Form and Function of Converb in Afaan Oromo

Zelalem Girma Abate[1], Dr. Atreyee Sharma[2]

[1]Research Scholar, and Dr. Atreyee Sharma, Department of Computational Linguistics,
The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India
Email: *zelisha11[at]gmail.com*

[2]EFLU, School of Languages Sciences, Hyderabad
Email: *atreyeesharma[at]efluniversity.ac.in*

Abstract: *This study describes the form and function of converb in Oromo. Oromo converb usually cannot be marked for tense and mood in contrast to main verbs. There are three converb forms: the generalized converb marked by a lengthened final vowel of a conjugated perfective, imperative or jussive verb, and two invariable specialized converb marked by the suffixes -aa or -naan. While the generalized converb usually denotes a sequence of events, the converb in –aa expresses a simultaneous event to the main clause verb while the converb in -naan is used in habitual or repetitive expressions. The converb most frequently denote simultaneous and consecutive events in relation to a main-clause verb but also occurs in other adverbial functions.*

Keywords: Converb, generalized converb, specialized converb, simultaneous, consecutive, habitual

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction to the language

The Oromo language is one of the major languages in Ethiopia and the largest member of the Oromoid subgroup of the Lowland East Cushitic branch (Appleyard, 2006:103). Oromo is the third most widely spoken language in Africa after Arabic and Hausa (Mahdi, 1995: xi). It is spoken in most parts of Ethiopia and in northern Kenya. It has been used as a vernacular language for a long time until it became the working language of the Oromia regional state since 1991 (Tolemariam, 2009:6).

Oromo has 24 consonant phonemes and five vowels represented in the Latin-based Qubee orthography. Its morphology is moderately complex similar in categories and extent to other Cushitic languages (Appleyard, 2006:103 f.). Oromo is a tone-accent language whereby tone does not distinguish between lexical items but is linked with morphological and syntactic categories (Appleyard, 2006:104).

1.2. Statement of the problem

The converb is a major topic in descriptive linguistics; but there is very little typological, cross linguistics research on converbs in Oromo language. However, earlier studies (for instance, Azeb and Dimmendaal (2006), Griefonow-Mewis (2001), and Stroomer (1995) deal with the converb as a grammatical category in Oromo; they ascribe various functions to the converbs in Oromo and call them by various names, like gerund, participial, consecutive, serial verb (cf. Azeb and Dimmendaal, 2006:426).

Indeed, the converb in Oromo has barely been recognized as a cross-linguistically valid grammatical category up to these days. Considering this gap, this study attempts an in-depth description of converbs in Oromo.

1.3. Introduction to the Converb from a Cross-Linguistic Perspective

1.3.1. Definition of Converb

Linguists define the term converb differently. Morpho-syntactically, Haspelmath (1995: 3) defines converb as a non-finite verb whose main function is to mark adverbial subordinate clauses. Nedjalkov (1995: 97), in contrast, defines converb as a finite but dependent verb form that is marked by a verbal affix rather than by a free conjunction.

Typologically, converbs are found in the SOV languages of Asia, Ethiopia and South America (Ebert 2008: 7). Concerning the origin of converbs, Coupe (2006:145) states that the term converb was first used in the linguistic description of Altaic languages.

Based on the above definitions, we can conclude that a converb is morphologically non-finite verb form that prototypically does not inflected for person, number, tense, aspect and mood. Syntactically, a converb is a dependent verb that lacks a subordinating conjunction. Converbs do not occur as a main verb in independent clauses (Nedjalkov 1995:97). Generally, a converb cannot occupy the position of finite verb forms, of a participle, of an infinitive and of a gerund; but it can occupy the position of an adverbial.

1.3.2. Function of Converb

Converbs can be used to express anterior of posterior sequences, temporal overlapping, durativity, condition, concession and so on (Coupe 2006:149). According to Haspelmath (1995:7), converbs generally modify verbs, clauses or sentences but they do not modify nouns or noun phrases. That means converbs do not take the place of verbal nouns (nonfinite verb forms specialized for argument subordination or complementation) nor participles (nonfinite verb forms specialized for adnominal subordination).

Another important function of converbs is clause chaining, i.e. converbs are used "in a more coordinative manner for linking a series of sequentially ordered predications in dependent clauses, with the sentence terminating in a matrix

clause. This is often referred to as clause chaining." (Coupe 2006:146)

The converb in such clause chaining constructions are called narrative converbs. They are used for combining a string of successive events that incrementally advance the plot towards its end point.

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that converbs can mark adverbial subordination and also denote a sequence of events in clause-chaining constructions.

2. Methodology

This study is a descriptive research in nature. It relies on primary linguistic data gathered through interviews with native speakers of Oromo, as well as on published data from Oromo grammars, like Stroomer (1995), Griefenow-Mewis (2001), and form Oromo dictionaries, like Hinsene (2012).

The elicitation of the data on converb in Oromo was based on a questionnaire prepared in Amharic as Meta-language. The questionnaire contains sentences and phrases focusing on the form and function of the converb. The data were transcribed using the Oromo orthography– qubee, which is quite close to a phonetic representation of the language.

3. Analysis of Data

3.1. Form and Function of Converb in Oromo

According to Azeb and Dimmendaal (2006:427), dependent verb forms that are used to conjoin sentences and to form complex predicates can be considered converbs. Furthermore, converbs might be inflected but dependent verbs, or non-finite verbs. Based on these criteria, three converbs can be identified in Oromo: (i) the generalized converb which also underwent various types of lexicalization and grammaticalization, (ii) the specialized habitual converb, and (iii) the specialized progressive converb.

3.1.1. Morphology of the Generalized Converb

The generalized converb is based on the perfective aspect, jussive or imperative. It inflects for subject agreement and is generally marked by lengthening of the verb-final vowel, as shown in the following tables:

Table 1: Inflection of Perfective Verb and Perfective-Based Converb

Person	Perfective		Converb	
1SG	*-(a)n waraab-e*		*waraab-ee*	
	1SG fetch-1SG.PFV	'I fetched'	fetch-1SG.PFV.CNV	'I fetching'
1PL	*waraab-ne*		*waraab-nee*	
	fetch-1PL.PFV	'we fetched'	fetch-1PL.PFV.CNV	'we fetching
2SG	*waraab-de*[1]		*waraab-dee*	
	fetch-2SG.PFV	'you fetched'	fetch-2SG.PFV.CNV	'you fetching
2PL	*waraab-dani*		*waraab-danii*	
	fetch-2PL.PFV	'you fetched'	fetch-2PL.PFV.CNV	'you fetching
3SG.M	*waraab-e*		*waraab-ee*	
	fetch-3SG.M.PFV	'he fetched'	fetch-3SG.M.PFV.CNV	'he fetching
3SG.F	*waraab-de*		*waraab-dee*	
	fetch-3SG.F.PFV	'she fetched'	fetch-3SG.F.PFV.CNV	'she fetching
3PL	*waraab-ani*		*waraab-an-ii*	
	fetch-3PL.PFV	'they fetched'	fetch-3PL.PFV.CNV	'they fetching

Note: PFV= Perfective, **CNV**= Converb, **IMP**= Imperative, **JUSS**= Jussive, **ABF**= Autobenefactive,   **1SG**= First Person Singular, **1PL**= First Person Plural, **3SG**= Third Person Singular, **3PL**= Third Person Plural, **2SG**= Second Person Singular, **2PL**= Second Person Plural, **M**= Masculine, **F**= Feminine,

Table 2: Inflection of Jussive Verb and Jussive-Based Converb

Person	Jussive		Converb	
1SG	*haa deem-u*		*-(a)n deem-uu*	
	JUSS go-1SG.JUSS	'I shall go'	1SG go-1SG.JUSS.CNV	'I going'
1PL	*haa deem-nu*		*deem-nuu*	
	JUSS go-1PL.JUSS	'we shall go'	go-1PL.JUSS.CNV	'we going'
2SG	*(haa deem-tu)*		*deem-tuu*	
	JUSS go-2SG.JUSS	'you shall go'	go-2SG.JUSS.CNV	'you going'
2PL	*(haa deem-tani)*		*deem-tanuu*	
	JUSS go-2PL.JUSS	'you shall go'	go-2PL.JUSS.CNV	'you going'
3SG.M	*haa deem-u*		*deem-uu*	
	JUSS go-3SG.M.JUSS	'he shall go'	go-3SG.M.JUSS.CNV	'he going'
3SG.F	*haa deem-tu*		*deem-tuu*	
	JUSS go-3SG.F.JUSS	'she shall go'	go-3SG.F.JUSS.CNV	'she going'
3PL	*haa deem-ani*		*deem-anuu*	
	JUSS go-3PL.JUSS	'they shall go'	go-3PL.JUSS.CNV	'they going'

---

[1] The stem-final voiced plosive b triggers the assimilation *t > d with the subject marker.

(Griefenow-Mewis 2001:74)
Note: PFV= Perfective, **CNV**= Converb, **IMP**= Imperative, **JUSS**= Jussive, **ABF**= Autobenefactive,   **1SG**= First Person Singular, **1PL**= First Person Plural, **3SG**= Third Person Singular, **3PL**= Third Person Plural, **2SG**= Second Person Singular, **2PL**= Second Person Plural, **M**= Masculine, **F**= Feminine,

Table 3: Inflection of Imperative Verb and Imperative-Based Converb

Person	Imperative		Converb	
2SG	*deem-i*		*deem-ii*	
	go-2SG.IMP	'Go!'	go-2SG.IMP.CNV	'you going'
2SG	*bitadh-u*		*bitadh-uu*	
	buy.ABF-2SG.IMP	'Buy for yourself!'	buy.ABF-2SG.IMP.CNV	'you buying for yourself'
2PL	*deem-a*		*deem-aa*	
	go-2PL.IMP	'Go!'	go-2PL.IMP.CNV	'you going'
2PL	*bitadh-a*		*bitadh-aa*	
	buy.ABF-2PL.IMP	'Buy for yourself!'	buy.ABF-2PL.IMP.CNV	'you buy for yourself'

The subject marker for perfective verbs and converbs in 1 are identical, except for lengthening of the final vowel and the lack of the proclitic 1SG marker *-(a)n* with converbs. In 2, however, the final vowel *i* of the 2/3PL marker in the jussive is replaced by *uu* in the converb form. Furthermore, the 1SG marker *-(a)n* which is lacking in the jussive occurs in the converb form. In 3, imperative and imperative-based converbs are identical except for the lengthening of the final vowel with converbs. Note that in the singular imperative two different suffixes occur.

3.1.2. Syntax of The Generalized Converb

The generalized converb in Oromo expresses an action that precedes the verb of the main clause. The verb of the main clause may be in the perfective or imperfective aspect (cf. example (1) and (2)), in the jussive (cf. example (3)) or imperative (cf. example (4)).

(1) Lematii ban-ee dabicha fudhat-e
    basket_tray open-3SG.M.PFV.CNV bread.DEF take.ABF-3SG.M.PFV
    "He opened the basket tray and took the bread."

(2) Lematii ban-ee dabicha fudhat-a
    Basket tray open-3SG.M.PFV.CNV bread.DEF take.ABF-3SG.M.IPFV
    "He will open the basket tray and take the bread."

(3) Inni bor daf-ee haa dhuf-u!
    he.NOM tomorrow be quick-3SG.M.PFV.CNV JUSS come-3SG.M.JUSS
    "He shall come quickly tomorrow!" (lit. "He shall be quick and come tomorrow!")

(4) Lematii ban-ii (*ban-ee) dabicha fudhadh-uu
    basket_tray open-2SG.IMP.CNV (open-3SG.M.PFV.CNV) bread.DEF take.ABF-2SG.IMP
    "Open the basket tray and take the bread!"

Example (4) shows that the generalized converb based on the perfective aspect cannot be combined with an affirmative reference verb in the imperative; here only the imperative-based converb can be used. However, if a negative imperative occurs in the main clause, the generalized converb has to occur in the perfective aspect:

(5) Bor daf-tee hin-dhuf-in!
tomorrow be_quick-2SG.PFV.CNV NEG-come-NEG.IMP/JUSS
"Do not come quickly tomorrow!"

Examples (1), (2), (3) and (5) show that the generalized converb based on the perfective aspect is basically devoid of tense-aspect/mood information. It obtains this information from the reference verb, i.e. in (1) the converb has a past or perfective reading, in (2) a future or imperfective reading, and in (3) a modal reading.

In the examples (1)–(5), the subject of the converb clause and of the main clause were the same. However, it is also possible to use the generalized converb in context, where the subject of the converb clause differs from that of the main clause:

(6) Inni gafarsa tokko ajjeess-ee hundumti keenya foon isaa nyaan-ne
he.NOM buffalo one kill-3SG.M. PFV.CNV all us meat its eat-1PL. PFV

"He killed a buffalo and all of us ate its meat."

In the example (6), the subject of the converb clause is third person singular inni 'he' while the subject of the main clause is first person plural hundumti keenya 'we' which literally means 'we all, all of us'.

The converb alone cannot form a full sentence, as shown in the following examples:

(7) *Ani bishaan waraab-ee …
    I.NOM water fetch-1SG.PFV.CNV
    "I fetching water…"

(8) Ani bishaan waraab-ee-n dhuf-e
    I.NOM water fetch-1SG.PFV.CNV come-1SG.PFV
    "I fetched water and came."

These examples show that the verb form marked by lengthening of its final vowel is a dependent verb used for conjoining events. It is therefore analyzed as converb. Besides clause chaining, generalized converb clauses are also used as adverbial modification of a main clause, as shown in the following examples:

(9) Ijoollumaa kooti jalqab-ee-n hama har'ati mana-barusmaa hin-deem-ne

childhood my start-1SG.PFV.CNV-1SG until today school NEG-go-PFV.NEG

"Since my childhood until today, I did not go to school."

(10) gala hat-anii golaaw-anii hin-deem-an

camel steal-3PL.PFV.CNV bend-3PL.PFV.CNV NEG-go-3PL.IPFV

"After stealing a camel, it is impossible to go bowing."

(Data from Abdurrahman 2002:29)

(11) Boolla keessatti kurf-ee du'-e

hole into fall-3SG.M.PFV.CNV die-3SG.M.PFV

i. "I fell into a hole and died."
ii. "He died because he fell into a hall."

In case like (11), the converb clause can be understood as denoting a preceding event to the main clause event or its cause, i.e. the converb has no clearly defined function but its interpretation depends on the discourse contexts. Therefore, it is considered to be a generalized (or general) converb.

Generalized converb clauses can be focused by attaching the suffix –ti to the converb, as in (12):

(12) Ishee-n mana_baankii- rraa liqii fuut-tee-ti makiina bit-e

she.NOM bank-from loan take-3SG.F.PFV.CNV-FOC car buy-3SG.F.PFV

"She took a credit from the bank and bought a car."

Iterative or intensive events in converb clauses can be expressed by reduplicating the converb:

(13) Hantuut-ni dhal-tee dhal-tee eegeen haf-naani oo-te

mouse.NOM give_birth-3SG.F.PFV.CNV give_birth-3SG.F.PFV.CNV tail remain- cry-

HAB.CNV 3SG.F.PFV

"The mouse gave birth again and again and cried when only (her) tail remained."

(Data from Abdurrahman 2002:41)

It was mentioned above, that with imperative verbs in main clauses, the generalized converb must occur in its imperative-based form.

Depending on the verb, the final vowel may be {i} or {u} with singular subjects, but is uniformly {a} with plural subjects:

(14) Ati mana gal-ii harka dhiqadh-uu buna dhug-i!

you.SG.NOM house enter-2SG.IMP.CNV hand wash.ABF-2SG.IMP.CNV coffee drink-2SG.IMP

"Enter the house wash your hands and drink coffee!"

(15) bay'is-aa fiig-a!

make_much-2SG.IMP.CNV run-2SG.IMP

"Run quickly!"

However, it is also possible to utter a sequence of commands simply by juxtaposing them without lengthening of the final vowel of verbs in non-final clauses:

(16) Deem-i nyaadh-u!

go-2SG.IMP eat-2SG.IMP

"Go (and) eat!"

The jussive-based generalized converb is used as complement to certain subordinating conjunctions, like utuu 'when, while, if':

(17) Utuu kitaaba dubbis-tuu laaqana nyaat-ti

when book read-3SG.F.JUSS.CNV lunch eat-3SG.F.IPFV

"While she is reading a book, she eats lunch."

(18) Caaltuu-n utuu fiig-duu kuf-te

Chaltu-NOM when run-3SG.F.JUSS.CNV fell-3SG.F.PFV

"Chaltu fell while she was running."

The jussive-based converb occurs in a subordinate clause marked by the conjunction utuu. The combination of jussive-based converb and utuu indicates that the state of affairs in the converb clause starts before the state of affairs in the main clause, but the two states overlap for a certain time (Meyer 2006:74). Instead of the jussive-based converb also the perfective based converb can occur in a subordinate clause marked by utuu, but then denotes a concessive clause:

(19) Utuu nyaat-ee iyyuu hin-fayy-u

when eat-3SG.M.PFV.CNV CNC NEG-recover-3SG.M.IPFV.NEG

"Even if he eats, he won't recover."

(Data from Debela and Meyer 2006:82)

The jussive-based converb can also occur as negated verb, which is marked by the circumfix hin-… -in for all persons except the 2PL which is negated by hin-… -inaa:

(20) Utuu Caaltuu-n hin-deem-inii dhuf-e

when Chaltu-NOM NEG-go-SBJ:NEG.CNV come-3SG.M.PFV

"He came before Chaltu went."

(21) Utuu cirree hin-nyaat-inii deem-e

When breakfast NEG-eat-SBJ:NEG.CNV go-3SG.M.PFV

"He went without eating breakfast."

In negation, the jussive-based converb clause marked by the conjunction utuu represents temporal adverbial clauses denoting the notion of 'before VERB' or 'without VERB' depending on the context.

It is also possible to negate the imperative-based converb, which then also encodes the meaning 'before/without VERB':

(22) Laaqana hin-nyaat-inii kott-u!

lunch NEG-eat-IMP.CNV come-2SG.IMP

"Come without eating lunch! / Come before eating lunch!"

The perfective-based converb, in contrast, cannot be negated.

3.1.3. Forms and Functions of the Specialized Converbs

3.1.3.1. Habitual Converb

The habitual converb is formed by attaching the suffix -naan to the verb stem. This converb does not inflect for subject agreement or polarity:

(23) Inni   qarshii   argan-naan bad-e
     he.NOM   money   get.ABF-HAB.CNV disappear-3SG.M.PFV
     "He (as usual) disappeared after having received money."

(24) Ciimani   hojja-naan   qarshii   baayee argat-tu
     hard   work-HAB.CNV   money   much get.ABF-2PL.IPFV
     "If they work hard, you will (usually) get more money."

The habitual converb refers to events which took place prior to the reference verb whereby the entire situation described by such sentences is considered as a habitual or repetitive situation.

In combination with an imperfective main-clause verb, the habitual converb can also get the reading of a real condition (cf. Debela and Meyer 2006:75):

(25) Barbaan-naan   hin bit-ta
     like-HAB.CNV FOC   buy-2SG.IPFV
     "Whenever you want you buy it."

If the habitual converb is combined with a perfective main-clause verb, it might also denote the cause for the event in the main clause:

(26) Tulluu-n   deem-naan   dhuf-te
     Tullu-NOM   go-HAB.CNV   come-2SG.PFV
     "Because Tullu left, you came."

3.1.3.2. Progressive Converb

The progressive converb is characterized by the suffix-aa which is attached to the verb stem. This converb does not inflect for subject agreement or polarity. A progressive converb construction denotes that the action of the converb takes place simultaneously with the action of the verb in the main clause.

(27) Inni   nyaat-aa   gara   hojji   deem-a
     he.NOM   eat-PRG.CNV   to   work go-3SG.M.IPFV
     "He goes to work while eating" (Mohammed and Zaborski 1990: 68)

(28) Caalaa-n   farda   guluf-aa dhuf-e
     Challa   horse   gallop-PRG.CNV come-3SG.M.PFV
     "Challa came galloping a horse."

4. Summary and Conclusion

This section summarizes and concludes the discussion from the previous sections on form and function of converbs in Oromo. It was shown that the form and function of converb in Oromo has not been well studied.

Based on this study, the following conclusion can be forwarded: In Oromo, the converb is a non-finite verb form which can be used for adverbial subordination, conditional expression, progressive actions, and clause chaining. The most common converb in Oromo is based on a perfective verb whose last vowel is lengthened. It is used for adverbial modification as well as for clause chaining, and takes part in various kinds of lexicalizations and grammaticalizations. Beside a verb in the perfective, also a verb in the imperative or jussive can occur with a lengthened final vowel in converb function. Due to its frequency and various functions it is called generalized converb.

The other kind of converb is the habitual converb marked by the suffix -naan. It is also a non-finite verb form whose main function is to denote overlapping events, which usually or frequently take place. The third kind of converb is the progressive converb marked by the suffix -aa and denotes events that are simultaneous to the reference verb. The habitual and progressive converbs are considered specialized converbs due to their specific meaning and more restricted occurrence. In contrast to the generalized converb, the specialized converbs do not inflect for person, number and gender as well as tense-aspect.

References

[1] Appleyard, David. (2006) Oromo. In: Keith Brown (ed.), Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics. Amsterdam: Elsevier.

[2] Azeb Amha and Gerrit J. Dimmendaal. (2006) Converbs in an African perspective. In: Felix K. Ameka, Allan Dench and Nicholas Evans (eds.), Catching Language: The Standing Challenges of Grammar Writing. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 393-440.

[3] Coupe, A. R. (2006) Converbs. In: Keith Brown (ed.), Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics. Amsterdam: Elsevier.
Ebert, Karen H. (2008) Forms and functions of converbs. In: Karen H. Ebert, Johanna Mattissen and Rafael Suter (eds.). *From Siberia to Ethiopia – Converbs in a Cross- Linguistic Perspective*. Zurich: Seminar for Allgemeine Sprachwisenschaft, 7-33.

[4] Griefenow-Mewis, Catherine (2001) A Grammatical Sketch of Written Oromo. Köln: Köppe.

[5] Haspelmath, Martin. (1995) Converbs as a cross-linguistic valid category. In: Martin Haspelmath and Ekkehard König (eds.), Converbs in Cross-Linguistic Perspective. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

[6] Hinsene Mekuria. (2012) Dungoo: የኦሮምኛ-አማርኛ-እንግሊዝኛመዝገበቃላት።Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press

[7] Mahdi Hamid Muudee. (1995) Oromo Dictionary. English-Oromo. Vol. I, Atlanta, Georgia: Sagalee Oromo Pubishing.

[8] Nedjalkov, Vladimir P. (1995) Some typological parameters of converbs. In: Martin Haspelmath and Ekkehard König (eds.), Converbs in a Cross-Linguistic Perspective. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 97-136.

[9] Stroomer, Harry. (1995) A Grammar of Booranaa Oromo (Kenya): Phonology, Morphology, Vocabulary. Köln: Köppe.

[10] Tolemariam Futa. (2009) A Typology of Verbal Derivations in Ethiopian Afro- Asiatic Languages. Utrecht: LOT.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

1, 2, 3	First, second, third person	ABF	Autobenefactive
CNV	Converb	DEF	Definite
F	Feminie	FOC	Focus
GER	Gerund	HAB	Habitual
IMP	Imperative	INF	Infinitive
IPFV	Imperfective	JUSS	Jussive
M	Masculine	NEG	Negation
NOM	Nominative	PFV	Perfective
PL	Plural	PRG	Progressive
SG	Singular		