Title
Object Markers are Doubled Clitics in Amharic

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6n7023wb

Author
Kramer, Ruth

Publication Date
2011-09-08

OBJECT MARKERS ARE
DOUBLED CLITICS IN AMHARIC*

Ruth Kramer
Georgetown University

It has long been debated whether the object marker in Amharic is a reflex of object agreement (Amberber 1996; Yimam 2006) or a doubled object clitic (Mullen 1986; Yabe 2001). I re-open this debate, evaluating previous arguments and developing several new arguments for the object marker being an object clitic. If agreement is analyzed as the Minimalist relation Agree, several diagnostics relating to case, the morphophonology of the object markers, and what happens when no object marker is possible, all demonstrate that the object markers are doubled clitics. The paper thus serves as a case study in how to distinguish agreement and clitics using multiple diagnostics (cf. Preminger 2009).

Keywords: morphology, syntax, agreement, clitics, clitic doubling, Amharic

1 Introduction

The empirical focus of this squib is a particular kind of morpheme that attaches to verbs in Amharic (Ethiosemitic). This morpheme typically co-varies in form with the phi-features of the direct object, and I will refer to it as the object marker. In (1), -*ɨw* is an object marker and reflects the third person masculine singular direct object *doro wät'un* 'the chicken stew.'

(1)   Almaz doro   wät'-u-n   bäll-atʃtʃ-**ɨw**
        Almaz chicken stew-DEF-ACC eat.PF-3FS.S-**3MS.O**
        'Almaz ate chicken stew.'[1]

In (2), -*at* is an object marker and it reflects the third person feminine singular direct object *doro-wa-n* 'the hen.'

(2)   Aster doro-wa-n   arräd-ätʃtʃ-**at**
        Aster chicken-DEF.F-ACC butcher.PF-3FS.S-**3FS.O**
        'Aster butchered the hen.' (Yabe 2001:2)

The central puzzle of this squib is the status of these object markers. Are they the reflex of agreement, i.e., the morphological realization of a bundle of phi-features on some functional head? Or are they doubled clitics, pronoun-like morphemes that are somehow associated with the direct object and possibly move to their position near the verb? I address these questions by taking a detailed look at the predictions made by current theories of agreement and clitic doubling, and see whether they are borne out in the

---

[1] Gloss abbreviations: 1 - first person, 2 - second person, 3 - third person, ACC - accusative case, DEF - definite marker, F - feminine, IMPF - imperfect, M - masculine, .O - object marker, PF - perfect, S - subject agreement, Examples without any attributed source are from my own fieldwork.

Amharic data. Expanding on and strengthening arguments in Mullen 1986 and Yabe 2001 (as well as proposing new arguments), I conclude that the object markers are best classified as doubled clitics.
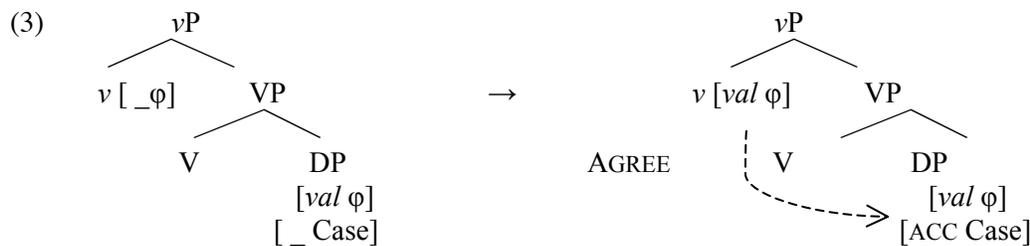
In terms of its broader implications, the squib is a case study in how to test for clitic doubling in a particular language. It serves as a counterpoint to recent research focused on the particular diagnostics that can be used to identify clitic doubling more generally (Preminger 2009).

The plan of the squib is as follows. In Section 2, I introduce the theories of agreement and clitic doubling that I will adopt and discuss previous Amharic research on object markers. In Section 3, I examine aspects of the morphophonological realization of object markers and argue that their realization is more in line with the behavior of a doubled clitic than an agreement morpheme. In Section 4, I show how there is no connection between case assignment and object markers, unlike what an agreement analysis would predict. In Section 5, the overall distribution of object markers is laid out. Section 6 concludes.

2 Theory of Agreement, Theory of Clitic Doubling

The kind of puzzle posed by the Amharic object marker is of a very general type. Any language that has a morpheme attached on (or near) the verb that co-varies with an argument will raise the same questions about its classification as an agreement morpheme or a doubled clitic. However, the boundaries between agreement and clitic doubling can be somewhat blurry, often because they are used without accompanying definitions and/or particular theories (agreement in particular has been used as a cover term for both; see discussion in Woolford 2003). There are certainly canonical properties associated with each of these options, i.e., properties that are common across all or most of the empirical phenomena classified as agreement or clitic doubling (e.g., agreement is usually obligatory; clitic doubling is usually optional). However, to give more concreteness to the differences between the phenomena, I assume particular theories of agreement and clitic doubling and note whether the object marker fulfills the predictions of these theories or not. I supplement this 'falsifiable prediction'-based approach with a more 'canonical property'-based approach as necessary.

For agreement, I adopt a conventional Minimalist formalization in terms of the Agree relation (Chomsky 2000, 2001, 2004). A functional head with unvalued phi-features (T for subject agreement, *v* for object agreement) searches downwards into its c-command domain for a DP with valued phi-features. This functional head is referred to as the probe. When the probe finds a DP with valued phi-features (called the goal), they enter into the Agree relation. The DP values the phi-features on the probe, and the probe assigns Case to the DP (nominative for T, accusative for *v*). The valued phi-features on the functional head are realized at PF as the agreement marker. An example with object agreement is in (3).

(3)

*v*P		*v*P

$v\,[\,\_\varphi]$ VP $\rightarrow$ $v\,[val\,\varphi]$ VP

V   DP   AGREE   V   DP
[*val* φ]   [*val* φ]
[_ Case]   [ACC Case]

In (3), the left of the arrow is the structure before the Agree relation: *v* has unvalued phi features (indicated by the underscore), and the DP direct object has valued phi-features (indicated by the *val*) and an unvalued Case feature. To the right of the arrow is the structure after *v* has entered into an Agree relation with the DP: the phi-features on *v* are now valued, and the DP has had its Case feature valued as accusative.

Certain conditions hold of the Agree relation, including the condition that the goal must be in the c-command domain of the probe. Another condition that will be relevant later is that both probe and goal must be 'active,' i.e., both must have unvalued features, in order to enter into an Agree relation. The unvalued features on the probe are phi-features, but just as important is the unvalued Case feature on the goal DP. As we will see below, this condition will cause an agreement analysis to make incorrect predictions about the behavior of Amharic object markers.

In terms of the PF side of agreement, I will be assuming Distributed Morphology for concreteness, but nothing hinges on this. I assume agreement relations are established in the syntax, but realized at PF in the post-syntactic morphology (cf. the proposals in Legate 2008). Since agreement is often a separate morpheme from the functional heads T or *v*, an Agr node may be inserted post-syntactically adjoined to T or *v* (see e.g., Marantz 1992 for the original conception of this; Embick and Noyer 2007:12-13 for a more recent version).

(4)　　　　　T　　　　　　　　　　Agr Node Adjoined to T at PF
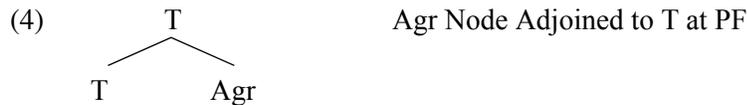
　　　T　　　　Agr

Agreement markers are most often morphophonologically dependent, and can be realized either affixed or cliticized to a host. Note, then, that agreement morphemes may be clitics in the morphophonological sense, viz. dependent elements that seem less dependent than affixes but more dependent than 'words.' However, agreement morphemes are distinct from doubled clitics which come about through a very different process.

Turning now to the theory of clitic doubling, it is difficult to designate a currently conventional or mainstream analysis of the phenomenon. There are a few major lines of analysis (Sportiche 1996; Uriagereka 1995; Torrego 1988; Rezac 2008; Anagnostopoulou 1999, 2003, 2004; Bleam 1999), and the details of implementation vary (e.g., whether the clitic is moved or base-generated, whether the clitic heads its own projection). For present purposes, it is sufficient to define clitic doubling as the attachment of some kind of pronoun-like head to the verbal complex whose features co-vary with those of a non-subject argument. The majority of recent theories assume that the clitic does not head its own projection (the major exception is Sportiche 1996; see also Bleam 1999). One of the major alternatives is the 'big DP hypothesis' (Torrego 1988; Uriagereka 1995; see also Anagnostopoulou 2004:Ch.4 for a variant) and I will adopt this theory, again for concreteness. Its details will not figure prominently in the discussion below, but the central idea is that the clitic is a D head with a null NP complement. The specifier of its DP is the doubled DP.

(5)　　　　　DP　　　　　　　　　　　　Big DP Hypothesis

　　(double)　　D

　　　　D　　　NP
　　　　　　　pro　　　　　　　　　　　(Uriagereka 1995:81, (2a))
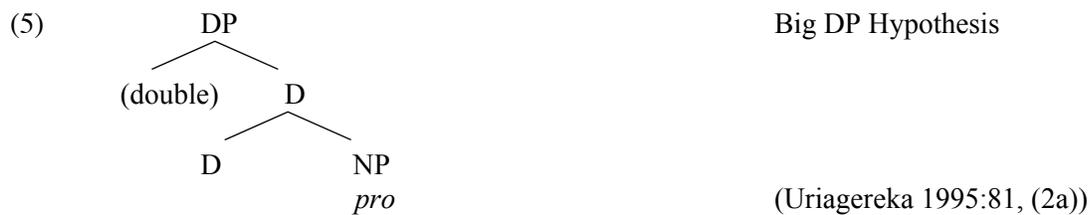
In Uriagereka 1995, the clitic raises to a DP-external functional head (FP) near the verb to account for its placement. Clitic doubling in this analysis is not directly associated with Case assignment, and it crucially does not involve the valuation of phi-features on a functional head in the verbal extended projection. A clitic is a syntactic head that undergoes movement (D), whereas an agreement marker is a set of phi-features on a syntactic head (T or *v*) that may have other features. These are the fundamental differences from the agreement analysis, and will suffice to distinguish clitic doubling from agreement in Amharic. Throughout the squib, it will be shown how the behavior of the object marker is compatible with a clitic doubling account but incompatible with an agreement account.

The agreement versus clitic doubling debate has somewhat of a history in the Amharic literature on the object marker. Much previous research has classified the object marker as the reflex of object agreement (see e.g., Amberber 1996, Amberber 2005; Engdashet 1998; Demeke 2003; Gasser 1983; Yabe 2007; Yimam 2004, 2006). In most cases, though, the term 'agreement' is used in its cover term sense and without any particular theoretical commitment. A key exception is Yabe 2007 where it is argued that object markers are the reflex of an agreement relation between the object and *v*. Yabe explicitly connects this agreement relation to the assignment of accusative case, but I will argue that object marking is not a necessary or a sufficient condition for accusative case marking as will be described more fully in Section 4.[2]

The clearest precedents for this squib are Mullen 1986 and earlier work by Yabe (2001), since they both argue that the object markers are doubled clitics.[3] However, their arguments are condensed and tend to be based on the 'canonical properties' of agreement vs. clitic doubling. In the squib, I will unpack and strengthen their arguments in addition to developing new reasons to treat the object markers as doubled clitics.

3 Morphophonological Realization

In this section, I present several generalizations about the morphophonological form of the object marker that suggest it is a doubled clitic and not an agreement morpheme.

In the account sketched above, agreement morphemes are the realization of phi-features on functional heads — conventionally, T for subject agreement and transitive *v* for object agreement. This predicts that the realization of those phi-features may vary depending on other features that the functional head itself has, e.g., a past tense feature on T. In other words, the functional head is part of the context for determining the form of the agreement morpheme. In terms of the Distributed Morphology analysis above, the Agr node adjoined to T can have its realization conditioned by the features of T. In fact, agreement morphemes usually do vary formally across different tenses. This variation can occur even in impoverished agreement systems. In English, for example, agreement is null on past tense verbs, but in the 3rd person singular present tense, it is -*s*.

In Amharic, subject agreement varies depending on aspect (perfect or imperfect), and a potential way to analyze this is that Asp bears the phi-features involved in subject agreement. A few representative perfect and imperfect verb forms are in (6).

(6)

	Perfect	Imperfect
a.	säbbär-ku	ɨ-säbr
	break.PF-1S	1S-break.IMPF
b.	säbbär-ɨh	tɨ-säbr
	break.PF-2MS	2MS-break.IMPF
c.	säbbär-ä	yɨ-säbr
	break.PF-3MS	3MS-break.IMPF

The perfect and imperfect series of agreement suffixes are clearly distinct in terms of their morphophonological form, and their position is also different. In the perfect, the agreement morpheme is suffixed to the verb whereas in the imperfect, it is prefixed (although certain imperfect forms include both prefixal and suffixal agreement).

Overall then, the Minimalist theory of agreement allows for the form of the agreement morpheme to vary across different types of verb forms (present tense, past tense, imperfect aspect, etc.) and this is exactly what we find cross-linguistically (and in Amharic). However, the form of the object marker is completely invariant across all verb forms (as first noted in Mullen 1986). The form of the object marker does not vary based on any property of the transitive *v*. Also, even though the object marker is part of the same Morphological Word as subject agreement (see (1)), it does not vary based on aspect (or any other component of that word). As the full paradigm of the object markers in Table 1 indicates, the object marker varies in form according to the phi-features of the argument with which it is associated.

Table 1: Object Marker Paradigm

	Singular	Plural
1st Person	-ññ	-n
2nd Person	-h (masc.) | -ʃ (fem.)	-atʃtʃɨhu
3rd person	-w, -t after *u* or *o* (masc.) | -at (fem.)	-atʃtʃäw
2nd person polite	-wo(t)	
3rd person polite	-atʃtʃäw	

In terms of how it varies morphophonologically, then, the object marker seem more akin to pronominals (i.e., D heads; Postal 1969) than a bundle of phi features on a verbal functional head.[4] This is exactly

---

[4] There is a wrinkle here. In some languages (e.g., Latin), agreement markers are part of a complex head of verb-related morphemes including the verb itself, tense, aspect, and perhaps other functional categories. An example is in (i) (abstracting away from the theme vowel of the verb).

(i)   amā - ve   - rā   - mus
        love - Asp[PERF] - Tense - 1S
        'We had loved.'

In Latin, if the Agr node is directly adjacent to aspect (i.e., if T is null), aspect can influence the form of Agr, even though Agr is inserted adjoined to T (Embick 2009). It seems, then, that a functional head that Agr is not originally adjoined to can result in variations in the form of Agr.

The relevance here is that in most cases of clitic doubling (including the Amharic object markers), the clitic is positioned near or within the complex head of verb-related morphemes (in some analyses, doubled clitics even moves to T; see e.g., Anagnostopoulou 2004). It seems plausible then, that a doubled clitic could vary depending on tense or aspect, if it is adjacent to some such head. However, to the best of my knowledge, all doubled clitics are invariant like the Amharic object marker. Perhaps doubled clitics will be best analyzed as not attached closely 'enough' to have their form influenced by the surrounding verbal heads -- in Romance, at least, they are intuitively more separate from the verbal complex than subject

what a 'big DP' clitic doubling analysis predicts since the clitic is merged as a D head (cf. Anagnostopoulou 2004 where doubled clitics in Greek are the realization of the moved [D] feature of a DP).

Taking a closer look at the form of the object marker itself also reinforces its connection to noun-related morphology. The 'big DP' analysis was partially motivated by formal parallels between determiners (D heads) and third person object clitics in various Romance languages (e.g., in Galician, determiners and 3rd person object clitics are identical: *(l)o, (l)os, (l)a, (l)as*). This formal parallel also exists in Amharic, although to a lesser degree, especially since determiners do not overtly agree in number. Although the feminine forms differ (*-wa* for the determiner, *-at* for the object marker), the third person masculine singular object marker (*-u*) is homophonous with the masculine singular definite determiner (*-u*). Also, as Yabe 2001 points out, the object marker also shares parts of its paradigm with the paradigm for pronominal possessors (*my, her, our,* etc). A few examples with pronominal possessors are in (7). The full paradigm of pronominal possessors is in Table 2 and Table 1 of the object marker paradigm is repeated for comparison.

(7) a. bet-e 'house-my' my house
b. bäk'lo-h 'mule-your.M' your mule
c. tämari-yatʃtʃɨn 'student-our' our student (Leslau 1995:50ff.)

Table 1: Object Marker Paradigm

	Singular	Plural
1st Person	-ññ	-n
2nd Person	**-h (masc.) | -ʃ (fem.)**	**-atʃtʃɨhu**
3rd person	-w, -t after *u* or *o* (masc.) | -at (fem.)	**-atʃtʃäw**
2nd person polite	**-wo(t)**	
3rd person polite	**-atʃtʃäw**	

Table 2: Pronominal Possessor Paradigm

	Singular	Plural
1st Person	-e	-atʃtʃɨn
2nd Person	**-h (masc.) | -ʃ (fem.)**	**-atʃtʃɨhu**
3rd person	-u (masc.) | -wa (fem.)	**-atʃtʃäw**
2nd person polite	**-wo(t)**	
3rd person polite	**-atʃtʃäw**	

As indicated by the bolded cells in the tables, the object marker and the pronominal possessor are formally identical for five out of eight slots of their respective paradigms. Moreover, the third person masculine singular forms, while not identical, are strikingly similar (*-u* and *-w* are often allophones of the same phoneme in Amharic with *-u* surfacing after consonants and *-w* after vowels).

If the pronominal possessors are analyzed as D heads (cf. Lyons 1986, Giorgi and Longobardi 1991), then the syncretism here is easily explained; both pronominal possessors and object markers would be the realization of a D with phi-features. Even if the pronominal possessors are not D heads, the formal parallels with the object marker are striking and indicate at least a strong historical connection.[5] This

---

agreement. The morphophonological properties of doubled clitics have not been studied extensively (as compared to their syntactic or semantic properties) but clearly merit some further research.

[5] A fair amount of research has focused on the connection between possessor construction and DPs with doubled clitics; see e.g., Bleam 1999 and references therein.

again ties the object marker much more closely in terms of its morphophonological form to the nominal system than the verbal system.[6]

In sum, then, the morphophonological form of the object marker does not vary with tense, aspect, any property of *v*, or anything at all except the phi-features of the argument with which it is associated. This is not predicted if it is an agreement morpheme, but it is predicted under a clitic doubling account. Moreover, the object marker displays formal parallels to determiners and pronominal possessors, demonstrating at least the vestiges of a link to the nominal morphology system, as predicted if it is a doubled clitic.

4 Case

In a Minimalist theory of object agreement (Chomsky 2000, 2001, 2004), there is a tight connection between object agreement and accusative Case. When *v* enters into an Agree relation with a DP, it values the Case feature on the DP as accusative. DPs which already have their Case features valued may not enter into an Agree relation with any functional head since they are no longer active. Accordingly, it is predicted that any DP that participates in object agreement will receive accusative Case, and that no DP that receives a different case can participate in object agreement.

Both predictions are false with respect to object markers in Amharic: accusative case is not a necessary condition for a DP to be related to an object marker (cf. Demeke 2003: Ch.3). For example, indirect objects, which are assigned case via the preposition *lä-* 'to', may be referenced by an object marker. In (8), the third person masculine singular object marker *-ɨw* refers to the male indirect object *Girma* and not the female direct object *the hen*.

(8)   Aster doro-wa-n   lä-Gɨrma   sät't'-ätʃtʃ-**ɨw**
       Aster chicken-DEF.F-ACC to-Girma   give.PF-3FS.S-**3MS.O**
       'Aster gave the hen to Girma.' (Yabe 2001:2)

In fact, object markers are not even limited to direct and indirect objects. Other, less-canonical types of internal arguments may be referenced by an object marker, including the internal arguments of the predicates *wait for*, *accept from, conceal from, buy from, steal from, come out of, flow out of,* and *come to* (Leslau 1995:416-417; Cohen 1970:145). These internal arguments may be in a PP headed by a different preposition than the dative *lä-* 'to.' For example, in (9), an internal argument of *buy* is marked with the ablative preposition *kä-* 'from.' The third person feminine singular object marker *-at* references this argument (*the woman*) and not the direct object 'a book' (which is masculine).[7]

(9)   ɨne kä-setɨyya-wa   and mäs'haf gäzza-hʷ-**at**
       I   from-woman-DEF.F   a   book   buy.PF-1S.S-**3FS.O**
       'I bought a book from the woman.' (Mullen 1986:260)

---

[6] It should be noted that the object markers do not formally resemble non-possessive pronouns (see e.g., Leslau 1995:46 for the pronominal paradigm). However, there is a crucial difference between non-possessive pronouns and the formally similar possessive pronouns and object markers. Non-possessive pronouns are intransitive D heads -- they do not take NP complements. Possessive pronouns and object markers under a big DP analysis necessarily take an NP complement. This fundamental syntactic difference may be the key to why they are realized distinctly. Thanks to Line Mikkelsen and Sharon Rose for raising this issue.

[7] I am setting aside here the use of object markers after the preposition-like verbal markers *-bb-* and *-ll-* to represent malefactives and benefactives, respectively (among other types of arguments). See the thorough description in Leslau 1995:424ff.

Therefore, an object marker can reference an argument without assigning accusative Case to it, counter to the predictions of an agreement analysis.

It should be noted that in many analyses of Romance clitic doubling, doubled clitics for datives are treated differently than doubled clitics for direct objects (see e.g., Uriagereka 1995). This is supported by the fact that dative and direct object clitics are two formally distinct series in most Romance languages. However, there is no formal distinction in Amharic (there is just one object marker series), and some accounts of clitic doubling do conflate indirect object and direct object clitics (see e.g., Bleam 1999; Sportiche 1996).

Even if the datives and other non-direct objects are discarded though, the agreement analysis still makes another incorrect prediction. In order to be assigned accusative Case structurally (which I assume is realized as accusative case morphologically), a direct object must enter into an Agree relation with *v*. This is assumed to hold cross-linguistically in Minimalism, but most languages do not realize the resulting object agreement. However, this squib is investigating the hypothesis that object agreement is realized in Amharic by the object marker. This predicts that a direct object should not surface with accusative case unless it is referenced by an object marker. This is false.

(10)   Almaz bet-u-n   ayy-ätʃtʃ
        Almaz house-DEF-ACC see.PF-3FS.S
        'Almaz saw the house.'

In (10), the direct object *betun* 'the house' is marked for accusative case (by the *-n* suffix) yet there is no object marker on the verb. It is grammatical for the verb to have an object marker, as in (11), but it is not required (The distribution of the object markers will be discussed in more detail in Section 5).

(11)   Almaz bet-u-n   ayy-ätʃtʃ-**ɨw**
        Almaz house-DEF-ACC see.PF-3FS.S-3MS.O
        'Almaz saw the house.'

An accusative case-marked direct object is grammatical even when the verb has an object marker for a different argument. Consider again (8), repeated below as (12).

(12)   Aster doro-wa-n   lä-Gɨrma sät'ʼ-ätʃtʃ-**ɨw**
        Aster chicken-DEF.F-ACC to-Girma give.PF-3FS.S-**3MS.O**
        'Aster gave the hen to Girma.' (Yabe 2001:2)

In (12), *dorowan* 'the hen' is marked for accusative case, and there is an object marker on the verb. However, the object marker references the indirect object *Girma* (third person masculine singular) and not 'the hen' (third person feminine singular).[8]

---

[8] The generalizations concerning whether a direct object or an indirect object can be referred to by the object marker are under investigation. It is usually claimed that it is ungrammatical to reference the direct object with an object marker when there is both a direct and an indirect object (although see Leslau 1995:191).

(ii)   *Aster doro-wa-n   lä-Gɨrma sät'ʼ-ätʃtʃ-**at**
         Aster chicken-DEF.F-ACC   to-Girma give.PF-3FS.S-**3FS.O**
         'Aster gave the hen to Girma.' (Yabe 2001:2)

However, preliminary results from ongoing research show that animacy (and more specifically, human-ness) is important here. If the direct object is definite and refers to a human, then the direct object is referenced by the object marker and the indirect object cannot be.

Finally, in certain cases, it is even ungrammatical to have an object marker reference an argument that has accusative case.

(13) Almaz ras-wa-n   bä-mästawät ayy-ätʃtʃ**(*-at)**
      Almaz self-her-ACC in-mirror   see.PF-3FS**(-*3FS.O)**
      'Almaz saw herself in the mirror.'

In (13), the reflexive direct object *raswan* 'herself' has accusative case, but it is ungrammatical to refer to it via an object marker on the verb. I conclude therefore that accusative case is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for being referenced by an object marker, making it highly unlikely that the object marker is a realization of object agreement.

The data in (8)/(12) pose one final problem for an agreement analysis. The DP *Girma* already has case since it has been assigned dative by the preposition *lä-* 'to.' In Minimalist terms, its Case feature has been valued. However, this means that *Girma* is inactive, and a probe like *v* is incapable of entering into an Agree relation with an inactive goal. Therefore, if object markers are object agreement, there should be no object marker that refers to *Girma*. However, in (8)/(12), there is an object marker *-ɨw* on the verb and it does reference *Girma.*

In sum, then, an agreement analysis makes a passel of incorrect predictions about the behavior of object markers with respect to accusative case-marking. As for a clitic doubling analysis along the lines sketched above, there is no such tight connection between doubled clitics and accusative Case/case, so there is no problem with the facts above.[9]

5 Distribution

As noted in Mullen 1986 and Yabe 2001, the distribution of the object marker in Amharic is very similar to the distribution of doubled clitics in other languages. I will first describe the distribution and then compare it to clitic doubling on other languages. To start, then, the object marker is generally optional in Amharic (Mullen 1986; see (10) and (11)). When present, it triggers a poorly-understood semantic effect of focus or some kind of emphasis on the argument which it references (Haile 1970; see also Demeke 2003). Object markers are only licensed for definite and/or specific arguments, although the exact generalization here is still under investigation (Yabe 2001; see Haile 1970 again for relevant discussion). Consider the contrast between (14) and (15).

(14) Aster doro-wa-n   arräd-ätʃtʃ(**-at)**
      Aster chicken-DEF.F-ACC butcher-3FS.S-**3FS.O**
      'Aster butchered the hen.' (Yabe 2001:2)

(iii) Almaz set-wa-n   lɨdʒ-wa-n   Gɨrma sät'ʼä-tʃtʃ-at / *sät'ʼä-tʃtʃ-ɨw
       Almaz female-DEF.F-ACC child-her-ACC Girma give.PF-3FS-**3FS.O** / give.PF-3FS-3MS.O
       'Almaz gave her daughter to Girma.'

It thus seems that which argument is referenced by the object marker (at least for this predicate) is not categorically indirect objects or direct objects, but variable depending on animacy and definiteness.

[9] Older analyses of clitic doubling (e.g., Jaeggli 1982) were often concerned with the relationship between case and doubled clitics. This is primarily because in Spanish, doubled clitics are only licensed if the direct object is case-marked via the preposition *a* (aka Kayne's Generalization). See Bleam 1999 for more recent discussion of these facts as well as Suñer 1988 for some counterexamples.

(15)   Aster doro   arräd-ätʃtʃ(**-at**)

       Aster chicken butcher.PF-3FS.S(**-3FS.O**)

       'Aster butchered a chicken.' (Yabe 2001:3)[10]

In (14), the direct object *dorowan* 'the hen' is definite and an object marker may (but need not) be attached to the verb. In (15), the direct object *doro* 'a chicken' is indefinite (its specificity is unclear) and attaching an object marker to the verb results in ungrammaticality. Finally, when an argument has been pro dropped, the object marker is always obligatory.

(16)   a. bäll-atʃtʃ   b. bäll-atʃtʃ-ɨw

       eat.PF-3FS.S   eat.PF-3FS.S-3MS.O

       'She ate.' / *She ate it.   'She ate it.'

In (16)a, there is no object marker. The sentence is grammatical, but only if there is no particular direct object in mind, similar to the English translation. If the sentence is to be interpreted as if there is a pro-dropped direct object, there must be an object marker referring to it as in (16)b.[11]

       This pattern of facts is very similar to one of the most well-known cases of clitic doubling: River Plate Spanish (see e.g., Jaeggli 1982). Clitic doubling in River Plate Spanish is optional for full DP direct objects, obligatory for dropped pronominal objects, and is conditioned by the specificity of the object.[12]

(17)   a. (Lo)   vimos a Guille   b. *(Lo) vi

       (3MS) saw   Guille   3MS saw

       'We saw Guille.' (Jaeggli 1982:14)   'I saw him.' (Jaeggli 1982:14)

In the interest of analyzing empirically similar phenomena in a similar way, this is clearly evidence in favor of the object marker being a doubled clitic.

       However, it is worth considering how strong of an argument this is. It is true that agreement as a phenomenon is not canonically optional, it does not canonically have any semantic effects and it is not canonically conditioned by any feature of the controller of the agreement. This much is clear from large typological studies like Corbett 2006. Nevertheless, there are exceptions to canonical behavior, and Corbett documents cases where agreement is conditioned by definiteness/specificity (Rural Palestinian Arabic:200-201), is associated with information structure (Tsez:197-1999) and is optional (Ngan'gityemerri:14-15).[13] Thus, it is not impossible that Amharic object markers would be agreement under this line of argumentation, although the chance of all of these non-canonical properties occurring at once in the same language does seem low.

       A more precise argument can be made using part of the same set of facts by appealing to a diagnostic developed by Preminger (2009). The diagnostic exploits the fact that agreement involves feature valuation of pre-existing unvalued features on a functional head, whereas clitic doubling involves

---

[10] A reviewer notes that (14) and (15) are not a minimal pair for definiteness since the direct object is case-marked in (14) but not in (15). This is because accusative case marking is differential in Amharic depending on definiteness. Definite direct objects must be case-marked whereas indefinite direct objects cannot be.

[11] There are at least two other constructions in which object marking is obligatory in Amharic: possessive sentences (*Almaz has-3FS.O a car*) and experiencer predicates (*Almaz is-tired.3FS.O*, i.e., something tired Almaz). I note these mostly for completeness since there unfortunately is not room for a thorough treatment of them in this squib. The possessive sentences are particularly interesting given the connections between possessive DPs and clitic doubled DPs (see fn. 4). See Yabe 2002ab, Yabe 2007 and Ahland 2009 for discussion and description.

[12] It is also conditioned by animacy; it is unclear whether animacy plays a part in Amharic.

[13] Corbett 2006 includes clitic doubling in the survey, but notes carefully when data has been described as clitic doubling. None of the examples cited above were described as such and some clearly cannot be clitic doubling (e.g., the Ngan'gityemerri data is agreement between a noun and an adjective).

the generation (or merging) of a pronoun-like morpheme. This makes different predictions about what happens when agreement or clitic doubling fails. The diagnostic is given in (18).

(18)   **Preminger's Diagnostic**
         Given a scenario where the relation R between a morpheme M and the corresponding full noun phrase X is broken -- but the result is still a grammatical utterance -- the proposed diagnostic supplies a conclusion about R as follows:
         a.   M shows up with default phi-features (rather than the features of X) → R is Agree
         b.   M disappears entirely → R is clitic doubling

The diagnostic begins by setting up a scenario where the agreement or clitic doubling relation is broken. This can occur for the Agree relation if a potential goal which is inactive intervenes between a probe and another (active) goal; this is the phenomenon of defective intervention. Defective intervention scenarios are ungrammatical in some languages (e.g., French) but in others (e.g., Icelandic) they cause the probe to surface with default phi-features. Thus, the relevant morphemes in Icelandic (subject markers) are agreement morphemes under this diagnostic.

For clitic doubling, Preminger (2009) discusses how the relation can be broken if the locality conditions of clitic doubling are not abided by (roughly, the clausemate relation; see Iatridou 1990). If the result is still grammatical (as Preminger 2009 shows it can be in Basque), the doubled clitic simply does not appear in the structure. There is no default clitic doubling since no phi features remain stranded to be given a default value. Essentially, Preminger's diagnostic provides a principled way of understanding the obligatory/optional contrast between canonical agreement and clitic doubling that was discussed briefly above. Agreement is 'obligatory' in that clauses where the Agree relation is disrupted are either ungrammatical, or a default morpheme must be inserted to realize the phi features left unvalued. In contrast, if clitic doubling as a process is not licensed, then the clitic is simply not generated; ergo, clitic doubling seems 'optional.'[14]

It is difficult to import Preminger's diagnostic wholesale into Amharic since the locality conditions on object markers are still under investigation. However, the test may still be applicable. In Amharic, the relation between the object marker and the DP it refers to is only capable of being established if the DP is definite/specific. When there is an indefinite argument, any attempted clitic doubling relation is ungrammatical (cf. how using a dative marker is ungrammatical in Basque in certain constructions; Preminger 2009:626).

(19)   *Aster doro   arräd-ätʃtʃ-**at**
          Aster chicken butcher.PF-3FS.S**(*-3FS.O)**
          'Aster butchered a chicken.' (Yabe 2001:3)

The question now becomes: how can (19) be repaired? If a default object marker is grammatical, then object markers are object agreement. If the absence of an object marker is grammatical, then the object marker is clitic doubling. As might have been expected, a default object marker (third person masculine singular) is ungrammatical.

(20)   *Aster doro   arräd-ätʃtʃ-**ɨw**
          Aster chicken butcher.PF-3FS.S-**3MS.O**
          'Aster butchered a chicken.'

---

[14] The diagnostic still has the problem of a 'canonical property' type of argument -- it does not capture that fact that some agreement phenomena may be (exceptionally) optional.

Leaving out the object marker entirely, though, is perfectly grammatical.[15]

(21)   Aster doro   arräd-ätʃtʃ
        Aster chicken butcher.PF-3FS.S
        'Aster butchered a chicken.' (Yabe 2001:3)

Thus, the object marker is a doubled clitic by Preminger's diagnostic, and not the reflex of an Agree relation.

         In this section, then, I have shown how the distribution of the object marker is very similar to the distribution of doubled clitics in River Plate Spanish. A diagnostic developed in Preminger 2009 buttressed this result by providing a way to falsifiably test for agreement and clitic doubling depending on their obligatoriness/optionality, and according to this diagnostic, Amharic object markers are in fact doubled clitics.

6 Conclusion

In this squib, I have argued that object markers in Amharic are doubled clitics. I have kept as much as possible to arguments based on the different predictions of a theory of agreement and a theory of clitic doubling make. I have considered evidence from the morphophonological from of the object marker, the interaction (or rather, lack of interaction) of the object marker with Case/case, and the distribution of the object marker. All the evidence points towards the object marker being a doubled clitic.

         This squib was intended not just to serve as a case study for distinguishing agreement from clitic doubling, but also to pave the way for a detailed analysis of the object markers. Clitic doubling in Amharic at first blush seems similar to clitic doubling in, say, River Plate Spanish as discussed in Section 5. However, its ability to appear with a variety of internal arguments (not just indirect objects; see Section 4) sets it apart from the better-known Romance cases of clitic doubling. The obligatory use of the object marker in possessive sentences and experiencer predicates(see fn. 8) directly connects to previous research (see e.g., Bleam 1999 on possessive sentences) and cries out for a unified explanation. In general, the research area of clitic doubling is crowded with analyses, and it may be that Amharic object markers, now that they have been clearly identified as doubled clitics, will help in narrowing down the options.

References

Ahland, Michael. 2009. From topic to subject: Grammatical change in the Amharic possessive construction. *Studies in Language* 33. 685-717.

Amberber, Mengistu. 1996. Transitive alternations, event-types and light verbs. Doctoral dissertation, McGill University.

Amberber, Mengistu. 2005. Differential subject marking in Amharic. In *Competition and Variation in Natural Languages: The Case for Case.* Mengistu Amberber and Helen de Hoop, eds. 295-319. Amsterdam: Elsevier.

Anagnostopoulou, Elena. 1999. On clitics, feature movement and double object alternation. In *NELS* 29. 41-55. Amherst, MA: GLSA.

---

[15] Crucially, default agreement in Amharic is not null (or else there would be no way to tell whether there was a null default agreement morpheme in (21)). The default agreement features in Amharic are third person masculine singular (see Kramer 2009) and are realized like any normal third person masculine singular morpheme in the relevant agreement paradigm (e.g., the forms of the definite marker, subject agreement, etc.).

Anagnostopoulou, Elena. 2003. *The Syntax of Ditransitives: Evidence from Clitics*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Anagnostopoulou, Elena. 2004. On clitics, feature movement and double object alternation. In *Minimality Effects in Syntax*. Arthur Stepanov et al., eds. 15-36. Berlin: Mouton.

Bleam, Tonia. 1999. Leísta Spanish and the syntax of clitic doubling. Doctoral dissertation, University of Delaware.

Chomsky, Noam. 2000. Minimalist inquiries, the framework. In *Step by Step: Essays on Minimalist Syntax in Honor of Howard Lasnik*. Roger Martin, David Michaels and Juan Uriagereka, eds. 89-155. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Chomsky, Noam. 2001. Derivation by phase. In *Ken Hale: A Life in Language*. Michael Kenstowicz, ed. 1-52. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Chomsky, Noam. 2004. Beyond explanatory adequacy. In *Structures and Beyond*. Adriana Belletti, ed. 104-131. New York: Oxford OUP.

Cohen, Marcel. 1970. *Traité de Langue Amharique*. 2nd ed. Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie.

Corbett, Greville. 2006. *Agreement*. Cambridge: CUP.

Demeke, Girma A. 2003. The clausal syntax of Ethio-Semitic. Doctoral dissertation, University of Tromsø.

Embick, David. 2009. Localism versus globalism in morphology and phonology. Ms., University of Pennsylvania.

Embick, David and Rolf Noyer. 2007. Distributed morphology and the syntax/morphology interface. In *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Interfaces*. Gillian Ramchand and Charles Reiss, eds. Oxford: OUP.

Engdashet, Haile Eyessus. 1998. Empty categories in Amharic and the theory of grammar. Doctoral dissertation, University of Delhi.

Gasser, Michael. 1983. Topic continuity in written Amharic narrative. In *Topic Continuity in Discourse: A Quantitative Cross-Language Study*. Talmy Givón, ed. Typological Studies in Language 3. 95-139. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Giorgi, Alessandra and Giuseppe Longobardi. 1991. *The Syntax of Noun Phrases: Configuration, Parameters and Empty Categories*. Cambridge: CUP.

Haile, Getachew. 1970. The Suffix Pronouns in Amharic. *Papers in African Linguistics* 3.

Halefom, Girma. 1994. The syntax of functional categories: A study of Amharic. Doctoral dissertation, University of Quebec at Montreal.

Iatridou, Sabine. 1990. Clitics and island effects. In *University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics* 2.1. 11-30. Philadelphia: Penn Linguistics Club.

Jaeggli, Osvaldo. 1982. *Topics in Romance Syntax*. Dordrecht: Foris.

Kramer, Ruth. 2009. Definite markers, phi-features, and agreement: a morphosyntactic investigation of the Amharic DP. Doctoral dissertation, UC Santa Cruz.

Legate, Julie Anne. 2008. Morphological and abstract case. *Linguistic Inquiry* 39. 55-101.

Leslau, Wolf. 1995. *Reference Grammar of Amharic*. Wiesbaden: Harrossowitz.

Lyons, Christopher. 1986. The syntax of English genitive constructions. *Journal of Linguistics* 22: 123-143.

Marantz, Alec. 1992. Case and licensing. In *Proceedings of the 1991 Eastern States Conference on Linguistics*. 234-253. Columbus: Ohio State.

Mullen, Dana. 1986. Issues in the morphology and phonology of Amharic: the lexical generation of pronominal clitics. Doctoral dissertation, University of Ottawa.

Postal, Paul M. 1969. On so-called pronouns in English. In *Readings in English Transformational Grammar*. Roderick A. Jacobs and Peter S. Rosenbaum, eds. Waltham, Mass.: Ginn and Company.

Preminger, Omer. 2009. Breaking agreements: Distinguishing agreement and clitic doubling by their failures. *Linguistic Inquiry* 40. 619-666.

Rezac, Milan. 2008. Phi-agree and theta-related Case. In *Phi Theory.* Daniel Harbour, David Adger, and Susana Béjar, eds. 83-129. Oxford: OUP.

Sportiche, Dominique. 1996. Clitic constructions. In *Phrase Structure and the Lexicon*. J. Rooryck and L. Zaring, eds. 213-276. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Suñer, Margarita. 1988. The role of agreement in clitic-doubled constructions. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 6:391-434.

Torrego, Esther. 1988. Pronouns and determiners: A DP analysis of Spanish nominals. Ms., University of Massachusetts, Boston.

Uriagereka, Juan. 1995. Aspects of the syntax of clitic placement in Western Romance. *Linguistic Inquiry* 26. 79-123.

Woolford, Ellen. 2003. Clitics and agreement in competition: Ergative cross-referencing patterns. In *Papers in Optimality Theory II*. UMOP 26. 421-49. Amherst, Mass.: GLSA.

Yabe, Tomoyuki. 2001. Clitic doubling and the link with possessed noun phrase constructions: the case of Amharic object marking. Paper presented at the CUNY/SUNY/NYU Mini-Conference.

Yabe, Tomoyuki. 2002a. On the *allä* morpheme in Amharic and its occurrences as an auxiliary elements [*sic*]. Paper presented at The Syntax of Tense and Aspect.

Yabe, Tomoyuki 2002b. On the expressions of possession in Amharic and Somali, and their prepositional elements *lä/la*. Paper presented at the CUNY/SUNY/NYU Mini Conference.

Yabe, Tomoyuki. 2007. The morphosyntax of complex verbal expressions in the Horn of Africa. Doctoral dissertation, CUNY.

Yimam, Baye. 2004. Agreement phenomena in Amharic. In *Studia Aethiopica.* V. Böll, ed. 319-336. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Yimam, Baye. 2006. The interaction of tense, aspect and agreement in Amharic syntax. In *Proceedings of ACAL 35*. John Mugane et al., eds. 193-202. Somerville: Cascadilla Press.