NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

THE GENITIVE CONSTRUCTION OF POSSESSION
IN AMHARIC

BY

GIRMA GETAHUN

A Linguistic Project submitted to the Graduate School in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts in Translation Studies

Approved:
First Reader:  
DR. Maik Gibson

Second Reader:  
Mrs. Mary Huttar

External Reader:  
DR. Okoth Okombo

July, 2007
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I declare that this is my original work and has not been submitted to any other Collage or University for academic credit.

(Signed) Girma Getahun

July, 2007
ABSTRACT

This paper presents the morphosyntactic markers of the genitive construction in Amharic. In Amharic, genitive markers are bound morphemes which are either prefixed or suffixed to the noun they modify. The genitive markers show some morphological and inflectional characteristics different from languages such as English and Greek. Amharic’s uniqueness makes it difficult to directly apply the methods proposed for these languages to the analysis of noun phrases that form the Amharic genitive. In this paper I present the construction of genitives in Amharic by taking examples of noun phrases that are frequently used in written and oral communication.
TO:

My mother Yeshimebet Kassa who passed away while I was working on this linguistic project
And
  My wife Senait Shiferaw
  and my daughter Bethlehem Girma
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

To God is the glory for enabling me to complete this work though inconvenient health challenges.

Secondly, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr George Huttar, the Translation Department Head for encouraging me and appreciating my challenges to create a proper solution.

My gratitude goes to Dr Maik Gibson, my project supervisor, despite his task as lecturer, for giving priority to supervise, for giving comments on my drafts several times, for suggestions, advice and directing the proper order of presenting this linguistic project. My thanks also go to Mrs. Mary Huttar my second reader for suggestions and encouragement that have been conducive to the accomplishment of this project.

Thirdly, I would like to thank SIL and Wycliffe Africa Area members, in particular Mr. Simon Caudwell, Ethiopian Branch (ETB) director, ETB colleague members and Mr. Edwin Kiptinness for their continuous praying, sharing burdens, encouragement and visiting me at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology.

Finally my thanks go to Ethiopian friends who are living on campus for their prayers and giving moral support during my grief time because of the death of my mother three months ago. I would like to thank my lovely wife Senait and our daughter Bethlehem for their unfailing love, continuous prayers, moral and spiritual supports during the course of our ups and downs.

May God bless all who have contributed for the accomplishment of this project!
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<td>OEF</td>
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<td>PN</td>
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<td>prepositional phrase</td>
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<td>SG</td>
<td>singular</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Each language has its own phonology (sound system), morphology (the structure of words), syntax (the combination of words into sentences), and semantics (the way in which sounds and meanings are related). So it is very important to give an introduction of Amharic from a linguistic point of view.

Background

Language

Amharic is a language of Ethiopia belonging to the South Ethiopic group of South Semitic languages, which, in turn, belong to the Semitic subfamily of the Afro-Asiatic-family of languages (Grimes, 2000).

Amharic, also called Abyssinian, Amaripa or Kucamba, is spoken by more than 18 million people as a first language and is used as a lingua franca throughout much of central highland Ethiopia. Amharic is also the language of more than 3 million Ethiopians who have immigrated to other lands. It is the second most commonly spoken Semitic language in the world, after Arabic.
Its status as national language is principally due to the long dominance of the Ethiopian monarchy by Amhara (the inhabitants of the northern highlands of Ethiopia). The name of the language was thus derived from Amhara. Amharic is related to Geez, which is still the classical and ecclesiastical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Though manuscripts in Amharic are known from the 14th century, the language has only recently been used as a general medium for literature, journalism, and education. Amharic employs a modification of the Ethiopic script (Lambdin, 1978). Amharic has been considerably influenced in its grammar and vocabulary by the nearby Cushitic tongues. (Britannica Concise Encyclopedia, 2006, s.v."Amhara")

Amharic is written in a script called fidel or abugida, a consonant-based syllabary, more properly an alphasyl/abary. It was adapted from Geez. Originally, the script contained only symbols for consonants with no indication of vowels which were added in the 3rd century A.D (Britannica Concise Encyclopedia, 2006, s.v. "Ethiopian Semitic Languages")

Amharic is used in government, public media, and national commerce, education to eighth grade in many areas and a wide variety of literature (fiction, poetry, plays, and magazines). It is also widely used in the evangelical churches of Ethiopia.

**Sound and Orthography**

Consonant and vowel phonemes
There is no agreed-on way of transliterating Amharic into Roman characters.

The Amharic examples in the sections below use one system that is common, though not universal, among linguists specializing in Ethiopian Semitic languages. The Amharic ejectives correspond to the Proto-Semitic "emphatic
consonants", usually transcribed with a dot below the letter, (Britannica concise Encyclopedia, 2006, s.v. "proto-Semitic,"). The consonant and vowel charts give these symbols in parentheses where they differ from the standard IPA symbols. 33 phonemes (altogether with over-differentiation), contained in this orthography are listed below. The script has 33 basic characters, each of which has seven forms depending on which vowel is added to the consonant. It is written horizontally from left to right. Amharic has 7 vowels.  
A distinguishing feature of consonants in Amharic is the presence of ejective sounds \( lp' \), \( tt' \), \( lk' \), \( lc' \), and \( ls' \).

The syllable patterns are \( eV \), \( eve \), \( v \), and \( evee \)

**Amharic orthography**

Vowels

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<tr>
<th>Phonemes</th>
<th>Graphemes</th>
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## Vowel Chart

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## Consonants

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<td>Plosives</td>
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<td>Trills</td>
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<td>Central Approximants</td>
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<td>Ejectives</td>
<td>P'</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

P' and v are borrowed
Word Order
The typical word order of Amharic is Subject-Object-Verb (SOV); prepositions, genitives, articles, and relatives precede noun heads. Question words appear either at the start of the sentence or at the end of the sentence. Case affixes and verb suffixes show person, number, and gender of subject.

Purpose of the Paper

Since Amharic is a language of wider communication and a national language of Ethiopia, it has many functions. All Bible translator training is conducted in Amharic, because the majority of the Bible translators cannot understand English. The Amharic Bible is used as a reference by most of the Bible translators. Thus translators must be able to use the Amharic Bible properly. To exploit the Amharic Bible for the purpose of translation requires the translators to know the morphosyntax of Amharic. Translators must know how a genitive construction in Amharic is marked to give the proper interpretation in their vernacular translation.

For example in Mark 1:4

1. \( \beta\acute{a}πτισμα \)
   \( \textit{baptisma} \)
   
   baptism.ACC.NEU.S
   
   \( \text{ΠΕ\Upsilon\omicron\omicron} \)

\( \text{Baptism of repentance'} \)

In Amharic this genitive construction is marked as;

(2) \( \text{ye-niseha} \)

\( t'\text{imk'et} \)

\( =\text{oss-repentance} \)

\( =\text{baptism} \)

\( \text{'Baptism of repentance'} \)
As it is seen in the above example ye-is a genitive marker.

Presentation of the Problem

How are genitive constructions marked in Amharic? Is there a particular particle or a bound morpheme that marks the genitive construction in Amharic? By applying our linguistic understanding, is it easy to identify one form of construction from those that look like genitive markers?

"Languages typically express many semantic relationships with some formal constructions used to express ownership. We call such formal construction possessive constructions, even though the semantic relation is not always one of possession." (Payne, 1997, 104).

For example, the noun phrase "his doctor" doesn't refer to a doctor that he "possesses" in the same way that his car refers to the car he possesses. Genitive case can be described as saying something about another noun within the same context. The description, however, can be done from different perspectives. (Payne, 1997)

The genitive of possession in this paper is the means by which the ownership relation is marked.

Many languages have their own morphological processes by which stems can be formally altered to adjust its meaning to fit its syntactic and communicational context. Amharic usually employs bound morphemes.

Data Collection Method

The data for this linguistic project was collected from different sources, daily conversation, Amharic Bible, Amharic student texts, Amharic newspapers and
my own understanding of the language as a native speaker in both oral and written materials.
CHAPTER 2
YE- AS A GENITIVE MARKER

Ye- has many different functions when suffixed and prefixed to noun and verbs. For example, it may work as a nominalizer. This paper focuses on the genitive function of ye-. Ye- is mainly used in the construction of a genitive case in Amharic. It is prefixed to a noun or a pronoun which is the possessor.

Nominal Possession

According to Trask possession is defined as 'a general name for any relation between two noun phrases by which the second in some sense 'belongs to' the first.' Possession is expressed in two main ways: by a possessive construction, in which the two noun phrases are involved and by a predication of possession. In this paper we will see possession expressed by a possessive construction (Trask, 1993, 212).

Material Possession

In this paper, items that can be sold, bought or transferred, such as a house, a cow, a car, a farm, etc are said to be material possessions

Ye- prefixed on a Noun

ye- + NP1 + NP2→Possessor + Possessum

(3) ye-yohannis bet ta-dese
'John's house' was renewed.

(4)  

ye-daniel mes'ehaf tikur new  

=css-Daniel! book black is  

'Daniel's book is black.'

As we can see in examples (3) and (4) ye- is prefixed on the possessors, John and Daniel, to show that the house and book are owned by them, respectively.

The plural marker for all nouns is -oc or -woc. There is no change in forms when the possessum is plural.

(5)  

ye-yohannis bet-oc  

=oss-John house-PL  

'John's houses'

(6)  

ye-yohannis wuSa-woc  

=oss-John dog-PL  

'John's dogs'

(7)  

*yohannis bet tadeses  

John house be.r. -Asr.renew  

Example (7) doesn't make sense to any Amharic speaker because it is grammatically wrong.

When the same or different materials are possessed between different persons or entities, ye- is prefixed to each of them. Look at examples; (8), (9) and (10) each coordinative possessor is prefixed by ye-.

(8)  

ye-yohannis ye-daniel-na ye-sara mekina  

=oss-John =oss-Daniel-and =oss-Sara car
John's, Daniel's and Sara's car.'

(9) ye-yohannis mekina ye-daniel feres-na ye-sara

ahiya
=oss-John car poss-Daniel horse-and =oss-sara
donkey

John's car, Daniel's horse and Sara's donkey.'

(10) ye-mengist-na ye-dirijit mekina-woc

Poss-government-and =oss-organization car-PL

'Government's and organization's cars.'

Ye-prefixed to a pronoun marking ownership

The pronoun which functions as a noun phrase is prefixed by ye- to denote
possession. Although the pronoun inflects with person and number, ye-
remains the same.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1st</td>
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<td>anci</td>
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<td>you</td>
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<td>3rd</td>
<td>3rd</td>
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<tr>
<td>iswa</td>
<td>isu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>she</td>
<td>he/it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First person personal pronoun

(11) ye-ine bet tilik new
=oss-tso house big is

'My house is big.'

(12) ye-ipa bet tilik new
=oss-j PL house big is

'Our house is big.'

Second person personal pronoun in gender and number

Unlike English, Amharic differentiates between masculine and feminine in second person singular. Consider examples (13) and (14). Ye does not alter, but rather use the same form for singular, plural and different persons.

(13) ye-ante irSa
POSS-2SG.M farm

'Your (male) farm'

(14) ye-anci irSa
POSS-2SG.F farm

'Your (female) farm,

(15) ye-inante irSa
POSS-2PL farm

'Your (plural) farm'

Third person personal pronoun in gender and number

Amharic uses different forms for third person masculine and feminine.
All of Amharic personal pronouns have vowels in initial position. When ye-is prefixed to a pronoun, either the contracted or the non-contracted form can be used. The contracted form omits a vowel based on a phonological rule (morphophonemic rule):

\[
[yə-] + [+\text{back}] \rightarrow [ya-]
\]

\[
[ye-] + [-\text{back}] \rightarrow [ye-]
\]

For example:

19) \ ye- + ante \ \sim \ yante
\ POSS- + 2SG.M -+ yours

20) \ ye- + ine \ \rightarrow \ yene
\ POSS- + 1sG -+ mine

Since the two alternatives, the contracted and non-contracted forms, are
acceptable, I have used the non-contracted form in this paper.
Other Types of Possession

This section discusses other types of possession including kinship, body part relations, and abstract possession.

**Ye- Used to Encode Kinship Relations**

This construction focuses on family relationship. According to cultural conventions of the Amharic-speaking people, husband-wife and parent-children relations can be categorized with genitive of possession. Although kinship relations have different interpretations from possessing materials, I have used =oss to indicate kinship relations.

In Amharic ye-is prefixed to the noun or pronoun it marks to show marriage or any other kinship relation (father, sister, brother, etc) with another noun in a noun phrase.

\[
\begin{align*}
  (21) \quad & \text{ye-yohannis } ii \quad \text{wede } nairobi \quad \text{hed-e} \\
  & =\text{oss-John son to Nairobi went-3SG.M} \\
  & \text{'}John's son went to Nairobi.' \\
\end{align*}
\]

This construction refers to legal son (such as adopted child) or born physically from the father, in this case *Yohannis*.

\[
\begin{align*}
  (22) \quad & \text{ye-yohannis mist ke-addis } ababa \quad \text{met'ae} \\
  & =\text{oss-John wife pp-Addis Ababa came-3SG.M} \\
  & \text{'}John's wife came from Addis Ababa.' \\
\end{align*}
\]

According to (22) the wife belongs only to Yohannis. The husband may have another wife or wives but there is no case where a wife has more than one husband.

\[
\begin{align*}
  (23) \quad & \text{Yohannis ye-IPA won dim new} \\
  & \text{John brother i} \\
  & =\text{oss-t PL} \\
\end{align*}
\]
'John is our brother.'

As we can see in examples (22), (23) and (24) the possessor must be followed by the possessum.

(24) yohannis ye-ine agot new
    John =oss-tsc uncle is

  'John is my uncle.'

**Abstract Possession**

Abstract concepts such as knowledge, spirit, sickness, god, love, soul, etc can be possessed.

(25) ye-ine iwk’et
    =oss-t SG knowledge

  'My knowledge'

(26) ye-israel amlak

  'poss-Israel's God'

  'Israel's God'

**Possession of Body Parts**

Amharic uses ye- as a possessive marker for both non-human and human body parts.

Non-human

(27) ye-t’erep’eza-w igir ac’ir new
    =oss-tabre-oes leg short is

  'The table's leg is short.'

In example (27) the leg is a part of the table.

(28) ye-duba fire
=oss-pumpkin fruit
'Pumpkin's fruit' (Text Folk Tale (Amharic))

Human

(29) ye-aster s'egur rejim new

=oss-aster hair-3sG.F long is
'Aster's hair is long.'

(30) ye-ne hod tamoal

=oss-tso stomach is sick
'My stomach is sick'

ye- With a Noun Phrase Embedded Under Another Noun Phrase

When a recursively embedded noun phrase occurs in a sentence ye-is prefixed only once on the first noun in the possessor-possessum order.

(31) ye-daniel wen dim mist mekina adis new

=oss-oaniet brother wife car new is
'Daniel's brother's wife's car is new.'

(32) ye-yohannis mist abat ihit mekina keyi new

=oss-john wife father sister car red is
'John's wife's father's sister's car is red.'

As we have seen in examples (31) and (32) above there is only one possible possessive marker on the first noun which is the main reference for the other nouns in the sentence. In example (31) the possessor of the possessed noun (car) is the noun immediately in front of the possessed item, 'wife' which precedes the 'car' (the possessum). The purpose of such sentences is to make clear to whom the possessed item belongs in a situation where the possessor is not known.
**Ye-prefixes Used for other Functions**

Since ye- has many functions, all ye- prefixes do not mark possession. It is important to check the type of the phrases and the order of the nouns related to the ye- prefix. I have used the gloss, POSS, to indicate the genitive relationship such as location (33) and (34). Consider the following examples.

**Ye- As a Locative Marker**

ye- can be prefixed on the noun to locate the place.

(33) ye-autobus mak'omia
    =oss-bus stop
    'Bus station'

(34) ye-sira bota
    =oss-work place
    'The place of work.'

**Ye- As Temporal Marking**

Ye- can be prefixed to a noun to indicate time (day, season or hour).

(35) ye-lidet ken
    =oss-birth day
    'Day of birth/birth day'

(36) ye-azmera wek'it
    =oss-harvest season
    'Season of harvest'
(37) ye-mehita      se2at

    pass-sleeping hour
    'Time of sleeping'

**Ye-In Causative Construction**

*ye-* can be prefixed to a noun to confirm the cause of the event.

(38) ye-gorf  adega

    pass-flood calamity
    'flood's calamity

**Ye- As Cause/Agent? Producer of the Action**

(39) ye-kebero    dims'

    pass-drum sound
    'Drum's sound'

In this example the drum is the source of the sound.
CHAPTER 3
PRONOMINAL POSSESSIVES

Pronominal suffixes mark possession by suffixing the suitable possessive personal pronoun morpheme on the noun possessed. The pronominal suffix inflects with the person addressed. In Amharic the case forms are morphologically realized in the pronominal system which has separate paradigms for nominative, accusative and genitive cases.

Gender is distinguished in Amharic in second and third person.

\[ NP2 + \text{ pronominal suffix} - \text{s-possessum} \]

Table 2: Possessive Pronoun suffixes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Pronoun</th>
<th>Gender and Number</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>Masculine</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-acihu</td>
<td>your</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>-wa</td>
<td>-u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>her</td>
<td>his/its</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-wan</td>
<td>-un</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-acew</td>
<td>their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-acewun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pronominal Suffixes

**Possessive Markers in First Person Singular and Plural**

(40) mes'ehef-e tek'doal
    book-1 so.ross was.torn
    'My book was torn'

(41) mes'ehef-acin tek'doal
    book-1 PL.POSS was.torn
    'Our book was torn.'

**Possessive Markers in Second Person, Gender and Number**

(42) lam- is met'-ac
    COW- came-F
    2SG.F.POSS
    'Your cow came.'

(43) lam-ih met'-ac
    COW-2SG.M came-F
    'Your cow came.'

(44) lam-acihu met'-ac
    COW-2PL came-F
    'Your cow came.'

**Possessive Markers in Third Person, Gender and Number**

If the possessed noun ends in a consonant, the third person masculine singular possessive marker suffix is -\textit{u}. When the possessed noun ends in a
vowel, the suffix will be \(-w\). In the case of accusative, the pronominal
possessive marker is -wan or -un depending on the consonant or vowel to which it is suffixed

(45) mekina-wa met'-a

\[
\text{car-3SG.F} \quad \text{came-M}
\]

'Her car came.'

(46) lam-wan [ei’e-c

\[
\text{cow-3sG.F.ACC} \quad \text{sold-3sG.F}
\]

'She sold her cow.'

(47) bet-u si-me/es

\[
\text{house-3sG.M} \quad \text{pp-back}
\]

'Back to his home,' (Text 1:1)

(48) bet-un Set’e

\[
\text{house-3sG.M.ACC} \quad \text{sold-3sG.M}
\]

'He sold his house'

(49) mekina-w tadeses

\[
\text{car-3sG.M} \quad \text{was.renewed}
\]

'His car was renewed.'

(50) bet-acew tadeses

\[
\text{house-3PL} \quad \text{was.renewed}
\]

'Their house was renewed.'

Homophony between the Pronominal and Definite Article Markers

Third person pronominal suffixes are homophonous with definite article markers.
As we can see in Table 3, the Amharic definite article seems to be complicated as there is no stem representing it. However, suffixes of various kinds attach themselves to nouns depending on whether the noun to which it is suffixed ends in a consonant or a vowel, is singular or plural, and is masculine or feminine.

Table 3: Amharic definite articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Third person in Gender and number</th>
<th>Nominative consonants</th>
<th>Nominative vowels</th>
<th>Accusative consonants</th>
<th>Accusative vowels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male singular</td>
<td>-u</td>
<td>-w</td>
<td>-un, -n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female singular</td>
<td>-wa</td>
<td>-wa</td>
<td>-un</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male plural</td>
<td>-u</td>
<td>-u</td>
<td>-un</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female plural</td>
<td>-u</td>
<td>-u</td>
<td>-un</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example if the noun to which it is suffixed is masculine singular and ends in a consonant, the marker of the definiteness is -u.

If the masculine singular ends in a vowel, the definite suffix is -w. In examples (51), (52) and (53) we can observe the homophony between pronominal suffixes and definite articles.

(51)  *mekina-w*  *met'-a*  /  *mekina-w*  *met'-a*
      car-DEF  came-M  /  car-3SG.M.POSS  came-M
      'The car came'  /  'His car came'

(52)  *feres-u*  *met'-a*  /  *feres-u*  *met'-a*
      horse-DEF  came-M  /  horse-3sG. M. =oss, came-M
      'The horse *came.*'  /  'His horse came'
The interpretation of the phrases depends on the context. Without the context they have two possible interpretations. For example (54) has only one possible interpretation whereas (55) has two different possible interpretations.

(54) ye-igziabiher-n bet atabelashu
    =oss-Ood-oer house don't.spoil
    'Do not spoil the house of God.'

(55) yohannis mekina-un geza
    John car-soss.Sse.u bought
    'John bought his car.'

Sentence (55) has another interpretation when -un marks definite article. That is 'John bought the car.'

As we have seen in example (55), it is important to give attention when a pronoun or definite article is suffixed to a possessum.

(56) yohannis mekinaw-un geza
    John car-3SG.M bought
    'John bought his car.'

We have seen how the possessum is suffixed by pronominal suffixes to mark the possessive construction.

The following chapter deals with alternative construction and the grammatical purpose of each form.
According to Trask, (1993, 58), Amharic has two different constructions for the same grammatical purpose. Example (57) shows the two alternative constructions.

(1)  

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{bet-e} & / & \text{ye-ine bet} \\
\text{house-tso.soss} & / & \text{Poss-1SG bet} \\
'My house' & / & 'My house'
\end{array}
\]

As we can see in example (57), one of the alternatives is to suffix a possessive marker on the possessum (a pronominal suffix, in this case) ; the other option is to prefix ye- on the possessor. The grammatical purpose remains the same. However, they do not have an identical function. From my emic understanding of the language (as a native speaker), it seems to me that the two forms have their own purpose beyond the default meaning.

Possession Markers on the Possessor and Possessum

Possession markers can indicate the purpose intended by a communicator. In a sentence, focus can be marked by possessive markers. Before dealing with the purpose of the possessor and the possessum markers, let us see focus from a linguistic point of view.
Focus is defined as ‘the kind of emphasis, that the speaker marks out a part of a message block as that which he wishes to be interpreted as informative’ (Halliday1967, 204).

In Amharic focus is often marked with bound morphemes and word order change. There are three types of focus, based on their structure, which can be used in different communicative situations. They are: predicate-focus structure, argument focus structure and sentence focus structure. (Lambrecht, 1994)

Of these focus structures in Amharic, argument and sentence focus structures are mainly used in written communication.

Consider the three ways used to mark possession with noun phrases from the Amharic Bible and newspapers.

**Ye- + np1 + np2 ~Possessor + Possessum**

Possession is marked by the juxtaposition of two noun phrases, the first being the possessor and the second being the possessum. When ye- is prefixed on the first noun neither the possessor nor the possessum is emphasized. In the examples below the purpose of such noun phrases is simply to relate a possessor and a possessum, without necessarily focusing on either of them.

(58) ye-igziabiher mengist
    =oss-Goo kingdom

'God's kingdom' (In.3:5)

In example (58) we are informed that the kingdom belongs to God, which is different from secular government of this world.
(59) ye-siga minot
\[\Rightarrow \text{oss-flesh lust}\]

'Flesh's lust' (the lust of the flesh)

(Galatians 5: 17; “For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want.”)(NRSV)

As we can understand from the context 'flesh' is in contrast with the 'spirit'. Ye- is prefixed for the purpose of indicating the desire of the flesh as opposed to the desire of the spirit. In this sentence 'lust' or 'desire' belongs to flesh.

Neither the possessor nor the possessum is focused.

(60) ye-abat-oc bihil
\[\Rightarrow \text{oss-father-rt, idiom}\]

'Fathers' idiom' (taken from an Amharic newspaper)

The purpose of sentence (60) is to mention one of the idiomatic statements of the forefathers. In Amharic most of the idiomatic expressions belong to the forefathers.

(61) ye-set-oc mahiber
\[\Rightarrow \text{oss-woman-rt. association}\]

'Women's association' (taken from Amharic newspaper)

In example (61) the women's association is distinguished from other associations, such as youth, farmers', teachers' or workers' association.

**Pronominal Suffix on a Noun to Mark Possessum**

NP2 + pronominal suffix-s-possessum

When we look at the possessum suffix in example (62) the purpose of this genitive construction is to indicate the emphasis. 'Flesh' is focused. It is understood by the participants that Jesus is talking about his body, He is not
introducing a new possessor. Unless the grammatical purpose is changed, sentence (62) will not be substituted by the pronominal possessor marker, ye-ine siga.

(62) sigay-e
flesh-1 SG. real food is =oss
'My flesh is real food.'

(John 6:55; "For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink ... ") (NIV)

(63) mahiber-acew tet'enakere
association-3PL. =oss was.strengthened

Their association was strengthened' (taken from an Amharic newspaper)

In example (63) the focus is on the 'association' which was strengthened. The possessum is marked purposely whereas there was an option to say women's association.

Example (64) (Bible in Amharic Revised, 2005) shows the ye-prefix on a pronoun whereas example (65) (Bible in Amharic, 1962) shows a noun possessum marked by pronominal suffix.

(64) ye-isun mislklrinet
POSS-3SG.M testimony

'His testimony'

(65) mislklrinet-un
testy-mony-3sG. M .ACC

'His testimony'
Both of these phrases are stated twice in (John; 3:32-33; "... but no-one accepts his testimony." (Verse 33) "The man who has accepted it (his testimony) has certified that God is truthful" (NIV).

These two versions focus differently. The new Amharic translation focuses on the possessor, in this case 'his' testimony, according to this context, John.

The older translation focuses on the possessum, in this case, the testimony.

To my understanding the emphasis should be on the testimony 'said by John about Jesus or the basic Christian foundation'. I stick to the older translation.

In this verse the older translation is more accurate than the new one. I would like to say that translators need to understand the pragmatics of the forms as they translate the text.

In a similar way, if we look at Genesis 37:31-33, we can observe that the two versions of the Amharic Bible have different interpretations.

(66) ye-yosefin fibs be-dem nekeru
=oss-Joseph robe r=blood they.dipped
‘They dipped Joseph’s robe in blood’

In verse 31, the Amharic translations have the same construction. Neither of the two noun phrases, 'Joseph' or 'robe' is focused. Example (66) simply gives new information without focusing on either the possessor or the possessum. If focus is wanted, pronominal possessive marker should be applied.

(67) llbs-un be-dem nekeru
robe-ross.aso.v =r=blood dipped
‘Thy dipped his robe in blood.’(The older Amharic version in verse 33)
Although they are the same verse the above examples have different interpretations. In (66) no focus is marked whereas in (67) the possessum is focused. This shows that the interpretation is different because of the use of different possessive markers.

**Ye- Prefixed on a Possessor Pronoun**

\[ ye- + \text{PN1} + \text{NP2} + \text{possessor-possessum} \]

(68) \text{ye-ante age/gay}

\[
\text{POSS-2SG.M servant} \\
\text{'Your servant' (Gen, 39:19)}
\]

Ye- is prefixed on the possessor \textit{ante}, to mark that the focus is on the possessor. In this context the wife's complaint is against the master, but not against the 'servant'. The 'wife's' utterance implies that the master is responsible for the matter because he is the one who brought the servant. So 'master', which is encoded with \textit{ante} is focused.

(69) \text{ye-isu mengist}

\[
\text{POSS-3SG.M} \\
\text{kingdom} \\
\text{'His kingdom'}
\]

(Luke 11: 18; "If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand?" (NIV))

This construction shows that the focus here is on 'Satan' the possessor of the kingdom. If we observe the text, Satan is mentioned and the focus is indicated by prefixing ye-on the pronoun \textit{isu}.
Comparison between the Possession Markers

The two possession markers are: ye- prefixed on a pronoun to encode the possessor, and the pronominal suffixes used to encode the possessum.

I have randomly selected nine chapters from the Amharic Bible to analyze how often the two forms occur within the passages to indicate the purpose intended.

Table 4 the number of possessive markers in each of the 9 chapters in the Amharic Bible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of the possession marker</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Possessions marked with ye- on a noun</th>
<th>Possessions marked on possessor (pronoun)</th>
<th>Possessions marked on possessum</th>
<th>Total number of possession markers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passage from the bible</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9×0)</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>95</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33.57%</td>
<td>33.57%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>55.83%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>283</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of these nine chapters is written on different subjects so that the frequencies of the possessive markers are varied. The number of verses does not determine the frequencies. When we consider John 8 and Genesis 31, we can say that the frequencies of each possession marker cannot be affected relatively by the number of verses. The decisive key for the distribution of the frequencies is the context in which the passages are written. The highest
percent of possession marked (55.83%) is possessum-focused. Within these nine chapters possessors are marked 10.6%, in which relatively the highest frequency is in John 17. Why does this happen? Because it is the type of utterance that Jesus said, in his prayer focused on his Father and himself. It looks like conversational or dialogue discourse.

For example, in John 17 the subject is Jesus' prayer. 7 possessor and 10 possessums are focused. Consider the following examples.

**Possessor focused**

(70) ye-ante

POSS-2SG.M

'Yours'

This phrase is repeated 5 times; they all focus on God, according to the context.

(71) ye-ine

=oss-tso

'Mine'

This phrase is repeated 2 times, focusing on Jesus himself.

**Possessum focused**

(72) tij-h, kat-h, sim-h,

Son-2SG.M.POSS, word-2sG.M.POSS name-2SG.M.POSS

'Your son', 'Your word', 'Your name',

dest-e ibr-e

joy-1 SG.POSS g lory-1 SG. POSS

'My joy', 'My glory'

The first 3 noun phases are repeated 2-3 times.
The possessions marked with ye- on possessor pronouns and possessions marked on the possessum in John 15 are the following.

(73) ye-ine \textit{dekmelme}\textit{z}\textit{um}/
=oss-tsc disciples
'My disciples' (verse 8)

(74) ye-ine-n \textit{tizez}/
=oss-t SG-DEF command
'My command' (verse 9 and 12)

(75) ye-inante \textit{desta}/
POSS-2PL joy
'Your joy' (verse 11)

(76) ye-rasu
ross-aso. m. own
'It is own' (verse 19)

(77) abat-e \textit{k\textasciitilde{a}}/e \textit{tik\textasciitilde{ir}}-e/
father -1 SG. POSS word-1 SG. =oss love-1 sc.ross
weyin-u
vlne-asc.ross,
'My father', 'My word', 'My love', 'Its vine',

\textit{desta}-e \textit{hiywe\textasciitilde{t}}-un \textit{wedaj-o\textasciitilde{c}}-u
joy-tsc.ross l ife-3sG. m. POSS friend-r-t-Sso.eoss
'My joy', 'His life', 'His friends',

\textit{wedaj-o\textasciitilde{c}}-e \textit{tire-ec}-u \textit{be-sim}-e
friend-PL-1 SG.POSS fruit-AcC-2PL.POSS =r=name-t sc.ross
'My friends', 'Your fruits', 'In my name',
As we have seen in this chapter the two constructions have different purposes. The data extracted from the text material evidenced our suggestion that each of the possessor and possessum markers have their own purpose. We should not simply say they have the same grammatical purpose.
CHAPTER 5
CONSTRUCT STATE OF GENITIVE MARKING

'In certain languages, notably Semitic languages, an overtly inflected form which is assumed by a noun to indicate that it is possessed or modified by another noun or NP which itself may exhibit no overt inflection' (Trask, 1993, 59)

This construct form is used in official writings such as government newspapers, in Amharic Bible translations, and in oral communications, as well. However, it is not productive in all cases like other genitive markers such as ye-prefix or pronominal suffixes. This might be because this construction is adopted from Ge'ez. Lambdin defines the Ge'ez construct state as:

'A modifying relationship between two nouns is indicated by adding -e to the first noun in the sequence Noun-+Noun-. It is the second noun that modifies, limits, or qualifies the first. Noun- is said to be in contrast with Noun-, or in the construct state. Example; qa'e nebiy 'the voice of the prophet' (Lambdin, 1978, 23)

The following noun phrases are used frequently in communication.

Construct + Absolute (Possessed Noun + Possessor Noun)

The construct is marked by the bound morpheme -e; the construct form is thus: NP+-e

The possessed noun is suffixed by -e to mark the construct form. 'bete' is a construct where as 'mengist' and 'kiristian' are absolute. It is necessary to understand that this construction is completely different from pronominal construction although suffixed to a possessum. In this construct form -e is never suffixed to a pronoun. In the following examples compare the ye-alternate with the construct state construction.
As we can see below, the construction of the construct state is also different from the construction of the ye- alternative. However they have the same relation between the noun phrases. Consider the following.

(78) bet-e mengist / ye-mengist bet
house-ross government / Poss-governmen house
'House of government' / 'Government's house'

The literal interpretation of bete mengist is 'palace' whereas yemengist bet is a house that belongs to the government, but does not belong to public or private parties.

(79) bet-e kiristien / ye-kiristien bet
house-ross Christian / =oss-christian house
'house of Christians'

bete kiristien is literally mean 'church' but yekiristian bet is a house which belongs to a Christian.

When a part belongs to the whole in this construct state (80), it indicates one particular part of the town. But, in the ye- construction 'town' division' means that the mentioned place belongs to the town/city council.

(80) kil-e ketema / ye-ketema kitil
division-ross town / =oss-town division
'Town's division'

When the type or the quality is wanted to be mentioned
mengist-e semay / ye-semay mengist

kingdom-ross heaven / =oss-heaven kingdom

'Kingdom of heaven'

Genitive of Kinship

weld-e mariam / ye-mariam lij

son-ross mary / =oss-Mary son

'Son of Mary'

weld is borrowed word from Ge’ez. In example (82) the difference between the two constructions is that ‘welde mariam’ is mainly used as a proper name for men, but ‘ye-mariam lij’ communicates that the son belongs to Mary

amlak-e Israel / ye-israel amlak

God-poss Israel / =oss-Israet God

'God of Israel' / 'Israel's God'

The semantic difference between the two in example (83) is emphasis (amlak-e Israel) and giving information (ye-israel amlak).

ye-lij abat / *abat-e lij

=oss-son father /

'Son's father'

Even if the relationship between ‘father and son’ is the same in both the constructions; the construct state does not work. So the construct state is not productive in all cases.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have attempted to show the morphosyntactic marker of the genitive construction in Amharic. I have shown how genitive of possession is marked mainly in three different forms:

1. In the possessor-possessum order, the possessor is prefixed with ye-.
2. The possessed noun is marked with a pronominal possessive suffix.
3. In a construct state -e is suffixed to the possessum.

The first one marks the possessor whereas the second and the third mark the possessum. Ye- can either be prefixed to a noun or a pronoun to mark nominal possession. -e can never be suffixed to pronouns, but only to nouns.

In Amharic personal pronouns are free morphemes, but pronominal possessive markers are bound morphemes, which are suffixed only to the possessed items. Pronouns inflect with person, number and gender, while ye- remains the same.

When a recursively embedded noun phrase occurs in a sentence ye-is prefixed only once on NP1 in the NP1+NP2 order. Pronominal suffixes are homophonous with definite article suffixes.

Although not productive in all cases, -e is suffixed to a possessum in a construct state, to mark possession in possessor-possessum order.
Pronominal markers have purpose beyond encoding possessions. When the possessed noun is suffixed with appropriate pronominal possessives, the possessum is focused. This is one of the outcomes of this paper.

When the possessor pronoun is prefixed with ye-, the possessor of the possessed noun is marked. Therefore a possessor marked NP is not simply a constructional alternative with a possessum marked.
REFERENCE LIST


APPENDIX
Text: Folk Tale (Amharic)

Ye-duba  fire-na  ye-shola  fire
poss-pumpkin fruit-and poss-fig fruit

"Fruit of pumpkin and Fruit of fig"

(1)  ke-iletat  and ken and ba/ager  gebeya  wulo wede
of-day.rt, one day one countryman market staying to
bet-u

house-ross

simeles  ye-tsehay  muket  betam  meta-w
back =oss-sun heat very beat-3sG.M

"Once-upon a time a countryman, having stayed at the market, while returning
home, the heat of sun beat him too much"

(2)  adekeme-wum
weakened-3sG.M

"It weakened him."

(3)  ke-zihm  yetenes  wede and kirncaf-u
yetenserafa
r=-this for to one branch-3sG. =oss shoot-out
tilik  ye-sho/a  zaf  sir  hed-o  tekemete
big =oss- fig tree under gO-PART sat.down
"Because of this he went to the big fig tree with its branch shoot out,
(and) sat under it."

(4)  
ketilom  wede  lay  wede kimcaf-u  angat
Next  to  up  to  branch-t-oss tuning his face.up
bimeleket
looked.at
shoal-w  mafrat-un  tegenezebe
fig-DEF  bo  re.  fru  it -  realized

"Next, turning his face up, having looked at the branch, he realized as
the fig bore fruit."

(5)  
keziam ye-shola-wun  fire meten k-ezaf-u  kumet-na
then  poss-fig-3s.G.M-DEF fruit size  pp-tree-poss.3sg.m height-
and
wufret  iyawedadere  "indet yihenin  yemiahil
thickness  much
kumet  with  PROG-
COmpare
yalew
fire yaferal?"
bemalet  tegereme.
Saying  amazed
Then, comparing the fig's fruit size with the tree's height and thickness
he said "how comes a tree having this much height and thickness
produces this small fruit?"
"Having been amazed by the situation, looking across, at a few
distance from the fig tree, he saw a pumpkin plant."

'That pumpkin bore fruit.'
behuala "God after sertoal"

earth creat-

hulu
asm
am-
to-na
fit-
.PAR
T-
and
"Comparing the pumpkin's and the fig's fruit, after his observation, he said" God created the earth, all the things on her fitting and having arranged he made."

(9) duban-na shoal-n si-fetir gin asastoal
pumpkin-and fig-OEF when-make but mistaken
"But when he made the pumpkin and the fig he was mistaken."

(10) ye-shola zaf tilik terara yemiahil newu
pass-fig tree big mountain as.much.as is
"Fig's tree is as big as a mountain."

(11) firew-u gin betam finish teter yemitahil
Fruit-pass but very small marble(a tiny stone) as much

na-t
is-F
"But the fruit is very small like a tiny stone"

(12) "ye-duba hareg degmo mekom inkuan
pass-pumpkin plant then stand even
yemayichil Meret le-meret yemigotet shiba
new
The pumpkin plant even can not stand that is lame trails on the ground."

(13) firew-u  gin  gulicha  a kilo  meret  lay
    fruit-ross  but  big.stone  equate  ground  on tegolitoal"

is.sited

"But its fruit, as big as big stone is sat on the ground."

(14) "igziabiher le-tin ish-un duba
    tilik fire  le-tilik-u shoal
God  pp-small-DEF pumpkin  big  fruit  pp-big-DEF  fig
fire  Degmo  finish fire setitot neger kemiabelash
fruit  then/and  small  fruit  giving  thing  instead  of  spoil
tilik-un
.big.
DEF

ye-duba  lay  biseklew  tinishu-n  fire  degmo  awurido
=oss-pumpkin  on  if.hang  small-DEF  fruit  then
bring.down
le-duba-w  bi-sete-w  aserar-u  tikkil yi-hon

never
"God, instead of giving to the small pumpkin big fruit and for the big fig small fruit, that ruins the system of his work, it will be right if the big pumpkin fruit is hang on the fig and the small fruit put down and give it to the pumpkin".

(15) honom gin finish-un le-tilik-u tilik-un degmo

however but smau-osr pp-big-OEF big-OEF then

le- tinshu ka-deregut duba-w fire-w kebdot

r=-small r=-rnade pumpkin-oar fruit-oar weigh

meret

ground

le-meret yigotetal.

pp-ground trails

"However if the small is given to the big and the big to the small, the pumpkin fruit weighs so that it trials on the ground."

(16) yihm le-temelkac betam yaskeyimal.

this =r=observer very is. bad

"This is very bad to the observer"
(17) igziabiher lemin endezih yetezeberareke sira inde-sera

God why like this mesed up work how-worked

Mikniyatu al-geba-n'im" iy-ale temeramere
reason NEG-understand- PROG- examined
1.sG say

"He examined saying that I don't understand the reason why God made such messed up work"

examination-soss because-tired-3.sG.M

(18) memeramer-u sil-adekeme-w zaf-un
tetreger-o indetegnam ankelafa
rested.on-PART as layover napped

"Because he was tired of the research, as layover at the tree, he napped."

(19) indetepam andit nefas yetalat ye-shola fire
as he slept one wind throw =oss-fiq fruit
ke-afincha-u arfa bi-timetaw-u himem-u
r=-nose-ross rested rr-beat-asc.v pain-oar
tesemtot dengito binin ale.
felt terrify. PART wake.up be
"While he was sleeping, a fruit of fig that fall by wind rested on his nose, beat him, felt him very sick, being terrified he wake up."
"As he raised up to sea what hit him, he saw a fruit of fig fall on his chest."

"As he quickly catch his nose in his hand and observed, he said 'it is amazing, I am so bleeding'."

"Now I have understood my fault that what I said boldly God is mistaken is wrong."

"I have caught fire on my chest; what I see one =oss-flq fire deret-u lay wedka aye fruit chest-rose on fall saw "As he raised up to sea what hit him, he saw a fruit of fig fall on his chest."
1sG as.said =oss-purnkln-oes fruit fig-OEF on
been
Nora afincay-e-n biło yigedl-e fj neber bił.ale
"As I have said, if the fruit of pumpkin had been on the fig, it could have killed me hitting my nose" he said.