SHORT COMMUNICATION

Some Morpho-Phonological Processes in Godʒdʒam Amharic

Gashaw Arutie Asaye[1]

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze morpho-phonological processes in Amharic, in particular in the variety spoken in Godʒdʒam[2]. The focus of the paper is those morpho-phonological processes that have been overlooked in the previous works. The study has identified that metathesis of vowels accompanied by devocalization is one of the most peculiarities of the Godʒdʒam Amharic variety. The analysis also shows that the degemination and weakening of t/tʃ in the morphemes *-ətʃtʃ* 'SBJ3SG.F' and *-otʃtʃ* 'PL' are observed in the variety. Note that these changes are precisely morphophonemic. Moreover, it is found out that the phonological processes of vowel raising and vowel centralization are the features of the dialect.

Keywords: Amharic, Godʒdʒam, metathesis, weakening, vowel centralization

Introduction

Amharic is a Semitic language belonging to the transversal group of the South Ethiosemitic branch of the Ethiosemitic family (Hetzro 1972). According to CSA (2008), it has 21, 631, 370 speakers as a first language

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[1] Assistant Professor in Theoretical and Descriptive Linguistics, Arba Minch University. Email address: gashgebu@gmail.com

in Ethiopia. It is the second most populous Semitic language next to Arabic (Girma, 2009; Hudson, 1997). It was the only language of education in Ethiopian primary schools and the most prestigious and dominant language in Ethiopia until 1991 (Meyer, 2006). It serves as a *de facto* lingua franca in major cities and towns of the country (cf. Meyer, 2011b, 2006; Hudson, 1997) and the working language of the Federal government of the current Ethiopian government.

Although there are monolingual speakers of Amharic in various major towns and cities of the country including Addis Ababa, native Amharic speakers live in the core Amhara areas such as Gondər, Godʒdʒam, [North] ʃəwa, and Wəllo (cf. Meyer, 2011b, 2006; Hudson, 1997).

Regional variations

The history of the dialectological study in Amharic goes half-century back. The pioneer Amharic dialect based study is Abraham's (1955) work, which focused on peculiarities of the Gondər variety (Zelealem, 2007). Since then, different scholars like Zelealem (2017, 2007), Baye (2016), Abdurahman (2014), Cowley et al. (1976), Amsalu and Habte Mariam (1973), Getachew and Seifu (1973) and Hailu and Fisseha (1973) have devoted their papers on Amharic regional dialects. Following such studies, five major Amharic regional varieties, which only represent areas of the native Amharic speakers, have been identified. These are Addis Ababa, which is equivalent to a 'standard variety,' Godʒdʒam, Gondər, ʃəwa (Mənz) and Wəllo (Zelealem, 2017, 2007; Meyer, 2011a). They have their own specific phonological, morphological and lexical features (for details, see the aforementioned works). However, there are cases in which a particular variety may share some peculiar features with another variety. In addition, there may be minor variations within a particular variety. Such issues need attention and should be identified through detailed researches (Zelealem, 2017).

Since Amharic is spoken throughout Ethiopia, it is expected that it may have other regional varieties (Zelealem, 2017). As a good insight, Beniam (2006) has devoted an article on lexical peculiarities of the Amharic variety of Harar, which is a multilingual area where Amharic, Harari, Oromo and Somali are spoken, and identified specific features of the variety.

182

Peculiarities of the Godʒdʒam Amharic variety

The Amharic variety of Godʒdʒam has specific phonological, morphological, and lexical features (Abdurahman, 2014; Getachew & Seifu, 1973). The main phonological features of the variety are strengthening (fortition) like /s'/ > /t'/ as in *s'əhaj* (SA) and *t'ɨhaj* (Godʒdʒam) 'sun,' palatalization of /k'/ > /tʃ'/ as in *k'im* (SA) and *tʃ'ɨm* (Godʒdʒam) 'grudge', insertion of the sound /n/ as in *balagara* (SA) and *bala**n**gara* (Godʒdʒam) 'opponent' and metathesis (for details Abdurahman, 2014; Zelealem, 2007). The prominent peculiar morpho-syntactic feature of the variety is the use of negated converb like *alt'ət't'ɨto* (Godʒdʒam) 'He did not drink,' which is not seen in SA (for details see Zelealem, 2017, 2007; Abdurahman, 2014; Getachew & Seifu 1973). Regarding lexical variation, it has plenty of words, which specify different types of kinship, jewelry, cultural clothes, furniture, greeting, ingestion, movement, etc. (for details see Zelealem 2017).

Nowadays the standard variety is influencing regional varieties including the Godʒdʒam variety and leveling them. Due to this, the Godʒdʒam variety is losing its peculiar linguistic features rapidly (Zelealem, 2017). Zelealem (2017) has also suggested that detailed studies should be conducted on it. Thus, the present study describes some phonological and morphophonemic processes that have not been discussed in the previous works.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 1 provides brief introduction about Amharic and its regional varieties focusing on the Godʒdʒam dialect. Section 2 deals with morpho-phonological processes that have not been addressed so far. The last section summarizes the whole discussion.

Morpho-phonological processes
In this section, I describe some phonological and morphophonemic processes that have not been well described in the previous works.

1. Metathesis accompanied by devocalization
Note that one of the paramount peculiar features of Godʒdʒam Amharic is a metathesis of vowels accompanied by a devocalization. Such process can only be seen when the first person singular possessive marking

morpheme *-e* is attached to a noun ending with the vowel */a/*. Consider the following set of examples.

	Nominal stems ending with */a/-* POSS1SG	Metathesis of */a/* and */e/*	Devocalization (i.e., */e/* to */j/*)	
(1)	*/alga-e/* >	*[algaea]* >	*[algja]*	'my bed'
	/dirʃa-e/ >	*[dirʃea]* >	*[dirʃja]*	'my share'
	/duka-e/ >	*[dukea]* >	*[dukja]*	'my footprint'
	/gɨra-e/ >	*[gɨrea]* >	*[gɨrja]*	'my left'
	/hʷala-e/ >	*[hʷalea]* >	*[hʷalja]*	'my back'
	/hillina-e/ >	*[hillinea]* >	*[hillinja]*	'my mind'
	/mərradʒa-e/ >	*[mərradʒea]* >	*[mərradʒja]*	'my sledgehammer'
	/resa-e/ >	*[resea]* >	*[resja]*	'my corpse'
	/sɨra-e/ >	*[sɨrea]* >	*[sɨrja]*	'my job'
	/ʃama-e/ >	*[ʃamea]* >	*[ʃamja]*	'my candle'
	/t'ɨla-e/ >	*[t'ɨlea]* >	*[t'ɨlja]*	'my umbrella'

As we can see in the above examples, the possessive marking element -e is affixed to the nouns ending with the vowel /a/. In such a case, /a/ and /e/ undergo metathesis and /e/ changes to /j/ that is a good example of devocalization. To the best of my knowledge, these sound changes have not been reported in any other Amharic varieties so far. In the Addis Ababa variety of Amharic, only the semivowel /j/ is inserted between /a/ and /e/ to avoid a sequence of vowels, e.g., algaje 'my bed,' dɨrʃaje 'my share,' sɨraje 'my job,' etc.

1. Weakening[3] accompanied by degemination

In Godʒdʒam area, the Amharic plural marker *-otʃtʃ*[4] regularly changes to *-oj*. The process is restricted in situations where the morpheme is not

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[3] It is identified that the phoneme */tʃ/* can be realized as *[j]* at word terminal position (in the underline form) if the penultimate consonant is not */r/,* e.g., */tatʃtʃ/* > *[taj]* 'bottom,' *[dɨnnɨtʃtʃ]* > *[dɨnnɨj]* 'potato,' */andatʃtʃ/* > *[andaj]* 'any, anything,' */kortʃ/* > *[kortʃ]* 'Erythrina abyssinica,' */wərtʃ/* > *[wərtʃ]* 'front leg of animal.'

[4] In this area, the plural marker *-otʃtʃ* cannot be followed by the definite marker *-u* because the plural marker itself shows definiteness.

followed by a possessive marker. This implies that the change is a morphophonemic process. Note that the process is not merely a weakening of a sound but there is also a degemination of the sound *tʃtʃ*. Consider the following set of examples.

	SA	Degemination of	**Godʒdʒam**	
	stem-PL- (ACC)	the PL marker	**Amharic**	
			weakening of	
			PL marker	
(2)	*/bəg-otʃtʃ-(n)/*	> *[bəg-otʃ-n]*	> *[bəg-oj-n]*	'the sheep'
	/zaf-otʃtʃ -(n)/	> *[zaf-otʃ-n]*	> *[zaf-oj-n]*	'the trees'
	/moɲɲ-otʃtʃ-(n)/	> *[moɲɲ-otʃ -n]*	> *[moɲɲ-oj- (n)]*	'the fools'
	/sənəf-otʃtʃ-(n)/	> *[sənəf-otʃ-(n)]*	> *[sənəf-oj -(n)]*	'the lazy [persons]'

As seen in (2), the plural marker *-otʃtʃ* is realized as *-oj*. In this change, the morpheme *-otʃtʃ* undergoes degemination and weakening types of sound changes. However, if it is followed by a possessive marking suffix, *-otʃtʃ* remains unchanged.

	Standard Amharic	**Godʒdʒam Amharic**	
	stem-PL-POSS	stem-PL-POSS	
(3)	*/bəg-otʃtʃ-e/*	*[bəg-otʃtʃ-e]*	'my sheep'
	/zaf-otʃtʃ -u/	*[zaf-otʃtʃ -u]*	'his trees'
	/ɨhɨt-otʃtʃ-h/	*/ɨhɨt-otʃtʃ-h/*	'your sisters'
	/zəməd-otʃtʃ-atʃtʃn/	*/zəməd-otʃtʃ-atʃtʃn/*	'our relatives'

In (3), *-otʃtʃ* is accompanied by the possessive markers (i.e., *-e* '1SG.POSS', *-u* '3SG.POSS', and *-atʃtʃn* '1PL.POSS'*)* and the sound changes of degemination and weakening are not observed.

The third person singular feminine subject marker *-ətʃtʃ* can also degeminate and weaken to *-əj*. The change is only true if it is not immediately followed by an object marker.

(4)

Underlying form verb stem-SBJ		Degemination of SBJ3SG.F marker		**Godʒdʒam Amharic** weakening of SBJ3SG.F marker	
/səbbər-ətʃtʃ/	>	*[səbbər-ətʃ]*	>	*[səbbər-əj]*	'she broke'
/wəddəd-ətʃtʃ/	>	*[wəddəd-ətʃ]*	>	*[wəddəd-əj]*	'she liked'
/sət't'-ətʃtʃ/	>	*[sət't'-ətʃ]*	>	*[sət't'-əj]*	'she gave'
/hed-ətʃtʃ/	>	*[hed-ətʃ]*	>	*[hed-əj]*	'she went'
/hon-ətʃtʃ/	>	*[hon-ətʃ]*	>	*[hon-əj]*	'she became'
/dənəggət'-ətʃtʃ/	>	*[dənəggət'-ətʃ]*	>	*[dənəggət'-əj]*	'she startled'

In this set of examples, *-ətʃtʃ* occurs without any other grammatical morphemes. In such a case it is regularly substituted by *-əj*. However, if it is accompanied by an object marker as in (5) below, it remains unchanged.

(5)

Standard Amharic verb stem-SBJ-OBJ	**Godʒdʒam Amharic** verb stem-SBJ-OBJ	
/səbbər-ətʃtʃ-h/	*[səbbər-ətʃtʃ-ih]*	'she broke you'
/gəddəl-ətʃtʃ-at/	*[gəddəl-ətʃtʃ-at]*	'she killed her'
/səddəb-ətʃtʃ-w/	*[səddəb-ətʃtʃ-iw]*	'she insulted him'
/ləmmən-ətʃtʃ-n/	*[ləmmən-ətʃtʃ-in]*	'she begged us'

As can be seen above, object markers (i.e., *-h* 'OBJ2SG.M', *-at* 'OBJ3SG.F', *-w* 'OBJ3SG.M,' and *-n* 'OBJ1PL') appear next to the subject marker *-ətʃtʃ*. Here *-ətʃtʃ* is not realized as *-əj*. But if there is an applicative between *-ətʃtʃ* and an object marker morpheme as in (6) below), *-ətʃtʃ* appears as *-əj*.

(6)

Underlying form Verb stem-SBJ-APPL-OBJ	Degemination of SBJ3SG.F marker	**Godʒdʒam Amharic** verb stem-SBJ-APPL-OBJ	
/səbbər-ətʃtʃ-bb-h/	*[səbbər-ətʃtʃ-bb-h]*	*[səbbər-əj-ibb-ih]*	'she broke [it] to your detriment'
/wəssəd-ətʃtʃ-bb-ɲɲ/	*[wəssəd-ətʃ-ibb-iɲɲ]*	*[wəssəd-əj-ibb-iɲɲ]*	'she took [it] to my detriment'
/gəddəl-ətʃtʃ-ll-at/	*[gəddəl-ətʃ-ll-at]*	*[gəddəl-əj-ill-at]*	'she killed [it] for her benefit'
/ləmmən-ətʃtʃ-ll-n/	*[ləmmən-ətʃ-ll-n]*	*[ləmmən-əj-ill-in]*	'she begged for our benefit'

The malfactive and benefactive applicatives *-bb-* and *-ll-* appear between the *-ətʃtʃ* and object marking morphemes. In such instances, the degemination and weakening of *-ətʃtʃ* is observed. This suggests that the change from *-ətʃtʃ* to *-əj*[5] is a morphophonemic process because it is morphologically conditioned.

2. Weakening of -əɲɲa to -ɨjja

In the Amharic variety of Godʒdʒam, ordinal derivational morpheme *-əɲɲa* occurs as *-ɨjja*. Notice also that the change in the morpheme is not only weakening of */ɲ/* but there is a vowel raising (i.e., */ə/ > /ɨ/)*.

(7)   **Standard Amharic**   **Godʒdʒam**
      Cardinal number - the derivational   **Amharic**
      morpheme of ordinals
      /and-əɲɲa/   >   *[andɨjja]*   'first'
      /hulət-əɲɲa/   >   *[hulətɨjja]*   'second'
      /sost-əɲɲa/   >   *[sostɨjja]*   'third'
      /arat-əɲɲa/   >   *[aratɨjja]*   'fourth'
      /assɨr-əɲɲa/   >   *[assɨrɨjja]*   'tenth'

As can be seen in the examples, *-əɲɲa* is unconditionally substituted by *-ɨjja*.

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[5] I also observe the change of *tʃtʃ* to *j* in the morphemes *-ətʃtʃ* and *-otʃtʃ* at some South Gondər and South Wəllo areas.

3. Vowel raising[6]

It is noted that the mid back vowel */o/* has changed to the high back vowel *[u]* in a coverbial stem of a biradical verb.[7]

(8) **Standard Amharic**   Godʒdʒam Amharic
Converbial stem-
/hon-/   >   *[hun-]*   'having been'
/k'om-/   >   *[kum-]*   'having stood'
/mok'-/   >   *[muk'-]*   'having been warm'
/mot-/   >   *[mut-]*   'having dead'
/nor-/   >   *[nur-]*   'hiving lived'
/rot'-/   >   *[rut'-]*   'having run'
/ʃol-/   >   *[ʃul-]*   'having been pointed'
/tʃ'oh-/   >   *[tʃ'uh-]*   'having shouted'
/zor-/   >   *[zur-]*   'having turned'

As can be observed, in these examples, the converbial stems of the verbs are biradicals and the vowel in the stems is */o/*. But phonetically it is realized as *[u]*.

4. Vowel centralization

In Godʒdʒam area, the change of front vowels to central vowels (i.e., */i/ > [ɨ]*, */e/ > [ə]*) is not an uncommon sound change. The change is dependent up on a phonological context; it takes place after a palatal sound.[8]

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[6] As a sporadic change, it is found out that the mid central vowel */ə/* moves up to the high central vowel */i/*. See the following examples.

(1)   Standard Amharic   Godʒdʒam Amharic
/s'əhaj/   >   *[t'ɨhaj]*   'sun'
/məhal/   >   *[mɨhal]*   'center'
/məngəd / >   *[mɨŋgəd]*   'road'
/məɲɲita/ >   *[mɨɲɲita]*   'a place for sleeping'

[7] This phenomenon is also common in the rural areas of Gondər and Wəllo.

[8] Sporadic changes of */i/ > [ɨ]*, */e/ > [ə]* have also been seen, e.g., */hid/ > [hɨd]* 'you (M) go!', */hed-/ > [həd-]* 'went.'

a) /i/ > [ɨ]/ [+palatal]_____

(9) /dʒin/ >   [dʒɨn]   'spirit, genie'
     /gidər/ >   [dʒɨdər]   'heifer'
     /kis/   >   [tʃɨs]   'pocket'
     /k'it'/ >   [tʃ'ɨt']   'buttock'
     /t'is/ >   [tʃ'ɨs]   'smoke'
     /wəkil/ >   [wətʃɨl]   'agent'
     /libəsi/ >   [libəʃɨ] >   [libəʃ]   'you(F) wear!'
     /firədi/ >   [firədʒɨ] >   [firədʒ]   'you(F) judge!'
     /azazi/ >   [azaʒɨ] >   [azaʒ]   'commander'
     /gʷədi/ >   [gʷədʒɨ] >   [gʷədʒ]   'harmful'

As we can see in the above examples, /i/ has changed to [ɨ] while occurring after palatal sounds. But at word terminal position, [ɨ] is omitted. It is important to note here that [ɨ] does not appear at word final position in the language. Besides, the examples in (9) and (10) show that affrication and palatalization take place before the front vowels such as /i/ (for details about palatalization see Mengistu, 2018; Zelealem, 2007).

b) /e/ > [ə]/ [+palatal]_____ [9]

(10) /geʃo/ >   [dʒəʃo]   'hop'
      /geta/ >   [dʒəta]   'God, lord'
      /k'es/ >   [tʃ'əs]   'priest'
      /t'esə/ >   [tʃ'əsə]   'it smoked'
      /azzɨzze >   [azɨʒʒə]   'I having ordered'
      /kəllɨlle >   [kəllɨjjə]   'I having concealed'
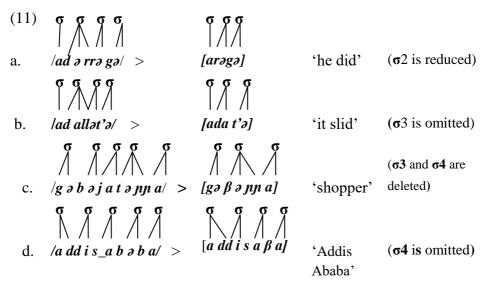   /wəssɨnne/ >   [wəssɨŋŋə]   'I having decided'

Examples in (10) above elucidate that /e/ becomes [ə] following a palatal sound which itself is a realization of a velar or an alveolar sound before a front vowel.

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[9] Such phenomenon is also observed in other regional varieties of Amharic such as North ʃəwa (Mənz) (cf. Hailu & Fisseha 1973: 120), Wəllo (cf. Amsalu & Habte Mariam 1973: 124), and Gondər (my personal observation).

5. Syllable deletion

Notice that syllable deletion is observed at word medial position in Godʒdʒam Amharic though it is not predictable; it is sporadic. See the following examples:

(11)

a.   /ad ə rrə gə/ >   [arəgə]   'he did'   (σ2 is reduced)

b.   /ad allət'ə/ >   [ada t'ə]   'it slid'   (σ3 is omitted)

c.   /g ə b əj a t ə ɲɲ a/ > [gə β ə ɲɲ a]   'shopper'   (σ3 and σ4 are deleted)

d.   /a dd i s_a b ə b a/ > [a dd i s a β a]   'Addis Ababa'   (σ4 is omitted)

The examples show that one or two syllable(s) of a word can be reduced but the word initial and final syllables cannot be deleted.

Summary

This paper intends to describe some morpho-phonological processes that have been neglected in the previous works in the Amharic variety of Godʒdʒam. The study shows that the sound changes of metathesis of vowels followed by devocalization take place when the first person possessive marking morpheme -e is affixed to nouns that end with the vowel /a/, e.g., /sira-e/ > [sirja] 'my job,' /duka-e/ > [dukja] 'my footprint,' etc. It is also identified that /tʃtʃ/ in the morphemes -ətʃtʃ 'SBJ3SG.F' and -otʃtʃ 'PL' is substituted by [j] in which the morphophonemic processes of degemination and weakening involve. Besides, the sound /ɲ/ in the ordinal derivational morpheme -əɲɲa has

unconditionally changed to *[j]*. Moreover, the sound changes of vowel raising (i.e., */o/ > [u]* in the converbial stem of biradical verbs) and vowel centralization *(*i.e., */i/ > [ɨ]/* [+palatal] __ , */e/ > [ə]/* [+palata l] ___) have been reported. Finally, it is observed that syllable deletion undergoes in a few words.

Abbreviations

1	first person	OBJ	Object
3	third person	PL	Plural
ACC	accusative	POSS	possessive
APPL	applicative	SA	standard Amharic
F	Feminine	SBJ	Subject
M	masculine	SG	Singular

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