

The particle *ʔinde* in Amharic

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Abstract

This paper describes the meanings and use of utterance particle *ʔinde* in Amharic, in relation to the relevance theory of communication (Wilson & Sperber 1995). Relevance theory attempts to capture the notion of relevance in communicative situations through contextual effects. As Dobson (1974: 4) has defined the word “particle” is frequently used to describe different kinds of morphemes, otherwise it is hard to level words in various languages. The particle *ʔinde* is used to express surprise and a feeling of discontent, to ask confirmation, to oppose or warn somebody doing something wrong. Paralinguistic features such as intonation of the particle also plays an important role in conveying the attitude of the speaker. The particle *ʔinde* is frequently used interrogatively, but also used in declarative construction.

1 Introduction

Amharic is the working language of the Federal Government of Ethiopia. Thus, Amharic is a widely spread lingua franca of the country. It has about 27 consonants and 7 vowels. The basic word order of the language is SOV (Bender, 1976:79). It is spoken by about 17,000, 000 people (2007 census report).

There are four different dialects of Amharic the Gojam, Wollo, Gondar and Shewa dialects. The names of the dialects are derived from the places where they are spoken.

2 Previous works in the Language

The Amharic language, compared with the other thoroughly unstudied languages of the country, has been studied particularly with respect to its phonology and grammatical structure. These studies include Baye (1994, 1999), Bender (1978), Girmay (1992), Leslau (1995), Alemayehu (1995), Getahun (1997). There are also some unpublished studies: Mullen (1986), Mulugeta (2001) Mphil thesis, Lulseged (1981) M.A thesis, Aster (1981) undergraduate study for the senior paper of B.A in Linguistics, etc, Of course, more work still needs to be done. For instance, there are a lot of utterance particles in the language that have not been well studied yet. Little work has been done on Amharic particles and related issues. For instance, Steve Nicolle (2000: 173) discussed markers of general interpretive use in Amharic and Swahili. Moreover, Olga kapeliuk (1978) has discussed particles of concatenation and of reference in on Amharic. In addition, Girma, Demeke and Ronny Meyer (2008: 46) treated the enclitic *-mm* in Amharic. They considered the morpheme *-mm* as a multifunctional morpheme. Furthermore, Baye (2000: 342-343) treats the particle *?inde* as a question word in his Amharic grammar book. However, the different particles found in the language need further study.

In this paper the meanings and use of the Amharic utterance particle *?inde* are treated from the relevance theory perspectives (Wilson & Sperber 1995). The research will employ qualitative methods to analyze the data. The data are collected from native speakers. As a native speaker the researcher's knowledge of the language is also additional input for the study. In the next section we will discuss the concept of relevance theory and then the Amharic utterance particle from the theoretical perspectives.

3 Relevance theory

Scholars agree that Relevance theory is one of the best influential models in the field of Pragmatics. It is proposed by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson. Relevance theory claims to provide a logical and cognitive account of relevance. It attempts to capture the notion of relevance in communicative situations through contextual effects. According to this theory, utterance production and interpretation is governed by a specific cognitive force, which makes us presuppose optimal relevance, that is, the derivation of adequate cognitive or contextual effects for minimal processing effort. The greater the

contextual effect, the greater relevance. According to Sperber & Wilson (1995), relevance depends on contextual effect and processing effort. This shows a clear connection between relevance and understanding. Communication is successful not when hearers recognize the linguistic meanings of utterance, but when they infer the speakers “meaning’ from it. In other words, the pragmatic interpretation process begins once the grammatical decoding process ends (Wilson & Sperber 1995).

In order to express the speaker’s attitude to the propositional content of his or her utterance different particles play vital roles in many languages. The word “particle” is frequently used to describe various kinds of morphemes in various languages (Dobson (1974: 4). That are difficult to label because they seem not to fit into what are traditionally understood to be the major categories—noun, verb, adjective, and so on. Here we describe the meanings and use of utterance particle *?inde* in Amharic, in relation to the relevance theory of communication.

4 The particle *?inde*

The lexical meaning of the particle *?inde* is a bit difficult to determine. Its interpretation depends on the views of the speaker attitude. Thus, the particle *?inde* often has more than one meaning or interpretation. The particle *?inde* is different from but presumably cognate with the content Amharic word *?indet* which has the meaning “how”. The content question word *?indet* is used only for question formation in content questions. On the other hand, the particle *?inde* functions as a marker of interpretive use and indicates the speaker’s attitude to a propositional content. It is not always used as an interrogative marker, but it has also other functions. Through different intonation patterns, it is possible to constrain its communicative contributions further. The particle *?inde* is a pervasive element in Amharic speech.

It is reasonable to assume that the particle *?inde* might derive from the Amharic question word *?indet*. This might have happened over time by a grammaticalization process involving the loss of final *-t*. It might can be an independent lexeme, however. This needs further study. For instance, the following examples show somewhat similar meaning with different interpretations.

- 1a. *ʔindet mət't'ah*
 how come-2MS
 “How did you come?”
- 1b. *mət't'ah ʔinde*
 come-2MS PAR
 “Did you come (expressing how and surprise)?”

Baye (2000: 342-343) treats *ʔinde* as a question word. He demonstrates the use of *ʔinde* using the following examples:

- 2a. *kasa mət't'a ʔinde*
 Kasa come-3MS PAR
 “Did Kasa come-3MS (*ʔinde*)?”
- 2b. *aster misawan bəllačč ʔinde*
 Aster lunch-3FS ate PAR
 “Did Aster eat her lunch (*ʔinde*)?”
- 2c. *dəmoz wəsədk ʔinde*
 salary take-2MS PAR
 “Did you take your salary (*ʔinde*)?”

As can be seen from the above examples, the particle *ʔinde* is not simply a question word but it has a focusing function. It is possible to form a question by omitting the particle *ʔinde* and using high intonation at the end, for instance, *kasa mət't'a?* “Did Kasa come?”, *dəmoz wəsədk* “Did you take your salary?” etc., Thus, the occurrence of the particle *ʔinde* following verbs expresses some idea of emphasis or focusing by the speaker. The particle *ʔinde* is also found preceding simple declarative sentences as shown below.

- 3a. *ʔinde kəbədə mət't'a.*
 PAR Kebede come-3MS
 “Oh! Kebede came”
- 3b. *ʔinde y-antə ikko nəw*
 PAR for-2MS PAR COP
 “Oh! It is really yours”

We will discuss also the function of the particle *?inde* further in a variety of utterance types. Consider the following examples.

4a. *dəmoz wəssədk ?inde?*
salary take-2MS PAR
“Did you take salary?”

4b. *dəmoz wəssədk*
salary take-2MS
“Did you take salary?”

As can be seen in the above example (4a), a woman saw her husband carrying something he bought for their household before the day of the salary. The woman expresses her surprise to him by using the particle *?inde*.

According to Wilson & Sperber (1995), relevant information may be derived not only from utterances and other acts of communication but also from observation, memory and inference. The relevance of the particle *?inde* here is that the wife communicates that she did not expect her husband to collect his salary by this early time (besides, she knows that he has not any other income). However, he comes home with some shopping. This surprised her because she expected him to get his salary sometime later, or the next day.

What function does the particle *?inde* have then? How can relevance theory account for its function? The utterance in example (4a) conveys a message by the particle *?inde*. On the contrary, the utterance in (4b) above (without *?inde*) is a normal question with out any additional information and the speaker asks such a question only when he wants to know whether her husband has taken his salary or not.

Similarly, the speaker expresses his surprise to the listener and seems to ask himself as well by using the particle *?inde* as in (5a and 6a) below, while the utterances in (5b) and (6b) are a normal questions that the speaker asked only to know whether the action is done or not.

5a. *misa-hi-n bəlah ?inde?*
lunch-2MS-ACC eat PAR
“Did you eat your lunch?”

5b. *misa-hi-n* *bəlah?*
lunch-2MS -ACC eat
“Did you eat your lunch?”

6a. *libs gəzah ?inde?*
cloth buy-you PAR
“Did you buy clothes?”

6b. *libs gəzah?*
cloth buy
“Did you buy a cloth?”

Wilson (1992: 45) argued that relevance is defined in terms of contextual effect and processing effort. Contextual effects are achieved when newly presented information interacts with the context of existing assumption in one of the following three ways: by strengthening an existing assumption, by contradicting and eliminating the existing assumption, and by combining it with the existing assumption to yield a contextual implication. Thus, the notion of context is therefore central to relevance theory, since what is relevant is that which produce a tangible contextual effect.

We will discuss and illustrate this idea by taking into account the previous examples and some others.

As already discussed in the previous example (4a), supposed the woman has an assumption that her husband would come without shopping for anything, since it is not a pay day. Surprisingly, he collected his salary early and bought something for the household. As soon as his wife saw this she asked him saying *dəmoz wəssəd k ?inde?* “Did you take your salary?” Surprisingly, her assumption and what is going on is contrary to her assumption.

On the contrary, if the woman has an assumption that her husband would come shopping for something since it is the usual time for the salary to be paid for civil servants, she would be surprised if he comes home without shopping for anything. Thus, she has to ask him by saying *dəmoz alwəssəd kim ?inde?* “Did’nt you take your salary?”

Here also, her assumption conflicts with what has actually happened. The function of the particle *?inde* is thus to express the speaker’s surprise by asking herself as well.

The following examples indicate the function of the particle *ʔinde* to convey the propositional attitude of the speaker.

7a. *dəkkəmiḥ ʔinde?*
tire-PF-you PAR Q
“Are you tired?”

7b. *dəkkəmiḥ?*
tire-PF-you
“Are you tired?”

The propositional content of the speaker in (7b) is that he wanted to know whether the hearer is tired or not. But in (7a) the particle *ʔinde* has a role for the interpretation of the proposition expressed. What is the intended relevance of the utterance (7a)? For the hearer to identify the proposition and the propositional attitude expressed, he should combine this with the intended set of contextual assumptions to obtain the intended contextual effects. The intended sets of contextual effects include the intended contextual implications of utterance. As in the utterance (7a) explained, *dəkkəmiḥ ʔinde* “Are you tired?”, indicates that the speakers not only ask whether the hearer is tired but also implies “Do you want to take a break or rest for sometime?”. It is a kind of ironic expression. It could also be contrary to expectation.

The particle *ʔinde* is used in most cases with questions. Baye (2000:343) also discussed *ʔinde* as a question word. In most cases, it occurs in question sentences and it needs confirmation as in (8b). The following utterance shows the functions of *ʔinde* for expressing surprise:

8a. *dawit mət't'a*
Dawit come
“Dawit, he has come”

8b. *mət't'a ʔinde*
come-3MS PAR
“Oh! Did he come?”

8c. *dawit ʔikko nəw*
Dawit PAR COP
“He is Dawit”

- 8d. *dawit nəw ?inde*
Dawit COP PAR
“Oh! Is he Dawit?”

In the example (8b) the function of *?inde* is not to describe any state of action but to represent the attention of the speaker to know more about the proposition expressed by the first speaker (8a), because the speaker (8b), does not have any previous knowledge about the coming of Dawit. He has the assumption that Dawit would not come, so when he heard of the coming of Dawit from speaker (8a), he asked by using the particle *?inde*. What makes the use of the particle *?inde* different here is that the speaker’s utterance is not based on what is observed but it is based on the proposition in (8a). So, the particle *?inde* conveys the attitude of the speaker in the utterance. He came contrary to the speaker’s assumption; hence surprise is expected as before.

It is also possible to use the particle *?inde* at the beginning of the sentence as in example (9a).

- 9a. *?inde! dawit mət’t’a*
PAR Dawit come
“Oh! Dawit has come”

- 9b. *dawit mət’t’a ?inde?*
Dawit come PAR
“Oh! Has Dawit come?”

The speaker never expected the coming of Dawit but when he suddenly saw him he surprisingly says: *?inde! dawit mət’t’a* “Oh! Dawit has come”. The particle *?inde* expresses the surprise of the speaker in both declarative and interrogative sentences as in examples (9a) and (9b), respectively. However, the hierarchy of surprise is restricted based on its position. When the particle *?inde* occurs at the initial position, the coming of the person is not expected but if it occurs at the final position, the coming of the person seems to be expected.

The particle *?inde* is also used for asking the confirmation of an assumption or endorsement of an opinion. The following example is used for an illustration:

10a. *ʔatimət'am ʔinde?*
 not will come PAR
 “Will you not come?”

10b. *timət'aləh ʔinde?*
 will come you PAR
 “Will you come?”

The speaker in (10a) has previous knowledge that the hearer may not come, and wants confirmation of this previous knowledge from the hearer. So the hearer will confirm the speaker idea by saying “I will not come (i.e., *ʔalimət'am*)”. On the contrary, the speaker in (10b) has previous knowledge that the hearer may come, and wants confirmation. Thus, the hearer will confirm the speaker’s idea by saying “yes I will come (i.e., *ʔimət'aləhu*). On the contrary it may be the other way round. In example (10a), the hearer may reply with surprise *ʔinde! ʔimət'alləhu* “Oh! I will come”. This means the previous knowledge of the speaker was not correct. The speaker confirmed his coming. In example (10b), if the speaker previous knowledge is wrong the hearer will answer to the speaker that he will not come. *ʔinde! ʔalimət'am* “Oh! I will not come”.

Moreover, the particle *ʔinde* can express the surprise of the speaker when it is uttered with either a high or a low intonation. Suppose Dawit saw a thief on the street trying to steal something from somebody’s pocket. He is surprised and says loudly *ʔinde* with a rising intonation. If he uttered it repeatedly with a very rising intonation, *ʔinde! ʔinde! ʔinde!* Looking towards the thief he intends to express an additional idea. When the particle *ʔinde!* is uttered repeatedly with a rising intonation, it conveys not only surprise but also implicatures of warning some one. The level of surprise is very high at this point, for expressing at once surprise (high intonation) or a feeling of discontent (low intonation) according to the used intonation pattern. But if it is uttered more than once, it will convey the speaker’s opposition or warning to somebody to stop what he is doing implicitly. So the concept and the attitude of the speakers in the above utterances are conveyed through the particle *ʔinde*.

Concerning the position of the particle *ʔinde* in a phrase, in most cases it follows verbs as in (4a, 5a, 6a, 7a, 8b, 9b, 10a and 10b). It also occurs

preceding nominal's such as nouns, pronouns etc as in (9a). For instance, as shown in the following examples, the particle *?inde* occurs preceding pronouns to express surprise in interrogative phrases:

11a. *?inde min honh?*
PAR what happen to you
“Oh! What happened to you?”

11b. *min honh?*
what happen
“What happened to you?”

12a. *?inde mannəw?*
PAR who is he
“Oh! Who is he?”

12b. *mannəw?*
who is
“Who is it?”

13a. *?inde ?ines?*
PAR what about me
“Oh! What about me?”

13b. *?ines?*
what about me
“What about me?”

As can be seen in the above examples, the particle *?inde* conveys a especial nuance in the utterance. For instance, in example (11a), the speaker's curiosity is not only to know simply what happens to the speaker but he also to express surprise by the contextual implicatures. He observes something strange comparing to his previous knowledge about the hearer. The speaker in (11b) does not have any previous knowledge about the hearer but he may simply intend to know what happened to him. Thus, in the above examples (11a, 12a, and 13a), that the particle *?inde* is precedes the pronouns conveys the attitude of the speaker in the utterance.

5 Conclusion

The particle *?inde* tells us that the proposition expressed is an interpretation of some perceived stimulus. The speech act is used to express surprise, to ask confirmation, to express a feeling of discontent, to oppose or warn somebody doing something wrong, etc. The intonation on the particle also plays an important role to convey the attitude of the speaker. As pointed out by Blass (1990: 105), intonation, facial expression and contextual factors will help to identify which attitude the speaker is actually taking.

NB. Abbreviations used in this paper.

1S	first person singular
2S	second person singular
M	male
F	female
PL	plural
3MS	third person masculine singular
3FS	third person feminine singular
1PL	first person plural
2Pl	second person plural
3PL	third person plural
DEF	definite
ACC	accusative
PAR	Particle
COP	Copula
Q	question

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