Asymmetrical Representation of Gender in Amharic

Zelealem Leyew

Abstract
In gender linguistics, it is customary to observe the correlation between language and socially constructed gender roles. Language users show male and female language behaviors in their discourse and pragmatics. The idea of societal perception of gender is also reflected in the structure of a language. We learn from the literature that a number of African languages have gender-biased patriarchal grammars. Amharic is one of them. This paper discusses the linguistic and pragmatic representation of gender in Amharic, a gendered language showing masculine and feminine distinction in its grammar. Gender representation in this language is asymmetrical heavily influenced by pragmatics. Masculine is the default gender with more prominence than feminine. The linguistic coding of gender carries socially significant meanings reflecting a male-biased grammar. The personal and demonstrative pronouns, generic and proper nouns, nominals and other word classes are inherently masculine. Masculine gender operates not only for nouns with + MALE feature but also for nouns with neuter gender. Any noun with - ANIMATE feature is encoded as male in the verb. Whereas masculine conveys augmentation, feminine conveys diminution. The data and texts for this study were collected from primary source (introspection – author’s native repertoire) and secondary sources (grammatical descriptions and novels written in Amharic).

Key words: Language, Society, Gender, Pragmatics, Correlation

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Introduction
Research on the relationship between language and gender started systematically in the 1970s. Since then, gender issues have attracted the attention of experts in behavioral, cognitive and cultural studies.³ Though the relationship between language and gender is obvious, the attention given by linguists to study the formal differences in the representation of gender in grammatical structures has been so far meager. It is only in recent years that the correlation between language and socially constructed gender roles and the reality that language users show male and female language behaviors in their discourse and pragmatics have attracted the consideration of sociolinguists (McConnell-Ginet, 1988; Cheshire, 2002). The bulk of the literature on gender and language focuses on the speech behavior of men and women and the conversational styles they follow (Wodak, 1997). Thus so far, the correlation between language and gender or the male and female asymmetry has been widely perceived as merely a matter of language use. By and large, women’s language is believed to reflect their conservatism, prestige consciousness, insecurity, deference, nurturance, emotional expressivity, connectedness, sensitivity and solidarity whereas men’s language reflects their toughness, competitiveness, independence, competence, hierarchy and control (Wodak, 2001).

In recent sociolinguistic research, the idea of societal perception of gender inequality as reflected in the structural systems of a language has also come to the forefront. From the Chomskyan model of Universal Grammar (UG), we learn that languages are alike in their underlying structures but different in their surface structures. Hence, at the level of surface structure (performance), some languages depict gender inequality in their grammar, others do not. Indo-European languages like German and Polish show the equal treatment of men and women in their grammar through affixes which is believed to be reflected in their everyday life. On the other hand, the feminist Dale Spender (1980), considers English as a ‘man-made’ language that has contributed to women’s oppression (Pauwels, 1998). The English 3SG has been considered awkward, at least by feminists, and hence there were attempts to coin a new sex-neutral pronoun (Crystal, 1997). The works of Labov (1966), Milroy (1992) and Trudgill (1972) are still influential regarding the socio-

³ According to Anthony Giddens, ‘gender’ concerns the psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females and ‘sex’ is a ‘biological or anatomical differences between men and women,’ (Wodak, 1997).
grammatical descriptions of gender with a focus on American and British English. Many other empirical studies have touched on the structural aspects of language that vividly show male preference.

The pragmatic analysis of some African languages reveals that women have restricted languages that make them different from men (Wolff, 2000). In the majority of cases in Africa, men can speak about taboo concepts such as body parts and sexual activities, whereas in women speech, such expressions are restricted or replaced by euphemistic or culturally appropriate forms in public discourse. It is customary that adult female speakers of these African languages do not address their husbands, in-laws and their immediate family by name. According to Southworth and Daswani (1974:235), 'In several parts of India, a wife may not mention her husband's name (and in some more conservative groups, any name or word with similar sounds); she must refer to him as 'he' or 'the children's father' or 'the man of the house' (in some cases, even the expression 'my husband' is not allowed); census-takers and others wishing to know the name of a woman's husband often are obliged to ask a neighbour.' Cited in Wodak (1997:10), Postl (1991:89) writes that, 'Due to their long history as public n-makers, men not only determine the economic, political and social orientation of social life, but influence the functioning and the semantic construction of each individual language'. It appears that a language with gender distinction need not automatically be patriarchal. It could be matriarchal, or even balanced. Apparently, a number of African languages have gender-biased patriarchal grammars as if they are mere inventions of males (see details in Corbett, 1991). However, gender linguistics remains a neglected area in this part of the world which is believed to have rich linguistic data and fascinating gender-related issues yet to be researched.4

This paper discusses the linguistic and pragmatic representation of gender in Amharic. I argue that male gender is more prominent than female gender and hence Amharic is one of the African languages with highly male-biased grammar. There are two types of relationship between language and gender: (a) the linguistic codings of gender which do not carry any socially significant meaning beyond the differentiation of signs that are necessary for communication and (b) the linguistic codings of gender which carry socially

4 Roza Taddese and Amanuel Raga (see references) have attempted to describe in their MA theses the gender-biased ideologies in Tigrinya and Afaan Oromo, respectively.
significant meanings reflecting gender bias. The major focus in this paper is (b) in which linguistic codings have social implications. The personal and demonstrative pronouns, generic and proper nouns, nominals and other grammatical features reflect polarity of the feminine gender. Masculine gender markers are used not only for nouns with + MALE feature but also for generic and plural nouns with neuter gender. Any noun with - ANIMATE feature is encoded as male in the verb. The masculine gender conveys augmentation, the feminine diminution. The data and texts were collected from two major sources: primary source (introspection – author’s native repertoire) and secondary sources (grammatical descriptions and novels written in Amharic).

**Gender asymmetry in corpus linguistics**

In this section, the bias of grammar and pragmatics towards male predominance is supported from the linguistic corpus of Amharic. Amharic is a gendered language whose grammatical structure is heavily influenced by pragmatic principles. Definite nouns show gender distinction between feminine and masculine through the definite marker morphemes –u (M) and –itu (F), as in ምያል-‘the (HE) goat’ vs. ምያል-‘the (SHE) goat’. Nouns agree in person, number and gender by portmanteau morphemes as in the verb በላ-‘He ate’ vs. በላ-‘She ate’. In pronouns, feminine and masculine grammatical genders are distinctly marked in 2nd and 3rd person singular. In the plural pronouns, gender distinction is neutralized and hence the two sexes share the same form (cf. (1) below). Bare adjectives (i.e. adjectives which do not formally modify any noun) behave like nouns and hence, though they underlyingly modify their covert heads, they assume gender in a way similar to nouns as in እንድ-‘the (HE) new’ vs. እንድ-‘the (SHE) new’. Amharic has gender specifiers for biologically male and female animals and human beings. In this case, ወንድ refers to ‘male’ as in ወንድ እández-‘male child (boy)’, ወንድ ከግ-‘male sheep’, etc. and ሳት refers to ‘female’ as in ሳት እández-‘female child’ (girl), ሳት ከግ-‘female sheep (ewe)’, etc.

Some linguistic structures of Amharic are deeply gender-inclusive typifying the language to be one of the languages with clear cases of male-preferring

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features. In pronouns, the preponderance of the masculine gender is obvious through feminine gender polarity as shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd}</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>ant-ä</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>anʧ-i</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3\textsuperscript{rd}</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>ɨrs-u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>ɨrs-wa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the data above, in both the 2SG and 3SG pronouns, gender is marked and hence the language has distinct forms for the feminine and masculine genders. In such instances, the biological gender corresponds to natural or biological gender. The base form of the 2SG is ant- and the gender markers are –ä for 2MS and -i for 2FS (Note that -ä is a 3MS marker in finite verbs as in t’al-ä ‘He dropped.’, hed-ä ‘He went.’, etc. and –i is a 2FS marker in imperative forms as in gɨbi ‘enter! (2FS)’, sam-ɨ ‘kiss! (2FS)’, etc.). The form anʧi is derived from the underlying form ant after going through the palatalization process: $t > ʧ / -i$. Similarly, the base form for the 3SG is ɨrs- and the gender markers are -u for the 3MS (just as in the possessive constructions such as bet-u ‘his house’, ɨldʒ-u ‘his child’, etc.) and –wa for the 3FS (as in bet-wa ‘her house’, ɨldʒ-wa ‘her child’, etc.). As can be seen from the data, the 2nd and 3rd person plural forms are derivatives of the 2MS and 3MS, respectively. In other words, in the plural pronouns, the masculine forms appear to be the bases. There are neither neuter plural forms nor plural forms which make the 2FS and 3FS their base. This is perhaps one of the major distinctions between Amharic and languages such as Ge’ez, Tigre, Tigrinya and some Gurage languages in which the 2nd and 3rd plural pronouns are distinct for the corresponding singular feminine and masculine pronouns.\footnote{6} Even if a speaker refers to a group of female persons in the 2PL or 3PL, the pronouns are always innä-antä or innä-ɨrsu, derivative of the 2MS and 3SG together with the plural marker ɨnnä. In this regard, it is axiomatic that plural pronouns are masculine gender marked as clearly seen from the structure and hence should refer to male references. However, these pronouns are

\footnote{6 The distinction of gender in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} plural is typical for all classical Semitic languages and goes back to Proto-Semitic (Maria Bulakh, p.c.).}
pragmatically perceived as gender neuter and are used for both genders.

In the following proximal and distal demonstrative pronouns and locative deictics, the plural demonstrative pronouns, like in the 2nd and 3rd personal pronouns, are derived from the corresponding singular masculine pronouns.

(2) Demonstrative pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proximal</td>
<td>yi-h (M)</td>
<td>innä-yi-h &gt; inn-yi-h &gt; inn-ih or innä-iz-yi-h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yi-h-if'ii (F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distal</td>
<td>y-a (M)</td>
<td>innä-ya &gt; inn-ya or innä-iz-ya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>y-a-if'ii-i (F)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Locative deictics

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proximal</td>
<td>iz-yih (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iz-yi(h)-if'ii (F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distal</td>
<td>iz-ya (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iz-ya-if'ii (F)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in (2), the singular feminine pronouns have the form: MASCULINE DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUN + (if'ii). Hence, masculine demonstrative pronouns are derived from the gender-neuter base and feminine demonstratives are derived from the masculine demonstrative pronouns. The AGR masculine marker for proximal is –h and for distal is -a. The morpheme -h marks 2MS in verb paradigms as in yaz-h ‘You held.’, mal-h ‘You swore.’, sak’-h ‘You laughed.’, etc. and the morpheme -a marks 3MS as in bäll-a ‘He ate.’, särr-a ‘He worked’, täyy-a ‘He slept.’, etc. The feminine marker for both proximal and distal is -if’ii. Again, the same morpheme marks 3FS in verb paradigms as in yaz-äif’ii ‘She held.’, mal-ä-if’ii ‘She swore.’, sak’-ä-if’ii ‘She laughed.’, etc. The morphemes -i and -a mark proximal and distal pronouns, respectively. Here again, the plural counterparts that are derived from the masculine singular demonstrative pronouns serve both feminine and masculine deictics. Hence, while referring to female persons in the plural, the speaker still uses the form consisting of the plural prefix plus the masculine
pronoun. Plural demonstrative pronouns and locative deictics bear the masculine gender marker and hence have a masculine reading. Nevertheless, speakers perceive them as gender neuter: an incompatibility between structure and language use. From the locative deictic ɨ-yih, we can derive the connector sɨhɨ-yih ‘therefore/because of this’ and from the distal locative deictic ɨ-ya, we can derive kā-ɨya ‘then’ which all contain the masculine form.

The inequity of gender in Amharic grammar has a wider array of contexts. In the following singular and plural forms of adjectives and nouns, the use of the masculine form as base is observed concretely:

(3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ityop'iyawi-t</td>
<td>ityop'iyawi-t-yan/*ityop'iyawi-t-otʃ/<em>ityop'iyawi-t-yan-otʃ</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ityop'iyawi</td>
<td>ityop'iyawi-yan/<em>ityop'iyawi-otʃ/ ityop'iyawi-yan-otʃ</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Ethiopian’</td>
<td>(Ge’ez pattern) (Amharic pattern) (double plural)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>māmh-ɨr-t</td>
<td>*māmh-ɨr-t-an/*māmh-ɨr-t-otʃ/<em>māmh-ɨr-t-otʃ</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>māmh-ɨr</td>
<td>māmh-ɨr-an/ māmh-ɨr-otʃ/ māmh-ɨr-otʃ*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘teacher’</td>
<td>(Ge’ez pattern) (Amharic pattern) (double plural)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k’iddis-t</td>
<td>*k’iddis-t-an/*k’iddis-t-otʃ/<em>k’iddis-t-otʃ</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k’iddus (M)</td>
<td>k’iddus-an/ k’iddus-otʃ/ k’iddus-otʃ*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘holy’</td>
<td>(Ge’ez pattern) (Amharic pattern) (double plural)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kibir-t (F)</td>
<td>*kibir-t-an/*kibir-t-otʃ/<em>kibir-t-otʃ</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kibur (M)</td>
<td>kibur-an/ kibur-otʃ/ kibur-otʃ*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘respected’</td>
<td>(Ge’ez pattern) (Amharic pattern) (double plural)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Amharic, pluralization in nouns is shown mainly in four ways: through suffixing -otʃ/*-wotʃ; suffixing -an, -at, -awint and -yan (archaic plurals); double pluralization (by applying the above two); and through reduplication (see details on Amharic plural formation in Baye (2000) and Leslau (2000)). As shown in (3) above, all the plural forms are derived from the masculine singular forms. If one wants to refer to a group of females, the analogical formations (with asterisk) exhibit possible structures to be used in the
language. However, the pragmatics, which relies mainly on societal perception, prohibits these analogical formations of pluralizing the feminine nouns. The data also proves that whereas the feminine is consistently marked by the -t suffix, the masculine is either unmarked or marked by internal vowel change. In Arbore, the feminine singulative is the second derived form from the male singulative as in *hokkol ‘lame (people)’ > *hokkol-an ‘a lame male’ > *hokkol-an-té ‘a lame female’; *geleba ‘Dhaasanech’ > *geleba-n ‘male Dhaasanech’ > *geleba-n-té ‘a female Dhaasanech’, etc. (Mous, nd).

In Amharic, every noun must belong to either of the two gender classes: masculine or feminine. Even if the subject noun is inanimate and non-living (obviously without any biological gender), the verb should license its subject in person, number and gender. This includes derived nominals from verbs. Infinitival nominals (verbal nouns), for instance, assume masculine features as in (4) below:

\[(4) \quad mä-ayät mä-amän nā-w \quad ‘(HE) Seeing is believing.’
INF-see INF-believe COP-3MS
*mä-ayät mä-amän na-t

mä-mmar yi- as-käbr-all \quad ‘(HE) Learning makes one respected.’
INF-learn 3MS-CAUS-respect-AUX
*mämar ti-as-käbr-all-äfftʃ

mä-nor bā-agār nā-w \quad ‘(HE) Living is better in one’s country.’
INF-live P-country COP-3MS
*mänor bā-agār nat

As shown in the data, the derived nominals are all perceived and grammatically specified as 3MS nouns (see the AGR morphemes). The sentences with the asterisk where the verbs are inflected for the 3FS –t are analogically possible to be used. However, they are unacceptable purely for pragmatic reasons.

In a similar way, manner nominals also assume the masculine gender and hence agree with masculine AGR markers in the verbs. Compare the following examples:
(5) alläbabäs -wa t’iru n-äw
way of dressing-3FS good COP-3MS
‘Her way of (HE) dressing is good.’

*alläbabäs-wa t’iru n-at

annägagär -wa däss yi-l-all
way of speaking-3FS likable 3MS-say-AUX
‘Her way of (HE) speaking is likable.’

*annägagär-wa däss ti-lall-äʧʧ

at’t’änän-atʧʧääw zämänawi hon-ä
‘way of studying-3PL modern become-3MS
Their way of (HE) studying has become modern.’

*at’t’än-an-atʧʧäw zämänawi hon-äʧʧ

Abstract nominals, like the above infinitival and manner nominals, assume masculine gender. In the first two examples below, the abstract nominals lkljinnät ‘childhood’ and t’eninnät ‘health’ appear as subjects. In the third example, aläk’innät ‘chiefdom’, appears as object. The AGR morphemes in all the verbs license the abstract nominals as 3MS.

(6) lidʒ-innät tämällis-o a-y-mät’-a-mm
child-ABS come back-3MS NEG-3MS-come-3MS-NEG
‘(HE) Childhood does not come back.’

*lidjinnät tämällisa atmät’amm

t’en-innät wanna-w habt n-äw
be healthy-ABS main-3MS wealth COP-3MS
‘(HE) Health is the main wealth.’

*t’eninnät wanna-wa habt n-at

issu aläkinnät-u-n a-y-t’äl-aw-imm
he chiefdom-3MS-ACC NEG-3MS-hate-3MS-NEG
‘He does not hate his (HE) chiefdom.’

*issu aläkinnät-u-n a-y-t’äl-at-imm
In Amharic imperative forms, the 2MS imperative is the basic form for both 2FS and 2PL imperative forms. As shown in (7) below, whereas the latter constantly show the imperative morphemes, the former either slightly changes in form or never changes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb stem</th>
<th>Imperative</th>
<th>2MS</th>
<th>2FS</th>
<th>2PL</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>täkkos-</td>
<td>täkkus!</td>
<td>täkkus-i (s&gt;ʃ/-i)</td>
<td>täkkus-u</td>
<td>shoot!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hed-</td>
<td>hid!</td>
<td>hid-i! (d&gt;ʤ/-i)</td>
<td>hid-u!</td>
<td>go!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yaz-</td>
<td>yaz!</td>
<td>yaz-i! (z&gt;ʒ/-i)</td>
<td>yaz-u!</td>
<td>hold/catch!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>las-</td>
<td>las!</td>
<td>las-i! (s&gt;ʃ/-i)</td>
<td>las-u!</td>
<td>lick!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sät’t’-</td>
<td>sit’!</td>
<td>sit’-i! (t’&gt;ʧ/-i)</td>
<td>sit’-u!</td>
<td>give!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sab-</td>
<td>sab!</td>
<td>sab-i!</td>
<td>sab-u!</td>
<td>pull!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>näggär-</td>
<td>nigär-</td>
<td>nigär-i</td>
<td>nigär-u!</td>
<td>tell!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 3MS is the basic form in many more instances. In dictionaries where Amharic appears either as the target or the source language, verbs are entered in the 3MS form as lemmas. In the following examples, the suffixes -a/-ä in the perfect are 3MS AGR markers which make the masculine gender more prominent than the 3FS or 3PL.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Dictionary meaning</th>
<th>Actual meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mät’t’-a</td>
<td>come</td>
<td>He came.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bäll-a</td>
<td>eat</td>
<td>He ate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arräs-ä</td>
<td>plough</td>
<td>He ploughed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fälläg-ä</td>
<td>search</td>
<td>He searched.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tāmar-ä</td>
<td>learn</td>
<td>He learned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k’orät’t’äm-ä</td>
<td>grind</td>
<td>He ground.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 3MS is the point of departure to teach Amharic grammar and hence gender asymmetry is observed in pedagogical methodology. Compare the following imperfect forms of verbs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Dictionary meaning</th>
<th>Actual meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yi-mät’t’-all</td>
<td>(will) come</td>
<td>He (will) come(s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yi-bäll-all</td>
<td>(will) eat</td>
<td>He (will) eat(s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yi-ars-all</td>
<td>(will) plough</td>
<td>He (will) plough(s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yi-fällig-all</td>
<td>(will) search</td>
<td>He (will) search(s).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the following three examples, the subjects of the embedded verbs are *agāritu* 'the country', *tāmariwōfäf* 'students' and *tāsibō* 'typhoid', respectively. The main verbs *yittawwäk'all, yimmāşlall* and *yittammänall* underlyingly assume an NP parallel to the English pleonastic ‘it’ or at the level of surface structure, take the subordinate clauses *agāritu ɨdgät ɨndäasayyätʃtʃ* ‘... that the country showed development’, *tāmariwōfäf wādā kʧ il yāğābbu* ‘... that students entered class’, and *tāsibō ɨzʊ hēb ɨndā-gāddālā* ‘... that typhoid killed many people’ as subjects licensed by the masculine gender and hence substitutable only by the 3MS ‘he’.

(10) ṣagāritu ɨdgät ɨndā-as-ayy-ātʃʃtʃ yi ɨtt-awwäk'-all
the country (F) development that-PASS-show-3FS 3MS-PASS-know-AUX
‘(HE) It is known that the country showed development.’

tāmari-wōfäf wādā kʧ il yāğābb-u yi- mās-all
student-PL to class that-enter-3PL 3MS-seem-AUX
‘(HE) It seems that the students entered class.’

tāsibō ɨzʊ hīz b ɨndā-gāddālā-ā yi- tt- ammän-all
typhoid many people as-kill-3MS 3MS-PASS-believe-AUX
‘(HE) It is believed that typhoid kill many people.’

In Amharic, definiteness is marked. As shown in (11), the masculine definite marker is –*u/-w* and the feminine definite marker is –*itu* which combines together the feminine marker –*it* and the masculine definite marker -*u*. Plural nouns take the masculine definite marker –*u*. Hence, such nouns, though they can inherently be feminine or neuter, are all structurally presented as masculine.

(11) | Masculine            | Feminine          |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singular</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mākina-w</td>
<td>‘the car’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bet-u</td>
<td>‘the house’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wonbār-u</td>
<td>‘the chair’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>māngād-u</td>
<td>‘the road’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bandira-w</td>
<td>‘the flag’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gibbi-w</td>
<td>‘the compound’</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mākina-ytu</td>
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<td>bet-itu</td>
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<td>wonbār-itu</td>
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<td>bandira-ytu</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>gibbi-ytu</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Semantically, the choice of definite markers carry an additional interpretation connected with size: the masculine definite markers convey bigness (augmentative) and the feminine definite markers smallness (diminutive). In (11), whereas those nouns in the first column (masculine definite) are perceived as big, wide and long, the feminine counterparts in the second column are perceived as small, narrow and short in size. The property of Amharic, as one of the Afro-Asiatic languages, confirms Diakonoff’s (1988) remark that female-diminution association is a common phenomenon in Afro-Asiatic languages. Compare a few more examples below on gender and size relationship.

(12) gizuf-u tärrara
    giant-3MS.DEF mountain
    ‘the (HE) giant mountain’

    *gizuf-itu tärrara
    ‘the (SHE) giant mountain’

    käbbad-u jākim
    heavy-3MS.DEF load
    ‘the (HE) heavy load’

    *käbbad-itu jākim
    ‘the (SHE) heavy load’

    bizzu-w hizb
    big amount 3MS.DEF crowd
    ‘the (HE) big crowd’

    *bizzu-itu hizb
    ‘the (SHE) big crowd’

In example (13), there is gender incompatibility between 3MS masculine nouns and 3FS feminine grammar. Such sentences with masculine subjects corresponding to feminine agreement markers are grammatically unacceptable.

(13) wändimm-e gobäz tāmari hon-ā
    brother-POSS.1SG clever student become-3FS
    ‘(SHE) My brother became a clever student.’

82
Kasa bizu māshāf anībb-all-āṭšʃ
Kasa many books read-Aux-3FS
‘(SHE) Kasa has read many books.’

Kasa! antʃʃi nā-ʃ indë yā-t’ārr-aʃ-ịŋ
Kasa! You.2FS COP-2FS EMPH REL-call-2FS-1SG
‘(SHE) Kasa! is it you who called me?’

However, feminizing the masculine, as in the above constructions, is acceptable as expressions of endearment, admiration and coaxing to a male person (see also Leslau, 2000).

**Gender asymmetry in common nouns**

One of the areas to examine gender (a)symmetry in languages are common nouns that are neither feminine nor masculine. According to Corbett (1991), in languages such as Maasai, the feminine is used both when a female is involved and when the sex of a person involved is unknown. In Dama, one of the Khoisan languages of Namibia, mixed group of people are addressed in feminine pronouns. In the same way, there are feminine-biased languages in Venezuela and Columbia (Corbett, 1991). In these languages, words such as ‘people’, ‘they’ and ‘one’ that have indefinite reference are addressed in the feminine. In the language Goajiro, spoken in South America, the male reference is made for masculine humans, sun and thumb; or all remaining nouns, the female gender is used with a wide array of occurrences.

In most Ethiopian languages, there is no as such ‘neuter gender’ which specifically marks the gender of ‘neuter nouns’. Nouns must be gender marked either feminine or masculine. In Amharic, the masculine gender is used as the default gender in the absence of any gender opposition indicated. The same is true, for instance, in Dime (Mulugeta, 2008), Zay (Meyer, 2001) and a number of Gurage languages including Muher (Meyer, fc). In Kambaata, even

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7 In Gorowa, a South Cushitic language, bodily defects such as taamppa ‘blind person’, daktani ‘fool’, etc. and sterility such as karaama ‘castrated animal’, puq’uli ‘bull without testicles’, etc. are grammatically feminine (Kießling, 2000). In Alagawa, (South Cushitic) sere’a ‘buffalo’, and karama ‘castrated bull’, with male connotations, are feminine (Mous, nd). The same author mentioned that, in Iraqw (South Cushitic), feminine is the default gender (Mous, 1993)
the naturally female living things *sa’-a* ‘cow’ and *meent-u* ‘women’ are grammatically masculine (Treis, 2008). The same property holds for Chaha, a South Ethio-Semitic language (Maria Bulakh, p.c.). In Afaan Oromo too, we observe a polarity of natural and grammatical genders: the word for 'cow', a biologically feminine animal, can be marked for and agree both as feminine and as masculine as in *sa’a kana* ‘this cow (F)’ and *sa’ati tana* ‘this cow (M)’. It is interesting to see 'cow' as a masculine noun widespread in Cushitic including Beja where *ʃa* 'cow (M)' agrees with the article, verbs and adjectives in the masculine (Roper, 1928). In the western dialect of Afaan Oromo, the use of feminine gender is restricted to females and to express diminutive and pejorative meanings (Clammonds 1999 – mentioned in Mous (nd)). On the other hand, in Arbore and Rendille, plural nouns that end in *ɔ* have a feminine base (Mous, nd). According to Hayward (1992), the feminine is the default gender in Afar.

In Amharic, *säw* refers to ‘man/person’ and *set* refers to ‘female/woman’. Morphologically, the two words seem to be derived from the same root *sä*-. The suffix –*w* is a masculine marker as in *näggär-ā-w* ‘He told him.’, *nä-w* ‘he is.’ etc. and –*t* is the feminine marker as in *näggär-ā-at* ‘He told her.’, *nä-at* ‘She is.’, etc. As in the following examples, *säw* ‘man’ which originally refers to a non-specific human being and hence generic.

\[(14) \quad \text{and säw mät’t'-a} \quad \text{one person come.PS-3MS} \]
\[\quad \text{‘A (HE) person came.’} \]
\[\quad *\text{and säw mät’t'-atʃtʃ} \ (3FS) \]
\[\quad \text{säw bà-k’wank’wa kä-insisat yī-lläyy-all} \quad \text{man by-language from-animals 3MS-differ-AUX} \]
\[\quad \text{‘(HE) Man differs from animals by language.’} \]
\[\quad *\text{säw bà-k’wank’wa kä-insisat ti-lläyy-all-ātʃtʃ} \ (3FS) \]
\[\quad \text{iyyä-and-und-u säw hulät hulät tʃīgginya mätkāl all- ābb- āt} \quad \text{each-one-one-3MS.DEF person two two seedling to plant AUX-MAL-3MS} \]
\[\quad \text{‘(HE) Each one has to plant two seedlings each.’} \]
\[\quad *\text{iyyä-and-and-wa säw hulät hulät tʃīgginya mätkāl all-ābb-at} \ (3FS) \]
mannjŋa-w-imm säw wādā-bet li-gāb-a yi-tʃil-all
everyone-3MS-FOC man to-house COND-3MS 3MS-can-AUX
‘(HE) Everyone is able to enter to a house.’

*mannjŋa-w-a-mm säw säw wādā-bet li-tt-gāb-a ti-tʃil-all-ātʃ (3FS)

In the above sentences, säw ‘man/person’ refers to both feminine and masculine human beings. However, the agreement markers in the verbs are always in the masculine. Hence, the sentences with the asterisks where AGR elements license feminine nouns are all unacceptable. First, the word säw which refers to ‘all human beings’ has a wider semantic range than set which refers only to ‘woman’. In other words, the latter is the subordinate of the former. Secondly, as in constructions such as säw-ɨyye ‘a man’ vs. set-ɨyyo ‘a woman’, lä-säw mot annäs-ā-w lit. ‘Death is the minimum punishment for Man.’, säw yassball ɨgzi’abître yfās’símall ‘Man plans, God accomplishes.’, the word säw seems to have narrowed its meaning toward a male reference.

In the following interrogative pronouns, the speaker alludes to the unknown referent with the 3MS. Using the 3FS in such constructions presupposes the knowledge of the speaker about the gender of the reference.

(15) mann n-āw yā-mann n-āw
who COP-3MS of-who COP-3MS
‘Who is (HE) it?’ ‘Whose is (HE) it?’

ityop’iyawi mann n-āw mann māt’t-a
Ethiopian (M.) who COP-3MS who come.PS-3MS
‘Who is (HE) Ethiopian?’ ‘Who (HE) came?’

min yi-ddārāg-all min tā-wāllād-ā
what 3MS-do.PASS-AUX what PASS-give birth.PS-3MS
‘What is (HE) done?’ ‘What (HE) was given birth to?’

In (16), and-āŋŋa yā-mm-i-wāt’a ɨmari ‘a student who stands first’ in the first sentence, and wāt’t’atu ɨwulkk ‘the young generation’ in the second sentence are both 3MS subject NPs as reflected by the AGR markers. Of course, both NPs encompass female students and female youth.
The following indefinite pronouns, derived from the interrogative pronouns with the enclitic –mm, also appear as 3MS as seen by the concord relation in the verb:

(17) \text{mannimm} al-mät’t’-a-mm
\text{nobody} \text{NEG-come-3MS-NEG}
\text{‘(HE) Nobody came.’}

*m\text{mannimm} al-mät’t’-atʃʃ-imm (3FS)

\text{minimm} al-tä-gäpp-ä-mm
\text{nothing} \text{NEG-PASS-find-3MS-NEG}
\text{‘(HE) Nothing was found.’}

* \text{minimm} al-tä-gäpp-ätʃʃ-imm (3FS)

\text{hullu-mm lîdʒ woladʒ-u-n} \text{mä-akbär alläbb-ât}
\text{all-FOC child parent-3MS.POSS-DEF INF-respect should-3MS}
\text{‘All (HE) child should respect his parents.’}

*h\text{ullum lîdʒ wäladʒwan makbär alläbbat (3FS)}

In the above sentences, the bare interrogative pronouns refer to any human being (‘males’ or ‘females’). However, the verbs must agree in person, number and gender specifically with a male human being and hence the sentences with the asterisks are not possible.

Generic or unspecified NPs favour the masculine gender. In the first example below, the notice is announced to sāw ‘man’ which under normal circumstances refers to any person including females. In the second example, the head noun of the relative construction yādākkāmāw ‘one (he) who gets tired’ is abal ‘member’, a noun referring to both genders. As can be seen in the data, both sāw and abal agree with the verbs in the 3MS. In the third example,
ẖë̀b ‘crowd’ which also includes a crowd of people including females takes the masculine definite marker -u. In the fourth example, though the head noun is not overtly mentioned, form the AGR marker, it can potentially be filled with a masculine noun such as s̱aw ‘man/person’, abal ‘member’, g̱lḻäs̱áb ‘individual’, etc., all perceived as masculine. Hence, any appearance of feminine agreement inflections in the verbs with the common/generic nouns is grammatically well-formed but pragmatically unacceptable.

(18)
lâ-sira ma-amâlkêt yā-mm-y-fällig s̱aw hullu nägä mà-mt’at yi-tfil-all for-work to-apply REL-IMPER-3MS-want person all tomorrow to-come 3MS-can-AUX ‘Anyone who wants to apply for a job can come tomorrow.’

yā-dâkkâm-āw abal m-arâf yi-tfil-all REL-gets tired-3MS member INF-take rest 3MS-can-AUX ‘Anybody who gets tired can take rest.’

hizb-u hullu alâmu-n amasäggän-ā-w people-3MS.DEF all Alemu-ACC thank-3MS.SUB-3MS.OBJ ‘All people thanked Alemu.’

bet lâ-m-agn-āt yā-mm-y-fällig zarewunu yi-mmäzgâb house COMP-INF-get-INF REL-IMPER-3MS-want just today 3MS.JUSS-register ‘He who wants to get a house can register just today.’

The examples in (19) below show the widely accepted pattern of conjoined nouns in the order male-before-female, which depicts the prominence of males over females among the Amhara:

(19) bal-inna mist *mist-inna bal ‘husband and wife’
        Addam-inna Hewan *Hewan-inna Addam ‘Adam and Eve’
        Abraham-inna Sara *sara-inna Abraham ‘Abraham and Sara’
        nīgusu-inna nigist-itu *nigist-itu-inna nīgusu ‘the king and the queen’

In other conjoined nouns such as wonḏâm̱īnna ȷ̱ẖ ‘brother and sister’, wonḏâm̱īnna set ‘male and female’, etc., the reverse order is also possible. However, it is difficult to find examples illustrating the order female-before-male as the exclusively accepted norm in Amharic.
Gender asymmetry in different semantic fields
In Amharic, nouns that are naturally male or female assume their respective masculine and feminine gender inflections in the verb. There are however numerous instances where nouns are assigned either masculine or feminine gender without exhibiting any natural sex. Physical objects which are naturally genderless assume the masculine gender as shown below.

(20) mängäd mängäd-u räzzäm-ä
road-3MS.DEF be lengthy.PS-3MS
‘The (HE) road became longer.’

dänn dänn-u tää-tʃ’afatʃ’af-ä
forest-3MS.DEF PASS-clear.PS-3MS
‘The (HE) forest is cleared.’

wik’iyanos säffii-w wuk’iyanos PACIFIC n-äw
wide-3MS.DEF ocean pacific COP-3MS
‘The widest (HE) ocean is pacific.’

tärara ya tärara tillik’ n-äw
that mountain big COP-3MS
‘That (HE) mountain is big.’

märet märet-tä-wäddäd-ä
land PASS-expensive.PS-3MS
‘(HE) Land plot became expensive.’

If a noun such as mängäd, dänn, etc. should take the feminine gender, it is either marked or the speaker wants to talk about a tiny portion of ‘road’, ‘forest’, etc. Amharic uses an evasive he-form where HE is used replacing the neuter singular. Hence, the use of ‘male’ items in sex-neutral contexts is extremely common in the language.

In Amharic, every noun must be specified for either feminine or masculine genders in the verb. In the following examples, abstract concepts take the masculine gender. The constructions with the asterisks that appear with feminine agreement markers would be possible except for the fact that they are pragmatically unacceptable.
(21)  fik’ir  fik’ir yiz- α- ɲɲ- all
love  catch-3MS-1SG-AUX
Lit. ‘(HE) Love has caught me.’

*fik’ir yi-za-ɲɲ-all-ātʃʃ (3FS)
Lit. ‘(SHE) Love has caught me.’

mot  mot a- yi- k’är- imm
death  NEG-3MS-avoidable-NEG
‘(HE) Death is unavoidable.’

*mot al-ti-k’är-imm (3FS)
‘(SHE) Death is unavoidable.’

higg  higg-u tā- t’as- ā
law-3MS.DEF.PASS-violate.PS-3MS
‘The (HE) law is violated.’

*hig-wa tā-t’as-ātʃʃ (3FS)
‘The (SHE) law is violated.’

sim  sim-ih  mann n-āw
name-2MS.POSS what COP-3MS
‘What is (HE) your name?’

*sim-if mann n-at (3FS)
‘What is your (SHE) name?’

In the following examples, concrete concepts take the masculine AGR marker –ā/-a in the perfect and y(i)- in the imperfect, both with masculine representation. The sentences with asterisk are grammatically well-formed but unacceptable from the pragmatic point of view.

(22)  rat  rat amāllāt’-āɲɲ
dinner  miss-3SG-1SG
Lit. ‘The (HE) dinner escaped me.’

*rat amāllāt’-ātʃʃ-ɲɲ
‘I missed (SHE) dinner.’
anbät’a  anbät’a säbl-u-n bäll-a-w
locust crop-DEF-ACC-eat-3MS-3MS.OBJ
‘(HE) Locust ate the crop.’

*anbät’t’a säbl-u-n ball-atʃʃ-iw
‘(SHE) Locust ate the grain.’

wiha  wiha yi-t’ät’t’-all
water 3MS-drink-AUX
‘(HE) Water is drinkable.’

*wuha ti-t’ät’t’-all-äʃʃ
‘(SHE) Water is drinkable.’

With fauna, big, powerful and ferocious animals are addressed as males. Should the sentences in the asterisks be acceptable, the nouns must be marked with the feminine definite marker –itu or take the specifier set ‘female’.

(23)  anbāssa  anbāssa hayläŋŋa n-āw
lion powerful COP-3MS
‘(HE) Lion is powerful.’

*anbāssa hayläŋŋa nat
‘(SHE) Lion is powerful.’

zāndo  zāndo märzāŋŋa n-āw
python poisonous COP-3MS
‘(HE) Python is poisonous.’

*zāndo märzāŋŋa nat
‘(SHE) Python is poisonous.’

zihon  zihon guadāŋŋa yi-hon-all
elephant friend 3MS-become-AUX
‘(HE) Elephant can become a friend.’

*zihon gwadāŋŋa ti-hon-all-äʃʃ
‘(SHE) Elephant can be a friend.’

In some instances, the feminine marker is attached to the name of small
animals irrespective of their biological gender as in \(t\text{"far"-it}\) ‘the (SHE) spider’, \(\text{"infil"-it}\) ‘the (SHE) lizard’, \(\text{"ayt"-it}\) ‘the (SHE) rat’, \(\text{"waf"-it}\) ‘the (SHE) bird’, etc.

Like many other naturally genderless entities, plant species, especially the big ones, agree in person, number and gender with the 3MS.

\((24)\)  wanza  wanza  wudd  hon-ä
\[\text{Cordia africana expensive become-3MS}\]
\['(HE) Cordia africana becomes expensive.'\]
\[*wanza wudd hon-\text{at}\]
\['(SHE) Cordia africana becomes expensive.'\]

\[\text{bahr-zaf  bahr-zaf  käsäl  yi-hon-all}\]
\['(HE) Eucalyptus can become coal.'\]
\[*bahr-zaf käsäl ti-hon-all-\text{at}\]
\['(SHE) Eucalyptus can become coal.'\]

Similarly, fruits such as \(\text{"bir"-tukan}\) ‘orange’, \(\text{"lomi}\) ‘lemon’, \(\text{"tir"-ingo}\) ‘an apple-like fruit’, etc. assume the masculine gender as in \(\text{"bir"-tukan tâwâddâd-ä}\) ‘(HE) orange became expensive.’, \(\text{"ine lomi-w-in mät t\text{'}ât"-hut}\) ‘I sucked the (HE) lemon.’ and \(\text{"tir"-ingo ëyä-t\text{'}aff-a yä-all-ä fïre n-aw}\) ‘(HE) apple-like is a fruit which is no more found in abundance.’

Body parts have no biological gender. However, they are represented by grammatical inflections in verbs. Unless a speaker wants to talk about a single hair follicle or one single finger or a piece of liver, intestine, nail, etc. or the tiny navel, all body parts assume the masculine gender in Amharic.

\((25)\)  gubbät  gubbät  bizu  däm  all-äw
\[\text{Liver a lot of blood have-3MS}\]
\['(HE) Liver contains a lot of blood.'\]
As shown below, color terms are generally masculine unless they modify small objects in size and hence are in the feminine gender. Compare the examples below:

(26) t’ik’ur t’ik’ur yä- mm-i-wodd-äw k’äläm n-äw
black REL-IMPER-1SG-like-3MS.OBJ color COP-3MS
‘(HE) Black is the color I like.’

k’äyy k’äyy yä-adäga milikkit n-äw
red of-danger mark COP-3MS
‘(HE) Red is a mark of danger.’

sämayawi sämayawi yä-sämay mälk all-äw
blue of-sky color has-3MS
‘Blue has the color of sky.’

All days of the week take masculine agreement. Any occurrence in the feminine form results in unacceptable utterances. Compare the examples in (27) below.

(27) sãŋŋo sãŋŋo adkami k’än n-äw
Monday tiresome day COP-3MS
‘(HE) Monday is a tiresome day.’

k’idame k’idame yä-gäbäya kän n-äw
Saturday of market day COP-3MS
‘(HE) Saturday is a market day.’
Sunday Sabbath COP-3MS
‘(HE) Sunday is Sabbath.’

In a similar vein, all months of the year assume masculine gender as in
mäskäräm t’äbb-a ‘(HE) September started.’, hídär yí-bär-d-all ‘(HE)
November gets cold.’, hamle zînab yí-bâz-a-bb-ät-all ‘(HE) July has much
rain.’, etc. The 13th month, which contains five or six epagomenal days, is
known as (SHE) p’agúme because of its short duration as compared to the
other months which consist of thirty days each. Directions are male as in
sâmen bâ-êih n-âw ‘North is in this direction.’, mîsrak’ yâ-s’âhay mëwt’â
n-âw ‘East is from which the sun rises.’, etc.

Kroeger (2005) mentions that the classification of particular nouns in
different gender classes reflects interesting facts about the worldview and
traditional beliefs of ethnolinguistic groups. According to him, Latin ignis
‘fire’ is masculine while flamma ‘flame’ is feminine. In the same language, sun
is masculine while moon is feminine. In Dyirbal, sun is feminine while moon
is masculine because in their myth, sun is the wife and moon is the husband.
In Amharic, the following geographical and astronomical concepts appear in
both the feminine and masculine forms.

(28) 

alâm alâm bâ-t’or-innât t-ammâs-â
world by-war-ABS PASS-overstrain.PS-3MS
‘(HE) World is overstrained by war.’

alâm bâ-t’or-innât t-ammâs-âf
world by-war-ABS PASS-overstrain.PS-3FS
‘(SHE) World is overstrained by war.’

agâr agar yâ-gara nâ-w
country of-common COP-3MS
‘(HE) Country is common to all.’

agâr yâ-gara na-t
country of-common COP-3FS
‘(SHE) Country is common to all.’
As shown in the examples above, the nouns aläm, agär and s’ähay can appear in both the masculine and feminine genders. Exceptionally, s’ähay ‘sun’ most often takes the feminine gender. In s’ähay wät’t’-a ‘(HE) Sun rises.’ s’ähay does not implicate the actual, astronomical object but the striking sunlight it emits at dawn. In few instances astronomical concepts like sämay ‘sky’ only appear in the masculine most likely because ‘sky’ is perceived as ‘massive’ in its size as in sämay-u t’är-r-a ‘The (HE) sky became clear.’

On the other hand, as shown in (29) below, märet and tf’äräk’a assume only the feminine gender.

(29) midir   midir ti-zor-all-ätfʃ  * midir yi-zor-all
earth 3FS-rotate-aux-3FS  ‘(SHE) Earth rotates.’

tf’äräk’a  tf’äräk’a tā-ayy-ätʃf  *tf’äräk’a tayy-ā
moon     pass-see-3FS  ‘(SHE) Moon is seen.’

Close observation shows us that Ethiopian culture perceives some heavenly bodies as gigantic and others as small in size. Thus, as compared to sämay ‘sky’ (always masculine), mkēr ‘earth’, tf’äräk’a ‘moon’ and s’ähay ‘sun’ are perceived as ‘too small’ to be referred to in the masculine. It is also worth mentioning that in Amharic myth, the sky is a heavenly body where God lives.

**Gender asymmetries in personal names**

We learn from sociolinguistics that language and society are inseparable and influence each other. The grammatical and sociolinguistic description of personal names is one of the variables worth considering to understand the inter-influence between language and society. Amharic personal names that
are derived from verbs, nouns and adjectives depict gender distinction and their meanings clearly show gender asymmetry (for details on Amharic personal onomastics, see Zelealem (2005)). The description of such names reveals the social 'importance' of males and the social 'unimportance’ of females.

In (30) below, representative examples of names that have a symmetrical distribution for both genders are given. As clearly seen, the corresponding female and male names share the same base form. The difference lies only in the gender marker suffixes. Whereas the male names are marked masculine by the morphemes –ä and -u, the female names are marked feminine by -ätʃʃ, -wa and -it.

(30) käbbäd-ä vs. käbbäd-ätʃʃ 'he became heavy.'
adan-ä vs. adan-ätʃʃ 'he healed.'
täwab-ä vs. täwab-ätʃʃ 'he became pretty.'
fälläk'-ä vs. fälläk'-ätʃʃ 'he sparkled.'
fät'tän-ä vs. fät'tän-ätʃʃ 'he hastened'
lämäm-u vs. lämläm-itu 'the verdant'
dimbär-u vs. dimbär-wa 'his boundary/her boundary'

Common nouns that are not inflected for gender are widely used as personal names. The following list of names show such genderless names that can be given to both males and females symmetrically.

(31) s'ägga ‘grace’ birihan ‘light’ abyot ‘revolution’
täsfa ‘hope’ s’ahay ‘sun’ sälam ‘peace’
aläm ‘world’ beza ‘ransom’ sisay ‘treasure’

However, it is not always the case that neutral names like in (31) are used equally for both genders. In some cases, a name that is not gender-marked can be reserved by the society for either of the two sexes. In that case, what matters a great deal in the determination of eligibility as a male or female name is not its morphological composition but the connotation embodied in the nouns when transferred to proper names. The gender-neutral names below are exclusively given to males:
This shows the societal conception of male over female in which the former is associated with pride, heroism, winning, bravery, chiefdom, etc. Names such as anbässa ‘lion’, näbr-o ‘leopard (vocative)’, goff-u ‘the buffalo’, gässilla ‘cheetah’, avrraris ‘rhinoceros’, etc. are exclusively given to males on the principle that these animals are felt to be kings of the forest. From flora, the most respected and giant ones are used as male names. This includes warka ‘Ficus vasta’, s’i’d ‘juniper’, zígba ‘cedar tree’, wanza ‘Cordia africana’, etc.

Flowering and climbing plants such as s’ègeräda ‘rose’, haräg ‘climber’, woyn-haräg ‘vine climber’ that are conceived as beautiful are given to females as personal names.

It is a commonplace in Amharic that bestowal of female names is ameliorative in the sense that these names are associated with beauty, faith, elegance, peace, fruitiness, sweetness, endurance, etc. The following nouns show no gender specification but are exclusively used as female names:

8 In Me’en, a Nilo-Saharan language, the word mac’i has two meanings: ‘brave’ and ‘man’ (data from Will, 1989).
(34) fälläguʃ ‘they wanted you (F).’  
mant’āgboʃ ‘who would dare to be bored of you (F)’  
fiimatʃ’aʃ ‘thousand for your (F) dowry’  
agānpähuʃ ‘I got you (F).’  
abozzänatʃʃ ‘She made one idle.’

In a similar vein, it is very common in the Amharic naming tradition that names which are marked for the masculine gender are bestowed exclusively as male names. Compare the list in (35) below.

(35) fiñarraw ‘thousands are afraid of him.’  haylu ‘his force’  
dämmissatʃʃəw ‘destroy them’  mängistu ‘his government’  
mär ra ‘he led’  bālaʃʃəw ‘hit them!’  
addäm ‘he revolted’  gizatʃʃəw ‘you rule them!’  
mannyazzizirwall ‘who dare to command him?’  yifräd ‘let him judge’  
säyf-u ‘the (M) sword’  indā-al-ā-w ‘as he would wish/say’

The above list of names bestowed upon males (see also example 32 above) is linked to augmentation, bravery, courage, determination, wisdom, authority, etc. The grammar of the language in principle would allow speakers to substitute the masculine gender markers by the feminine and give corresponding names to females. However, the pragmatic norms do not allow such names to be bestowed upon females, if this occurs, it is considered strange.

(36) *fiñ-farr-at ‘thousands are afraid of her.’  *hayl-wa ‘his force’  
*däm-imʃ-ʃəʃəw ‘destroy them’  *mängist-wa ‘her government’  
*mär-r-ʃə ‘she led’  *bā-y-ʃə ‘hit them’  
*addäm-ʃə ‘she revolted’  *giz-i-ʃə ‘you rule them’  
*man-y-aziz-at-all ‘who dare to command her?’  *ti-fräd ‘let her judge’  
*säyf-itu ‘the (F) sword’  *indā-al-ā-w ‘as she would wish/say’

To find a feminine counterpart for every masculine personal name is not easy in Amharic personal nomenclature. This indicates the discrepancy between
linguistic rules that generate well-formed utterances and extra-linguistic factors, or in this case, the perception of speakers that makes functional restrictions and thus influences the grammar.

Full names in Amharic refer to the name bearer plus the name of the father and if need be the name of grandfather, one of the manifestations of a patriarchal society. Amharic full names exhibit the syntactic pattern "child, then father". Whichever word class the child's name is derived from, the relationship between the child's and the father's names is like any other NP in the language, with the modifier appears preceding the modified. In that case, a father of ten has the chance to be described ten times by his children's name(s) (male and female). According to Levi-Strauss (1966), in naming, either the name giver or the name receiver is signified. When we closely observe the Amharic "child, then father" names, male names show gender compatibility between the name bearer (male child) and his father (CHILDMASCULINE+ FATHERMASCULINE). On the other hand, female names show gender incompatibility between the name bearer (female child) and her father (CHILDFEMININE + FATHERMASCULINE). Compare the following examples in which names of children are marked either for 3FS or 3MS whereas names of fathers are consistently marked for 3MS:

\[(37)\]  
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{adan-ä} & \text{ sät't'-ä-p̥} \\
& \text{heal-3MS give-3MS-1SG} \\
& \text{‘(HE) Setegn (HE) healed.’}
\end{align*}
\]
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{adan-ätʃʃ} & \text{ sät't'-ä-p̥} \\
& \text{heal-3FS give-3MS-1SG} \\
& \text{‘(HE) Setegn (SHE) healed.’}
\end{align*}
\]
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{abbäb-ä} & \text{ aläm-u} \\
& \text{sprout-3MS world-3MS.DEF} \\
& \text{'(HE) Abebe (HE) sprouted.’}
\end{align*}
\]
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{abbäb-ātfʃ} & \text{ aläm-u} \\
& \text{sprout-3FS world-3MS.DEF} \\
& \text{‘(HE) Alemu (SHE) sprouted.’}
\end{align*}
\]
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{märr-a} & \text{ nɪgus} \\
& \text{lead-3MS king (M)} \\
& \text{‘(HE) King (HE) led.’}
\end{align*}
\]
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{märr-ätʃʃ} & \text{ nɪgus} \\
& \text{lead-3FS king (M)} \\
& \text{‘(HE) King (SHE) led.’}
\end{align*}
\]
The metaphorical expression \textit{wänd nat} lit. ‘She is male.’ or \textit{wänd-a-wänd} ‘male-like actor’ to a female connotes admiration and attribution: she is not like all other females but courageous like males. On the other hand, if a male person is described as \textit{set-a-set} ‘female-like actor’, the referent is perceived as delicate and cowardly. The \textit{wänd} ‘male’-based names also symbolize the Amharic - speaking society as a male-dominant one. Examples are given below.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{wänd-wäsän} lit. ‘top limit even among males’
\item \textit{wänd-at’ir} lit. ‘strong defender even among males’
\item \textit{wänd-awwik} lit. ‘trouble-maker even among males’
\item \textit{wänd-afraj} lit. ‘dismantler even of males’
\end{itemize}

It should in principle be possible to generate set ‘female’-based names as counterparts of the above \textit{wänd}-based names. Nevertheless, such names are unacceptable in naming practices and hence the following names do not exist.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{*set-wäsän} \textit{*set-awwik}
\item \textit{*set-at’ir} \textit{*set-afraj}
\end{itemize}

The linguistic rules of Amharic potentially generate names equally for both sexes. However, the social factors limit female names to a few semantic fields. Males seem to maintain high value as heroes, chiefs, judges; trustworthy, responsible and successful persons; celebrities; models, etc. in the society. The male names \textit{fum(ät)} ‘high rank/position’ and \textit{nēgus} ‘king’ and the female names \textit{yäfum-näʃ} ‘You belong to a high-ranking man’ and \textit{yänēgus-näʃ} ‘You belong to a King.’ clearly illustrate the stereotype of the society towards the two genders. In a society where females are looked down on, there are no female names connected to important political, economic and social activities. Females are well-known for their lenience, subservience, and taking care of their family.

**Titles and others**

Professional and non-professional social titles show more evidence substantiating gender bias in Amharic. In some languages like Arabic and German, titles are gender-marked (Farwaneh, 2005). In Arabic, the suffix -\textit{a} shows feminine as in \textit{daktoor} vs. \textit{daktoor-a}, ‘Doctor’, \textit{zamiil} vs. \textit{zamiil-a} ‘comrade’, \textit{muhandis} vs. \textit{muhandis-a} ‘engineer’, etc. In German, the suffix –
in distinguishes female from male titles as in Ärzt vs. Ärzt-in ‘physician’, Lehrer vs. Lehrer-in ‘teacher’, Fahrer vs. Fahrer-in ‘driver’, etc.

Professional titles in secular Ethiopia are given to both genders but, unlike Arabic and German, they are not gender-marked. During feudal Ethiopia (with a few remnants until today), ranks were given exclusively for males. This ranges from the lowest ranks such as biłatta ‘servant in a palace’, aggafari ‘messenger, reception observer’, lik’ä-mäk”as ‘entertainer by traditional music’ up to the highest such as afä-nığus lit. ‘mouth of the King’, lítuč ras lit. ‘head prince’, nígus ‘King’, etc. (see details on traditional titles in Arega (1967)). In the Ethiopian Orthodox church, the spiritual ranks diyak’on ‘deacon’, k’es ‘priest’, p’ap’p’as ‘pope’, etc. are bestowed exclusively upon males. In titles such as mämhr vs. mämhr-t ‘teacher’, mänäkuse vs. mänäkus-it ‘nun’, etc., the masculine is marked by a zero morpheme and the feminine by –(i)t. Still the masculine is identical with the base or citation form (same as in Arabic and German). Ato ‘Mr.’ is given as a title to a male adult irrespective of his qualification, marital status, occupation and so forth. On the other hand, when it comes to females, W/ro ‘Mrs.’ is given to a female who is married and W/rit ‘Miss’ to a female who is not yet married. In that regard, whereas both titles of females are binary reflecting both ‘femaleness’ and ‘marital status’, the male title is unitary expressing only ‘maleness’. In this connection, the Amharic terms resemble the English Miss vs. Mrs. and the forms of address in German Fräulein (obsoleto) vs. Frau, in French Mademoiselle vs. Madame, in Spanish Señorita vs. Señora and in Italian Signorina vs. Signora.

Other compound terms such as the following are constructed based on ‘maleness’ or fields related to ‘maleness’. As shown in the third column, the female-based counterparts for the terms in the first column are grammatically perfect but socially unacceptable.
(40) balä-abbat ‘feudal lord’  *balä-innat
abba-wärra ‘master of house’  (*)jimma-wärra
bal-ɨndʒera ‘companion’  *mist-ɨndʒera

In the above examples, the term balä-abbat referring to a feudal lord in fact includes women feudal lords. abba-wärra is the master of the house who makes all the decisions in his homestead. It seems that the corresponding feminine term imma-wärra has emerged through time which also indicates that symmetrical terms are possibly introducible through analogy. In the same way, wändä-lat’t’e ‘bachelor’ has now the equivalent feminine term setä-lat’t’e ‘spinster’. In the same vein, for wänd-a-gäräd ‘male-looking female’, the term set-a-gäräd has become a possible equivalent for ‘female-looking male’.

In feudal Ethiopia, the term yä-tʃin gäräd ‘maid of thigh’ (providing the feudal lord with all services including sex during campaigns) does not have an equivalent for the male counterpart. The main reason is that females were perceived first as incapable of leading any campaign on their own and secondly even if they go as campaign leaders, they would never be allowed to be accompanied by yä-tʃin lole ‘servant of thigh’ for the same purpose, at least publicly. The words färmut’a ‘prostitute’ or set-adari ‘whore’ which are of course pejorative are associated only with females. The same is true of the word galämota ‘widow/divorce’ which describes only females. ʃɨmagيلة denotes ‘old male person’ and baltet denotes ‘old female person’.

Connotatively, whereas ʃɨmagيلة refers to a mediator which can potentially include female mediators, baltet (possibly derived from bal tä-yet which literally means ‘husband from where’) implies ‘no more chance of getting a husband. In Amharic, the word kبشر-א-נני’ה̄נה [honour-cleanness] ‘virginity’ refers to females as it is only from females that sexual intercourse before marriage is unacceptable. The compound words wänd ɨldʒ [male child] ‘boy’ and set ɨldʒ [female child] ‘girl’ show a clear case of gender

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9 It is a loanword from Afan Oromo. For ‘female master of house’, Afan Oromo has haɗa worra.
asymmetry. Whereas the former compound word simply means ‘boy’, the latter (which also has a synonym kl.Generic-a-gäräd ‘child-CONN-girl’) refers to a girl with zero sexual experience, one who has maintained her kl.Vocative-nis-‘shäna ‘virginity’. This shows the social perception in which virginity is considered as of high value and is expected of females before marriage, whereas male virginity is undesired or even unexpected. The compound words ars-o addar ‘farmer’ and arbrit-o addär ‘pastoralist’ refer to males as indicated by the 3MS gerundive suffix –o. These words however potentially describe not only male farmers and pastoralists, but also male and female farmers and pastoralists combined or possibly even farmers and pastoralists who are exclusively females.

In some dialects of Amharic, it is a commonplace to say wälläd-ä-b-at ‘He made use of her to give birth to a child.’ It is also common to say as-räggäz-ä-t ‘He made her become pregnant.’ which sounds like the man did it alone or forcibly without the consent of the woman (see Zelealem (2007) for more on Amharic dialects). The word yä-bet īmābet ‘housewife’ has the connotation: ‘She does not have any work outside the house’. In other instances such as īnat agär ‘motherland’, īnat kʷ“ankʷ-a ‘mother tongue’, etc., mothers are more favoured than fathers. Some nouns like nāgar-it ‘large drum’, sāraw-it ‘army’, azur-it ‘whirlpool’, etc. have only feminine forms with the –it suffix, with no masculine counterparts. Interestingly, these nouns nevertheless must take verbs in the masculine gender as in nāgar-it tä-goʃʃäm-ä ‘a large drum was beaten’, sāraw-it-u tämmäm-ä ‘the army moved in huge numbers’, azur-it a-däkkäm-ɲɲ ‘the whirlpool made me tired’, etc.

Among the Amhara the identity of wives is subordinated to the identity of their husbands. This is observed by calling a woman ‘the wife of X’ or the ‘mother of (HE) Y’ or the ‘daughter of (HE) Z’ having in mind that she is better known by her husband's or son's or father's name. The following extracts from Merse-Hazen W/K’irk’os's (1999:292) autobiography entitled ‘Yäzämän Tarik Tëez håye Käayehutåna Käsämmahut: 1896-1922’ (The Memory of My Life: From What I Saw and What I Heard) show how women and men are identified in the society, which is also the case today:

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 winsan እስከ የለ (ማናቸው ይካጣሩ የጠ *(*ማወቅ የሚጠቅቅ የለ ሠራርና የለ ለማወቅ) የስር ዋቀቅ ይታች የያድረጉ ወቅ የስር ይታች የለ ለማወቅ ይታች ከታች::

Wäyzäro Adanä Mäskäräm 5 K’änt Motäw BäAk’ak’i Mädhane-Aläm Täk’ábbrü ‘Mrs. Adanach Hagos (the wife of Dejazmach Woldegebriel, Minister of Palace) died on September 5 and was buried at Akaki Medhane-Alem church.’

አለኝ ሰፈርኝ ይርካር (ማዲስ ለማወቅ የሚወቅ) የር ያት ገባ ወላየ የጠቀም የለ ለማወቅ ይታች ከታች::

Aläk’a Wäldä-Yared Elariyon (Yäbiluy Lik’inna Yäk’ine Mämhir) T’ärr 8 K’änt Bä96 Amät idmeyaʃʃaw Motäw Addis-Aläm Maryam Täk’ábbrü:: ‘Chief Wolde Yared Elarion (distinguished scholar of Old Testament and teacher of K’ine) died on January 8 at the age of 96 and was buried at Addis Alem St. Mary church.’

አለኝ ገብሩ እስሎ ከለ (ማዲስ ለማወቅ የሚወቅ) የር ያት ገባ ወላየ የጠቀም ይታች ከታች::

Azza ʃʃibbi Ibsa (K’ädmo Yäbetä-Mäng Wämbär Mulu Bet Azzaʃimm Yänäbbärut) Mägabbit 25 K’änt Motäw Addis Abäba S’ilase Täk’ábbrü:: ‘Commander Shibiru Ibsaj (formerly chair of the palace and latter commander in post of the whole house) died on March 25 and was buried at Addis Ababa Selassie (Trinity) church.’

ውያኝ ደስታ የለ ባለ (ማዲስ ለማወቅ የሚወቅ) የር ያት ገባ ወላየ የጠቀም ይታች ከታች::

Wäyzäro Dästa Ayyäla (Yä-S’ihfat Ministru Yäs’aḥafe Tiʔzaz Wäldämäsk’äl Mist) Säne 3 K’änt Motäw Addis Abäba ist’ifanos Täk’ábbrü:: ‘Mrs. Desta Ayele (the wife of the Minister of Pen, Chief Secretary Wolde Mesk’el) died on June 3 and was buried at Addis Ababa Estefan church.’

ማወቅ ይርካር ይሬ (ማዲስ ለማወቅ የሚወቅ) የር ያት ገባ ወላየ የጠቀም ይታች ከታች::

Yä-Däazmaʃ Mammoo Bäzzabbih (Yä-Bäzzabbih Abba Dikkir Liʃ) Mot Nähase 9 K’änt BäGämu Täsämma:: ‘Dejazmach Mammoo Bezabbih’s (son of Bezzabbih Abba Dikir) death at Gemu was heard on August 9.’

In the above announcements, the two married women were identified with reference to their husbands. On the other hand, the three men were identified more with reference to their fathers, their heroic deeds and eminence in
scholarship. In all cases, there is gender inequity in the sense that maleness connotes self-identity, high prestige and superior status whereas femaleness connotes subordinate identity, low prestige and inferior status.

**Texts**

As texts are of utmost importance to investigate natural discourse and language use, the following two texts were randomly selected to demonstrate evidence for the male-biased grammar and pragmatics in Amharic.

Text 1 (Source: Tobiya (Afework, 1900))

```
yi-h(a) wäre bāyā- agār -u tū- zārr- a- nna
this-HE news throughout-country-HE.DEF PASS-spread-HE-CONJ
hullu-mm bāyā- zāmād- u
all-FOC throughout-relative-HE.DEF
mā-mot mā- mmarāk yi- llak’k’ās fit- u- n yi- nātš’
INF-die INF-surrender PROG-weep face-HE-ACC HE-scratch

’āgur-u- n yi-k’k’orrāt’ džemmar-ā.
hair-HE-ACC HE-cut start-HE
yā-kiristiyān-u nīgs-im yā-t’ør- u- n mā- alāk’
of-Christian-HE king-FOC of-army-HE.DEF-ACC INF-perish
yā-sost -u -n -imm dādžamta[otli] mā-mot
of-three-HE.DEF-ACC-FOC (RANK) INF-die
yā-andāŋnw- in- imm dādžamta[tt] mā-tt- asār
of-first-HE.DEF-ACC-FOC (RANK) INF-PASS-imprison

yā-agār- u- n imm mā-zzārāf-inna mā-t’fat bā- ayy-ā gize
of-country-HE.DEF-ACC-FOC INF-loot-CONJ INF-perish when-see-HE time
wodiyaaw bā-hazān- inna bā-diniggát’e tamm-o kā-t’ik’it k’ān wodiya
immediately by-sorrow-CONJ by-terrify be sick-HE P-few day after
alā- k’ān-u tū- k’āssāf-ā mot-ā.
```
NEG-day-HE PASS-exterminate-HE die-HE
የክርስትያኑም ዲኝ ላክ ውረ ገነ ከን
yä-kiristiyan-u- mm agär bä-and gize nigos at’t’a
of-Christian-DEF.HE-FOC country in-one time king lose-HE
ጊዜ በጊዜ-ናጉስ ሰው ይም እና ከጊዜ
ager- u-mm midrābāda hon-ā
governor disappear-HE-MAL-HE country-HE.DEF-FOC desert become-HE

Rough translation
This news having spread throughout the country, because of the death and surrender of relatives, everyone started to weep, to scratch his face and to cut his hair. The king of the Christians, having heard of the extermination of all the army, the death of the three top Dejazmaches, the imprisonment of one Dejazmach, the looting and devastation of the country, suffered deep sorrow and shock, became seriously sick and unexpectedly within a few days died. The Christian country, within a short period, became a land that had lost its king and remained with no governor. The whole country became a desert.

As shown in the text, there exists a significant difference between the representation of males and the representation of females. The preponderance of the masculine gender (3MS) in Amharic is obvious from the text in which not even a single female attribute appears. All the nouns: wore ‘news’, agär ‘country’, zămād ‘relative’, fit ‘face’, t’āgur ‘hair’, kiristiyan ‘Christian’, nigos ‘king’, t’or ‘army’, dādʒazmatʃ ‘traditional military rank’, gize ‘time’, hazän ‘sorrow’, dānīggat’e ‘fear’, k’ān ‘day’ and gāți ‘governor’ are in the masculine gender and demand the corresponding masculine AGR elements.

Text 2 (Source: Habtīnna T’eninnāt (Maaza, 1948))
በዚህ መለም እየሚኖር ያው መመምራይ ያሉ፣ ገብት ያስፈላጊዎች ከናቸው፡፡ ከወወ ከሁለተኛ
bä-ɨz-yih aläm lä-īmm-yi-nor säw mādʒāmāriya mulu t’eninnāt hulättāŋa
P-here-HE world P-REL-HE-live man first ለና በወወ ከሁለተኛ በሚካ ተስፋ ከሁለተኛ
mulu habt asfālāgi-wotʃʃi nā-atʃʃaaw. kä-īnna-iz-yih kä-hulätt-u
full wealth necessity-PL COP-3PL P-PL-here.HE P-two-DEF
የለመርዳት ይማይችል ይደካማ ከመሆኑም በላይ
and-u yä-goddāl-ā-w indā- hon- ā ras-u-n
one.HE.DEF if-lack-HE-HE.OBJ COMP-become-HE self-HE-ACC
ለመርዳት ይማይችል ይደካማ ከመሆኑም በላይ

lä-mä-rdat yä-imm-al-yi-tʃil däkkama kä-mä-hon-u-mm bā-lay
P-INF-help REL-FOC-NEG-HE-able weak P-INF-become-HE-FOC P-top
lä-mä-rdat yä-imm-al-yi-tʃil däkkama kä-mä-hon-u-mm bā-lay
P-INF-help REL-FOC-NEG-HE-able weak P-INF-become-HE-FOC P-top
idme-w-in-ina sink'-u-n kʼotʼab-i-w age-HE-ACC-CONJ food supply-DEF.HE-ACC save-AGN-HE
idme-w-in-ina sink'-u-n kʼotʼab-i-w age-HE-ACC-CONJ food supply-DEF.HE-ACC save-AGN-HE
baläbet- u nā-w indā-tā balal-āw possessor-DEF.HE COMP-HE COMP-PASS-say-HE-HE.OBJ
baläbet- u nā-w indā-tā balal-āw possessor-DEF.HE COMP-HE COMP-PASS-say-HE-HE.OBJ
baläbet-u silā-hon-ā akbir-o-inna tātʼānk′-o possessor-HE COMP-be-HE respect-HE-CONJ be careful-HE
baläbet-u silā-hon-ā akbir-o-inna tātʼānk′-o possessor-HE COMP-be-HE respect-HE-CONJ be careful-HE
l-i-yiz-atʃfəw yīgābb-aw-all COMP-HE-hold-3PL should-HE-AUX
l-i-yiz-atʃfəw yīgābb-aw-all COMP-HE-hold-3PL should-HE-AUX
habt- inna tʼeninnāt-imm and gize yā-amāllāt-ʼu indā-hon-ā wealth-CONJ health-FOC one time if-escape-3PL COMP-be-HE
habt- inna tʼeninnāt-imm and gize yā-amāllāt-ʼu indā-hon-ā wealth-CONJ health-FOC one time if-escape-3PL COMP-be-HE
wādā k′āddām-ā bota-atʃfəw lá-mā-māllās to former-HE place-3PL P-INF-return
wādā k′āddām-ā bota-atʃfəw lá-mā-māllās to former-HE place-3PL P-INF-return
bīzu dikam-inna tīgīl indā-all-ā bīzu-mm gānzāb many effort-CONJ strive COMP-exist-HE many-FOC money
bīzu dikam-inna tīgīl indā-all-ā bīzu-mm gānzāb many effort-CONJ strive COMP-exist-HE many-FOC money
woʃʃ′i mā-adrāg indā-m yi-as-fāllīg yā-tā awwāk′-ā nā-w expenditure INF-do COMP-IMPER-HE-CAUS-need REL-PASS-know-HE COP-HE
woʃʃ′i mā-adrāg indā-m yi-as-fāllīg yā-tā awwāk′-ā nā-w expenditure INF-do COMP-IMPER-HE-CAUS-need REL-PASS-know-HE COP-HE
silāzīh yih-itʃ ̃f mās′ihaʃ habt- inna tʼeninnāit hence this.HE-SHE book wealth-CONJ health
silāzīh yih-itʃ ̃f mās′ihaʃ habt- inna tʼeninnāit hence this.HE-SHE book wealth-CONJ health

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Rough translation:
To a human being in this world, first, full health and second, full wealth are of high value. If one of the two is lacking, one becomes weak and fails not only to help himself but also creates troubles for his relatives and friends. As the proverb goes, ‘It is only the possessor himself who can keep his age and his provisions for long’. At the same time, it is the possessor who can shorten his life and lose his wealth. For this reason, he has to handle the two with respect and care. As to wealth and health, once they start declining, it is well-known that it requires tiresome ups and downs and a lot of expenditure of money to bring them back to their original state. Hence, this small book is named ‘Wealth and Health’ as she shows how to take care of wealth and health.

In the above text, the author imparts important culture-bound points to his readers about health and wealth. The 3MS agreement marker appears thirty-six times in this small text and hence almost all generic and common nouns appear in the masculine gender. Hence, nouns such as säw ‘human being/man’, t’eninnät ‘health’, habt ‘wealth’, ras ‘head’, dlme ‘age’, sänk’ ‘food supply’, bota ‘place’, etc. are all masculine. But in the last statements the author resorts to the use of the feminine gender six times when he refers to his own small book, which again underlines the strong connection between smallness and the feminine gender.

Conclusion
The topic of gender-sensitive speech is one of the central issues in sociolinguistics for the strong intimacy between language and society is clearly shown in what is called gender linguistics. Gender is a social category that reflects social perception. The social perception, in its turn, is expressed through language or linguistic signals. Gender symmetries or asymmetries are encoded in language and hence the study of the system of a language and its
use enables to better understand society. In addition to naturally male nouns, other nouns in different semantic fields, including those without gender, are masculine, especially when there is a connotation of augmentation. HE refers not only to male referents but also to generic nouns which are either genderless or may denote either ‘female’ or ‘male’. Naturally female nouns as well as some nouns without natural gender but small-sized are grammatically feminine. With concrete nouns, gender classification in Amharic correlates mainly with size. Even derived nominals, plural pronouns, demonstratives and so on are most often grammatically masculine. As a result, the occurrence of HE statistically greatly exceeds the occurrence of SHE. In Amharic, the correlation between natural/biological gender and grammatical gender does not always follow real-world semantic patterns and hence, structurally and pragmatically, Amharic is a male-biased language.

Feminists consider English as a ‘man-made’ language and an agent of women’s oppression. If that is the case, how would Amharic and several other male-biased languages be labelled in the hierarchy? The grammar and pragmatic practices of languages have been the subject of feminist scrutiny, often leading to elaborated and sometimes exaggerated descriptions of sexist practices. Creating a women-centered language, the introduction of new words with new women-centered meanings and the avoidance of HE-centered structures and uses have been recommended by promoters of the feminist movement especially in America and Europe. Nevertheless, no sexist language has been altered to a non-sexist language in any part of the world.10

In the Ethiopian context, as part of the Ethiopian millenium development goals, there are on-going efforts to address gender-related issues, alleviate the deep-rooted problems and bring about change of perception. There are efforts in the education sector to promote gender equality in the curriculum. Meanwhile, the fact that a gender-biased grammar exists has relatively been unnoticed and the pragmatics has not been given much attention. The reason is perhaps because of the prevalence of other pressing and practical issues observed on a daily basis regarding female inequality. The socio-political and economic issues attract more attention from anthropologists, sociologists and other scholars in humanities. Unequivocally, the society should internalize women’s equality through the elimination of gender discrimination and should profoundly understand and appreciate and recognize women’s

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10 In German, a conscious attempt to add – in to feminine professions: Bibliothekerin vs. Bibliotheker, Wissenschaftlerin vs. Wissenschaftler, etc.) has had considerable success (Otir Gensler, p.c.).
contributions to society. The manifestations of the patriarchal value systems that have a direct effect on cultural and social practices should lessen. In such societies, language is undeniably a powerful instrument of patriarchy, but not really ‘man-made’.

Evidently, Ethiopian society is highly patriarchal and hence in most parts of the country, females are looked down on as lower in their social, economic and political status. By any measurement, however, ethnolinguistic groups are never misogynist. What we should work hard for is to gradually but surely create a society where men and women enjoy equal acceptance and status in political, economic and social activities. Creating a more gender-neutral language or replacing a male-biased grammar by a female-biased grammar or thinking to form a 'democratic' language that treats the two genders equally might not be impossible, but it is a long shot – for some not even worth considering. If need be, symmetrical language planning in the African context would be a worthwhile activity provided that the necessary change of mind and attitude toward gender equality is attained first.

REFERENCES
Zelealem Leyew


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Rutledge.

**Abbreviations and Acronyms**

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