
Deictic Features of Demonstratives in Ethiosemitic Languages

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Abstract

This paper examines the deictic features of demonstratives in Ethiosemitic languages from a cross-linguistic typological perspective. In most cases, demonstratives in Ethiosemitic languages deictically blend two systems: distance-oriented and person-oriented. As a result, among the studied languages, Amharic and Harari are the three deictic terms that blend the two systems, namely proximal (near to the speaker), distal (far away from both the speaker and the hearer), and the near addressee that refers to a location of the referent farther away from the speaker, and it also indicates that the referent is close to the hearer. However, "Ezha" is four deictic terms, namely proximal (near to the speaker), medial (an entity a bit far from the speaker but still in the vicinity of the speaker), distal (far away from both the speaker and the hearer), and near addressee (it refers to a location farther away from the speaker, and it also indicates that the referent is close to the hearer). Only Tigrinya has the two deictic terms (speaker-proximal and speaker-distal). Demonstratives in the Ethiosemitic languages can be combined with prepositions to refer to the topography, direction, and position of the referent.

Key terms: [demonstrative, deictic-features, deictic-term, distance-oriented, person-oriented]

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1. Introduction

Systematic description and comparison of the demonstrative systems in Ethiosemitic languages vis-à-vis the existing theoretical discussions. The available literature on demonstratives focuses only on one language (Getatchew 1967, Baye and Rawda 2007, Meyer 2010, Fekede 2023). Even the comparative study on Semitic demonstratives in general (Hasselbach 2007) includes only Geez from Ethiosemitic languages. One can guess that this kind of exclusion of Ethiosemitic languages from wider comparative and theoretical discussions is due to a lack of data. The goal of this research is to shed light on the issue so that the demonstrative systems of the languages could be available for further research. Specifically, this study attempts to examine the deictic features of demonstratives in the selected languages by general typological works like Diessel (1999), Dixon (2003, 2010), and Himmelmann (1996).

Ethiopia and Eritrea are home to speakers of the Ethiosemitic languages. According to Hetzron (1969, 1972, and 1977), the Ethiosemitic languages are Ge'ez, Tigre, Tigrinya, Amharic, Argobba, Gafat, Harari, East Gurage, Western Gurage, and North Gurage. Due to time and resource limitations, it is not possible to attest to all Ethiosemitic languages of demonstrative types; therefore, this research selected four languages from the three sub-branches. Tigrinya is one of the selected languages of this study, from the northern Ethiosemitic group. However, the study leaves aside Tigre, which is spoken in northern Eritrea (out of Ethiopia), and Ge'ez, which is no longer spoken but remains the public worship language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Besides, Amharic and Harari are the targeted languages of this study from the Transversal South Ethiosemitic. Amharic is used as the working language for the period of the fieldwork. The reason Harari was selected is that it is more closely related to East Gurage (Bender, 1976:29 and Hetzron, 1972:119). However, the study has also left aside Gafat, which was spoken in Gojjam but has died out within this century, and Argobba, which is spoken in a few spread regions in Ankober, north of Addis Ababa, but is a dying language (Leslau 1997: xv). Besides this study, selected Ezha (from Western Gurage).

The Tigray people of the Tigray Region of Ethiopia, as well as the central and southern Eritrea, speak Tigrinya. Amharic is spoken in Ethiopia's capital city of Addis Ababa as well as the country's central and northern highlands, including the ancient provinces of Shewa, Wello, Gojjam, and Gonder. In addition, Amharic is spoken as a first or second language across Ethiopia, however competence levels vary. Its role as a lingua franca should be mentioned. For this reason, the federal government and other regional governments use it as their official language. Harari is spoken in the city of Harar by the Harari people. Ezha is spoken in the Gurage Zone of the Central Ethiopia Regional State (Kassaye & Asfawwesen 2025).

2. Research Methodology

Two sources provided the data used in this article. Secondary sources, including written texts and narratives (both published and unpublished M.A. theses and PhD dissertations), account for a portion of it, while native speakers provide the remaining portion.

The elicitation of data was based on a questionnaire prepared in Amharic as a metalanguage. The questionnaire has been prepared based on general typological research on demonstratives, Himmelmann (1996), Diessel (1999), and Dixon (2003). These works are also used for the description and analysis of this work. The majority of the data was presented in a four-level manner, with the informant's actual utterance appearing in the first line, the hypothetical morpheme-by-morpheme breakdown appearing in the second line, glossing appearing in the third line, and the English translation appearing in the fourth line.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Deixis and demonstratives from a typological perspective

The term "*deixis*" refers to some lexico-grammatical forms or expressions, and their meaning depends on a certain context of use. In traditional grammar, deictic expressions are categorized into three semantic types: person, place, and time (Bühler 1934: 102). However, languages may have expressions for "discourse" and "social" deixis or manner deixis ("like

this/that"). As well as, Dixon (2003:63) defines the term "deictic" as "the pointing function of demonstratives, when accompanied by a gesture indicating an object or place or mimicking an action." Scholars agreed that demonstratives have been considered a subtype of place deictic, and their meaning is dependent on contextual factors. In language typology, demonstratives play between language universals and diversity. On account of language universal characteristics, all spoken languages exhibit at least two demonstratives in their grammar (Diessel, 1999:2; Dixon, 2003:61). On the other hand, demonstratives also display remarkable cross-linguistic diversity. The form, the number of deictic terms, the semantics, and the pragmatic uses of demonstratives are not uniform and lack strong universals (Diessel 1999:3-5). In communication, speakers use demonstratives like "*this*" and "*that*" to indicate entities in their immediate environment. But it is not well-defined uniformly in different languages. Which factors determine whether the speaker uses one demonstrative (*this*) or the other (*that*)? In addition, in the number of demonstrative items in the lexicon, languages may have only two or as many as twelve (Anderson & Keenan, 1985; Diessel, 1999).

3.2. The deictic features of demonstratives

The notion of demonstrative should have fulfill three basic criteria: first, demonstratives serve specific syntactic functions (they serve as a pronouns, adnominals, locational adverbs, etc.); second, they generally serve specific pragmatic functions (they indicate the location of a referent and coordinate both the speaker's and the addressee's attention on the referent); finally, demonstratives are characterized by specific semantic features of the referents (Diessel 1999:2). The semantic domains of demonstratives comprise two kinds of features: *qualitative features* and *deictic features* (Lyons 1977: 648) (Diessel 1999: 35). Demonstratives can provide some qualitative (non-deictic) information about the referents, including whether the referent is single or plural, animate or inanimate, female or male, or human or non-human. According to a number of earlier typological studies (e.g., Anderson and Keenan 1985, Diessel 1999, Dixon 2003), languages

differ greatly in the qualitative information that is encoded in demonstrative forms related to identifying the referent.

On the other aspect, demonstratives are deictic (pointing) elements that concern the location of the referent relative to the deictic center (origo). Regarding the deictic center of a referent, there are two prominent claims from the cross-linguistic literature on demonstratives. The classic studies of demonstratives (e.g., Bühler 1982 [1934]) claim that demonstratives primarily concern the referent's relative distance from the speaker (as Levison (2004) speaker-anchored distance systems). Based on this perspective, proximal demonstratives (e.g., English "*this*" and "*here*") convey that the referent is near the speaker and distal demonstratives (e.g., English "*that*" and "*there*") that it is relatively far from the speaker. However, for many non-Indo-European languages, research shows that demonstratives do not only make the distinction between the distances of an entity with regard to the speaker but also both the speaker and the hearer as a deictic center (e.g., Hanks 2005). Thus the second perspective respects the participants' roles rather than simply the distance of an entity relative to the deictic center. Based on the second perspective, the deictic feature of demonstratives and its interpretation also depend on the relations between the speaker and addressee and between the addressee and the object (Levison, 2004). In addition, demonstratives can also convey non-distance properties of the referent—for example, visibility or location in a geocentric frame of reference (Hanks 2009).

In most of the world's languages, demonstratives can have at least two distance scales (two terms) that locate the referent at two different distance scales: proximal vs. distal. For instance, English is a two-term deictic language. The English demonstratives *this* vs. *that* and *here* vs. *there* are used contrastively. *This* and *here* denote a referent that is closer to the deictic center (the speaker) than *that* and *there*. *This* and *here* are proximal, and *that* and *there* are distal (Anderson and Keenan 1985: 280-308).

In contrast to the two-term deictic languages, there are languages that have three deictic terms, which have three demonstratives indicating three different locations on a distance scale: proximal (scale 1), medial (scale 2), and distal (scale 3). The three deictic languages are categorized into two different systems: *distance-oriented system* languages and *person-oriented system* languages (Anderson and Keenan 1985: 282–286); (Diessel 1999:39); (Fillmore 1982:49-50). Levison (2004: 24-26) uses the term "speaker-anchored distance systems" to refer to "distance-oriented systems," and "speaker-or-addressee-anchored systems" refers to person-oriented systems.

In the distance-oriented system (speaker-anchored distance system), the three terms are represented, e.g., in Spanish, as *este* 'near speaker (or scale 1)', *ese* 'mid distance to speaker (or scale 2)', and *aquel* 'far from speaker (or scale 3)' (Data from Levison 2004: 24). However, in a person-oriented system (speaker-or-addressee-anchored system), the three terms are represented, e.g., in Japanese as *ko-* 'near speaker (or scale 1),' *so-* 'near addressee (or scale 2),' and *a-* 'away from speaker and addressee (or scale 3)' (Data from Diessel 1999: 99). Both systems agree at the proximal (distance scale 1, "near speaker") and the distal (scale 3, "far away from speaker/speaker and addressee"). However, the medial distance, or scale 2, is where they diverge. The distance-oriented system of language (e.g., Spanish) contains the middle term that refers to a location in medial distance (i.e., scale 2 is further away from the position of the speaker than scale 1 but closer than scale 3). However, the person-oriented system languages hold the middle term (medial (scale 2)), which is in relation to the addressee's location (i.e., "close to addressee") (Anderson and Keenan 1985: 282-286).

There are languages that mix the two systems, i.e., merge distance-oriented and person-oriented systems (Dixon 2003: 86) and (Lyons 1999: 109). For example, Boumaa Fijian (an Austronesian language) has a three-term language that blends the two systems, as *yai* 'this/here or scale 1' is close to the speaker, *yaa* 'that/there or scale 2' is mid-distance from the speaker,

often close to the hearer, and *mayaa* ‘that/there or scale 3’ is a far distance from the speaker and addressee (data from Dixon 2003: 86).

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.2. Form and deictic features of demonstratives in Ethiosemitic

We first, in section 4.2.1, describe the basic form of the demonstratives in the given languages. In section 4.2.2, we examine demonstratives' deictic features in their morphological structures. These descriptions are based on Diessel (1999). Diessel (1999) is a detailed study of demonstratives in a large variety of languages. The purpose of these descriptions is to illustrate systematically the extent of formal similarity and variation of demonstratives among the languages.

4.2.1. Basic form of demonstratives in Ethiosemitic

Demonstratives in Ethiosemitic languages belong to closed-class functional words, which are treated as determiners Baye (2000: 0); Nazareth (2011: 27-28); Beniam (2013: 368); Endalew (2014: 66). In this section, we have discussed the demonstrative stem (demonstrative without its inflectional endings) in the selected languages. Tigrinya (the Northern Ethiosemitic language) has two demonstrative roots, *ʔizi*—‘this’ and *ʔiti*—‘that’.¹ Amharic (the Transversal South Ethiosemitic group) has two dedicated demonstrative stems and a third-person pronoun form that functions as a demonstrative. The dedicated demonstrative stems are *jih*, ‘this,’ and *ja*, ‘that’. The demonstrative stems change into *-zzi* and *-zzija* when they are preceded by a prefix. For instance, the plural prefix *innä-* plus the demonstrative stem *jih* ‘this’ and *ja* ‘that’ yield *innäzzih* ‘these’ and *innäzzija* ‘those,’ respectively. The fricative *-zz-* is inserted between the prefix and the base, and the initial approximant *j* of the stem changes into the vowel *i*. This phonological process also indicates when any other prepositions are attached to the bases, like *kä-* ‘from’, *wädä-* ‘toward’, and *silä-* ‘because’ then, which are yielding *käzzih* ‘from here’, *wädäzzih* ‘towards here’, and *silähzzi* ‘because of this’, respectively (Leslau 1969:83; Meyer 2011:1189). In many languages, there are formal and functional similarities between demonstratives and third-person pronouns (Dixon

2003:67; Himmelmann 1996:206; and Anderson and Keenan 1985:280). In addition to the basic form, an independent third-person pronoun form substitutes the role of demonstrative in most Ethiosemitic languages. Like the regular form of demonstratives, Amharic uses the independent third-person pronoun form *issu* ‘he/that’ to provide some deictic and qualitative information about the referent.

Like Amharic, Harari has two dedicated demonstratives and a third-person pronoun form that have extended demonstrative function. The two dedicated demonstratives are *ji* ‘this’ and *jä?* ‘that’, while the independent third-person pronoun form *azzo* ‘he/that’ also conveys some semantic information about the referent. In addition, Harari uses other forms of pronouns, *huwwa* ‘that he’ and *hijja* ‘that she,’ which have extended demonstrative functions for human referents. Ezha (Western Gurage languages of the Outer-South Ethio-Semitic language) requires three dedicated demonstrative stems: *zi(h)* ‘this’, *hi(h)* ‘MED’ that’), and *za(h)* ‘that’. According to Hetzron (1977: 57), the use of demonstrative forms ending in the fricative *h* is unclear. However, Fekede (2002: 41) points out that when in a slowly pronounced speech, we use the demonstrative forms ending with the fricative “*h*”; otherwise, the short forms are more common. According to my investigation, the situation is not clear; thus, it needs further investigation. In addition, Ezha uses the 3rd person independent personal pronoun *xut* ‘he/that’ to make some demonstrative functions. The following table shows the dedicated demonstratives, which consist of the demonstrative root and a deictic element, as well as the independent third-person pronoun form that has an extended demonstrative function.

languages	Basic demonstratives	gloss	A third person pronoun form as demonstrative function	gloss
Amharic	<i>jih</i> <i>ja</i>	‘this’ ‘that’	<i>issu</i>	‘he/that’

Harari	<i>ji</i> <i>jä?</i>	‘this’ ‘that’	<i>azzo</i> <i>huwwa</i> <i>hijja</i>	‘he/that’ ‘that he’ ‘that she’
Tigrinya	<i>ʔizi</i> <i>ʔiti</i>	‘this’ ‘that’	-	-
Ezha	<i>zi(h)</i> <i>za(h)</i> <i>hi(h)</i>	‘this’ ‘that’ ‘that MED’	<i>xut</i>	‘he/that’

Table 1 Form of demonstratives in Ethiosemitic

Table 1 reveals that the three languages (Amharic, Harari, and Tigrinya) distinguish two series of dedicated demonstrative stems, and only Amharic and Harari have third-person pronoun forms that have extended demonstrative function. Ezha has three series of dedicated demonstrative stems and the 3rd person independent personal pronoun, which functions as a demonstrative.

Kassaye & Asfawwesen (2025: 6) stated that the Amharic and Harari demonstratives are made from the same root, *j-*, and are attached with the suffixes *ih* and *-i*, which indicate proximity to an entity. In contrast, the suffixes *-a* and *-ä?*, which are attached with the same root *j*, indicate far deixis, respectively. Ezha demonstratives, on the other hand, are derived from the same root, *z-*, which is attached with *-i* for proximal and *-a* for distal, respectively. This is known as the opposition *i: a* separates the "near" demonstrative from the "far" demonstrative. The third dedicated demonstrative stems *hi* 'that', which is distinct from the first, is only found in Ezha. Thus, we could understand that the languages grouped into three groups based on the demonstrative stem: Ezha, the western Gurage language is one group, Amharic and Harari, the transversal South Ethiosemitic languages, in second group. Tigrinya, the northern Ethiosemitic language, showed the third exclusive form, where the suffix *-zi*, which is attached to the demonstrative root *ʔi*, indicates the proximal entity and the suffix *-ti* indicates the distal entity. The third person pronoun form, which has an extended demonstrative function, is used in Amharic,

Harari, and Ezha; Tigrinya does not have this feature. Harari is the only one who employs pronouns that extend the demonstrative function for human referent.

4.2.2. Deictic features of demonstratives in Ethiosemitic

Language with a three-way distinction in a person-oriented system is a variant of a distance-oriented system with two distance terms. Also, languages with a four-way distinction in a person-oriented system can be the variant of a distance-oriented system with three distance terms (Diessel 1999: 39-40). We can describe the spatial description of Ethiosemitic languages' demonstratives based on the two different perspectives as follows: either the deictic reference of the referent depends on a *distance-oriented perspective* (i.e., the distance between the speaker and the referred entity) or on a *person-oriented perspective* (i.e., the distance of the entity with regard to the speaker and hearer as the deictic center). Let us see one by one.

4.2.2.1. Ethiosemitic demonstratives from person-oriented perspective

The person-oriented perspective is one of the deictic descriptions of demonstratives in Ethiosemitic languages, which is to make the distance of the referred entity with respect to both the speaker and the addressee as a deictic center. Based on this perspective, both Amharic and Harari use the *3-deictic terms* that indicate three different locations on a distance scale that require two dedicated demonstratives and third-person pronouns. Thus, in this perspective, a three-degree distinction is made between the referred entity, the addresser, and the addressee, such as: (i) Proximal (PROX), i.e., the demonstratives point to an entity that is proximal to the speaker but not considered the addressee (ii). Distal (DIS), i.e., the demonstratives point to an entity that is far away from both the speaker and the hearer, and (iii) Proximal to addressee (PROX-ADR), i.e., the demonstratives (third-person pronoun form functions as demonstrative) point to an entity that is proximal to an addressee and distal to a speaker. There are, thus, two proximal and

"I'll tell you what," said the man.

[illegible]

PROYAM 1-11 GODFREY 3MAG

'This child is very strong.'

(1) $\mathcal{C}_1 = \{1, \dots, 11\}$ and

$$11 \quad 10 \quad 9 \quad 8 \quad 7 \quad 6 \quad 5 \quad 4 \quad 3 \quad 2 \quad 1$$

PROY. F.	1.11	4.1	1.4	1. PV 2FSC
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$$\langle T1 \rangle = \langle E \rangle = 1, 1, 1, \dots, 1, 1, \dots, 1, 1, 1, \dots, 1, \dots,$$

(1) $\mathcal{C} = \mathcal{C}_1 \cup \mathcal{C}_2$ and $\mathcal{C}_1 \cap \mathcal{C}_2 = \emptyset$;

innä zizib lidz otftf almoz in söddöb u ot

PI PROY child PI A ACC insult PV 3PI SUBJ 3ESG ORI

'The... children... of...'

(entities close to addresser)

a. ii. *ʔaiwädäl inta*

ii. $t'oi$ wädäl int o

PROV M Sheep? fat COPPRS 3MSG

'This sheep is fat.'

(an entity close to addresser)

Die beiden ersten Punkte sind die wesentlichen Aussagen des Theorems.

PROV F2 old women have exist DV 3ESC

'This old woman has a boy.'

c. *jiätf wäldätf anu mähat'ün*

ji-ätf wäldi-ätf an-u mähat'ün

PROX-PL boy-PL I- beat.PV-3PL.SUBJ-1SG.OBJ
ACC
?

‘These boys beat me.’

(entities close to addresser)

d. *jiätf k'ähatätf anu mähat'ün*

jiä-ätf k'ähat -ätf an-u mähat'-u-n

PL-PROX girl-PL I- beat.PV-3PL.SUBJ-1SG.OBJ
ACC

‘These girls beat me.’

(entities close to addresser)

Demonstratives give deictic information about the entities, such as *lidz* ‘child’ in 1(a and b), *lidz-otfif* ‘child-PL’ in (1c), *t'aj* ‘sheep’ in (2a), *ragit* ‘old woman’ in (2b), and *wäld-ätf* ‘boy-PL’ in (2c) and *k'ähatätf* ‘girl-PL’ in (2d), which are close to the speaker but not considered the hearer, respectively.

The second-degree distinction from a person-oriented system is distal (DIS). In this perspective, an entity is far away from both the speaker and the hearer. Let us consider Amharic and Harari examples below: (Data from Kassaye & Asfawwesen 2025:8).

(3) Amharic

ja bet färräsä

ja bet färräsä

DIS.M house demolish.PV-3MSG

‘That house destroyed.’

(an entity far both the speaker and the hearer)

ja-		jä-ine	nä-ŋŋ
tʃtʃi	lam?		
DST.-	cow	GEN-	COP.PRS -3FSG
F?		I ?	

c.innazzija lidzotstf tämariwotstf natstfäw

PL- child-PL student-PL COP.PRS-3PL
DST?

(4) Harari

jä? wäldi mähalläk' sät'-e-n
DIS.M boy money give.PV-3MSG.SUBJ-1SG.OBJ
'That (M) boy gave me money'
(An entity far both the speaker and the hearer)

jäʔ-ttä k'āhat ak'il int-e
DIS-F girl wise COP.PRS-3FSG
'That (F) girl is wise.'
(an entity far both the speaker and the hearer)

jä?-ätʃ	däw-ətʃ	wädäl	int-äju
DIS	– goat-PL	fat	COP.PRS -3PL
PL?			
'Those goats are fat.'			

(An entity far both the speaker and the hearer)

In the examples from Amharic and Harari, the distal demonstratives *ja* and *jä?*, meaning ‘that,’ indicate the location of various entities: *bet* ‘house’ in (3a), *lam* ‘cow’ in (3b), *lidz-ot/f* ‘child-PL’ in (3c), *wäldi* ‘boy’ in (4a), *k’ähat* ‘girl’ in (4b), and *däw-af* ‘goat-PL’ in (4c), all of which are far away from both the speaker and the hearer.

When we compare the demonstrative plural marker with the referent (noun) plural marker, we find that the plural demonstrative marker *innä-* (e.g., *innäzzih* and *innäzzija* seen in (1c and 3c) respectively) differs phonologically and positionally from the nominal plural marker *ot/f* (e.g., *lidz-ot/f* “child-PL” seen in (1c and 3c)). However, like in (4c) the referent *däw* ‘goat’ and the distal demonstrative base *jä?* ‘that’ in Harari are both joined with the same plurality suffix ‘- *ät/f*’.

In many languages, there are formal and functional similarities between demonstratives and third-person pronouns (Dixon 2003:67; Himmelmann 1996:206; and Anderson and Keenan 1985:280). Except for Tigrinya, the other languages (Amharic, Harari, and Ezha) use an independent third-person pronoun that substitutes the role of demonstrative from the person-oriented view. By using this form, the speaker changes the origo from himself towards a relation between him, the addressee, and the referent, in which the referent must be close to the addressee but far away from the speaker. Thus, this form is used as the third-degree distinction, namely proximal-addressee (PROX-ADR). Let us look at the following Amharic and Harari examples:

(5) Amharic

a. *issu mäkina jāne new*

issu	mäkina	jä-ine	n-ew
3MSG/PROX-ADR.M?	car	GEN-I	COP.PRS -3MSG

‘He/that car is mine.’

b. *iss^wa dīmmät jantä nätf̣*

issu-a	dīmmät	ja-antä	n-äṭf̣
3SG-F / PROX-	cat	GEN-	COP.PRS-3FSG
ADR.F ?		you?	

‘She (that) cat is yours.’

(an entity proximal to the addressee but far from the addresser)

c. *innässu wättaddäroṭf̣ itopp’jawijan naṭf̣äw*

innä- issu	wättaddär-	itopp’ja-awi-	na-ṭf̣äw
	oṭf̣?	jan?	
PL-3MSG/ PROX-	soldier –PL	itopp’ja-M-	COP.PRS-3PL
ADR.PL ?		PL?	

‘They /those / soldiers are Ethiopians’

(entities proximal to the addressee but far from the addresser)

(6)Harar

a. *azzo wäldi haṭ̣’ir inta*

azzo	wäldi	haṭ̣’ir	int-a
3MSG/ PROX-	boy	short	COP.PRS -3MSG
ADR.M?			

‘That (M) boy is short.’

(an entity near the addressee but far from the addresser)

B. *azze k’ähät k’orräm inte*

azze	k’ähät	k’orräm	int-e
3FSG/ PROX-	girl	beautiful	COP.PRS-3FSG
ADR.F?			

‘That (F) girl is beautiful.’

(an entity near the addressee but far from the addresser)

c. *azzijäṭf̣ gāräṭf̣ gidir intäju*

azzo-äṭf̣	gär- äṭf̣	gidir	int-äju
3M-PL/ PROX-ADR.PL	house-PL	big	COP.PRS -3PL

‘They/those houses are big.’

(entities near the addressee but far from the addresser)

The third independent singular personal pronoun forms in the Amharic and Harari examples function as determiners to the head nouns *mākina* ‘car’ in (5a), *dimmāt* ‘cat’ in (5b), *wättaddär-otf* ‘soldier-PL’ in (5c), ‘*wäldi* ‘boy’ in (6a), *k’ähat* ‘girl’ in (6b), and *gär-āt* ‘house-PL’ in (6c), respectively. When the personal pronouns are functioning as determiners for head nouns, then they convey the meaning of a spatial deictic element that establishes reference to entities that are near to the hearer but distant to the speaker. As a result, the personal pronoun form refers to a location at a distance from the speaker, and it also indicates that the referent is close to the hearer. In addition to the basic personal pronoun form, only Harari has special personal pronoun forms that have extended demonstrative functions. These forms indicate human referents that are near the addressee but far from the addresser in my sample; consider the examples below:

(7) **Harari**

a. *huwwä wäldi amirin nāra*

huwwä	wäldi	amirin	nār-a
3MSG/ PROX-	boy	king	COP.PAS-3MSG
ADR.HUM.M??			

‘He/that boy was king’

(an entity near the addressee but far from the addresser)

b. *hijjä k’ähat didzti*

hijjä	k’ähat?	didz-ti
3FSG/ PROX-	girl	Come.PV-3FSG
ADR.HUM.F?		

‘She/that girl came.’

(an entity near the addressee but far from the addresser)

There is a restriction that *huwwä* always indicates the human masculine referent as in (7a) and *hijjä* with human feminine entities as in (7b). Consider the phrases below:

(8) Harari

a. **huwwä* *gar*
3SGM/ PROX-ADR.HUM.M house
‘he/that house’

b. **hijjä* *t’ay*
3SGF/ PROX-ADR.HUM.F sheep
‘she/that sheep’

c. **huwwä* *bara*
3SGM/ PROX-ADR.HUM.M ox
‘he/that ox’

d. **hijjä* *lam*
3SGF/ PROX-ADR.HUM.F cow
‘she/that cow’

The structures from (8a)–(8d) are not allowed in Harari. since there is a semantic mismatch between the non-human referents, such as *gar* ‘house’ in (8a), *t’ay* ‘sheep’ in (8b), *bara* ‘ox’ in (8c), and *lam* ‘cow’ in (8d), with the demonstratives *huwwä* ‘that he’ and *hijjä* ‘that she.’ The demonstratives *huwwä* ‘that he’ and *hijjä* ‘that she’ are intrinsically marked for human referents.

On the other hand, Ezha made 4-way distinctions of spatial references based on person-oriented perspective, which require three dedicated demonstratives and a third-person pronoun, namely:

(i) Proximal (PROX), i.e., the demonstrative points to the referent that is near to the speaker but not considered the addressee. (ii) Distal (DIS), i.e., the demonstrative points to the referent that is far away from both the speaker and the hearer. (iii) Medial (MED), i.e., the demonstrative points to the referent that is a medium-distance relative to the speaker (the demonstrative indicates the location of the referent is in the vicinity of the

speaker but cannot be easily reached). (iv) Proximal to addressee (PROX-ADR), i.e., the third-person pronoun "is pointing to entities that are proximal to an addressee and distal to a speaker, as shown in (9) below.

(9) Ezha

a. *zi(h) gäräd märkammanja*

zi(h) gäräd märkamman-ja

PROX girl beautiful-COP.PRS-3FSG

‘This girl is beautiful.’

(an entity close to addresser.)

b. *za(h) miss geffu*

za(h) miss geff-u

DIS man tall -COP.PRS.3MSG

‘That man is tall’

(An entity far both the speaker and the addresser)

c. *hi(h) t’aj jäxitu*

hi(h) t’aj jä-xit-u

that/ MED- sheep GEN-3FSG- COP.PRS -3MSG

M?

‘That sheep is hers.’

(an entity medium distance relative to the speaker)

d. *xut t’aj jäxitu*

xut t’aj jä-xit-u

3MSG/ sheep GEN-3FSG- COP.PRS -3MSG

PROX.ADR?

‘He/that sheep is hers.’

(an entity near the addressee but far from the addresser)

The noun *gäräd* ‘girl’ in (9a) co-occurs with the demonstrative *zi* ‘this’ that indicates the proximity of the referent relative to the speaker. In contrast, *miss* ‘man’ is farther away from the speaker, and it is represented by the demonstrative *za(h)* ‘that’ in (9b). Similarly, *t’aj* ‘sheep’ is at a medium

distance from the speaker, and it is still in the vicinity of the addresser. However, the speaker cannot easily reach it. Then, it is indicated by the medial demonstrative *hi(h)* ‘that MED’ in (9c). The referred entity *t’aj* ‘sheep’ is relatively near to the hearer but distant from the speaker, then the entity is indicated by the 3SM personal pronoun *xut* ‘it/he’ used as a demonstrative in (9d).

4.2.2.2. Ethiosemitic demonstratives from distance-oriented perspective

The second deictic dimension is distance-oriented perspective. Here, the speaker is the only reference point for the location of the referent (i.e., this perspective is excluding the hearer from the deictic center, or the reference does not consider the location of the addressee). In this view, the demonstratives indicate varying degrees of closeness or distance between the speaker and a referent (Anderson and Keenan 1985).

Based on this perspective, demonstratives in Amharic, Harari, and Tigrinya indicate *two spatial contrasts* of the referents relative to the speaker (speaker-proximal (PROX) and speaker-distal (DIS)). Here are examples.

(10) Amharic

a. *jih lidz wändimme näw*

jih	lidz	wändimm-e	n-äw
PROX.M	child	brother-POS	COP.PRS -3MSG

‘This child is my brother.’

(an entity close to speaker)

D. *jihitʃf lam bät’am wäfram näʃʃf*

b. *ja bet färräsä*

ja	bet	färräs-ä
DIS.M	house	demolish PV-3MSG

‘That house demolished.’

jih-tʃʃf	lam	bät’am	wäfram	-näʃʃf
PROX- F	cow	very	fat	COP.PRS -3FSG

This cow is very fat.’

(an entity close to speaker)

d. *jatʃʃ dimmät näʃʃʃ näʃʃʃ*

ja-tʃʃ dimmät näʃʃʃʃ näʃʃʃ
DST- F cat white COP.PRS -3FSG

‘That cat is white.’

(entities far from speaker)

e. *innäzzih betotʃʃ jäne natʃʃäw*

innä-jih bet-otʃʃ jä-ine n-atʃʃäw
PL- house-PL GEN-I COP.PRS -3PL
PROX

‘These houses are mine.’

(entities close to speaker)

f. *innäzzija lidzotʃʃ təmariwotʃʃ natʃʃäw*

innä-ja lidz-otʃʃ tamari- n-atʃʃäw
wotʃʃʃ
PL- child-PL student-PL COP.PRS-3PL
DST? ?

‘Those children are students.’

(entities far from speaker)

(11) Harari

a. *ji tʃʃ gidirinta*

ji tʃʃ gidir int-a
PROX.M sheep big COP.PRS -3MSG

‘This sheep is big.’

(an entity close to speaker)

b. *jä? tʃʃ wädäl inta*

jä? tʃʃ wädäl int-a
DST.M sheep fat COP PRS.-3MSG

‘That sheep is fat.’

(an entity far from speaker)

c. *jittä lam motti*

ji-ttä lam motti
 PROX -F cow die.PV-3FSG
 ‘This cow died.’
 (an entity close to speaker)

d. *jä?ttä lam wälädti*

jä?ttä lam Wäläd-ti
 DIS -F cow give-birth.PV-3FSG
 ‘That cow gave birth’
 (an entity far from speaker)

e. *jiätf t’ajätf k’ali intäju*

ji-ätf t’aj-ätf k’ali int-äju
 PROX- sheep- expensive COP.PRS -3PL
 PL? PL?
 ‘These sheep are expensive.’
 (an entities close to speaker)

f. *jä?ätf gärätf gidir intäju*

jä?-ätf gär-ätf gidir int-äju
 DIS – house – big COP.PRS -3PL
 PL? PL?
 ‘Those houses are big.’
 (an entities far from speaker)

(12) Tigrinya

a. *ʔizi dīmmu s’älim ijju*

ʔizi dīmmu s’älim ij-j-u
 PROX.MSG cat black COP.PRE-3MSG
 ‘This cat is black.’
 (an entity close to speaker)

g. ***ʔiziʔän mämhiran nifʕat***

ʔiziʔ-än	mämhir-an	nifʕ-at	ijj-än
PROX-	teacher-PL	clever-	COP.PRS -3FPL
FPL?		Pl	

‘These teachers are clever.’

(entities close to speaker)

h. ***ʔitiʔän ʔanʔisti nab asmära käjidän***

ʔitiʔ-än	ʔanʔisti	nab	asmära	käjid-än
DST-	woman.PL	to	Asmera	go.PV-3FPL
FPL?				

‘Those women went to Asmera.’

(entities far from speaker)

From the bolded phrases of Amharic, Harari, and Tigrinya above, there is a clear *spatial contrast* between two entities at different distances, with the speaker as the only deictic center. The demonstratives found in structures (10a), (10c), (10e), (11a), (11c), (11e), (12a), (12c), (12e), and (12g) identify an entity or entities viewed from the speaker’s relative spatial perspective as being near the speaker. However, the demonstratives in (10b), (10d), (10f), (11b), (11d), (11f), (12b), (12d), (12f), and (12h) indicate an entity or entities non-proximal to the speaker, respectively.

In addition, in both Amharic and Harari data, the proximal and distal demonstratives in the singular differentiate between masculine and feminine referents. In this instance, the demonstratives of masculinity are either unmarked morphologically or of basic form. Thus, demonstratives convey some gender information about the referents in Amharic and Harari; however, the plural does not, as in (10e), (10f), (11e), and (11f) for Amharic and Harari, respectively. Conversely, gender differentiation has been observed in Tigrinya demonstratives for both singular and plural referents, as in (12). As I mentioned earlier, the associative prefix *innä-* plus the basic form demonstrative *jih* and *ja* yield *innäzzih* ‘these’ and *innäzziya* ‘those’, respectively, in Amharic. The fricative “zz” is inserted between the prefix

and the base, and the initial approximant "j" of the base changes into the vowel *i*.

In contrast, Ezha is a three-way contrast (speaker-proximal (PROX), speaker-medial (MED), and speaker-distal (DIS)) from a distance-oriented perspective (only the speaker as origo). Here are examples.

(13) Ezha

a. **zi(h)** *miss* *gobäzu*

zi(h) miss gobäz-u

PROX man clever-COP.PRS.3MSG

‘This man is clever.’

(an entity close to speaker)

b. **hi(h)** *miss* *geffu*

hi(h) miss geff-u

MED man tall -COP.PRS.3MSG

‘That man is tall’

(An entity a bit far from of the speaker but, still in the vicinity of the speaker)

c. **za(h)** *gämmija* *zäb* *k’ätt’ärom*

za(h) gämmija zäb k’ätt’är-o-m

DST man.PL lion kill.PV-3MPL-MVM

‘These men killed lions.’

(entities far from speaker)

d. **zi(h)** *miſt* *tſännätſim*

zi(h) miſt tſännä- tſi-m

PROX woman come.PV-3FSG-MVM

‘This woman came.’

(an entity close to speaker)

e. **hi(h)** *gired färät fäkkärämam*

hi(h) gired färät fäkkär-äma-m

MED girl.PL food cook.PV-3FPL-MV-M

‘These girls cooked a food.’

(an entities a bit far from of the speaker but, still in the vicinity of the speaker)

f. **za(h)** *gäräd märkamanjm*

za(h) gäräd märkama-n-ja

DIS girl beautiful - COP.PRS-3FSG

‘that girl is beautiful’

(An entity far from speaker)

The demonstrative *zi(h)* ‘this’ in (13a) and (13d) indicates the proximity or closeness of an entity, but if the entity is farther away, it is referred to by *za(h)* ‘that’ as in (13c) and (13f). If the entity is still in the vicinity of the speaker but cannot be easily reached, then it is referred to by the medial demonstrative *hi(h)* ‘that MED’ as in (13b) and (13e). i.e., *hi(h)* indicates the distance of the referent further away from the position of the speaker than *zi(h)* but closer than *za*. From the bolded phrases (13a)–(13f) for Ezha above, we see the structure demonstrative + inherently masculine and feminine referents. *miss* ‘man’ in (13a and 13b) and *gämmija* ‘men’ in (13c) are inherent masculine referents; however, *gäräd* ‘girl’ in (13f) and *mißt* ‘woman’ in (13d) are inherent feminine referents. But both are predetermined by the basic demonstrative forms *zi(h)* ‘this,’ or *za(h)* ‘that’ i.e., Ezha demonstratives do not provide gender and number information about the referents. The gender and number distinctions are expressed by different agreement markers on the verb.

Positionally, demonstratives in most Ethiosemitic languages occur in pre-nominals. Therefore, the reverse order is not acceptable.

(14) Amharic

* *lidʒ jih bärrun käffätäw*

lidʒ jih bärr-u-n käffät-ä-w
child PROX.M door-DEF-ACC open.PV-3MSG.SUBJ-3MSG.OBJ
'Child this opened the door.'

(15) Ezha

* *miss zi(h) gobäzu*

miss zi(h) gobäz-u
man PROX clever-COP.PRS.3MSG
'man this is clever'

(16) Harari

* *t'aj ji tägoʔara*

t'aj ji tä-goʔar-a
sheep PROX.M PASS- slaughter.PV-3MSG
'Sheep this was slaughtered.'

The ungrammaticality of (14), (15), and (16) is that demonstratives do not precede the head nouns. This feature is a well-known fact in the Ethiosemitic languages. But, in Tigrinya, the head nouns precede the demonstrative, as in (17), when both the article and demonstrative occur in one DP or NP.

(17) Tigrinya

a. *ʔizom säbat ʔiziʔom nab addäwa käjidom*

ʔiz-om säb-at ʔiziʔ-om nab addäwa käjid-om
DEF-MPL man-PL PROX – MPL to Addewa go.PV-3MPL
'These men went to Addewa.'

ʔizi k'ola ʔizi tämäharaj ijju

ʔizi k'ola ʔizi tämähar-aj ijju-u
DEF.MSG child (M) PROX.MSG student-M COP.PRS-3MSG
'This child is a student.'

We can conclude from the above discussion, from distance-oriented perspective, the languages are grouped into two: the languages (Tigrinya, Amharic, and Harari) use two distance terms, i.e., the two-way *contrast* PROX vs. DST, and the language (Ezha) has a *three-way contrast*: PROX, MED, and DST.

On the other hand, in the person-oriented perspective, the languages require the regular demonstratives and the third-person pronouns, for which both the speaker and the hearer serve as reference points. In this perspective, the selected languages are grouped into two: the languages (Amharic and Harari) use three distance terms, i.e., a three-way contrast, namely PROX (proximal to the speaker), DST (distal to both the speaker and the hearer), and PROX-ADR (entity proximal to an addressee and distal to a speaker). On the other hand, Ezha uses four distance terms, i.e., a four-way *contrast*: PROX (proximal to the speaker), DST (distal both from the speaker and the hearer), MED (the demonstrative point to the referent that is a medium distance relative to the speaker), and PROX-ADR (entity proximal to an addressee and distal to a speaker). Besides a stationary referent, demonstratives can also convey the movement of a referent in a certain direction (movement) relative to the deictic center (mostly from the speaker's point of view) (Diessel 1999:45).

In Ethiosemitic languages, demonstratives with different directional prepositions or postpositions indicate either the referent is moving towards the deictic center or the referent is moving away from the deictic center. The movement of the referent towards the deictic center (often the speaker) is frequently indicated by a directional preposition with a demonstrative base. Here are examples:

(18) Amharic

wädäzzih na

wädä - jih n-a
towards – come.IMP-2MSG
PROX.M?

‘come towards this!’

(from there to this place (towards the speaker))

(19) Harari

kilji didža

kil-ji didž-a
towards- come.PV-3MSG
PROX.M?

‘He came towards this’

(from there to this place (toward the speaker))

From the above Amharic and Harari examples, we see that the directional **prepositions** *wädä-* in (18) and *kil-* in (19) basically go with the demonstrative bases *jih* and *ji* ‘this.’ These directional prepositions encode the meaning ‘towards,’ which indicates that the referent is moving towards the deictic center (proximal to the speaker). Similarly, the proximal *zih* ‘this’ with the directional **postposition** *njä* ‘towards’ in (20) indicates that the referent is moving toward the deictic center in Ezha. The direction marking system is quite different in Tigrinya. Tigrinya has the directional morpheme *nab* ‘to’ in (21), which is a **free form**.

(20) Ezha

zihenjä nehä

[zi-he]-njä ne-hä
[PROX –VIC] =>here- come.IMP-2MSG
towards?

‘Come towards this’

(come from there to this place (toward the speaker))

(21) Tigrinya

nabzi niſi

nab ʔizi niſ- i
towards come.IMP-2FSG
PROX.M?

‘come towards this!’

(come from there to this place (toward the speaker))

On the other hand, the same directional morphemes are attached with the distal demonstratives that indicate the referent is away from the speaker. Let us consider the examples below:

(22) Amharic

wädäzza hid

wädä- ja hid
towards – go.IMP.2MSG
DIS.M?

‘go towards there’
(from here to that place (away from the speaker))

(23) Harari

kiljä? let’

kil- jä? let’
towards go.IMP.2MSG
DIS.M?

‘Go toward there.’
(from here to that place (away from the speaker))

(24) Ezha

zahenjä wär

[za-he]-njä wär
[DIS- VIC] =>there- go. IMP.2MSG
towards?

‘Go towards there.’
(go from here to that place (away from the speaker))

The bolded phrases in the above examples indicate that the direction of movement depends on the demonstrative base, i.e., the proximal demonstrative with a directional morpheme implies movement towards the speaker as shown in (18), (19), (20), and (21), whereas the distal demonstrative with the same particles indicates movement away from the speaker as in (22)-(24).

Similarly, the demonstratives occur with the locative prefixes *be* and *bä* with the locative nouns *gäräb* and *bäkuul* that determine the direction of the referent's movement relative to a point of reference (the speaker) for Harari and Amharic, respectively, as shown below.

(25) **Harari**

a. *ānbe ji gäräb let' a*

an-be ji gäräb let' -a
I-LOC PROX.M side go.PV-3MSG
'He went this side/direction from me. '
(through the speaker's line/direction)

b. *ānbe jā? gäräb let' a*

ān-be jā? gäräb let' -a
I – DST.M side go.PV-3MSG
LOC?
'He went that side/direction from me.'
(away the speaker's line/ direction)

(26) **Amharic**

a. *bäzzih bäkuul hedä*

bä- jih bäkuul hed-ä
LOC –PRX.M side go.PV-3MSG
'He went through this direction.'
(through the speaker's line/direction)

b. *bäzza bäkuul hedä*

bä- ja bäkuul hed-ä
LOC – side go.PV-3MSG
DIS.M?
'he went through that direction '
(away the speaker's line/ direction)

5. Conclusion

This paper has shown the deictic functions of the demonstrative in four Ethiosemitic languages. All four languages included in our sample have demonstratives that indicate a deictic contrast (different distance-marked). Amharic, Harari, and Ezha (the Southern Ethiosemitic languages **group**) are a mix of the two systems: distance-oriented, in which the speaker is the only point of reference for the location of the referent, and person-oriented, in which, in addition to the speaker, the location of the hearer serves as another reference point. In contrast, only Tigrinya (the Northern Ethiosemitic languages group) made the two-way distinction of spatial references to the referents (Speaker-Proximal vs. Speaker-Distal) from a distance-oriented perspective. Thus, in the distance-oriented perspective, the languages are grouped into two group: the languages (Tigrinya, Amharic, and Harari) use two distance terms, i.e., the two-way contrast PROX vs. DST, but, the language (Ezha) has a *three-way contrast*: PROX, MED, and DST.

On the other hand, in the person-oriented perspective, the languages require the regular demonstratives and the third-person pronouns, for which both the speaker and the hearer serve as reference points. In this perspective, the selected languages are grouped into two: In one hand, Amharic and Harari take a three-way distinction, namely:

- (i) Proximal (PROX): "Demonstrative" indicates the location of the referent close to the speaker.
- (ii) Proximal to addressee (PROX-ADR): "The independent third-person pronoun form" (which is not a dedicated morphosyntactic type of demonstrative) indicates the location of the referent as close to the addressee and far from the speaker.
- (iii) Distal (DST): "Demonstrative" indicates the referents are far from both the speaker and the addressee.

On the other hand, Ezha is a *four-deictic-term language* that requires three dedicated demonstratives and a third-person pronoun, namely:

- (i) Proximal (PROX), i.e., the demonstrative *zi* 'this,' points to the referent that is near to the speaker but not considered the addressee.
- (ii) Distal (DIS), i.e., the demonstrative *za* 'that' points to the referent that is far away from both the speaker and the hearer.
- (iii) Medial (MED), i.e., the demonstrative *hi* "that MED" points to the referent that is a medium-distance relative to the speaker (i.e., the demonstrative indicates the location of the referent is in the vicinity of the speaker but cannot be easily reached).
- (iv) Proximal to addressee (PROX-ADR), i.e., the third-person pronoun *xut* "he/that" is pointing to entities that are proximal to an addressee and distal to a speaker.

In addition to distance of the stationary referents, demonstratives in the studied languages are augmented for another deictic feature as whether the referent is moving toward, or away from the deictic centred. This feature is expressed by demonstratives with different directional prepositional and postpositional practices in all four languages. Thus, the movement or directional marking system groups the languages under investigation into three: Amharic and Harari, in one group i.e. demonstrative bases with directional *prepositional* particles encode that the referent is moving towards or away from the deictic centred (often the speaker) and in Ezha on the other that, demonstrative bases with both directional *prepositional* and *postpositional* practices indicate that the referent is moving toward or away from the deictic centred. Tigrinya use a *free morpheme* for indicates the direction and or movement of the referent. Furthermore, Amharic, Harari, and Tigrinya demonstratives encode for number and gender information about the referents. However, Ezha demonstratives do not marked for the number or gender of their referents. Accordingly, Ezha demonstratives are morphologically invariable when they co-occur with noun. In addition, the language number and/gender marking systems are grouped into three categories: Tigrinya and Harari in one group (as suffix), Ezha in the other (non-affix). The third exclusive form is found in Amharic (as prefix).

List of abbreviations and symbols

1SG	First person singular	M	masculine
1PL	First person plural	MVM	Main verb marker
2FSG	2 person feminine singular	NEG	negation
2MSG	2 person masculine singular	NP	Non-past tense
2PL	second person plural	OBJ	object
3FSG	third person feminine singular	OBL	Obligation
3MSG	third person masculine singular	PASS	passive marker
3PL	third person plural	PAST	Past tense
1PL	First person plural	PL	Plural
ACC	accusative	POSS	Possession marker
AUX	auxiliary verb	PRS	Present tense
C	consonant	PROS	prospective
CNV	converb marker	PROX	proximal
COMP	complementizer	PV	perfective basic stem
COP	copula	REL	relative marker
DAT	dative	RN	relational noun
DEF	definite	SG	singular
DOBJ	direct object	SGV	singulative
DST	distal	SUBJ	subject
F	feminine	V	vowel
FUT	future	VN	verbal noun
GEN	genitive	*	Ungrammatical expression/form
IMP	imperative	=>	Become
IPV	imperfective basic stem		
JUS	Jussive		

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