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Explorations in Ethiopian Linguistics:
Complex Predicates, Finiteness
and Interrogativity

Edited by
Ronny Meyer, Yvonne Treis
and Azeb Amha



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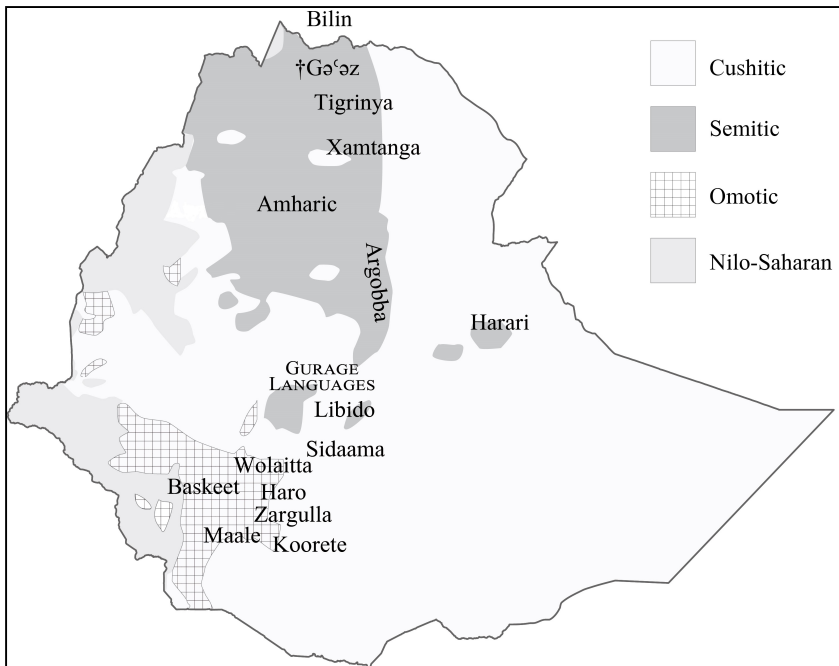
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Preface

Ronny Meyer & Yvonne Treis

The present volume brings together twelve contributions reflecting recent research trends in the description of Ethiopian languages. All contributions published in this volume deal with linguistic problems at the interface of morphosyntax and semantics/pragmatics; more precisely, they are analyses of interrogativity, complex predicates and finiteness in Ethiopian languages.

Map 1: Approximate Location of Cited Ethiopian Languages



Most of the contributions are based on research presented in the linguistic panels at the 18th *International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, held on 29 October – 02 November 2012 in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia. The multi-disciplinary conference was jointly organized by the French Center for Ethiopian Studies

(Addis Ababa) and the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (Addis Ababa University) under the motto *Movements in Ethiopia, Ethiopia in Movement*.

Seven contributions are concerned with Ethio-Semitic languages, in particular with Amharic, Argobba, Gə'əz, Harari, Tigrinya and different Gurage languages. Two contributions deal specifically with the Cushitic languages Xamtanga and Libido, while the remaining three articles focus on the Omotic languages Baskeet, Koorete and Zargulla. Furthermore, the Cushitic languages Bilin and Sidaama, the Omotic languages Haro, Maale, and Wolaitta, as well as various Semitic languages outside Ethiopia are cited in some contributions for comparative purposes. The approximate location of these languages is indicated on Map 1.

The first section of this volume contains two articles from the panel on *Interrogativity*. Interrogativity has hitherto often only been handled in a very cursory manner in the grammatical descriptions of Ethiopian languages. In-depth analyses of this grammatical domain could, however, contribute interesting details to intonation research, language typology, and areal and historical linguistics. Omotic languages, many of which are hitherto little known, mark mood inflectionally and thus possess interrogative verbal morphology. Furthermore, the study of the morphology of interrogative pronouns and their diachronic origin can reveal interesting historical insights for the classification of individual languages or language groups. It also remains to be examined how widespread the use of interrogative pronouns plus an additive focus morpheme (similar to English 'even') in the function of indefinite pronouns is attested in Ethiopia. This phenomenon may well turn out to be an areal feature. The following two contributions take a first step towards a detailed examination of issues related to interrogativity in two selected Ethiopian languages.

Yvonne Treis' contribution on *Interrogativity in Baskeet*, a language of the Omotic family, is an in-depth study of morphological, syntactic and pragmatic aspects of interrogativity based on a corpus of recordings of natural speech events. Questions in Baskeet are either marked by intonation only, by an additional interrogative morpheme *-a*, or by a special interrogative verb form. The article discusses, among others, the form and function of the six simplex interrogative pronouns in Baskeet, namely PERSON, THING, TIME, QUANTITY, MANNER, PLACE, and SELECTION, and pronouns derived from them. Furthermore, these pronouns are compared with equivalents in related languages from the Omoto branch of Omotic. Finally, Treis demonstrates the use of interrogative pronouns in non-interrogative contexts in Baskeet.

The second contribution on interrogativity, *Question about Amharic Questions with yəhon: A Tentative Semantic Study* by Magdalena Krzyża-

nowska, is concerned with the Ethio-Semitic language Amharic. It provides a semantic analysis of a special type of Amharic content and polar questions, namely those with the modal epistemic auxiliary *yəhon* ‘might’. Krzyżanowska’s analysis is based on a model developed by Andrzej Bogusławski and other Polish linguists. Accordingly, Amharic questions with *yəhon* are analyzed as consisting of three main components: the theme (i.e. a declarative sentence underlying the question), the rheme (i.e. the interrogative intention marked by prosody), and an additional predication on the theme conveyed by the auxiliary *yəhon*. It is shown that *yəhon* conveys epistemic modality *de re* in content questions, whereas it carries epistemic modality *de dicto* in polar questions. Polar questions with *yəhon* are then compared with declarative sentences marked by the auxiliary *yəhonall* ‘might’, and the additional pragmatic information conveyed by the particles *mənalbat* ‘perhaps’ and *ənde* ‘really’ in questions with *yəhon* is discussed. Finally, the use of *yəhon* as a marker of politeness is shown.

The second section of the volume assembles contributions dealing with *Complex Predicates*, which attracted considerable theoretical interest over the past years. Here Ethiopian languages are of particular interest because of the diversity of complex predicate structures attested in different linguistic families in the country. The two most frequently mentioned features of complex predicates in the linguistic literature (see, for instance, Mengistu, Baker & Harvey 2010) are (i) that they comprise of a sequence of verbal predicates that are structurally and semantically related, and (ii) that verbs in complex predicates typically share an argument as well as tense, aspect, modality and/or polarity. Commonly, periphrastic causatives, converb-plus-verb constructions, particle-plus-verb constructions and ideophone-plus-verb constructions are subsumed under the concept of complex predicate.

The four contributions of the second section discuss empirical issues related to complex predicates in individual Ethiopian languages. They point out the semantic/pragmatic differences between complex predicates and their monoverbal counterparts, the morphosyntactic properties of the component verbs in complex predicates, and the differences between complex predicates on the one hand and multi-clausal constructions or clause chains on the other. Of particular interest are syntactic and morphological mechanisms for combining verbs in a complex predicate, ordering restrictions regarding the component verbs, selection criteria for combining verbs in complex predicates as well as ways to subordinate or nominalize complex predicates and to mark modality and polarity in clauses headed by complex predicates. Thus, different types of complex predicates can be identified in individual languages, and

historical processes such as grammaticalization as well as contact phenomenon can be examined.

Abdu Ahmed's contribution *Complex Predicates in Amharic Counterfactual Antecedent Clauses* is concerned with syntactic and semantic aspects of complex predicates in a single clause type. There are two canonical types of counterfactual antecedent clauses in Amharic: one is based on a monoverbal construction, the other on a complex predicate consisting of a converb and the auxiliary verb *honä* 'be(come)'. In addition to counterfactuality, the latter clause type encodes uncertainty of the speaker. It is shown that the converb encodes reference to the subject (and, optionally, to objects or adjuncts) of the verbal event, while the main verb, *honä* 'be(come)', is only marked for agreement with an expletive subject. The main verb is also the carrier of information on tense, aspect and modality. The author draws a distinction between converb-plus-verb and coverb-plus-verb complex predicates, which differ morphologically but share syntactic features. As subordinate conjunctions or adverbs can intervene between converb/coverb and main verb, complex predicates in Amharic cannot be considered serial verb constructions, which is in agreement with Azeb Amha's analysis of complex predicates in Zargulla.

Azeb Amha identifies in her contribution, *Complex Predicates in Zargulla*, three types of complex predicates. Based on the first component verb, she distinguishes between complex predicates based on converbs, intensive verb stems and ideophones. While basically every verb could occur as first component verb, the number of verbs occurring as second component in complex predicates is restricted to eight verbs – most of them are motion verbs. Semantically, complex predicates encode specific aspects of a verbal event as well as the effect, manner or path of the event. Complex predicates in Zargulla always consist of two component verbs, whereby the first component itself may be represented by a complex predicate.

Binyam Sisay Mendisu's contribution, *Grammaticalization of Existential Auxiliaries in Koorete*, explores the grammaticalization processes undergone by the verbs *ba-* 'disappear, not exist' and *yes-* 'live, exist' in Koorete, an Omotic language. It is shown that several grammaticalization stages (as full verb, existential verb, auxiliary, and grammatical morpheme) exist simultaneously in the language. In the analysis of complex predicates, in which the morphemes under investigation are used as auxiliaries, it is observed that inflectional morphemes occur on both the auxiliary and the main verb. Thus, auxiliary verb constructions in Koorete are categorized as split-headed.

In her contribution *Benefactive Applicative Periphrases with yiw-* 'give' in *Xamtanga*, Chloé Darmon shows that the applicative in the Central

Cushitic language Xamtanga is based on a biverbal periphrastic construction, which licenses the expression of an additional beneficiary participant. The construction involves the converb form of a lexical verb followed by the valency operator *yiw-* ‘give’. Based on a comparison of the characteristics of the benefactive converb-plus-finite verb constructions with other formally identical V1–V2 patterns, it is argued that the ‘give’-periphrasis in Xamtanga is a complex predicate. While *give*-benefactives may be common in other parts of the world, Xamtanga is so far the only known language of the Ethiopian linguistic area that has developed an applicative construction with ‘give’.

The third section of this volume concentrates on issues of *Finiteness*. The finite/non-finite distinction is frequently made in grammars but there is no general consensus on their cross-linguistic definition (cf. Nikolaeva 2007). Often finiteness is considered to be a phrasal or verbal category – mainly defined through specific values for TAM and person marking – but sometimes it is regarded as a clausal category that also encompasses, among others, illocutionary force, i.e. markers of assertion, questions, etc. With regard to Ethiopian languages, the finite/non-finite distinction displays a high degree of linguistic variability. Even within the same linguistic sub-family, independent affirmative clauses may contain a verb only inflected for aspect or modality, and subject agreement, or they may require additional information on tense, focus, or illocutionary force. Furthermore, there are several unsettled debates on certain grammatical phenomena in Ethiopian languages in which finiteness plays a crucial role: Regarding Ethio-Semitic languages, it is, for instance, contested that they have converbs in the strict sense. In Highland East Cushitic, the function of the so-called “additional morphemes” on main clause verbs is still unclear. Six contributions give an overview about the complexity of the questions relating to finiteness in Ethiopian languages. Their general tenor is that finiteness is a scalar or relational category rather than a binary one.

One-to-many correspondence between a grammatical meaning and its morphological realization within one word is the topic of Maria Bulakh’s contribution *Multiple Exponence in the Long Prefix Conjugation of the Transversal South Ethio-Semitic Languages*. She focuses on the analysis of “multiple exponence” for subject referencing on imperfective verbs in main clauses of Amharic, Argobba, Harari, Wolane, and Zay. In these languages, this verb form consists of a main verb in the imperfective aspect followed by the auxiliary verbs **hallawa* or **nabara*. The original analytic construction of this verb form is said to have had double marking of person, once on the main verb and once on the auxiliary verb. The common trend in today’s lan-

guages, however, is to eliminate one of the redundant morphemes, either throughout the entire paradigm or in certain persons only. Bulakh shows that the individual languages use different patterns for dealing with multiple exponence, i.e. the discussed languages do not equally tolerate multiple exponence. There is a general tendency to avoid repetition of formally identical morphemes and to tolerate double marking only if the two markers are formally not too similar.

Joachim Crass discusses clausal finiteness and the mismatch between morphological markedness of affirmative and negative main and subordinate verbs in his contribution *The Asymmetry of Verbal Markedness in Libido*. Libido – a Highland East Cushitic language – has a fairly complex verbal morphology. For the description of the verbal system, Bisang's (1998; 2001; 2007) concept of asymmetry is applied, which is concerned with the occurrence of obligatory categories in main and subordinate verbs. Miestamo's (2005) typology of standard negation is used to describe and categorize the structural asymmetries between affirmative and negative forms of main and subordinate verbs.

Lutz Edzard is concerned with the notion of finiteness from a general comparative Semitic perspective in his contribution *The Finite–Infinite Dichotomy in a Comparative Semitic Perspective*, in which he discusses data from Akkadian, Arabic, Aramaic, Biblical Hebrew and Ethio-Semitic. It is shown that a clear-cut dichotomy between the categories *finite* and *infinite* is problematic in the verbal domain of Semitic – notably as far as the Ethio-Semitic converb/gerund, the Akkadian stative/verbal adjective, and the conjugated noun in predicative position are concerned. In many Semitic languages, verbal nouns or infinitives can adopt a *finite* function pragmatically, notably as imperatives. Furthermore, the first element in serial verb constructions tends to lose the morphological features associated with finiteness and to be grammaticalized into an adverb. In Amharic, certain converbs have become lexicalized in a frozen form with default 3SG.M subject reference; they function synchronically as adverbs.

In his contribution *Finiteness in Gurage Languages*, Ronny Meyer outlines the remarkable variation in marking verbs for finiteness in independent main clauses vis-à-vis dependent clauses in genetically closely related and geographically adjacent languages. The detailed analysis of inflectional features of verbs including TAM, subject indexing, polarity and clausal status, and a comparison of these features in dependent and independent clauses shows that finiteness in Gurage languages is a relational category of the clause that can best be defined through a combination of morphological and syntactic features.

Mulusew Asratie's contribution *Case Marking in Amharic Copular Constructions* discusses the nominative/accusative alternation of NP and AP predicates in Amharic copular constructions from a generative perspective. Based on differences between the accusative and nominative predicates regarding their semantic interpretation, agreement and word order, it is argued that accusative predicates must be assigned by a functional element that introduces "eventivity".

Stefan Weninger studies the Ethio-Semitic converb from a comparative and diachronic perspective in his contribution *Wandering along the Border of Finiteness: The Gə'əz and Tigrinya Converb(s) in a Diachronic Perspective*. He compares the Gə'əz converb with its counterpart in modern Tigrinya, the closest modern relative of Gə'əz. In some respects, the Tigrinya converb has lost features of finiteness still present in Gə'əz. In other respects, it behaves more like a finite verb. Moreover, the modern cognates of the Gə'əz converb have neither developed into a fully finite nor into a fully infinite verb form in any modern Ethio-Semitic language. Instead, converbs have remained a fuzzy category, which makes the author develop a scalar definition of finiteness.

We have made no attempt to unify the transliteration and transcription systems across the individual contributions. Apart from IPA, representations in Fidäl (for some Ethio-Semitic languages) and specialized transliteration/transcription systems are used. The reader should, therefore, be aware that a single sound might have various representations across the contributions, but is usually consistently reproduced by the same symbol in individual contributions. The ejective velar plosive, for instance, is represented by the IPA symbol *k'*, or the symbols *k* and *q* according to the conventions of the *Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* (DMG) and the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* (EAE), respectively. Palatal consonants are marked by a haček in some contributions, i.e. IPA *ɟ* is represented by *ȝ* or *ǧ*. Regarding the vowels, the mid-central vowel is either given as *ä* or *ə*. Note, however, that the symbol *ə* can also represent the mid-high vowel in some contributions on Ethio-Semitic languages, which appears as *i* elsewhere. Vowel length is either marked by a double vowel, e.g. *aa*, or by a macron above the vowel symbol, e.g. *ā*.

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Question about Amharic Questions with *yəhon*: A Tentative Semantic Study

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Abstract

This paper presents a tentative semantic analysis of Amharic content and polar questions with the modal epistemic auxiliary **ይሆን** *yəhon* ‘might’, known as *deliberative* or *meditative* questions. It begins with a review of linguistic works where questions with *yəhon* have been most comprehensively treated. Next, it briefly discusses the concept of thematic-rhematic structure of sentences, which is then applied to investigate the meaning of questions with *yəhon*. In these questions the following main components are indicated and described in detail: the theme, being a declarative sentence contained in each question; an additional predication on the theme conveyed by *yəhon* (the *thematic dictum*); and the rheme, carried largely by prosodic features. Special attention is devoted to elucidating the meaning of *yəhon*. It is shown that *yəhon* conveys epistemic modality *de re* in content questions as it scopes over the variable, whereas it carries epistemic modality *de dicto* in polar questions as it scopes over the whole declarative sentence. The meaning of polar questions with *yəhon* is compared with the meaning of declarative constructions involving the distinct epistemic modal auxiliary **ይሆናል** *yəhonall* ‘might’. Then, the meaning of the particles **ምናልባት** *mənalbat* ‘perhaps’ and **እንደ** *ənde* ‘really’ accompanying questions with *yəhon* is briefly discussed. Finally, the use of *yəhon* as a marker of politeness is presented.

1 Introduction

The aim of this paper is to propose a tentative semantic analysis of Amharic questions with the modal epistemic auxiliary **ይሆን** *yəhon*.¹ It will focus on questions like the following:

1 I like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Orin Gensler for providing insightful advice and criticisms and for supporting me before and during my conference presentation. I thank him also for English proofreading of the last version of this article. Equally, I am greatly indebted to my Ethiopian friends Tə’gəst Bərhanu, Abrəham Aduñña, Sälomon Gäbräyäs and Gidäna Mäsfən for their invaluable help and for their patience.

- (1) ሰላማዊት ነገ ትመጣ ይሆን?
sälamawit nägä tə-məṭa yəhon?
 Sälamawit tomorrow 3SG.F-come\IPFV AUX.Q
 ‘Might Sälamawit be coming tomorrow?’
- (2) አሉላን ማን ረድቶት ይሆን?
alula-n man rädät-o-t yəhon?
 Alula-ACC who help\CNV-3SG.M-OJ.3SG.M AUX.Q
 ‘Who might have helped Alula?’

The basic conceptual apparatus which will be applied in the analysis is that elaborated by Bogusławski (1977). The main thrust of his approach is to investigate the meaning of questions by describing their thematic-rhematic structure. Since each type of sentence has its own particular thematic-rhematic structure, this structure can be used to describe questions of all types with all their characteristic features.² Additionally, the present paper is to some extent inspired by Danielewiczowa (1996) where she applies Bogusławski’s concept to examine the thematic-rhematic structure of questions in Polish. Her work was especially instructive in pulling apart the various components of the structure, a task which is particularly difficult for questions.

Our analysis will aim at tentatively indicating the main components of the thematic-rhematic structure of questions with *yəhon* and at establishing the meaning that each component contributes. Special attention will be devoted to elucidating the meaning of the auxiliary *yəhon*, which is crucial for distinguishing *yəhon* questions, known as *deliberative* or *meditative*, from other types of questions (in particular those with non-standard semantics such as rhetorical questions, riddles and exam questions) and from declarative constructions involving the epistemic modal auxiliary *yəhonall*. Also, it will be shown that the kind of epistemic modality that *yəhon* conveys depends on the type of question in which it is contained, i.e. *de re* in content questions and *de dicto* in polar questions. The semantic category of epistemic modality will be conceptualized in terms of a scale which involves different degrees of the speaker’s certainty in regard to the truth-value of the sentence.³ Since the

2 On the analysis of questions as kinds of statements and directives, see Danielewiczowa (1996:10 ff.).

3 For epistemic modality treated in terms of the degree of the speaker’s certainty or similar notions (commitment, confidence), see e.g. Lyons (1977), Rytel (1982), Coates (1983), Givón (1994) and Nuyts (2001).

scale is continuous the modal epistemic meanings may be delimited only roughly as high, medium and low degree of certainty. The auxiliaries *yəhon* and *yəhonall* convey low degree of certainty. Finer differences in meanings between pairs of sentences will be discussed in terms of having greater, lower or equal degree of certainty. Morphologically, *yəhon* is the 3SG, masculine, simple imperfective form of the verb *ገኘ* *honä* ‘become’. The verb *yəhon* has undergone a grammaticalization process here and has come to serve as a frozen interrogative auxiliary which always follows the main verb (or the predicate nominal in a nominal sentence). It is completely invariant; there is no *təhon* ‘may you (SG.M)/she become’, etc.

The next part of the article, Section 2, presents how the semantics of questions with *yəhon* has been dealt with in three previous works on Amharic grammar. It is followed by Section 3 containing a brief discussion of the thematic-rhematic structure of sentences, with a special focus on interrogatives. The next lengthy Section 4 treats the main individual components of the thematic-rhematic structure of questions with *yəhon*, i.e. theme, thematic dictum and rheme. These are described separately for content and polar questions. Section 5 discusses how the particles *mənalbat* ‘perhaps’ and *ənde* ‘really’ contribute to the meaning of questions. Section 6 presents the use of *yəhon* as a politeness marker. The last Section 7 contains the conclusion.

The analysis will be illustrated with sentences representing both spoken and written Amharic.⁴ Some sentences were constructed by the author together with Amharic speakers.⁵

2 Review of literature

Thus far the semantics of Amharic questions has been examined only briefly and not systematically. In linguistic descriptions of the language, questions with *yəhon* have been given relatively (though not absolutely) more attention in three works: Cohen’s *Traité de langue amharique* (1936), Goldenberg’s *The Amharic Tense-System* (1966) and Leslau’s *Reference Grammar of Amharic* (1995). Let us touch upon each work separately.

-
- 4 The examples are taken from real conversations, radio programs and novels. References are given in the footnotes only for sentences taken from five novels and one radio play. The abbreviated titles of novels are followed by the page number and the line number.
 - 5 Four Amharic speakers participated as the informants in writing this paper: Tə’gəst Bərhanu, Abṛəham Aduñña, Sälomon Gäbräyäs and Gidäna Mäsfən. All of them speak Amharic as their first language. Gidäna Mäsfən speaks also Tigrinya as his first language. Sälomon Gäbräyäs speaks Oromo as his second language while Tə’gəst Bərhanu speaks Tigrinya.

Cohen (1936:382 f.) treats questions with *yəhon* in a section on hypothetical interrogative sentences. He understands them as questions conveying a meaning of open or incomplete “*éventualité*”, that is, *possibility* or *eventuality*. Goldenberg (1966:77) first mentions *yəhon* as an independent form, i.e. a copula preceded by a nominal, expressing ጥርጣሬ *ṭarəṭṭare* “doubt” and መደገጥ *mädängät* “unpleasant surprise”. Further on, in the chapter devoted to compound tenses, he discusses the gerund with *yəhon* referring to an event which took place before the moment of speaking (Goldenberg 1966:206) and the imperfective with *yəhon* referring to an event which is taking place at the moment of speaking or will take place in the future (Goldenberg 1966:247 ff.); both of these are used in questions and exclamations of “surprise and fear”, especially in monologues and in inner speech. In his *Reference grammar of Amharic*, Leslau (1995:312, 328, 382, 776) takes into consideration similar aspects of questions with *yəhon*. He indicates that *yəhon* may be used alone as the main verb or it may be preceded by an imperfective or a gerund verb form to express probability or possibility in a question.

Thus, questions with *yəhon* have been noted by linguists and their basic meaning has been described, but not in detail. To the best of my knowledge, there has been no study devoted to the prosodic features of Amharic questions, with the exception of Alemayehu Haile’s (1990) analysis of the intonation contour of Amharic polar questions.

3 Introduction to the thematic-rhematic structure of questions

The analysis of questions with *yəhon* will consist in describing their thematic-rhematic structure. The thematic-rhematic structure refers to the division of a sentence into two main semantic parts called *theme* and *rheme*.⁶ Theme is the thing or concept which is being talked about in the sentence while rheme is what is being said about this thing. Only simple sentences have such a simple binary structure. For complex sentences with several arguments and/or several predicates the structure may consist of several themes and rhemes (Karlak 1999:493 f., 596 f.). Furthermore, there can be various additional predications which are connected with the theme and which cannot be negated; these are called *thematic dicta* or presuppositions (Danielewiczowa 1996:42).

As the axis of any question, that is, as the question’s rheme, Bogusławski (1977:242) suggests the formula: “I want to become confronted with a true sentence about...”; then the predication expressed by the question follows, which constitutes the question’s theme. In other words, by asking a question

6 In other scholarly traditions these terms correspond roughly to *topic* and *comment*, *psychological subject* and *psychological predicate*, *datum* and *novum*, respectively.

4 Thematic-rhematic structure of questions with *vəhon*

4.1 Theme of questions with *vəhon*

(3) **ይህንን ቸኮሌት ሠናይት አጥጥታልኝ** **ይሆን?**
yəh-ənnən čäkolet sännayt amṭət-a-ll-əññ *yəhon?*
 this-ACC chocolate Sännayt bring/CNV-3SG.F-BEN-OJ.1SG AUX.Q
 ‘Might Sännayt have brought me this chocolate?’

- The sender does not know whether sentence (4) is true or false and s/he wants to verify it. This is a polar (yes/no) question.

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- (5) **ምን ችግር ገጥሟት ይሆን?**
mən čəggər gätm-o-at yəhon?
 what problem happen\CNV-3SG.M-OJ.3SG.F AUX.Q
 ‘What problem might have happened to her?’

For this question the *datum questionis* is sentence (6):

- (6) **የሆነ ችግር ገጥሟታል**
yä-hon-ä čəggər gätm-o-at-all
 REL-be\IPFV-3SG.M problem happen\CNV-3SG.M-OJ.3SG.F-AUX.NPST
 ‘Some problem has happened to her.’

This sentence is considered to be true, that is, it is presupposed. This is a salient difference between content questions and polar questions: the *datum questionis* is presupposed in the former but not the latter.

4.2 Thematic dictum of questions with *yəhon*

It should be noted that the *datum questionis* of (3) and (5) does not include *yəhon*. This is because *yəhon* conveys an additional predication about the theme. For expressing an event which may be taking place at the moment of speaking or may take place in the future, the main verb⁷ occurs in its simple imperfective form, e.g.:

- (7) **አልማዝ መቼ ትመጣ ይሆን?**
almaz mäčə tə-mäṭa yəhon?
 Almaz when 3SG.F-come\IPFV AUX.Q
 ‘When might Almaz be coming?’

An event which might have taken place before the moment of speaking is indicated by the converb form, e.g.:

7 In my analysis of the meaning of *yəhon*, nominal (non-verbal) sentences have not been taken into account. Some examples of such sentences are given only in the part dealing with prosody (cf. 30 and 31). It appears that in nominal sentences *yəhon* may be both a copula and an interrogative auxiliary at the same time like in (30). Yet *yəhon* may also occur separately, following the copula as in (31). There seems to be a difference in meaning between the sentences: (30) conveys higher degree of certainty than (31).

- (8) ብርቅቆውን ማን ሰብሮ ይሆን?
bərčəqqo-w-ən man säbr-o yəhon?
 glass-DEF-ACC who break\CNV-3SG.M AUX.Q
 ‘Who might have broken the glass?’

Questions with *yəhon* most often occur in monologues and inner speech, a fact which is tightly connected with their semantics. Apart from the sender there might be a listener but s/he is essentially irrelevant. The listener is not really the intended addressee and therefore the sender does not expect an answer from her/him. The answer possibly exists, but at the moment of speaking it is not available. If there is an *addressee* at all, it is the sender her/himself. That is why, although the sender *poses* the question, s/he does not really *ask* the question,⁸ in the normal sense of seeking information in the answer and nothing more. Rather, s/he invites her/himself (and possibly her/his listener) to *deliberate* on the answer, which (s/he thinks) is somehow difficult to arrive at. In what follows we shall try to elucidate how questions with *yəhon* become *deliberative* questions.

4.2.1 Meaning of *yəhon* in content questions

The *datum questionis* for question (9) is the declarative sentence (10) which contains a variable ‘someone’:

- (9) አሉላን ማን ረድቶት ይሆን?
alula-n man rädət-o-t yəhon?
 Alula-ACC who help\CNV-3SG.M-OJ.3SG.M AUX.Q
 ‘Who might have helped Alula?’

- (10) (እገሌ)ይሆን አሉላን ረዳው
(əgäle)yəhon alula-n rädä-w
 (someone)_{AUX.Q} Alula-ACC help\PFV.3SG.M-OJ.3SG.M
 ‘(Someone)_{yəhon} has helped Alula.’

By asking the question, the sender is looking for a specific thing that s/he could substitute for the variable of the *datum questionis*, just as in standard questions without *yəhon*. The interrogative auxiliary *yəhon* scopes over the variable, bringing out a range of things which the sender could take into consideration as the true thing. Thus, in contrast to standard questions where

8 On the difference between asking and posing a question see Lyons (1977:753 ff.).

only one thing is taken into consideration as the true thing, in questions with *yəhon* there are more potential candidates which are taken into consideration as the true thing substitutable for the variable. In other words, the true thing appears against a background of other things; to reach the answer,⁹ the sender needs to sort these out.¹⁰ By way of illustration consider sentences (11) and (12) which are uttered in succession as the speaker's proposed answer to question (9):

- (11) ቶማስ ረድቶት ይሆናል
tomas rädət-o-t yəhonall
 Tomas help\CNV-3SG.M-OJ.3SG.M AUX.EMOD
 'Thomas might have helped him.'
- (12) አይ፤ እሱ አይደለም። ሰነፍ ነው
ayy əssu aydällä-mm sänäf nä-w
 no he NEG.COP.3SG.M-NEG lazy COP-3SG.M
 'No, it's not him. He is lazy.'
- (13) አልማዝ ትሆናለች
almaz tə-hon-all-äčč
 Almaz 3SG.F-be\IPFV-AUX.NPST-3SG.F
 'She might be Almaz.'

4.2.2 Meaning of *yəhon* in polar questions

In polar questions the sender presents the whole *datum questionis* as the object to be verified, i.e. s/he looks for the affirmation or for the negation of the truth of the *datum questionis*. However, polar questions with *yəhon* are enriched with an additional meaning which we shall present here. The *datum questionis* for (14) is the declarative sentence (15):

9 Sometimes the answer may not be the main aim as the sender knows that it does not exist or is unavailable at the moment of speaking. Even sorting out the things may only serve as a way to exclude those which appear as false.

10 I have adopted the basic concept for elucidating the meaning of Amharic content questions with *yəhon* from Boguslawski (1993), who examines Russian content questions with the verb *možet* 'can'.

- (14) ሰላማዊት ነገ ትመጣ ይሆን?
sälamawit nägä tə-mäṭa yəhon?
 Sälamawit tomorrow 3SG.F-come\IPFV AUX.Q
 ‘Might Sälamawit be coming tomorrow?’
- (15) (ሰላማዊት ነገ ትመጣለች)_{yəhon}
*(sälamawit nägä tə-mäṭa-all-äččə)*_{yəhon}
 (Sälamawit tomorrow 3SG.F-come\IPFV-AUX.NPST-3SG.F)_{AUX.Q}
 ‘(Sälamawit is coming tomorrow)_{yəhon}’

The auxiliary *yəhon* scopes over the whole declarative sentence, indicating that it is only one of a range of sentences which are candidates for the true sentence. The sender does not know whether the *datum questionis* is verifiable at all. Yet, s/he poses the question because s/he does not exclude that the sentence might be true and thinks that it should be taken into consideration. To make this explanation clearer, let us consider other questions concerning Sälamawit that, in the same context, the sender might raise:

- (16) ወይስ ከነገ ወዲያ ትመጣ ይሆን?
wäyss kä-nägä wädiya tə-mäṭa yəhon?
 or from-tomorrow beyond 3SG.F-come\IPFV AUX.Q
 ‘Or might she be coming the day after tomorrow?’
- (17) አትመጣ ይሆን?
a-t-mäṭa yəhon?
 NEG-3SG.F-come\IPFV AUX.Q
 ‘Might she not be coming at all?’

One more example taken from a novel:

- (18) ትርጉግ ትዝ አለችው። በነፍስ ትኖር ይሆን?
tərango təzz al-äččə-əw bā-näfs tə-nor yəhon?
 Tərango IDPH. say\PFV-3SG.F- in-soul 3SG.F- AUX.Q
 remember OJ.3SG.M exist\IPFV

ሞታ	ይሆን?	አያውቅም
<i>mot-a</i>	<i>yəhon?</i>	<i>a-y-awq-əmm</i>
die\CNV-3SG.F	AUX.Q	NEG-3SG.M-know\IPFV-NEG
‘He remembered Təṛəngo. Might she be alive? Might she have died? He does not know.’ (KB 13: 7–8)		

The *deliberative* or *meditative* character that questions with *yəhon* assume seems to result from the fact that the sender confronts her/himself with *a range of* things which s/he takes into consideration as possibly true and *a range of* sentences that are candidates for the true sentence. This is a sufficient condition for a question to become *deliberative*.¹¹ Next may come the sender’s attempts to eliminate false candidates and select the true one.

4.2.3 Modal epistemic meanings of *yəhon*

Whereas standard questions, as Bogusławski (1977:245) says, have “intellectual, non-egocentric and impartial [...] character, especially, [...] in comparison with other utterances expressing the will to learn something”, in questions with *yəhon* the sender highlights, basically, her/his lack of knowledge.¹² In content questions with *yəhon* the sender does not know which one out of the range of candidate things s/he should substitute for the variable. In polar questions with *yəhon* the sender does not know whether the *datum questionis* is verifiable but s/he does not exclude that it might be true and thinks that it should be taken into consideration.

Although both content and polar questions convey a modal epistemic meaning, as was already mentioned, there is a crucial difference in scope

11 Questions with *yəhon* cannot be identified with rhetorical questions, taken in the narrow sense as “questions which lead the addressee to understand the opposite” (Bussmann 1996:408). In fact, *yəhon* may occur in rhetorical questions as in the example below where a positive content question implies a negative assertion, i.e. ‘People will never get to know that life is holy.’

(i)	ሰዎች	ሕይወት	ቅዱስ	መሆኑን	የሚያውቁት	መች	ይሆን?
	<i>sāw-očč</i>	<i>həywät</i>	<i>qaddus</i>	<i>māhon-u-n</i>	<i>yāmm-iy-awq-u-t</i>	<i>māč</i>	<i>yəhon?</i>
	man-PL	life	holy	be\VN-POSS.	REL-3PL-know\	when	AUX.Q
				3SG.M-ACC	IPFV-3PL-OJ.3SG.M		

‘When might people get to know that life is holy?’

12 One might argue that, in principle, we ask questions because we do not know something and we want to learn about it. However, ignorance is not a necessary component of questions. An examiner knows the answer but still poses a question which grammatically is in no way different from the same question asked by someone who does not know the answer. In light of this, questions with *yəhon* contain a clear and explicit signal of the sender’s relative ignorance.

between them. In linguistics and logic this distinction can be conceptualized in terms of *de re* (Latin “about the thing”) modality and *de dicto* (Latin “about what is said”) modality.¹³ The auxiliary *yəhon* in content questions, whose scope ranges over variables within the *datum questionis*, conveys epistemic modality *de re* as it concerns things in the actual world, i.e. ‘Who/What is possibly X?’ In contrast, *yəhon* in polar questions, scoping over the whole *datum questionis*, carries epistemic modality *de dicto* as it concerns what is said about a state of affairs, i.e. ‘Is it possible that *p*?’ Thus, in this type of questions *yəhon* conveys a low degree of certainty in respect to the truth of the sentence. It is more problematic to assign the degree of certainty to *yəhon* in content questions since we cannot assign the truth-value to a non-sentential variable. To do so, we need to assume that even though *yəhon* scopes over the variable, it extends beyond it and embraces the whole sentence in which it is embedded. That means, the variable is taken together with what is predicated about it. Then, *yəhon* conveys a low degree of certainty in respect to the truth of the sentence containing a variable for which a range of candidate things may be substituted.

4.2.4 The auxiliary *yəhon* in comparison with *yəhonall*

Beside *yəhon* there is a similar modal epistemic auxiliary **ይሆናል** *yəhonall* which occurs only in declarative sentences. From the morphological point of view, *yəhonall* is a standard compound imperfective form, composed (in the usual way) of the 3SG, masculine, simple imperfective form of the verb **ሆነ** *honä* ‘become’ and the 3SG, masculine, perfective form of the verb **አለ** *allä* ‘be present’. In the course of the grammaticalization process *yəhonall* has become a frozen form and, simultaneously, its function has shifted from lexical to purely grammatical. Thus, semantically, it conveys only the modal epistemic meaning whereas the main predication is expressed by the main verb that precedes it (and takes subject agreement).

If we take into consideration its scope, *yəhonall* is more closely related to *yəhon* in polar questions than to *yəhon* in content questions. Consequently, it is more appropriate to compare its meaning with *yəhon* in polar questions. The essential difference between the two auxiliaries is that *yəhon* occurs exclusively in questions whereas *yəhonall* is used in statements. This implies that we may expect distinct intonation patterns for the two types of utter-

13 About *de re* and *de dicto* modalities in linguistics, see e.g. Lyons (1995:230 f.) and Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet (2000:308 f.). *De re* and *de dicto* modalities in logic are treated e.g. by Allwood et al. (1977:114 ff.) and Gamut (1991:45 ff.). Quine (1953) opposes this distinction.

ances. Besides, the meaning of *yəhonall* differs in at least two other points. First, the sender takes into consideration only *one* sentence at a time whose truth s/he is uncertain of and, therefore, the sentence with *yəhonall* does not assume a *deliberative* character. Secondly, and as a corollary of the previous point, the degree of certainty that it conveys is higher than in the case of polar questions with *yəhon*.

Compare (19) vs. (20):

- | | | | | |
|------|---------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------|---------------|
| (19) | ሰላማዊት | ነገ | ትመጣ | ይሆን? |
| | <i>sälamawit</i> | <i>nägä</i> | <i>tə-mäṭa</i> | <i>yəhon?</i> |
| | Sälamawit | tomorrow | 3SG.F-come\IPFV | AUX.Q |
| | ‘Might Sälamawit be coming tomorrow?’ | | | |
-
- | | | | | |
|------|---------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| (20) | ሰላማዊት | ነገ | ትመጣ | ይሆናል |
| | <i>sälamawit</i> | <i>nägä</i> | <i>tə-mäṭa</i> | <i>yəhonall</i> |
| | Sälamawit | tomorrow | 3SG.F-come\IPFV | AUX.EMOD |
| | ‘Sälamawit might be coming tomorrow.’ | | | |

One may wonder whether both auxiliaries might perhaps be interpreted as conveying basically the same epistemic meaning of low degree of certainty. The difference in meaning between sentences in which they occur would be then ascribed to the type of utterance: question for *yəhon* and statement for *yəhonall*.

4.3 Rheme of questions with *yəhon*

The rheme of questions, in general, comprises all those components which are responsible for interrogativity. For content questions interrogativity is conveyed in the first place by interrogative pronouns. They are aurally perceived as stressed¹⁴ (indicated here in bold), which is why they are the main bearers of the rheme.¹⁵ The final word or phrase may have a rising intonation, but this seems not to be obligatory.¹⁶

14 The author is not able to say which type of word stress is peculiar to Amharic.

15 To establish prosodic features of questions I used my own recordings of two Amharic speakers as well as recordings that accompany Obolenski et al. (1964).

16 In the speech of two Ethiopians rising intonation at the end of content questions did not occur.

- (21) **ምን ችግር ገጠማት?**
mən čəggər gättäm-ä-at?
 what problem happen\PFV-3SG.M-OJ.3SG.F
 ‘What problem happened to her?’
- (22) **አዲስ መኪና መግዛት ለምን ያስፈልጋታል?**
addis mākina mägzat lämən y-asfälləg-at-all?
 new car buy\VN why 3SG.M-need\IPFV-OJ.3SG.F-AUX.NPST
 ‘Why does she need to buy a new car?’ (lit. ‘Why does it need her to buy a new car?’)
- (23) **እናቱ አሁን ምን እየሠራች ነው?**
ənnat-e ahun mən əyyä-särra-čč nə-w?
 mother-POSS.1SG now what PROG-work\PFV-3SG.F COP-3SG.M
 ‘What is my mother doing now?’

The prosody of Amharic content questions with *yəhon* is essentially the same as in the above examples. The interrogative pronouns are always very clearly stressed, whereas *yəhon*, being the last word, does not have a rising intonation or, if it is there, it is not prominent.

- (24) **ምን ችግር ገጥሟት ይሆን?**
mən čəggər gättm-o-at yəhon?
 what problem happen\CNV-3SG.M-OJ.3SG.F AUX.Q
 ‘What problem might have happened to her?’
- (25) **አዲስ መኪና መግዛት ለምን ያስፈልጋት ይሆን?**
addis mākina mägzat lämən y-asfälləg-at yəhon?
 new car buy\VN why 3SG.M-need\IPFV-OJ.3SG.F AUX.Q
 ‘Why might she need to buy a new car?’
- (26) **እናቱ አሁን ምን እየሠራች ይሆን?**
ənnat-e ahun mən əyyä-särra-čč yəhon?
 mother-POSS.1SG now what PROG-work\PFV-3SG.F AUX.Q
 ‘What might my mother be doing now?’