THE MAPPING OF TENSE IN AMHARIC

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Abstract

This paper tries to provide how tense is mapped in Amharic. Amharic expresses tense periphrastically by using verbs to indicate past and non-past. However, it is not uncommon to find the past tense marker in non-past and the non-past tense markers in past contexts. In all their occurrences, the tense markers show various semantic contrasts to each other in addition to tense. Based on these semantic contrasts, I argue that the mapping of past and non-past tense in Amharic is fashioned in such a way that the past tense marker indicates exclusion and the non-past tense markers indicate inclusion, similar to Iatridou's (2000) proposal for English and Greek. I also show that the mapping of tense in such a way explains the unique interaction of the tense markers with negation and complementizers (conditionals) in the language.

1. Introduction

Tense is the grammatical expression of the location of an event in time (Comrie 1985, Dahl 1985, Klein 1991, Binnick 2001, Timberlake 2007 among others). It usually locates the situations (events) relative to some other time as deictic center, which is usually the time of utterance. Relative to the time of utterance, the situation (event) time may precede, coincide, or proceed. Accordingly, there are three commonly known tense types, namely past, present and future respectively. These tenses are known as Absolute, Deictic or Primary tenses (Binnick 2001, 557).

In addition to the utterance time, tense may also indicate time relative to another deictic center. For example, it may indicate relative to the time interval between the primary tenses we saw above, as in *had sung, and would sing*. These types of tenses are usually known as Relative (Anaphoric, Secondary) tenses (Binnick 2001, 557). Furthermore, tense may indicate the relative remoteness of the situation time relative to the deictic center. Such types of tenses are known as *metrical tense*s. In this case, we have contrasts like remote vs. immediate past tense (Binnick 2001, 557).

In Amharic, tense is expressed periphrastically by using the verbs *allä*, *näw* and *näbbär* (Goldenberg 1964, Demeke and Meyer 2001, Demeke 2003, Yimam 2006, Asratie 2014, Meyer 2016 among others). *allä* and *näw* indicate non-past (present and future) tense, while *näbbär* is the past counterpart of *allä* and *näw* as shown in (1) below:

(1) a. yonas   zändɨro   tämarri   näw
      Jonas   this.year   student   be.prst-3msg$_s$
      Jonas is a student this year.
   b. yonas   zändɨro   hagär   wɨst'   allä
      Jonas   this.year   country   inside   be.prst-3msg$_s$
      Jonas stays in the country this year (lit, J. is present in the country this year).
   c. yonas   amna   tämari/ wuc'   hagär   näbbär
      Jonas   last.year   student/ outside   country   be.pst-3msg$_s$
      Jonas was a student/ in a foreign country last year.

However, there are cases where the tense markers do not follow this division of labour, i.e., there are contexts where the past tense marker is used in non-past (2), and the non-past tense markers are used in the past (3):

(2) a.   zändro   tämari   **näbbär-ku** gɨn…
      this.year   student   **be-1sg**$_s$ but…
      Nominally I am a student this year, but…

   b.   b-i-čil-imma   kärmo   tämari   **näbbär-ku**
       if-1sgₛ-can.imperf-foc   next-year   student   **be-**1sgₛbut
       If I were able to, I would be a student next year.

(3) a. tɨnantina ɨ-bet   wist' indä-**allä-hu** saba   mät't'a-čč
       yesterday at-house inside C-**be.-1sgₛ**   S.   come.perf-3fsgₛ
       Saba arrived when I was at home yesterday.

   b. šekspir   tawak'i   därasi **näw**
       Shakespeare   kown   writer **be.prst-3msgₛ**
       Shakespeare is/was a well-known writer.

This double dissociation between the Amharic tense markers and tense triggers a question. How do we explain the presence of the past tense marker in non-past and the non-past tense markers in the past? Most of the previous literature written on Amharic tense does not focus on this issue. Goldenberg (1964), Demeke and Meyer (2001), Demeke (2003) Yimam (2006) provide formal descriptions of the tense system and show the interaction of the tense markers with aspect, mood and agreement. The use of the past tense marker in non-past contexts is touched up on only by Meyer (2016), who shows that the past tense marker *näbbär* can also be used to express irrealis, and argues that this happens because the past and the irrealis are semantically related (Meyer 2016:215). That is, the past situation is perceived as an event that is not contemporaneous with the moment of utterance resulting in the semantic generalization that the past tense marker as an irrealis marker. However, Meyer's analysis does not cover the entire phenomena in Amharic. It contains only one instance of the use of the past tense marker in the non-past. It does not say anything about the use of the non-past tense marker in the past, nor does it cover all instances where the use of the past tense marker in non-past contexts. The paper aims at providing a complete picture of the contexts where the past and the non-past tense markers of Amharic are used including contexts where they are not expected, and tries to provide an explanation for such an expected distribution.

The paper is organized as follows: In § 2, I present the general picture of the distribution of the tense markers. In §2.1, I describe the phenomena in copular clauses. In § 2.2 I describe verbal clauses. In § 3 I present my analysis and in § 4, I present the benefit my analysis provides in explaining the unique interaction of the tense markers with negation and complementizers in the language which has not be explained satisfactorily so far. Finally, § 5 Concludes the paper.

2. General description: the distribution of tense markers in Amharic

Amharic tense markers show up in copular and verbal clauses. The presence of non-past tense markers in the past, and that of the past tense markers in the non-past is observed in both the copular and verbal clauses. I discuss each of them separately in 2.1 and § 2.2.

2.1. Copular clauses

In copular clauses, the past tense marker can also be found in non-past clauses. Consider (4) for example. In (4)a, *näw* is used to indicate non-past in contrast to *näbbär* in (4)b. Their contrast is due to tense as indicated by the temporal adverbs. However, the past tense marker *näbbär* can also be found in non-past, as in (4)c. (4)c does not differ from (4)a in terms of tense; both of them are present as indicated by the temporal adverb *zändro* (this year). The use of *näw* vs. *näbbär* in this case contrasts not in terms of time. Rather their usage contrasts in terms of actual vs. nominal meaning. That is, (4)a is a statement about the actual studenthood of Jonas by the time asserted in the sentence. In the interpretation of this statement, Jonas behaves/acts like an actual student as expected. By contrast (4)c has the meaning that Jonas is not behaving /acting like an actual student although he is a student. His studenthood is nominal, not actual.

(4) a. yonas   zändro   tämari   näw
     Jonas   this.year   student   **be**.prsnt.**3sg**$_s$
     Jonas is a student this year.

b. yonas amna   tämari   **näbbär.**
   Jonas last.year   student   **be.**pst.**3sg$_s$.**
   Jonas was a student last year.

c. yonas zändro   tämarri   **näbbär.**
   Jonas this.year   student   be.pst-3msg$_s$
   Nominally *Jonas is a student this year.*

A similar contrast is also observed between *allä* and *näbbär*, *as in* (5). In (5), all clauses express an obligation. That is (5)a is non-past obligation, (5)b is past obligation as indicated by the temporal adverb. In addition to this, the past tense marker can also be used in the non-past obligation, as in (5)c. In this case it expresses an obligation which is unlikely to be fulfilled. As opposed to the obligation with the present tense marker *allä* in (5)a, the obligation marked by the past tense marker in (5)c is unlikely to be fulfilled. This is witnessed by the statement that follows in brackets. A statement that could follow from the fulfillment of the obligation is unacceptable with the unlikely obligation in (5)c:

(5) a. nägä   mämt'at   all-ä-bb-iňň
    tomorrow   come.inftv   be.prst-3msg$_s$-appl-1sg$_o$
    I have to come tomorrow.

   b. tinantina   mämt'at   näbbär-ä-bb-iňň
     yesterday   come.inftv   be.pst-3msg$_s$-appl-1sg$_o$
     I had to come tomorrow.

   c. nägä   mämt'at   näbbär-ä-bb-iňň,
    tomorrow   come.inftv   be. pst-3msg$_s$-appl-1sg$_o$
   (gin   al-ɸ-čilim/ *silazih   t'äbbik'-äňň
   but   neg-1sgs-be.able to-neg/ so   wait.imprtv.2msg$_s$-1sg$_o$
   *I have to come tomorrow, (but I cannot/ *so wait me.)*

In the examples so far, we saw that the so-called past tense marker in Amharic copular clauses is also found in non-past. But, the story does not end here. The non-past tense marker can also be used in the past. This is observed in (6). There is no difference

between (6)a. and (6)b in terms of tense. Both are past tense as Bealu Girma[1] is no more alive.

(6) a. bäʔalu gɨrma tawak'i   etyop'ɨyawi   därasi näw
    Bealu   Girma kown   Ethiopia   writer be.prst-3msg$_s$
    Bealu Girma is a well-known Ethiopian writer.
   b. bäʔalu   gɨrma tawak' ityop'ɨyawi   därasi näbbär
    Bealu   Girma kown Ethiopia   writer be.pst-3msg$_s$
    Bealu Girma was a well-known Ethiopia writer.

In this case, the contrast between the present and the past tense markers is in terms of what Musan (1995) called existence time vs. predication time. Before proceeding to the discussion, let me first elaborate what existence time and predication time mean from Asratie (2014) as demonstrated by the past tense examples in (7) below. In (7)a the subject exists and the predicate has an extension. This means that George Bush is alive and the president of the United States is not an empty set. The clause is past because the predication relationship between George Bush and the presidency of the United States has ceased at some point despite the fact that George Bush is alive and the president of the United States still has a member. In other words, the sentence is past because of the predication time. The clauses in (7)b and (7)c by contrast are past because of the existence time of the subject and the extension of the predicate respectively. (7)b is past because the subject Pushkin is no more alive, and (7)c is past because the predicate member of League of Nations does not have an extension at present:

(7) a. George Bush was a president of the United States.
    b. Pushkin was a poet.
    c. Ethiopia was a member of the League of Nations.

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1   Note that Bealu Girma was an Ethiopia writer in the 1960's and 70's. He is not alive anymore.

Coming back to Amharic, the use of the past and non-past tense markers in clauses whose temporal location is past shifts between existence time vs. predication time. The use of *näbbär* in (6)b indicates existence time. As a result, the relationship between the subject and the predicate disappears when the subject ceases to exist. The use of *näw* (6)a, on the other hand, indicates predication time. It indicates that the predication relationship between Bealu Girma and being *tawaqi* (well-known) remains true till the time of utterance irrespective of the life time of the subject. The use of *näw* would be unacceptable if Bealu Girma is no longer considered as one of the well-known Ethiopian writers by the time of utterance. This means that we have a *fake present* tense whose temporal location is past, but is marked by the present tense marker *näw*.

To sum up, in Amharic copular clauses, the past and non-past tense markers are found in clauses they are not expected. The past tense marker is found in the non-past and renders nominal and unlikely interpretation, while the use of the non-past tense in the past shifts existence time to predication time.

2.2. **Verbal clauses (Verb + auxiliary constructions)**

Amharic tense markers show up with verbs, which are marked for different aspects albeit their distribution varies. The non-past marker *allä* shows up with imperfective and completive aspects, as in (8)a&b, but not with progressive and perfective aspects (8)c&d. The non-past marker *näw* does not appear with the imperfective (9)a and perfective verbs (9)b. It appears with completive (9)c and progressive (9)d aspects. On the other hand, the past tense marker *näbbär* can appear with all perfective, imperfective, completive and progressive aspects of verbs (10).

(8) a. saba tɨ-mät'-all-äčč
    S.   3fsgₛ-come.imperf- be.prst-3fsgₛ
    Saba comes/will come"

  b. saba mät't-ɸ-all-äčč
    S.   come.compltv-3fsgₛ-be.prst-3fsgₛ
    Saba came/ has come"

    c. *saba ɨyyä-mät'ťa-č-all-äčč
      S.   prog-come.perf-3fsg$_s$-be.prst-3fsg$_s$
   d. *saba mät'ťa-č-all-äč
      S.   come.perf-3fsg$_s$-- be.prst -3fsg$_s$

(9) a. *saba   tɨ-mät'-a   nä-w
      S.   3-come.imperf-fsg$_s$ be.prst-3fsg$_s$
  b. *saba   mät'ťa-čč   näw
      S.   come.perf-3fsg$_s$ be.prst-3fsg$_s$
  c. saba   mät't-a   näw
      S.   come.compltv-3fsg$_s$ be.prst-3fsg$_s$
    It is the case that Saba came/has come.
  d. saba   ɨyyä-mät'ťa-čč[2]   nä-w
      S.   prog-come.perf-3fsg$_s$ be.prst-3msg$_s$
    Saba is coming.

(10) a. saba   tɨ-mät'-a   näbbär
       S.   3-come.imperf-fsg$_s$ be.pst-3msg$_s$
   Saba came/used to come/would come.
  b. (sɨra b-ɸ-ageňň)   alläf-ä-llɨ-ňň   näbbär[3]
    (job   if-1sg$_s$-find. iperf) pass-3msgs-appl-1sg$_o$ be.pst.3msg$_s$
   (If I got a job), all my problems would blow over.
  c. saba   mät't-a   näbbär
      S.   come.compltv-3fsg$_s$ be.pst-3msg$_s$
   Saba came/ Saba had/was about to/ would have come.
  d. saba   ɨyyä-mät'ťa-č   näbbär
      S.   prog-come.perf-3fsg$_s$ be.pst-3msg$_s$
   Saba was coming.

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2   Note that the progressive in Amharic is formed by adding the prefix *ɨyyä-* to the perfective verb.

3   Almost all scholars who wrote on Amharic tense markersmention that theydo not show up with the perfective aspect. This is not however true. Such examples are common in everyday communication particularly in expressing counterfactual conditionals.

Moreover, the non-past tense markers do not show up with negation (11)a&b unlike the past tense marker (11)c-e:

(11) a. saba at-mät'a-mm(*-all-ӓčč/ *na-t)
        S.   neg.3fsg$_s$-come.imperf- neg-be.prst-3fsg$_s$
        Saba does not come/will come.
    b. saba al-mät't-ačč-imm (*-all-ӓčč/*na-t)
        S.   neg-come.compltv-3fsg$_s$-neg-be.prst -3fsg$_s$
        Saba does not came/ has not come.
    c. saba al-mät't-ačč-imm   (*-all-ӓčč/na-t)/ näbbär
        S.   neg-come.compltv-3fsg$_s$-neg (be.prst-3fsg$_s$)/be.pst -3msg$_s$
        Saba did not/had not come.
    d. saba at-mät'a-mm   näbbär
        S.   neg.3fsg$_s$-come.imperf-neg   be.pst-3msg$_s$
        Saba did not use to come/ would not have come.
    e. saba al-mät't'-ačč-imm   näbbär[4]
        S.   neg-come.compltv-3fsg$_s$-neg   be.prst -3fsg$_s$
        Saba had not come.

Generally, the distribution of the tense markers in terms of the aspectual (and of course polarity) form of the verbs can be summarized as follows:

Table 1: the distribution of the tense markers in terms of the aspectual form of verbs

Tense marker	imperfective	perfective	completive	progressive	negation
allä	√		√		
näw			√	√	
näbbär	√	√	√	√	√

The use of the past tense marker in non-past and that of the non-past tense markers in the past is observed in all these types of

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4   This is found only in the Gojjam dialect of Amharic.

constructions. In the sections that follow, I show how the use of tense markers with each type of aspectual marked verbs looks like.

2.2.1. The imperfective + aux

As discussed above, the imperfective verbs show up only with *allä* and *näbbär* as tense markers auxiliaries. In the imperfective + auxiliary constructions, *allä* and *näbbär* contrast not only in terms of tense as in (12), but also in terms of the level of factuality, as in (13). In (13), unlike in (12), the contrast between *allä* and *näbbär* is not in terms of tense. Both clauses are future as indicated by the temporal adverb (*nägä* 'tomorrow'). The use of *allä* vs. *näbbär* in this case indicates the speaker's judgment about the realization of Saba's coming depending on his belief about the conditions, which allow/disallow the event to happen. *allä* is used to indicate that it is *more likely for Saba to come* because the conditions observed by the time of utterance are positive for the realization of Saba's coming. If *näbbär* is used, on the other hand, it indicates that it is *unlikely for Saba to come* as the conditions at the utterance time are not favorable for her to do so:

(12) a. saba tɨ-mät'-all-äčč
    S.   3fsgs-come.imperf- be.prst-3fsgs
    Saba comes/will come.
  b. saba tɨ-mät'-a   näbbär
    S.   3-come.imperf-fsgs   be.pst-3msgs
  Saba used to come/ was coming.

(13) a. saba näga   tɨ-mät'-all-äčč
    S.   tomoorow 3fsgs-come.imperf- be.prst-3fsgs
    Saba comes/will come tomorrow.
  b. saba nägä   tɨ-mät'-a   näbbär
    S.   tomorrow 3-come.imperf-fsgs   be.pst-3msgs
    Saba would come/would have come.

A similar contrast is observed between the non-past marker *allä* and the past tense marker *näbbär* in conditionals. *allä* is used in real/factual conditionals as in (14)a while *näbbär* is used in unreal/ imaginary conditionals as in (14)b. This is similar to what Meyer (2016) observed and considered as an irrealis function of the past tense marker. Note that the real/factual vs. unreal/imaginary meanings are exclusively contributed by the use of auxiliaries. Unlike in English and many other languages, the factual and imaginary conditionals do not differ in the antecedent (condition) clauses in terms of aspect and tense. They differ solely in the consequent (result) clauses by the use of *allä* vs. *näbbär*, as in (14)a&b.

(14) a. saba b-ɨ-däwil-ill-at   tɨ-mät'-a-llä-čč
    S.   if-1sg$_S$-call.imprf-appl-3fsg$_O$ 3-come.imperf-fsg$_S$-be.prst-3fsg$_S$
    If I call Saba, she will come.
  b. saba b-ɨ-däwil-ill-at   tɨ-mät'-a   näbbär
    S.   if-1sg$_S$-call.imprf-appl-3fsg$_O$ 3-come.imperf-fsg be.pst.3msg$_S$
    If I (had) called her, Saba would (have)come.

To conclude, in the imperfective + auxiliary construction, the use of *allä* vs. *näbbär* contrasts not only in terms of tense, but also in terms of factuality and conditionality. *allä* is used in present tense, factual and real conditions while *näbbär* is used in past tense, imaginary and unreal conditions.

2.2.2. Progressive +auxiliary

Verbs marked for the progressive aspect appear only with *näw* and *näbbär*. As in the imperfective + auxiliary constructions, the contrast between *näw* and *näbbär* is not only restricted to tense, as in (15). As can be seen in (16), *näw* and *näbbär* can also contrast in terms of (in-) substantiality. The use of *näbbär* in (16) indicates that Saba's coming is insubstantial either because she will be too late or her coming will not bring the expected result. This is evidenced by the unacceptability of the last question in the dialogue in (17) if the bold printed auxiliary were *näw*.

(15) a. saba   zare   ɨyyä-mät'ṭ'a-č   nä-w
      S.   today   prog-come.perf-3fsgₛ be.prst-3msgₛ
      Saba is coming today.

    b. saba   tɨnantɨna   ɨyyä-mät't'a-č   näbbär
      S.   yesterday prog-come.perf-3fsgₛ be.pst-3msgₛ
      Saba was coming yesterday.

(16) a. Saba zare   ɨyyä-mät't'a-č   näw
      S.   today prog-come.perf-3fsgₛ be.prst-3msgₛ
      Saba is coming today. (Her coming is likely to fulfill the
      expectorations)

    b. saba   zare   ɨyyä-mät't'a-č   näbbär
      S.   today   prog-come.perf-3fsgₛ be.pst-3msgₛ
      Saba is coming today. (But her coming is unlikely to fulfill the
      expectorations)

(17) a. A: hello
      B: hello
     A: ɨyyä-mät'a-h   **näw**
        prog-come.perf-2msgₛ be.prst-3msgₛ?
        Are you coming?
     B: ɨyyä-mät'a-hu   **näbbär,** …
       Prog-come.perf-1sgₛ be.pst.3msgₛ
       I am coming, …
    A: mɨn   agat'äm-ä-h?
    What   encounter.perf-3msgₛ-2msgₒ
     What happened to you?

2.2.3. Completive +aux

The completive verb appears with all the three tense markers. Just like the cases we saw so far, the choice between *allä/näw* vs. *näbbär* is made, not only based on past vs. non-past, as in (18). It is also made based on whether a past event has substantial effect by the time of the utterance or not, as in (19) below:

(18) a. yonas   zare   mät't-o-all
      Jonas   today   come.grnd-3msg.gen-be.3msg$_s$
      Jonas came/has come today.

   b. yonas   zare   mät'to   n-ä-w
      Jonas   today   come.grnd-3msg.gen   be.3msg$_s$-3msg$_o$
      It is the case that Jonas came/has come today.

   c. yonas   tɨnant   mät't-o   näbbär-ø
      Jonas   yesterday come.grnd-3msg.gen   be.pst-3msg$_s$
      Jonas came/had come yesterday.

(19) a. yonas   tɨnant   mät't-o   all
      Jonas   yesterday come.grnd-3msg.gen   be.3msg$_s$
      Jonas came/has come yesterday.

   b. yonas   tɨnant   mät'to   n-ä-w[5]
      Jonas   yesterday come.grnd-3msg.gen   be.3msg$_s$-3msg$_o$
      It is the case that Jonas came/has come yesterday.

   c. yonas   tɨnant   mät't-o   näbbär-ø
      Jonas   yesterday come.grnd-3msg.gen   be.3msg$_s$
      Jonas came/had come yesterday.

All the clauses in (19) are past as indicated by the temporal adverb *tɨnant* 'yesterday'. When *allä* and *näw* are used as in (19)a and (19)b, the effect of event (Jonas' coming) which happened in the past is also observed by the time of utterance either because he has still been in the place where he was said to have come, or his coming has a substantial effect it was expected to have. In other words, the meaning is equivalent to saying "He came yesterday and he still

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5   In the standard Amharic, such clauses are incomplete. They are usually found as a part of complex sentence like (i) below. But, they are found as independent clauses in the Gojjam dialect:

(i) yonas tɨnant   mät't-o   n-ä-w   y-ayyäyä-hu-t
   J.   yesterday come.grnd-3msg be.3msgs-3msgo C-see.perf-1sgs-3msgo
   It is (because) Jonas had come yesterday that I saw him.

exists in the place or the expectations from his coming are still observed"

By Contrast, when *näbbär* is used as in (19)c, the clause has the opposite meaning. It means that Jonas's coming does not hold true at the present either because he is no longer at the place where he was said to have come, or his coming did not have the effect it is/was expected to have. For example, a person who just met Jonas at the place where he had arrived the day before can use *allä* and *näw* (20)a to ask someone for confirmation of the time of Jonas's arrival, but using *näbbär* (20)b is unacceptable as long as Jonas in there:

(20) a. yonas tɨnant   mät't-o   all/näw?
       Jonas   yesterday come.grnd-3msg   be.3msg$_s$/be.3msg$_s$-3msg$_o$
      ahun agäňňä-hu-t
      now meet.perf-1sg$_s$-3msg$_o$
    Did/has Jonas come yesterday? I just met him. (With allä)
     Is It the case that Jonas came/has come yesterday? I just met him.
     (with näw)
 b. yonas tɨnant   mät't-o   näbbär-ø
    Jonas   yesterday come.grnd-3msg   be.3msg$_s$
    (*ahun agäňňä-hu-t)
     now   meet.perf-1sg$_s$-3msg$_o$
    Did/ had Jonas come yesterday? I just met him.

To sum up, in addition to the non-past vs. past contrast, the use of *allä/näw* and *näbbär* in the completive + auxiliary clause has the meaning whether or not the past event (state-of affair that happened/completed) in the past also holds true at the time of utterance or has a substantial effect by the time of utterance.

2.2.4. Perfective + auxiliary

Many scholars who wrote on the tense system of Amharic state that the tense marking auxiliaries do not show up with the perfective verbs. However, this is true only for non-past tense markers *näw* and *allä*. The past tense marker *näbbär* can appear with perfective verbs.

This is particularly common in unlikely conditionals and negative clauses, as in (21)a and (21)b:

(21) a. sɨra b-ɸ-agäňň   alläf-ä-lli-ňň   näbbär
    job if-1sg$_s$-find. iperf   pass-3msgs-appl-1sg$_o$ be.pst.3msg$_s$
    If I got a job, all my problems would blow over.
  b. tɨnanatɨna   almät'ahum   näbbär
   yesterday   neg-1sg$_s$-come.perf-neg be.pst-3msg$_s$
  I did not come yesterday.

Unlike in the cases we saw so far, the use of *näbbär* in these cases does not contrast with other tense markers. It rather contrasts with its absence/bare perfective. Both clauses in (21) are acceptable without *näbbär*. If *näbbär* is absent from the unlikely conditional as in (22), the unlikely reading disappears, and the sentence would have a likely conditional meaning of "All my problems will blow over when I get a job."

(22) sɨra   b-ɸ-agäňň   alläf-ä-lli-ňň
   Job   if-1sg$_s$-find. imperf   pass-3msgs-appl-1sg$_o$
   All my problems blew over when I find a job.

Similarly, when *näbbär* is removed from the negative clause as in (23), the past tense changes from a definite past (referring to a specific time in the past) to an indefinite past:

(23) tɨnanatɨna al-mät'a-hu-m
    yesterday neg-come.perf-1sg$_s$-neg
    I did not come yesterday.

The change from a definite to an indefinite past is clearly observed when there is no temporal adverb. For example, a person who heard his friend uttering (24)a after lunch time understands that the speaker has not eaten his lunch at any time before the utterance time. This means that the event of lunch-eating did not generally happen between the utterance time and the topic time (the time the speaker asserts that he did not eat lunch). As a result, it is

acceptable for the addressee to say "you must be hungry. Why not you have your lunch now?" On the contrary, a person who heard (24)b does not think so. Rather, he thinks that the speaker had his lunch at sometime between the topic time and the utterance time. In this case, the past tense refers only to a definite time in the past.

(24) a. misa-ye-n   al-bälla-hu-m.
        lunch-1sg$_{poss}$ neg-eat.perf-1sg$_s$-neg
        I did not eat my lunch.
    b. misa-ye-n   al-bälla-hu-m   näbbär
        lunch-1sg$_{poss}$ neg-eat.perf-1sg$_s$-neg be.pst.3msg$_s$
        I did not eat my lunch.

2.3. **Interim summary**
To summarize, the use of the past tense and non-past tense markers in Amharic can be summarized as in table (2). Surely, what we can conclude from this description is that tense is just a subset of the function of these verbs. In other words, the so-called tense markers in Amharic indicate a number of issues in addition to tense.

Table 2: summary of the uses of tense markers in Amharic

Clause types		*allä/näw*	*näbbär*
Copular clauses		Present tense Factual reading likely obligation Predication time	Past tense, Nominal reading Unlikely obligation Existence time
Verb + Auxiliary constructions	Imperfective +auxiliary	Non-past tense Real/factual reading	Past tense Unreal/imaginary reading
	Progressive +auxiliary	Present tense Substantial effect to present	Past tense Insubstantial effect to present
	Completive + auxiliary	Present tense Substantial effect to present	Past tense Insubstantial effect to present
	Perfective + auxiliary		Unlikely condition Definite past

Now, the question that follows this observation is this: If the so-called tense markers in Amharic indicate much more than tense, how do we explain this phenomenon? This will be the focus of the section that follows.

3. Analysis

Logically, two types of potential arguments can be forwarded about the function and distribution of the so-called tense markers in Amharic. The first is to consider each of the oppositions/semantic contrasts between the forms and propose an accommodative category. Accordingly, for Amharic, we may tend to propose a category which may accommodate all the contrasts/oppositions we saw above. However, such a category will be unique to the language and does not help in promoting either typological or theoretical studies as the phenomena will be considered a unique property of the language. So, I will not proceed in this direction.

The second argument, which I will be pursuing here, is to claim that the so-called tense markers have more than one meaning as in, for example, the English *will* which indicates future as well as modal. In this case, one may also argue that tense is still the primary function while the others are secondary. But this will be very difficult as finding strong evidence that can support tense is primary and the others are secondary functions. What would be rather helpful is to assume that tense marking, although it is somewhat universal phenomena, is mapped in various ways in different languages. Accordingly, the various functions/meanings of the Amharic tense markers we saw above are considered as parts of the tense mapping system in Amharic. This means that the meaning of tense may vary from language to language. In fact, various typological and theoretical accounts of tense (Comrie 1985, Dahl 1985, Iatridou 2000, Binnick 2001, Lindstedt 2001,) pursue this line. A very good analysis of such a phenomenon and which I am following here in particular is Iatridou (2000) who observed the use of past tense morphology in non-past contexts in languages like English and Greek and proposed an exclusive meaning for past

tense markers. In these languages counterfactual wishes (25) and counterfactual conditionals (26) which do not have past tense interpretations involve past tense morphology, which Iatridou calls fake *past*:

(25) a. I wish I had a car (Conveys I don't have a car now') Iatridou (2000:231-231)
   b. I wish I had had a car when I was a student. (I didn't have a car then)

(26) a. If he were smart, he would be rich. (He is not smart and he is not rich)
   b. If he had been smart, he would have been rich. (He was not smart and he was not rich)

Iatridou explains such a phenomenon by proposing that the past tense morpheme has a skeletal meaning of (27):

(27) T(x) excludes C(x), where
   T(x) stands for topic (x), (i.e., the x we are talking about)
   C(x) stands for 'the x that for all we know the x of the speaker')

According to Iatridou, the variable x can range over **times** or **worlds**. When it ranges over time, we get T(t): the set of **times** we are talking about (topic time), and C(t): set of times that for all we know is the time of the speaker (utterance time).[6] In this case (27)

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6 Iatridou adopts the notion of topic time and utterance time from Klein (1991), who identified three types of times: Topic time (TT), Situation time (TSit) and Utterance time (TU). To identify these three notions of time, consider the following example from Klein (1991:2):

i. The light is on.
      From this sentence we can identify the three times: the time when the light was on, the time for which the claim was made, and the time when the utterance was made. The first is s situation time. This time covers the entire time the light stays being on. The second is the topic time. This is the time for which the claim that 'the light was on' is made. This time is different from the situation time. The light may have

provides past tense interpretation in which topic time excludes the utterance time. When x ranges over **worlds**, T(w): worlds we are talking about (Topic worlds), and C(w): the worlds that for all we know are the worlds of the speaker (actual worlds). In this case, (27) provides counterfactual wishes and conditionals in which Topic world excludes the actual world.[7]

Following a similar fashion, the uses of past and non-past tense markers in Amharic can be generalized smoothly as a function of exclusion and inclusion. The past tense marker *näbbär* indicates exclusion. That is, it indicates that the topic time/world excludes the utterance time/world. But, unlike in English and Greek which use the past tense in counter factual wishes and counter factual conditionals, the exclusion function of the past tense in Amharic covers a wide range of contexts. The nominal reading, the unlikely obligation, the existence time reading, the unreal/imaginary reading, the insubstantial effect and the unlikely condition readings follow

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been on for long time before or after the assertion time. The third is the utterance time (the time when the person utters the sentence). Assume that one observes the light when he enters a room and utters (1) after he left the room. The situation time is the entire time when the light remains on (including the time before or after the person enters the room). The light may still be on by the time the speaker utters. This means that the situation time may continue up to the time that the speaker utters. The topic time is the time for which the speaker refers to the light being on. That is, the time that he was in the room and asserted the "being-on" of the light. The utterance time is when the speaker utters that the light was on after he went out of the room. Tense marking applies to the relation between topic time and utterance time.

7   One basic problem of this argument is that it would be a misnomer to tense. As long as we define tense as a grammatical marking of the location of a situation respective to some other time, the non-tense functions of the so-called tense markers cannot be accommodated in the definition. Yet giving it a new category name would be more confusing than the misnomer.

from this general exclusion function of the past tense. In the same token, the non-past tense markers indicate inclusion. They indicate that the topic time/world includes the utterance time/world. Accordingly, the present, factual, likely obligation, predication time, substantial effect readings are borne from this general meaning of the non-past tense markers.

4. Further benefits

The claim that Amharic tense markers indicate inclusion/exclusion of the utterance time/world to the topic time explains two unique phenomena which have not been addressed well so far: the interaction of the tense markers with negation and complementizers. I discuss each of them below.

4.1. Amharic tense markers and negation

Amharic non-past tense markers are not compatible with negation. This is manifested in two ways. Firstly, non-past tense markers *näw* and *allä*, unlike the past tense marker *näbbär*, cannot be negated by the regular negation marker *al…m* (28). The negation of these verbs involves expletive verbs (29):

(28) a. saba i-bet   wist'   al-näbbär-äčč-m (**negation of näbbär)**
    Saba at-house inside neg-be-3fsg$_s$-neg
    Saba was not at home.
  b. * saba   i-bet   wist'   al-n-ä-at-m
    Saba   at-house   inside   neg-be-3msg$_s$-3fsg$_o$-neg
  c. *saba   i-bet   wist   al-all-äčč-m
    Saba   at-house   inside   neg-be-3fsg$_s$-neg

(29)a. saba i-bet   wist   ay-däll-äčč-im (**negation of näw)**
    S.   at-home   inside neg-be-3fsg$_s$-neg
    Saba is not at home.
  b. saba   i-bet   wist   yäll-äčč-im (**negation of allä)**
    S.   at-home   inside neg.be-3fsg$_s$-neg
    Saba is not at home.

Secondly, *allä* and *näw,* unlike *näbbär* do not show up with main/lexical verbs which are marked for negation (cf. (30)b,(31)b vs. (32)b):

(30) a. saba   ti-mät'a   all-äč
     Saba   3fssg_s-come. imperf   be-3fsg_s
     Saba comes/will come.

   b. saba   at-ti-mät'a-m   (*all-äč)
     saba   neg-3fsg-come. imperf-neg   be-3fsg_s
     Saba comes/will come.

(31) a. saba   mät't-a   *nä-w*
     saba   come. cmpltv-3fsg_s   be-3mfsg_s
     It is the case that Saba came/ hacome come.

   b. *saba   al-mät't-a-m   (**nä-w*)[8]
     saba   neg-come.grnd-3fsg_s-neg   be-3mfsg_s
     Saba comes/will come.

(32) a. saba   ti-mät'a   näbbär
     saba   3fsg-come. imperf   be.past.3msg_s
     Saba used to come/would (have) come.

   b. saba   at-ti-mät'a-m   (näbbär)
     saba   neg-3fsg-come.imperf-neg   be.3msg_s
     Saba did no use to come/ would not (have) come.

Demeke (2003) argues that this complementary distribution of the non-past tense markers and negation is due to the fact that the non-past markers (*allä* and *näw)* have a polarity feature. i.e., they

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8   In the standard Amharic the completive does not conjugate for negation. The negation of clauses whose main verb is gerund is expressed by the perfective form of the verb. In the Gojjam dialect, however, gerunds have negative form as in (i). In this case also only *näbbär* shows up with the negation:

(i) saba   al-mät't-a-m   (näbbär)/*all-äč/*n-äw
     saba   neg-come.grnd-3fsgs   be-3mfsgS/ be-3fsgS/ be-3mfsgS
     Saba did not come/ had not come come.

indicate that the clause is affirmative while the negation marker has negative polarity. He then argues that the complementary distribution between *allä/näw* and the negation marker follows from this conflict. Such a claim, however, does not explain why only *allä* and *näw*, but not *näbbär* have polarity features despite all of them introduce affirmative clauses.

The complementary distribution of the non-past tense markers (*allä* and *näw)* and negation goes straight forward from the inclusion vs. exclusion meaning of tense markers. As argued by Silva (2016)[9] at length, negation is an operation which has semantics of exclusion. According to Silva (2016: 234) "to negate means to exclude" a statement from the world where its affirmative counterpart is true. If this is semantics of negation, it results in a conflict with the semantics of the non-past tense markers, which have an inclusion meaning. The complementary distribution with the non-past and negation then follows from this conflict. With the past tense marker, however, there is no semantic conflict which prohibits it from appearing with negation.

4.2. **Interaction with complementizers**
Embedding under complementizer is allowed only for the past tense *näbbär* (33)a, but not for the non-past tense markers *allä and näw* (33)b&c:

(33) a.　saba　　tɨ-mät'a　　　　　(kä-)näbbär[10]
　　　　S.　　　3fsg-come. imperf　if-was.3fsgs
　　　　If saba was coming/used to come/would(have) come.
　　b.　saba　　tɨ-mät'a　　　　　(*kä-)all-äčč
　　　　Saba　　3fsg-come. imperf　if-have-3fsgs
　　c.　saba　　lɨ-t-mät'a　　　　(*kä-)n-ä-w
　　　　Saba　　to-3fsg-come.imperf　if-is-3msgs-3mgso

9　Silva (2016) argues that "to negate means to exclude" either in the sense of the Tractarian type (contradiction), or in the sense of by contrariety.

10　In Amharic most complementizers are procliticized to the finite verb. See Asratie (2005) for details.

When embedding non-past tense clauses is required, either the tense marker disappears (34)a or the tense marker is replaced by the stative verb *honä* 'become' (34)b:

(34) a. saba **bi**-tɨmät'a…
     Saba   if-3fsg-come. imperf
     If Saba comes…

 b. ***saba** lɨ-t-mät'a   (*kä-**)hon-ä…**
     Saba   to-3fsg-come.imperf   since-become-3msg$_s$
     If Saba is to come…/ If it is the case that Saba is to come…

This complementary distribution between the non-past tense matkers (*allä*/*näw)* and complementizers is also argued by Demeke (2003) from a syntactic point of view to be due to the tense markers compete with complemenizers to occupy one syntactic position. Demeke argues that both complementizers and tense markers a [+ force] feature, i.e. complementizers introduce dependent clauses while auxiliaries introduce independent clauses, and that their complementary distribution follows from this conflict. However, this does not explain why complementizers contrast only with the non-past tense markers *allä* and *näw,* but not with the past tense marker *näbbär*, provided that all of them introduce independent clauses, and hence have a [+ force] feature.

The interaction between the non-past markers and complementizers can also be better explained by the inclusion vs. exclusion meaning of the tense markers proposed above. The complementizers introduce conditionals or hypothetical clauses (35) (Ahmed 2010), which are at least not actual at the time of utterance. The fact that the complementizers introduce clauses which are not actual at (are excluded from) the utterance time results in a conflict with the semantics of the non-past tense clauses which indicate inclusion. The complementary distribution between complementize-ers and non-past tense markers then follows from this conflict.

(35) a. yonas   bi-mät'a-ɸ
    Jonas   comp-come.perf-3ms
    'If Jonas comes'

  b. yonas   kä-mät't'a-ɸ
    Jonas   comp-come.perf-3ms
    'If Jonas comes'

  c. yonas   si-mät'a
    Jonas   comp-3ms-come.imperf
    'When Jonas comes'

5. Conclusion

Different languages have their own mapping of tense. In this paper, I showed how the past and non-past tense marking in Amharic is mapped. I showed that in Amharic, the past tense marker, in addition to past, triggers nominal reading, the unlikely obligation, the existence time reading, the unreal/imaginary reading, the insubstantial effect, the unlikely condition readings. The non-past tense markers indicate the present, factual, likely obligation, predication time, substantial effect readings are borne from this general meaning of the non-past tense markers. I then argue based on these functions that the past tense marker indicates exclusion while the non-past tense markers indicate inclusion. Finally, I also showed that this meaning/function of tense markers in Amharic explains their interaction with negation and complementizers.

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