

The determinations of the spell-out of ν in the Amharic and Oromo Morphological Causatives

Data & A Puzzle A morpho-syntactic puzzle has been observed in Oromo, a Cushitic language of Ethiopia, and Amharic, Oromo's adjacent Ethiopian Semitic language. In Oromo, the verbal complex of the morphological causative constructions of agentive verbs (MCA), realizes two occurrences of the causative/transitive marking (CT) morpheme, *-s* (cf. 1b), even when the agentive base verbs are not adorned with a CT morpheme as in (cf. 1a). The verbal suffix, *-s*, also derives transitives from ergatives (cf. 2). In Amharic, MCA is also adorned with causative *-s-* plus an extra transitive morpheme, *a-* (cf. 3), that does productively appear with non-agentive verbs but not with agentive verbs (cf. 4abc). Therefore, there seems to be a mismatch between the number of CT morphemes and the changes derived in the argument structure of the Oromo and Amharic MCA.

Proposals Against the backbone of the basic architecture of Distributed Morphology, I claim that: (i) the above *-s* and *a-* morphemes in Oromo and Amharic are different phonetic realizations of ν along with their phonetically null counter part in a structure as in (7); (ii) the phonetic exponents of the ν are determined by their morpho-syntactic contexts (for similar approaches for the spell-out of ν in different languages, see Bhatt and Embick 2004, Embick 1996, Lidz 1999, Miyagawa 1996). Therefore, the apparent morpho-syntax mismatch observed in the Oromo and Amharic MCA is not a mismatch at all. Rather, they are the consequences of the fact that ν that introduces the agent of the causativized verb is not realized when it is embedded under another ν . Adopting the ideas that the spell-out of the same functional head can have distinct phonetic exponents based on the different approximation to its Root (Embick 2003 and Bhatt & Embick 2004), the paper claims that ν can be phonetically realized as either \emptyset or *-s* in Oromo, and \emptyset , *a-*, or *-s* in Amharic based on its structural relation to its Root.

Analyses Besides its appearance on the transitive alternant of ergative-transitive alternating verbs (cf. 2,4), Oromo *-s* and Amharic *a-* appear with deadjectival or denominal transitive verbs (cf. 5,6). Judging from these distributional patterns in different types of transitive formation, I assume that Oromo *-s* and Amharic *a-* are a realization of agent-introducing ν [AG]. For the lack of *a-* and *-s* in the underived agentive verbs (cf. 1a,3a) and the presence of them in the derived agentive construction (cf. 3b,4b,5,6), I assume that the spell-out of ν is sensitive to what lies below it. For the sake of description, I assume that a Root denotes an eventuality. With these assumptions made, we can describe the spell-out affairs of ν in the Oromo and Amharic transitive structure as in (8). As we have observed above, there is superfluous appearance of a CT element, namely, the two occurrences of *-s* in Oromo and the presence of the *a-s-* complex in Amharic. One natural line of thought concerning this phenomenon is that the ν [AG] of agentive root is spelled out, as *-s* in Oromo or *a-* in Amharic when it is dominated by another ν and the outer ν itself is always spelled out as *-s*. The spell-out of ν is also sensitive to what lies above it. Thus the previous description of the spell-out affairs must be revised. Along with a rule for the outer ν , the spell-out situation of ν in Oromo and Amharic is described as in (9).

Data

- (1) a. gud-e b. gud-(i)s-(ii)s-e (2) a. danf-e
buy-past buy-CT-CT-Past 'A boil_{ERG}'
'A bought B' 'A made B buy C' b. danf-(i)s-e
'A boil_{TRS} B'
- (3) a. mäta-∅ b. a-s-mäta-∅ (4) a. fäla c. (*a)-mäta
Kick-SUB CT-CT-kick-SUB 'A boil_{ERG}' 'kick_{TRS}'
'A kicked B' 'A made B kick C'
- (5) a. Malaa b. gudaa (6) a. g^wənc
'pus' 'big' 'cheek'
Malaa-(i)s gud-(i)s b. a-g^wänäccä
'discharge pus' 'make big' 'give a cheekful of'
- (Oromo: Temesgen 1995)

(7) ...[_{vP} v [_{vP} v [_{vP} √ ...]]]

(8) v[AG] ↔ ∅/ in the vP structures of agentive
Roots

v[AG] ↔ -s/ otherwise in Oromo

v[AG] ↔ a-/ otherwise in Amharic

(9) **The Inner v**

v[AG] ↔ ∅/ in the vP structures of agentive
root

v[AG] ↔ -s/ in the vP structures of non-
agentive root in Oromo

v[AG] ↔ -s/ dominated by v in Amharic

v[AG] ↔ a-/ in the vP structures of non-
agentive root in Amharic

v[AG] ↔ a-/ dominated by v in Amharic

The outer v

v[AG] ↔ -s

Reference

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