Negation in Amharic Discourse

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Abstract: This paper provides a description of the functions of wh-elements, kinship terms, and pronouns of endearment at the level of discourse. The wh-elements which serve as question words in the syntax of the language function as expressions of negation at the level of discourse. The kinship terms which occur with any structural case form in the syntax, exhibit a first person genitive possessive affix which refers to a possessor in topic position. Among such terms ïhïte 'my sister' has a reduced form ïte which functions as a pro-form of addressee and also serves as an expression of a higher (stronger) level of negation. Its use is gender sensitive as it selects only a male addresser in topic position. Among the other kinship terms is abbat, 'father', not innat "mother", which, like ïte, occurs as an expression of a higher level of negation. Its use suggests another instance of gender and/or power sensitivity. In all cases, the kinship terms or their pro-form ïte refer to an addressee, while the pronouns of endearment refer to an addresser in topic position. The expressions suggest that there is a hierarchy of negation or denial at the level of discourse, which in the syntax is expressed by a single verbal prefix al-.

1. Introduction

This paper deals with the way a subset of wh-elements, personal pronouns and nouns of high salience in the sense of Comrie (1981) behave in Amharic discourse. The wh-elements include the following:

man	'who'	yet	'where'	ïndet	'how'
mïn	'what'	mäčč(ä)	'when'		

The pronouns are:

	1.	ïne	'I'
	2. M	anta	'you'
	F.	anči	
	PL.	ïnnantä	
	3. M	ïssu	'he'
	F.	ïssuwa	'she'

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And the set of salient nouns consists of the following kinship terms:

ïnnat	'mother'	ïhït	'sister
abbat	'father'	lïğ	'child'
wändïm	'brother'		

In the literature on Amharic syntax, such as Leslau (1995), wh- forms in general have been treated as question words only and that the nouns in the above set have never been considered at the level of discourse with the feature of salience in focus. It is the objective of this paper to provide an initial description of the way the three sets of forms behave with regard to polarity at the level of discourse, and also show how the forms in question interact with each other and with such grammatical features as aspect, case and agreement to express various levels of negation. To this end, the presentation is organized in five sections, of which the second deals with the nouns in the above set in general, the genitive form ïhït-e 'my sister' and its reduced counterpart ït-e, in particular. This is followed by a description of the behavior of the wh-elements in section three, and their interaction with the noun abbat 'father' in section four. Finally, a summary of the highlights of the discussion is presented in section five.

2   Salient nouns: the case of ïhïte 'my sister'

One distinctive feature of salient nouns in Amharic is that they show affixes for the features singulative and definiteness, and that the affixes for these features are mutually inclusive. At the level of discourse salient nouns also exhibit genitive pronominal affixes for first personal singular. With the singulative and the definite affixes attached to them, the nouns in the above set look like the following:

1.	ïnnat- ïyyä-wa	>	[ïnnatïyyʷowa]	'the mother'
	abbat- ïyyä-u	>	[abbatïyyʷow]	'the father'
	wändïm- ïyyä-u	>	[wändïmyyʷow]	'the brother'
	ïhït - ïyyä-u-a	>	[ïhïtïyyʷowa]	'the sister
	lïğ- ïyyä-u	>	[lïğïyyʷow]	'the child'

The affixes are -ïyyä for the singulative, and –u and –wa for the definite masculine and feminine, respectively[1]. Such singulative definite forms cannot occur with genitive pronominal suffixes since structures like 2(b-c) below are unacceptable:

2.   (a) wändïm – e
           brother   -1SG.GEN
            'my brother'
      (b) * wändïm – u - e
            brother   -DEF-1SG.GEN[2]
             'the my brother'
      (c) * wändïm – ïyyä - u   - e
            brother   -SGL – DEF -1SG.GEN
             'the my brother'

The ungrammatical structures suggest that there is a co-occurrence restriction that disallows the use of the definite and the genitive pronominal affixes with the same head noun, owing perhaps to the fact that both affixes are pronominal.

With these brief introductory statements, we now consider a context of discourse where there is:

   (a)   a certain Kasa, who has been sick for sometime;

   (b)   another person Yonas, who is a neighbor of Kasa, and who has been visiting him as expected of a good neighbor, and

   (c)   a female neighbor Aster, who has not been visiting Kasa contrary to expectation.

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[1] Actually, the definite marker is only –u, which is also a third person marker, and the suffix -a following it is a third person feminine marker.

[2] Note the following abbreviations:

MD	middle	IMPF	imperfective	M	masculine	GEN	genitive
AUX	auxiliary	FOC	focus	ACC	accusative	PF	perfective
CMPL	completive	CNT	contingent	NEG	negative	OP	operator
SG	singular	PL	plural	F	feminine	COMP	complementizer
SGL	singulative augmentative	ASOC	associative	DEF	definite	AUG	
ENDR	endearing	CS	Causative				

In a sudden encounter with Aster, Yonas asks her whether or not she has visited Kasa, the sick person, assuming that she has knowledge of the sickness. His question runs as follows:

(3)   Ato kasa-n   t'äyyäk'- š   -ïw
         Mr. K.-ACC   visit   -2FSG   -3MSG.ACC
         Lit. 'Have you asked Mr. K.?
         'Have you visited Mr. K?'

Aster responds to the question with a surprise question of information about Kasa, the sick person. Her question also runs as follows:

4. mïn   hon   -o   -all?
   what   happen:CMPL   -3MSG:GEN   AUX:PRES
   Lit. 'What has become of him?'   'What has happened to him?'

In response to this, Yonas also asks a surprise question of reassurance in negative polarity about Kasa's sickness. The question goes as follows:

5. al-   sämma -š   -im   ïnde?
   NEG   hear:PF-2SGF OP   Q
   'You have not heard? 'Haven't you heard?'

He also adds an emphatic statement with focus on the verb:

6.   tä-ʔamm   -o   -al   ïkko
        MD-sick:IMPF -3MSG:GEN AUX:PRES   FOC
        'He is /has been SICK'

At this point, Aster reacts to the question of reassurance in a manner that also emphatically states her lack or denial of knowledge of Kasa's sickness. Her response to the emphatic question in (5) and the follow up assertion in (6), has the form shown in (7) below.

7.   ïne (ï)te!
        I - ?   ' I, never'

(7) is an emphatic utterance of denial or lack of knowledge of Kasa's sickness stated in (6). However, whereas (5) is an emphatic statement in negative polarity indicated by the negative marker al- attached to the verb, (7) is a highly reduced utterance comprising only the pronoun ïne which refers to Aster, and the form ïte. Furthermore, this utterance, that is (7), has a negative (denial) reading although neither of the constituents functions as a negative marker in the grammar of the language. The question that follows from this concerns the source of the negative reading of the utterance in (7) and the categorial status and function of the form (ï)te.

In order to answer both questions, we need to relate the utterance in (7) to the structures in (5) and the follow up statement in (6), which, respectively relate to the fact that Kasa has been sick and to the reassurance question about the same state of sickness. In other words, the negative reading of the utterance in (7) presupposes a structure in which the clause that expresses the state of sickness in (6) serves as a complement of the negative predicate of the interrogative clause of reassurance in (5). The presupposed clause is, thus, along the line in (8) below.

8.   [ïne   [kasa   ïndä ta- mmäm –ä]   al- sämma   -hu -m]
        I   K.   that MD-sick-PF-3MSG   NEG- hear:PF   -1SG -OP
               'I have not heard that K has been/ sick'

In this structure, ïne 'I' which refers to Aster functions as an external argument of the negative predicate al- sämma –hu-m. In the negative structure in (5), the same

predicate takes Aster as its external argument and the clause <u>Kasa tammo-al</u> ' Kasa has been/is sick' as its internal argument (complement). The same negative predicate also agrees in gender with the feminine pronominal subject which is phonetically null since its content is recoverable from the agreement affix. In other words, (8) is a structure in which the negative verbal predicate of the structure in (5) takes the feminine noun Aster as its external argument, and the affirmative clause in (6) as its internal argument. This is the structure from which the utterance in (7) gets its negative reading. If this is correct, then we are left with the second question that concerns the function of <u>ïte</u> in (7)?

A first impression would be to claim that <u>ïte</u> is a pro-form of the VP in (8) which is predicated of the subject <u>ïne</u> 'I'. The VP is headed by the negative verb <u>al-sämma-hu-m</u> 'I have not heard' which has scope over the entire clause that describes the state of sickness which Kasa is experiencing. As hinted at above, this might account for the negative reading of <u>ïte</u>[3]. There is, however, a problem that this impression faces with regard to the syntactic status of <u>ïte</u>. If it is a pro-form of a VP in a structure like (8), then one would expect there to be a co-occurrence restriction between it (= <u>ïte</u>) and the VP, which, however is not the case here since structures like (9) below where ïte occurs following the VP are possible though they may not be readily acceptable.

9. [ïne [kasa   ïndä ta- mmäm   –ä   al- sämma   -hu -m]] ïte
    I   K   that MD-sick-PF -3MSG   NEG- hear:PF   -1SG –OP ?
        'I have not heard that Kasa has been/is sick'

Such structures become increasingly acceptable with the VP reduced to just the negative head <u>al-sämma-hu –m</u> ' have not heard' as in 10(a) and (b) or to null as in (c).

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[3] See an alternative argument in section 3 below.

10.   (a)   [ïne [al- sämma   -hu -m] ïte]
                I   NEG hear:PF   -1SG-OP-?
                    'I have not heard'
        (b)   [[al-   sämma   -hu -m] ïte]
                NEG hear:PF   -1SG-OP- ?
                    'I have not heard'
    (c)   ïne ïte
            I   ?

In (a) the complement clause of sickness has been deleted, and ïte occurs with the negative verb of the remnant clause. In (b) it occurs with the same remnant clause but with the subject ïne being null, and in (c) ïte occurs with only the subject, the VP being reduced to null. In other words, ïte can occur with either the VP along with its external argument as in 10(a), or with the VP but without the external argument as in (b), or with only the external argument, without the VP as in (c). In all cases, the structural relation ïte has is with the clause and its position is always final, actually external to the clause.

A further question in connection with ïte, relates to its category status. For this, we need to consider the set of the salient nouns introduced at the beginning, where ïhït-e 'my sister' was introduced with the genitive suffix –e which refers to a first person singular possessor. The other nouns in the set can also occur with the same genitive suffix as the following example demonstrates:

11.   [ïne al- sämma   -hu -m] wändïmm-e
        I   NEG hear:PF   -1SG-OP   brother   -1Sg. GEN
            'I have not heard, my brother'

The genitive noun wändïmm-e 'my brother' here occurs in the same final position as ïhïte 'my sister' does in (10a) above, and that co-occurrence of any two salient nouns is not possible, which supports the claim that ïte is a noun like any of the others in the set. However, whereas the others in the set have only one form, ïhïte has two, namely a full form ïhïte, and a reduced variant ïte. And in a structure like 10(c) above where the VP is reduced to null, it is only the reduced counterpart ïte that can occur with ïne. In other words, structures like (12) below with an elided VP are not possible with wändïmm-e 'my brother' or any of the other nouns occurring

in final position because it is only a reduced form that is allowed in this position and wänd̈m-e 'my brother' is not such a form.

> 12.   * ïne   wänd̈mm-e
>   I   brother-1SG.GEN

This suggests that only a reduced variant like ïte is possible in structures with an elided VP..

As can be observed from the gloss in (11), the suffix –e refers to a first person singular possessor which in Amharic is also true of nouns in general. But in structures like (11), a salient genitive noun like wänd̈mm-e 'my brother' cannot show any genitive (possessive) affix that refers to just any possessor; it has to display one which refers to only a first person singular possessor. The fact that –e makes reference to only such a first person singular possessor suggests that it refers to a speaker in a discourse such as the one between Yonas and Aster regarding Kasa's sickness. The noun to which –e is suffixed is a possessed singular noun which refers to the addressee in the same discourse and that such an addressee could be anyone that the salient nouns in the set may refer to. However, from the grammaticality of the structure in 10(c), and the ungrammaticality of the one in (12) above, one can suggest that only ïte qualifies to occur in structures where an entire VP is elided as already pointed out, in which case, it (ïte) serves as a pro-form for any of the other salient nouns of the set, which have no reduced variants. And it seems that it is in respect of this extended function as a pro-form of the other nouns in the set that the genitive noun ïḧt-e 'my sister' has reduced itself to ïte. In other words, the noun has undergone a process of formal reduction or grammaticalization to serve as a discourse pronominal for the other salient nouns.

However, along with this extended pronominal function, ïte has also acquired a value for negative polarity as the discourse in 13(b) below suggests.

13. (a)   Yonas asks: [kasa ïndä ta- mmäm –ä   sämma - š]
                        K   that MD- be-sick:PF 3MSG hear:PF -3FSG
                  'Have you heard that K has been/was sick?

    (b)   Aster responds: ïne ïte
                             I   ?
                             'I have never'

The structure in 13(a) is an affirmative interrogative which asks about Kasa's sickness. A simple negative response to the question would show the negative prefix attached to the verb as in (14):

              14   al- sämma-hu-m
                   NEG.hear:PF-1SG-OP
                   'I did not hear'

If, on the other hand, the intension of a response to a question like 13(a) is to strongly deny knowledge of sickness on the part of the respondent, the response would be like in 13(b) above with a rising intonation on ïte and a reading of strong denial of knowledge of sickness. From this, one would argue that ïte is an expression of denial, a higher or stronger level of negation. This argument is not implausible given the fact that the language has a similar level of expression for refusal, parallel to the one in 13(b) above. Observe the affirmative imperative in (15), and the responses in 15(a) and (b):

15.   Father: wädä ïmhïrt   bet   hid

                           to   learning   house   go
                           'Go to school'
       Child: (a)   al-hed-ïm
                     NEG-go-OP
                     'I will not go'

           (b)   ïmbi!   'No!'

15(a) is a simple negative response to the imperative utterance by the father whereas the structure in (b) is a blunt refusal of a higher (stronger) force. This parallel between assertion and denial on the one hand, and negation and refusal on the other supports the claim that ïte is an expression of a higher level negative polarity in discourse. This also means that the form has a nominal, pronominal and polarity functions. As a pronominal, it stands for the other salient nouns as in the structure in (11) above and as a polarity element it expresses a higher level of negation alias denial as in 13(b).

3. Wh-elements

In all the works on Amharic known to me, the wh-elements introduced in the introduction here are treated as question words in situ, that is not moved to clause initial positions as is the case in other languages like English, for example, where such elements undergo movement. Consider in this regard the following wh-questions.

1.   (a)   man mät't'   -a?
who come:PF –3MSG
       'who came?'
    (b)   Kasa mäččä mät't'   -a?
K. when come:PF   –3MSG
Lit. 'K when came?'   'When did K. come?'
    (c)   Kasa yet   hed -ä?
K   where go:PF -3MSG
Lit. 'K. where went?'   'Where did K go?'

These structures and others like them are treated as questions that refer to arguments, and adjuncts of adverbial functions in clauses. Whereas this is generally the case at the level of syntax, it is possible to treat such wh-elements differently at the level of discourse. In this regard, consider, for example, the interrogative structure in (5) in the preceding section, repeated here as 2(a), and the corresponding emphatic response of denial as in (b) below:

2.   (a)   Yonas asks: al-   sämma -š   -im   ïnde?
                            NEG   hear:PF-2SGF OP   Q
                      You have not heard?' 'Haven't you heard?'
      (b)   Aster replies: ïne ïte!
                                        I   ?
                            I have never (heard)

The structure in (b), which is uttered as a response to the question in 2(a) is an expression of an emphatic denial or lack of knowledge of sickness of Kasa by the respondent Aster, at a given place and time. And this emphatic denial is augmented by the structures in (3) below:

3.   (a)   man   nägr   -o   - ňň!?
             who   tell:PF -3MSG:GEN 1SGACC
             Lit. 'Who having told me?'
             'Who the hell has told me?'
      (b)   mäčč   sämïčč   -e?
             when hear:PäF   -1SG:GEN
             Lit. 'When I having heard!?'
              'When the hell have I heard?'
      (c)   yet   sämïčč   -e?
             where heard:PF   1SG:GEN
               'Where I having heard?'
             'Where the hell have I heard?'

These structures may appear interrogative in form since they all contain the wh-elements, man 'who', mäčč 'when', and yet 'where'. One would, hence, assume that the structures are questions about a certain unknown person who ought to be there to inform Aster about the sickness of Kasa at some place and time. But contrary to this assumption, it is possible to argue that the wh-elements in the structures in question refer to no such an agent, time and place. One would argue that the wh-forms serve as expressions of emphatic negative polarity about an unknown person who was supposed to be telling Aster about the sickness of Kasa at some place and time. One would say that such wh-elements are, in fact, like the English indefinite pronouns of negative polarity, nobody, nowhere, etc, which show the negative operator 'no'. In Amharic, such elements and others like them show a suffix –m as we can see from

the list in (4) below, which corresponds to the bare counterparts of those in the structure in (3) above:

4.	mannï-m	'nobody'
	mäččä-m	'no time'
	yetï-m(m)	'nowhere'

It is worth noting here that the verb in the structures in (3) is in the completive aspect[4] indicated by the template cvcvcc- and by a subject agreement suffix which is genitive. But these structures can also occur with the same verb in the perfective aspect where the subject affix refers to a nominative subject. Hence, corresponding to (3) above, we have those in (5) below:

5.   (a)   man näggär **-ä**   - ňň?
             who tell:PF -3MSG   -1SG:ACC
             lit. 'Who having told me?'
                    'Nobody has told me'

      (b)   mäčč sämma **-hu**   - ňň?
             when hear:PF -1SGS -1SG:ACC
             Lit. 'When I having heard?'
             'I have never heard'

      (c)   yet   sämma **-hu**   - ňň?
             where hear:PF -1SGS   1SG:ACC
             Lit. 'Where I having heard?'
              'I have heard nowhere'

Both the completive in (4) and the perfective in (5) above are clause types that serve as expressions of lack or denial of knowledge about a state of affair such as Kasa's sickness in the mini dialogue. And both types show this sate of sickness with the bare wh-elements, that is, without the verbal negative marker al- appearing in the

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[4] The completive is a type of perfective that signals the termination of an event and the ensuing of another (see Baye, 2004).

verb of the completive clause. The difference between the two clause types is in the force of denial which they express; the completive type seems to suggest a much stronger force of denial than the perfective one. Note that the subject agreement affixes here are genitive as opposed to those in the perfective clause where the affixes refer to a nominative subject. This suggests that aspect and agreement have a role to play in the readings of such structures. Note, however, that the force of denial is on the absence or lack of agent, time and place for the state of sickness to have been told to the addressee, Aster. When the force of denial is on the general truth of the state of affair, the structures occur with the negative marker al- prefixed to the perfective verb as in (6):

6.   (a)   mannï -m al-näggär   -ä   -ň   -m[5].
                 Who   -OP NEG-tell:PF - 3MSG -1SGACC -Comp
                   Lit.'Nobody has not told me' 'Nobody has told me'
        (b)   mäččä-m al-sämma   -hu -m
                 When-OP NEG –hear:PF-1SG-Comp
                   'I have not heard at no time' 'I have never heard at all'
        (c)   yeti-m(m)   al- sämma   -hu -m
                 Where-OP   NEG-hear:PF -1SG –Comp
                   'I have not heard nowhere' 'I have not heard anywhere'

These structures show the operators al- and –m attached to the verbs and the wh-elements, respectively. The reading of such structures is, thus, one of double negation as the glosses may indicate.

Note that the perfective verb stems in the above negative structures show a suffix –m in the position following the object agreement affix. This suffix, that is –m is not

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[5] Negative structures in completive aspect and genitive subject agreement are possible in the Gojjam variety. Hence corresponding to 4(a) above, we have:

      mannïm   al- nägr   -o   -ň
      nobody   NEG-having told-3MSG:GEN   -1SG:GEN
      Lit.   'Nobody not having told me'
               'Nobody has told me'

a negative polarity marker like the one which is attached to the wh-elements; the –m
which we see here is a main clause marker of negative polarity[6]. Support for this
comes from subordinate clauses with an overt complementizer, from which –m is
excluded as a violation of a constraint that disallows the occurrence of two
complementizers in the same clause, Chomsky (1986). Consider the following
examples:

      7.   (a)   Kasa mïsa   al- bäll -a   -m
                      K.   lunch NEG eat:PF -3MSG   Comp
                      'K. did not eaten lunch'
          (b)   Kasa mïsa   ïndä al- bäll -a
                      K.   lunch comp NEG- eat:PF -3MSG
                       'That K. did not eaten lunch'
          (c) * Kasa mïsa   ïndä al- bäll -a   -m[7]
                      K.   lunch   Comp NEG- eat:PF -3MSG Comp
                       'That K. did not eaten lunch'

Like the noun ïhïte 'my sister' the wh-element mäčč(ä) 'when', can also optionally
reduce itself to mäčč and serve as a temporal deictic. In either of its forms (full or
reduced), it renders two possible readings, question or negation, determined by a
shared knowledge of context between speaker and hearer. Consider the following
examples:

      8   (a)   Kasa mäčč(ä) mät't'   -a?
                      K   when   come:PF -3SG
                      'When did K come?' /'Kasa never came'
          (b)   Kasa mäčč(ä) mät'ït   -o
                      K   when   come:PF -3SG
        Lit. 'When K having come?' /'K. having never come?'
          (c)   Kasa mäčč(ä) yi-mät' – al(l)
                      K   when   come:PF -3SG
                      'When will K. come? / K. will/does not come?

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[6] Affirmative main clauses are not marked in Amharic unlike in other Semitic languages like Chaha,
for example, where apparently the same element –m is used (Girma, 2004)
[7] This structure is possible for a conjunctive reading of –m as 'and that he has not eaten'

The verbs in these structures are perfective, completive and imperfective, respectively. The imperfective one shows the subject agreement as a prefix and a non-past tense auxiliary –al(l) as a clitic. The reading of each structure is ambiguous between the interrogative and the negative determined again by shared context of discourse. Consider, for example, the following structures where a negative reading is allowed in favor of an interrogative one:

9.   Kasa mäčč(ä) mät't'   -a   ïnna   nä-w
        K   when   come:PF -3SG and   be-3MSG

                                     yä   -ïmm- ïn -hedä-u[8]
                                     Comp –CNT-1PL- go-3MSG
        Lit. 'So Kasa when having come that we go it'
        'Kasa never came, so how is it that we go'

This reading presupposes a situation where Kasa was expected to reach a place at a fixed time and then go to some other place together with others who would be waiting for him just on time, except one who arrived late. Knowing that Kasa had not arrived, the late comer would complain to the others by making reference to the fact that Kasa had not come and the idea of going together would not be possible. In this context mäčč(ä) means *'never'*, and not *when.*

4   Interaction between wh-elements and salient nouns

In the structures considered in the preceding section, it has been shown that the wh-elements serve as expressions of emphatic denial or negation. And the degree of denial or negation varies according to the type of aspect and case in a clause where the wh-elements occur. It is much stronger in clauses of completive aspect and genitive case than in perfective and imperfective clauses where the case is nominative. In this section, we consider the interaction between the wh-elements in question and the salient nouns in the set. We consider only one salient noun, abbat-

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[8] I assume –u to be a pleonastic (impersonal) pronoun (see Baye, 1988, 2000).

<u>e</u>[9] 'my father' since only it can occur with the wh-elements. Consider the following structures in relation to the mini dialogue between Yonas and Aster about Kasa's sickness.

1.   (a)   man-abbat -e   nägr   -o   - ňň!?
             Who-father-1SG:GEN   tell:PF -3MSG:GEN -1SG:ACC
                    Lit. 'Who my father having told me?'
                  'Who the hell has told me?'/ 'Nobody has told me'
      (b)   mäčč abbat-e   sämïčč   -e?
             when father-1SG:GEN hear:CMPl   -1SG:GEN
             Lit. 'When my father I having heard?'
                'When the hell I having heard?'
                'I have never heard'
      (c)   yet   abbat -e   sämïčč   -e?
             where fathet -1SG:GEN   heard:CMPL   - 1SG:GEN
                 Lit. 'Where my father I having heard?'
                     'Where the hell have I heard?'
                     'I have never heard'

These structures are the same as those in the completive aspect we have already considered in (3), in the preceding section, except that these contain the genitive noun, <u>abbat-e</u> 'my father'. The effect of the noun is one of showing a greater degree of regret on the part of the speaker, Aster for not having had anyone who could, otherwise, have told her about Kasa's state of sickness. Aster, the speaker, is, in a way, cursing herself for not having heard about the sickness.

As stated before in relation to structures like ((13b), section 2) repeated here as (2), one may assume that the function of the form *ite* is to express denial of knowledge of sickness expressed by the negative VP which is predicated of the subject/topic *ïne* *'I'*.

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[9] See Baye (2011) on the use of <u>abbat</u> 'father' in other contexts.

2.   ïne ïte

        I   sister   'I never'

However, a closer examination of the dialogue in which *ite* occurs suggests that it is actually a pronoun that refers to the addressee himself, that is, to the person (Yonas), who has raised the very question of visit to the sick man. The structure, hence, presupposes a representation of the type shown in (3) at some level of its derivation.

3.   [*ïne* [man-abbat-e   nägr   -o   - ňň!]   *ït-e*?]
        I   Who-father-1SG:GEN   tell:PF -3MSG:GEN 1SGACC sister-1SG:GEN
        Lit. 'I who my father having told me, my sister?'/ 'Who the hell has told me, my sister'
                 'Nobody has told me'

Here ïne 'I' is an object moved to a topic position[10]. That this is so is clear from the first person accusative affix -ňň in the verb which refers to *ïne.* The external argument of the verb is man-abbat-e 'who my father'.

It is possible to use the other kinship terms, *abbat-e* 'my father', *ïnnate-e* 'my mother', *wändïm-e* 'my brother',and *lïǧ-e* 'my child' in the position of *ite* with the same topic *ïne* 'I' in place (final). Consider the following where ïnnate-e *'my mother'* is used in the position of *ït-e* 'my sister'.

3   [*ïne* [man abbat-e   nägr   -o   - ňň!]   *ïnnate* -e
      I   who father-1SG:GEN   tell:PF -3MSG:GEN -1SGACC   mother -1SG:GEN
       'I who my father having told me, my mother?'/ 'Who the hell has told me, my mother'
             'Nobody has told me'

Other terms that can occur in the position of ït-e include second person pronouns of endearing function as in the following example.

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[10] One could also assume a base generated topic here.

5.   [ïne [Kasa indä   ta-mmäm   ä]
        I   K.   Com   MD be:sick:PF   -3MSG.

     man abbat -e   nägr   -o   -ň]   antä-yye[11]/, anči-yye /   ïnnä-antä- yye.
      who   father -1SG:GEN   tell:CMPL-3MSG-1SG.ACC you- ENDR   you:F- ENDR ASSOC.-you-
ENDR
                                        Lit 'Who my father having told me that…my you'
                                     'Nobody has told me that…my dear'

But structures with a non-kin, and hence a non salient addressee, such as *guadäňňa* 'friend', for example, cannot occur in the position of *it-e* 'my siste*r*' as structures like (6) below are unacceptable:

6. * [*ïne* [man abbat-e   nägr   -o   - ňň!] *guadäňňa* *-e*
        I   who father-1SG:GEN   tell:PF -3MSG:GEN -1SGACC friend   -1SG:GEN
   'I who my father having told me, my friend?'/ 'Who the hell has told me, my friend'
                  'Nobody has told me' my friend!'

This makes <u>ite</u> a pro-form of a salient addressee to which are also included pronouns of the type in the structure in (5) above.

The facts considered thus far refer to knowledge of past events, which is either denied and/or regretted by a speaker. There are similar expressions which make reference to an event of denial of having ever doing something to someone who is high in power position. Consider the following:

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[11] This suffix could be treated as a variety of the same first person genitive pronominal suffix –e. Compare the following example:

    (a) Almaz- ïyye 'my dear Almaz'
    (b) Almaz-e   'my Almaz'
    (c) *Almaz-e-yye

The fact that (c) is unacceptable suggests that the genitive and the endearing have the same function. One would conjecture that -yye expresses a possession of a much beloved person, see also Taddesse (1989).

7.   Question:
                  aläk'a-šĭ - n   tä -sadïb   -äš   tï -?awk' -i   all -äš?
                  boss-2FSG-ACC   MD – insult:CMPL -2FSG   2P – know -2F   AUX-2FSG
                         Lit. 'You have known insulting your boss?'
                         'Have you ever insulted your boss?'

       Answer:
         (a) aläk'a-ye   - n   tä- sadïb   -e   al- ?awk' -im
           boss -1SG:GEN -ACC MD- insult:CMPL -1SG:GEN NEG- know:IMP -OP
                  Lit. 'I have not known insulting my boss'
                  'I have never insulted my boss'

         (b)   ïne ïte!
              I   never

The utterance in (a) is a simple negative response to the question and is indicated by the negative operator <u>al</u>- prefixed to the verb, whereas the one in (b) is an emphatic expression which suggests that the respondent feels that she has no power to attempt to do such a thing. Such a structure is followed almost as a natural consequence by any of the following where the wh-element <u>mïn</u> 'what' is again used.

      8.   (a)   mïn   a- k'bït'   -o   - ň
                       what   CS- be brat:CMPL -3MSGEN -1SG.ACC
                       'What having caused me to be brat'

                (b)   mïn k'ïbbïtt't'   adïrg   -o   - ň[12]
                       what be brat :AUG   make:CMPL -3MSG   -1SG.ACC

These structures show the wh-element <u>mïn</u> 'what' but their function is not one of asking a question but expressing the respondent's lack of power to make such a fatal mistake as insulting a boss. The utterance in (b) is much the same in meaning but with a higher level of intensity indicated by the intensive stem <u>k'ïbbït't'</u> of the root <u>k'-b-t'</u> and the completive lexical causative verb <u>adïrg</u>- 'having made'. But much more intensive is the structure in (9) below where the word <u>abbat-e</u> 'my father' is use.

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[12] Other verbs that can be used in the same context and purpose are: <u>k'ort'o</u>- 'cut', <u>agbït</u>- 'enter' and <u>t'ïllïk</u>'- 'intrude'

9.   mïn abbat-e   k'ïbbïtt't' adïrg   -o   - ň
      what father-1SGGEN   be brat   make:CMPL 3MSGEN   -1SGACC
            Lit. 'What my father made me a brat'
      'What the hell would make me do such a heedless thing?'

In the structures considered thus far, it is the first person singular pronoun ïne which
occurs in topic position with the form ïte in final position. In all cases, the reference
of the pronoun in the topic position is to a female person, in this case to Aster; it is
effeminizing for a male person to say:

10.   * ïne- ïte! [13]

      1F-sister-my

However, there are contexts where a third person pronoun can occur in the same
topic position in (10). Consider, for example, a situation where a husband asks his
wife whether or not their maid has washed his shirts? To which the disgruntled wife
responds in a manner that suggests the maid has been unruly and that his shirts have
not been washed at all.

11. Husband:
      (a)   Aster [šämiz   al- at't'äb -äčč-   ïm   ïnde]]?
             A.   shirt   NEG-wash:PF -3FSG   -Op   Q
             Lit. 'Has Aster not washed shirt?

     Wife: (b)   ïsswa ïte!
                       she   sister-my
                       'she   never!'

A natural response to the question in 11 (a) would have been a plain negative
structure with the negative operator al- prefixed to the perfective verb. The wife has
used the structure in (b) with the third person feminine pronoun in topic position
while keeping the form ïte in place. And the other third person pronouns are also

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[13] In the Gojjam variety, a vocative form 'ayya' is used when the respondent is a male person
according to Zelealem Leyew, (p.c.)

possible in such structures. Note also that the wife uses the same form ïte although she is responding to a male addressee, her husband, which clearly argues in favor of the claim that the form *ïte* is an expression of a higher level negation in discourse.

5. Summary

The purpose of this paper was to describe the behavior of wh-elements, some salient nouns and pronouns of endearment function at the level of discourse. The wh-elements, which serve as question words that refer to arguments, temporal and spatial adjuncts in the syntax, function here as expressions of negation of a higher level. The salient nouns, which function as referential arguments in the syntax, and in any structural case form, function in discourse as referential of addressee and that they show a first person genitive possessive affix which refers to a possessor in topic position. Among such nouns, ïhïte 'my sister' has a reduced form ïte, which functions as a pro-form for any addressee in some contexts and as an expression of a higher level of negation in others. In such structures, it selects only a male speaker or addresser as topic which suggests that its (ïte) use is gender sensitive.

Among the other salient nouns, the form abbat, 'father' occurs with the wh-elements to express a higher level of denial or negation of knowledge of event or involvement in an event. Here again ïte occurs with a noun, abbat 'father' that refers to a male person, and not with *ïnnat* 'mother', another instance of gender and/or power sensitivity. In all the structures, salient nouns and second person pronouns of endearment or their pro-form ïte occur as addressee, while first and third person singular pronouns occur as topic or addresser. The level of negation or denial which the wh-elements express is shown in rank order as follows:

(a) ïne ïte

(b) man abbat   -e   nägr   - o   -ň
    who father 1SG:GEN   tell:CMPL -3MSG.GEN -1SG.ACC
    'Who my father having told me' 'Who the hell has told me'

(c) man nägr   -o   -ň
    who tell:CMPL 3MSG:GEN   1SG.ACC
     'who having told me?'

(d) mann-ïm   al-näggär   - ä   -ň
    who-OP   NEG-tell:PF   -3MSG 1SG.ACC
         'Nobody has told me'

The structure in (d) which has an indefinite negative pronoun subject and a verb in the perfective aspect with negative polarity serves as a paraphrase of the others.

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