

# THE TIGRINYA *zə*- PREFIX: A MORPHOLOGICAL REFLEX OF SUCCESSIVE-CYCLIC MOVEMENT

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Tigrinya is a head-final Ethio-Semitic language spoken in Eritrea and northern Ethiopia. Tigrinya relative clauses are predominantly prenominal and appear between the demonstrative and the noun, as illustrated in (1).

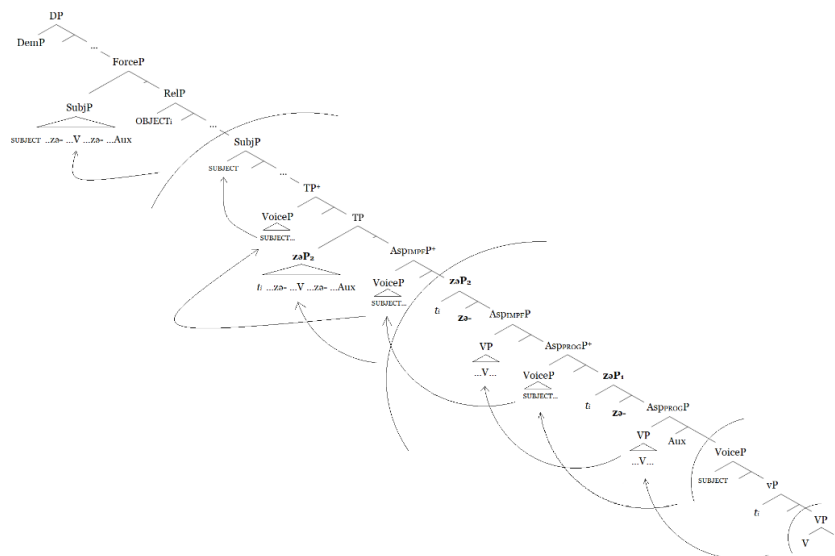
- (1) [ʔitom ʔanɛ zɛ-nbeb-om mətʂafti] ʔazenagaʕi ʔijom  
 DEM.mp 1s zə-read.IMPF.1s-3mp book.mp amusing COP.PRES.3mp  
 ‘The books that I read are amusing.’ (Lit.: ‘The that I read books amusing are.’)

Notice the element *zə*- prefixed to the verb, which one might consider to be a relative complementizer or operator (Overfelt 2009). However, when an auxiliary occurs along with the verb in a relative clause to express progressive aspect, *zə*- is prefixed to both the verb and the auxiliary as shown in (2), suggesting that a different analysis of this element must be sought for.

- (2) [ʔiti ʔanɛ zɛ-nbeb-o zɛ-llexu mətʂaf] ʔazenagaʕi ʔiju  
 DEM.ms 1s zə-read.IMPF.1s-3ms zə-AUX.PRES.1s book.ms amusing COP.PRES.3ms  
 ‘The book that I am reading is amusing.’ (Lit.: ‘The that I am reading book amusing is.’)

I therefore propose that *zə*- is a morphological reflex of successive-cyclic movement (McCloskey 2002, Müller 2011, Van Urk 2015, Georgi 2017 among others) of the relativized nominal Head that raises from its argument position to an A-bar position in the left periphery. On a more abstract level, this is similar to past participle agreement in French relativization (Kayne 1989), but in this language the agreement marker appears only on the verb and not the auxiliary and in Tigrinya *zə*- does not inflect for phi-features. I implement the derivation of relative clauses in Tigrinya in the following way: I take *zə*- to be generated in the head of a projection that I call *zəP*; I claim that there are two *zəP* projections in the structure, *zəP*<sub>1</sub> and *zəP*<sub>2</sub>, merged between the two aspectual projections and their respective XP+ projections (following Koopman & Szabolsci 2000). When *zə*- is merged, it triggers the movement of the relativized Head, which raises to Spec,*zəP*. (3) schematizes the derivation of (2), taking an LCA-based approach to head-finality (Kayne 1994).

(3)



Interestingly, *zə-* does not only occur in relative clauses, but also in comparatives, as in (4), and raising constructions, as in (5).

- (4) Tesfay kab-ti ʔane zə-ħasəbəxu-wo yəʕabi  
 Tesfay.ms PREP-DEM.ms 1s zə-think.PERF.1s-3ms 'be tall'.IMPF.3ms  
 'Tesfay is taller than I thought.' (Lit.: 'Tesfay than what I thought is taller.')
- (5) Kidane ʔiti mətʃəf zɛ-nbeb-o zɛ-llo jəməsl  
 Kidane.ms DEM.ms book.ms zə-read.PERF.1s-3ms zə-AUX.PRES.3ms seem.IMPF.3ms  
 'Kidane seems to be reading the book.'

These examples support the analysis of *zə-* as a reflex of successive-cyclic movement in which the prefix attracts the moved constituent. The phenomenon also implies that the *wh*-movement in comparatives (Chomsky 1977) and the A-movement of the NP in raising constructions take place in very local steps. Notice that in control constructions in Tigrinya, the prefix *kə-* appears on the verb instead of *zə-*:

- (5) Daniel Ruth kə-təħegəz-o jətsbə  
 Daniel.ms Ruth.fs kə-help.IMPF.3fs-3ms expect.IMPF.3ms  
 'Daniel expects Ruth to help him.'

This suggests that the distinction between raising and control constructions must be maintained, despite attempts to reconceptualize control and unify the two phenomena (Hornstein 1999, Manzini & Roussou 2000).

The phenomenon presented suggests, first, that *wh*, A and A-bar movements must be more local than what has been proposed in standard Phase Theory (Chomsky 2000) and, second, that the notion of cyclicity and the nature of phases must be further developed.

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