

# THE TIGRINYA zə-PREFIX: A MORPHOLOGICAL REFLEX OF SUCCESSIVE-CYCLIC MOVEMENT

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## SETTING THE SCENE

Tigrinya is a **head-final Ethio-Semitic language** spoken in Eritrea and northern Ethiopia. In this language, the order of constituents is **SOVAux**.

Habitual present tense is realized synthetically, as in (1):

- (1) ʔanɛ kulu gəziɛ məs dəm-ay jətsawɛt (ʔijɛ)  
1s all.ms time.ms with cat.ms-POSS.1s play.IMPF.1s COP.PRES.1s  
'I (do) always play with my cat.'

Present progressive is realized analytically, the verb occurring with the auxiliary ʔallo, as in (2):

- (2) ʔanɛ hədʒi məs dəm-ay jətsawɛt ʔallɛxu  
1s now with cat.ms-POSS.1s play.IMPF.1s AUX.PRES.1s  
'I am playing with my cat now.'

Tigrinya **RELATIVE CLAUSES** are predominantly prenominal and appear between the demonstrative and the noun, as in (3):

- (3) [ʔitom ʔanɛ zɛ-nbeb-om mɛtʃhafti] ʔazɛnagaʃi ʔijom  
DEM.mp 1s zə-read.IMPF.1s-3mp book.mp amusing COP.PRES.3mp  
'The books that I read are amusing.' (Lit.: 'The that-I-read-books amusing are.')

Notice the element **zə-** prefixed to the verb, which one might consider to be a relative complementizer or operator (Overfelt 2009). However, when an auxiliary occurs along with the verb in a relative clause to express progressive aspect, **zə-** is prefixed to both the verb and the auxiliary as in (4):

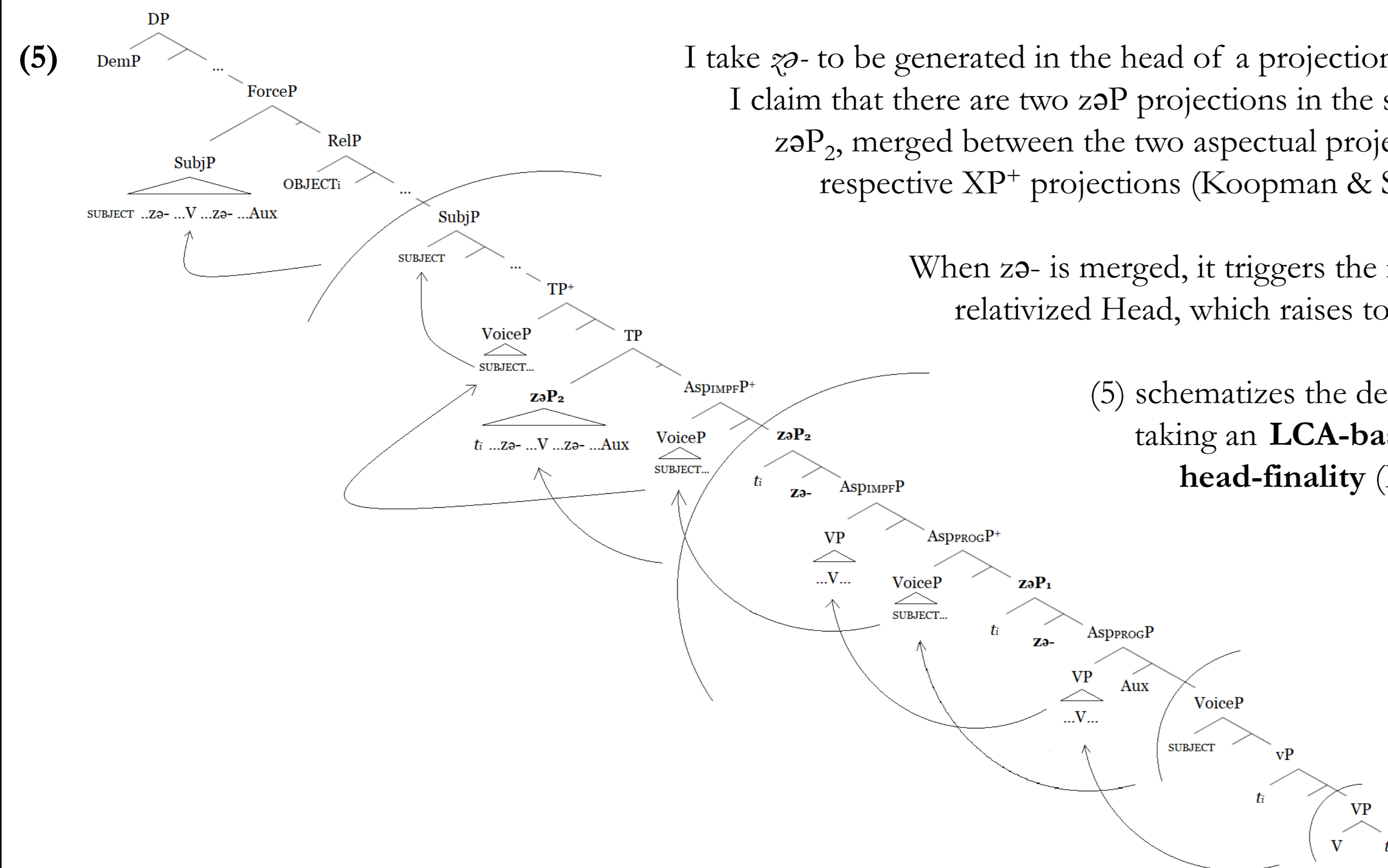
- (4) [ʔiti ʔanɛ zɛ-nbeb-o zɛ-llɛxu mɛtʃhaf] ʔazɛnagaʃi ʔiju  
DEM.ms 1s zə-read.IMPF.1s-3ms zə-AUX.PRES.1s book.ms amusing COP.PRES.3ms  
'The book that I am reading is amusing.' (Lit.: 'The that-I-am-reading book amusing is.')

THIS SUGGESTS THAT A DIFFERENT ANALYSIS OF THIS ELEMENT MUST BE SOUGHT FOR.

## THE PROPOSAL for the derivation of Relative Clauses in Tigrinya (WORK IN PROGRESS)

I propose that **zə-** is a morphological reflex of successive-cyclic movement of the relativized nominal Head (McCloskey 2002, Müller 2011, Van Urk 2015, Georgi 2017 among others) that raises from its argument position to an A-bar position in the left periphery.

I implement the derivation of relative clauses in Tigrinya in the following way:



I take zə- to be generated in the head of a projection that I call **zəP**; I claim that there are two zəP projections in the structure, zəP<sub>1</sub> and zəP<sub>2</sub>, merged between the two aspectual projections and their respective XP<sup>+</sup> projections (Koopman & Szabolsci 2000).

When zə- is merged, it triggers the movement of the relativized Head, which raises to Spec,zəP.

(5) schematizes the derivation of (4), taking an **LCA-based approach to head-finality** (Kayne 1994).

## Some Additional Data... (why not?!)

Notice that **zə-** is present in all types of relative clauses.

**SUBJECT RCs**  
[ʔiti ʃəkolata zə-bɛɪʃ zɛ-lo wɛdi] Tekle  
DEM.ms chocolate.fs zə-eat.IMPF.3ms zə-AUX.PRES.3ms boy.ms Tekle  
jəbhal  
call.IMPF.3ms  
'The boy who is eating chocolate is called Tekle.'

**INDIRECT OBJECT RCs**  
[ʔiti wɛdi nəza Tərəmuz zə-həb-o  
DEM.ms boy.ms OM-DEM.mf bottle.fs zə-give.IMPF.1s-OM.ms  
zɛ-llɛxu] haw-a nRuth iju  
zə-AUX.PRES.3ms brother.ms-POSS-3fs OM-Ruth.fs COP.PRES.3ms  
'The boy to whom I am giving this bottle is Ruth's brother.'

**FREE RCs**  
ʔəntay kəm-zɛ-gaTɛmɛ zə-fɛɪəT səb jɛlen  
what kəm-zə-happen.PERF.3ms zə-know.IMPF.3ms nobody  
'Nobody knows what happened.'

**AMOUNT/MAXIMALIZING RCs**  
[n-əta zə-wɛdɛqə-ya wɛini] kə-sɛti  
OM-DEM.fs zə-drop.PERF.2ms-OM.fs wine.fs kə-drink.IMPF.1s  
mə-dɛɪɛxu  
mə-want.PERF.1s  
'I would like to drink the wine that you dropped on the floor.'

**NON-RESTRICTIVE RCs**  
Tɛsfay [ʔab salsai dərbi zə-qmɛt] kab ʔətrə mɛtsiʔu  
Tɛsfay.ms PREP third.ms floor.ms zə-live.IMPF.3ms PREP Eritrea come.PERF.3ms  
'Tɛsfay, who lives on the third floor, comes from Eritrea.'

## PLOT TWIST!

Interestingly, **zə-** does not only occur in relative clauses, but also in **COMPARATIVES**, as in (6):

- (6) Tɛsfay kab-ti ʔanɛ zə-hasəbɛxu-wo yəʃabi  
Tɛsfay.ms PREP-DEM.ms 1s zə-think.PERF.1s-3ms 'be tall'.IMPF.3ms  
'Tɛsfay is taller than I thought.' (Lit.: 'Tɛsfay than what I thought is taller.')

in **RAISING CONSTRUCTIONS**, as in (7):

- (7) Kidane ʔiti mɛtʃhaf zɛ-nbeb-o zɛ-llo jəmɛsl  
Kidane.ms DEM.ms book.ms zə-read.PERF.1s-3ms zə-AUX.PRES.3ms seem.IMPF.3ms  
'Kidane seems to be reading the book.'

These examples support the analysis of zə- as a reflex of successive-cyclic movement in which the prefix attracts the moved constituent.

The phenomenon also implies that the *wh*-movement in comparatives (Chomsky 1977) and the A-movement of the NP in raising constructions take place in very local steps.

Notice that in control constructions in Tigrinya, the prefix **kə-** appears on the verb instead of zə-, as in (8):

- (8) Daniel Ruth kə-təhɛgəz-o jətsbə  
Daniel.ms Ruth.fs kə-help.IMPF.3fs-3ms expect.IMPF.3ms  
'Daniel expects Ruth to help him.'

This suggests that the distinction between raising and control constructions must be maintained, despite attempts to reconceptualize control and unify the two phenomena (Hornstein 1999, Manzini & Roussou 2000).

### THE PHENOMENON PRESENTED SUGGESTS

- 1) THAT *WH*, A AND A-BAR MOVEMENTS MUST BE MORE **LOCAL** THAN WHAT HAS BEEN PROPOSED IN STANDARD PHASE THEORY (CHOMSKY 2000)
- 2) THAT THE NOTION OF **CYCLICITY** AND THE NATURE OF **PHASES** MUST BE FURTHER DEVELOPED.