



**HAL**  
open science

## ON IDEOPHONES IN ETHIOSEMIITC

Ronny Meyer

► **To cite this version:**

Ronny Meyer. ON IDEOPHONES IN ETHIOSEMIITC. 29th Annual Conference and Annual Research Week of the College of Humanities, Language Studies, Journalism and Communication, May 2022, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia. hal-03831939

**HAL Id: hal-03831939**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03831939v1>**

Submitted on 27 Oct 2022

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

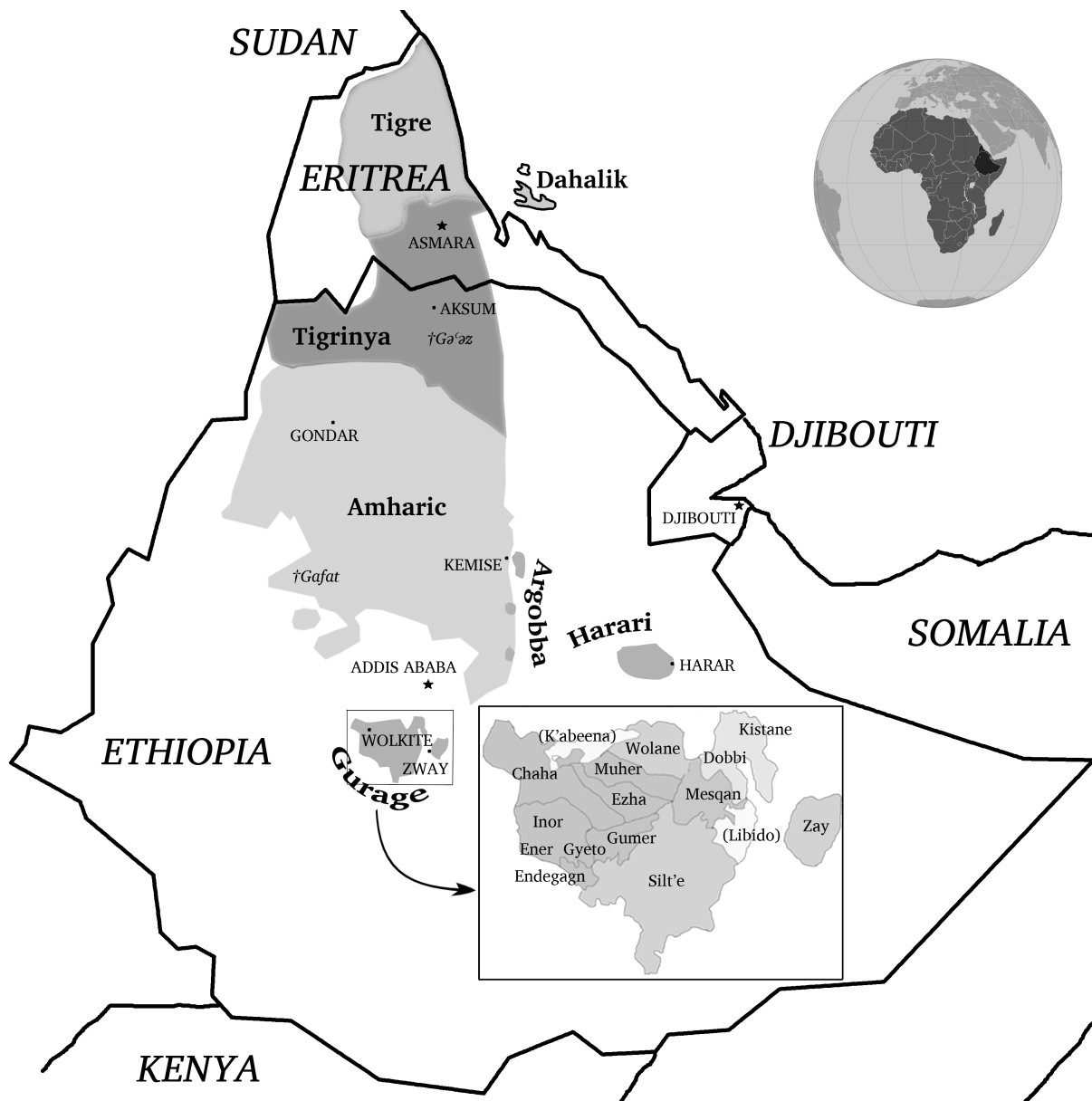
# ON IDEOPHONES IN ETHIOSEMITIC

Ronny Meyer (INALCO/LLACAN, Paris)

29<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference and Annual Research Week of the College of Humanities,  
Language Studies, Journalism and Communication

Addis Ababa University, 10–12 May 2022

Map 1: Ethiosemitic Languages



(1) [Several guests sit in a cafe bar drinking coffee and reading newspapers. Suddenly one of the guests jumps up startled and searches for his cell phone. Since he can not find it, he accuses the waiter and the other guests of theft. The waiter then asks him to pay the bill ...]

(1a) [...] የሂሳብ ደረሰኝ የመጣበትን ትንሽቱ  
*jä-hisab dörösäjn jä-mätt'a-bbät-in tinnif-ijje*  
 GEN-bill receipt GEN-[REL]come\PFV.S3SM-APL.O3SM-ACC small-DIM  
 አቃፊ ነገር ብድግ ሲያደርገው --  
*ak'afi nägär biddigg s-j-adärg-äw*  
 holding thing IDPH.lift\_suddenly when-S3SM-make\IPFV-O3SM  
 'When he suddenly took up the rather small folder in which the bill came –'

(1b) ክው!! እፍር!! ሽምቅቅ!! እንደው መግቢያ ጥፍት!!  
*kiww iffirr fimk'ikk' indäw mägbija t'iffitt*  
 IDPH.very\_scared IDPH.very\_ashamed IDPH.be\_folded\_up even entrance IDPH.absence  
 'He got frightened! He got ashamed! He pulled (his arms) over (his chest)! He did not know where to disappear!'

(1c) «ምድር ዋፊኝ፣ ሰማይ ተከደንብኝ» አይነት ነገር፤  
*midir watf'i-jjn sämaj täkädän-ibbi-jjn ajnät nägär*  
 earth swallow\IMP.S2SF-O1SG heaven cover\_up\IMP.S2SM-APL-O1SG kind thing  
 '(He was thinking) Something like "(Oh) earth swallow me, (oh) heaven cover me up" –'

(1d) ሞባይሉ ዱብ አላለም!!  
*mobajl-u dubb al-al-ä-mm*  
 cell\_phone-POSS.3SM IDPH.appear/fall\_suddenly NEG-say\PFV-S3SM-NEG  
 '(when) his cell phone suddenly appeared (in front of him) (lit. did not say "appearance").'

Source <https://www.sewasew.com/p/ፈትሹልኝ>

Complex predicates with a transitivity distinction (cf. Leslau 1995: 580–596)

(2) a. INTRANSITIVE                      b. TRANSITIVE  
*bikk' al-ä*                                      *bikk' adärräg-ä*  
 IDPH say\PFV-S3SM                      IDPH make\PFV-3SM  
 'It appeared suddenly.'                      'He took out (something).'

### Semantic types of ideophones (Wetter 2003)

|   |  |                                 |
|---|--|---------------------------------|
| (3) IMITATIVE SOUND SYMBOLISM<br>(Onomatopoeia) | <i>t<sup>w</sup>a</i><br>(popping noise) | <i>fīww</i><br>(whizzing noise) |
| SYNESTHETIC SOUND SYMBOLISM                     | <i>billittf'</i><br>(flashing)           | <i>zimm</i><br>(quietness)      |
| CONVENTIONAL SOUND SYMBOLISM                    | <i>s'ätt</i><br>(calmness)               | <i>däss</i><br>(joy)            |

### Nouns and verbs with sound symbolic features (cf. Baye 1999a)

|   |                                  |
|---|----------------------------------|
| (4) Nouns   | Verbs                            |
| <i>f'atf'ut</i> 'chick'                           | <i>täntf'attf'a</i> 'twitter'    |
| <i>f<sup>w</sup>af<sup>w</sup>ate</i> 'waterfall' | <i>tänkätäkkätä</i> 'bubble'     |
|   | <i>tänk'ät'äkk'ät'ä</i> 'shiver' |
|   | <i>tänäk'ännäk'ä</i> 'wobble'    |
|   | <i>täwäzäwwäzä</i> 'flutter'     |

### Linguistic features of Amharic ideophones

#### – Reduplication

|                         |                               |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| (5) a. SINGLE EVENT     | b. REPEATED EVENT             |
| <i>t'äbb</i> <i>alä</i> | <i>t'äbb~t'äbb</i> <i>alä</i> |
| 'It dripped (once).'    | 'It dripped repeatedly.'      |

#### – Function as predicate

|                 |                   |                  |   |                  |                |                 |
|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|---|------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| (6) ለጅቷ         | ብቅ                | ጥልቅ              | – | እናትዬዋ            | ቆጣ             | ድርቅ።            |
| <i>liḍi-twa</i> | <i>bikk'</i>      | <i>t'illikk'</i> |   | <i>inat-jewa</i> | <i>k'oma</i>   | <i>dürrikk'</i> |
| child-DEF.F     | IDPH.             | IDPH.            |   | mother-SNG.F     | stand\CNV.S3SF | IDPH.           |
|                 | appear_from_below | immerse          |   |                  |                | very_dry        |

'The daughter goes up and down – the mother standing rigidly.'

#### – Nominalization in -ta

|                                  |                               |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| (7) a. <i>zimmi-ta</i> 'silence' | c. <i>inde-ta</i> 'of course' |
| b. <i>dässi-ta</i> 'joy'         | how-NMLZ                      |

### Non-lexical ideophones

#### a. Constructions with a reduplicated noun as coverb

|                                     |                                 |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| (8) a. <i>f'äw~f'äw</i> <i>al-ä</i> | b. <i>f'is~f'is</i> <i>al-ä</i> |
| salt~salt say\PFV-S3SM              | smoke~smoke say\PFV-S3SM        |
| 'It tastes salty.'                  | 'It smells like smoke.'         |
| c. <i>bird~bird</i> <i>al-ä-ገገ</i>  |                                 |
| cold~cold say\PFV-S3SM-O1SG         |                                 |
| 'I feel cold.'                      |                                 |

b. Derived ideophones (cf. Baye 1999b)

- (9) Root  $\sqrt{s_1-b_2-r_3}$  (BREAK) Regular verb:  $tä-s_1äbb_2är_3ä$   
MPASS-break\PFV-S3SM  
'it is broken'

INTENSIVE TEMPLATE

- $C_1CC_2CC_3 > s_1ibb_2irr_3 > s\textit{ibbirr} alä$  'it broke completely'  
 $s\textit{ibbirr} \sim s\textit{ibbirr} alä$  '(several things) broke completely'  
 $s\textit{ibbirr} adärrägä$  'he broke (it) completely'

ATTENUATIVE TEMPLATE

- $C_1äC_2äC_3 > s_1äb_2är_3 > säbär alä$  'it cracked'  
 $säbär \sim säbär alä$  '(several things) cracked'  
 $säbär adärrägä$  'he cracked (it)'

- (10) a. GUMER  $tän \sim tän$   $ji-bir$   
smoke~smoke S3SM-say\IPFV  
'It smells like smoke.'
- b. SILT'E  $iseettfä \sim iseettfä i-l-aan$   
butter~butter S3SM-say\IPFV-AUX.NPST  
'It smells/tastes like butter.'
- c. TIGRINYA  $t'äsmi \sim t'äsmi$   $ji-bil-ilo$   
butter~butter S3SM-say\IPFV-AUX.NPST  
'It smells/tastes like butter.'

- (11)
- |              |                |                |                       |
|--------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------|
|              | AMHARIC        | SILT'E         |                       |
| REGULAR VERB | $däräk'ä$      | $däräk'ä$      | 'be(come) dry'        |
| INTENSIVE    | $därrikk' alä$ | $kifitf baalä$ | 'dry up completely'   |
| ATTENUATIVE  | $däräk' alä$   | $kuss baalä$   | 'be a little bit dry' |

- (12) TIGRINYA  
Regular verb  $xäfätä$  'open'  
Intensive  $xiffit bälä$  'open completely/suddenly'  
Attenuative  $xift bälä$  'open a little bit'

## Abbreviations

|      |              |      |                        |
|------|--------------|------|------------------------|
| ACC  | Accusative   | NEG  | Negation               |
| APL  | Applicative  | NMLZ | Nominalizer            |
| AUX  | Auxiliary    | NPST | Non-past               |
| CNV  | Converb      | O    | Object                 |
| DEF  | Definite     | PFV  | Perfective             |
| DIM  | Diminutive   | POSS | Possessive             |
| F    | Feminine     | REL  | Relative clause marker |
| GEN  | Genitive     | S    | Subject                |
| IDPH | Ideophone    | SF   | Singular-feminine      |
| IMP  | Imperative   | SG   | Singular               |
| IPFV | Imperfective | SM   | Singular-masculine     |
| M    | Masculine    | SNG  | Singulative            |

## References

- Baye Yimam. 1999a. Root extension and root reduction in Amharic. *Ethiopian Journal of Language and Literature* 9. 56–88.
- Baye Yimam. 1999b. The verb ‘to say’ in Amharic. *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 32(1). 1–50.
- Leslau, Wolf. 1995. *Reference grammar of Amharic*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Wetter, Andreas. 2003. Ideophones in Amharic. In Kézié K. Lébikaza (ed.), *Actes du 3e Congrès Mondial de Linguistique Africaine, Lomé 2000*, 257–267. Colgne: Köppe.

INALCO  
Département Afrique et Océan indien  
65 rue des Grands Moulins  
75013 Paris / France

ronny.meyer@inalco.fr  
ronny.meyer@cnrs.fr

[http://llacan.vjf.cnrs.fr/p\\_meyer.php](http://llacan.vjf.cnrs.fr/p_meyer.php)