Case Marking Systems in Two Ethiopian Semitic Languages

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This paper presents a description of the case marking systems in Amharic and Tigrinya. The case system is fully retained in the pronominal and determiner systems of both languages. Nominal case markings are, however, observed only in definite objects. The languages are nominative-accusative in their case system as can be seen from the pronouns, the definite article, and pronominal affixes which are attached to the verb to show agreement with subjects and definite objects. There is also interaction between the semantic notion of definiteness and object marking, which takes two forms: an object marker attached to the nominal object and an object marking verbal affix. In both cases, it is only if the object is definite that these object markings appear. This is an instance of split P. The two related object-marking phenomena always coexist in both languages.

1. Introduction

In this paper, an attempt will be made to give a description of the case marking systems in Tigrinya and Amharic, closely related Ethiopian Semitic languages. Two languages have been considered instead of just one for comparative reasons. Amharic and Tigrinya exhibit a nominative-accusative case system. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that the languages do not have typical nominal case marking except in objects which are definite. The case system is fully retained in the pronominal and determiner (specifically definite article) system. In addition, verbal affixes which show agreement in person, number and gender with subjects and objects help in giving an idea of what the case systems in the languages look like (Amanuel, 1998; Leslau, 1995; Getahun, 1990; and Baye, 1987; among others).

As a background, it will be shown why the languages have are said to have a nominative-accusative system starting with the pronominal and determiner (definite article) system of the languages. Following this, an attempt will be made to demonstrate how verbal affixes are used to show agreement with subjects and objects in transitive sentences involving verbs with typical transitivity features (Hopper and Thompson, 1980). This is done in order to demonstrate the interaction between object marking and the semantic notion of definiteness which is one of the major objects of this paper. According to Hopper and Thompson, "Transitivity involves a number of components, only one of which is the presence of an object of the verb. These components are all concerned with the effectiveness with which an action takes place" (1980: 251).

In the overall discussion, reference will be made to Hopper and Thompson (1980) since the issues they raised are central to this paper. Hopper and Thompson identified the

following scalar parameters of transitivity: participants, kinesis, aspect, punctuality, volitionality, affirmation, mode, agency, affectedness of object, and individuation of object. It is the last parameter that would be of immediate relevance to this paper since it is concerned with the properties of objects. Hopper and Thompson (1980: 253) point out that referents of nouns are either less or more highly individuated depending on the properties they have. They argue that proper nouns are more individuated than common nouns, human/animate more than inanimate, concrete more than abstract, singular more than plural, count more than mass, and referential/definite more than non-referential/ indefinite. Since the property definite versus indefinite will be the central concern of this paper, it will be discussed in some detail. In connection with this, the authors state, "An action can be more effectively transferred to a patient which is individuated than to one which is not; thus a definite O is often viewed as more completely affected than an indefinite one" (Hopper and Thompson, 1980: 253). They also posit a hypothesis which they claim to be a universal property of grammars. They call it 'Transitivity Hypothesis': "If two clauses (a) and (b) in a language differ in that (a) is higher in Transitivity according to any of the [transitivity] features, …then, if a concomitant grammatical or semantic difference appears elsewhere in the clause, that difference will also show (a) to be higher in transitivity" (1980: 254-255). There are concomitant structural manifestations such as the presence of an object marker or an object marking verbal affix which shows agreement with the object which will be one of the main purposes of this paper.

    The semantic notion of definiteness is treated in this paper for the reason that it strongly correlates with a split case marking in the coding of objects. In the next sections of this paper, a discussion of the pronominal and determiner systems of the languages will be presented followed by a discussion of the interaction between object marking and definiteness.

2. Case Systems in Tigrinya and Amharic

    Both Amharic and Tigrinya are nominative-accusative in their case system. As pointed out above, there are no nominal case markers except in definite objects. In both languages, case forms are morphologically realised in the pronominal system which has separate paradigms for nominative, accusative and genitive cases. They are also realized overtly in the determiner system of NPs, and more specifically the definite article. While the definite article in Tigrinya is realized as a separate word (*ʔɨt*- for nominative and *nət*- for accusative), it is realized in the form of a suffix in Amharic (*-u* for basic nominative and *-un* for accusative). In Tigrinya, there are inflectional paradigms for number and gender in the singular and plural forms. In Amharic, however, it is only in the singular that we see gender distinction.

2.1. Pronouns

    Tables 1 and 2 below show the pronominal systems of Tigrinya and Amharic. As can be seen from the tables, in the case of Tigrinya, in the nominative forms of the personal pronouns, we can see that the stem *nɨss*- is common (except in the first person singular and plural) and the other forms are conjugated using agreement markers. In the

accusative forms, *nɨ-* is an object marker, as we shall see in the next section, which appears at the beginning of all the forms and suffixes which show person, number and gender concord are added to it.

Table 1: Tigrinya pronominal system

Person	Nominative	Accusative	Genitive
1s	*ʔanə*	*niʕay*	*natəy/nayyə*
1p	*niħna*	*niʕana*	*natna/nayna*
2ms[1]	*nɨssɨxa*	*niʕaxa*	*natxa/natka/nayxa*
2fp	*nɨssɨxi*	*niʕaxi*	*natxi/natki/nayxi*
2mp	*nɨssɨxatum*	*niʕaxatum/ niʕaxum*	*natxatum/natatxum/nayxatum*
2fp	*nɨssɨxatɨn*	*niʕaxatɨn/ niʕaxɨn*	*natxatɨn/natatxɨn/nayxatɨn*
3ms	*nɨssu*	*niʕiʔu*	*natu/nayu*
3fs	*nɨssa*	*niʕaʔa*	*nata/naya*
3mp	*nɨssatom*	*niʕatom/niʕiʔom*	*natatom/natom/nayatom*
3fp	*nɨssatən*	*niʕatən/niʕiʔən*	*natatən/natən/nayatən*

In the genitive, *nat-* (*nay-*) is the stem common to all the inflected forms in the paradigm. Following it are added the inflectional suffixes showing the agreement features of person, number and gender.

Table 2: Amharic pronominal system

Person	Nominative	Accusative	Genitive
1s	*ɨne*	*ləne*	*yəne*
1p	*ɨňňa*	*ləňňa*	*yəňňa*
2ms	*antə*	*lantə*	*yantə*
2fs	*anči*	*lanči*	*yančI*
2mp 2fp	*ɨnnantə*	*lənnantə*	*yənnantə*
3ms	*ɨssu/ɨrsu*	*ləssu/lərsu*	*yəssu/yərsu*
3fs	*ɨssʷa/ɨrsʷa*	*ləssʷa/lərsʷa*	*yəssʷa/yərsʷa*
3mp 3fp	*ɨnnəssu/ɨnnərsu*	*lənnəssu/lənnərsu*	*yənnəssu/yənnərsu*

In the case of Amharic, as can be seen from Table 2, there is more diversity, the third person singular forms being more anomalous than the others. While all other forms

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[1]Polite forms exist in the pronominal system of the languages. In Tigrinya, there are polite forms for 2ms *nɨssɨxum* or *nɨssom*, for 2fs *nɨssɨxɨn* or *nɨssən*, for 3ms *nɨssom*, and for 3fs *nɨssən*. In Amharic, there are also polite forms but with no gender distinction: *ɨrsɨwo* for 2ms/2fs and *ɨrsačəw* 3ms/3fs. In Tigrinya, the use of polite forms applies to the determiner system as well where we have the same inflections for both the 3mp and its corresponding 3ms polite form on the one hand and for 3fp and 3fs polite form on the other. Mason (1996: 20) points out that the polite forms, which are used when talking about or addressing a person one defers, may be used as plurals.

involve an alveolar nasal as part of the stem, the third person singular forms do not. The object marker *lə-* and the genitive marker *yə-* are added as prefixes taking the nominative as a stem to derive the accusative and genitive forms respectively. The presence of alternations in both tables is attributed to dialectal differences in both languages.

2.2. The Determiner (Definite Article)

The definite articles in Tigrinya and Amharic show more differences than the pronominal system. While there is a stem for the article in Tigrinya, it is realized in the form of a suffix in Amharic as shown in the following tables.

Table 3: Tigrinya definite article

	nominative	Accusative	Examples	gloss
ms	*ʔɨt-i*	*nət-i*	*ʔɨti/nəti wədi*	*wəddi* 'boy'
fs	*ʔɨt-a*	*nət-a*	*ʔɨta/nəta gʷal*	*gʷal* 'girl'
mp	*ʔɨt-om*	*nət-om*	*ʔɨtom/nətom ʔawəddat*	*ʔawəddat* 'boys'
fp	*ʔɨt-ən*	*nət-ən*	*ʔɨtən/nətən ʔawalɨd*	*ʔawalɨd* 'girls'

As can be observed from Table 3, *ʔɨt-* is the stem common to both the nominative and the accusative forms of the definite article in Tigrinya. What makes them distinct from each other is the presence of the object marker with the accusative forms. Note that the underlying representation for *nət-* is *nɨ-ʔɨt-*, which has been realized as *nət-* at the surface level[2]: *ʔɨt-* → *nɨ-ʔɨt-* → *nət*.

Table 4: Amharic definite article

	Nominative		Accusative	examples	Gloss
	Consonants	Vowels			
ms	*-u*	*-w*	*-un*	*səwɨyye-w/-un*	*səwɨyye* 'man'
fs	*-wa/-itu/-i(i)twa*	*-wa/-yet/-yetwa*	*-un*	*setɨyyo-wa/-n*	*setɨyyo* 'woman'
mp	*-u*	*-u*	*-un*	*səwwočč-u/-un*	*səwwočč* 'men'
fp				*setočč-u-/-un*	*setočč* 'women'

The Amharic definite article shows a more complicated picture as can be seen from Table 4. There is no stem representing the definite article as discussed above in the case of Tigrinya. It is realized in the form of a suffix attached to the noun it specifies. The

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[2] This phenomenon of phonological reduction seems to be quite common both in Amharic and Tigrinya. For example, in Tigrinya, the directional prepositions *kab* 'from' and *nab* 'to' are composed of *kɨ+ʔab* and *nɨ+ʔab* respectively. Likewise, in Amharic, as can be seen from Table 2, there is phonological reduction when the object marker and the genitive marker are added to the nominative, which serves as the stem. For example, in the first person singular, when the object marker *lə-* and the genitive marker *yə-* are added to the nominative *ɨne*, the initial sound of the stem has been deleted yielding the following: *lə+ ɨne = ləne* and *yə+ɨne = yəne*.

Amharic definite article is a suffixed element and has different realizations depending on whether the noun to which it is attached ends in a consonant or a vowel, singular or plural, and masculine or feminine. According to Leslau (1995: 155), if the noun to which it is attached is masculine singular and ends in a consonant, the marker of definiteness is -*u* as in *bet* 'house', which becomes *bet-u* 'the house'. If the masculine singular ends in a vowel, however, the definite suffix is -*w* as in *resa* 'corpse', which becomes *resa-w* 'the corpse'.

On the other hand, if the noun to which the definite suffix is attached is feminine singular and ends in a consonant, the marker is realized as -*wa*, -*itu*, or -*it*^*w*^*a* (*it*^*w*^*a*) used interchangeably as in *gərəd* 'maid' which becomes *gərəd*^*w*^*a/ gərəditu/ gərədit*^*w*^*a* 'the maid'. If the noun is feminine singular and ends in a vowel, the suffixed element is -*wa*, -*yɨtu* (-*ytu*) or -*yɨtwa*, again used interchangeably, as in *doro* 'hen', which become *dorowa/ doroyɨtu/ doroyɨtwa* 'the hen' (Leslau, 1995).

There is no gender distinction in the plural in Amharic. The plural marker for all nouns is -*očč* or -*wočč*, the former for nouns ending in a consonant and the latter for nouns ending in a vowel, the -*w*- serving as an epenthetic segment between the cluster of vowels which is not permissible in both Amharic and Tigrinya. The definite marker added to these regardless of whether the noun is treated as masculine or feminine in the singular is -*u*. For example, in the masculine, as in *nɨgusočč* 'kings' (the plural of *nɨgus* 'king'), the definite form becomes *nɨgusočč-u* 'kings'. In the feminine, as in *nɨgɨstočč* 'queens' (the plural of *nɨgɨst* 'queen'), the definite form becomes *nɨgɨstočč-u* 'the queens'.

The are certain forms which do not show any gender distinction and hence can be used for both masculine and feminine. One such example is *astənagaj* 'waiter/waitress'. The addition of an appropriate definiteness suffix determines the gender. For example, if -*u* is suffixed to it, it becomes *astənagaj-u* 'the waiter'; if -*wa* is suffixed to it, it becomes *astənagaj*^*w*^*a* 'the waitress'. In the plural, there is no difference as discussed above: *astənagajočč* 'waiters/waitresses' becomes *astənagajočč-u* 'the waiters/the waitresses'.

It should be noted that while a distinction is made between masculine and feminine in both singular and plural in Tigrinya, it is only in the singular that a gender distinction is made in the case of Amharic. "For the plural, no distinction is made between the masculine and the feminine" (Leslau, 1995: 155).

2.3. Pronominal Affixes

With the above introduction to the pronominal and determiner system of Tigrinya and Amharic so as to give a picture of the case system, we now see how case forms are indicated with the help of pronominal affixes attached to the verb. This will also help to further show the nominative-accusative nature of the case systems of the languages.

Tigrinya:
1a) *kasa məs'iʔ-u*
    Kasa came-3msS
    'Kasa came.'
  b) *kasa ʔanbəssa-tat qətil-u*
    Kasa lion-PM   killed-3msS

'Kasa killed lions.'

Amharic:

2a) *kasa ʔarrəf-ə*
   Kasa rested/died-3msS
   'Kasa rested/died.'

 b) *kasa ʔanbəss-oč gəddəl-ə*
   Kasa lion-PM   killed-3msS
   'Kasa killed lions.'

The pronominal affixes attached to the verbs in the above examples show that Amharic and Tigrinya are nominative-accusative in their case systems. In (1) and (2), we see simple intransitive sentences in the (a) examples, and transitive sentences involving a direct object in the (b) examples. While the subjects of the intransitive sentences (S) and those of the transitive sentences (A) share similar features, the objects of transitive sentences (O/P) behave differently. For example, no matter whether the sentence is transitive or intransitive, the pronominal affix which is attached to the verb always agrees with the subject (S or A) in person, number and gender. The presence of a pronominal affix corresponding with the object appears only if the object is definite as will be shown in the following section.

3. Object Marking and Definiteness

Apart from the typical case marking systems demonstrated above, the two languages also demonstrate a situation in which there is an interaction between object marking and the semantic notion of definiteness. The object marking takes two forms: using an object marker attached to the object or an object marking pronominal affix attached to the verb.

3.1. Object Marking Pronominal Affix and Definiteness

The pronominal affix which marks the object in both languages interacts with the definiteness of the direct object in sentences with monotransitive verbs. Put another way, it is only if the nominal object is definite that the object marking verbal affix is attached to the verb. This is one instance of split P system. The split in this case is that if the nominal object is definite, the object marking verbal affix is attached to the verb; if the nominal object is indefinite, the object marking verbal affix is not attached to the verb.

Tigrinya:

3a) *kasa ʔanbəssa-tat qətil-**u***
   Kasa lion-PM   killed-3msS
   'Kasa killed lions.'

 b) *kasa nət-om ʔanbəssa-tat qətil-**u-wwom***
   Kasa OMDef-3mp lion   killed-3msS-3mpO
   'Kasa killed the lions.'

Amharic:

4a) *kasa ʔanbəssoč gəddəl-ə*
   Kasa lion   killed-3msS
   'Kasa killed lions.'

 b) *kasa ʔanbəsso-č-u-n   gəddəl-ačč̣əw (ə-ačč̣əw)*
   Kasa lion-PM-Def-3mp-OM killed-3msS-3mpO
   'Kasa killed the lions.'

In Examples 3 and 4, the (a) sentences involve indefinite nominal objects, while the (b) sentences involve definite nominal objects. If the nominal object is indefinite, what we observe is that there is no pronominal affix attached to the verb. On the other hand, if the nominal object is definite, a pronominal affix which agrees in person, number and gender with the object is attached to the verb following the pronominal affix which shows concord with the subject. The fact that the pronominal affix which shows agreement with the subject is always attached to the verb is due to the pro-drop nature of the language. Pronominal subjects are optionally used unless there is some pragmatic reason to retain them. Yet, the verbal affixes attached to the verb always help in identifying the pronominal subject even if it may not appear overtly.

In sum, what we see in the above discussion is an interaction between the occurrence of the object marking pronominal affix and the semantic notion of definiteness. It is only if the object is definite that the pronominal affix occurs.

3.2. Object Marker and Definiteness

There is also an interaction between an object marker and the semantic notion of definiteness. Note that the object marker discussed here is different from the pronominal affix attached to the verb which was discussed in the previous section. The presence of an object marker along with the nominal object (preceding the object in the case of Tigrinya and following it in the case of Amharic) is likewise determined by whether the object is definite or not. Similar to the discussion in the preceding section, this is an instance of split P. In other words, the split would be between the occurrence of an object marker with the nominal object which is definite and its absence when the nominal object is not definite.

Tigrinya:

5a) *elsa ʔanbəssa qətil-a*
   Elsa lion   killed-3fsS
   'Elsa killed a lion.'

 b) *elsa hadə səbʔay qətil-a*
   Elsa one   man   killed-3fsS
   'Elsa killed a man.'

 c) *elsa nət-u   səbʔay qətil-a-tto*
   Elsa OMDef-3ms man   killed- 3fsS-3msO
   'Elsa killed the man.'

 d) *elsa ni-kasa   qətil-a-tto*
   Elsa OM-Kasa   killed-3fsS-3msO

‘Elsa killed Kasa.’

Amharic:

6a) *elsa ʔanbəssa gəddəl-əč̌*
   Elsa lion   killed-3fsS
   ‘Elsa killed a lion.’

 b) *elsa and səwɨyye gəddəl-əč̌*
   Elsa one man   killed-3fsS
   ‘Elsa killed a man.’

 c) *elsa səwɨyye-w-ɨn gəddəl-əč̌č̌-ɨw*
   Elsa man-Def3ms-OM killed-3fsS-3msO
   ‘Elsa killed the man.’

 d) *elsa kasa-n gəddəl-əč̌č̌-ɨw*
   Elsa Kasa-OM killed-3fsS-3msO
   ‘Elsa killed Kasa.’

As shown in Examples 5 and 6, when the object is not definite, no matter whether human or non-human, referential or non-referential, the object marker does not appear along with the direct object as in the (a) and (b) examples. Nevertheless, the object marker appears along with the object when the object is definite as in the (c) examples and proper nouns, which are inherently definite as in the (d) examples. Hopper and Thompson mention a situation in Spanish which "shows an extreme restriction in requiring that O's marked with *a* must be not merely animate, but also either human or human-like–and furthermore that they be referential, as opposed to merely definite" (1980: 256). In Amharic and Tigrinya, it is only definiteness, but not humanness or referentiality that matters. Quoting Berman (1978), Hopper and Thompson discuss that O-markings occur with definite O's regardless of referentiality or animacy taking an example from Modern Hebrew, in which an indefinite O is not marked as the object (but unmarked like the subject) while a definite O is marked with the object marker *et*, in addition to the definite article (1978: 256). This shows that there are two accompanying formal representations - an instance of double marking of the definite accusative, i.e., attaching an object marker to the nominal object, and adding a pronominal affix to the verb showing agreement features. In fact, these features seem to coexist all the time, as one does not occur without the other.

It is also important to see what picture the object marking takes in sentences involving verbs taking two objects, commonly called indirect and direct, or first and second objects. Dryer (1986) calls these primary and secondary objects respectively. The verbal suffixes which show agreement in person, number and gender with the subject and the object are sequentially attached to the verb in order to signal the subject and indirect object agreement features.

Tigrinya:

7a) *kasa nɨ-ʔaster məs'ħafti hib-**u-wwa***
   Kasa OM-Aster book   gave-3msS-3fsO
   ‘Kasa gave Aster a book.’

  b) *ʔaster ni̱-kasa mᴂsʼħaf hib-**a-tto***
    Aster ᴏᴍ-Kasa book   gave-3fsS-3msO
    'Aster gave Kasa a book.'

Amharic:
 8a) *kasa lᴂ-aster mᴂsʼhaf sᴂtʼtʼ-**at** (**ᴂ-at**)*
    Kasa ᴏᴍ-Aster book   gave-3msS-3fsO
    'Kasa gave Aster a book.'   (Getahun, 1990: 176/178)
  b) *aster lᴂ-kasa   mᴂsʼhaf sᴂtʼtʼ-**ᴂčč-i̱w***
    Aster ᴏᴍ-Kasa book   gave-3fsS-3msO
    'Aster gave Kasa a book.'

    Examples 7 and 8 involve ditransitive verbs. Whenever there are two objects, the theme argument remains unmarked, while the recipient/beneficiary is doubly marked in both languages: a dative-benefactive marker preceding the recipient argument, and a verbal affix showing agreement with it appears next to the pronominal affix designating the subject. The agent and recipient arguments in the (a) examples, which differ in gender have been switched in the (b) examples. Consequently, we see a change in the agreement markers which are attached to the verb. In his discussion of predicates taking two objects, Dryer argues, "In transitive clauses containing a notional DO but no IO, the object affix represents the notional DO. *In clauses containing both a notional IO and a notional DO, the object affix represents the notional IO*" (1986: 812, emphasis added).

    In his cross-linguistic study of topic, pronoun, and grammatical agreement, Givon argues in the same line: "When both an accusative and dative-benefactive are present in the neutral word order, dative agreement takes precedence over accusative" (1976: 162). The above phenomenon partly goes along with the issue of humanness. Since the indirect object represents the recipient, which is most likely to be human, it takes precedence over the direct object which represents the theme. Hence, the object marking pronominal affixes which agree with the recipient appear next to the subject marking affix, while the direct object remains unmarked. In their discussion of sentences with ditransitive verbs, Hopper and Thompson (1980) argue that when a human object is in competition with an inanimate object for overt marking, it is the human object that wins. Since their study is discourse-based, the generalization that Hopper and Thompson give makes more sense. Although this appears to be the general tendency, there can also be situations in which a non-human object can win. Nevertheless, what matters most in the case of Amharic and Tigrinya is not the humanness/non-human, but definite/indefinite distinction.

    A similar situation is observed in the case of argument promotion. One such instance is the causative. In both Amharic and Tigrinya, a sentence with a monotransitive verb becomes ditransitive with the addition of the causative morpheme.

Tigrinya:
 9a) *kasa bᴂggiʕ ħarid-**u***
    Kasa sheep slaughtered-3mss
    'Kasa slaughtered a sheep.'
  b) *asterni̱-kasa bᴂgiʕ ʔa-ħrid-**a-tto***

Aster<small>OM</small>-Kasa sheep CAUS-slaughtered-3fss-3mso
'Aster caused Kasa to slaughter a sheep.'

Amharic:

10a) *kasabəg arrəd-ə*

    Kasasheepslaughtered-3mss

    'Kasa slaughtered a sheep.'

  b) *aster kasa-n   bəg   ʔasarəd-əčč-iw*

    Aster Kasa-OM sheep CAUS-slaughtered-3fss-3mso

    'Aster caused Kasa to slaughter a sheep.'

Transitive verbs are two-place predicates. The addition of the causative marker to transitive verbs introduces a causer argument and the ultimate output seems to be similar to non-causative ditransitive verbs. The causer argument assumes the subject position; the patient assumes the direct object position; while the causee takes the indirect object position. As in the discussion of sentences with ditransitive verbs, the object marker is attached to the causee. In addition, the object marking pronominal affix attached to the verb agrees in person, number and gender with the causee, since the causee takes the position of the indirect object. In connection with this, Comrie (1989:177) states that in cross-linguistic study of causative constructions involving transitive verbs, the indirect object seems to be the most justified position for the causee which is extremely widespread across the languages of the world. The verbal affixes also help in signalling the subject and the indirect object in the causative construction just similar to non-causative constructions with ditransitive verbs as stated above with the subject marking pronominal affix appearing immediately next to the verb and then followed by the indirect object marking pronominal affix. The basic object of the monotransitive verb, however, remains unmarked.

4. Summary

This paper set out with the object of presenting a description of the case marking system in system in Tigrinya and Amharic, closely related Ethiopian Semitic languages. While there are no nominal case markings except in definite objects, the case marking system is fully retained in the pronominal and determiner (definite article) systems of both languages. This paper has also shown that the languages are nominative-accusative in their case system, with the help of not only pronouns and the definite article, but also pronominal affixes which are attached to the verb to show the agreement features of person, number and gender with subjects and definite objects taking typical transitive sentences.

An attempt has also been made to show the interaction between object marking and the semantic notion of definiteness. Object marking has been seen from two perspectives. On the one hand, there is an object marker which is attached to the nominal definite object. On the other hand, there is an object marking verbal affix which is attached to the verb. In both cases, it is only if the object is definite that these object markings appear. This is an instance of split P. The two related object-marking phenomena always coexist.

Whenever the object is definite, not only is the object marker attached to the nominal definite object, but the object marking pronominal affix is attached to the verb. Although there are instances where the occurrence of the object markings is closely related to the human and non-human, animate and inanimate, and referential and non-referential distinctions in several other languages as shown by Hopper and Thompson (1980), it is only the definite-indefinite distinction which is the essential parameter in the case of Amharic and Tigrinya.

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Key to Abbreviations Used

1,2,3 = 1st, 2nd and 3rd Person
CAUS = Causative Marker
Def = Definite
E.C. = Ethiopian Calendar
Gen = Genitive
f = feminine
m = masculine
O = object
OM = Object Marker
PM = Plural Marker
p = plural
s = singular
S = subject