes and adjectives in verbless clauses, reflects prominent syntactic features of Agaw at the time of the formation of Gəʿəz.

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Summary

The most frequent and most typical relative clauses in Gəʕəz have a verbal predicate, but also nominal, or in other terms verbless, sentences may be relativized. Since Gəʕəz has no copula, nominal sentences are composed of the subject and of the predicative complement of a zero copula only. Considering that in sentences with relative clauses the headnoun stands outside the relative clause, all that is left in the latter is the relative pronoun and what acts as the predicative complement. Hence the nominal relative clauses have a much reduced structure and may be interpreted wrongly as one-member sentences.