# AGAINST AN INITIAL WH FILTER IN AMHARIC*
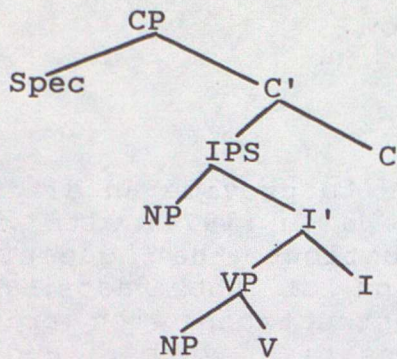
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## 1. INTRODUCTION:

The objective of this paper is to provide an alternative analysis to a constraint proposed by Hailu (1974) with respect to the ungrammaticality of constructions that question the subject in situ. As a description of the facts, Hailu's observation holds true for all constructions with transitive verbs. Constructions with intransitive verbs, and small clause constructions, however, contradict Hailu's observation. The alternative solution proposed here will provide an explanation to the facts observed by Hailu. The same analysis will provide an explanation to the data which stood as counter evidence to Hailu's constraint.
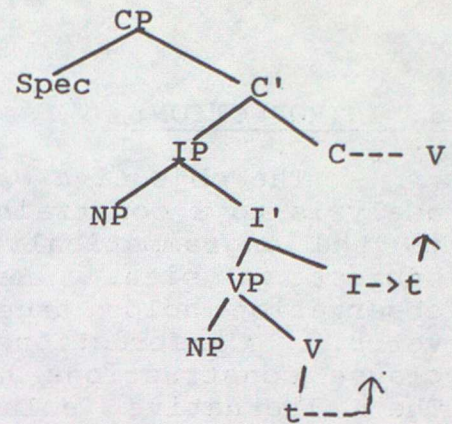
## 1.1 BACKGROUND:

Amharic is an S O V language (Greenberg (1963), Bender (1976), Hailu (1974), Taddese (1972)). XPs are head final. Prepositions in pps are analysed as case markers (Tremblay & Kabbaj forthcoming). Following Koopman's (1983) V to I movement and Tremblay's (1986) analysis of V to I to C in Amharic CP structure, the following Deep and Surface Structures are proposed for Amharic.

a. <u>D-Structure</u>                    b. <u>S-Structure</u>

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           CP                                      CP
          /  \                                    /  \
       Spec   C'                               Spec   C'
             /  \                                     /  \
           IPS   C                                  IP   C--- V
          /  \                                     /  \        ↑
        NP    I'                                 NP    I'
             /  \                                     /  \
           VP    I                                  VP   I->t
          /  \                                     /  \
        NP    V                                  NP    V
                                                        \
                                                        t---↑
```

There is no Wh movement in syntax (i.e no Wh in Spec of CP).

Examples:

(2) a. Kǎbbǎdǎ lǎ-alǎmu mǎs'haf sǎt't'-ǎ(-w).
       Kebbede to-Alemu a book gave-3smS(-3smO)
       'Kebbede gave a book to Alemu.'

    b. * mɨn kǎbbǎdǎ  lǎ-alǎmu   sǎt't -ǎ(-w)?
         What Kebbede to-Alemu  gave-3smS (-3smO)
         'What did Kebbede give to Alemu?'

    C. kǎbbǎdǎ lǎ-alǎmu mɨn sǎt't-ǎ(-w)?
       Kebbede to-Alemu what gave-3smS(-3smO)
       'What did Kebbede give to Alemu?'

In addition to this empirical evidence, the absence of a syntactic movement is further confirmed by the absence of the properties of the rule that moves Wh phrases into Comp (commonly known as Wh diagnostics (Chomsky 1977)). One of these properties is the presence of a Wh word on the surface in the Comp position of an S' (for us, in the SPEC of CP). As shown in (2) however, no Wh word appears in Comp at S-Structure in Amharic. Therefore, one of these properties is lacking. Elements (like Relativizer, Complementizer...etc) that normally appear in Comp by themselves in English are prefixed to the verb in Amharic.

Examples:

(3) a. käbbädä yä-mätt-äw lɨǰ mät't'-a.
        Kebbede REL-hit-3smS-3smO boy came-3sms
        'The boy who Kebbede hit came.'

    b. täsfaye alämu käbbädä-n ɨndä-mätt-a(-w) näggär-ä-N
        Tesfaye Alemu Kebbede-ACC that-hit-3smS(-3smO)
        'Tesfaye told me that Alemu hit Kebbede.'

    c. käbbädä girma si-mät'-a hed-ä.
        Kebbede Girma when-came-3smS went-3sms
        'kebbede left when Girma came.'

The second property is the existence of a gap inside IP. There is no such gap in Amharic.

Examples:

(4) a. k̈abbäd̈a yä-ayy-ä-w säw
    Kebbede REL-see-3smS (-smO man)
    Lit:  The man Kebbede saw him.'

    b. *k̈abbäd̈a yä-ayy-ä säw
    kebbede REL-see-3smS man
    'The man Kebbede saw'

    c. k̈abbäd̈a ayy-ä(-w)
    Kebbede˙ saw-3smS(-3smO)
    'kebbede saw (him)'

The last diagnostic property is the application of subjacency.  In Amharic, subjacency does not apply as, relativization does not obey CNPC.
Examples:

(5) yä-m̈att-aw-ɨn          säw-yyä almaz yä-ag̈aNN-ä-čɨw    säw
    REL-hit-3smS-3smO-ACC man the Almaz REL-find-3smS-3smO man

    gar ẗanägaggär-ku
    with talked-1sm/fS

    'I talked with the man who Almaz found the man who hit
    him'..

## 1.2 THE PROBLEM:

Questioning a subject in situ in a construction where the V takes a complement results in ungrammatical sentences. Examples:

(6) a. käbbädä yonas-ɨn mätt-a(-w).
   kebbede Yonas-Acc hit-3smS-3sm0
   'Kebbede hit Yonas.'

   b. *mann Yonas-ɨn mätt-a(-w)?
   Who Yonas-ACC hit-3smS-3sm0
   "Who hit Yonas?'

The same is true with copulative (equational) sentences. Taddese has also noticed this fact. "In equational sentences, both the subject NP and the predicate attribute may be questioned, but mere substitution of a question word in the place of the questioned constituent would result in ungrammatical sentences ---" (1972 :202)
Examples:

(7) a. käbbädä astämari-w näw
   Kebbede teacher-the/his is
   'kebbede is the/his teacher.'

   b. *man astämari-w näw?
   Who teacher-the/his is
   'Who is the/his teacher?'

For a language that has no wh movement in the syntax, not to allow questioning the subject in situ seems to be paradoxical. Therefore, why questioning subjects in situ in such constructions is not possible needs proper explanations.

## 1.3. SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM:

Hailu Fulas (1974) proposed the following filter: "A questioned constituent may not occur as the initial element of its clause." This filter, apart from not being explanatory, has standing counter-examples. Constructions with intransitive verbs, are a few such counter-examples. In such constructions, the subject can be questioned in situ.

Examples:

(8) a. kăbbădă măt't' -a
       kebbede came-3smS
       'Kebbede came.'

    b. mann măt't' -a?
       Who  came-3smS
       'Who came?'

In a small clause construction, questioning the object in situ is not possible. Hailu's filter says nothing about such constructions; in fact, the filter predicts that such constructions would be grammatical, since the Wh word is not

clause initial. The reason for the ungrammaticality of (9 b)
below, however, cannot be anything other than the Wh word
being in situ. This is attested by comparing the minimal
pairs in (9 a) and (9 b).


(9) a. Kӓbbӓdӓ-n bӓ-atkɨlt bota-w wɨst' agӓNN-ӓ (-w).

   kebbede-ACC CA=garden place-the inside found-3smS(3smO)

   'He found kebbede inside the garden.'


   b. * mann-ɨn bӓ-atkɨlt bota-w wɨst' agӓNN-ӓ(-w).

   Whom-ACC CA-garden place-the inside found-3smS(-3smO)

   'Who did he find in the Garden?'


The examples in (8b) and (9b) are counter-examples to the
filter proposed by Hailu. To sum up, we reject Hailu's filter
because, it lacks explanatory power. It is not at all clear
why a language would need such a constraint. It has apparent
counter-examples. Therefore, if it were to be accepted, it
would remain to be a language particular rule.

Having rejected Hailu's filter, we would like to provide
an alternative solution to the problem. The solution that we
propose appeals to William's (1980) theory of Predication and
Huang's (1982) theory of Wh movement.

If roughly generalized, the predication theory says that
there is a tight relationship between the subject and its
predicate. This relationship is expressed by the c-command
relationship that both categories enter into. A predicate is

commanded by, and commands its subject. We will assume that this relationship holds for Amharic. Unlike Williams, however, we will assume that traces are not visible for predicates.

Huang (1982:254), in his theory of Wh movement, says, "--- language families do not differ with respect to whether they have a Wh movement rule or not;  but may differ in where they use the rule, in the syntax or in the LF."3 According to  this theory, we will assume that the Wh rule in Amharic applies at LF.

The above two assumptions explain why questioning the subject in situ results in ungrammatical sentences.  The  Wh word (in accordance with Huang's theory) moves at LF to the SPEC of CP, which is assumed to be the left of C.   This movement would leave the subject inaccessible to its predicate. Trace is not visible to the predicate, therefore, the c-command relationship that existed between the subject and the predicate prior to the movement would be blocked by IP, as IP is no more dominating the Wh word but the trace.  The only way to save such  a  structure  is  by  re-establishing  the  c-  command relationship  of  the  subject  and  the  predicate.   This  is possible by moving the object to the Topic position which is assumed to be either to the left or to the right of CP.

Examples:

(10) a. k̇äbbädä astämari-w näw.
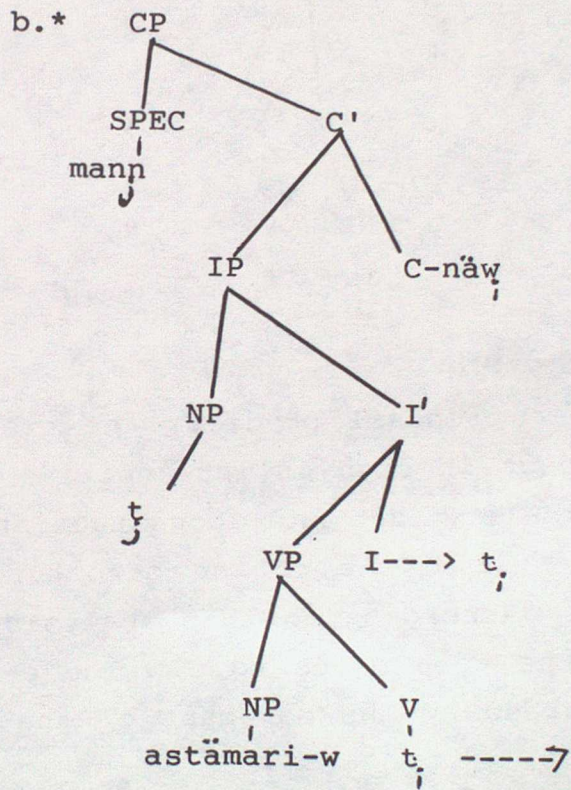        kebbede teacher-the/his is
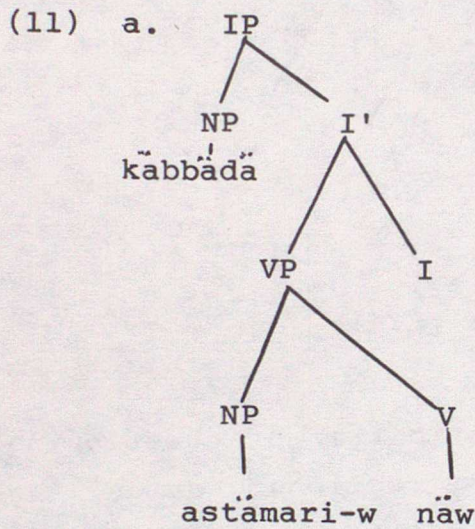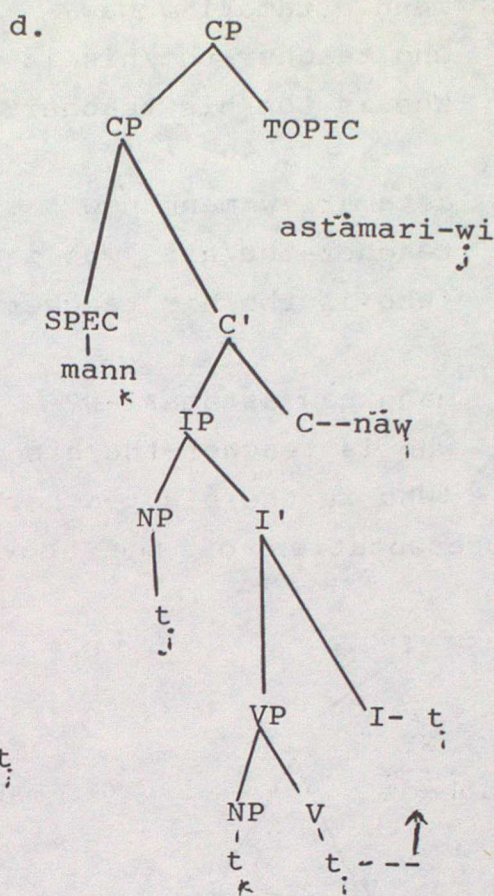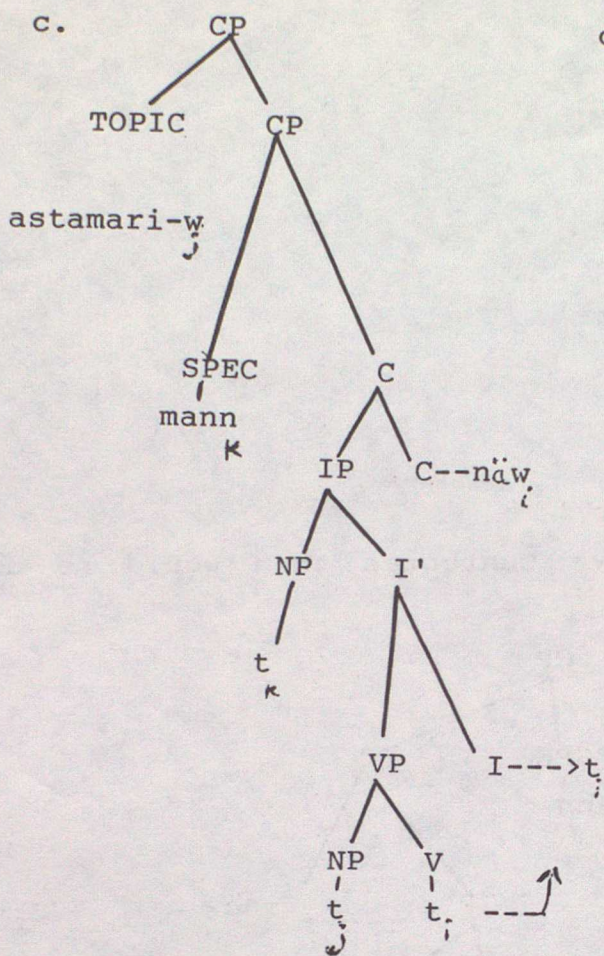        "Kebbede is the/his teacher."

b. *mann astämari-w näw?
   who teacher-the/his is
   'Who is the/his teacher?'

c. astämari-w mann näw?
   teacher-the/his  who is
   'Who is the/his teacher?'

d. mann näw astämari-w?
   who is teacher-the/his
   'Who is the/his teacher?'

The representation of the above sentences then would be as
follows:

(11)  a.      IP                    b.*      CP
           /      \                        /      \
         NP        I'                   SPEC       C'
         |         |                     |        /  \
       kabbädä     |                    mann     /    \
                   |                     ·      /      \
                   |                           IP      C-näw
                 /   \                        /  \        ·
               VP     I                     NP    I'
              /  \                          |    /  \
            NP    V                         |   /    \
            |      \                        t   VP   I---> t
       astämari-w  näw                      ·  /  \      ·
                                              NP    V
                                              |     ·
                                         astämari-w  t  ---->
                                                     ·

c.

CP

TOPIC          CP

astamari-w
          j̣

              SPEC          C

              mann
                 k̈

                    IP          C--nä̈w
                                      i

                 NP          I'

                 t
                  k̈

                       VP          I--->t
                                         i

                    NP     V
                    ṭ       t
                     j̣       i    --⌐

d.

CP

          CP          TOPIC

                           astämari-wi
                                    j̣

     SPEC          C'

     mann
        k̈

          IP          C--nä̈w
                            i

       NP          I'

       t
        j̣

            VP          I- t
                            i

         NP     V
         t       t    ↑
          k̈       i  ---

Our proposal predicts the grammaticality of questioning the subject in situ in intransitive constructions. For us, the grammaticality of such constructions follows naturally from Trembley's analysis of the structure of CP which we adopted earlier. According to this analysis, whenever IP is dominated by CP, the verb moves to C. The c-command relationship which is disturbed by the movement of the subject to the SPEC of CP is,

therefore, saved by the movement of the Verb to C since the moved verb can now c-command the subject and vice-versa. The reason we are not able to question the subject in situ in a transitive sentence is that such structures would not be able to maintain the c-command relationship between the subject and the predicate, since the object which is part of the predicate would be in situ blocked by IP from entering into such c-command relationship. As indicated earlier in the copulative constructions, such constructions could be saved only by moving the object to the TOPIC positions.

Small clause constructions favour our analysis more than Hailu's. The filter Hailu proposed says nothing about the fact that questioning the object in small clause construction results in ungrammatical sentences. A sentence like (9b) undermines Hailu's observation since it is a non-clause initial but ungrammatical Wh construction. Our theory, however, offers an explanation as to why questioning the object in small clause construction such as (9 b) is not possible. It is because, in such construction the predication relationship exists between the object and the pp in the same manner as it existed between the subject and the predicate. Therefore, when questioning the object, the c-command relationship would be discontinued as the object has to move to the SPEC of CP and, its trace is not visible for predication. The sentence could be saved, however, in a manner other such constructions are saved, that is, by re-establishing the c-command relationship by moving the pp to the TOPIC positions, as in the structure below:.

(12)   ba-atkilt botaw wist' kabbada mann-ɨn ayy-ä?
       CASE-graden place inside kebbede who-ACC saw-3smS
       'Who did Kebbede see in the garden?'

    The alternative analysis that is provided here accounts
for all the ungrammatical sentences of Hailu and makes
predictions as to how to save such structures.  The prediction
made by the analysis is borne out as could be seen below.

(13)   *mann yonasɨn mättaw?     (H=15)
        who Yonas-dm hit-he-him
       'Who hit Yonas?'

    Sentence (13) is ungrammatical because mann moves at
LF to the SPEC of CP, the verb mättaw, according to the
structure we proposed for Amharic, IPs dominated by CP move to
C but, the object yonasɨn remains in situ. This disturbs the c-
command relationship that existed between the subject and the
predicate, hence leading to ungrammaticality . To save the
structure, as is predicted, we need to move the object to the
TOPIC position which is either to the left or to the right of
CP. This give us sentence (14) and (15) bellow, which are
grammatical.

(14)   yonas-ɨn mann mätt-a-w?
       Yonas-dm who hit-he-him
       'Who hit Yonas?'

(15)    mann mätt-aw Yonas-in?
        Who hit-he-him Yonas-dm
        'Who hit Yonas?'


The tree structure for (13), (14) and (15) would be similar
with that given in (11 b-d). The explanation that we would give
for the ungrammaticality of (16) below is the same as the
explanation we gave for (13).

(16)    *mann yähedäččiw nat?    (H=17.c)
        Who rm-went-she-df is-she
        'Who is she that went?'


The structure in (16) is the same as the copulative sentence
shown in (11 a), except that the object NP in (16) is a
relative clause. The structure is shown below as represented in
Hailu.

17)
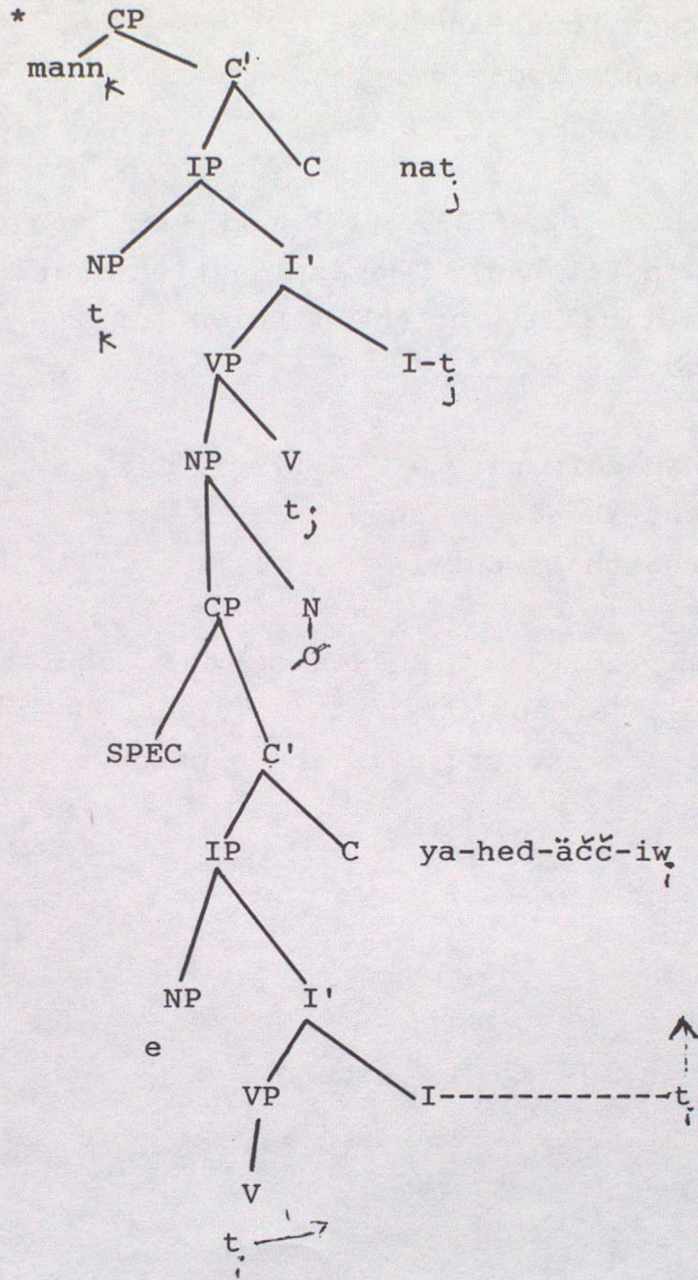


To save the above structure, we need to move the subject NP, which is a relative clause in this case, to the TOPIC

position. Since we have two TOPIC positions, moving it to either position restores the c-command relationship, and we get the following grammatical sentences.

(18) yähedäččiw mann nat?
     rm-went-shed-df who is-she
     'Who is she that went?'

(19) mann nat yähedäččiw?
     who is-she rm-went-she-df
     'Who is she that went?'

The ungrammaticality of (20) below again follows from our theory of predication.

(20) *mann tämari näw?
     who student is-he
     'Who is a student?'

(21) tämari mann näw?
     student who is he
     'Who is a student?'

(22) mann näw tamari?
     Who is-he a student
     'Who is a student?'

As shown above in (21) and (22), we can save the structure in (20) by moving the object <u>tämari</u> to the TOPIC positions. Questioning the subject of a relative clause which is a subject NP as could be seen from (23) is not possible.

(23) ?*ma(nn) yämättaw lɨj̈ tämari näw?    (H=25)
     Who rm-hit-he-him child student is-he
     ?  'The boy who he hit is a student?'

The structure is saved as usual by moving the object to the TOPIC positions as shown in (24) and (25).

(24)  tämari man yämättaw lɨj̈ näw?
      student who rm-hit-he-him child student is-he
     ? 'The boy who he hit is a student?'

(25)  man yämättaw lɨj̈ näw tämari?
      Who rm-hit-he-him child is-he a student
     ? 'The boy who he hit is a student?'

In cases like (24) and (25), in order for the c-command relationship between the subject and the predicate to be re-established, when we question the subject of the IP of the relative clause, we need to assume that the whole relative subject NP moves to the SPEC of CP.  The evidence we have for this is the impossibility of questioning the object of the IP of the relative clause in situ in (29). Notice that questioning

the object in situ, except for small clause constructions, is not a problem. Therefore, what seems to matter here is whether or not both are dominated by a subject NP.

(26) *mann anči näš?
       Who you(fsg) are you
         'Who are you?'

Again moving the object NP anči to the TOPIC positions saves the sentence. Accordingly, we have (27) and (28).

(27) anči mann näš?
       you(fsg) who are you
       'Who are you?'

(28) man näš anči?
       Who are you you
       'Who are you?'

The following sentence shows the impossibility of questioning the object in situ inside a relative clause in a subject NP.

(29) *mannin ÿämättašiw ančci näš?          (H-33.b)
       Who-dm rm-hit-you(fsg) you(fsg) are-you(fsg)
       (No English equivalent is provided.)

The same mechanism saves the sentence in (29)

(30) anči mannin yämättačiš näš?
     you(fsg) who-dm rm-hit-you(fsg) are-you(fsg)
     (no English equivalent is provided.)

(31) mannin yämättašiw näš anči?
     Who-dm rm-hit-you(fsg) are-you(fsg)you(fsg)
     (No English equivalent is provided.)

     Finally the last ungrammatical sentence of Hailu with a
clause initial Wh word is sentence (32) below.

(32) *mann almazin yämättat näw?
     Who Almaz-dm rm-hit-he-her who is-he
     'Who is it that hit Almaz?'

     The relative clause object NP almazin yämättat could be
moved to the TOPIC positions to get the two grammatical
sentences, (33) and (34)

(33) almazin yämättat mann näw?
     Almaz-dm rm-hit-he-her who is-he
     'Who is it that hit Almaz?'

(34) mann näw almazin yämättat?
     who is-he Almaz-dm rm-hit-he-her
     'Who is it that hit Almaz?'

## 1.4. CONCLUSION:

To summarize what we has been said so far, by rejecting the filter that Hailu had proposed to account for the impossibility of questioning the subject in situ, we provided an alternative analysis that appeals to William's theory of predication and the universal rule of Wh movement proposed by Huang. The analysis we have proposed not only explains the observation made by Hailu in terms of universals, but also accounts for data which stood as counter evidence to the filter proposed by Hailu. With the alternative analysis provided here, we are able to account for every ungrammatical sentence that was given by Hailu as evidence for the filter he had proposed. Our analysis, in addition to the explanation it provides to all the ungrammatical sentences of Hailu, makes strong predictions as to how to save sentences, (13) to (34) above. Therefore, it is our claim that this alternative analysis provided here is more adequate, explanatory and also makes correct predictions.

### Notes

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