

## Original Research

# The subject and non-subject agreements in the Yemsa relative clauses

by Mitike Asrat

Mitike Asrat

ORCID 0009-0000-4856-7514 ✉ [mitikeasrat2727@gmail.com](mailto:mitikeasrat2727@gmail.com)  
Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia

Article history Received November 2, 2023 | Revised March 18, 2024 | Accepted March 11, 2024

Conflicts of interest The author declared no conflicts of interest

Research funding No funding was reported for this research

doi [10.22363/2521-442X-2024-8-1-115-126](https://doi.org/10.22363/2521-442X-2024-8-1-115-126)

For citation Asrat, M. (2024). The subject and non-subject agreements in the Yemsa relative clauses. *Training, Language and Culture*, 8(1), 115-126.

*This study aims to elucidate the subject and non-subject agreement mechanisms within Yemsa relative clauses, an area not comprehensively covered by existing research. By analysing these agreement forms, the study seeks to bridge the identified gap in the understanding of Yemsa's syntactic structures. The research questions guiding this study focus on the mechanisms through which subject agreements are manifested in Yemsa's relative clauses and the morphological markers they employ, alongside an examination of how non-subject agreements within these clauses diverge from subject agreements. The data were collected through the elicitation technique through informant interviews about subject and non-subject agreements in the Yemsa relative clauses. The data were analysed using a descriptive approach. The person-marker inventories are suffixes. Siewierska's Prominence Hierarchy works in Yemsa. The order of the suffixes is modifier > head. Person markers simultaneously indicate masculine and feminine referents and numbers. Siewierska's Predicate Hierarchy works on Yemsa. The suffix element -nà appears in the relative verbs. The word order in the relative clause is (O)VS. The nominative case is unmarked, whereas the accusative case is marked. The subject argument is expressed in the same manner as an independent clause. The description of the subject and the non-subject agreement in the Yemsa relative clauses has significant implications for developing the general features of Omotic and Afroasiatic languages. The study will serve as an input for the preparation of pedagogical materials in the language.*

**KEYWORDS:** Yemsa, relative clause, subject agreement, non-subject agreement, transitive verb, intransitive verb, ditransitive verb, Afroasiatic language, Omotic language



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

There is significant variation in the classification and organisation of languages in the Afroasiatic language family among linguists. Each linguist proposes a different hierarchical structure, indicating the relationships between the languages and subfamilies within the Afroasiatic phylum. This diversity of perspectives leads to differences in how the internal structure of the Afroasiatic language family is categorised. Blench (2005) highlights the diversity within the Afroasiatic phylum, noting that the classification and internal branching of its subfamilies vary as widely as the scholars who have examined them. This is evidenced by the differing branches proposed by linguists such as Greenberg (1963), Ehret (1979, 1995, 2005), and Hetzron (1990). Childs (2003) points out that Afroasiatic languages, encompassing 200-300 African languages, boast the largest number of speakers across the continent. According to Frajzyngier

and Shay (2012), these languages are spoken across a vast geographical area that includes Northern Africa, Central Africa, the Horn of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and parts of Central Asia, such as where Arabic is spoken. Hetzron (1990) further specifies that speakers of Afroasiatic languages are found in the Middle East, North Africa, Northeast Africa, and the north-western regions of Central Africa. Hayward (2000, 2003) classifies the family into six language families: Semitic, Berber, Egyptian, Chadic, Cushitic, and Omotic. Within this extensive family, Yemsa is identified as part of the Kafa-Gimojan group of the Western Omotic languages, which falls under the Gimojan subgroup, as documented by Bender (2000) and Azeb (2017).

The Omotic language family includes many languages in the Omo Valley of Southern Ethiopia (Theil, 2007; Hetzron & Frajzyngier, 2018). Several Omotic languages are spoken within the borders of Ethiopia, particularly in the southwestern part of

the country (Tosco, 2000; Frajzyngier & Shay, 2012). Yemsa is spoken in southwestern Ethiopia in the Central Ethiopia Regional State, particularly in the Fofa area.

According to the Central Statistical Agency, the Yem community numbers 159,923 individuals (CSA, 2007). Azeb (2012) notes that their nearest neighbours include speakers of Cushitic and Semitic languages, particularly the Gurage. Getachew (2001) expands on this, indicating that the Yem are geographically situated with the Gurage, Hadiyya, and Kambata communities to their east across the Gibe River, and are surrounded by the Jimma zone to the south, north, and west.

This study targets the underexplored domain of subject and non-subject agreements within Yemsa relative clauses, a dialect of the Omotic language from southwestern Ethiopia. Although some linguists have ventured into Yemsa's linguistic features, their focus primarily hovers around its phonology and basic morphosyntax, leaving a notable gap in the analysis of agreement patterns in relative clauses, an essential feature that could reveal much about its syntactical organisation and typological classification. This oversight exposes a critical area for linguistic inquiry and brings to the fore Yemsa's significance within the Afroasiatic language family, where comprehensive studies on its agreement systems are markedly scarce.

Aiming to fill the identified gap, this study seeks to identify Yemsa's morphological and syntactical features to describe its linguistic framework and contribute to the comparative studies of agreement systems in Afroasiatic languages. In addition, this study investigates the mechanisms of subject and non-subject agreements within the relative clauses of Yemsa. Specifically, the study seeks to analyse the morphological markers and syntactical structures that facilitate agreement in Yemsa, thereby contributing to a better understanding of its grammatical functioning.

To that end, the study will address the following research questions: 1. How are subject agreements manifested in Yemsa's relative clauses, and what morphological markers are involved? 2. In what ways do non-subject agreements within these clauses differ from subject agreements, particularly in terms of morphological and syntactical representation?

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The linguistic research on Yemsa, a language of notable interest, encompasses extensive studies in phonology, morphology, and syntax, conducted by various scholars over the years. Phonological aspects of Yemsa have been delineated by Wedekind (1990) and Eba (2012), who provided comprehensive phonological descriptions. Morphological analysis was advanced by the works of Hirut (1993) and Zaugg-Coretti (2013), focusing on the language's morphological structures. In the field of syntax, Derib (2004) and Teshome (2007) have contributed significantly with their studies on the structure of noun phrases and the composition of simple nominal and verbal clauses, respectively. Further elucidation on Yemsa's noun phrase structure was provided by Derib (2004) through the application of

Principle and Parameters Theory, specifically employing the DP hypothesis to illuminate the language's internal noun phrase architecture. Complementarily, Teshome (2007) investigated the syntactic structure of simple nominal and verbal clauses in Yemsa, employing a Minimalist Programme approach.

The tonal system of Yemsa, as agreed upon by Zaugg-Coretti (2013), Wedekind (1990), and Hirut (1993), consists of three distinct levels: mid, low, and high. This agreement among scholars highlights the importance of tone in the linguistic structure of Yemsa and underscores the coherence in scholarly conclusions regarding its phonological characteristics.

The study of agreement has been one of the areas of interest in descriptive grammar, attracting rather significant scholarly attention due to its complexity and importance in the construing and interpreting of language structure (Moravcsik, 1978; Corbett, 1979; Avgustinova & Uszkoreit, 2003; Ouhalla, 2005). This area has been the focus of numerous studies aiming to define and understand the nature of agreement within various languages, as evidenced by the work of Lehmann (2015), among others.

Agreement is a grammatical feature of the person, number, gender, and class of arguments in the verb (Blake, 2004; Corbett, 2001a). There are two types of agreements: concord and pronoun-antecedent (Ravera, 1992). An agreement is a marking of person, number, and sometimes gender or class of arguments on the verb, which describes a specific argument and any noun phrase (NP) representing the same argument (Blake, 2004). In addition, it has grammatical features in which the controller and target are both overt in the same clause (phrase) and an anaphoric agreement where there is no overt controller in the clause (phrase) featuring the target (Siewierska & Bakker, 2009).

Different types of agreement in natural language are subject-verb agreement, DO-verb agreement, and ID-verb agreement; possessor-possessum agreement; adjective-noun agreement; prepositional object agreement; and complementizer-NP agreement.

In many African languages, the subject or object marker attaches to a verb that contains grammatical qualities such as person, gender, number, and humanness represented by the subject or object (Kari, 2017). Subject markers are also known as pronominal subject markers (Dimmendaal, 2000). The element that determines the agreement is the controller. The element whose form is determined by agreement is the target. A number is an agreement feature that has singular, dual, and plural values (Corbett, 2001b).

Person agreement indicates referents (Siewierska & Bakker, 2009). Person/number indicators on verbs can constitute agreement; the NPs are the arguments, and the agreement markers index these arguments (Bybee, 2000). The primary targets of person agreement are predicates, possessive nouns, and adpositions (Siewierska, 2004). Person markers rarely mark a person alone, but they can show other grammatical categories such as number, gender, and case (Siewierska, 2004).

Gender features are any non-quantificational, non-referential, deictic, and non-case-related properties (Moravcsik, 1978). Morphological devices and alliterative concord are devices of gender marking (Corbett, 1991). Furthermore, speakers assign gender through the meaning, the phonology, or the morphology of a noun (Corbett, 1991; Corbett, 2005). Gender is an affix adjacent to the stem, an agreement marker associated with some other constituent, or both (Moravcsik, 1978; Grischechko & Akopova, 2015; Grischechko et al., 2015). It is more common for gender to be identified in the third person than in the second and more common in the second than in the first person (Bybee, 2000). Gender assignment can be done using two types of information about a noun: its meaning (semantics) and its form. Information about the form can be word structure (including derivation), inflections (morphology) and sound structure (phonology) (Corbett, 1991). Formal gender assignment rules are phonological rules that refer to a single form of a noun, whereas morphological rules require more information about it; they must refer to more than one form (Corbett, 1991).

The most basic type of number agreement appears in sentences involving nominals with an overtly marked singularity or plurality (Moravcsik, 1978). Clauses headed by plural nouns display different possibilities of agreement morphology on the relative pronoun and the RC (Arsenijević & Gračanin-Yuksek, 2016). The plural expresses itself through individuation, numeration, and participation (Moravcsik, 2017). Siewierska (2004) states that agreement markers, such as affixes, can be located in verbal, nominal, or adpositional stems; they appear to be *stem + affix*, *affix + stem*, or a fused stem.

The number of arguments in predicates falls into three categories: intransitive, monotransitive, and ditransitive (Dryer, 2007; Siewierska, 2004). All languages have intransitive clauses, which are clauses with a verb and only one NP participant, and transitive clauses, which are clauses with a verb and two NP participants (Tallerman, 2015). Any language can construct a clause with an intransitive or transitive predicate (with possible subtypes of extended intransitive and transitive) (Dixon, 2010).

The marking of S, A, and P is determined based on various criteria, such as morphological marking, syntactic behaviour, and semantic properties (Siewierska, 2004). In transitive clauses, both A and P may bear overt case marking under appropriate circumstances (Siewierska & Bakker, 2009). Agentive before patient argument languages are the A and P person markers, which are prefixes, both suffixes, and those in which the two markers occur on opposite sides of the stem (Siewierska, 2005b). Concerning argument discrimination, word order is a better alternative strategy than agreement, at least when it is relatively stable (Siewierska & Bakker, 2009).

The ditransitive verb is a verb with a subject, a recipient (addressee) argument, and a theme argument, which is indirect-object construction, double-object construction, secondary-object construction, and mixed (Haspelmath, 2005). It is a three-argument construction (Malchukov et al., 2011).

### 3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study adheres to Payne's (1997) framework, which posits that a comprehensive linguistic analysis should encompass both communicative and formal symbolic aspects of a language. The examination of subject and non-subject agreements within Yemsa's relative clauses is informed by seminal works in the field, notably those by Corbett (1991, 2001a, 2001b) and Siewierska (2004, 2005a, 2005b), among others. The typological framework adopted aligns with the objectives of the study, underscoring a descriptive analytical approach. This methodology resonates with Wells' (1963) principles for descriptive linguistics, which advocate for a language description that is idioglottal, asemantic, static, nonfictive, agglutinatively oriented, economical, procedural, and grammar-reducing.

Participant selection criteria focused largely on linguistic proficiency, with all participants being native Yemsa speakers. Data collection was conducted in the Saja and Fofa regions, home to the Yemsa-speaking community. The key informants included Demeke Jenbere (42), Tekalegn Ayalew (60), Almaz Tesfaye (40), and Adanche Kebede (54), representing a targeted balanced gender distribution. These informants contributed linguistic data and engaged in discussions to refine the collected material.

Data gathering methodologies encompassed informant interviews, utilising elicitation techniques to probe subject and non-subject agreements in Yemsa's relative clauses. Elicitation prompts were initially presented in Amharic, prompting informants to provide the corresponding Yemsa equivalents. Subsequent discussions with informants aimed to clarify and refine the data gathered.

The analysis employed a descriptive framework to identify the subject and non-subject agreements observed in Yemsa's relative clauses. Data were transcribed, annotated, segmented, analysed, translated, and interpreted, drawing from linguistic evidence gathered.

This approach allowed for the identification of grammatical patterns and regularities within the data. Despite time constraints posing inevitable challenges, the data were phonetically and phonemically transcribed using International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols. Discrepancies between phonetic and phonemic representations were addressed through four-line glossing, comprising phonetic transcription, morpheme-by-morpheme segmentation, morphological glossing, and free translation, to ensure clarity and accuracy in the presentation of the findings.

### 4. STUDY RESULTS

#### 4.1. Subject agreement in the relative clauses

##### 4.1.1. Person

In some languages, person markers are clitics, affixes, or covert (Siewierska, 2004). In Yemsa, the imperfective and progressive relative verbs have a person and gender agreement, but the perfective verb does not. The 3MS and 3FS are coverts in the perfective verb, as shown in (1).

(1)	a.	màkinàa-s-sī	ʔafatèddii	nèggàdée-s	kējāa-s-ōn	wàagè
		car-DEF-IN	sleep.PFV.3MS	merchant-DEF	house-DEF-ACC	buy.PFV.3MS
		<i>'The merchant who slept in the car bought the house.'</i>				
	b.	màkinàa-s-ōn	wàagè	ʔàsūu-s	wössamà	dàni
		car-DEF-ACC	buy.PFV.3FS	woman-DEF	prize	find.PFV.3FS
		<i>'The woman who bought the car won a prize.'</i>				

The absence of phonological form is interpreted as a marker of a grammatical person in many languages (Siewierska, 2004). The phonological absence of 3MS and 3FS in (1) is considered a grammatical person marker. The HN of a perfective relative verb agrees with the unmarked person in 3MS and 3FS through perfective reading.

Languages in which only some realisations of the third person singular are zero while other realisations are not (Siewierska, 2005a). For instance, 3MS and 3FS are zero in the perfective relative verb, as shown in (1), but not the others, as shown in (2). There is no phonological form for 3MS and 3FS, as in (1). They are zero. The source of differences in person markers is variation in morphophonological form (Siewierska, 2004). The person's marker difference between the perfective relative verb and the imperfective relative verb is morpho-

phonological form. Hence, the perfective verb person marker is zero or covert, as shown in (1), whereas the imperfective verb person marker is overt, as shown in (2).

Subject-verb agreement in inflected languages is demonstrated by verb affixes expressing person, gender, and number (Pawlak, 2012). Person is one of the most elusive grammatical categories and occurs with other elements (Heath, 2004). As illustrated in (2), *-ē* '3MS' and *-ā* '3FS' person markers occur in an imperfective relative verb, respectively. The person marker inventories are suffixes, which are *stem + affix*. Hence, grammatical markers indicate the nominal feature of the HN in RC, as shown in (2).

Languages that indicate subject-verb agreement tend to code for the person and number of the subject, whereas languages that signal object-verb agreement tend to code for the

(2)	a.	kējāa-s-sī	fēe-f-e	ʔàsūu-s	kēeni	krā	kasànak	ʃolsawà
		house-DEF-IN	live-IPFV-3MS	man-DEF	house.POSS	rent	pay.PFV.3MS	must
		<i>'The man who lives in a room should be paid rent.'</i>						
	b.	fōfā-kī	hām-f-ā	ʔàsūu-s	mʔ			
		fofa-ALL	go-IPFV-3FS	woman-DEF	laugh.PFV.3FS			
		<i>'The woman who is to go to Fofa laugh.'</i>						

object's definiteness and animacy (Hopper & Thompson, 1984). As shown in (2), Yemsa tends to use subject-verb agreement to indicate person and number. As a result, the person markers *-ē* '3MS' and *-ā* '3FS' appear with an imperfective marker *-f*.

In many African languages, the subject or object of a sentence is followed by a subject or object marker, which attaches to a verb and contains grammatical qualities such as person, gender, number, and humanness represented by the subject (Kari, 2017). A verb is a form that is 'conjugated' according to person, tense, and mood (Hopper & Thompson, 1984, p. 703). As shown in (2), the verb form appears with the person and aspect marker. In Amharic, person is obligatory and is followed by either gender or number (Baye, 2007). In Yemsa, the person marker occurs with an imperfective aspect marker. The relative verb agrees with the HN in number, gender, and person (Heck & Cuartero, 2013). *-ē* '3MS' and *-ā* '3FS' person markers occur in a relative verb, as shown in (2). The HNs *ʔàsūu-s* 'the man'

and *ʔàsūu-s* 'the woman' agree with the relative verbs *fēe-f-ē* 'lives' and *hām-f-ā* 'to go' in the RC. Therefore, the HNs of RC agree with the relative verb in terms of gender, number (singular), and person.

The imperfective relative verbs have person and gender agreement, but not the perfective. The controller (HN) and target are overtly in the headed relative clause. However, the controller is covert in headless RC. The controller and target are phonologically realised in the heading relative clause. As illustrated in (2), the subject *ʔàsūu-s* 'the man' and *ʔàsūu-s* 'the woman' are controllers of the relative clause, and the verbs *fēe-f-ē* 'lives' and *hām-f-ā* 'to go' are the target in the RC. The controller agrees with the target.

The argument prominence hierarchy outlines the distribution of dependent person markers among languages based on four syntactic functions (Siewierska, 2004).

(3) subject > object 1 > object 2 > oblique

As illustrated in (4), the dependent person marker *-à* indicates the subject of the relative verb. The dependent-person markers indicate more subject features than others. According to

(4)	kèjää-s-ön	wàagè-dif-à	ʔàsüu-s	mʔ-dif-à
	house-DEF-ACC	buy-PROG-3FS	woman-DEF	laugh-PROG-3FS

*'The woman who is buying the house is laughing.'*

As illustrated in (4), the person/number marker constitutes an agreement in which NPs are arguments of the verb, and the agreement markers index these arguments.

Based on their decreasing morphological independence and phonological substance, dependent person markers are classified into four categories presented below (Siewierska, 2004).

(5) weak > clitic > bound > zero

Yemsa has a bound-person marker, as illustrated in (4). The person marker *-à* '3FS' indicates the HN in the relative verb. It is a bound-person marker. It appears in *stem + affix* order. The location of the agreement is in the verb.

The assumptions about the order of affixes are *modifier > head* or *head > modifier* (Siewierska, 2004). Here, person agreement affixes are treated as heads and the targets to which they are attached as modifiers. Accordingly, the person agreement affixes should be suffixes in *modifier > head* languages (OV) and prefixes in *head > modifier* languages (VO). Yemsa is an SOV language in which the person's agreement is a suffix. Hence, the suffixes order in Yemsa is *modifier > head*, as shown in (4).

(8)	föfä-ki	häm-f-ē	ʔàsüu-s	ʔäkämä	wà
	fofa-ALL	go-IPFV-3MS	man-DEF	big	COP.PRES

*'The woman who is buying the house is laughing.'*

As previously outlined, this study addresses a key research question of how subject agreement is manifested in the relative clauses of Yemsa. The findings reveal that subject agreement in Yemsa's relative clauses is primarily marked through suffixation, with the structure of the relative verb adhering to a *stem + affix* configuration. This method of person marking within the relative verb serves not only to delineate common linguistic features among the Ometo languages but also provides valuable observations for Afroasiatic typological studies. Similarly, another research question posed at the outset concerns the morphological markers responsible for both subject and non-subject agreements within relative clauses. The analyses conducted offer clear answers, suggesting that morphological markers such as *-ē* '3MS' and *-à* '3FS' play a key role in the construction of person markers within the relative verb. These findings point to the importance of specific morphological markers in the grammatical structure of Yemsa, contributing significantly to our understanding of its complex system of agreement.

the argument prominence hierarchy shown above, subjects are more prominent than others. Therefore, Yemsa goes with the prominence hierarchy.

Cross-linguistically, person agreement in predicates is considerably more common than in possessed nouns, and possessed nouns are more common than in adpositions (Siewierska, 2004). This concept is demonstrated in the predicate hierarchy as presented below:

(6) The predicate hierarchy  
predicates > possessed nouns > adpositions

As shown in (4), the person agreement marker suffixes in a predicate, which means the first target is the predicate to take person agreement markers over other elements. Therefore, the predicate hierarchy mentioned above works in Yemsa.

The distribution of person agreement with the four semantic classes of predicates may be illustrated in the semantic predicate hierarchy below (Siewierska, 2004).

(7) The semantic predicate hierarchy  
event > property > class, locational

As shown in (8), the person's agreement in the intransitive clause is suffixed to the event predicate. Therefore, it goes with the semantic predicate hierarchy.

#### 4.1.2. Gender

Gender features refer to non-quantificational, non-referential, deictic, and case-related properties of nominals or noun phrases, lexicalized separately from other nominal properties, and include distinctions related to animacy, humanness, sex, or other qualitative properties (Moravcsik, 1978). As shown in the following examples, gender is a nominal feature that appears within the person marker.

Gender is present in language through the lexical properties of nominals, either as an affix adjacent to the stem or as an agreement marker associated with another constituent (Moravcsik, 1978). Person markers differentiate gender based on sex, with male markers being masculine and female markers being feminine (Siewierska, 2004). As illustrated in (9), the person markers *-ē* '3MS' and *-nī* '3FS' indicate male (masculine) and female (feminine) referents, which are *ʔàsüu-s* 'the man' and *ʔàsüu-s* 'the woman'. The language distinguishes between male and female genders through person markers.

(9)	a.	kējāa-s-ōn	wàagè-f-ē	ʔàsüu-s	fofa-ki	hàmà-ní-r
		house-DEF-ACC	buy-IPFV-3MS	man-DEF	fofa-ALL	go-3MS-FUT
		<i>'The man who buys the house will go to Fofa.'</i>				
	b.	fofa-ki	hàmà-ni-r	ʔàsüu-s	màajà-s	wàagè-dif-ā
		fofa-ALL	go-3FS-FUT	woman-DEF	cloth-DEF	buy-PROG-3FS
		<i>'The woman who will go to Fofa is buying the cloth.'</i>				

A person marker can show gender and number (singular) through morphemes, as illustrated in (9). As a result, *-ē* '3MS' and *-nī* '3FS' person markers indicate the gender of the HN in the relative verb. As a result, the genders of the HNs are masculine and feminine, respectively. Therefore, the HNs agree with the verb in terms of gender.

As in (9), the masculine or feminine gender appears in the RC. The relative verb suffixes *-ē* '3MS' and *-nī* '3FS' indicate masculine or feminine gender. They are inflectional suffixes that appear after the verb stem. These morphological morphemes simultaneously indicate gender. The HNs agree with the relative verb in terms of gender. As a result, the mechanism for the gender marking is a morphological device rather than an alliterative concord. The third person can show gender in Yemsa.

Yemsa speakers can assign masculine or feminine gender biologically, as shown in the above examples. Furthermore, speakers assign nouns to gender through the meaning and the phonology or morphology of a noun (Corbett, 2005). A noun's gender is assigned through semantic factors or according to a combination of semantic and formal (morphological and phonological) factors (Corbett, 1991). As a result, the masculine or feminine gender appears in the RC. It is done through semantics and form.

The typical Afroasiatic grammatical gender system is masculine and feminine (Appleyard, 2012). As shown in the above examples, gender is either masculine or feminine. Gender is

manifested through agreement, for instance, between the verb and its noun subject or between determiners and head nouns (Appleyard, 2012). The gender is indicated through the agreement marker in the verb.

#### 4.1.3. Number

The singular number is not marked on the nominal, aligning with the widely accepted belief that the singular is the unmarked number compared to the plural (Corbett, 2000a). As shown in (9), the HNs are not marked for singular. As a result, the HNs are not marking for sigulative.

Number is a complex and logical structure in any language (Corbett, 2001a). As mentioned above, the person marker in the relative verb can show the number (singular) and gender. Therefore, in Yemsa, number, person, and gender are indicated through person markers attached to the verb stem. The morphemes *-ē* '3MS' and *-nī* '3FS' can show number (singular), person, and gender, as in (9). Yemsa has two number values singular and plural.

Person and number rarely occur together, and when they do, morphological segmentation separating the person markers from the number markers is not easy (Bybee, 2000). The person and number markers appear together, which is suffixed on the verb stem, as shown in (10). It is difficult to distinguish the person marker from the number marker. As a result, the person marker indicates the number (singular).

(10)	kējāa-s-ōn	wàagò-ní-r	nèggàdèe-s	sāfar-dif-ē
	house-DEF-ACC	buy-3MS-FUT	merchant-DEF	worry-PROG-3MS
	<i>'The merchant who will buy the house is worrying.'</i>			

Number agreement is most visible in sentences with clearly specified single or plural nominals and agreeing elements like nominal modifiers, verbs, or pronouns (Moravcsik, 1978). As shown in (10), singularity appears through the person marker. *nèggàdèe-s* 'the merchant' is a singular HN. As a result, the relative verb agrees with the number agreement. Meanwhile, the HN *nèggàdèe-s* 'the merchant' agrees with the relative verb *wàagò-ní-r* 'will buy' in terms of number. Therefore, the HN agrees with the verb in number (singular). As a result, verb inflection is used to show the number marking in the language.

Agreement is one of the morphological means of marking a number in a verb, where the number marked on the verb is nominal. Cross-linguistically, demonstratives and verbs are relatively frequent agreement targets, displaying agreement in number either uniquely or in combination with other categories, most notably gender (Corbett, 2001a). In the above examples, the number agreement on the verb indicates singularity. This number marking is a nominal feature. Verbs are marked for number in Amharic (Mulugeta, 2017), whereas in Yemsa, a number is indicated through the person marker.

Most intransitive and transitive verbs in Yemsa agree with their subjects. These clauses' verbs agree with their subjects in terms of person, number, and gender. The transitive relative verb shows verbal and subject agreement (nominal agreement). The verbal agreement appears in the verb, where *-f* is an imperfective aspect marker, as illustrated in (11). On the other hand, a

subject agreement appears in a relative verb, as shown in 11, *-ē* as a '3MS' marker. All languages have agreement on intransitive and transitive predicates (Siewirska, 2004). As a result, as illustrated in (11) and (12), person agreement in intransitive verbs occurs in a transitive verb. The intransitive and transitive relative verbs have a person suffix: *-ē* '3MS'.

(11)	dàabbòo-s-ōn	mée-f-ē	ʔàsüu-s	ʔàkàmà	wà
	bread-DEF-ACC	eat-IPFV-3MS	man-DEF	big	COP.PRES

*'The man who eats the bread is big.'*

(12)	fòfà-kì	hàm-f-ē	ʔàsüu-s	jèetè-dif-ē
	fòfà-ALL	go-IPFV-3MS	man-DEF	talk-PROG-3MS

*'The man who goes to Fofa is talking.'*

The case may be overtly marked on either the A or the P or both; the overt marking of both is less common than the overt marking of just the A or P (Siewierska & Bakker, 2009). The nominative case is unmarked, but the accusative case is marked, as illustrated in (11). The patient *ʔéetóo-s-ōn* 'the lion' is marked as an accusative case in (11). The marking of the patient is supported to discriminate between the agent and the patient in the argument structure. *ʔàsüu-s* 'the man' is an agent, whereas *dàabbòo-s-ōn* 'the bread' is a patient. As a result, it marks the P rather than the A. Yemsa is not overtly marked in both cases. The ac-

cusative case is marked more than the nominative case. The NPs are identified through case marking. As a result, the argument is indexed through case-marking. Every language also has extended transitive (or ditransitive) clauses (typically involving *give* and often some other verbs such as *show* and *tell*) that require a third obligatory argument. The syntactic status of the two non-A core arguments of these verbs varies from language to language (Onishi, 2001). As shown in (13), Yemsa has a ditransitive clause. The syntactic status of the three obligatory arguments is subject, direct object, and indirect object.

(13)	nàa-s-k	màs'áfāa-s-ōn	tèjǰè	ʔàsüu-s	kàsè-dif-à
	boy-DEF-DAT	book-DEF-ACC	bring.PFV.3FS	woman-DEF	play-PROG-3FS

*'The woman who brought the book to the boy is playing.'*

In ditransitive clauses, the secondary object has the semantic role of an addressee, recipient, or beneficiary, while the primary object has the semantic role of a theme. As shown in (13), the relative verb *tèjǰè* 'bring' is a known ditransitive verb. It is a three-argument ditransitive verb. *ʔàsüu-s* 'the man', *màs'áfāa-s-ōn* 'the book', and *nàa-s-ik* 'to the boy' are three arguments of a main and a RC. The non-relativised ditransitive verb word order is S (O2) (O1) V, while the relativised ditransitive verb word order is O2 (O1) V S (PP) V. The semantic role

of indirect object *nàa-s-ik* 'to the boy' is that of a recipient, while the semantic role of direct object *màs'áfāa-s-ōn* 'the book' is that of a theme, as shown in (13). The indirect object is marked through *-k*, as shown in (14).

In ditransitive clauses, case marking favours the R over the T; the overt case marking of both the R and the T occurs more frequently than in the two arguments of transitive clauses (Siewierska & Bakker, 2009). Accordingly, Yemsa overtly marks the R and T, as shown in (15).

(14) a.	nàwāa-s-k	dèebdāabèe-s-ōn	tíǰí	ʔàsüu-s	tèǰǰirè	wòllè
	girl-DEF-DAT	letter-DEF-ACC	write.PFV.3MS	man-DEF	loudly	speak.PFV.3MS

*'The man who wrote the letter to the girl spoke loudly.'*

b.	nàa-s-k	màajāa-s-ōn	wāagè	ʔintōo-s	ʔotùm	wà
	boy-DEF-DAT	cloth-DEF-ACC	buy.PFV.3FS	mother-DEF	rich	COP.PRES

*'The mother who bought the cloth to the boy is rich.'*

(15)	nàa-s-k	kèjàa-s-ōn	ʔim	ʔàsūu-s	fōfā-si	fāa-f-à
	boy-DEF-DAT	house-DEF-ACC	give.PFV.3FS	woman-DEF	fōfā-IN	live-IPFV-3FS

*'The woman who gave the house to the boy lives in Fofa.'*

The overt marking of R and T is suffixes. The recipient or addressee is indicated by *-k*, whereas the theme is marked by *-ōn* for the accusative case, as shown in (15).

Building on the preceding analysis, it is evident that the person marker in Yemsa not only indicates gender and number but also significantly enriches our comprehension of Yemsa's linguistic framework. Furthermore, this aspect of Yemsa's grammar exposes the broader typological features of Afroasiatic languages, emphasising its relevance for comparative linguistic studies within this language family.

#### 4.2. Non-subject agreement in the relative clauses

We discussed the agreement elements of the subject in the RC, which is a nominal suffix. The person, gender, and number

should agree with the HN of the RC. Agreement with both agent and object marking is not a common feature in languages around the world (Paudyal, 2008). Subject or object markers functioning as pure agreement morphemes are not easy to find in African languages (Creissels, 2005). The following discussion shows the non-subject agreement of Yemsa.

Object agreement criteria are often considered language-specific and unrelated to universal linguistic principles (Woolford, 1999). In the following examples, the HNs *kèjàa-s* 'the house' and *ʔéetóo-s* 'the lion' are DO inside the RC. As we see in the relative verb morphology, the suffix element *-nà* appears on the relative verbs. Therefore, *-nà* is an object agreement attached to the verbs in an object relativisation. The following examples illustrate this fact:

(16)	a.	ʔàsūu-s	wàagè-nà	kèjàa-s	tʃ'	wà
		woman-DEF	buy.PFV.3FS.Sj-3FS.Oj	house-DEF	expensive	COP.PRES
		<i>'The house which the woman bought is expensive.'</i>				
	b.	ʔàsūu-s	wòr-nà	ʔéetóo-s	ʔàkàmà	wà
		man-DEF	kill.PFV-3MS.Oj	lion-DEF	big	COP.PRES

*'The lion that the man killed is big.'*

In (16), the HN *kèjàa-s* 'the house' and *mèwùu-s* 'the tiger' functioned as DOs of an RC, which is empty in the RCs. However, it is recoverable from the agreement marker in the relative verb. As a result, the object agreement marker appears in a verb to indicate DO relativisation. The object agreement marker does not exist in subject relativisation, but only exists in object relativisation.

On the one hand, Ezha verbs can also optionally contain object agreement suffixes (Endalew, 2016). None of the Omotic

languages marks the object (Azeb, 2017). Yemsa is one of them. It does not mark objects in a transitive verb in a simple main clause. As a result, there is no overt object marker in the main clause in the above examples. An object agreement marker occurs in the object relativisation, as shown in (16).

The intransitive and transitive verbs appear with one or two core arguments (Dixon, 2010). Intransitive verbs have one core argument. Only one NP participated in an intransitive clause, as shown in (17).

(17)	fōfā-ki	hàm	ʔàsūu-s	gàràam	wà
	fōfā-ALL	go.PFV.3FS	woman-DEF	kind	COP.PRES

*'The woman who went to Fofa is kind.'*

The exploration of person, gender, and number within Yemsa's grammatical delineates shared linguistic features through specific mechanisms and morphological markers. Notably, the employment of person markers as suffixes in relative verbs in Yemsa may delineate a characteristic feature among the

Ometo languages, facilitating comparative typological analyses, especially in relation to Bench, through the lens of morphological markers. This granular focus on gender and number representation through person markers advances our understanding of Yemsa's linguistic architecture. Moreover, these findings have



practical implications, contributing to the development of grammatical resources for Yemsa. They enhance both the creation of pedagogical materials tailored for students at various educational levels and the preparation of comprehensive grammar texts. Beyond educational applications, this research provides foundational data for language development initiatives within applied linguistics. Furthermore, it establishes a methodological framework for conducting comparative typological studies on subject and non-subject agreements across related languages, thereby

(18)	ʔàrùu-s-òn	ʔàss-f-ē	ʔássinjàa-s	jètètè-dif-ē
	lesson-DEF-ACC	teach-IPFV-3MS	teacher-DEF	talk-PROG-3MS

*'The teacher who teaches the lesson is talking.'*

The argument coding is as follows: (a) an argument is expressed in the same way as it shows in an independent clause; (b) an argument is expressed differently than it occurred in an independent clause; (c) an argument is not expressed (van Lier, 2009). Yemsa belongs to type (a). As shown in (18), a subject argument expresses itself in the same way as an independent clause.

(19)	ʔéetóo-s-òn	wórí	ʔàsüu-s	tàptà	wà
	lion-DEF-ACC	kill.PFV.3MS	man-DEF	fast	COP.PRES

*'The man who killed the lion is fast.'*

The RC is head-final. The syntactic function of NPs is to be the subject of RC. The semantic role of a subject is that of an agent of RC, whereas the semantic role of a direct object is that of the patient. The simple sentence word order of Yemsa is SV in intransitive verbs, whereas the RC word order becomes (PP)VS. The simple main clause differs from the relativised clause. The intransitive verb takes the PP as a complement. It is a motion verb. The relativised intransitive verbs, which have an event predicate that indicates motion, take a PP as a complement, as illustrated in (19).

(20)	fòfà-n	jà	ʔàsüu-s	dàabbòo-s-òn	màa
	fofa-ABL	come.PFV.3FS	woman-DEF	bread-DEF-ACC	eat.PFV.3FS

*'The woman who came from Fofa ate the bread.'*

The investigation of subject and non-subject agreements within Yemsa relative clauses not only advances our knowledge of the syntactic characteristics specific to Yemsa and the broader Ometo language group but also addresses a previously identified lacuna in the detailed description of these grammatical agree-

ments in Yemsa. These data hold considerable value for typological studies within the Afroasiatic language family in terms of both specific linguistic inquiries and general linguistic theoretical frameworks, potentially setting new precedents for future research in comparative linguistics.

#### 4.3. Syntactic feature

The three-way typology of DCs is the (partial) (non-) expression of TAM operators and person marking; the nominal category determiner and case/adposition; and argument(s) coding in DCs (van Lier, 2009). Yemsa belongs to the latter type.

In some languages, the basic word order is subject-verb-object (SVO) (Comrie, 1988). A language can be verb-final (Dimmendaal, 2008). The clause arguments (NPs) show variation in the main clause and RC orders. The main clause and a relative clause show argument-order differences. The transitive main clause order is SOV, whereas a transitive relative clause is OVS, as shown in (19).

The alignment of the core arguments in (19) is determined based on morphological marking (zero marker or unmarked) and syntactic position. Accordingly, Yemsa belongs where A comes before P. The subject is positioned initially (head initial) (SV). It is placed finally (head-final) (VS) in an RC, as demonstrated in (19).

As demonstrated in (20) below, the syntactic role of *ʔàsüu-s* 'the woman' is that of the subject, whereas *fòfà-n* 'from Fofa' is a prepositional phrase. However, the semantic role of the NPs is that of an experiencer and source, as shown in (20).

## 6. CONCLUSION

The core objective of this research was to dissect the subject and non-subject agreement processes in Yemsa's relative clauses, focusing on the identification and analysis of morphological markers and syntactic arrangements that underpin these agreements. The investigation aimed to bridge a notable gap in linguistic literature by providing a detailed account of Yemsa's agreement patterns and, thereby, enriching our comprehension of its grammar. This contribution should facilitate comparative analyses with other Afroasiatic languages and create a more comprehensive dialogue within the field of linguistic typology.

The findings reveal that in Yemsa, the manifestation of person agreement varies across verb aspects, with imperfective and progressive forms displaying overt person markers, whereas perfective verbs employ a covert marking strategy. This distinction emphasises a morphophonological differentiation in person marking, integral to Yemsa's grammatical coherence. Furthermore, the study specifies the language's adherence to a modifier-head syntax, an SOV order, and a predicate hierarchy that prioritises person agreement markers, delineating a sophisticated interconnection between syntax and morphology.

The research also investigated the gender distinction within person markers, showcasing how Yemsa differentiates masculine and feminine referents, thus emphasising gender as a crucial

nominal feature. Moreover, the analysis extended to subject agreement across verb types and illustrated a consistent alignment of verbs with their subjects in terms of person, number, and gender. This alignment positions Yemsa within Type A languages, characterised by a consistent expression of subject arguments akin to independent clauses.

This study should contribute to the development of grammatical resources and educational materials for Yemsa, facilitate language teaching and learning at various educational levels, and offer foundational data for computational linguistics applications and further comparative studies within the Omotic languages and beyond.

In light of these contributions, this research emphasises the importance of further inquiry into unexplored aspects of Yemsa's grammar, such as information structure and expressive language forms like blessings and curses. The observations gained from this study on subject and non-subject agreements pave the way for future comparative research across Omotic languages and encourage a deeper investigation into the interaction between agreement mechanisms and other grammatical categories.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank the informants who participated in the interview.

## Appendix. List of symbols and abbreviations

1, 2, 3	1st, 2nd, 3rd person	IPFV	Imperfective
-	Morpheme boundary	M	Masculine
[ ]	Phonetic representation	NP	Noun phrase
A	Agent	Oj	Object
ABL	Ablative	PFV	Perfective
ACC	Accusative	P	Patient
ALL	Alative	POSS	Possessive
COP	Copula	PRES	Present
DAT	Dative	PROG	Progressive
DC	Dependent clause	R	Recipient
DEF	Definite marker	RC	Relative clause
DO	Direct object	SOV	Subject-Object-Verb
F	Feminine	Sj	Subject
FUT	Future	SVO	Subject-Verb-Object
HN	Head noun	T	Ditransitive object theme
IN	Inessive case	TAM	Tense-Aspect-Mood

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Mitike Asrat

ORCID 0009-0000-4856-7514 ✉ [mitikeasrat2727@gmail.com](mailto:mitikeasrat2727@gmail.com)

Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia