

## Negation in Amharic and Ezha: A comparative perspective

Endalew Assefa \*

(Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia)

**Abstract:** This article offers a description of negation marking in the two Ethio-Semitic languages: Amharic and Ezha. The description has been made from the perspective of synchronic comparison. The article discloses that both Amharic and Ezha make use of negative prefixes in order to reverse the truth condition of an affirmative expression. The negative morphemes employed by each of the two languages have two allomorphic variants whose alternation is grammatically conditioned. The two allomorphs of the negative marker in Amharic are *al-* which occurs with perfective and imperative verbs, and *a-* that surfaces with imperfective and jussive verbal conjugations. Similarly, the Ezha negative prefix appears as *an-* with perfective verbal bases, and as *a-* with imperfective, jussive and imperative verb forms. In both languages, the negative prefixes attach to verbs preceding person prefixes and following subordinators in negative subordinate clauses. When it comes to copular and existential verbs, as compared to prototypical verbs, negation in both languages can be expressed in two ways: in some cases, the aforementioned negative prefixes are employed; and in some other cases, completely different verb forms rendering negative readings are introduced, hence, lexical negation via suppletion.

**Keywords:** negation, allomorph, prototypical verb, copular verb, existential verb

### 1. Introduction

Amharic and Ezha are closely related languages in that both of them belong to the South Ethio-Semitic language groups within the Ethio-Semitic language family. Amharic together with Argoba, Harari and East Gurage languages forms the Transversal South Ethio-Semitic sub-family, whereas Ezha belongs to the Outer South Ethio-Semitic sub-group which encompasses North Gurage, West Gurage and the extinct language Gafat (Hetzeon, 1977).

Amharic is a language which serves as a working language of the Ethiopian federal government in addition to its wider scope of usage as a lingua franca in almost all parts of the country. The language has a long research tradition in the realm of Semitic studies as it

---

\* Dr. Endalew Assefa: Assistant Professor of Linguistics, Department of Linguistics and Philology, College of Humanities, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. E-mail: endexye2006@gmail.com.

### *Negation in Amharic and Ezha: A comparative perspective*

has attracted the attention of several linguists. Thus, the language has relatively been well documented (Meyer, 2011).

By contrast, Ezha is one of the least studied Ethio-Semitic languages. The language is natively spoken in the Ezha woreda within the Gurage zone of the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR). It is widely spoken in and around the town of Agenna within the Ezha woreda administration. It is also spoken in other areas such as Wolkite and Addis Ababa by people who left their homeland for different reasons such as trade and education (Endalew, 2014).

This article presents a comparative description of Negation marking in the two languages: Amharic and Ezha. In doing so, no specific theoretical framework has been employed. The analyses are merely informed by the assumptions of descriptive linguistics based on the synchronic features of the target languages. Amharic data were collected through introspection by using the researcher's own native intuition, while Ezha data were accessed mainly via elicitation augmented by recording of free narratives by consulting native speakers of the language.

## **2. Discussion**

This section presents the description of negation marking in Amharic and Ezha from a comparative point of view. The phenomena of negation marking in the two languages have been displayed by sub-classifying them into three parts: negation in lexical verbs, negation in copular verbs and negation in existential verbs. These are discussed one after the other in the following subsequent sub-sections.

### **2.1 Negation of lexical verbs**

Lexical verbs of Amharic involve two, three or four root consonants of which di-consonantal verbs are often reductions of tri-consonantal ones involving weak radicals (laryngeals and approximants) that either disappeared or turned into vocalic radicals through time (Baye, 1999; Meyer, 2011). Ezha lexical verbs, on the other hand, can be of mono-, di-, tri- or quadri-consonantal (Endalew, 2014). In both languages, lexical verbs of any kind can inflect for negation.

With reference to lexical or prototypical verbs, the Amharic negative morpheme appears as *al-* on perfective verbal bases, whereas that of the Ezha negative morpheme surfaces as *an-* in situations where it attaches to the same verbal forms of the language: perfective bases. The following examples demonstrate this point.

(1) Amharic

a. al-kəffət-ə-mm

NEG-open.PFV-3MS.Sj-CM

'He did not open.'

*Endalew Assefa*

Ezha

b. an-k'ət'ər-ə

NEG-kill.PFV-3MS

'He did not kill.'

In the negative perfective forms of Ezha type-A verbs, the penultimate radicals degeminate as opposed to the affirmative counterparts where the penultimate radicals geminate (as in *k'ətt'ərəm* 'he killed' as contrasted with *ank'ət'ərə* 'he did not kill' where the final *-m* in the affirmative structure is a clause marker and does not constitute the verbal base). By contrast, the penultimate root consonants of type-A verbs remain geminate in both negative and affirmative perfective structures of Amharic (as in *kəffətə* 'he opened' Vs. *alkəffətəmm* 'he did not open' where the terminal *-mm* in the negative is a clause marker and not part of the verbal base).

In the imperfective and jussive verbal conjugations, the negative prefixes of both Amharic and Ezha assume the same realization, i.e. *a-* as exemplified in (2). In both languages, the negative prefix gets priority to the person prefix in their concatenation from left to right to be attached to the verbal base.

(2) Amharic

a. a-j-kəft-imm

NEG-open.IPFV-CM

'He will not open.'

b. a-ji-kfət

NEG-3MS-open.JUSS

'Let him not open.'

Ezha

c. ek'ət'r

a-j-k'ət'r

NEG-3MS-kill.IPFV

'He will not kill.'

d. a-ti-k't'ir

NEG-3FS-kill.JUSS

'Let her not kill.'

There occurs an interesting interplay between the negative prefix and the respective clause marker of the two languages (*-mm* in Amharic and *-m* in Ezha). The Amharic negative structures in both perfective and imperfective conjugations presuppose the appearance of the clause marker *-mm*, which does not occur in the affirmative structures. However, in Ezha, an opposite phenomenon occurs; the clause marker surfaces in the affirmative verbal forms of perfective conjugations, while it disappears in the negative

*Negation in Amharic and Ezha: A comparative perspective*

counterparts. Thus, in Amharic the negative prefix co-occurs with the clause marker *-mm* in the perfective and imperfective verbal forms. By contrast, the Ezha negative prefix precludes the clause marker *-m* which occurs on perfective verbs in the affirmative; hence, the two morphemes are said to be mutually exclusive.

The Ezha negative morpheme also excludes future tense suffixes. Whenever a verb form implying futurity is in its affirmative, it takes the suffix *-te* to indicate definite future as in (3a) and *-fə* to render an indefinite future reading as in (3c) (Endalew, 2014). However, in cases where such verb forms are negated, the future endings disappear since they are mutually exclusive with the negative prefix as depicted by (3b) and (3d).

- (3) a. *ji-k'ət'ir-te*  
3MS-kill.IPFV-DFUT  
'He is going to kill.'
- b. *ek'ət'r*  
*a-j-k'ətr*  
NEG-3MS-kill.IPFV  
'He will not kill.'
- c. *jə-k'tir-fə*  
3MS-kill.JUSS-IFUT  
'He will probably kill.'
- d. *ejək'tir*  
*a-jə-k'tir*  
NEG-3MS-kill.JUSS  
'He will not probably kill.'

Note that, in Ezha, the definite future is expressed by imperfective verbal bases, while the indefinite future reading is rendered by using jussive verbal conjugations. The negative expressions in (3) render both future and present tense readings due to the absence of the future tense suffixes upon their mutual exclusiveness with the negative prefix. Thus, the tense specification turns out to be context sensitive. Hence, the utterance *ank'ət'innə*, for instance, would mean either 'we will not kill' or 'we do not kill' depending on the discourse context. It is worth noting at this juncture that, unlike Ezha, Amharic does not make any distinction between definite and indefinite future readings. The imperfective verb forms in Amharic simply signal a non-past connotation.

In the imperative verb forms, the Amharic negative morpheme appears as *al-* (like the case in perfective structures), while the Ezha negative prefix occurs as *a-* (as is the case for imperfective and jussive verbal conjugations). The following are exemplary structures capturing this fact.

- (4) Amharic

*Endalew Assefa*

- a. attikfət  
al-t-kfət  
NEG-2MS-ope.IMP  
'Do not Open!'  
Ezha
- b. a-t-kit'r  
NEG-2MS-kill.IMP  
'Do not kill !'

In both Amharic and Ezha, in situations where the negative prefix occurs on verbs of subordinate clauses, the subordinate clause marker takes precedence over the negative morpheme in their attachment to the verbal base. The following are illustrative examples using negative conditional clauses.

(5) Amharic

- a. bərrun kalkəfətəw...  
bərr-u-n kə-al-kəffət-ə-w...  
door-DEF-ACC COND-NEG-open.PFV-3MS.Sj-3MS.Oj  
'If he did not open the door...'  
Ezha
- b. zəbbiwe bank'ət'ərən  
zəbb-we bə-an-k'ət'ər-ə-n  
lion-DEF COND-NEG-kill.PFV-3MS.Sj-3MS.Oj  
'If he did not kill the lion...'

Similarly, in relative clauses, the negative prefix in Amharic occurs following the relative clause marker as indicated in (6a) and (6b). Note that *jə-* and *imm-* are Amharic relativizers in the perfective and imperfective respectively. However, Ezha behaves in a completely different ways in this regard; the relativizer never appears with negative relative verbs in both perfective and imperfective conjugations. Hence, the negation marker attaches itself directly to the verbal base in the perfective as in (6c) and preceding the person prefix in the imperfective as indicated in (6d).

(6) Amharic

- a. məs'af jalanəbəbəw lidz...  
məs'af jə-al-anəbbəb-ə-w lidz...  
book REL-NEG-read.PFV-eMS.Sj-DEF boy...  
'The boy who did not read the book...'
- b. hisab immajwəddəw təmari  
hisab imm-a-j-wədd-ə-u təmari  
Maths REL-NEG-3MS-like.IPFV-3MS.Sj-DEF

### *Negation in Amharic and Ezha: A comparative perspective*

‘The student who does not like Maths...’

Ezha

c. zəbb an-k’ət’ər-ə-we miss...

lion NEG-kill.PFV-3MS.Sj-DEF man

‘The man who did not kill a lion...’

d. zəbb ek’ət’rwe miss...

zəbb a-j-k’ət’r-we miss...

lion NEG-3MS-kill.IPFV-DEF man...

‘The man who will not kill a lion...’

Both Amharic and Ezha do have what are known as composite verbs which involve two components. In both languages, composite verbs are derivatives of invariable elements (which could be idiophones or onomatopoeic words) that carry the verbal semantics followed by a supportive verb conveying grammatical information. In Amharic the supportive verb is either *al-* ‘say’ or *adərrəg-* ‘make’ (Baye, 2008; Meyer, 2011; Endalew, 2014), while in Ezha it is either *bar-* ‘say’ or *amənnə-* ‘make’ that serves as a supportive verb (Endalew, 2014).

Such verbs can be negated in both Amharic and Ezha wherein the negative marker appears on the supportive verb, and not on the initial invariable element. The following are instances of composite verb negation in both languages under comparison.

(7) Amharic

a. k’uttj’ al-al-ə-mm

sit NEG-say.PFV-3MS.Sj-CM

‘He did not sit down.’

b. kəff al-adərrəg-ə-mm

lift NEG-make.PFV-3MS.Sj-CM

‘He did not lift (something).’

Ezha

c. britj’ ambarə

britj’ an-bar-ə

flash NEG-say.PFV-3MS.Sj

‘It did not flash.’

d. digg an-amənnə-xw

slow-down NEG-make.PFV-1S.Sj

‘I did not make it sluggish.’

### 2.2 Negation of copular verbs

Copular verbs of both Amharic and Ezha appear to be very irregular since they exhibit unusual conjugational patterns as compared to the prototypical verbs discussed in the

preceding section. Some paradigms of copular verbs in both languages are even suppletive. This goes in line with cross-linguistic realities stipulated in Payne (1997).

Amharic and Ezha employ different copular forms for different tenses. The present copula appears as *nə-* in Amharic and as the suffix *-n* (with the variant *-r* and the suppletive form *-u*) in Ezha (Endalew, 2014). In both languages, these copular forms co-occur with suffixes indicating their subjects, and can take (pro) nouns, adjectives, and adverbs as their complements. The inflectional paradigms of the copulas in the present tense for both languages are given in table 1.

Table 1. The present copulas in Amharic and Ezha

	Amharic		Ezha	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
1	nə-ገገ	nə-n	-n-x <sup>w</sup>	-n-ndə
2M	nə-h	nə-attfihu	-n-xə	-n-xu
2F	nə-ፍ	nə-attfihu	-n-x <sup>j</sup>	-n-xma
3M	nə-w	nə-attfəw	-u	-r-o
3F	nə-at	nə-attfəw	-n-ja	-r-əma

The agreement suffixes following the Amharic copula are the copies of object suffixes that appear on prototypical verbs (Baye, 2007:8). Similarly, in Ezha, except for the 1S and 3PL the agreement suffixes are the object suffixes on prototypical verbs with imperfective conjugations. For second person, the suffixes match with the light<sup>①</sup> object agreement elements of the regular verbs, while the element following the 3FS copula is the copy of the heavy<sup>②</sup> object suffix. The agreement markers for 1S and 3PL following the copula, on the other hand, are identical to the subject agreement suffixes with perfective verbs (Endalew, 2014).

The following examples demonstrate how the present copular elements in Amharic and Ezha behave sententially. Note also that the examples depict the fact that the present copulas can assume (pro) nominal, adjectival and adverbial complements. The clause marker *-m* (see 2.1) of Ezha can not be attached to the present copula.

(8) Amharic

- a. ja lidz gobəz təmari nə-w  
 that boy clever student COP.PRES-3MS  
 ‘That boy is a clever student.’
- b. setijjəwa deffar nat

<sup>①</sup> Light object suffixes in Ezha appear with singular subjects except for 2FS (Endalew, 2014).

<sup>②</sup> Heavy object suffixes in Ezha are those which presuppose plural and 2FS subjects (Endalew, 2014).

*Negation in Amharic and Ezha: A comparative perspective*

set-jjə-wa deffar nə-at  
 female-SING-DEF brave COP.PRES-3FS  
 ‘The woman is brave.’

Ezha

c. ijja tāmari-n-xw  
 I student-COP.PRES-1S  
 ‘I am a student.’

d. məs’af-we jə-xit-u  
 book-DEF GEN-she-COP.PRES.3MS  
 ‘The book is hers.’

e. gred-we mərkama-r-əma  
 girl.PL-DEF beautiful-COP.PRES-3FPL  
 ‘The girls are beautiful.’

f. gred-we zaxe-r-əma  
 girl.PL-DEF there-COP.PRES-3FPL  
 ‘The girls are over there.’

The future tense copula is expressed by *hon-* in Amharic and *xər-* in Ezha. Both of these copular forms are morphologically similar with the prototypical verbs of the respective languages. The Amharic future copula inflects for person by taking the same affixes as lexical verbs of the language do. Similarly, the Ezha future copula can inflect for person, and definite and indefinite future tenses. It can also be used in the perfective with the declarative clause marker *-m* just like typical verbs (Endalew, 2014). This complies with Payne (1997) who states that copulas can have many or all of the morphosyntactic properties that characterize prototypical verbs. Semantically, however, copular verbs always carry little or no semantic content other than converting a noun phrase into a predicate. The following table presents the copular conjugations of Amharic and Ezha in the future tenses.

Table 2. Copulas of Amharic and Ezha in the future tenses

Amharic		Ezha	
		Definite future	Indefinite future
1S	i-hon-allə-hu	ə-xər-te	ə-xir-ǰə
2MS	t-hon-allə-h	ti-xər-te	ti-xir-ǰə
2FS	t-hon-i-allə-ǰ [tɪhɔnalləǰ]	ti-xər-i-te	ti-xir-i-ǰə
3MS	j-hon-allə-ə [jɪhɔnall]	ji-xər-te	ji-xir-ǰə
3FS	t-hon-allə-tǰ	ti-xər-te	ti-xir-ǰə
1PL	in-hon-allə-n	ni-xər-nə-te [nixənnətə]	ni-xir-nə-ǰə [nixinnəǰə]

*Endalew Assefa*

2MPL	t-hon-allə-att[ihu [tihonallatt[ihu]	ti-xər-o-te	ti-xir-o-ǧə
2FPL	t-hon-allə-att[ihu [tihonallatt[ihu]	ti-xər-əma-te	ti-xir-əma-ǧə
3MPL	j-hon-allə-u [jihonallu]	ji-xər-o-te	ji-xir-o-ǧə
3FPL	j-hon-allə-u [jihonallu]	ji-xər-əma-te	ji-xir-əma-ǧə

The element *-allə* in Amharic is the non-past auxiliary. Whereas, the invariable right peripheral suffixes (*-te* and *-ǧə*) in Ezha are the definite and indefinite future markers in their respective order. In both languages, the prefixes are person markers. The following examples demonstrate how the future copulas of the two languages behave in affirmative sentences.

(9) Amharic

- a. hakim ti-hon-allə-h  
physician 2MS-COP.FUT-AUX.PRES-2MS  
'You will be a physician.'
- Ezha
- b. ijja wəttaddər ə-xər-te  
I soldier 1S-be (come).IPFV-DFUT  
'I will be a soldier.'
- c. ijja wəttaddər ə-xir-ǧə  
I soldier 1S-be (come).JUSS-IFUT  
'I will probably be a soldier.'

In the construction of copular negation, Amharic employs a suppletive form to indicate the negative of the present copula. This form is *ajdəllə-* which renders a negative reading without the attachment of any negative affix; hence, lexical negation. For the future copula, however, the affirmative form takes the negative prefix *a-* to indicate negation. This phenomenon makes the future copula behave like prototypical verbs in the imperfective and jussive (see 2.1).

In Ezha, on the other hand, the negative of both the present and the future copulas is based on the future copula, i.e. *xər-*. This form, like typical verbs (see 2.1), takes the negative morpheme that surfaces as *an-* in the present and as *a-* in the future tense. The following are illustrative examples in both languages.

(10) Amharic

- a. təmari ajdəllə-hu-m  
student COP.PRES:NEG-1S-CM  
'I am not a student.'
- b. məmmihir a-t-hon-u-m  
teacher NEG-2MPL-COP.FUT-2MPL.Sj-CM

*Negation in Amharic and Ezha: A comparative perspective*

‘You will not be teachers.’

Ezha

c. ijja wəttaddər an-xər-xw

I soldier NEG-COP.FUT-1S

‘I am not a student.’

d. xino wəttaddər exəro

xino wəttaddər a-j-xər-o

they (M) soldier NEG-3MPL-COP.FUT-3MPL

‘They are not going to be soldiers.’

e. wəttaddər a-t-xir-o

soldier NEG-2MPL-COP.FUT-2MPL

‘You (MPL) will not probably be soldiers.’

In Amharic, the negative copular verb both in the present and future bears the clause marker *-mm*. This is the case in prototypical verbs as well (see 2.1), hence, the copulas behaving like typical verbs. On the other hand, in Ezha, the present and future negative copulas do not carry the clause marker *-m*. Besides, the suffixes *-te* and *-ǰə* which render definite and indefinite future readings respectively cannot co-occur with the negative prefix. These features make the negative copulas exhibit similar properties with prototypical verbs discussed in section 2.1. In situations where there are person prefixes, the negative prefixes in both Amharic and Ezha appear before the person prefixes; this is the case in structures signaling future tense.

The past copulas are *nəbbər-* and *bannə-* for Amharic and Ezha in their respective order. Table 3 depicts the inflectional paradigms of the past copulas in the two languages.

Table 3. The past copulas in Amharic and Ezha

	Amharic		Ezha	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
1	nəbbər-ku	nəbbər-n	bannə-x <sup>w</sup>	bannə-nə
2M	nəbbər-k	nəbbər-att[ǰhu	bannə-xə	bannə-xu
2F	nəbbər-ǰ	nəbbər- att[ǰhu	bannə-x <sup>j</sup>	bannə-xma
3M	nəbbər-ə	nəbbər-u	bannə-ə [bannə]	bannə-o [bannəwo]
3F	nəbbər-ətt[ǰ	nəbbər-u	bannə-tt[ǰ	bannə-əma

The agreement elements suffixed to the past copulas of both languages are identical to the subject suffixes for prototypical verbs. As with the present copula, in Ezha, the clause marker *-m* cannot be suffixed to the past copula. The following examples show how the past copulas of the two languages are employed in affirmative sentential use.

(11) Amharic

*Endalew Assefa*

- a. wəttaddər nəbbər-n  
soldier COP.PAST-1PL  
'We were soldiers.'
- b. axu təmari bannə-xu  
you.MPL student COP.PAST-2MPL  
'You (MPL) were students.'

In both Amharic and Ezha, the past copulas can serve as auxiliaries to express distant past tense. In such a case, the Ezha copula *bannə* can alternatively be replaced by its reduced form 'ba'. The two forms can be used in free alternation as there is no any grammatical or contextual ground to choose one or the other; the former is used in slow speech, while the speakers usually prefer the latter in fast articulation. Thus, the utterances given in (12b) and (12c) below, for instance, render the same reading and are equally acceptable in the language.

(12) Amharic

- a. asəffa anbəssa gədl-o nəbbər  
A. lion kill-CNV AUX.PAST  
'Assefa had killed a lion.'
- Ezha
- b. jina təmaribet wər-nə-m bannə  
we school go.PFV-1PL-CNV AUX.PAST  
'We had gone to school.'
- c. jina təmaribet wər-nə-m ba  
we school go.PFV-1PL-CNV AUX.PAST  
'We had gone to school.'

In the formation of negative structures involving the past copula, Amharic makes use of the affirmative past copula with the negative prefix *al-* discussed earlier. By contrast, Ezha employs a suppletive form *nəbər-* and then attaches the negative prefix *an-* to indicate negation. These negative morphs are those attested for regular verbs of the respective languages.

(13) Amharic

- a. wəttaddər al-nəbbər-u-m  
soldier NEG-COP.PAST-3MPL-CM  
'They were not soldiers.'
- Ezha
- b. ijja təmari an-nəbər-xw  
I student NEG-COP.PAST-1S  
'I was not a student.'

### 2.3 Negation of existential verbs

Like copular verbs, the verbs of existence in Amharic and Ezha employ different forms pertaining to different tenses. The present existential reading is expressed by *allə-* in Amharic and by *nər-* in Ezha as illustrated by the following table.

Table 4. Amharic and Ezha verbs of existence in the present tense

	Amharic		Ezha	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
1	allə-hu	allə-n	nər-x <sup>w</sup>	nər-nə [nənnə]
2M	allə-h	allə-attfihu [allattfihu]	nər-xə	nər-xu
2F	allə-f	allə- attfihu [allattfihu]	nər-xi [nərxɪ]	nər-xma
3M	allə-ə [allə]	allə-u [allu]	nər-ə	nər-o [nəribbo]
3F	allə-ttʃ	allə-u [allu]	nər-əttʃ	nər-əma

The agreement suffixes following the existential verb of both Amharic and Ezha are identical to the subject affixes with regular perfective verbs of the respective languages. The agreement element attached to the Ezha 3MPL existential verb undergoes strengthening thereby changing from the underlying *-o* to the surface form *-bbo*. The following are affirmative sentential examples in the two languages involving the verbs of existence in the present tense.

(14) Amharic

- a. indaləw izih allə  
 indaləw izih allə-ə  
 E.here exist-3MS.Sj  
 ‘Endalew is here/Endalew exists here.’

Ezha

- b. dengjawe təmaribet nəribbo  
 dengja-we təmaribet nər-o  
 boy.PL-DEF school exist.PRES-3MPL  
 ‘The boys are at school./The boys exist at school.’

With regard to negation, the present negative existential verbs of both languages are suppletive forms; they are not based on the affirmative verbs of existence presented above. In Amharic, the negative reading for the verb of existence in the present is signaled by using *jəllə-*, while that of Ezha is expressed by the form *ennə-*. These unique forms render a negative reading without the addition of any negative morpheme. These negative lexical forms in both languages are followed by subject agreement suffixes of the regular verbs in the perfective conjugations.

Table 5. Amharic and Ezha negative verbs of existence in the present

	Amharic		Ezha	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
1	jəllə-hu-mm	jəllə-n-mm	ennə-x <sup>w</sup>	ennə-nə
2M	jəllə-h-mm	jəllə-att[ihu-mm [jəllatt[ihumm]]	ennə-xə	ennə-xu
2F	jəllə-ƒ-mm	jəllə-att[ihu-mm [jəllatt[ihumm]]	ennə-xi [ennəx <sup>i</sup> ]	ennə-xma
3M	jəllə-ə-mm [jəlləmm]	jəllə-u-mm [jəllumm]	ennə-ə [ennə]	ennə-o [ennəwo]
3F	jəllə-ttƒ-mm	jəllə-u-mm [jəllumm]	ennə-ttƒ	ennə-əma [ennəma]

Note that the invariable right peripheral suffix *-mm* in Amharic is the negative clause marker discussed for lexical verbs in section 2.1. In Ezha, like copular and lexical verbs, the clause marker *-m* never appears on the negative existential verb. The structures in (15) demonstrate how the present negative existential verbs of Amharic and Ezha behave in sentences.

(15) Amharic

- a. səwottfu biro jəllumm  
 səw-ottƒ-u biro jəllə-u-mm  
 man-PL-DEF office exist.PRES.NEG-3MPL-CM  
 ‘The people are not in office./The people are absent from office.’

Ezha

- b. gredwe təmaribet ennəma  
 gred-we təmaribet ennə-əma  
 girl.PL-DEF school exist.PRES.NEG-3FPL  
 ‘The girls are not at school./The girls are absent from school.’

The past verbs of existence in Amharic and Ezha are expressed by *nəbbər-* and *bannə-* respectively. Note that these forms coincide with the past copular verbs of the respective languages (see 2.2); hence, in both languages the same form is used to express both copular and existential readings in the past tense. The following table depicts the inflectional patterns of the past existential verbs in the languages under comparison.

Table 6. Existential verbs of Amharic and Ezha in the past tense

	Amharic		Ezha	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
1	nəbbər-ku	nəbbər-n	bannə-x <sup>w</sup>	bannə-nə
2M	nəbbər-k	nəbbər-att[ihu]	bannə-xə	bannə-xu
2F	nəbbər-ƒ	nəbbər-att[ihu]	bannə-xi [bannəx <sup>i</sup> ]	bannə-xma
3M	nəbbər-ə	nəbbər-u	bannə-ə [bannə]	bannə-o [bannəwə]

*Negation in Amharic and Ezha: A comparative perspective*

3F	nəbbər-əttf	nəbbər-u	bannə-ttʃ	bannə-əma [bannəma]
----	-------------	----------	-----------	---------------------

Like the case in present existential verbs, the agreement suffixes following the past verbs of existence in both languages are identical to the subject agreement suffixes for regular verbs in the perfective conjugations. The following constructions show how the past verbs of existence in Amharic and Ezha are used sententially.

(16) Amharic

- a. tilant biro-əttʃin wist' nəbbər-n  
yesterday office-1PL.POSS inside exist.PAST-1PL.Sj  
'We were in our office yesterday.'
- b. ijja sarsija addisaba bannə-xw  
I two \_ years \_ ago Addis Ababa exist.PAST-1S.Sj  
'I had been in Addis Ababa two years ago.'

For past negative expressions involving the verb of existence, Amharic employs the same form as in the past affirmative, i.e. *nəbbər-*, whereas Ezha introduces a different form compared to the one used in the affirmative past and expresses negative past based on the existential verb *nəbər-* which can only be used for negative formation. These forms (the Amharic *nəbbər-* and the Ezha *nəbər-*) are apparently the same except that there is gemination of the second root consonant in Amharic which is not the case in Ezha. By taking these past existential verb forms, both Amharic and Ezha attach the negative prefixes *al-* and *an-* respectively to signal negation as demonstrated by the following table.

Table 7. Inflectional paradigms of Amharic and Ezha negative existential verb in the past

	Amharic	Ezha
1S	al-nəbbər-ku-mm	an-nəbər-x <sup>w</sup>
2MS	al-nəbbər-k-mm	an-nəbər-xə
2FS	al-nəbbər-ʃ-mm	an-nəbər-xi [annəbərxi]
3MS	al-nəbbər-ə-mm	an-nəbər-ə
3FS	al-nəbbər-əttʃ-mm	an-nəbər-əttʃ
1PL	al-nəbbər-n-mm	an-nəbər-nə [annəbənnə]
2MPL	al-nəbbər-əttʃihu-mm	an-nəbər-xu
2FPL	al-nəbbər-əttʃihu-mm	an-nəbər-xma
3MPL	an-nəbbər-u-mm	a-j-rəbr-o [erəbro]
3FPL	an-nəbbər-u-mm	a-j-rəbr-əma [erəbrəma]

In Amharic, the right most invariable suffix (i.e. *-mm*) is the clause marker in the negative, while those suffixes preceding *-mm* are subject agreement elements. In Ezha, the suffixes are subject agreement markers and there is no clause marker in the negative as is

the case in lexical and copular verbs (see 2.1 and 2.2). The following are instances of negative structures involving existential verbs in the past pertaining to the two languages under concern.

(17) Amharic

- a. təmariwottfu kiddim timihirtbet alnəbbərum  
 təmari-ottf-u kiddim timihirtbet al-nəbbər-u-mm  
 student-PL-DEF moment-ago school NEG-exist.PAST-3MPL-CM  
 ‘The students were not at school a moment ago.’

Ezha

- b. xinəma səstra agənnā an-nəbər-əma  
 they (F) two\_days\_ago Agenna NEG-exist.PAST-3FPL  
 ‘They (F) were not in Agenna two days ago.’

The Amharic existential verb in the future tense is *-nor-* which is a suppletive form different from both the present and past verbs of existence indicated earlier. By contrast, Ezha employs *-rəbr-* for the definite future and *-nbir-* for the indefinite future. These forms are arguably related to the past existential verb in the negative (i.e. *nəbər-*) discussed earlier. As noted earlier for lexical verbs, unlike Ezha, Amharic does not distinguish between definite and indefinite future readings on existential verbs. The inflectional paradigms of the future existential verbs of the two languages are given in table 8.

Table 8. Amharic and Ezha verb of existence in the future tense.

Amharic		Ezha	
		Definite Future	Indefinite future
1S	i-nor-allə-hu	ə-rəbr-te	ə-nbir-ʃə
2MS	t-nor-allə-h	ti-rəbr-te	ti-nbir-ʃə
2FS	i-nor-i-allə-ʃ	ti-rəbr-i-te	ti-nbir-i-ʃə
3MS	j-nor-allə-ə [jinorall]	ji-rəbr-te	ji-nbir-ʃə
3FS	t-nor-allə-ʃ	ti-rəbr-te	ti-nbir-ʃə
1PL	in-nor-allə-n	ni-rəbr-nə-te	ni-nbir-nə-ʃə
2MPL	t-nor-allə-attʃihu [tinorallattʃihu]	ti-rəbr-o-te	ti-nbir-o-ʃə
2FPL	t-nor-allə-attʃihu [tinorallattʃihu]	ti-rəbr-əma-te	ti-nbir-əma-ʃə
3MPL	j-nor-allə-u [jinorallu]	ji-rəbr-o-te	ji-nbir-o-ʃə
3FPL	j-nor-allə-u [jinorallu]	ji-rəbr-əma-te	ji-nbir-əma-ʃə

In the Amharic forms, the prefixes are all person markers, while the right most suffixes are subject agreement elements. The affix *-allə* that precedes the subject markers is the

*Negation in Amharic and Ezha: A comparative perspective*

non-past auxiliary marker as indicated in the inflectional paradigm of the future copular verb as well (see 2.2). Likewise, the prefixes in the Ezha paradigms are person indicators, while the invariable terminal suffixes *-te* and *-fə* relate to definite and indefinite future marking respectively. The affixes preceding these future morphemes are subject markers which are identical to those in regular verb conjugations. The following two examples illustrate how the future verbs of existence in Amharic and Ezha are used in sentential structures.

(18) Amharic

- a. nəgə sibsəbaw laj inoralləhu  
nəgə sibsəba-u laj i-nor-allə-hu  
tomorrow meeting-DEF on 1S-exist.FUT-AUX.PRES-1S.Sj  
'I will exist on the meeting tomorrow.'

Ezha

- b. gred-we səstə addisaba ji-rəbr-əma-te  
girl.PL-DEF two\_days\_later Addis Ababa 3FPL-exist.FUT-3FPL-DFUT  
'The girls will be in Addis Ababa after two days.'
- c. jina səstə addisaba ni-nbir-nə-fə  
we two\_days\_later Addis Ababa 1PL-exist-1PL-IFUT  
'We will probably be in Addis Ababa after two days.'

In future negative expressions involving verbs of existence, both Amharic and Ezha make use of the negative prefix *a-* to be attached to the respective future existential verbs indicated in table 8. The following exemplary sentential constructions illustrate this point.

(19) Amharic

- a. jə-zare amət səw-ottf-u bahirdar a-j-nor-u-mm  
GEN-today year man-PL-DEF B. NEG-3PL-exist.FUT-3PL-CM  
'The people will not exist in Bahirdar next year.'

Ezha

- b. adot-əna səstə agənnə a-t-rəbr  
mother-1S.POSS two\_days\_later Agenna NEG-3FS-exist.FUT  
'My mother will not be in Agenna after two days.'
- c. səstə agənnə a-t-ribr-əma  
two\_days\_later Agenna NEG-2PL-exist.FUT-2FPL  
'You (FPL) will not probably be in Agenna two days after.'

Notice that the negative prefix employed in both languages is identical to the one applied to lexical verbs in the imperfective and jussive conjugations (see 2.1) as well as to that used with future copular forms (see 2.2). In Amharic, the negative clause marker *-mm* appears on the future existential verb as is the case in lexical and copular verbs. In Ezha, on the

other hand, the negative verbs of existence preclude the clause marker *-m* as well as the definite and indefinite future markers *-te* and *-fə* since these three suffixes are mutually exclusive with the negative prefix, which also applies to regular and copular verbs of the language (see 2.1 and 2.2).

### **3. Summary**

In this article, an attempt has been made to offer a synchronic comparative description of negation in two genetically related languages: Amharic and Ezha. The comparison is conducted from a purely descriptive perspective without introducing any theoretical assumption thereby avoiding the possible occurrence of any theory-internal problem which could possibly impose bias on the data analyses.

The article revealed that negation in both Amharic and Ezha can be expressed by employing three categories of verbs. These are lexical verbs (including composite verbs), copular verbs and existential verbs. Most of these verb classes in both languages render negative readings by attaching a negative prefix; there are rare instances within the class of copular and existential verbs of both Amharic and Ezha where negation is lexically expressed in the absence of any negative marker.

Lexical verbs of Amharic render negation by prefixing a negative morpheme which has two grammatically conditioned variants. On perfective and imperative verbal bases, the negative prefix appears as *al-* while it occurs as *a-* on imperfective and jussive verb forms. In the case of composite verb negation, the negative marker attaches to the supportive verb that comes as a second element of the juxtaposition.

In Ezha, on the other hand, the negative morpheme to be attached to lexical verbs surfaces as *an-* on perfective forms, whereas it becomes *a-* in imperfective, jussive and imperative conjugations. Like the case in Amharic, the negation of composite verbs in Ezha requires putting the negative prefix at the beginning of the supportive verb.

In both languages under comparison, the negative prefix precedes person prefixes in their attachment to the verbal bases in the imperfective, jussive and imperative conjugations. But, the negative marker in both languages occurs following the conditional marker in negative conditionals. When it comes to negative relative verbs, the negative morpheme is preceded by the relativizer in Amharic. In Ezha, however, the relativizer never appears in negative relative verbs so that the negative marker attaches directly to the verbal base in the perfective and preceding the person prefixes in the imperfective. Note that in Ezha, the relative marker is zero even in the affirmative relative clauses with imperfective verb forms as opposed to perfective conjugations where the relativizer overtly surfaces as *jə-*.

Concerning negation involving copular verbs in the present tense, Amharic employs a

### *Negation in Amharic and Ezha: A comparative perspective*

suppletive form that differs from the respective affirmative copula and that conveys a negative reading without the addition of any negative affix. In Ezha, by contrast, the negative of the present copula coincides with the future copula with the addition of the negative prefix that surfaces as *an-*. The negative future copulas of both languages are constructed by attaching the same negative marker used in the imperfective forms of lexical verbs, i.e. *a-*, to the respective affirmative future copular forms. With regard to the negation of the past copula, Amharic simply attaches the prefix *an-* to the past copular verb *nəbbər-*. Whereas, Ezha uses a different form to which the negative morpheme *an-* is to be attached. This suppletive form based on which the negative past copula is formed is *nəbər-* as opposed to the past copula *bannə-* used in the affirmative.

When it comes to existential verbs, both Amharic and Ezha employ suppletive negatives in the present which signal negation on their own in the absence of negative affixes. However, the future copulas of both languages are negated by using the same negative prefix that turns out to surface as *a-* to the respective existential verbs in the affirmative. Past existential verbs of both Amharic and Ezha are the copies of the past copulas in the respective languages. The negative version of the past existential verb in Amharic is formed by prefixing *al-* to the past affirmative copula. By contrast, in Ezha, like the case in the negation of the past copula, the negation of the past verb of existence is not based on the affirmative existential verb form. A different verb form is introduced and the negative prefix *an-* is attached to this suppletive form to yield the negative past existential verb in an exactly the same manner as the negative past copular verb formation.

In all types of verbs, the Ezha negative prefix is mutually exclusive with the future tense markers (*-te* for definite future and *-ǝ* for indefinite future) and the declarative clause marker in the perfective, i.e. *-m*. In Amharic, on the other hand, the negative morpheme presupposes the clause marker *-mm*. This suffix never appears on affirmative forms. It only comes out with the negative prefix involving declarative clauses (perfective and imperfective verbs); hence, it is considered to mark negative declarative clauses.

Generally, the two languages under comparison are found out to exhibit very similar patterns of negation marking. To the extreme, they even employ identical morphs in certain instance such as in the imperfective and jussive conjugations where the negative prefix appears as *a-* in both languages. In the negation of present copular and existential verbs again, both of the languages involve the application of suppletive negatives (lexical negation). The position of the negative markers is also the same; in both languages, the negative marker is a prefix that occurs following subordinators on subordinate clauses and preceding person prefixes, if there is any.

There are also differences, although they appear to be very minor, between the negation patterns of the two languages. For example, unlike Amharic, Ezha does not employ an

overt relativizer in negative relative verbs. In addition, in the past tense, Ezha uses a suppletive copular verb form, which is different from the affirmative past copula, (which also applies to the past existential verb) to which the negative prefix is to be attached to render a negative reading in the past. This is not the case in Amharic where the negative of both the past copular and existential verbs is formed simply by prefixing the negative marker to the same affirmative form in the past (note that the past copular and existential verbs assume the same form).

### **Symbols and abbreviations**

1, 2, 3	First, Second and Third Person
ACC	Accusative
AUX	Auxiliary
CM	Clause Marker
CNV	Converb
COP	Copula
DEF	Definite
DFUT	Definite Future
F	Feminine
FUT	Future
GEN	Genitive
IFUT	Indefinite Future
IPFV	Imperfective
M	Masculine
NEG	Negative
Oj	Object
PFV	Perfective
PL	Plural
POSS	Possessive
PRES	Present
REL	Relativizer
S	Singular
Sj	Subject

### **References**

- Assefa, E. 2010. *The Syntax of Ezha Nominal Functors* [M]. USA: VDM Publishing House Limited.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2014. *Descriptive Grammar of Ezha: A Central West Gurage Language, Ethio-Semitic* [D]. PhD Dissertation, Department Of Linguistics, Addis Ababa University.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2017. Multifunctional Morphemes *jə-* and *-m* in Ezha: An Ethio-Semitic Language [J]. *Macrolinguistics*, 5(6): 24-36.
- Bauer, L. 2003. *Introducing Linguistic Morphology* [M]. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Grimes, B. F. (ed.). 2003. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* [M]. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics and the University of Texas at Arlington.
- Halliday, M. 1994. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* [M]. London: Arnold.
- Hetzron, R. 1972. *Ethiopian Semitic. Studies in Classification* [M]. Manchester: Manchester University press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1977. *The Gunnän Gurage Languages* [M]. Naples: Istituto Oriental di Napoli.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1996. The Two Futures in Central and Peripheral Western Gurage [A]. In G. Hudson (ed.)

***Negation in Amharic and Ezha: A comparative perspective***

- Essays on Gurage languages and culture* [C]. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 153-73.
- Hetzron, R. and M. Bender. 1976. The Ethio-Semitic Languages [A]. In M. Bender, et al (eds.) *Language in Ethiopia* [C]. London: Oxford University press, 23-33.
- Katamba, F. 1993. *Morphology* [M]. London, Michigan: Penguin Books Limited.
- Leslau, W. 1950. *Ethiopic Documents: Gurage* [M]. New York: Viking Fund.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1967. The Jussive in Ezha [J]. *Journal of Semitic studies* (Manchester), 12(1): 65-82.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1969a. Towards the Classification of Gurage Dialects [J]. *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 14: 96-109.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1969b. Ezha Riddles [J]. *Rassegna di Studi Ethiopic*, 23: 43-78.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1979a. *Etymological Dictionary of Gurage (Ethiopic). Volume-I: Individual Dictionaries* [M]. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1979b. *Etymological Dictionary of Gurage (Ethiopic). Volume-II: English-Gurage Index* [M]. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1979c. *Etymological Dictionary of Gurage (Ethiopic). Volume-III: Etymological Section* [M]. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Matthews, P. H. 1991. *Morphology* [M]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Menuta, F. 2002. *Morphology of Ezha* [D]. MA Thesis, Department of Linguistics, Addis Ababa University.
- Meyer, R. 2006. *Wolane, Descriptive Grammar of an East Gurage Language (Ethiosemitic)* [M]. Köln: Köppe.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2011. Gurage [A]. In S. Weninger (ed.). *The Semitic Languages: An International Handbook* [C]. De Gruyter Mouton, 1220-1275.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2011. Amharic [A]. In S. Weninger (ed.). *The Semitic Languages: An International Handbook* [C]. De Gruyter Mouton, 1178-1212.
- Payne, T. 1997. *Describing Morphosyntax: A Guide for Field Linguistics* [M]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Petros, D. 2000. *Sound Mutation: The Morphology of Chaha* [M]. Philadelphia and Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Polotsky, H. J. 1951. *Notes on Gurage Grammar* [M]. Jerusalem: Israel Central Press.
- Yimam, B. 1999. Root Reduction and Extension in Amharic [J]. *Ethiopian Journal of Languages and Literature*, 9: 56-88.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2008. *Amharic Grammar* [M]. Addis Ababa: Eleni Private Limited Press.