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DISCOURSE ANALYSIS, EDUCATION, SOCIOCULTURAL ISSUES,
LAW, REGIONAL DYNAMICS, AND TIGRINYA LITERATURE

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Gender and number morphology in Tigrinya

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Abstract

There is crosslinguistic evidence for concluding that in languages with a gender/number inflectional system, i.e. more generally a nominal class system, inflectional exponents make an interpretive contribution (Manzini and Savoia, 2005, 2007, 2011; Kihm, 2005; Dechaine et al. 2014; cf. Kramer, 2014 on Amharic) and hence can be equated to types of classifiers. Tigrinya nominal and adjectival morphology (cf. Tesfay Tewolde, 2002) provides us with such evidence that gender/number morphology has interpretive content. In keeping with recent literature on nominal inflection (nominal class/gender), we assume that gender morphemes correspond to elementary predicates (‘classifiers’) which are interpreted at the CI interface as restricting the denotation of nominal arguments. We treat the plural as a particular type of classifier, identified with a part-whole (hence divisibility) content notated (\subseteq) or with a content [aggregate] unifying mass singulars with plurals. Within this framework we investigate the syncretism whereby the same morphemes *-ti/-at* that introduce the plural can also have a gender/noun class interpretation. The strongest assumption is that *-ti/-at* lexicalize the same part-whole or aggregate interpretive content in all contexts where they occur. Indeed our proposal is that these inflectional elements do not coincide with feminine in the traditional sense of the term, but concern the representation of inherent qualities of referents, like countability, extension, etc.

We argue that in languages with a gender and number inflectional system, nominal class exponents provide an interpretive contribution (Manzini and Savoia, 2005, 2007, 2011; Kihm, 2005; Déchaine et al., 2014; Kramer, 2014 on Amharic; Fassi Fehri, 2015 on Arabic) and can be equated to types of classifiers. Tigrinya nominal and adjectival morphology (Tefsay Tewolde, 2002) displays a syncretism of feminine and plural inflections, which is hard to capture in terms of traditional descriptive categories of gender and number. This leads us to conclude that the internal structure of nouns must involve other categories, which govern the distribution of

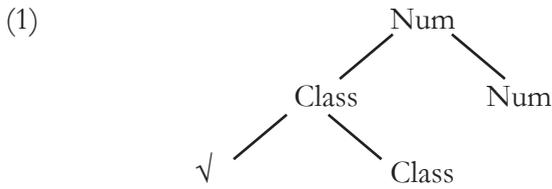
the inflectional morphemes and their combination with the root, specifically a category [aggregate] covering mass singulars and plurals.

1. A framework morphosyntactic theory of N (with reference to Indo-European)

This article is placed within the minimalist framework of Chomsky (1995, 2000, 2001, 2013). Morphologically, we adopt a morpheme-based approach and we assume that the same basic computational mechanisms underlie syntax and morphology, as in Distributed Morphology (DM, Halle and Marantz, 1993). We differ from DM in assuming that there is no separate *morphological structure* component capable of rearranging the syntax before *vocabulary insertion* takes place. In other words, the syntax projects from actual lexical items. Even if *late insertion* is adopted for independent reasons, operations not contemplated by minimalist syntax (such as impoverishment) cannot feed it. This stance is generally deemed to be too strong – but see Kayne (2010), Manzini and Savoia (2007, 2011) for arguments that it is quite sufficient to account for (considerable portions of) the morphosyntax of Romance languages.

The morphemic analysis of Indo-European nouns is fairly straightforward (Halle and Vaux, 1998 for Latin). The first component is a root; following once again DM (Marantz, 1997), we may think of the root $\sqrt{\quad}$ as category-less. Next to the root a vocalic morpheme encodes properties that depending on the language, may include gender and/or number and/or declension class. A third slot may be available, specialized for number (e.g. Spanish) or for number and case (e.g. Latin).

How does this morphemic sequence translate into morphosyntactic structures? The consensus in the literature (Picallo, 2008; Déchaine et al., 2014 on Bantu nominal classes; Fassi Fehri, 2015 on Arabic) is that at least two functional projections are needed – corresponding roughly to gender and number. In homage to the cross-linguistic comparison with Bantu languages (and possibly with Chinese classifiers, Crisma et al., 2011), the lower category is often labelled Class, the higher category is Num, as illustrated in (1) (alternatively, Carstens (2008) treats Bantu nominal classes as genders).



Following Higginbotham (1985), the category-less root is interpreted as a predicate. The predicate represented by the root in turn has one open argument place (the R-role, Williams, 1994), which is ultimately bound by a D/Q operator (Higginbotham, 1985). It is natural to assume that gender (and number) specifications, and in general classifiers, apply to the argument x open at the predicate. In other words, the category Class restricts the content of the argumental variable ultimately bound by D/Q. Similarly, Percus (2011) entertains the possibility of a conjunctive semantics for the (root, gender) pair.

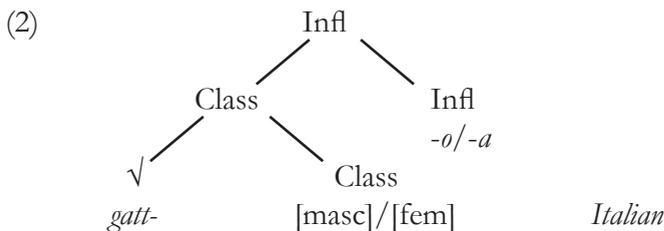
Conversely, we reject a variant on the schema in (1) which takes Class to identify with Marantz's (1997) nominalizing category n (Kihm, 2005; Ferrari Bridgers, 2008; Kramer, 2014, 2015) – though otherwise a constructionist view of the category NP as ClassP/NumP is implicit in (1). Note that though we adopted the traditional Class/Gender vs. Number categorization in (1), Borer (2005) assimilates number to a Div (count) property falling within the set of classifiers. Déchaine et al. (2014) incorporate this conclusion in their structure for N(P), by assuming that Class is a field of categories including at least two projections for sortal class elements (gender) and count/mas class elements (number).

Pursuing a minimalist line of analysis, Chomsky (2013) proposes a revision of Phrase Structure Grammar (PSG) assuming that the order of constituents depends on a third factor principle operating in the process of externalization at the sensorimotor (SM) interface (Chomsky, 2013; see discussion in Manzini and Savoia submitted). More precisely, the computational operation that forms syntactic objects, namely Merge, yields non-ordered couples (sets) of the type $\{x, y\}$. According to Chomsky (1995), the operation Merge projects either x or y ; the projected element is the head and the label of the syntactic object. In fact, inflectional morphology shows two main orders, in that we find both inflection exponents in initial position (as in Bantu Languages), or inflection in final position as in Indo-European languages, and in part in Semitic languages. A crucial

aspect, apparently independent of rightward or leftward linearization, is that inflection is in a position where it closes the argument of the predicative stem. It is known that typologically (Bybee, 1985) inflectional markers close the word; for example, evaluative morphemes tend to insert between the root and the inflectional elements in both Indo-European and Bantu languages. What is more, quantification-related inflections such as the plural tend to follow or precede, according to the prevalent order, the gender/noun class morphology.

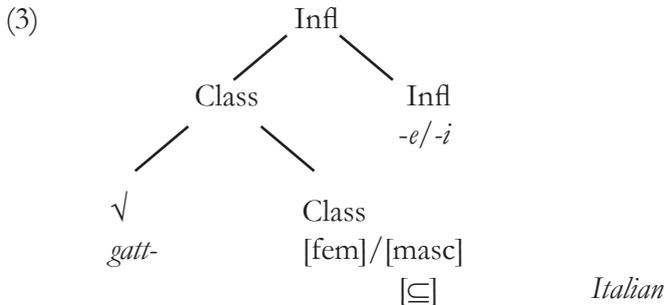
Extra complexity arises in Indo-European languages from the fact that there is no one-to-one mapping between the content of Class, which enters agreement with determiners and modifiers of N, and the inflections immediately following the root. The latter are instead sensitive to inflectional class. The standard DM treatment of inflectional class (Oltra-Massuet and Arregi, 2005; Kramer, 2015) has a Th(ematic vowel) node adjoined to Class/*n* post-syntactically. The content of Th are diacritics such as [I] for I inflectional class, etc. and the latter are in turn spelled out as *-a*, *-o*, etc. (e.g. in Latin, in Spanish, etc.). We have already mentioned that we reject the dedicated Morphological Structure component of DM on grounds of restrictiveness. The countercyclic adjunction of Th after the syntactic derivation (contra Chomsky's (1995) Extension Condition) provides a tidy illustration of the richness of the model.

As a first illustration of the structures that we propose, we exemplify Italian *gatt-o* 'he-cat' and *gatt-a* 'she-cat' in (2). In (2) the property 'cat' is compatible with both a feminine and a masculine Class, depending on the sex denoted. We tentatively assign the inflectional vowel of Italian to an Infl Position – which embeds both the root and the Class node.

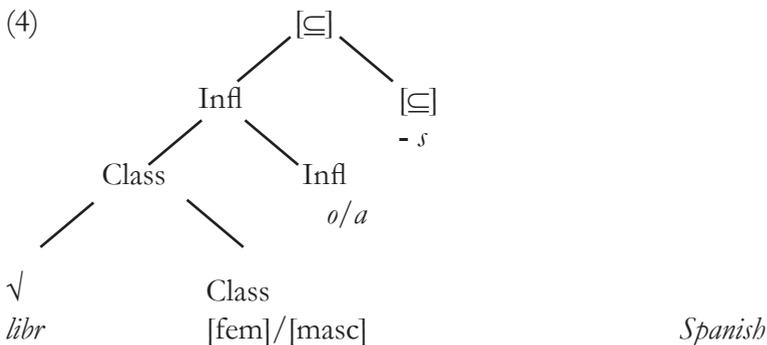


In fact, while languages like Spanish have an independent lexicalization for the plural, namely *-s*, in Italian pluralization is obtained by a change of the thematic

vowel. Following Manzini and Savoia (2011a, 2011b, 2012) we formalize the content of the plural node as \sqsubseteq , saying that the denotatum of the predicate can be partitioned into subsets. In these terms we may suppose that the plural of *gatto/gatta* in (2), namely *gatti* ‘cats’ *gatt-e* ‘she-cats’ has the structure in (3).

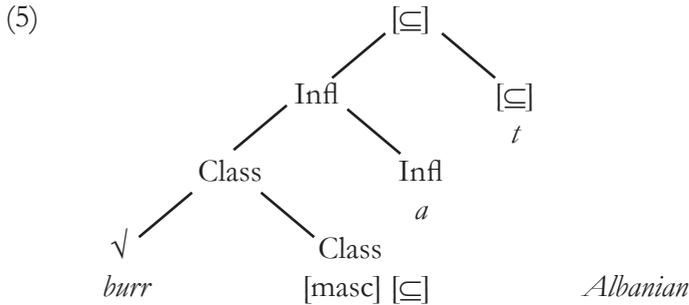


Given (3), if we keep identifying the vocalic inflection of Spanish with the Infl position, it is evident that the specialized $-s$ segment for plurality in Spanish must occur on top of Infl itself, as schematized for *libros/libras* ‘books/pounds’ in (4).



A clear set of predictions are born from (4) – namely that in the same language, number may be expressed either by Class/Infl or by the specialized \sqsubseteq node – hence that number may be realized both by Class/Infl and by \sqsubseteq . The prediction is not difficult to verify. For instance in Albanian (Manzini and Savoia, 2011b, 2012), in a class of nouns the indefinite direct case takes an $-a$ inflection in the plural, e.g. *burr/burr-a* ‘man/men’. This distribution is very similar to the Italian one, suggesting that $-a$ lexicalizes the \sqsubseteq content in the Infl position. Yet

this is only true of Ns interpreted as indefinites. In the definite interpretation, Albanian Ns have a richer inflection. Specifically, in the direct cases, whatever form the N takes in the indefinite is followed by a *-t* segment. Manzini and Savoia argue that this is a lexicalization of plural, yielding representations of the type in (5) for *burrat* ‘the men’.



The layered or ‘distributed’ structuring of gender is independently advocated in current literature. For Steriopolo and Wiltschko (2010), gender can be distributed over at least three nodes – namely the root, the *n* node and the D node (cf. also the Inner N_{Asp} and Outer N_{Asp} of Dèchaine et al., 2014). Fassi Fehri (2015), in his discussion of Arabic *-at*, stresses that besides forming the feminine of human roots, *-at* is involved in a many alternations that involve number (count/mass) rather than gender. Among other things, Fassi Fehri suggests that singulative *-at* in Class is embedded under Num. At the same time, *-at* can also be a plurative, turning a singular into a group-denoting plural. Fassi Fehri proposes that this results from a structure where gender (with group denotation) takes scope over Number.

Let us then assume that we have an adequate working model of the categories and structures involved in nominal inflection. This still leaves several questions open – dealt with in various forms in the literature quoted. One problem has to do with the correct pairing up of roots with their gender – and of (root, gender and/number) with their appropriate inflection. The issue arises because the gender with respect to which N agrees is not predictable from the root – even when sexed referents are involved. Thus Italian *la guida* ‘the guide’ is feminine even when referring to a male guide – and Italian *il contralto* is masculine even

when referring to a female singer (as it normally does). Furthermore, we already saw that genders (and numbers) cross-classify with inflectional classes/vowels.

In order to proceed in the discussion, it is worth noting that the various matches required can be obtained, if necessary, by stipulation – without recourse to anything but the standard syntactic mechanism of selection. Consider first gender declension class vowel associated with roots. For Kramer (2015) the diacritics [I], [II], [III] in, say, Spanish, are matched with large sets of roots; the diacritics themselves are then interpreted as vocalic endings, namely *-a* for [II], etc. Technically the rule that inserts the class diacritics under Th is sensitive to the context determined by certain sets of roots: insert *-e* in the context $\sqrt{p}adr$, $\sqrt{m}adr$, etc. But this means that we are again in the presence of a selectional restriction. Indeed this is the position taken by Kayne (2010: 73-74).

As for gender, Kramer (2015: 54) explicitly endorses the view that gender she terms ‘arbitrary’ is selected by the root. A similar approach is suggested by Acquaviva (2009: 5), namely that ‘morphological and semantic information can be dependent on the choice of a root without being encoded on the root itself’. To say ‘a noun has gender X’, for instance, means in this perspective ‘a root Vocabulary item is licensed in the context of [n] with gender X’. In other words, the standard syntactic notion of selectional restriction is powerful enough to encode the fact that a certain Class content is associated with a certain lexical base and not with others.

On the other hand, at least some Class contents are determined directly by the root (see Italian *donna* ‘woman’, feminine, or *marito* ‘husband’, masculine). What is more some (root, Class) combinations are interpreted compositionally, as indeed *gatto*, *gatta* ‘cat(m), cat(f)’ in the previous examples. There is also the matter of gender contributing singulative or plurative properties in Semitic – which in fact may have parallels in Indo-European (see Ferrari Bridgers, 2008; Crisma et al., 2011 for suggestions of gender denoting ‘size’). Theorists generally do not question the fact that Class/*n* may sometimes be interpreted and sometimes not, but simply seek to model this fact. For Kramer (2015), the difference is to be expressed via the [interpretable] feature. For Steriopolo and Wiltschko (2012), Fathi and Lowenstamm (2015), it is a matter of where gender is embedded in the structure. Yet given general ideas of simplicity, we are surprised to find

that a certain category is sometimes interpreted and sometime not in the same structure – which is quite different from the interpretable/uninterpretable alternations of standard minimalist theory.

Similarly, we do not expect to find that in some languages (including the familiar Indo-European ones) there are morphological exponents that do not introduce any syntactico-semantic content. The lack of such content is problematic in a framework like the present one where we try to enforce the idea that morphology is syntax – though it may be less problematic under the view of the morphological component advocated by DM. Even so, morphology not corresponding to any syntactico-semantic structuring implies an appeal to paradigmatic organization which potentially undermines the morpheme-based view of Hallean morphology, as is known in the literature (Blevins 2006).

The interpretation of Class and the relation of Class to root, to Infl and to Num are the main issues that we seek to clarify here, by reference to the case study provided by Tigrinya. In sections 2-3, the Tigrinya data, the descriptive presentation of the inflectional morphemes and the historical discussion lean heavily on Tesfay Tewolde (2002), though several examples originate from the discussions between the authors. In section 4, we provide a first analysis of the data within the framework laid out in this section.

2. Tigrinya inflectional forms

Tigrinya nouns usually lack any gender specification. However, Gender distinctions can be observed on possessive suffixes as in (6), determiners (7), gerundives (8), pronouns (9), some adpositions (10), and some quantifiers (11). The suffixes in the 3rd singulars and plurals are *-u* (ms), *-a* (fs), *-om* (mpl) and *-än* (fpl).

- | | | | | |
|-----|---|--|--|---|
| (6) | i. <i>sɨm-u</i>
name-his
'his name' | ii. <i>sɨm-a</i>
name-her
'her name' | iii. <i>sɨm-om</i>
name-their(m)
'their(m) name' | iv. <i>sɨm-än</i>
name-their(f)
'their(f) name' |
| (7) | i. <i>ɾit-u</i>
the-ms
'the(ms)' | ii. <i>ɾit-a</i>
the-fs
'the(fs)' | iii. <i>ɾit-om</i>
the-mpl
'the(mpl)' | iv. <i>ɾit-än</i>
the-fpl
'the(fpl)' |

- | | | | | |
|------|--|---|--|---|
| (8) | i. <i>wässin-u</i>
decided-3ms
'he decided' | ii. <i>wəssin-a</i>
decided-3fs
'she decided' | iii. <i>wässin-om</i>
decided-3mpl
'they(m) decided' | iv. <i>wəssin-än</i>
decided-3fpl
'they(f) decided' |
| (9) | i. <i>miss-u</i>
3 rd -ms
'he' | ii. <i>miss-a</i>
3 rd -fs
'she' | iii. <i>miss-(at)-om</i>
3 rd -pl-mpl
'they(m)' | iv. <i>miss-(at)-än</i>
3 rd -pl-fpl
'they(f)' |
| (10) | i. <i>biṣäykar-u</i>
without-3ms
'without him' | ii. <i>biṣəykar-a</i>
without-3fs
'without her' | iii. <i>biṣäykar-om</i>
without-3mpl
'without them(m)' | iv. <i>biṣäykar-än</i>
without-3fpl
'without them(f)' |
| (11) | i. <i>gäli-r-u</i>
some-3ms
'some of it(m)' | ii. <i>gäli-r-a</i>
some-3fs
'some of it(f)' | iii. <i>gäli-r-om</i>
some-3mpl
'some of them(m)' | iv. <i>gäli-r-än</i>
some-3fpl
'some of them(f)' |

The two different genders, traditionally labeled 'masculine' and 'feminine', can alternate as agreements for the same nouns, as in (12).

- | | | | | | |
|------|----|-----------------------|----------------------|--|-----------------------|
| (12) | a. | <i>ṗit-i</i>
the-m | <i>gæza</i>
house | <i>ḥamläwaj</i>
green-m | <i>ṗijj-u</i>
is-m |
| | b. | <i>ṗit-a</i>
the.f | <i>gæza</i>
house | <i>ḥamlæwæj-ti</i>
green-f (diminutive) | <i>ṗijj-a</i>
is-f |

In a subset of nouns, inflectional endings combine directly with the nominal stem, as in (13a-b); moreover, there are nouns specialized for animate female or male beings, as in (13c). Nouns referring to sexed animals may require a gender tied to their reference, as in (13d).

- | | | | | |
|------|-----------------|----------|-------------------|-----------|
| (13) | a. <i>ḥam-</i> | <i>u</i> | a'. <i>ḥam-</i> | <i>at</i> |
| | father-in-law-m | | mother-in-law-f | |
| | b. <i>ḥaw</i> | | b'. <i>ḥaw-ti</i> | |
| | brother-m | | sister-f | |
| | c. <i>g'al</i> | | c'. <i>wäddi</i> | |
| | girl | | boy | |

d. *ʔit-i / ʔit-a* *dimmu*
 the.m / the.f cat

On the other hand, feminine can also introduce a diminutive or evaluative (size or affect) meaning which overrides gender distinctions, bringing about something like ‘little/ lovely/ beloved’, as in (14).

(14) a. *ʔit-a wäddi* *nifif-ti ʔiy-y-a*
 the-f boy clever-f is-f
 ‘That lovely boy is clever’

b. *ʔit-a* *säbʔay färīb-a hadim-a*
 the-f man afraid-f fled-f
 ‘The man was afraid and fled’

Tigrinya has passive participles with the pattern *CiC(C)uC* followed by *-ti* for the feminine and by *-at* for the plural, as in (15).

(15)	i. <i>mīrux</i> prisoner (m)	ii. <i>mīrux-ti</i> prisoner-f	iii. <i>mīrux-at</i> prisoner-pl
	i. <i>sibur</i> broken(m)	ii. <i>sibir-ti</i> broken-f	iii. <i>sibur-at</i> broken-pl

We also find active participles with the pattern *Cä/aC(C)aC-* followed by *-i/-ay* for the masculine, *-it* for the feminine and *-ti* for the plural, as in (16). We assume that ‘o’ is derived from ‘an’.

(16)	i. <i>säbar-i/-ay</i> breaker (m)	ii. <i>säbar-it</i> breaker-f	iii. <i>säbär-ti</i> breaker-pl	iii'. <i>säbar-o (t)</i> breaker-pl
	i. <i>fät'ar-i/-ay</i> creator (m)	ii. <i>fät'ar-it</i> creator-f	iii. <i>fät'är-ti</i> creator-pl	iii'. <i>fät'ar-o (t)</i> creator-pl

Tigrinya has adjectives related to ancient Semitic passive participles. These adjectives, exemplified in (17), have the patterns *CäCCiC* for the masculine and *CäCCaC* for the feminine followed by *-ti* for the plural.

(17)	i. <i>qäyyih</i> red (m)	ii. <i>qäyyah</i> red (f)	iii. <i>qäyyah-ti</i> red –pl
	i. <i>bällih</i> sharp (m)	ii. <i>bällah</i> sharp (f)	iii. <i>bällah-ti</i> sharp– pl
	i. <i>gäzzif</i> big (m)	ii. <i>gäzzaf</i> big (f)	iii. <i>gäzzäf-ti</i> big–pl

Some nouns take *-ay* (and its allomorphs *-way*, *-äway*, *-ttay*, *-ättay*) and its feminine counterpart *-äyti* (and its allomorphs *-väyti*, *-änäyti*, *-ttäyti*, *-ättäyti*). In (18)-(19), feminine gender is marked by *-ti*. Furthermore, *-o/-ot* (< *aw(t)*) and *-ti* (*a* in the stem extended by *t* can be *a>ä*) indicate number.

(18)	i. <i>hamli-äway</i> greenish (m)	ii. <i>haml-äväy-ti</i> greenish (f)	iii. <i>haml-äv-ot</i> greenish (pl)
(19)	i. <i>bilän-ay</i> of Bilen (m)	ii. <i>bilän-äyti</i> of Bilen (f)	
	i'. <i>bilän-ättay</i> of Bilen (m)	ii'. <i>bilen-ättäyti</i> of Bilen (f)	iii. <i>bilänättot</i> of Bilen (pl)

The number ‘one’ has forms to indicate masculine and feminine genders, whereas the numbers two and more than two do not show gender distinctions. The form with the feminine marker *-ti* marks the feminine, as in (20b). Ordinal numbers indicate gender and number distinctions, as in (21).

(20)	a. <i>hadä</i> one (m)	b. <i>han-ti</i> (< <i>hadä-ti</i>) one-f
	a'. <i>keittä zanisti</i> two women	b'. <i>keittä säbɨnt</i> two men

(21)	a. <i>kaḷiʔ-ay</i> other m	b. <i>kaḷiʔ-äy-ti</i> other-f	c. <i>kaḷiʔ-ot</i> other- pl
	a'. <i>saḥs-ay</i> third (m)	b'. <i>saḥs-äyti</i> third (f)	c'. <i>saḥs-ot</i> third- (pl)

3. Plural in Tigrinya

Greenberg 1955 identifies /a/ as a marker of nominal and verbal plurality in Afroasiatic languages, inserted in a consonant-vowel pattern. Semitic languages have so-called broken plural forms like *qit't* 'cat' vs *qit'at* 'cats'. According to Hasselbach-Andee (2007: 124-125), *-ā-t* (primarily associated with feminine) is the most common external plural. In Giʕiz, *-an* is used for masculine plural (adjectives and (animate) nouns), while *-at* can be used for feminine plural or feminine plural and masculine plural. The plural morpheme *w* and its compounds appear in numerous Semitic languages. Thus, *w* can appear either as part of plural markers or be part of broken plural patterns. For instance, Giʕiz has the plural forms (which Hasselbach calls external plurals) *ʔab* 'father' vs *ʔabaw* 'fathers'. In languages like Syriac, the insertion of *w* is primarily attested in connection with the feminine plural as in *lebbā* 'heart' vs *lebbawātā* 'hearts'. In Arabic *w* can be inserted before feminine plural as in *sanat-un* 'year' vs *sanawat-un* 'years'. The broken plurals that we observe in different Ethio-Eritrean Semitic languages (Tigre, Giʕiz, and Tigrinya) do not show any innovative features with respect to Arabic.

In Tigrinya, external plural morphology takes two main forms. In common plurals in (22), the plural is marked by *-at* (*a* extended by *t*), in (22a, 22b'), or by *-t-at* (*-at* preceded by *t*), in (22c'). *-a-t* marks plural in adjectives in (22'b) and occurs in plural bases such as *ʔawädd-a-t* "boys" in (22'c). In the lexically restricted plurals, as in (22'a''), the singular stem with *a* followed by *t* or *aw>o* indicates plural.

Finally, (22'b-c) exemplifies the occurrence of *-ti* as plural morphology in nouns, (22'a''), adjectives (22'b,c) and in plural nominal bases as *ḥs-ti* "women".

(22)	a. <i>ʔit-om</i> those-mpl	<i>säb-a-t</i> person-pl	<i>ṣibbux'-a-t</i> beatiful-pl	<i>ʔijj-om</i> are-mpl
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	b. <i>säb</i> man-sg	b'. <i>säb-at</i> men-pl	
	c. <i>ʔinsäsa</i> animal-sg	c'. <i>ʔinsäsa-t-a-t</i> animal-pl	
(22')	a. <i>ʔalam-i/-ay</i> weaver.m(sg)	a'. <i>ʔalam-it</i> weaver.f (sg)	a''. <i>ʔalam-o/-ot/-ti</i> weaver-pl
	b. <i>ʔit-än</i> those-fpl	<i>ʔanis-ti</i> woman-pl	<i>ʃibbux'-a-t/ nanwab-ti</i> beautiful-pl/tall-pl
			<i>ʔijj-än</i> are-fpl
	c. <i>ʔit-om</i> those-mpl	<i>ħatsar-ti</i> short-pl	<i>ʔawädd-a-t</i> boys-pl

Broken plurals, as in (22'), generally reproduce a *CVCVCV(C)* template, in turn possibly combining with the plural suffix *-at* or *-ti*. Broken plurals show a lot of alternants (Tefsay Tewelde, 2002) that implement the phonological template with different solutions; from the morphological point of view a clear systematic relation between the singular and the plural is not possible. Even in instances in which the vowels and the consonants of the singular form are partially retained, the sequence changes to realize the CV template in an often unpredictable way. Therefore, we are induced to conclude that both forms are listed in the lexicon. In the nominal internal plurals we observe the vowel *-a-* inserted within the stem

(22'')	a. <i>ħaw</i> brother.sg	a'. <i>ʔaħin-a-t</i> brothers-pl
	b. <i>mälħax</i> angel.sg	b'. <i>mälax-i-x-ti</i> angels-pl
	c. <i>bäx'li</i> mule.sg	c'. <i>ʔabk'ül-ti</i> mules-pl.
	d. <i>kämbi</i> rock.sg	d'. <i>ʔaxaniħ</i> rocks-pl

e. <i>mänbär</i>	e'. <i>mänabär</i>
chair	chairs

The Tigrinya internal plurals with the pattern *CVCaCVC* (or others derived from it), can idiosyncratically be suffixed with *-a-t* or *-ti*. These forms can (etymologically) be regarded as double plurals. (23ii-iv), (24ii-iv) and (25ii-iii) are the plural forms of (23i), (24i) and (25i) respectively. (23ii) and (24ii) are the basic internal plural form, while in (25iii) *-ti* is added to the basic internal plural. In (23iii)-(25iii), the plural vowel *a* is deleted. In (23iv) and in (24iv), *-a-t* and *-ti* are added to the forms in (23iii) and in (24iii) respectively. These items may be regarded as doubly plural marked.

(23)	i. <i>kälbi</i> dog	ii. <i>ṛaxalīb</i> dogs	iii. <i>ṛaxlab</i> (< <i>ṛaxalab</i>) dogs	iv. <i>ṛaxlab-at</i> dogs
(24)	i. <i>bäx'li</i> mule	ii. <i>ṛabax'īl</i> mules	iii. <i>ṛabqal</i> (< <i>ṛabaqal</i>) mules	iv. <i>ṛabqālti</i> mules
(25)	i. <i>täxli</i> plant	ii. <i>ṛataxīl-ti</i> plants'	iii. <i>ṛatkīl-ti</i> (< <i>ṛataxīl-ti</i>) plants'	

The examples in (22)-(22'') reveal that the suffixes *-ti*, *-it* and the vowel *-a-* within the stems indicate feminine gender, while *a* extended by *t* as in *-at* or *a...ti* > *ä...ti* (where *a* within the stem suffixed by *-ti* > *ä...ti*) or *a* followed by *aw* (where *aw* > *o*) marks plural. In the nominal internal plurals we observe the vowel *-a-* inserted within the stem, while *t* (as in *-at*) can be added idiosyncratically as a double plural. In the lexically restricted plurals the singular stem with *a* followed by *t* or *aw* indicate plural. In more common plurals, the plural is marked by *a* extended *t*.

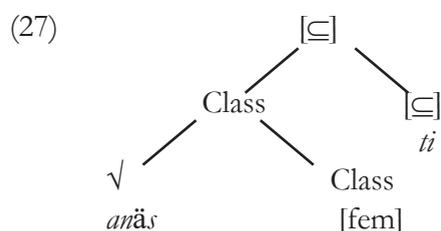
A point we are particularly interested in is the fact that suffixes *=a-t* and *-ti*, that we have seen operating in the plural formations, occur also as feminine inflections in some subsets of nouns/adjectives, as in (13) and (26).

(26)	a. <i>ṛit-a</i> the-f	<i>säbāj-ti</i> woman-f	<i>ṣibbiṣ'-ti</i> beatiful-f	<i>ṛijj-a</i> is-fsg
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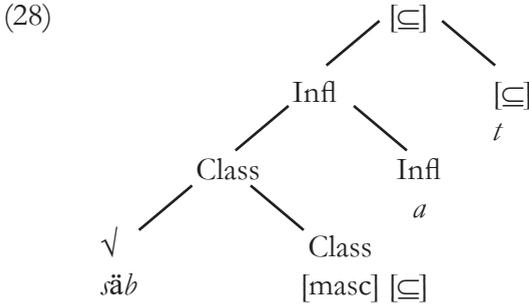
b. <i>ʔit-i</i>	<i>säbʔai</i>	<i>šibbu-x'</i>	<i>ʔijj-u</i>
the-m	man-m	beautiful-m	is-msg
c. <i>šibur</i>	c'. <i>šibir-ti</i>	c''. <i>šibur-at</i>	
broken-m	broken-f	broken-pl	

4. Analysis: Number

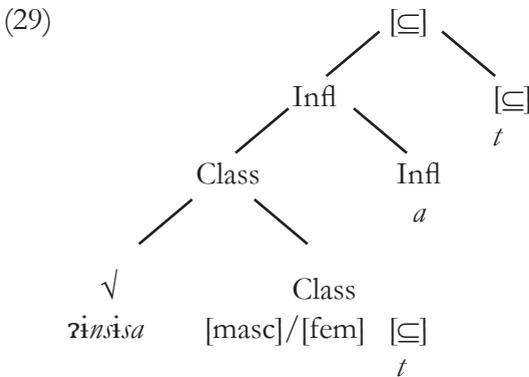
In keeping with the analysis of the internal structure of the noun that we applied to Romance in section 1, we begin by associating the morphemes introducing the plural interpretation, specifically *-ti* and *-a-t* to the $[\sqsubseteq]$ content, along the lines proposed by Manzini and Savoia (2011, 2012), Franco and *et al.* (2015). More precisely, we analyse the combination of a lexical base in \surd and an inflectional ending as in structure (27), for *anäs-ti* ‘women’, where the lexical base expresses predicative content and the inflectional exponent lexicalizes the $[\sqsubseteq]$ node. As for the Class node, we assume that it corresponds to a [fem] restriction on the content of the argumental variable of the stem. The $[\sqsubseteq]$ element introduces a content, restricting the lexical base in turn, prior to saturation by an operator (the D, Higginbotham 1985). We treat the plural as a particular type of classifier, which is identified with a part-whole content notated (\sqsubseteq) .



As highlighted in the discussion surrounding (5), we can expect that plural – possibly on a par with other inflectional contents – can be realized both as Class specification and as $[\sqsubseteq]$, as in (28). Thus, the ending *-a-t* can be decomposed in the inflectional element *-a-*, that we see independently lexicalized as part of plural inflections, and a *-t* element specialized for the $[\sqsubseteq]$ reading, connectable to the first part of *-ti* in (27) and independently attested in *säbʔu-t* ‘men’.

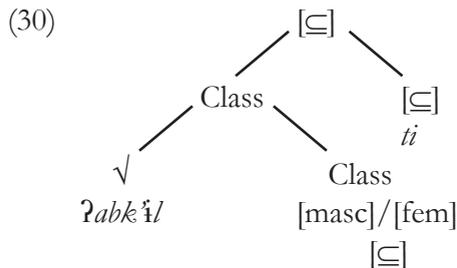


In fact, Tigrinya provides us also with more complex forms such as ʔinsisa-t-a-t ‘animals’, where we find the *t* exponent repeated in an in-between position and in final position. So, we must allow the inflectional/Class element to be recursively introduced, as in (29). Recursion emerges in other inflectional systems, as, for instance, in Bantu languages, where classifiers can co-occur with one another, in Romance evaluative suffixes arrangements, etc. The interesting point is that Merge of inflectional/Class material can take place recursively as long as it meets the requirements for compositional interpretation, based on the relative scope of the restrictions introduced on the lexical root. Therefore, what we generally observe is that specialized quantification-related exponents, i.e. \subseteq , take in their scope the rest of the structure, i.e. are the external elements that close the complex word¹.



¹ This holds also if a movement derivation is assumed, in which the N(P) cyclically moves to the higher positions associated respectively to *t*, *a*, *t*.

If we finally consider the broken plural forms, we see that many among them include an *-a-* component inside their phonological sequence. On the basis of the discussion in section 3, we can conclude that these bases are specialized for plural. Moreover, some alternants combine with a plural inflection, yielding structures such as (30). These forms can be understood as an interesting exemplification of the fact that the lexical basis introduces gender and number properties that can be doubled by inflectional exponents selecting them.



Interpretively, the plural of count nouns corresponds to an aggregate of atoms/individuals, whose subsets are sets of atoms in turn (Chierchia, 2010). In other words, when $[\subseteq]$ takes scope over the noun that it attaches to, e.g. ‘woman’ in (31), it contributes plurality to it by isolating a subset of the set (or set of sets) of all things that are ‘woman’.

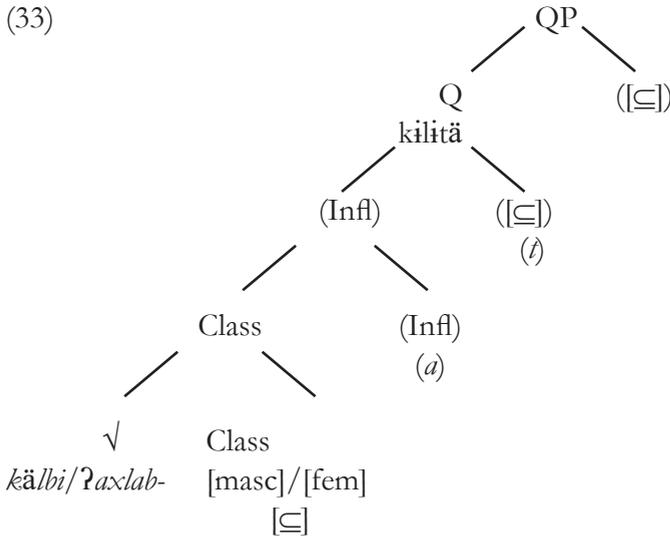
- (31) a. *anis-ti* ‘women’
 b. the x $[\text{x} \subseteq \{\text{woman}\}]$
 i.e. ‘the x such that x is a subset of the set of things with the property ‘woman’

Plural inflection may be optionally left out if a numeral precedes a noun, as in (32a), though it is obligatory if a quantifier precedes the noun, as in (32b).

- (32) a. *kiḥttä* *kälbi/ kiḥttä* *ʔaxlab-at* *gojāj-u*
 two dog/ two dog-pl run-3pl
 b. *biḥbat* *ʔaxlab-at/ *kälbi*
 many dog-pl/ dog

The possibility of having the sequence numeral-uninflected noun suggests that the numeral element can subsume the number interpretation introduced by the stem. In other words, this information may be completely satisfied by the numeral, as indicated in (33).

(33)



5. Analysis: Gender

We have seen that in Tigrinya, gender is intrinsically defined with bases denoting sexed animals and humans, as in (13), or variably fixed in the other cases, as expressed on the functional elements and adjectives agreeing with the noun in (12). Moreover, we noticed that different gender specifications may introduce different evaluative meanings. This suggests, in our view, that the gender is not arbitrary but associated to predictable restrictions on the argumental variable of the stem. As indicated above, the data from Tigrinya reveal that masculine and singular are generally devoid of specialized morphology; feminine and plural are in the most cases expressed by means of morphological exponents.

In general, gender is not overtly marked on Tigrinya head nouns. However, nouns derived from adjectives and participles can show gender distinctions as seen in (15)-(16), here repeated in (34). The early function of *-ti* in *?anäs-ti* may be as a feminine gender marker or a plural marker. The exponents *-it* and *-ti* indicate

feminine gender, while the vowel *a* > ä (in the CV pattern of the stem) followed by *-ti* and *-a-t* are plural markers.

(34)	i. <i>wäladi</i> parent.m	ii. <i>wäladi-t</i> parent.f	iii. <i>wäled-di</i> (< <i>wäläd-ti</i>) parent.pl
	i. <i>ʔamani</i> believer.m	ii. <i>ʔamani-t</i> believer.f	iii. <i>ʔamän-ti</i> believer.pl
	i. <i>mīruḥ</i> prisoner.m	ii. <i>mīrūḥ-ti</i> prisoner.f	iii. <i>mīruḥ-a-t</i> prisoners
		ii. <i>säbäy-ti</i> woman.f	iii. <i>ʔanīs-ti</i> women.pl

It remains to be explained why the same morphemes that introduce the plural can also introduce a gender/noun class interpretation. So, *-ti* characterizes feminine alternants, in (34ii), and *-a-t* occurs as a feminine suffix in examples like *ḥam-a-t* ‘mother-in-law’. The strongest assumption is that the same [⊆] content that we have associated with plural is present in the combinations where the so-called feminine reading is selected. In other words *-ti/-a-t* preserve their interpretive content in all contexts where they occur.

The problem is how [⊆] may be compatible with singular feminine reference. In fact, if what it does is predicate the divisibility of a stem denotation (Borer), then we may expect to find it on singulars as well as on plurals. Specifically, we may expect the same [⊆] material to be associated with count nouns, independently of whether they are singular or plural, just to denote their divisibility; indeed Manzini and Savoia (2011) follow this line of analysis for Latin *-s* (both singular and plural) and for its Romance continuators (especially the masculine singular *-s* of predicative adjectives in Romansh, Manzini and Savoia 2011c). On the other hand, thinking of Chierchia’s (2010) treatment of mass singulars as pluralities of sort, i.e. as ‘aggregates’ of parts (rather than of atoms), one may predict the existence of language that treat them alike inflectionally. For Manzini and Savoia (2017) this possibility is in fact instantiated in the neuter of Albanian. In general, our proposal then is that inflectional elements do not coincide with masculine/

feminine in the traditional sense of the term, but concern the representation of inherent qualities of referents, like sex, countability, extension etc. This would be valid also for masculine inflection.

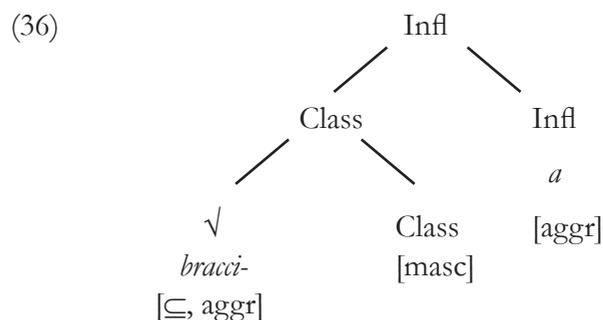
The syncretism between feminine singular and plural (non-gender specific) is not a prerogative of Semitic languages (Fassi Fehri, 2015, Kramer, 2015). In Latin and Classical Greek, the nominal inflection vowel *-a* is associated with neuter plural and with feminine singular. In Albanian, *-a* appears as the nominative singular of feminine nouns besides lexicalizing the plural (feminine/masculine). In Italian, *-a* appears to be feminine and singular by default, as in (35a); however, it also introduces the plural of a set of nouns characterized by a distinctive semantics, denoting ‘a plurality of weakly differentiated parts’ (Acquaviva, 2008), as illustrated in (35d). The singular of these nouns is masculine, as in (35b) and it sometimes displays a regular masculine plural with a pure count interpretation such as (35c). Note that Romance languages have only two target genders (in the sense of Corbett 1991), namely masculine and feminine – and the *-a* plural agrees in the feminine with determiners and adjectives in (35d).

- (35)
- | | | |
|---------|---------------------|-----------|
| a. l-a | cas-a | bianc-a |
| the-fsg | house-fsg | white-fsg |
| | ‘the white house’ | |
| b. il | bracci-o | lung-o |
| the | arm/ branch-msg | long-msg |
| | ‘the wall’ | |
| c. i | bracc-i | lungh-i |
| the.mpl | branch-mpl | long-mpl |
| | ‘the long branches’ | |
| d. l-e | bracci-a | lungh-e |
| the-fpl | arm-A | long-fpl |
| | ‘the long arms’ | |

The potential theoretical interest of taking up the classical topic of the feminine/plural syncretism is precisely that recent formal syntax and semantics

studies revise the traditional oppositions of singular and plural, and of gender and number – yielding potential insights into their syncretism. First, as sketched above, underlying the standard number opposition singular/plural, there is an interpretive tripartition between mass nouns, count singulars and count plurals. More to the point mass singulars overlap in many respects quite closely with count plurals (Chierchia, 2010); while in other respects the opposition is between count nouns, irrespective of number, and mass nouns (Borer, 2005).

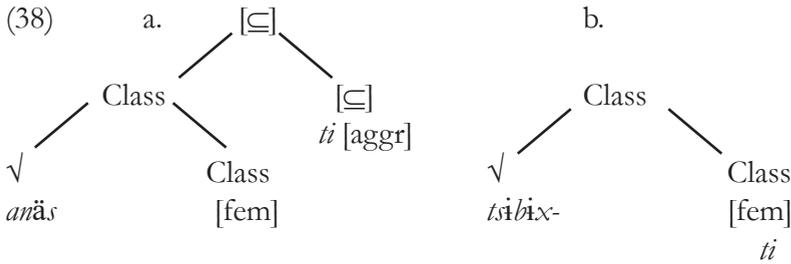
Acquaviva's (2008) semantic characterization of Italian *-a* plurals as consisting of 'weakly differentiated parts' is justified by body part Ns and other artifacts such as *mur-a* 'walls' denoting aggregates of not clearly distinguishable parts. Therefore, the *-a* inflection corresponds to a set whose members however are rather more like parts of a whole (mass nouns) than like individuated atoms. Manzini and Savoia (forthcoming) differentiate the *-a* plural from specialized plural morphemes (such as *-i*) by associating with the former with the property [\subseteq , aggr]. This would yield structures of the type in (36) for *braccia* 'arms'. We suggest that in (36), *-a* does in fact have an [aggr] content, matching that of the Class node.



In the structure in (36) we have embedded the assumption that the Infl element *-a* is associated with [aggr]. Its occurrence as an inflectional class marker in the singular would seem to advise against this. Nevertheless, if we are to continue assuming that there is a single Infl item *-a* occurring both in the singular and in the aggregate plural, this property must be associated with *-a*, as in (37), albeit optionally. We understand that [aggr] can be associated with *-a* in the singular, for instance with mass nouns (including nominalizations), or with collective nouns.

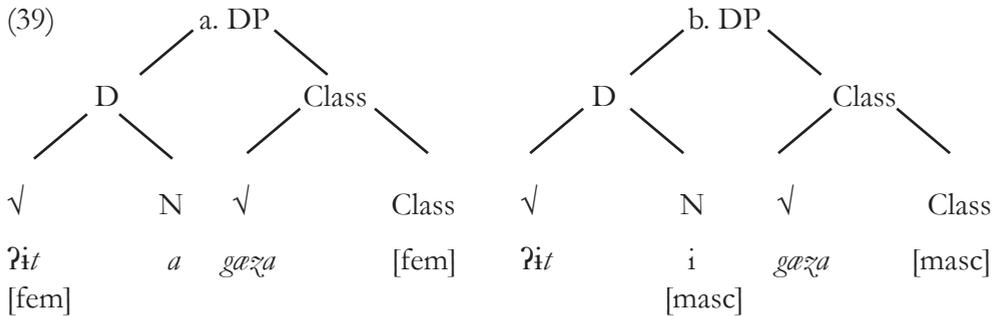
(37) *-a:* Infl, (aggregate)

We tentatively extend these conclusions to the Tigrinya syncretism between plural and feminine, for instance feminine *-ti* in (38b) and plural *-ti* in (38a). Pursuing the proposal in (36), we assume that these roots select the Class content [aggr], admitting the combination with the same *-ti* morpheme. In particular, (38a) replaces the first proposed structure in (27).



c. *-ti:* (aggregate)

Another problem is why different roots select one of the possible Class contents. Kramer (2014) in analyzing Amharic proposes that stems are associated to a nominalizer *n* head (see section 1) identifiable with [+/-FEM] content, fixing the class of the noun. Masculine and feminine determiners are marked for these features and yield agreement. It will be the inherent properties of the stem, like animacy, countability, concreteness etc., which will drive coupling with the inflection, that generally is a variable/optional mechanism, except for the system of sexed/human nouns, where the inflections align with the distinction based on sexual characters. Taking the discussion that precedes into account, we assume that roots which do not combine with overt inflections (and are not intrinsically sexed) are interpreted as admitting a Class specification [masc] or [fem], as in (39a,b), externalized only on the determiner or adjective.



6. Concluding remarks

In this contribution, we have examined some aspects of the Tigrinya nominal/adjectival inflectional system, concentrating on the syncretism between feminine and plural. The theoretical perspective we have applied is that nominal class/number inflectional exponents provide an interpretive contribution (Manzini and Savoia, 2005, 2007, 2011; Kihm, 2005; Dechaine et al., 2014; Kramer, 2014, 2015). In keeping with recent literature on nominal inflection (nominal class/gender) we have assumed that gender morphemes correspond to elementary predicates (‘classifiers’) which are interpreted at the CI interface. When a lexical base $\sqrt{\quad}$ combines with an inflectional ending, the predicative content expressed by the lexical base is restricted by the Class content associated to the inflectional morpheme, prior to saturation by an operator (the Determiner, cf. Higginbotham 1985). As for the plural, we treat it as a particular type of classifier, which along the line proposed by Manzini and Savoia (2011, 2012), Franco and *et al.* (2015), is identified with a part-whole content, notated (\subseteq). In essence, the plural of count nouns corresponds to an aggregate of atoms/individuals, whose subsets are sets of atoms in turn (Chierchia 2010). Therefore (\subseteq) contributes plurality to the noun that it attaches to, by isolating a subset of the set (or set of sets) of all things that are identified by the base.

In Tigrinya, plural inflection may be optionally omitted in the presence of a numeral preceding the noun, which in this context, coincides with a pure lexical base. This confirms that bases in themselves are devoid of any number/gender specification (i.e. they are not singular). The other question we have investigated is the syncretism whereby the same morphemes *-ti/-at* that introduce the plural can also introduce a gender/noun class interpretation. The strongest assumption

is that *-ti/-at* lexicalize the same part-whole interpretive content in all contexts where they occur. The problem is how plurality (\subseteq) may be compatible with singular reference. In fact, if all that (\subseteq) does is predicate the divisibility (in the sense of Borer) of a predicate (a set), then we expect to find this specification on mass singulars as well as on plurals. Our proposal is that inflectional elements do not coincide with masculine/feminine in the traditional sense of the term, but concern the representation of inherent qualities of referents, including countability, extension, etc. This also holds for masculine inflection.

Another problem we have faced is why different stems select one or the other of the possible Class interpretations. Our answer is that in Tigrinya, as well as in general in inflectional languages, inherent properties of the stem like animacy, countability, concreteness etc., will drive coupling with inflections (which in Tigrinya is a variable/optional mechanism), except for the system of sexed/human nouns, where the inflections align with the distinction based on sexual characters.

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