Some Insights into Tigrinya Definite Article and Demonstrative
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Tigrinya, one of the Ethiopian Semitic languages of the northern contingent, is supposedly with paradigms of the definite article and the demonstrative. Nonetheless, the forms of the definite article and the demonstrative in the language are functionally shrouded in ambiguity. This is due to formal similarity. Consequently, there are various competing views in the literature.

Bender et al (1976: 115-116) presents the definite article and the demonstrative in Tigrinya as identical—"'the house' and 'that house' are not necessarily distinguished". Ullendorff, categorizes the variants of the definite article and the demonstrative as "demonstrative pronouns" (1985: 22). According to Mason (1996: 17), the demonstrative adjectives can be repeated (cf. also Bender et al 1976: 116) with the noun coming in between. The work also indicates that the demonstrative adjective may not be repeated in less formal use. Tesfay (2002) points out that the stems of the demonstrative pronouns are /'ɨzi/ and /'ɨti/ which take the suffix pronouns /-u, -a, -om, -ən/; but does not explain why the masculine singular remains /'ɨzi/ (proximal) and /'ɨti/ (distal) (123). It also argues that in the definite articles the vowel /i/ is deleted as in /'ɨti + a > 'ɨta/ (127) without giving the rationale for why and how.

The purpose of the present paper is to sort out inconsistencies and to forward the following arguments among others.

1. The reason why the definite article and the demonstrative appear identical is a manifestation of merger in progress.

2. What appears to be a repetition of the demonstrative adjective is a definite article combined with a demonstrative and resulting in a demonstrative adjective.

3. The vowel, /i/, considered to be deleted in the definite article, actually indicates the third person masculine singular which possibly resulted from sound change.