



Research Article

Semantic Changes of the Amharic verb አለ *alə* ‘say’: Its Lexicalization and Grammaticalization Routes

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Abstract

This study argues for two claims; 1) treating the three forms of the Amharic verb አለ ‘say’ –አል *al* ‘AUX’, and –አል–*al* ‘INFLECTION’ as etymologically the same and 2) describing meaning extensions of the Amharic verb አለ ‘say’ from being a verb of communication evolving to that of reporting, mean, understand, call, hit, ignore, causal, purposive, confirmation, negation, invite or forbid to speak, auxiliary, valency changer (intransitive), modal auxiliary, verbalizer, expressive and tense-aspect-modal marker. These meaning extensions happened through the two language change processes, lexicalization and grammaticalization. The 33 sets of data for the analysis and discussion come from various written sources and introspective data from the author. To discuss meaning extensions of *ale* ‘to say’ two descriptive semantic change models Bybee and Dahl (1989) and Heine and Kuteva (2002, 2005) have been used.

አጠቃላይ

ይህ “የዐማርኛ “አለ” ግስ ቃላዊና ሰዋሰዋዊ የፍቺ ለውጦች” የተሰኘ የጥናት ጽሑፍ ኹለት ግቦች አሉት። እንደኛው በዐማርኛ የግስ መዋቅር በተለያየ ወውድ የሚከሰቱ ሦስቱን “አለ” ምዕላዶች “ሥርወ-ቃላቸው” እንደ መኾኑን ማሳየት እና ኹለተኛው የዐማርኛ “አለ” ግስ ፍቺ ለውጦችን ከንግግር ግስነት ወደ ራፖር አቅራቢ፣ ፍቺ፣ መረዳት፣ መባል፣ መምታት፣ ችላ ማለት፣ ሰብብ፣ ዓላማ፣ ማረጋገጫ፣ አሉታዊ፣ የ(አለ)መናገር ግብዣ፣ የግስ ረዳት፣ ማሟያ ስም ጨማሪነት፣ ኹኔታዊ ረዳት ግስነት፣ ግስ አድራጊነት፣ ቃል አካይነት፣ እና ወደ ጊዜና አንቀፅ አመልካችነት ማድጉን ማሳየት ነው። ይህ ጥናት አትኩሮቱ በዐማርኛ እነዚህ የ“አለ” የፍቺ አንድምታዎች ቃላዊ እና ሰዋሰዋዊ የለውጥ መንገድ የተከሉትን ብቻ ነው። በዚህ መጣጥፍ እነዚህን ቃላዊ እና ሰዋሰዋዊ ፍቺያዊ ለውጦች ለማስረዳት ከጸሐፊውና ከተለያዩ ምንጮች የተገኙ 33 የቋንቋው አስረጅዎች ጥቅም ላይ ውለዋል። የ“አለ”ን ቃላዊና ሰዋሰዋዊ ለውጦችን ለመወያየት ይህ ጥናት የባይቢና ዳል (1989) እንዲሁም የሃይነና ኩቴቫ (2002, 2005) ሞዴሎችን መሠረት አድርጓል።

Keywords:

Amharic, verb to say, meanings, grammaticalization, lexicalization

ቅልፍ ቃላት፤

አለ፣ የዐማርኛ ሰዋሰው፣ ቃላዊ ለውጦች፣ ሰዋሰዋዊ ለውጦች

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1. Introduction

In any human language, such as Amharic, which is an organic system, parts/ units fit and recalibrate within the system they exist. Open-class language parts/ units i.e., words such as nouns and verbs serve as primary carriers of meaning. They also function as primary grammatical units to form larger grammatical

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units, phrases and sentences. These primary units are limited in number which is estimated to be 6 million words in Amharic (Aberra, 2023). These 6 million words represent an unlimited number of meanings, functions, an unlimited number of collocations (frequent co-occurrence of words) and an unlimited number of grammatical combinations of the given language. In this system, open-class words such as nouns and verbs are recycled in various ways to carry multiple meanings (polysemy), extended additional meanings (figurative senses) and additional grammatical functions. Languages do not only add meanings to existing words but they also have mechanisms and processes to add meanings. When lexical words add structural, grammatical meanings, they pass through the process of grammaticalization and when words add full-fledged (lexical) meanings they pass through the process of lexicalization.

Amharic serves as the lingua franca of Ethiopia—a country with an estimated population of 130 million. It is the mother tongue of more than half the population, including in most cities and towns, and is the second most widely spoken Semitic language (Meyer, 2011). A large contingent of diasporas in Israel, the US and Europe speak Amharic. Amharic also functions as the only state's working language by constitution. It has been used in education, mass media, and religious activities. Amharic also has a record of written literature since the 1400s, lexicographical and grammatical descriptions going back to the 17th century, and dictionaries of the most frequent words (Aberra, 1997, 2023, Amberber, 2023, Krzyżnowska, 2024).

Local literature Amberber (1996), Meyer (2024), Wetter (2002), Yimam (1999), Łykowska (2003, 2006) gave considerable attention mostly from syntactic perspectives to the Amharic *alə* 'say' verb and its etymologically related words. Amberber (1996), Meyer (2024), Wetter (2002) and Yimam (1999), for example, have discussed the grammatical roles of *alə* 'say' but not meaning extensions which I deal with in this paper. Their studies extrapolate the role of 'say' in forming composite verbs and being a vital part of expressive utterances of the language. The studies emphasized the other unit of the composite, i.e., other than *alə* 'say'; how ideophones as part of composite phrasal verbs are introduced into the grammar system. Amberber's (1996) unique contribution is worth mentioning; he discussed the motivation why the verb "say" is involved in such varied contexts.

Globally, the literature stated that the word "say", which denotes the movement or transfer of ideas by sounds, is a very productive verb and highly prolific in its meaning extensions (Heine and Kuteva, 2002, 2005, Levin, 1993). Heine and Kuteva (2002) have enumerated eight meaning extensions of the verb "say" as "cause, complementizer, conditional, evidential, purpose, quotative, simile, and subordinator".

In the discussion of verbs of communication and transfer of ideas in which the verb "say" is one subgroup, Levin (1993) observed that "their sentential complements figure prominently in any description of the properties of these verbs". As the Amharic verb *alə* 'say' is not specified for "inner manner" (Amberber, 1996) as most other verbs do, it necessitates any complement to fulfill that need for the verb to be fully specified.

That manner specifying complement (ideophone, verbal nouns) that is a manner movement of some kind has also been observed in Wetter's (2002) and Yimam's (1999) studies. Ideophones form composite verbs with *alə* "say" of "onomatopoeic, synesthetic, and conventional" ones for Wetter (2002) and these "verbal nouns" for Yimam (1999).

The phonologically similar: *alə* 'say', *al* 'AUX', and *-al* 'TAM' based on their syntactic and semantic roles seem to be different but these three verbal forms are the same as the latter are the desemanticized, decategorized, and phonologically depleted forms of *alə* 'say' to that of encoding grammatical items. Yimam (1999) argued the loss of two consonant radicals *bh* of **bhl* > *l* 'say' (phonetic loss) as the cause for the loss of the literal meaning of "say" and it is performing more as a grammatical unit introducing the "verbal noun", the "ideophone" into the grammar system of Amharic.

As the two anonymous reviewers rightly pointed out the study of Amharic verb as is the case in other

aspects of the language has a far widening impact at the global scale. The Hebrew Semitist, Kapeliuk (2023, p. 409), for instance, identified the study of the verb “say” as introducer of words into verbs is a common feature of Ethiosemitic languages. In addition she reiterates that Ethiosemitic languages such as Amharic’s subordinating nature of the full fledged inflected clauses by the use of “say” and other verbs made Ethiosemitic structurally different from classical Semitic languages and mentioned “the reputation of being very difficult for the Semitist” to study Kapeliuk (2023, p. 413).

Every single case study of Amharic language has a far reaching wider effect in the field of linguistics, especially in theory formulation. Amberber noted to related cases in this regard. “Amharic has takes centre stage in a number of important theoretical studies and debates. Philippe Schlenker’s (2003) influential study of direct and indirect quotation [by the use of the verb say] in formal semantics employs data from Amharic to motivate a new theoretical analysis of indexicals” (Amberber, 2023, 21.22). The verb *alə* ‘say’ acquired meaning extensions due to its moving to the final position of the verb structure of Amharic; the movement was triggered by the word order change in Amharic from VSO to SOV and correlated verb- auxiliary order. I quoted generously about this word order change from Aberra (2025)Aberra (2025).

Various studies claim that the word order change took place in Amharic, possibly from VSO in the pre-17th century to the present strict SOV in the post-17th century (Bach, 1970, Hudson, 1972, Little, 1974a,b, 1977, Tremblay, 1987). Amharic does not only have the SOV word order, but there also exists an accompanying correlated syntactic properties, and harmony features; ordering between modifiers and heads. For example, Amharic has the verb-auxiliary order, and it has also post positions (Aberra, 2025)

Amberber (2023) in his notes #3 discussed how Amharic has shaped linguistic theory “generative typology” by the 1970 study of Emmon Bach’s word order change study of Amharic. “The Amharic data Bach used her theoretical and empirical discussions” reverberated “in the study generative typology and her Amharic word order change article took center stage for two decades”.

The Amharic verb *alə* ‘say’ (as a frequently used verb) has multiple meanings and multiple forms (words) in various grammatical (structural) contexts. In addition to its being a polysemic word, the verb *alə* and its two other related forms *al* ‘AUX’ and *–al* ‘TAM’ enrich their repertoire of meaning through processes such as grammaticalization and lexicalization. Identifying the lexicalized and grammaticalized meanings of the verb *alə* is the major challenge for this study. Explaining how the verb *alə* ‘say’ developed these three interrelated and complementary forms is the second problem the study deals with.

Apart from its multiple meanings, the verb *alə* ‘say’ in contemporary Amharic has three verbal forms sharing phonological similarity: *alə* ‘say’, *al* ‘AUX’, and *–al* ‘TAM’. Identifying meaning extensions of the verb *alə* ‘say’ through the processes of lexicalization and grammaticalization is the objective of this study.

The grammatical meaning extensions of the auxiliary *alə* ‘say’ was reported in Aberra (2025).

It introduces single and double words and expressing subjectivity to independent clauses it introduced. As a single-word introducer, it provided meanings such as valency changer, modal auxiliary, expressive marker, verbalizer (light verb) and enclitic word introducer; as a double words introducer the entire construction provided figurative meanings and as a linker of two clauses *alə* ‘AUX’ gave subjectivity readings to the entire event encoded by the construction.

2. Materials, methods and models

This study discusses the Amharic *alə* ‘say’ and its related forms focusing solely on their meaning extensions in various syntactic, semantic, and phonological contexts and situations. These three forms *alə* ‘say’, *al* ‘AUX’, and *–al* ‘TAM’ and correlated meanings, are studied together based on three converging evidence:

Abbr.	Meaning	Abbr.	Meaning	Abbr.	Meaning
1	1st person	2	2nd person	3	3rd person
ACC	accusative	ATE	attenuative	AUX	auxiliary
BV	basic verb	C	consonant	CAUS	causative
CONJ	conjunction	COP	copula	DEF	definite
F	feminine	FIG	figurative meaning	IMPR	imperative
IMPREV	imperfective	INF	infinitive	INS	instrument
INTE	intension	INTR	intransitive	LEX	lexical
lit.	literal meaning	M	masculine	MANN	manner nominal
N	noun	NOM	nominative	NPAST	non-past
OBJ	object	OBL	oblique	PASS	passive
PAST	past	PL	plural	POSS	possessive
PREV	perfective	PRS	present tense	SBJ	subject
SG	singular	TAM	tense–aspect–mood	TR	transitive
V	vowel				

Table 1. List of abbreviations.

1) their multiple meanings and associated lexicalized and grammaticalized contexts; 2) their syntactic roles; and 3) their phonological shapes, the interaction of cliticization and phonological rules of both the diachronic and synchronic nature.

Specifically, this study describes the lexicalized and grammaticalized meanings of the Amharic verb ‘to say’ based on the 33 sets of data collected from various published sources and identified in this study (Table 1).

For the sake of interdisciplinary readers, Lete’s (2011, 28–29) definitions of lexicalization and grammaticalization are in order. “Grammaticalization and lexicalization are two forms of lexical expansion, one functional [grammatical], the other semantic [meaning] (p.28)”. “Grammaticalization turns out to be a process of (or more (change) of “semantic bleaching” or voiding, but not in a complete way (p.28)”. There are residues of some aspects (components) of the form and the meaning of the source word. “Lexicalization, however, is a process of semantic [meaning] transfers (29).” Both [lexicalization and grammaticalization] processes involve language change following similar mechanisms, however, based on their end results, they vary. Change from grammaticalization resulted in grammatical form/ meaning and change from lexicalization resulted in a new lexical form/ meaning.

To discuss the meaning extensions of *alə* ‘to say’ two descriptive semantic change models (Bybee and Dahl, 1989) and Heine and Kuteva (2002, 2005) have been in use.

Bybee and Dahl (1989) semantic change model for the study of TAM requires description of (1) gram type (T, A, M); (2) expression (the form *alə*); (3) classhood (position of *alə* in the given construction; (4) the path/ process the word *alə* took (lexicalization or grammaticalization); (5) context (semantic property – meaning the item rendering); and (6) interaction (combination, collocation, co-occurrence) of the item in question.

The lexicalization and grammaticalization models are concerned with the genesis and development of lexicalized and grammaticalized forms. The models’ primary goal is to describe how lexicalized/ grammaticalized forms and constructions arise and develop through space and time, and to explain why they are structured the way they are.

Two stages of development (of the process) are designated in the process of lexicalization/ grammati-

calization. These are the source (both in form and meaning) and the target. In the present study, the source form is *alə* and the source meaning is ‘say’; the target forms and meanings, however, vary.

To reiterate, on a technical level, lexicalization/ grammaticalization models involve four main interrelated linguistic mechanisms; (1) desemanticization (or semantic bleaching) (loss in meaning content of the source); (2) phonological depletion (erosion, or phonetic sound/ letter reduction) of the form, loss in phonetic substance (*alə* lost two of the three consonants *b* and *h* and remained with *l*; (3) dectagorization:- loss in morphosyntactic properties characteristic of lexical or other loss of grammaticalized forms, and (4) context generalization (extension) i.e., use of the form-meaning pair in new contexts.

Section (2) below presents the grammatical profile of Amharic, verb structures of the verbal complex as a grammatical context of the verb *alə*, the auxiliary *al* and the suffix – *al*. Section (3) analyzed, the lexicalization and grammaticalization meanings of the verb *alə* ‘say’—including its proposed grammaticalization process to that of an auxiliary and inflection *al*. Section (4) discussed the analysis, Section (5) concluded the report and Section (6) enlisted the recommendation.

3. Grammatical Profile of the Amharic verbs

Amharic has root (radical) pattern morphology in its verb structure (Amberber, 2023, 415). Amharic verb stems, the verb stripped off its subject and object person marker affixes, have three morphological constituents: 1) the consonantal verb root often called a radical, which specifies the verb core meaning; 2) the infixed vowel specification; and 3) the prosodic template, the two (2 and 3) together specify the tense-aspect-modality of the verb. The consonantal radical, which ranges from one to a handful, usually carries the verb’s lexical meaning, as illustrated in (1).

	Radical	Lexical meaning	Radical	Lexical meaning
(1)	ሸ	<i>š</i> ‘want’	ኸ	<i>n</i> ‘come, be’
	ሰጥ	<i>st</i> ‘give’	ብል	<i>bl</i> ‘eat’
	ሰብር	<i>sbr</i> ‘break’	ወድድ	<i>wdd</i> ‘love’
	ግልብጥ	<i>glbt</i> ‘turn something over’	ብርብር	<i>brbr</i> ‘search’
	ኸክርብት	<i>nkrbt</i> ‘throw’	ወሸኸክር	<i>wšnk’r</i> ‘stack’

Having these skeletal radicals, the Amharic verb stem is formed by infixing the vowels between them and the vowels enable the resulting verb stem to encode modal, aspectual and tense distinctions, such as the perfective, imperfective, iterative and intensive; compare (2a) to (2d)¹.

From the set of verbs in (1), I use a semantically active process verb $\sqrt{sbr} > sabbər$ - ‘break’ wherever possible following Amberber’s (2003) choice of the same verb for its phonological and morphological regularity. The three-consonantal radical (\sqrt{sbr} ‘break’) verb *sabbər*- shows fewer morphological irregularities in its conjugations and it is also a typical regular verb in the sense that it possesses three radicals (Newman and Aberra, 2009, p. 253). Regular Amharic verbs start with consonants. Conversely, some irregular verbs start with the vowels /a/ like ከለ *alə* ‘say’, ከለ *allə* ‘exist, present’, ከለፈ *allafə* ‘passed’, and ከደረገ *adərrəgə* ‘make, do’ due to their loss of the first radical or both the first and the second radicals as the case may be.

¹The subscript numbers refer to similar or different radicals. Identical subscript numbers refer to having same consonant. Different subscript numbers refer to different consonants.

	VOWEL + GEMINATION	AGREEMENT + other affixation	Gloss
Perfective	<i>səbbər–</i>	<i>səbbər–ə</i>	‘he broke it’
Imperfective	<i>–səbr–</i>	<i>yī–səbr–al</i>	‘he breaks, he will break it’
Imperfective	<i>–səbr–</i>	<i>yī–səbr nəbbər</i>	‘he was breaking it’
Habitual	<i>–səbr</i>	<i>yī–səbr–al</i>	‘he breaks it’
Telic/completive	<i>səbr–</i>	<i>səbr–o–</i>	‘he broke it and...’
Iterative	<i>səbabbər–</i>	<i>mə–səbabər</i>	‘breaking’

Table 2. Amharic major aspectual stem types. Adopted from Amberber (2003), Leslau (1995).

Person	SUBJECT			OBJECT
	non-perfective	Perfective	subordinate imperfective	
1SG	<i>i - ā-</i>	<i>-hu - Ū</i>	<i>- e - ḥ</i>	<i>-ññ</i>
2SG.M	<i>tī - ṭ-</i>	<i>-h - Ū</i>	<i>-h - Ū</i>	<i>-h</i>
2SG.F	<i>tī - ṭ-</i>	<i>-aš - ḥāṭ</i>	<i>-š - ṭ</i>	<i>-š</i>
3SG.M	<i>yī - ḫ-</i>	<i>-ə, a - ḫ, ḥ</i>	<i>-o - ḥ</i>	<i>-u, - w</i>
3SG.F	<i>tī - ṭ-</i>	<i>-ačč - ḥṭ</i>	<i>-a - ḥ</i>	<i>-at</i>
1PL	<i>in - ā ṭ-</i>	<i>-n - ṭ</i>	<i>-ən - ḫ ṭ</i>	<i>-n</i>
2PL	<i>tī - ṭ-</i>	<i>-aččihu - ḥṭ</i>	<i>-aččihu</i>	<i>-aččihu</i>
3PL	<i>yī - ḫ-</i>	<i>-u - ḥ</i>	<i>-u</i>	<i>-aččəw</i>

Table 3. Amharic person marker affixes in perfective and imperfective verb stems. Adopted from Amberber (2003), Leslau (1995), Newman and Aberra (2009)

					PROSODIC TEMPLATE	ASPECTS
(2)	a.	ḥḥC–	<i>səbbər–</i>	‘broke’	CVCCVC–	PERFECTIVE
	b.	ḥḥC–	<i>səbr–</i>	‘breaks/will break’	CVCC–	IMPERFECTIVE
	c.	ḥḥḥC–	<i>səbabbər–</i>	‘broke into pieces’	CVC ₂ VC ₂ C ₂ VC–	ITERATIVE
	d.	ḥḥCḥḥC–	<i>sibirbir–</i>	‘shattered’	CVC ₂ VC ₃ C ₂ VC ₃ –	ITERAT. and INTENSIVE

Once we have the verb stem as set out in example (2) and also represented in Table 2, more TAM inflections and agreement markers (Table 2) are affixed to these constructed stems.

The portmanteau (fused) person, number, and gender agreement markers, the TAM markers, and the consecutive agreement markers are usually affixed to the verb stem.

Thus, the main verb such as $\sqrt{\text{ḥḥC}} \sqrt{sbr}$ ‘break’ changes its prosodic template to encode mainly perfective, imperfective and iterative aspects as shown in Table 2. The suffixes in both Tables 2 and 3 encode either additional aspect distinctions concurrently with the verb stem or with the other inflectional/ derivational elements such as agreement markers and valency-changing morphemes. Thus, the fully-fledged Amharic past and perfective verb has the following forms and structures as sampled in (3):

(3)

<i>a.</i>	<i>səbbər-ə</i> ሰበር-ኧ break.PRFV-3SG.M.SBJ ‘He broke (it).’	<i>b.</i>	<i>səbbər-ə-ññ</i> ሰበር-ኧ-ኝ break.PRFV-3SG.M.SBJ-1SG.OBJ ‘He broke me.’
<i>c.</i>	<i>tə-səbbər-ə</i> ተ-ሰበር-ኧ PASS-break.PRFV-3SG.M-SBJ ‘It was broken.’	<i>d.</i>	<i>as-səbbər-ə</i> አሰ-ሰበር-ኧ CAUS-break.PRFV-3SG.M ‘He made it broken by someone.’

4. Analysis of the lexicalized and grammaticalized meaning extensions of *alə* ‘say’, *al* ‘AUX’, —*al* ‘TAM’

In this section, I analyze the extended meanings of *alə* ‘say’, *al* ‘AUX’, —*al* ‘TAM’ from the lexicalized and figurative meanings to the most grammaticalized meaning senses; from being a verb of communication to that of reporting, mean, understand, call, hit, ignore, causal, purposive, confirmation, negation, invite or forbid to speak, auxiliary, modal auxiliary, expressive, verbalizer and tense-aspect-modal marker. These meaning extensions happened through the language change processes; lexicalization and grammaticalization. The central (literal) sense of *alə* ‘say’ (as in (4) below) is the starting point where *alə* ‘say’ serves as a communication verb (Levin, 1993, p. 202).

(4)	<i>ine</i>	<i>issu-n</i>	<i>al-ku-t</i>
	እኔ	እሱ-ን	አል-ኩ-ት
	I	he-ACC	say-1SG.SBJ-3SG.M.OBJ
	‘I said to him.’		

Example (4) can also have an alternative meaning ‘I said it’ or ‘I told him’ where the verb serves to transfer ideas from a speaker to a hearer. In the following discussions of meaning extensions say is the SOURCE written on the left, the “>” greater than sign indicates the direction of change (= from) and the TARGET meaning, the extended meaning comes after the “>” sign.

4.1. SAY > SPEECH REPORTING

In Amharic, it is usual to replicate a speech that is uttered, rather than to put it into what is called indirect speech. The examples in (5) are illustrative of this nature:

(5)

a.	<i>issu</i>	<i>al-mət t'a-m</i> እሱ አል-መጣ-ዋ he NEG.1SG-come.PRFV-NEG 'he said I will not come'	<i>al-ə</i> አል-ኧ say.PRFV-3SG.M
b.	<i>issu</i>	<i>ay-mət t'a-m</i> እሱ አይ-መጣ-ዋ he NEG.1SG-come.PRFV-NEG '*he _i said, he _i will not come' 'He _i said, he _i will not come'	<i>al-ə</i> አል-ኧ say.PRFV-3SG.M

In (5a) the verb ‘come’ refers to a speaker-agent quoted directly, *al-mət t’a-m* ‘I will not come’. The quoted word has the first person agreement with the speaker-agent while he was also reported as 3SGM with *alə*. In contrast, somebody else reported the speaker-agent’s absence, his not coming in (5b).

Moreover, the independent pronoun, *issu* ‘he’, as in (5a), together with the verb *alə*, refers to the actual subject-agent involved in the event encoded as the third person in the example from the reference point of the actual speaker in the discourse. By contrast, *issu* ‘he’ in (5b) is ambiguous in the indirect speech as it has two co-referential agreement markers: both the main verb “say” and the event. On the semantic grounds, (5a) is factual whereas (5b) has some probability of happening or not happening, as it reflects the opinion or for that matter knowledge and experience of the reporter, not the subject of the main event.

4.2. SAY > MEAN

The verb *alə* ‘say’ also encodes an additional meaning; ‘mean’ with the function of sentence explanation and reformulation (Łykowska, 2006, 808), as in (6):

(6)	<i>yih</i>	<i>min</i>	<i>mə-alət</i>	<i>nə-w</i>
	ይህ	ሞን	መ - አለት	ነው
	this	what 2B	INF-say	be.PRES-3SG.M
	‘What does this mean?’ (LIT. It is to say what?)			

In example (6), it is a request for an interpretation, explanation, or elaboration of the already said utterance as it doesn’t seem to be clear to the hearer and more confirmation is requested.

4.3. SAY > UNDERSTAND

The verb of communication, *alə* ‘say’, lends itself to encoding ‘understand’ and ‘call’, as in (7) and (8):

(7)	<i>buladin</i>	<i>yərswo</i>	<i>məlakəñña</i>	<i>nə-w</i>	<i>biyy-e...</i>
	ቦላዲን	የርሶ ወላክተኛ	ነው	ብይ-ኤ	
	Plowden	2SG.POL messenger		be.PRES-3SG.M	say.IMPRFV-1SG.SCM
	‘My understanding that he, Mr. Plowden, is your envoy ...’ (Asfaw, 1979).				

In a related context, *alə* ‘say’ can co-occur with *ገባ- gəbba-* ‘understand’ and the word *alə* ‘say’ renders a different meaning, ‘idea (Noun)’ (Worku, 2014) የ-አል-ከው ገብቶኛል *yə-al-kəw gəbtoññal*, literally ‘I understand what you said’, ‘I understand your idea/ proposition’. Worku (2014) generalized that the word *alə* ‘say’ is an omnipresent word, where it has figurative senses for words (reports), ideas (proposition), and action (understand and hit).

4.3.1. SAY > CALL

The verb *alə* ‘say’ has figurative meanings, which are directly related to the vocalizing or speaking role call and speak (tell):

(8a)	<i>mamo</i>	<i>yi-l-u-t-al</i>
	ማሞ	ይ-ለ-ኡ-ት-አል
	mamo	3PL-say.IMPRFV-3PL-3SG.M-be
	‘They call him Mamo.’	

4.3.2. SAY > SPEAK/ TELL

-
- (8b) *ant indi-ti-l ay-dəll-əm*
 አንት እንድ-ት-ል አይ-ደል-ኸሞ
 You as/ for –you–say NEG–be–NEG
 ‘It is not (for) you to speak/ to tell.’ (Goldenberg, 1965)
-

4.4. SAY > HIT

The verb *alə* ‘say’ has figurative meanings which do not seem to be related to the vocalizing or speaking role but that of action, it has an extended meaning with an interpretation such as ‘hit’. Consider the example in (9):

-
- (9) *bəl-əu*
 በል-ኸው
 say.IMPRFV.IMP–3SG.M.OBJ
 ‘Hit him!’
-

Example (9) also has the literal meaning ‘say it to him’ and ‘say it’. The form *bəl* in (9) is the imperfective form of *alə*.

4.5. SAY > IGNORE

The entire construction in (10) renders the meaning ‘put him aside’ or ‘ignore him’. The word ‘say’ denotes ignore which can be physical like pushing him aside or figuratively, they did not involve him in the conversation.

-
- (10) *wədə gon al-u-t*
 ወደ ጎን አል-ኡ-ት
 to side say–3PL.S–3SG.M.O
 ‘They put him aside, they ignored him.’
-

4.6. SAY > CAUSAL

At the clause level the verb *alə* ‘say’ may have two subordinating clause marking functions rendering meanings (when, while), ‘causal’ (see §4.6) and ‘purposive’ (see §4.7). For instance, in (11) (see Page 38), it has a causal and in (12), purposive subordinating complementizer meanings.

4.7. SAY > PURPOSIVE

-
- (12) *gəmməd-u tə-bətʃ-o-al si-l*
 ገመድ-ኡ ተ-በጥሰ-አ አል
 rope-DEF PASS-break.IMPRFV-3SG.M.SCM.be when.3sg.m-say
 ast-awwək’-ə-ññ
 አስገት-አ ወቅ-ኸ-ኝ
 CAUS-know.IMPRFV-3SG.M-1SG.OBJ
 ‘He informed me that the rope was broken.’ (Leslau 1995)
-

(11)

<i>inč'ət i-səbir-al-hu</i>	<i>si-l</i>	<i>iŋ-e-n</i>	<i>k'orrət'-ku-t</i>
እንጨት ኢ-ሰብር-እል-ሁ	ሰ-ል	እጅ-ኤ-ን	ቅረጥ-ኩ-ት
wood 1SG-break.IMPRFV-be-1SG	when.1SG-say.IMPRFV	hand-1SG.POSS-ACC	cut.PRFX-1SGS-3SG.M.O
'While I intend to break the wood, I cut my hand.'			

In the above examples, the verb ‘say’ has more of a grammaticalized meaning of subordinating, becoming dependent, with the time-marking proclitic *s-* ‘when, while’. It has the causal rendering where the second action ‘cutting one’s hand’ happens incidentally while performing the first action ‘breaking wood’, as shown in (11). The use of the verb ‘say’ in (12), however, *alə* ‘say’ is related to the reporting function of the verb, here to inform about what happened, ‘the breaking of the rope’.

4.8. SAY > CONFIRMATION

The verb *alə* extends semantically itself to fulfill other vocalizing functions by encoding confirmation or rejection (4.10) of the discourse, as in (13) and (14) respectively:

- | | |
|------|--|
| (13) | <hr/> <i>min-im ay-il</i>
<i>ፖን-እፖ አይ-ል</i>
what-NEG NEG.3SG.M-say
‘it is all right, it is not bad.’ / lit. ‘It does say nothing.’ |
|------|--|

4.9. SAY > NEGATION

- | | |
|------|--|
| (14) | <hr/> <i>bəl inni-hid</i>
<i>በል እንኹድ</i>
say.2SG.M.IMP 1PL-go.IMPRFV.JUSSIVE
‘Come on, let’s go.’ |
|------|--|

Although the above examples show a similar vocalizing function with reporting sense, the use of the verb *alə* ‘say’ has an interesting drift towards a negative connotation of the event or the conversation. At the discourse-level, comments listed as shown below in (16a) to (16b), the sentences have contrasting and negative implications that oppose or disagree with the event that happened or was stated earlier.

4.10. SAY > INVITE or FORBID to SPEAK

- | | |
|------|---|
| (15) | <hr/> <i>bəl inji</i>
<i>በል እንጂ</i>
say focus
‘Say something! Why do you keep quiet?’ (Yimam 1999:35) |
|------|---|

The contrastive pragmatic element *inji* shows “the contrast between the two states of the addressee about the attention he has to pay to what the addresser is going to say. If the addressee fails to respond, if (s)he does not pay attention, or shows no interest in what is being said, the addresser may quit the conversation in either way” (Yimam, 1999), as in (16a) or, as in (16b).

- | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|-----------------------|---|---------------------|-----------------|--|-----------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|--|-----------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|--|--|--|
| (16) | <table border="0"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top; padding-right: 10px;">a.</td> <td> <hr/> <i>bəl təw-ə-w</i>
 <i>በል ተው-ኧ-ው</i>
 say leave-3SG.M.SBJ-3SG.M.OBJ
 ‘Okay, leave it.’ (Yimam, 1999) </td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top; padding-right: 10px;">b.</td> <td> <hr/> <table border="0"> <tr> <td><i>min yi-l-al</i></td> <td><i>yihə bəl</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>ፖን ይ-ል-እል</i></td> <td><i>ይኸ በል</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td>what 3SG.M-say-AUX</td> <td>this one say</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">‘What are you talking about?’</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">Lit. ‘What is he saying, this one, (you) tell me.’ (Yimam, 1999)</td> </tr> </table> </td> </tr> </table> | a. | <hr/> <i>bəl təw-ə-w</i>
<i>በል ተው-ኧ-ው</i>
say leave-3SG.M.SBJ-3SG.M.OBJ
‘Okay, leave it.’ (Yimam, 1999) | | b. | <hr/> <table border="0"> <tr> <td><i>min yi-l-al</i></td> <td><i>yihə bəl</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>ፖን ይ-ል-እል</i></td> <td><i>ይኸ በል</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td>what 3SG.M-say-AUX</td> <td>this one say</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">‘What are you talking about?’</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">Lit. ‘What is he saying, this one, (you) tell me.’ (Yimam, 1999)</td> </tr> </table> | <i>min yi-l-al</i> | <i>yihə bəl</i> | <i>ፖን ይ-ል-እል</i> | <i>ይኸ በል</i> | what 3SG.M-say-AUX | this one say | ‘What are you talking about?’ | | Lit. ‘What is he saying, this one, (you) tell me.’ (Yimam, 1999) | |
| a. | <hr/> <i>bəl təw-ə-w</i>
<i>በል ተው-ኧ-ው</i>
say leave-3SG.M.SBJ-3SG.M.OBJ
‘Okay, leave it.’ (Yimam, 1999) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| b. | <hr/> <table border="0"> <tr> <td><i>min yi-l-al</i></td> <td><i>yihə bəl</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>ፖን ይ-ል-እል</i></td> <td><i>ይኸ በል</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td>what 3SG.M-say-AUX</td> <td>this one say</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">‘What are you talking about?’</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">Lit. ‘What is he saying, this one, (you) tell me.’ (Yimam, 1999)</td> </tr> </table> | <i>min yi-l-al</i> | <i>yihə bəl</i> | <i>ፖን ይ-ል-እል</i> | <i>ይኸ በል</i> | what 3SG.M-say-AUX | this one say | ‘What are you talking about?’ | | Lit. ‘What is he saying, this one, (you) tell me.’ (Yimam, 1999) | | | | | | |
| <i>min yi-l-al</i> | <i>yihə bəl</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>ፖን ይ-ል-እል</i> | <i>ይኸ በል</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| what 3SG.M-say-AUX | this one say | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ‘What are you talking about?’ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Lit. ‘What is he saying, this one, (you) tell me.’ (Yimam, 1999) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

It is also possible to use either (16a) or (16b) if the conversation gets sour between the participants. For example, if one of them begins to attack the other verbally, the victim may express his desire to end the conversation by either expressing his intention politely as (16a) or by reflecting his anger in the form of a surprise, in a form of a question as shown in (16b). In both (16a-b) *bəl* form of *alə* ‘say’ is used in different positions and expressions. The question “What is he saying” is addressed to a third party, real or imaginary, who witnessed the conversation between the participants. The anger and the escalated animosity embodied by the conversation are reflected not only in the verb ‘say’ but in the whole construction.

In sum, the above-lexicalized meaning extensions are figurative meanings of the verb *alə* ‘say’. The word *alə* ‘say’ passed through the process of lexicalization. In these contexts, the verb *alə* has a grammatical status either as a main verb or as a subordinate verb where it controls nominal or clausal complements.

The verb *alə* ‘say’ developed into a dependent grammatical unit and it needed to co-occur with other units, constituents, and words to attain an independent status as being part of the composite verbs. In these contexts, the verb *alə* manifests an auxiliary function. “Auxiliation” is a process whereby a lexical verb develops into an auxiliary grammatical structure over a while, with accompanying semantic, morphosyntactic, and phonological changes (Kuteva, 1994).

4.11. SAY > GRAMMATICALIZED MEANING EXTENSION (AUXILIARY)

4.11.1. SAY > AUXILIARY

Dawkins (1969) called *alə* ‘say’ an “operative” word where words or nonce words are introduced into the verb system. In these constructs, *alə* serves as a locus for inflectional markers, mostly without any sense of the meanings of ‘say’ and without the grammatical collocations, nominal and clausal complements illustrated in the earlier examples (4.1–4.10).

Consider the following contexts:

(17)	a.	<i>kua al-ə</i> ክኡኣ ለል-ኧ knock say.PRFV-3SG.M ‘It sounded (knocked).’	b.	<i>kua kua al-ə</i> ክኡኣ ክኡኣ ለል-ኧ knock knock say.PRFV-3SG.M ‘It rattled, clattered, knocked.’
	c.	<i>k’uč’č’ al-ə</i> ቁጥጥ ለል-ኧ sit say.PRFV-3SG.M ‘He sat down.’	d.	<i>zimm al-ə</i> ዝግግ ለል-ኧ Quiet say.PRFV-3SG.M ‘He kept quiet.’
	e.	<i>išši al-ə</i> እሺ ለል-ኧ All right say.PRFV-3SG.M ‘He said all right/ okay.’	f.	<i>k’əs bəl</i> ቀሰ ስል slow say.2SG.M.IMP ‘Go slow!’ / ‘Be slow!’

First, in examples (17a-f), *alə* aligned itself with the onomatopoeic words, and even, as in (17d) with *zimm* ‘quiet,’ which has a contrasting semantic value to “say”. Even more, as in (17f), we do not see any speaking or vocalizing action except being asked to be slow or go slow.

All the uses (17a-f) illustrated as having complements—or perhaps collocates—of *alə* are onomatopoeic words without any word class status of their own in Amharic. However, this does not mean that all these onomatopoeic or nonce words are equal in their candidacy for the word class status. For example, ቁጥጥ *k’uč’č’* ‘sit’ in (17c), ዝግግ *zimm* ‘quiet’ in (17d), and ቀሰ *k’əs* ‘slow’ in (17f) served as stems for nominals

such as ተቀማጭ *tək'əmmač'č'* ‘deposit’, ‘one who sits, resides’, ዝጥጥር *zimmtəñña* ‘an introvert’, and ዝጥጥር *k'əsəstəñña* ‘a slow mover’.

Second, as Rosen (1997) suggested there are some diagnostic syntactic tests for identifying auxiliary status. For the present purpose, the verb formation, valency changing, negation, and co-occurrence restrictions are mentioned. For example, an auxiliary “cannot be causative” and “cannot be negated” (Rosen, 1997, 176). In the example below, the perfective *alə* does not have a grammatical causative form. The asterisk (*) before example (18b) indicates a hypothetical ungrammatical construction.

(18)	a.	<i>al-ə</i> አለ-ኧ say.PRFV–3SG.M ‘He said’	(19)		<i>as-bal-ə</i> ; አሰ-ባለ-ኧ CAUS–say.IMPRFV–3SG.M ‘He made or caused it to be said’
	b.	* <i>as-al-ə</i> አሰ-አለ-ኧ CAUS–say.PRFV–3SG.M ‘He caused (it) to be said’			

In contrast to (18b), the imperfective form of ‘say,’ *bal*, collocates with the causative in (19). Note that this causative construction is for the lexical “say,” not for its auxiliary sense of meaning, the carrier of TAM. To add one more example, auxiliaries may or may not be negated with the Amharic negation marker *al-...-m* as in (20):

(20)	a.	<i>alə</i> አለ say.PRFV–3SG.M ‘He said’	b.	<i>al-al-ə-m</i> አለ-አለ-ኧ-ም NEG –say.PRFV–3SG.M–NEG ‘He did not say’

Considering its syntactic properties, the verb *alə* ‘say’ is conjugated for negation like the regular verbs of Amharic; thus the discontinuous negation marker *al-...-m*. *alə* ‘he said’ becomes *al-al-ə-m* ‘he did not say’ or *ay-il-m* ‘he will not say’. Yet, in its status as an auxiliary, the verb ‘say’ cannot be negated.

4.11.2. SAY (AUX) > VALENCY CHANGER (INTRANSITIVE)

Even though *alə* ‘say’ as an auxiliary verb cannot be causative, it can function as a valency changer for the coverb, the word it collocates with, in the phrasal (composite) verb construction. When *al* ‘AUX’ collocates with another verb or nonce word, the construction, the verbal composite, becomes intransitive whereas when አደረገ *adərrəgə* collocates with another verb or nonce word the construction, the verbal composite becomes a transitive.

The verb *alə* contrasts with the auxiliary አደረገ *adərrəgə* ‘he makes’/ ‘he does’ and functions as valency changing auxiliary in encoding periphrastic causative/non-causative distinctions. These contrasting patterns are demonstrated in example (21):

(21)	a.	<i>kəṭəff</i>	<i>adərrəg–ə</i>	a'.	<i>kəṭəff</i>	<i>al–ə</i>
		ከተፍ	አደረግ-ኧ		ከተፍ	አል-ኧ
		slice.PRFV	make/ do.PRFV–3SG.M		slice.PRFV	AUX.PRFV–3SG.M
		‘He made it to appear suddenly’			‘He appears suddenly’	
	b.	<i>č’illit’</i>	<i>adərrəg–ə</i>	b'.	<i>č’illit’</i>	<i>al–ə</i>
		ጭልጥ	አደረግ-ኧ		ጭልጥ	አል-ኧ
		finish.PRFV	make/ do.PRFV–3SG.M		finish.PRFV	AUX.PRFV–3SG.M
		‘He drank it completely’ whereas			‘He vanished/ got into deep concentration’	

In (21a') and (21b') *alə* is used as an intransitive marking auxiliary to mark the execution of the event or the act by the experiencer. The contrasting examples in (21a) and (21b) use *adərrəgə* ‘do’ to encode transitivity, the agent doing something. It shows that the agent becomes the cause of the action instead of becoming the experience.

It is also the case that these two valency changers collocated with intransitive and transitive verbs respectively where already the construction is intransitive and transitive. There are also cases where both *alə* and *adərrəgə* collocate with similar verbs or nonce words specifically motion verbs where the construction is rendered as intransitive and transitive respectively.

The successive diachronic grammatical processes of *alə* to that of auxiliary and valency changer as: Lexical verb (‘say’) > (desemanticized) aux. verb (by functional split) (Wetter 2002) to:

- (a) Lexical verb (‘say’) > quotative verb > (desemanticized) aux. verb (intransitive)
 (b) Lexical verb (‘say’) > quotative verb > (desemanticized) aux. verb (transitive)

(22a)	ካሳ አለ <i>kassa alə</i> > ካሳ መጣ-ሁ አለ <i>kassa mət’ t’a-hu alə</i> > ካሳ ዝግደ አለ <i>kassa zimm alə</i> (intransitive) K. say/tell:3SG.M > K. come-1SG say:3SG.M > K. quiet say:3SG.M ‘Kassa told/said’; ‘Kassa said, ‘I come’; ‘Kassa kept quiet’
(22b)	ካሳ አለ <i>kassa alə</i> > ካሳ መጣ-ሁ አለ <i>kassa mət’ t’a-hu alə</i> > ካሳ ዝግደ ጭጭ አደረገ <i>kassa zimm č’ič’č’ə adərrəgə</i> (transitive) K. say/tell:3SG.M > K. come-1SG say:3SG.M > K. quiet (shout-shout) made:3SG.M ‘Kassa told/said’; ‘Kassa said, ‘I come’; ‘Kassa made keep quiet’

4.11.3. SAY (AUX) > MODAL AUXILIARY

The verb *alə* in its auxiliary function interacts with other Amharic auxiliaries in the verbal system by collocating in wider grammatical contexts. For instance, *alə* serves in the imperative construction as a carrier of tense, aspect, and mood, as in (23e) (Łykowska, 2003). For some verbs, it shows intensity and still for others it shows swift movement. In real divergent cases, *alə* changes the meaning of the word it collocates with. The examples (23) are from Dawkins (1969):

The examples in (23) are further illustrations of the auxiliary status of *alə* ‘say’. The examples in (23) are different in the sense that the words “return”, “turn”, “passed”, “sliced”, and “dream” are sources of the collocates in the *alə* construction. The *al* ‘AUX’ rendered an extension of the vocalizing role where the non-verb-like elements or structures can be introduced in the verbal system or structure of the language.

a.	<i>mələss</i> መለሰ return 'Turn around, face about (cool down, create peace)'	<i>al-ə</i> ለል-ኧ AUX.PRFV-3SG.M	b.	<i>zorr</i> ዘር turn a little 'Make way (get out of the way)'	<i>al-ə</i> ለል-ኧ AUX.PRFV-3SG.M
c.	<i>alləf-ə</i> ለለፍ-ኧ pass.PRFV-3SG.M 'He passed'		vs.	<i>illiff</i> ለለፍ pass 'Move a little far.'	<i>al-ə</i> ለል-ኧ AUX.PRFV-3SG.M
d.	<i>kəttəf-ə</i> ከተፍ-ኧ slice.PRFV -3SG.M 'He sliced'		vs.	<i>kətaff</i> ከተፍ pass 'He appears suddenly'	<i>al-ə</i> ለል-ኧ AUX.PRFV-3SG.M
e.	<i>alləm-ə</i> ለለሞ-ኧ dream.PRFV-3SG.M 'He dreamt'		vs.	<i>illimm</i> ለለሞ pass 'He vanished'	<i>al-ə</i> ለል-ኧ dream AUX.PRFV-3SG.M

4.11.4. SAY (AUX) > VERBALIZER

Amharic uses *alə* as a carrier of inflectional elements of verbs (as a verbalizer) to introduce non-verb-like elements into the verbal system, thus rendering meanings intended by the speaker that may not easily be encoded by the standard verb conjugations. For instance, *kəttəf* as in (23d) below (25) has two components: swiftness of cutting into slices and repeatability of the slicing action to produce smaller and smaller items.

(24)	<i>kəttəf-ə</i>	vs	<i>kəttəff</i>	<i>al-ə</i>
	ከተፍ-ኧ		ከተፍ	አል-ኧ
	slice.PRFV -3SG.M		slice.PRFV	AUX.PRFV-3SG.M
	‘He sliced’		‘He appears suddenly.’	

The standard verb conjugation does not allow encoding these two aspects of the event of slicing. By contrast, the verb *alə* allows the speaker to encode the intended iterative meaning:

(25)	<i>kitiftiftiftif alə</i>	ከትፍትፍትፍትፍ አለ	‘It sliced and sliced into smaller size.’
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In example (25) *alə* does not encode an agent or doer of the slicing, but the unspecified patient which undergoes the process of being intensely sliced. It is equivalent in the sense of the passive structure where the valency is reduced. Likewise, Amharic also uses *adərrəgə* ‘he makes/does’ as valency-changing devices that contrast with *alə* as discussed in (3.12.2).

Łykowska (2006) used “PRO-VERBS” parallel to that of PRO-NOUNs for the verbalizer (verb-maker, in place of the verb). To avoid confusion between the term proverb ‘for sayings’ and “PRO-VERBS” of Łykowska, a verbalizer has been adopted for the verb-making function of *alə* ‘AUX’. Meyer (2024) identified *alə* not only as an introducer of non-verbal elements but also introducer of loan words into the verbal system of Amharic.

4.11.5. SAY (AUX) > EXPRESSIVE

Amharic expressives are mainly compounding of a desemanticized lexical verb *alə* ‘say’ which acquired a status of auxiliary, and collocate (co-occur) with any preceding nominal, deverbal, defective verb or adjectival words. The expressive tells us about the feelings of the agent or the emotional load of the event represented in the verbal construction. I argue that Amharic expressives are formed in three productive processes:

- | | |
|-------|---|
| (a) | Reduplication of non-finite /prefix necessitating forms as in |
| | <i>tə-billəč’č’əlləč’č’-ə</i> from <i>billič’č’</i> ‘sparked’ |
| | ተ-በለጩለጩኛ-ኧ ብልጩ |
| (26) | PASS-glitter-glitter-PERF-3SG.M |
| | ‘He glitters and glitters.’ |
| (b) | Compounding with a desemanticized auxiliary <i>alə</i> or <i>adərrəgə</i> as in (27a)–(27b) |
| (27a) | <i>billič’č’ alə</i> ብልጩ አለ ‘He sparked ones.’ (Lit. It sparked ones.) |
| (27b) | <i>billič’č’ adərrəgə</i> ብልጩ አደረገ ‘He made it sparked.’ |

Or reduplicating the adjectival with *alə* as in:

- | | |
|------|---|
| | <i>hodun barr barr; libunn firhat firhat yiləw nəbbər</i> |
| (28) | ሆዱን ባር ባር፣ ልቡን ፍርሃት ፍርሃት ይለው ነበር |
| | ‘Son votre tremblait, son cœur était frappe d’epouvante’ (Kapeliuk, 1984) |

(c) By onomatopoeic forms expressing both absolute and relative iconicity unlike Gasser (2004)

- | | | |
|------|---|--|
| (29) | <i>an-gəč'č'aggəč'-ə</i>
ኣ ጎ-ገጫ ገጫ-ኧ
3SG.M:make-collided repeatedly
'He made collided repeatedly.' | from <i>gəč'č'-ə</i>
ገጫ-ኧ
'It bumped! It collided' |
|------|---|--|

4.12. SAY > TAM (affix *-al*)

In addition to its lexical and dependent auxiliary status, the verb ኣለ *alə* 'say' became an inflectional unit, *-al* tense, aspect and modal marker. The verb *alə* 'say' follows a path of grammaticalization process to the status of AUXILIARY (*al*) and a TAM marking affix (*-al*) in the language in contemporary Amharic as schematized in (30) while it still functions as a lexical verb:

- (30) *Verb*₁ √*bhl* > *alə* 'say' > *auxiliary*1 *alə* > *auxiliary*1 (final vowel reduction) *al* > suffix *-al*¹

Aberra (in press) argued, there were language changes in Amharic that involved phonological depletion of frequent verbs from three radicals such as √*bhl* 'say' to two and one radical *al* 'say'; post-1700 VSO to SOV word order change of Amharic transitive sentences from Verb-Subject-Object to Subject-Object-Verb (Bach, 1970, Hudson, 1972, Tremblay, 1987) and the cliticization (of the monosyllabic words) rule of Amharic which applies to all single syllable language units to have dependent status, i.e., they have to be attached to the next available host, larger language unit of the language.

Moreover, in its affixal form, the verb in the structure merges and comes into play as a locus for inflectional markers and in SOV languages the verb inflectional markers tend to have a fixed position, the final position. It is possible to draw on supporting evidence for this claim from the linguistic studies of Amharic (Amberber, 2003). Amharic uses the form *al* with the same meaning 'AUX' as illustrated in (31). Thus, having a fixed position and fixed role, the same meaning, led *-al* to be at the endpoint of its grammaticalization process. Semantically, the suffix *-al* encodes habitual, imperfective and completeness/ relevance of the verb:

- (31) *yi-assib-al*
 ይ-ኣሰብ-ኣል
 3SG.M-think.IMPRFV-say-INFL
 'He thinks' (Amberber 2003)

5. Discussion of why the verb *alə* 'say', *al* 'AUX', and *-al* 'AFFIX' have extended meanings and how the forms are interrelated

The three verbal units, *alə* 'say', *al* 'AUX', and *-al* 'TENSE-ASPECT-MODAL' marker, have varied extended meanings. Subsets of these varied extended meanings analyzed in Section (4) have lexicalization and grammaticalization routes; when the units end up having a lexical word different from the meaning 'say' the route (the process), is lexicalization. In all other cases when the extended meanings resulted in having grammatical meaning, the route is grammaticalization.

Once again, Amharic was a verb-initial language (Bach, 1970, Hudson, 1972, Tremblay, 1987). In a transitive sentence where there are subject (s), object (o), and verb (v), the verb comes initial, the subject medial, and the object final (vSO). Although words in a language move freely especially for various communicative purposes, from position to position (Initial, Medial, Final) generally subjects, objects and verbs prefer certain positions in most cases. Amharic changed its order from VSO – to "strict SOV".

In this change, Amharic verbs have assumed the final position in the sentence. This final position is shared by verbs (such as *alə* ‘say’), auxiliaries (helping verbs) (such as *al* ‘AUX’), and inflectional markers (such as *–al* ‘TENSE-ASPECT-MODAL’ marker). Sharing the final position by the three verbal units, *alə* ‘say’, *al* ‘AUX’, and *–al* ‘TENSE-ASPECT-MODAL’ markers helped us to hypothesize that they may be the same.

Prototypical Amharic verbs such as ንግር *ṅgr* ‘tell’ or ብህል *ḅhl* ‘say’ have three consonants, however, frequent verbs and other words of Amharic have either two consonants or one (ነው *nw* ‘be’, ብል *bl* ‘eat’, ሸ *š* ‘seek’). The frequent word አለ *alə* ‘say’ has one consonant (*l*) and one vowel (*a*) - which made it similar to አል *al* AUXILIARY and -አል *–al* INFLECTIONAL MARKER. From the word ብህል *ḅhl* ‘say’ two sounds were lost (deleted) but with some residues in some constructions. The sound *b* was completely lost without a trace from *alə* but *h* was lost with a trace *a*, *h* > *a* (Voigt, 1980). So *ḅhl* ‘say’ which end up in being *alə*.

Although the latter two, *al* auxiliary and *–al* inflectional markers, have no history to indicate they have other sounds the verb *alə* ‘say’, however, has a history where it was made up of three sounds *ḅhl* ‘say’ and lost the first two sounds. There are various tests and pieces of evidence to show that *al* was *ḅhl*. For instance, the two semantically related nouns *bahil*, and *bihil* have all three sounds. Some verb conjugations also show that ‘say’ has two sounds *b* and *l* as in *bəl* ‘you say it’.

The word አለ *alə* ‘say’ sharing a similar form and a final position with *al* ‘AUX’ and *al* ‘INFL’ is an utterance word, a communication word in its basic meaning.

As a result of its being a communication verb, *alə* ‘say’ represents other events (actions) and prior conversation (communication) as an event. These functions lend *alə* ‘say’ to be a reporting verb (cf. 4.1). And being a reporting verb, a representative verb in the words of Dawkins (1969) an “operative verb” enables it to carry additional meanings of communication. When the event requires a response of some kind; as a result, the word ‘say’ has been used.

If the event response requires clarification, explanation, definition, and understanding, the responder used *alə* ‘say’ as a reporting (4.1); meaning (explaining) (4.2); understanding (4.3); and calling (naming) or not calling (4.4). However, if the event response requires more than the communicative response that is a follow-up action-event *alə* ‘say’ may mean hit it (4.5); ignore it (4.6); or why the event was happening, the cause of it (4.7); the purpose of it (4.8); or positive confirmation to the event is needed (4.9) or negative confirmation (4.10), or total rejection or invitation to respond (4.11).

In these eleven lexicalized meanings of *alə* ‘say’, the event or the first utterance gets a physical or verbal response be it an explanation or rejection of the event or the utterance.

However, the verb *alə* ‘say’ may lose its basic meaning ‘say’ and simply serves as a filler, as an operative verb (also with አደረገ *adərrəgə* ‘do’, አሰኘ *asəññə* ‘to name’ (Łykowska, 2006, 807-808)) of some kind. This evokes the auxiliary (helping) capability of *alə* ‘say’ (4.12.1). In this case, the verb *alə* ‘say’ lost its meaning (desemanticized), lost its syntactic category as a main verb (decategorized) and downgraded to the status of helping verb (“PRO-VERB” (Łykowska, 2006)). In this capacity, *al* ‘AUX’ with another lexical (meaning) component of the verb may serve as a valency changer (introducer of an agent/ actor of the event (4.12.2); expresses of the agent’s action (4.12.3); a carrier of verb conjugations (4.12.4); and a carrier of the agent’s (the event’s) feelings, situations (4.12.5).

Being in a fixed position, sentence-final, losing either its semantics and syntax may reduce the status of *alə* ‘say’ from being as a verb or an auxiliary, and still *alə* ‘say’ serves not as a carrier of conjugation but it, itself becomes a verb conjugation by marking the portmanteau tense, aspect, and modal of the verb.

6. Conclusion

Contemporary Amharic has three verbal forms sharing phonological similarity: *alə* ‘say’, *al* ‘AUX’, and *–al* ‘TAM’ affix. Although their syntactic and semantic roles are different, they are the same as the latter are

the extensions of *alə* ‘say’ to that of encoding grammatical items, hence the process is of semantic extensions. On a larger scale, the auxiliation trend of the Amharic verb *alə* ‘say’ reflects the grammaticalization trend observed for like items in other languages (Aberra, 2025, Heine and Kuteva, 2002). What makes the Amharic case interesting—is the ultimate conflation of the verb into an auxiliary, *al* and a syncretized TAM marking affix *–al*. Even though, previous literature treated them as if they were independent of each other in forms and functions. On the contrary, this study presents an alternative description: by studying the three forms together based on converging evidence: 1) their polysemic meanings and associated grammatical contexts; 2) their syntactic roles; and 3) the interaction of cliticization and phonological rules of both the diachronic and synchronic nature. This alternative argument reports meaning extensions of the Amharic verb *alə* ‘to say’ *al* ‘AUX’ *–al* ‘INFL’ focusing from being a verb of communication to that of reporting, mean, understand, call, hit, ignore, causal, purposive, confirmation, negation, invite or forbid to speak, auxiliary, valency changer (intransitive), modal auxiliary, verbalizer, expressive and tense-aspect-modal marker.

7. Recommendation

Transitions of the change of word order from vso to sov and the phonological rules and cliticization of the language in that order seem interesting as they did not get traction in the descriptions of Amharic studies except for Mullen (1986) “pronominal clitics”; Gasser (1985) “the enclitics *m* and *ss*,” and the mention of proclitics and enclitics in Leslau (1995). The three rules have wide-reaching effects as almost all monosyllabic words of grammatical nature undergo these processes consistently. The inflectional roles and meanings of *–al* ‘INFL’ have to be discussed in comparison and contrast with other tense-aspect-modal inflections of Amharic. In addition, these rules do not seem to be also restricted to Amharic (Ethio-Semitic), but they seem to have also wide-reaching effects in other Semitic languages as the recent studies of ancient Semitic languages attested: Elamite Stolper (2008), Akkadian and Eblaite (Huehnergard and Woods, 2008), and Geez (Gragg, 2008). This history and changes observed beyond Amharic warrant further study.

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