

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Linguistic Analysis of Amharic k'ine: A Corpus-based Approach

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### Abstract

*This study analyzed Amharic k'ine from linguistic semantics and pragmatics viewpoint. A descriptive qualitative research method was employed. Data was collected primarily from a corpus of bəgəna song lyrics. Besides, a key informant interview was conducted. All accessible bəgəna song lyrics were considered, but only those words, verses, phrases, lines, and/or stanzas that contain k'ine were taken for analysis. Double context and semantic ambiguity were identified as the main characteristics of Amharic k'ine. The ambiguity is created when the language item has two or more structural and cognitive meanings. The study also revealed that ambiguity is created phonologically, morphologically, syntactically, and through various contextual factors. It was also found that k'ine contains semantically incompatible meanings: surface and underlying. Using metaphors, ambiguous words, and words that are similar, but different in the parts of the speech have been frequently employed to contrive k'ine. Understanding the use of metaphors, splitting/dividing words, merging two words, deleting sounds or syllables, and the like can help to determine and unravel the true meaning of the k'ine. Overall, this study provides a linguistic analysis of how k'ine is created and interpreted in Amharic. It is concluded that the language use of k'ine is an embodiment of power hierarchy and the relation between divine beings and man, the perception and conception of the real and imagined world.*

**Keywords:** k'ine, song lyrics, semantics, pragmatics, contextual interpretation, ambiguity

## Introduction

Amharic belongs to Ethio-Semitic language subfamily (Goldenberg, 1977; Hetzron, 1972; Leslau, 1995). Amharic is being used nationwide by diverse ethnic groups as a common language or lingua franca in inter-ethnic communication and it has become the official language of the Federal Government of Ethiopia. It has the second largest number of speakers among all Semitic languages next to Arabic (Hudson, 1998). Amharic has five different dialects: Gojjam, Wollo, Gondar, Shewa, and Addis Ababa (Hudson, 1998; Meyer, 2011; Zelealem, 2007).

The Amharic alphabet has thirty-three basic symbols, not counting the four labiovelars. Each symbol has

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seven different shapes, traditionally called “orders”, depending on the vowel with which the basic symbol is combined (Leslau, 1995). Amharic also has its own typical phonological, morphological, and syntactic features that characterize it.

Regarding the phonology, morphology, and syntax/structure of the Amharic language, several studies have been conducted by various local and foreign researchers (Tadesse, 1972; Mullen, 1986; Alemayehu, 1987; Leslau, 1995; Rose, 1997; Mulugeta, 2001; Mulusew, 2014; Baye, 2016). However, these studies have focused on the grammatical description and analysis of Amharic; little or almost no account has been said on Amharic from the point of view of linguistic semantics and pragmatics.

In addition, graduate students in the Department of Amharic Language Literature and Folklore and English Language and Literature at Addis Ababa University have done some studies on the content, theme and performance analysis of some literary works for their dissertations (Mengesha, 2000; Anley, 2003; Tekle-Haimanot, 1986; Abebe, 2010; Bolay, 2002; Kawase, 2005; Tigist, 2010 to mention a few). However, some of these theses focused on folklore, some on anthropology, and the rest on history; none of these studies was a linguistic inquiry. In addition, although these studies made their analysis on Azmari ‘minstrel’ song lyrics, they were not analyzed from linguistic semantics and pragmatics points of view.

k’ine has been passed down orally from generation to generation in Ethiopia for many centuries. At present, however, because the works and the creative ability of our forefathers or church scholars in contriving it are being forgotten, we are unable to get countless skills and knowledge that we should have learned. In addition, the Western language and culture are impacting Amharic language use and the fact that indigenous knowledge such as k’ine is being forgotten triggered me to conduct this study. Therefore, this study is intended to fill in the identified research gaps and analyze Amharic k’ine from linguistic semantics and pragmatics perspectives. Specifically, this article tried to address the mechanisms by which k’ine is created in Amharic, analyze the strategies to be used to solve the mystical meaning, and figure out the meaning or secretive message that is conveyed through the k’ine.

## **Literature review**

### **Linguistic semantics and pragmatics**

The difference and relationship between pragmatics and semantics is the subject of philosophical discussion among linguists, philosophers, and language experts. Leech (1981: 320) states, “The relationship between semantics and pragmatics has remained a matter of fundamental disagreement.” Despite this, Leech clarifies that the dichotomy between pragmatics and semantics sometimes corresponds to the distinction between competence and performance or meaning and use. Since pragmatics has had the greatest influence on semantics, it is challenging to think of pragmatics without semantics and semantics without pragmatics (Leech, 1981; Yule, 1996). Semantics is the study of meaning in language, and the connections between language forms and real-world entities (Hurford et al., 2007; Yule, 1996). It studies the meaning of morphemes, words, phrases, sentences, and the connections between signs and symbols and their real-world meanings.

Pragmatics is part of the general theory of meaning and studies the relationship between the structure of a semiotic system (notably language) and how language (knowledge) is used in context (Mey, 1993; Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Saeed, 2003). Pragmatics is the study of meaning as it is conveyed by a writer or speaker and understood by a reader or listener (Yule, 1996). According to Kadmon (2001), pragmatics deals with language use by transcending literal meaning. It focuses on the unsaid, inference, and implicit meaning as well as how language structure operates on this foundation of the assumed and the inferred. The same verbal expression might have multiple meanings in different contexts. Thus, it's important to use contextual elements to go beyond the information provided linguistically (Ervin-Tripp, 1996).

The context in communication encompasses more than just the linguistic details surrounding an utterance; it is typically thought of as a broad, multifaceted idea that encompasses social, cognitive, cultural, linguistic, physical, and other non-linguistic contexts (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). Levinson (1983: 276) claims, "a context must be understood here to be a set of propositions describing the beliefs, knowledge, commitments and so on of the participants in a discourse". Context should; therefore, include all of the information that the hearer uses to understand linguistic expressions.

## Overview of k'ine ቅኒ in Ethiopia

k'ine has a long history in Ethiopia. Many Ethiopian scholars believe that it was formerly contrived and performed only in Ge'ez, and later in both Ge'ez and Amharic (Debebe, 2008). Being performed in Ge'ez and Amharic, k'ine has been considered one of the criteria for evaluating one's mental maturity, intellectual ability, and eloquence (Debebe, 2008).

k'ine is a potent figure of speech for expressing feelings, and encompasses broader concepts. Although many Ethiopian Orthodox Church scholars (cf. Debebe, 2008; Mahitemeselassie, 2007) believe that k'ine is found only in Ethiopia, Birhanu (2005) claims that ancient people like the Jews were praising their Lord through the mysterious words provided by the k'ine. The outstanding Ethiopian scholar, St. Yared, has said much the same thing concerning addressing a song of praise in k'ine to the Lord. It is very difficult to exactly tell the origin and history of k'ine. However, it is believed that the originator of k'ine in Ethiopia is St. Yared (Mahitemeselassie, 2007; Debebe, 2008).

Different scholars proposed various definitions of k'ine. For instance, Abebe (1994) defined it as a freedom of thinking and a field of art that expresses the ideas and feelings of human beings in wonderful language usage and poetic style by using gold and wax, which bear deep mystery and fertile creativity. k'ine is an artistic property that encompasses broader concepts such as poetry, ways of speaking (proverbs), values, customs and cultures in an integrated way.

Generally speaking, all scholars of k'ine agreed upon the idea that k'ine has great values in a given society, and it is believed to be the result of a matured mind and thinking, and it contains both secular and spiritual lives of human beings secretly, but with sound language use and artistic manner (Belay, 1994).

All k'ine are poems, but not all poems can be k'ine. k'ine is different in that a profound idea can be veiled underneath an everyday idea through the mode of Səminna wərk' 'Wax and Gold' (Haliegebriel, 1970). Besides, According to Abebe (1994) and Mersha (2018), k'ine is an independent subject that has unique features and rules such as its metric system, usage of symbolization, selection of best language and grammar, argumentative styles, features of wondering, questioning, reasoning, criticizing, examining and analyzing things and nature, and its searching and researching quality.

k'ine is a unique style of poetry from Ethiopia that is rich and deep in meaning and demands critical thinking and analysis of the poetry to understand its meaning. The poetry, mystery and linguistic excellence of kine are so popular in Ethiopia that many Ethiopians learn them and become proficient in the art. History tells us that Ethiopian rulers, including the late Emperor Haile-Selassie, were some of the students of kine (Belay, 1994).

Old Testament, New Testament, Books of Scholars, Books of Monks and Literary works and others are the sources of St Yared's music. The biblical source and justification for Yared's Music is the Old Testament, especially Psalm 150.

*Praise God in his sanctuary.  
Praise him with the sound of a trumpet  
Praise him with the psaltery  
Praise him with a tumbrel with stringed instruments and organs  
Praise him up on the loud cymbals  
Praise him up on the high-sounding cymbal*

The lyrics were composed in such a way as to conform to the music so that there would be no fundamental change in the original structure of the liturgy. They were not certainly whimsical or unusual in character but divine revelations (Lisanework, 1990).

## **k'ine and linguistic ambiguity**

Ambiguity is defined as "... the state of having more than one possible sense" (Murphy, 2010:84). An expression is considered ambiguous if it can be interpreted or understood in more than one way. By using unique effects like irony, sarcasm, comedy, puns, etc., ambiguity can be purposefully produced to convey or express thoughts and emotions. Ambiguity is one of the characteristics of a k'ine "pun".

Complex phrases or clauses or phrasal attachment and elliptic phenomena that can be interpreted in multiple ways are said to exhibit syntactic ambiguity, while lexical ambiguity arises when a given lexical item has two semantically conflicting meanings (Bucaria, 2004; Hirst, 1987; Oaks, 1994; Attardo et al., 1994). Words are altered at the sound level to create phonological ambiguity (Seewoester, 2011). Other scholars, like Stageberg (1998), divided ambiguity into four categories: script, class, syntactic (attachment), and lexical.

In Amharic, k'ine is embedded within words and phrases that contain double meanings called hibrə k'al. Every k'ine is composed of a complex meaning that can be represented in the form of səminna wərk' 'wax

and gold' (Mahitemeslassie, 2007). *səm* 'wax' is a cover term used to transmit the speaker's or the writer's meaning explicitly, while the work 'gold' is the meaning the writer or speaker wants to convey meaning subtly (cf. Mahitemeslassie, 2007; Debebe, 2008).

Having this theoretical foundation, this paper tried to analyze the linguistic features that are used to contrive Amharic *k'ine* and the mechanism used to figure out the semantic and pragmatic meanings of Amharic *k'ine* are identified and analyzed accordingly.

## Methods

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method and the data is mainly accessed from written and spoken Amharic *bəgəna* song lyrics corpora. In addition, key-informant interviews were conducted with *bəgəna* players [dərɗariwotɕɪf] and lyricists to supplement the main data. The study employed a comprehensive sampling technique in selecting the data. Since only the *bəgəna* song lyrics that contain *k'ine* were selected, all accessible song lyrics were found to be manageable to be used in the study. In selecting the key informants, a purposive sampling technique was used. The selection of informants was purposeful because random selection may lead to wrong data in cases where participants have no idea about the issue raised.

In analyzing the data, the expressions and/or utterances that contain *k'ine* were first transcribed phonemically using IPA with glosses in English. The data were presented in interlinear morpheme-by-morpheme in three tiers. The first tier was the data line which contained underlying and segmentable morphemes or morpheme combinations. The second line/tier glossed the grammatical categories of each morpheme. The third tier/line was an English literal translation. Finally, the transcribed, glossed and translated data were analyzed qualitatively and thematically based on the objectives.

## Results and Discussion

In this subsection of the article, the semantics and pragmatics of Amharic *k'ine* are analyzed by extracting examples from the Amharic *bəgəna* song lyrics.

### Linguistic expressions having two incompatible meanings

There are *k'ine* whose ambiguity is created by expressions that are embedded with two or more incompatible meanings. The forms of the expressions may have similarities and/or differences based on their syntactic behaviors, pronunciations, and meanings as in (1):

a. Expressions of the same syntactic categories and pronunciation, but different in meaning as in (1) below.

- |     |    |            |              |                |                    |                 |
|-----|----|------------|--------------|----------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| (1) | a. | <i>mot</i> | <i>fidəl</i> | <i>təmɾ-o</i>  | <i>j-anəbb-all</i> | <i>sɪ-nni-l</i> |
|     |    | death      | alphabet     | learn.CVB-3SGM | 3SGM-read.IPFV-AUX | when-1PL-say    |

*ink<sup>w</sup>an*      *li-j-anəbb-inna*      *gəna*    *j-agz-all*  
 let alone      PROS-3SGM-read.IPFV-and      still      3SGM-count letters.IMP-AUX  
 ‘When we say that death will read the alphabet  
 But, it is lagging instead of reading’

- b. *jə-zare*      *zəməən*      *səw*      *sira*  
 GEN-today      period      man      work  
*sar-u-m*      *k’it’əl-u-m*      *al-j-a-kor-a*  
 grass-DEF-FOC      leave-DEF-FOC      NEG-3SGM-CAUS-proud.IPFV-3SGM  
*iwk’ət-u-s*      *jə-ant-ə [jantə]*      *məssəl-ə-jən*  
 knowledge-DEF-FOC      GEN-you-3SGM look like-3SGM-1PL  
***bə-ʔabinnət***      *adin-ə-jən*  
 in-fatherhood      save.IMP-2SGM-1SG

‘The works of the present-day man and the grass and the leaves do not make  
 one be proud of them.

It seems to me that the knowledge is yours, and save me in your fatherhood.’

The phrasal expressions jagzall ‘reading the letters slowly’ in (1a) and bəʔabinnət ‘as a father’ in (1b) are a verb and a noun or NP, respectively) and with the same form and pronunciation. Since the two expressions are phrases, they create structural ambiguity. The k’ine of each of the above examples also resides in these phrases.

In (1a), jagzall can be used both in the senses of reading and movement. One of the meanings of jagzall is ‘to read the letters one by one and slowly’; the other is to take/move something/someone from one place to another. Due to this, the surface meaning of jagzall in (1a) is related to the very slow reading process of the letters (not full-fledged words) of a certain language. However, the underlying meaning (the gold) of the couplet is that death will inevitably take everyone to the grave (death continues taking its toll); no one shall remain from death. This ambiguity is created because jagzall has one form, but two semantically incompatible meanings which arose from its phrasal nature as a verb with the same form and pronunciation in both its surface and underlying meanings. Due to the phrasal nature of jagzall, structural ambiguity is created. Readers and/or listeners should know the layered meanings of jagzall in different social contexts.

In example (1b), bəʔabinnət has two possible meanings in different religious contexts. bəʔabinnət is ‘fatherhood’ in its surface meaning (wax), and the second meaning is ‘with your exemplary deeds’. This ambiguity is created by the expression abinnət ‘a state of being a father’ which is an abstract noun derived from the noun ab ‘father’ and used here to conceal the intentional meaning. To spell out the intentional meaning, the reader/listener should know the other meaning of abinnət ‘exemplary’. In the Christian religion, it is believed The Father sent his only Son (i.e., Jesus) to this world as a savior of the descendants of Adam. In so doing, He paid a lot of sacrifices that Christians consider ‘exemplary deeds’ to all mankind; all that Jesus

did while He was on earth are considered by Christians exemplary. The “gold”, intentional meaning of the term in (1b) is that everything in this world and the deeds of the present-day people are worth nothing; please save me in your multitude of mercy and exemplary deeds.

The speaker in (1b) is addressing Jesus Christ who has the divine power to save and redeem Adam from the insecurity and/or fear he has at the time of the utterance. The reference made by the utterance *bəʔabinnət adinəŋn* ‘please save me with your exemplary deed’ is Jesus Christ, which makes the expression religious.

expressions of different syntactic categories and meanings, but with the same pronunciation. Some Amharic expressions can be used as nouns and (con)verbs at the same time and create lexical or structural ambiguity of the type presented in (2).

(2)	a.	<i>jə-k'ədmo</i>	<i>zəmən</i>	<i>sihtəti</i>		
		GEN-past	year	error		
		<i>bə-s'om</i>	<i>k'an</i>	<i>asa</i>	<i>məblati</i>	
		at-fasting	day	fish	to eat	
		<i>jə-ʔahun</i>	<i>zəmən</i>	<i>səw</i>	<i>al-j-awk'</i>	<i>məla</i>
		GEN-now	year	person	NEG-3SGM-know.IPFV	way of doing sth
		<i>bə-s'om</i>	<b><i>firo</i></b>	<i>nə-u</i>	<i>jəmmi-bəl-a</i>	
		at-fasting	pulse sauce	COP-3SGM	REL-eat.IPFV-3SGM	

‘The error of the past,  
It was eating fish on a fasting day.  
The person of nowadays does not know how to eat,  
He is eating ‘**Shiro**’ (pulse sauce without butter or meat) on fasting days.’

b.	<i>kə-izzija</i>	<i>tatʃif</i>	<i>jə-ʔall-ə-tʃif</i>	<i>kəto</i>	<i>min</i>
	from-there	below	REL-exist.IPFV-3SGM-	absolutely	what
	<i>kəto</i>	<i>min</i>	<sup>3SGF</sup> <i>k'əmmə-f</i>	<i>al-f-at</i>	<i>wəj</i>
	absolutely	what	eat sth.PFV-2SGF	say.IPFV-2SGF-3SGF	Q
	<i>h<sup>w</sup>ala</i>	<i>s'əs'ət-u</i>	<i>bə-ant-i [bantʃi]</i>	<i>ji-hon-all</i>	
	later	regret-DEF on-you-2SGF		3SGM-become.IPFV-AUX	
	<i>təj</i>	<i>siɡa</i>	<b><i>bil-a-f</i></b>	<i>ji-hon-all</i>	
	please	meat	ask.CVB-3SGF-2SGF	3SGM-become.IPFV-AUX	

‘What happened to the woman who is below over there  
 Have you asked her if she had eaten something?  
 If not, the regret will be upon you later  
 Please, it may become that she having asked you for meat’

In Amharic, *firo* has two different syntactic classes: a noun and a converb. If *firo* is used as a noun, it refers to ‘pulse sauce served with injera/bread during Lent’; when used as a converb, *firo* means ‘breaking fasting’. This ambiguity is created since *firo* as a noun and *firo* as a converb have homographic forms. The ambiguity is syntactic when *firo* is used as a converb in *firo nəw jəmmibəla* ‘It is having broken fasting that he eats’. It is a subordinate clause that shows manner. When it is used as a noun, the ambiguity becomes lexical. Thus, the two senses require a restructuring of the expression as nominal and clausal.

The meaning of (2a) is based on *firo* (Noun), and it means ‘during the fasting periods, he eats the pulse sauce’. This sense changes when *firo* is used as a converb of a subordinate clause rendering the meaning ‘eating animal products by breaking fasting’. From religious experience, Ethiopian Orthodox Christians strictly abstain from eating any animal products during Lent. Therefore, *firo* (noun) ‘Pulse sauce/stew’ is used here as a cover term of the intended meaning by creating a structural relation, where the verb *firo* is used as the head of a subordinating clause of the manner of eating. Thus, the underlying meaning of the *k’ine* in (2a) is not about the pulse sauce *firo*, but about breaking fasting by eating animal products during Lent.

The expression that contains the layered meaning in (2b) is *bilaf* which belongs to two word-classes: converb/gerundive and adjective/noun at the same time. Due to this, it has two semantically incompatible meanings in different contexts. One of its meanings is ‘she having asked you’. As an adjective, *bilaf* refers to ‘something useless or futile’. As a verb, it serves as a converb of a subordinating clause as in *siga bilaf jihonall* ‘she might have requested you for meat’. *siga* ‘meat’ refers to ‘body’ which is perishable.

To figure out the intentional meaning of (2b), looking into the other lines of the verse is important. For example, the word *k’əmməf* ‘you tasted food’, in line two, has some semantic relation with *siga* ‘meat’, which makes the literal/surface meaning of the entire verse in (2b) ‘Have you asked the woman down there if she had eaten a small bit of food? She might have asked you for meat. If not, the regret will be upon you’. The relationship between *mək’məs* ‘to taste a bit of food’ and *siga* ‘meat’ shows that the surface meaning of *təj siga bilaf jihonall* is about food. However, the underlying meaning is that we have to help each other while we are alive on earth since our life is temporary and futile; our body is perishable, or death is inevitable.

## Metaphoric *k’ine*, Amharic *k’ine* contrived metaphotically

*k’ine* can be contrived metaphorically as the following Amharic data show.

- (3) a. *jə-geta-atfiṭin*            *t’əbaj*  
           GEN.Lord-GEN.1PL      food

<i>jalə-?ine</i>	<i>jəmmi-j-awk'</i>	<i>all-ə</i>	<i>wəj?</i>
without-me	REL-3SGM-know.IPFV	exist.IPFV-3SGM	Q?
<i>mata</i>	<i>lə-gibir</i>	<i>malkam</i>	<i>səw</i>
night	for-invitation	patient	man
<i>k'an</i>	<i>s-i-k'k'ot't'-a</i>	<i>kifu</i>	<i>nəw</i>
day	when-3SGM-wrath.IPFV-	wicked	is

3SGM

'Is there anybody who knows the behavior of our Lord except me?

In the evening, he is a good person for the invitation, but when he gets angry in the daytime, he becomes wicked/cruel.

- b. *lelit*      *kə-tf'ik'a*      *laj*      *fərəs*      *bi-t'il-hi*  
 night      from-mud      on      horse      if-fall.IPFV.3SGM-2SGM  
*wəndimm-e*      *al-ti-nadəd*      *mann-imm*      *al-ajj-ə-hi*

brother-GEN.1SG NEG-2SGM-get angry.IPFV anyone-FOC NEG-see.PFV-3SGM-2SGM

*jilk'un*      *tət'ənk'ək'*      *k'an*      *ində-al-j-t'il-h*

instead      be careful.2SGM      day      COMP-NEG-3SGM-f.IPFV-2SGM

'If a horse has downed you on mud during the night, my brother, please don't get angry since nobody saw you. Instead, be careful so you don't fall during the day time'

The phrases *k'an sik'k'ot't'a* in (3a) and *k'an indajt'ilihi* in (3b) are metaphoric expressions that refer to time as having human behavior of anger that may lead one to fail.

The literal meaning of *k'an sik'k'ot't'a* in (3a) is that he is patient during the night, but when he is in rage or wrath, he becomes ruthless. Similarly, the metaphoric expression *k'an indajt'ilihi* in (3b) has the surface reading you should be very careful not to fall during the daytime; if so, people may laugh at you and get you embarrassed.

On the contrary, the underlying meaning of both *k'an sik'k'ot't'a* and *k'an indajt'ilihi* is that life becomes very hard when time is against you. These kinds of expressions are commonly used by Amharic speakers when referring to hard times in their lives. The metaphors *k'an sik'k'ot't'a* and *k'an indajt'ilihi* use FIGHT as a source domain concept and TIME as a target concept. The conceptual mapping from the source to the target can be understood as: TIME is your opponent and can cause you to suffer from misfortunes/bad luck. The fight is against bad times and the means is hard work. This means our life is always in confrontation with our opponent, hard times. Winning the fight against hard times will secure our livelihood in a relatively sustainable way while losing it would make it miserable.

## k'ine and its disambiguation techniques

In this sub-section of the paper, different methods used to unravel the meaning of Amharic k'ine are discussed.

### Reduplication and merger method

A merger is used to bring together two words into one word that has a new meaning different from the meanings of the constituent words; the two forms (F1 and F2) result in a new form (F3). Consider the following compound k'ine.

- (4) a. *k'ut t'aba s-al-nn-adərg təfamt-ən bəlt-əni*  
 saving when-NEG-1PL-do.IPFV struggle greedily.CVB-1PL eat.CVB-1PL  
*innənnə [wət' at t'-u] ijna indzəra at t'-a-ni*  
 they sauce/stew lack-3SGM we injera/bread lack-3SGM-1PL  
 'Without saving, we having eaten our food greedily,  
 While they are short of sauce/stew, we are short of injera'

- b. *wəj atf'd-ən al-t'al-n-əw wəj kəbt al-bəll-a-w*  
 or having.mow-IPL NEG-throw.IPFV-1PL-3SGM or cattle NEG-eat.IPFV-3SGM-3SGM  
*katto mətfe ji-hon [ja sar] malək'ija-w*  
 so when 3SGM-become.IPFV that grass means to an end-3SGM  
 We neither mowed and threw it, nor did the cattle eat it,  
 Then, when will that grass become finished?

We have the expressions wət't'at't'u 'they got short of sauce' and ja sar 'that grass' in (4a) and (4b) respectively, and the layered meanings reside in them. wət' at't'u 'they got short of sauce' is a clause where wət' 'stew' occurs as a complement of the verb at't'-u 'they lacked'. In a connected speech, the VP reads as wət'at't'u, and renders a surface meaning of 'lack of stew'. The same form reads as a reduplicated form of wət't'u 'they rose' leading to wət'-a-t't'u which renders the meaning 'they keep rising'.

The surface meaning of (4a) is that since they ate everything without saving, they ran out of any stew, and we are short of injera. The underlying meaning of (4a) comes from wət' and at't'u or from the reduplication of the verb wət't'u which leads to wət'-a-t't'u. This is a lexical process whereas the first is a syntactic one. Thus, the process of unraveling the intended meaning of (4a) is the following.

wət ‘sauce’ (F1) + at’t’u ‘they are short of’ (F2) > wət’at’t’u ‘they are promoted to the highest positions’ (F3). This is the result of the interaction between syntactic and lexical structures. The meaning of the resulting form is not compositional in the sense that it does not come from the two words. The underlying meaning of (4a) is, therefore, while they got promoted, we remained without indžəra, which is metaphoric of the abstract concept of ‘livelihood’.

The same method is used to unravel the underlying meaning of (4b), where, ja ‘that’ + sar ‘grass’ > ja-sar[jasar] ‘that grass’ is a noun phrase that refers to ‘a bunch of grass’. The meaning is compositional here as it comes from the meanings of the constituent elements. However, in connected speech, the phrase may be read as [jə-asar] a genitive phrase rendering the meaning of ‘agony’. Thus, the meaning of (4b) changes from the surface meaning when will that grass be finished to a desperately uttered complaint about hardship rendering a sense of ‘agony’ the end of which is not known by human beings.

## Splitting (Decomposition) method

The meaning of k’ine can also be figured out by splitting the word that contains the layered meaning into two different words and then analyzing it accordingly. The resulting expression may turn up being a phrase or a clause and its meaning is quite different from the meanings of the source as in (5):

(5) a.	<i>jə-ɖiŋŋa</i>	<i>mədhanit</i>	<i>ajnat-ot/ɬi</i>
	GEN-we	medicine	type-PL
	<i>bə-bizu</i>	<i>all-u</i>	<i>k’iməm-ot/ɬi</i>
	in-plenty	exist.IPFV-	spice-PL
	<i>nəgər gin</i>	3PL	<i>s-i-assib-əwi</i>
	but	I	when-1SG-think.IMP-
	<i>sirasir-u</i>	<i>məlkam</i>	3SGM
	root of plants-DEF	good	<i>nə-u</i>
			COP-3SGM

‘In our medicine types, there are plenty of spices  
But when I think of this, the roots of the plants are better’

b.	<i>məkarij-e</i>	<i>bəzz-a</i>	<i>bet</i>	<i>sir-a</i>	<i>jəmmi-l-əwi</i>
	advisor-GEN.1SG	become	plenty.	house	build.IMP-2SGM
					REL-say.IPFV-3SGM

*mɪn j-atakkɪt-əŋŋ-allahunl-i-afərs-əwi*

what 3SGM-tire.IMP.3SGM-1SG-AUX

nowCOMP-1SG-destroy.IPFV-3SGM

‘There are many people who advise me to build a house

But why should I get tired of it, for I know that I will destroy it recently’

*sirasiru* ‘the root types’ in (5a) and *lafərsəwi* ‘I will destroy’ in (5b) are expressions in which the ambiguity is created, but each looks like a single form. To disambiguate the meaning, we apply the same rule of identifying the two independent possible meanings by deconstruction. i.e.,  $F1 > F2 + F3$ , where the meaning of the source form (F1) is analyzed as (F2 and F3).

The literal meaning of *sirasiru* is ‘the types of roots’ which is a reduplication of *sir* ‘root’, and it renders a collective meaning of root types. The surface meaning of (5a) is that there are many spices used as traditional medicines, but the roots of some special plants are better than others. However, the underlying meaning of (5a) comes from *sir-a-sir-u* (root-linker-root-DEF) when the reduplicated form *sirasiru* is decomposed into the two forms: *sira* ‘work’ and *siru* ‘you work’. With this semantic change arising from the noun *sira* ‘work’ and the verb *siru* ‘work’, the intended meaning is that it is better to work and support oneself than be dependent on others.

The same method is used to make clear the implied meaning of *lafərsəwi* ‘I will destroy it’ in (5b). *lafərsəw* is decomposed into *lə-afər*[*lafer*] and *səw*>[*lə-afər-səw*] which is a prepositional phrase, from the verb *afərs-* ‘demolish’ to disambiguate the meaning. *lafərsəwi* ‘I will destroy’ ( $F1 > lafər$  ‘for dying’ + *səw* ‘man’, whose compositional meaning will be *lə-afər səw* ‘for the dying man’. The ‘wax’ of (5b) is about house construction and its liability for destruction within a very short period, so it is worthless to put too much effort into it. However, to get the underlying meaning of the expression, *lafərsəw* is decomposed into *lə-afər* ‘for the dying’ and *səw* ‘man’ which results in *lə-afər səw* ‘for the dying man’. The intentional meaning is all about the treatment of life and death, but not about building a house.

## **Sandhi (word boundary) phenomena) to unravel the meaning of Amharic k’ine**

Sandhi is a cover term for a wide variety of phonological processes that occur at word boundaries. Crystal (2008: 422) defines Sandhi as, “A term used in syntax and morphology to refer to the phonological modification of grammatical forms which have been juxtaposed”. This means a word may modify its sound or form due to the influence of an adjacent or neighboring word. The most common types of deletion identified in the present study are apocope, synalepha and/or aphaeresis, consonant deletion and truncation (syllable deletion).

## a. Apocope

Apocope refers to the deletion of a vowel sound at a word-final position (Campbell, 1998). Apocope is being used here to solve the mystery of the Amharic k'ine as in (6).

(6)	<i>jə-ʔijjərusalem</i>	<i>seti</i>		
	GEN-Jerusalem	woman		
	<i>golgota</i>	<i>laj</i>	<i>sərt-a</i>	<i>beti</i>
	Golgotha	on	build.CVB-3SGF	house
	<i>igzer j-a-t'in-a-f</i>		<i>al-n-at</i>	<i>wəji</i>
	God 3SGM-CAUS-solace	IMP-3SGM-2SGF	say.PFV-1PL-3SGF	Q
	<i>wəld-a</i>	<i>al-mot-ə-bb-at-im</i>		<i>wəji</i>
	give birth.CVB-3SGF	NEG-die.PFV-3SGM-APPL-3SGF-COM		Q

‘The woman of Jerusalem having built a house on Golgotha

Did we say to her that may God solace/strengthen you, for she having given birth and her child died?’

In (6), the expression that contains the pun is *wəlda almotəbbatim*. Expressions like *jat'naḥ* ‘may God solace/strengthen you’ are used when someone loses a loved one and is in deep sorrow. Thus, the words *mot* ‘death’ and *məs'īnanat* ‘getting solaced/strengthened’ can occur in the same semantic field. The ambiguity occurs since the Ge'ez form *wəld* ‘son’ has the Amharic gerundive/converbial form *wəlda* ‘she has given birth’.

The stated meaning of (6) is that there is a woman whose house is in a place called Golgotha in Jerusalem; the son she gave birth to had passed away and it is customary to solace people when this kind of social phenomenon occurs. When visiting someone who has lost a loved one, Amharic speakers use a special expression at the time of parting with the expression *igziʔabher jat'inaḥ*/ʃ/tʃtʃihu ‘May God solace/strengthen you’. Thus, what the expressions in (6) conventionally attempt to convey is that the speaker is asking himself and others if they have wished the woman whose child has died, so God has given her the strength to withstand the grief she is experiencing.

To get the underlying meaning of (6), the person marking final-vowel -a of *wəlda* is deleted and becomes *wəld* in geez is ‘Jesus, the Son of the Virgin Mary’. This process makes the final line of (6) *wəld2 almotəbbatim wəj* ‘Didn’t her son (Jesus) die?’ in *wəlda almotəbbatim wəj* in Amharic *wəlda* is gerundive and gives the surface/literal reading the action of giving birth; when the -a in *wəlda* is deleted, *wəld almotəbbatim wəj* becomes a noun phrase and the intended reading is *wəld* ‘Jesus, the Son’.

set ‘woman’ represents the Virgin Mary, *golgota* ‘Golgotha’ is the place where Jesus was crucified (Matthew 27:3; Mark 15:22; John 19: 17-18) and there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother (St. Mary) and sorrowed over the death of her only Son for which she needed solace. In the Holy Trinity (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit), the Son is *wəld* ‘Jesus Christ’.

2 Inter syntactic phenomena between Ge'ez and Amharic

Having the above relations in mind, the underlying meaning of (6) is that the Virgin Mary delivered a Son called Jesus, but the chief priests of the Jews crucified her only Son and she was crying with deep grief for which she needed a solace.

## b. Synalepha and/or Aphaeresis

Synalepha, in linguistics, is the process of vowel elision especially as it arises when one word ends in a vowel and the following word begins with another vowel; the first vowel sound of the second word is deleted under the influence of an adjacent word which ends with another vowel sound when the words are used in connected speech. Another Sandhi phenomenon that is similar to synalepha is aphaeresis which refers to the deletion of an initial sound in a word (Crystal, 2008). To unravel the intentional meaning of a given k'ine, some expressions used synalepha and aphaeresis as in (7)

- (7) *midir-n*            *t'älla*            *mət'mək'*            *man*            *as-təmar-əwi*  
 earth-ACC            local beer            to prepare            who            CAUS-learn.PFV-3SGM
- ijjə-t'ərr-a*            *a-t'ət't'-a-w*                            *jih-n*            *hullu səwi*
- PROG-call.IPFV-3SGM    CAUS-drink.PFV-3SGM-3SGM    this-ACC    all            man
- ‘Who taught the earth to prepare t'älla (local beer),  
 It was calling and then made all these people drink’

In the above couplet, t'älla ‘local beer’, mət'mək' ‘to prepare’, ijjət'erra ‘he is calling’ and at'ət't'aw ‘he made him drink’ are linguistic expressions used by Amharic speakers, usually rural dwellers when they are talking about social events like inviting people at home. The surface meaning of (7) is compositional, for its meaning is the total of the meanings of its constituents. Thus, the surface reading of (7) is that it is surprising that the earth prepared a drink (t'älla) as if it were a human being and invited all these people and made them drink the t'älla ‘local beer’.

The underlying meaning (‘the gold’) of (7), however, is not about preparing t'älla and inviting people for a drink. The intended meaning is gained by deleting the first sound of at'ət't'aw ‘he made him drink’ to yield t'ət't'aw ‘he drank it’, a change from being causative to agentive. The second line of (7) becomes ijjət'erra t'ət't'aw jihin hullu səw ‘he called and drank all these people’. This might be taken place because the vowel /a/ is found at the final position of ijjət'erra and the initial position of at'ət't'aw. When ijjət'erra at'ət't'aw is said in connected speech, the causative marker a- of at'ət't'aw is deleted due to the Sandhi phenomenon called synalepha. Therefore, the wərk' ‘gold’ of the above song couplet will be ‘death is taking everyone into the grave turn by turn; everyone, regardless of age, sex, economic status, etc, is mortal and buried inside the earth and soil is piled on him/her after death.

Consonants can also be deleted when they are found at word boundaries. This means aphaeresis is taking place in which the initial sound of a word can be deleted to disambiguate the meaning of a given k'ine. To illustrate this, consider the following example:

- (8) *al-i-taggaḥ-h-im* *gira kə=a-gəbb-a-h-ənn*  
 NEG-1SG-fight.IPFV-2SGM-COMP left if=CAUS-enter.IPFV-3SGM-2SGM-1SG  
*dəgmo-mm mafər all-ə kə-səw fit t'ilə-h-ənn*  
 also-FOC humiliation exist.IPFV- 3SGM from-man in front fall.PFV-2SGM-1SG  
 'I cannot fight with you if you make me enter to the left,  
 There is also humiliation when you fall me down in front of a man'

The stated meaning of (8) is that I will not fight with you if you get me confused and there is also humiliation if you let me fall down in front of people. The expression *dəgmomm mafər allə* has two semantically incompatible meanings and is hence ambiguous. If the two words are said in a relatively longer pause, *dəgmomm* 'also' and *mafər* 'humiliation' will give us the surface meaning. However, if they are used in connected speech, the focus marker -mm in *dəgmomm* seems to be used on behalf of the m- in *mafər* 'humiliation' and causes it to be deleted, and results in *afər* 'soil'; it is here that the intentional meaning of the k'ine becomes vivid. Thus, the second line of the couplet will be *dəgmomm afər allə kəsəw fit t'iləhənn* 'there is also soil if you cause me to fall down in front of people'. The intentional meaning of (8) is about the already known and expected death no matter how long we live on earth.

### a. Truncation

Not only vowel sounds are deleted but also syllables can be truncated between word boundaries. Truncation is "a term sometimes used in phonology to refer to a process of word shortening which is phonologically predictable" (Crystal, 2008: 497). This means truncation is used in this article to refer to making a polysyllabic word shorter or briefer by removing one of its syllables. The implied meanings of some Amharic k'ine are discovered by truncating a syllable of a given word as in (9) below.

- (9) a. *t'aft'-o-nn* *ində-al-bəl-a*  
 become tasty.CVB-3SGM-1SG COMP-NEG-eat.IPFV.1SG-3SGM  
*ji-mirər-əw bil-əhi*  
 3SGM-taste bitter.JUS-3SGM say.CVB-2SGM  
*minnəw be-siga (h)amot t'əmmir-əh sət't'-ə-h-ənn*  
 why with-meat bile mix.CVB-2SGM give.PFV.3SGM-2SGM-1SG  
 'I am unable to eat the food since you have made it bitter'  
 b. *g'ədin* Why did you give me the meat mixed with the bile?'  
*kə-dabit-u fətiṭ-əh t'ibəs-əw*  
 rib meat with-shoulder meat-DEF mix.CVB-2SGM roast.JUS-3SGM  
*iski-bəl-a (h)amot-u-n al-j-awk'-im-inna səw*  
 until-eat.IPFV-3SGM bile-DEF-ACC NEG-3SGM-know.IPFV-COMP-FOC man

‘Roast the rib meat and the tripe together  
The man does not know until he eats the bile’

The surface meanings of (9a) and (9b) are evident from the free translation of each of the above examples. However, to work out the intentional meanings of (9a) and (9b), the deletion of the first syllable of (h)amot ‘bile’ in (9a) and (h)amotun ‘the bile’ in (9b) will be taken place when it is said in connected-speech with the preceding word. In other words, (h)amot ‘bile’ will be reduced and become mot ‘death’ and (h)amotun ‘the bile’ will be motun ‘his death’. Amharic speakers usually use amot to say hamot, so the deleted syllable is (h)a-. Note here also the semantic changes each word has undergone.

To appreciate the main meaning (wərk’ ‘gold’) of (9a), the linguistic expressions should be restructured and become minnəw besiga mot tʃəmmirəh sət’t’əhəŋŋ ‘why did you give me more in the death of the flesh’. This entails that the one who died in the flesh and set all the descendants of Adam free is Jesus Christ. Besides, from the concept of the Holy Trinity, it is Jesus who was born from the Virgin Mary by inheriting her flesh and soul without losing his inherent divine power and behavior. While he was on earth, Jesus was teaching and preaching for about 33 years and eventually, he crucified himself for the well-being of mankind. This issue is discussed in many chapters of the New Testament, and a good example of it is Romans Chapter 1: 3-4, which can be read as: “Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared [to be] the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead...” According to this idea, the one who revealed himself as being made of the seed of David according to the flesh is Jesus Christ. Therefore, the underlying meaning of minnəw besiga mot tʃəmmirəh sət’t’əhəŋŋ is that the death of Jesus Christ according to the flesh (but eternal in his divine power and authority), set Adam free from all the plenitudes.

The underlying meaning of (9b) is not compositional; it is rather in the word (h)amotun ‘the bile’ when the first syllable (h)a- is deleted and reduced into motun ‘his death’. This would make the second line of the couplet in (9b) iskiḃəla motun ajawkiminna səw ‘man does not know until he dies’. This means human beings do not know the exact time in which their earthly life is concluded and their flesh is to be buried; nobody knows the actual time (day and date) that death ‘knocks his/her door’. Thus, the core meaning of (9b) is whatever activities we do on earth (good or bad), death is an inevitable debt that will take the lives of all human beings to the grave.

It is still possible to unravel the intended meaning of a given k’ine by taking part of the first word and merging it with the next (adjacent) word or syllable so that a completely new word with a new meaning will be formed or derived as in (10).

(10)	<i>al-t-wisəd-i-w[atiwisədʒiw]</i>	<i>s-i-l-u-at</i>	<i>j ə - ik'a</i>	<i>wəsəd-a</i>
	NEG-2-take.IMP-2SGF-3SGM	when-3SGM-say.	take.CVB-3SGF	property take.CVB-3SGF
	IPFV-3PL- GEN-man			
	<i>dəgmo t'il-a</i>	<i>mət't'-a-tʃtʃ</i>	<i>l-t-a-gəbb-a-n</i>	<i>ida</i>
	also forget.CVB-3SGF	come.PFV-3SGM-3SGF	PROS-2SGF-	enter. 3SGF- debt
	PROS-2SGF-CAUS-enter.IPFV-3SGF-1PL	CAUS	IPFV- 1PL	

‘She having taken someone’s property even though they ordered her not to take it,  
But she having forgotten to bring (lost) it to let us enter to debt’

In (10), the word that contains the layered meaning is *t'ila* ‘she having forgotten/lost’ when it is used with the next word *mət't'atʃtʃ* ‘she has come’. When *t'ila mət't'atʃtʃ* is used as it is, the surface meaning of the entire couplet is that they told her not to take someone’s property, but she took it disregarding their advice, and she finally came back without that material. As a result of this, the people who had forbidden her not to take that property will be debited.

To figure out the underlined meaning of (10), we should say (read) the expressions *t'ila* and the perfective verb *mət't'atʃtʃ* ‘she came’ repeatedly and rapidly. The third person singular feminine marker *-a* in *til-a* will be detached from *t'ila* and attached to the next word *mət't'atʃtʃ*, yielding a semantically causative form *amət't'atʃtʃ* ‘she has brought’ (i.e. *t'il-a mət't'atʃtʃ* > *t'il amət't'atʃtʃ* ‘she has brought quarrel’). Thus, the intended meaning of (10) is she has taken someone’s property without permission. Due to this, she has brought a quarrel that leads the speakers to debt.

## Conclusions and recommendations

This study was intended to analyze Amharic *k'ine* from linguistic semantics and pragmatics viewpoint. Double context and ambiguity were identified as the main characteristics of Amharic *k'ine*. Ambiguity is created when the language item has two or more structural and cognitive meanings. Some of the ambiguities were phonological, lexical, morphological and syntactic. Metaphors, homonyms, idioms, compound words, words with two possible meanings in different contexts, words with the same pronunciation, but have different meanings, consonant phonemes in words that can be geminated or degeminated, etc. were used to contrive *k'ine*. To unravel the intended meaning, understanding the context of utterance and the meaning of homonymous words, metaphorical linguistic expressions, idioms, proverbs, splitting words into distinct words, merging two words, deleting sounds/syllables, figuring out the possible meanings of words that carry the layered meanings in the *k'ine* and geminating or degeminating expressions were used.

God, or Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, life in this world and that world, hell and heaven are symbolically expressed and metaphorically conceptualized. The futility of earthly life is also articulated. The result also

revealed that the language of the Amharic k'ine is found to be an embodiment of power hierarchy, the relation between divine beings and man, and the perception and conception of the real and imagined worlds. The language use of k'ine is the result of a matured mind and thinking, and it contains both the secular and spiritual lives of human beings secretly and artistically. I believe that this study will be a starting point for further study on similar issues and literary and artistic works. Accordingly, an in-depth study on k'ine, especially on the major themes of the bəgəna song lyrics and other related issues should be conducted.

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### List of Abbreviations

1	First person
IPA	International Phonetics Alphabet
2	Second person
IPFV	Imperfective
3	Third person
LOC	Locative
ACC	Accusative
M	Masculine
AP	Adjectival Phrase
NEG	Negative
APPL	Applicative
NP	Noun Phrase
AUX	Auxiliary
PFV	Perfective
CAUS	Causative
PL	Plural
COMP	Complementizer
PROS	Prospective
COP	Copula
POSS	Possessive
CVB	Converb
PP	Prepositional Phrase
DEF	Definite
PRES	Present
DEM	Demonstrative
PRX	Proximal
EXIST	Existential
Q	Question
F	Feminine
REL	Relativizer
FOC	Focus
SG	Singular
GEN	Genitive
VP	Verb Phrase
IMP	Imperative