A note on Verum Focus in Tigrinya

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Abstract: This paper provides novel data on the phenomenon of Verum Focus (Höhle 1988) in Tigrinya (Eritrea and Ethiopia, Ethio-Semitic, SOV). I claim that the copula used in individual-level predicates in this understudied language, *ʔɨjju*, also has the function of marking Verum Focus. I provide a preliminary analysis of the syntax of this element by suggesting that it is a verb that raises from its first merge position to the left periphery of the clause, more specifically to the head of a Focus projection. From this position *ʔɨjju* attracts constituents of different sizes to its specifier, conveying the meaning of Verum but also Contrastive and Exhaustive Focus in Tigrinya.

Keywords: Tigrinya, Ethio-Semitic, verum, focus, copula, syntax

1. Introduction

This paper[1] studies a phenomenon that, to my knowledge, has never been studied before in Tigrinya, an Ethio-Semitic language spoken mainly in central Eritrea and northern Ethiopia. To claim that a linguistic phenomenon has never been investigated before in this language is however not surprising: Tigrinya is not a well-studied language, and its grammatical descriptions can almost be counted on one hand (cf. Conti Rossini 1940, Leslau 1941, Mason 1996, Kogan 1997, Bulakh 2009, Bulakh 2023). My purpose here is therefore to provide and carefully describe novel data on this language, ultimately to broaden our understanding of Tigrinya and, maybe, of the also understudied Ethio-Semitic branch.

What this short paper is not going to do is to provide a piercing analysis of the phenomenon taken into consideration. I will give a tentative examination to explain the data presented; however, a wider and more detailed study will be left to further research (Cacchioli, in preparation).

The phenomenon that will be under scrutiny is Verum Focus (Höhle 1988, 1992, Hartmann et al. 2008, Gutzmann and Castroviejo 2008, Gutzmann et al. 2020, a.o.). Consider the following Tigrinya examples:

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[1] Unless otherwise noted, the data presented in this paper were collected by myself in fieldwork with three Eritrean native speakers of Tigrinya. Transcription conventions in Ethio-Semitic are subject to significant individual variation. I have followed Leipzig glossing conventions except for the φ-features in the Imperfective verbal conjugation (which are hyphenated in front of verbs) and the use of capital S and O for subject and object marking morphology on verbal forms.

(1) a. dmu riɛj-u
         cat   see.GER-S.3MS
         'He saw a cat.'

     b. dmu riɛj-u   **ʔijju**
         cat   see.GER-S.3MS   VERUM
         'He **did** see a cat.'

Example (1a) presents a declarative clause in Tigrinya with a null pronominal subject, an object and a finite verb in this order. In (1b), the element *ʔijju* is added at the end of the sentence. By looking at the English translation of (1b), we notice that an emphatic *do* is added. The emphatic *do* and the element *ʔijju* seem therefore to convey the same meaning: an emphasis on the truth of the sentence or, in other words, Verum Focus.

To this day, the specific use of the *ʔijju* element presented above (whose nature and properties will be revealed in the following pages) has not received proper attention. To my knowledge, only two grammars mention it and they do it in a very vague manner. One grammar says that a declarative sentence in which this element is present conveys the meaning of an "actual state" (Conti Rossini 1940, 54, personal translation from Italian) with no clarification of whether the adjective *actual* (*attuale* in Italian) means 'existing at a present time' or 'truly existing, real'. The other grammar says that the *ʔijju* element added to a declarative sentence is a way to express a "probability/possibility" (Leslau 1941, 90, personal translation from French), leaning more toward a modal meaning. A third vague description of the phenomenon was given more recently in a dissertation: the author claims that *ʔijju* is "an auxiliary", that "it shows present time" and that all in all the meaning of a sentence in which *ʔijju* appears is "similar" to that of a sentence without it (Yohannes 2016, 202, 203, 207). Finally, the fourth and most precise account of the phenomenon claims that the insertion of the *ʔijju* element (in cleft sentences) provides "more emphasis" (Kifle 2011, 258).

In this paper, I will claim that *ʔijju* marks Verum Focus. I will go even further and argue that *ʔijju*, in more general terms, marks Focus (Verum, Contrastive and Exhaustive) in Tigrinya. I will do so by providing first a background on some relevant grammatical properties of this language; secondly, in section 3, I will go through the data on Verum Focus carefully explaining and showing the peculiar characteristics of the element mentioned above; lastly, in section 4, I will discuss some preliminary ideas and tentative analyses before concluding.

2. Background on Tigrinya

Tigrinya is an Ethio-Semitic language closely related to languages such as Tigre and Amharic and more distantly to Arabic and Hebrew. It is spoken by approximately 9 million people mainly in central Eritrea - as the national language - and in the Tigray region in northern Ethiopia (Bulakh 2023). There exist several regional varieties between Ethiopic and Eritrean Tigrinya, but at present "no dialectal research has been conducted" (Kifle 2011, 16).

As in all other Semitic languages, Tigrinya possesses non-concatenative root morphology: it has a triconsonantal root system in which roots constitute the semantic core of the words. Let us take for example the root *g-b-r*. It conveys the meaning of *doing*. From this root it is possible to create verbs: tense, aspect and modality information is obtained through vowel templates, as in (2) for perfective and in (3) for imperfective.

(2) gɛbɛr-ɛ   (3) jɨ-gɛbbɨr
     do.PFV-S.3MS   S.3MS-do.IPFV
     'He did.'   'He does.'

Tigrinya is a head-final language with canonical SOV word order (in complex verbal forms the auxiliary follows the verb). Both its nominal and verbal systems are head-final.[2] Consider examples (4), (5) and (6).

(4) ʔɨt-i   sɛbʔay   n-ɨt-a   lam   ɣ'ɛtil-w-a
     DEM-MS   man   DOM-DEM-FS   cow   kill.GER-S.3MS-O.3FS
     'The man killed the cow.'

(5) mɨs   dɨm-ay   jɨ-ts'awɛt   nɛyr-ɛ
     PREP   cat-POSS.1S S.1S-play.IPFV   BE.PAST- S.1S
     'I was playing with my cat.'

(6) kɛmzi-mɛts'i-ɛ   jɨ-fɛllɨt
     COMP-come.PFV-S.3MS   S.1S-know.IPFV
     'I know that he came.'

In (4), the verb ɣ'ɛtilwa 'kill' agrees with the subject of the clause ʔɨti sɛbʔay 'the man' and the object nɨta lam 'the cow' precedes the verb that is found in final position.[3] In (5), the auxiliary nɛyrɛ expresses progressive aspect and is found in final position after the verb. Example (6) shows that subordinate clauses precede matrix clauses in Tigrinya and that complementizers / subordinating particles are prefixed on the embedded verbs.[4]

As also shown in the preceding examples, in Tigrinya subject agreement morphemes on verbs vary between prefixal and suffixal paradigms on the basis of aspect (and/or tense). Imperfective verb forms take prefixal subject agreement and express habitual present tense, as in (7).

(7) kullu   mɛʔalti   nab   bet   tɨmhɨrti   jɨ-xɛjjɨd
     every   time/day DIR   house   learning   S.1S-go.IPFV
     'I go to school every day.'

Gerundive verb forms take suffixal subject agreement and express perfectivity, as in (8).[5]

(8) tɨmali   nab   bet   tɨmhɨrti   kɛid-ɛ
     every   DIR   house   learning   go.GER-S.1S
     'Yesterday I went to school .'

Perfective verb forms also take suffixal subject agreement and also express perfectivity. However, they are used only in the presence of clausal prefixes such as sentential negation

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[2] Note, however, that despite the order of its constituents, Tigrinya possesses prepositions and prefixes.
[3] In Tigrinya, demonstratives serve the functions of determiners and Differential Object Marking is obtained with an *n-* prefix (cf. Overfelt 2020).
[4] Cf. Cacchioli (in preparation) that investigates the syntax of clausal prefixes in Tigrinya and Cacchioli and Shlonsky (2023) that tackles the behavior of the prefix *kɛmzi-* found in example (6).
[5] The Gerundive is currently used in the spoken language and has replaced the Perfective in affirmative declarative clauses to express perfective actions (Bulakh 2019, 186; Cacchioli 2023).

which is expressed in Tigrinya by the circumfix *ʔay-...-n* (Leslau 1941, Mason 1996 a.o.). This is illustrated in (9).

(9) timali nab bet   timhɨrti   ʔay-kɛd-ku-n
     every   DIR house   learning   NEG-go.PFV-S.1S-NEG
     'Yesterday I didn't go to school .'

Tigrinya possesses two verbs that can be translated with the English *to be*[6]: *ʔallo* and *ʔijju*.[7] The paradigms of these verbs in present tense appear in Table 1 below. In past tense, *ʔallo* and *ʔijju* share a common perfective form, *nɛbɛrɛ*, and a common gerundive form, *nɛyru*.

	ʔallo	*ʔijju*
1S	ʔall-ɛxu	ʔi-jjɛ
2MS	ʔall-ɛxa	ʔi-xa
2FS	ʔall-ɛxi	ʔi-xi
3MS	ʔall-o	ʔi-jju
3FS	ʔall-a	ʔi-jja
1P	ʔall-ɛna	ʔi-na
2MP	ʔall-ɛxum	ʔi-xum
2FP	ʔall-ɛxin	ʔi-xin
3MP	ʔall-ɛwu	ʔi-jjom
3FP	ʔall-ɛwa	ʔi-jjin

Table 1 : The paradigms of *ʔallo* and *ʔijju*.

The verb *ʔallo*[8] has two functions: it is used as a copula in the context of stage-level predicates or locatives, as in (10), and as an auxiliary to mark progressive aspect, as in (11). Thus, prefixal Imperfective verbal forms are interpreted as habitual when they are not accompanied by the auxiliary - as in (7) - and as progressive/continuous when they are. The form of *ʔallo* in present tense morphologically follows the suffixal conjugation (perfective).

(10) dɛximɛ   /   ʔab   gɛza   ʔall-ɛxu
      tired   LOC   house BE₁.PRES-S.1S
      'I am tired/at home.'

(11) ʔindʒɛra   nɨ-bɛlʕ   ʔall-ɛna
      injera   S.1P-eat.IPFV BE₁.PRES-S.1P
      'We are eating injera.'

ʔijju also has two functions: firstly, it is used as a copula in the context of individual-level predicates, as in (12).

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[6] A somewhat similar dichotomy is found in Spanish: in this language the verb *ser* 'to be' is used as a copula when occurring with individual-level predicates (as *ʔijju*) and the verb *estar* 'to be' is used with stage-level predicates and marks progressive aspect (as *ʔallo*) (González-Vilbazo and Remberger 2005).

[7] As traditionally done in literature on Semitic languages, I will use the 3MS perfective form to label these and other verbs throughout the paper.

[8] For the sake of clarity, I gloss *ʔallo* as BE₁ and *ʔijju* as BE₂.

(12) bɛlaħ   ʔi-jja
      intelligent.FS BE$_2$.PRES-S.3FS
      'She is intelligent.'

Secondly, it is used in a sentence with a verb in the imperfective form prefixed by the element *ki-* - tentatively identified as a Mood° head in Cacchioli & Overfelt (2023) - to express future tense (Kogan 1997, Bulakh 2023, a.o.).

(13) Tɛsfay   ʔaħmilti   ki-bɛlʕ   ʔi-jju
      Tesfay   vegetables COMP-eat.IPFV.S.3MS BE$_2$.PRES-S.3MS
      'Tesfay will eat vegetables.'

The last grammatical property of Tigrinya relevant for this study is that in this language yes/no questions are constructed with the interrogative particle *do*. This particle is placed after "that part of the sentence which is the main object of the question" (Kogan 1997, 442; also cf. Leslau 1941; Mason 1996[9]). I interpret this *part* as being, in more formal terms, the focalized element of the sentence. This is illustrated in (14) and (15).

(14) tijatir   ti-fɛttu   do
      theater   S.2MS-like.IPFV   INT
      'Do you like theater?' (also 'Do you LIKE theater?')

(15) ti-sɛmiʕa-ni   do   ʔall-ɛxa[10]
      S.2MS-hear.IPFV-O.1S   INT   BE$_1$.PRES- S.2MS
      'Are you listening to me?' (also 'Are you LISTENING to me?')

When the question contains a copula, the *do* particle is prefixed to it, as in (16). Note that *do* loses its [o] vowel and the copula loses its [ʔ].

(16) a. nsxa   Tɛsfay   d-i-xa
          you.MS   Tesfay   INT-BE$_2$.PRES-S.2MS
          'Are you TESFAY?'

      b. nsxa   d-i-xa   Tɛsfay
          you.MS   INT-BE$_2$.PRES-S.2MS   Tesfay
          'Are YOU Tesfay?'

The particle *do* cannot appear in *wh*-questions, as shown in (17).

(17) ʔintay   bɛliʕɛ-xa   (*do)
      what   eat.GER-S.2MS   INT
      Intended: 'What did you eat?'

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[9] Note that in these works *do* is not placed after the focalized element, but it is *suffixed* to it. However, my informants write this particle as a free morpheme.
[10] The order *tisɛmiʕani ʔallɛxa do* (with *do* appearing in final position) is also grammatical, but my informants prefer the version provided in (15) and cannot make a distinction between the two in terms of conveyed meaning.

With all these grammatical properties of Tigrinya in mind, we can now turn to the phenomenon studied in this paper, namely the third use of the copula *ʔijju*.

3. *ʔijju* marks Verum Focus

I claim that aside from its presence in copular and future tense constructions, *ʔijju* serves the function of marking Verum Focus. Consider the difference in the English translations in (18b), (19b) and (20b) as compared with (18a), (19a) and (20a).

(18) a. dmu   riɛj-ɛ
          cat   see.GER-S.1S
          'I saw a cat.'

   b. dmu   riɛj-ɛ   **ʔi-jjɛ**
       cat   see.GER-S.1S   VER-S.1S
       'I **did** see a cat.'

(19) a. ʔit-a   mɛts'ħaf   hib-ka-jo
          DEM-FS   book   give.GER-S.2MS-O.3MS
          'You gave him the book.'

   b. ʔit-a   mɛts'ħaf   hib-ka-jo   **ʔi-xa**
       DEM-FS   book   give.GER-S.2MS-O.3MS   VER-S.2MS
       'You **did** give him the book.'

(20) a. ʔiz-a   gʷal   ti-fɛlt'-a
          PROX-FS   girl   S.3FS-know.IPFV-O.3FS
          'She knows this girl.'

   b. ʔiz-a   gʷal   ti-fɛlt'-a   **ʔi-jja**
       PROX-FS   girl   S.3FS-know.IPFV-O.3FS   VER-S.3FS
       'She **does** know this girl.'

The data above shows that adding *ʔijju* to a sentence means adding assertiveness and emphasis about the truth of what has been said. It can also be used in truth-value correcting contexts. This resembles the use of emphatic *do* (Breithbarth, De Clercq and Haegeman 2013) that is found in the English translations.[11] I will use the term 'emphatic *ʔijju*' when mentioning the specific use of *ʔijju* as a Verum Focus marker and I will gloss it as VER.[12]

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[11] Henceforth, I use the adverb *indeed* when the emphatic *do* is ungrammatical in the English translations of some examples in Tigrinya.

[12] One might think that the phenomenon under investigation is Predicate Focus (Zimmermann 2014) rather than Verum Focus given that *ʔijju* seems to be adjacent to predicates in all the examples mentioned above (because verbs in Tigrinya appear in final position therefore on the left of emphatic *ʔijju*). However, if we look at a copular clause *ʔijju* does not appear adjacent to the predicate *ħamima* but in final position as expected.

(i)   ʔit-a   lam   ħamima   nɛyr-a   **ʔi-jja**
       DEM-FS   cow   sick.FS   BE.PAST-S.3FS   VER-S.3FS
       '**Indeed**, the cow was sick.'

This supports the analysis according to which *ʔijju* marks Verum Focus and not Predicate Focus.

In the rest of this section, I will present in detail the morphological and syntactical properties of emphatic *ʔɨjju* in Tigrinya. Preliminary explanations of the data will be provided later in section 4.

3.1 Morphological properties of emphatic *ʔɨjju*

3.1.1   Form

Emphatic *ʔɨjju* can appear in clauses in present tense - cf. (20b) above - and in past tense - cf. (18b) and (19b). However, its form does not change: It always takes the present tense form, *ʔɨjju*. Note that if the past copula *nɛyru* is added to a sentence, *nɛyru* does not convey a Verum meaning. As (21b) shows, if *nɛyru* co-occurs with a verb in imperfective, the meaning is that of the English past progressive. Whereas as (22b) shows, if *nɛyru* co-occurs with a verb in gerundive, the meaning is that of the English past perfect.[13]

(21)   a.   mɨs   dɨm-ay   ji-ts'awɛt   **ʔɨ-jjɛ**
            PREP   cat-POSS.1S   S.1s-play.IPFV   **VER-S.1S**
            'I **do** play with my cat.'

    b.   mɨs   dɨm-ay   ji-ts'awɛt   nɛyr-ɛ
            PREP   cat-POSS.1S   S.1s-play.IPFV   BE.PAST-S.1S
            'I was playing with my cat.' (*'I WAS playing with my cat.')

(22)   a.   ʁ'ɨdmi   ʔindɛgɛna   b-ʔit-a   dmu   mɨ-sbar-u
            before   again   by-DEM-FS   cat   NOM[14]-break-S.3MS
            n-it-i   mɛts'awɛri   ʔaʕɛr-ɛ-jo   **ʔɨ-jjɛ**
            DOM-DEM-MS   toy   repair.GER-S.1S-O.3MS   **VER-S.1S**
            'I **did** repair the toy before the cat broke it again.'

    b.   ʁ'ɨdmi   ʔindɛgɛna   b-ʔit-a   dmu   mɨ-sbar-u
            before   again   by-DEM-FS   cat   NOM-break-S.3MS
            n-it-i   mɛts'awɛri   ʔaʕɛr-ɛ-jo   nɛyr-ɛ
            DOM-DEM-MS   toy   repair.GER-S.1S-O.3MS   BE.PAST-S.1S
            'I had repaired the toy before the cat broke it again.'

The data above shows that Verum Focus can only be marked by the *present* tense copula *ʔɨjju.*

3.1.2   Agreement

Emphatic *ʔɨjju* obligatorily agrees with the subject of the sentence. As illustrated in (23) below, a default 3MS subject agreement (or any other persons) leads to the ungrammaticality of the sentence.

(23)   dmu   riɛj-ɛ   ʔɨ-{jjɛ/*jj**u**}
            cat   see.GER-S.1S   VER-{S.1S/***S.3MS**}
            'I **did** see a cat.'

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[13] Note, however, that it is possible to add emphatic *ʔɨjju* at the end of the sentence in (22b).
[14] Nominalizer.

The presence of obligatory subject agreement on *ʔijju* is a first piece of evidence in support of the claim that in Tigrinya Verum Focus is conveyed by a *verb* (and not by a complementizer).[15] This will be discussed in more detail in section 4.

3.2 Syntactic properties of emphatic *ʔijju*
3.2.1   Position

We have seen that emphatic *ʔijju* is obligatorily found in final position. However, see section 3.2.6 for some further considerations.

3.2.2   Auxiliaries and Copulas

With regard to auxiliaries and copulas, emphatic *ʔijju* cannot appear in a sentence where the individual-level copula *ʔijju*, as in (24), or the stage-level copula and auxiliary *ʔallo*, as in (25) and (26), are present. Note that also in English emphatic *do* cannot be added to the sentences in the translations of (24) and (25), but an adverb like *indeed* must be inserted instead.[16]

(24) a.   *bɛlaħ   ʔi-jja   ʔi-jja
       intelligent.FS BE_2.PRES-S.3FS   VER-S.3FS
       Intended : '**Indeed**, she is smart.'

(25) a.   *ʔab   gɛza   ʔall-ɛxu   ʔi-jjɛ
       at   house BE_1.PRES-S.1s   VER-S.1s
       Intended : '**Indeed**, I am at home.'

(26)   *ʔindʒɛra   ni-bɛlʕ   ʔall-ɛna   ʔi-na
       injera   S.1P-eat.IPFV BE_1.PRES-S.1p   VER-S.1P
       Intended : '**Indeed**, we are eating injera.'

Emphatic *ʔijju* is also not availabe in future constructions, as shown in (27).

(27)   *Tɛsfay   ʔaħmilti   ki-bɛlʕ   ʔi-jju   ʔi-jju
       Tesfay   vegetables   COMP-eat.IPFV.S.3MS BE_2.PRES-S.3MS   VER-S.3MS
       'Tesfay will eat vegetables.'

      However, emphatic *ʔijju* can occur along with the past copula *neyru* - as in (28) - and the suppletive form *xiwwin*, derived from *konɛ* - as in (29).[17]

(28)   ʔit-a   lam   ħamima   nɛyr-a   **ʔi-jja**
       DEM-FS   cow   sick.FS   BE.PAST-S.3FS   VER-S.3FS
       '**Indeed**, the cow was sick.'

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[15] However, one could think that this is an instance of complementizer agreement (I thank Tom Meadows for pointing this out to me).

[16] A reviewer pointed out that the morphosyntax of English is obviously different than that of Tigrinya and the reasons for the unavailability of *do* in these cases are probably different than the ones proposed later in section 4.

[17] Ongoing work on the syntax of modality in Tigrinya with Jason Overfelt (cf. Cacchioli and Overfelt 2023).

(29) Sɛgɛn   sɛb   tɨ-ħiggɨz   tɨ-xɨwwɨn   **ʔɨ-jja**
    Segen   people   S.3FS-help.IPFV   S.3FS-become.PFV VER-S.3FS
    '**Indeed**, Segen might help people.'

A tentative explanation for why emphatic *ʔɨjju* cannot cooccur with the copula *ʔɨjju* and the copula and auxiliary *ʔallo* will be provided in section 4.

3.2.3   Negation

Emphatic *ʔɨjju* can appear in a negative declarative sentence but cannot itself be negated.

(30) Tɛsfay   ʔaħmilti   ʔay-bɛlʕɨ-n   **ʔɨ-jju**
    Tesfay   vegetables   NEG-eat.IPFV.S.3MS- NEG   VER-
                                             S.3MS
    '**Indeed**, Tesfay doesn't eat vegetables.'

(31) *Tɛsfay   ʔaħmilti   jɨ-bɛlʕ   ʔay-kon-ɛ-n
    Tesfay   vegetables   S.3MS-eat.IPFV   NEG-VER-S.3MS-NEG
    Intended: '**Indeed**, Tesfay doesn't eat vegetables.'

As illustrated in example (31), sentential negation cannot occur on the suppletive form *konɛ* to negate *ʔɨjju* which marks Verum Focus.

3.2.4   Subordination

The datapoints provided so far illustrated the phenomenon of Verum Focus in simple sentences. In complex sentences, emphatic *ʔɨjju* can occur in subordinate clauses in the presence of the complementizer *ʔɨlu*, as in (32c), but not in the presence of the complementizer *kɛmzɨ-*, as in (33c).[18]

(32) a.   ʔaman   Tɛsfay   mɛts'ħaf-ti   jɨ-ʃɛyɨt'   ʔɨl-u
          Aman   Tesfay   book.P   S.3MS-sell.IPFV   COMP-S.3MS
          jɨ-ħasɨb
          S.3MS-think.IPFV
          'Aman thinks that Tesfay sells books.'

    b.   ʔaman   Tɛsfay   mɛts'ħaf-ti   jɨ-ʃɛyɨt'   ʔɨl-u
          Aman   Tesfay   book.P   S.3MS-sell.IPFV   COMP-S.3MS
          jɨ-ħasɨb   **ʔɨ-jju**
          S.3MS-think.IPFV   VER-S.3MS
          'Aman **does** think that Tesfay sells books.'

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[18] Note that it is not possible to have both *kɛmzɨ-* and *ʔɨlu* in the same sentence.

c. Ɂaman Tɛsfay mɛts'ħaf-ti ji-ʃɛyɨt' **Ɂɨ-jju**
    Aman Tesfay book.P   S.3MS-sell.IPFV VER-S.3MS
    Ɂɨl-u   ji-ħasɨb
    COMP-S.3MS   S.3MS-think.IPFV
    'Aman thinks that Tesfay **does** sell books.'

(33) a. Ɂaman Tɛsfay mɛts'ħaf-ti kɛmzɨ-ʃɛyɨt'   ji-ħasɨb
          Aman Tesfay book.P   COMP-sell.IPFV.S.3MS S.3MS-think.IPFV
          'Aman thinks that Tesfay sells books.'

  b. Ɂaman Tɛsfay mɛts'ħaf-ti kɛmzɨ-ʃɛyɨt'
      Aman Tesfay book.P   COMP-sell.IPFV.S.3MS
      ji-ħasɨb   **Ɂɨ-jju**
      S.3MS-think.IPFV VER-S.3MS
      'Aman **does** think that Tesfay sells books.'[19]

  c. *Ɂaman Tɛsfay mɛts'ħaf-ti kɛmzɨ-ʃɛyɨt'
      Aman Tesfay book.P   COMP-sell.IPFV.S.3MS
      Ɂɨ-jju   ji-ħasɨb
      VER-S.3MS   S.3MS-think.IPFV
      Intended: 'Aman thinks that Tesfay **does** sell books.'

    Moreover, note that if we add a continuation to the sentence in (32c) such as in (34) in which what Aman thinks is contradicted, the presence of emphatic *Ɂɨjju* is infelicitous.

(34) Ɂaman Tɛsfay mɛts'ħaf-ti ji-ʃɛyɨt' **(*Ɂɨ-jju)** Ɂɨl-u
      Aman Tesfay book.P   S.3MS-sell.IPFV VER-S.3MS   COMP-S.3MS
      ji-ħasɨb,   gɨn Tɛsfay Ɂay-ʃɛyɨt'-n   **Ɂɨ-jju**
      S.3MS-think.IPFV   but Tesfay NEG-S.3MS-sell.IPFV- NEG VER-S.3MS
      Intended: 'Aman thinks that Tesfay **does** sell books, but Tesfay **does**n't sell (books).'

    The reason why emphatic *Ɂɨjju* can occur with *Ɂɨlu* but not with *kɛmzɨ-* will not be accounted for in this paper but will be left to further research. The data above is presented for the sake of completeness.

3.2.5   Questions

This sub-section presents several points with regard to the occurrence of emphatic *Ɂɨjju* in interrogative clauses. Firstly, emphatic *Ɂɨjju* can optionally be suffixed to the interrogative particle *do*. Compare examples (14) in section 2 (repeated below) with examples (35), and example (15) with (36).

(14) tijatɨr   tɨ-fɛttu   do?
      theater S.2MS-like.IPFV   INT
      'Do you like theater?' (also 'Do you LIKE theater?')

---

[19] This example is slightly marginal for certain native speakers (p.c. Nazareth Amlesom Kifle).

(35)   tiɟatir   ti-fɛttu   d-**i-xa?**
theater   S.2MS-like.IPFV   INT-VER-S.2MS
'Do you like theater?' (also 'Do you LIKE theater?')

(15) a. ti-sɛmiʕa-ni   do   Ɂall-ɛxa?
        S.2MS-hear.IPFV-O.1S   INT   BE$_1$.PRES-S.2MS
        'Are you listening to me?'

    b. ti-sɛmiʕa-ni   Ɂall-ɛxa   do?
        S.2MS-hear.IPFV-O.1S   BE$_1$.PRES- S.2MS   INT
        'Are you listening to me?'

(36) a. *ti-sɛmiʕa-ni   d-**i-xa**   Ɂall-ɛxa?
        S.2MS-hear.IPFV-O.1S   INT-VER-S.2MS   BE$_1$.PRES-S.2MS
        Intended: 'Are you listening to me?'

    b. ti-sɛmiʕa-ni   Ɂall-ɛxa   d-**i-xa?**
        S.2MS-hear.IPFV-O.1S   BE$_1$.PRES- S.2MS   INT-VER-S.2MS
        'Are you listening to me?'

Examples (14) and (35), respectively (15) and (36), show that there is no difference in meaning between a sentence with and a sentence without emphatic *Ɂijju*.[20]

       Secondly, emphatic *Ɂijju* cannot appear in *wh*-questions (like the particle *do*, cf. (17) in section 2). This is illustrated in (37).

(37) a. *Ɂintay   bɛliɛ-xa   **Ɂi-xa?**
        what   eat.GER-S.2MS   VER-S.2MS
        Intended: 'What did you eat, indeed?'

    b. *Ɂintay   bɛliɛ-xa   d-**i-xa?**
        what   eat.GER-S.2MS   INT-VER-S.2MS
        Intended: 'What did you eat, indeed?'

       Thirdly, if emphatic *Ɂijju* is present in a question, it is obligatorily (for most speakers) present in the answer, as shown in (39).

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[20] Note that if a speaker utters the questions in (35) and (36b) with a raising pitch accent, their goal is to receive an information (the answer to the question). However, if a speaker utters the questions with a falling pitch accent, their goal is still to receive an information, but also to show that they think the opposite of what they are asking to be true (I thank an anonymous reviewer who pointed out that this phenomenon is known in the literature as *negative bias*).

    Note also that a somewhat similar effect is obtained in Italian by the insertion of the adverb *davvero* in a question, as illustrated in (ii) below.

(ii) a. ti   piac-e   davvero   il   teatro?
        DAT.2S   like.PRES.S.3MS   indeed, really   DET.MS   theater
        'Do you **really** like theater?'

    b. mi   sent-i   davvero?
        DAT.1S   hear.PRES.S.2M   indeed, really
        'Are you **really** hearing me?'

However, as pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, *davvero* may license negative bias, but does not have to.

(38)　Q:　Tɛsfay　　ʔaħmilti　　ji-bɛlʕ　　　　do?
　　　　　Tesfay　　vegetables　S.3MS-eat.IPFV　INT
　　　　　'Does Tesfay eat vegetables?'

　　A:　Ewe,　Tɛsfay　ʔaħmilti　ji-bɛlʕ　　　　(ʔi-jju)
　　　　yes　Tesfay　vegetables　S.3MS-eat.IPFV　VER-S.3MS
　　　　'Yes, Tesfay eats/(does eat) vegetables.'

(39)　Q:　Tɛsfay　　ʔaħmilti　　ji-bɛlʕ　　　d-**i-jju**?
　　　　　Tesfay　　vegetables　S.3MS-eat.IPFV　INT-VER-S.3MS
　　　　　'Does Tesfay eat indeed vegetables?'

　　A:　Ewe,　Tɛsfay　ʔaħmilti　ji-bɛlʕ　　　　*(**ʔi-jju**)
　　　　yes　Tesfay　vegetables　S.3MS-eat.IPFV　VER-S.3MS
　　　　'Yes, Tesfay **does** eat vegetables.'

Lastly, notice that emphatic *ʔijju* cannot be used alone to answer a question, such as those in (14), (15), (35), (36).

(40)　A:　*ʔi-jjɛ
　　　　　VER-S.1S
　　　　　Intended: 'I **do**.'

This contrasts with emphatic *do* in English which can be used to answer a question alone (with a VP ellipsis), as shown in the translation of (40) above.
　　　　Moreover, (15a,b) show that the *do* particle can appear before and after the progressive auxiliary *ʔallɛxa*, whereas *do*+VER, as in (36a,b) can only appear after it. *do*+VER can appear before the auxiliary, only if it is prefixed by the relative marker (which Cacchioli 2023 takes to be a morphological reflex of successive-cyclic movement) *zi-*, as in (41) below.[21]

(41)　ti-sɛmiʕa-ni　　　　　d-**i-xa**　　　z-ɛll-ɛxa?
　　　S.2MS-hear.IPFV-O.1S　INT-VER-S.2MS　REL-BE$_1$.PRES- S.2MS
　　　'Are you listening to me?'

The sentence above is structurally similar to an English cleft and could probably be interpreted as meaning something like *Is (it) listening to me that you are (doing)?*.

3.2.6　　Verum Focus v. Contrastive Focus

As shown in section 3.2.1, emphatic *ʔijju* is always found in final position, namely at the edge of the matrix or embedded clause (except when appearing with *do*, as discussed in the

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[21] On the one hand, according to my informants there is no difference in meaning between (41) and (36b) and (15). However, I am fully aware that there must be a subtler difference between these sentences that cannot be grasped by naïve native speakers.
　　　　On the other hand, if Verum Focus emphasizes or reverses the truth value of a proposition, then we could ask what it means, semantically, to have it in an interrogative clause (that is not true or false).

previous section). However, as a matter of fact, the element *ʔijju* can be also found in another position: let us consider (42) below.

(42) a. dmu   **ʔi-jjɛ**   riɛj-ɛ
          cat   VER-S.1S   see.GER-S.1S
          'I saw A CAT (not a dog).'

    b. ʔit-a   mɛts'ħaf   **ʔi-xa**   hibka-jo
        DEM-FS   book   VER-S.2MS   give.GER-S.2MS-O.3MS
        'You gave him THE BOOK (not the bottle).'

    c. ʔiz-a   gʷal   **ʔi-jjɛ**   ji-fɛlt'-a
        PROX-FS   girl   VER-S.1S   S.1S-know.IPFV-O.3FS
        'I know THIS GIRL (not this boy).'

When *ʔijju* appears on the left the verb (and not in final position) it expresses Contrastive Focus.[22] More specifically, this element is right adjacent to the focalized element in the sentence. Note that this behavior is similar to that of the interrogative particle *do*, as discussed in section 2.

Emphatic *ʔijju* can also express Exhaustive Focus in clauses containing the focal particle *only* as in (43) - and in what resembles English cleft clauses - as in (44).

(43) ʔanɛ   t'ray   **ʔi-jjɛ**   zi-sɛmiʕ-ɛ-ka
      I   only   VER-S.1S   REL-hear.GER-S.1S-O.2MS
      'I am the only one who heard you.'

(44) n-Tɛklɛ   **ʔi-jjom**   zi-dɛli-u   z-ɛll-ɛwu
      DOM-Tekle VER-S.3MP   REL-search.IPFV-S.3MP   REL-BE$_1$.PRES-S.3MP
      'It is Tekle that they are looking for.'

As the examples above show, emphatic *ʔijju* does not only mark Verum Focus, but also Contrastive and Exhaustive Focus.

With all the morphological and syntactic properties presented in the previous sections, we can now turn to the syntactic derivation of the phenomenon.

4. The syntax of emphatic *ʔijju*

The previous sections provided a description of the use and distribution of emphatic *ʔijju* in Tigrinya. It is now time to provide a (tentative) analysis of the phenomenon.

We have seen that the element *ʔijju* has several functions in Tigrinya: it is the copula in the context of individual-level predicates, it is used to construct the future tense[23]

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[22] Cf. Zellou (2010) for a more detailed discussion of this particular phenomenon.

[23] In Cacchioli (in preparation) I suggest that the future construction in Tigrinya such as (13), repeated below, is a control construction that could literally be translated in English with *Tesfay is (about) to eat vegetables*. This would mean that in this case *ʔijju* has the function of a copula.
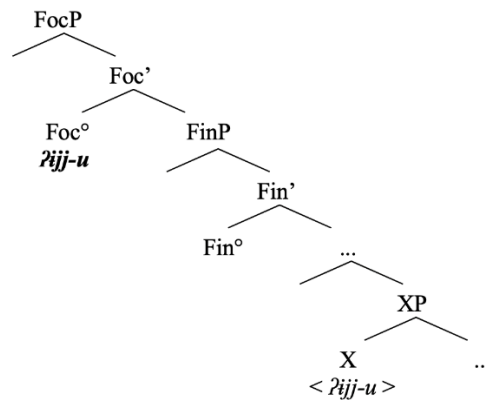
(13) Tɛsfay   ʔaħmilti   ki-bɛlʕi   ʔi-jju
      Tesfay   vegetables   COMP-eat.IPFV.S.3MS   BE2.PRES-S.3MS
      'Tesfay will eat vegetables.'

and it marks Verum Focus. Leaving the two first functions aside for the time being, the question that comes to mind is: what is *ʔijju*? To which syntactic category does it belong? Is it a verb or a complementizer?[24]

I claim that because its morphological form is identical to one of the two copulas (cf. section 3.1.1) and, especially, because it obligatorily agrees with the subject of the sentence (cf. section 3.1.2), emphatic *ʔijju* must be a verb. In simpler terms, emphatic *ʔijju* and the copula *ʔijju* are the same element (and not two different elements that are coincidentally morphologically identical). However, because of its function of conveying Verum Focus (a discourse-related property) it must be associated in one way or another to the Focus projection (Jackendoff 1972 and subsequent work) found in the C° domain or Left Periphery. Moreover, the fact that the distributional properties of emphatic *ʔijju* differ from those of verbs when marking Contrastive Focus (namely that it is not found in final position) is a second piece of evidence in support of the idea that this verb must have moved from its first merge position low in the structure. Thus, I claim that a sentence where emphatic *ʔijju* appears - such as the one below in (46a) (example (1b) in the introduction) - is a mono-clausal construction in which *ʔijju* merges as a verb/copula in a verbal projection (either vP, VP, PredP, but XP for now[25]). In this position it is able to get subject agreement. Then, it moves higher in the structure to be able to mark Verum Focus.

Where does *ʔijju* land? And how can we account for the word order in (46a)? I suggest - taking a split-CP approach à la Rizzi (1997) - that *ʔijju* lands in the head of a Focus projection right above FinP and acts as a probe attracting focalized constituents, as represented in (45). I take an LCA approach to head-finality (Kayne 1994).

(45)

```
              FocP
               |
              Foc'
             /    \
          Foc°    FinP
         ʔijj-u     |
                   Fin'
                  /    \
                Fin°    ...
                       /   \
                            XP
                           /  \
                          X    ...
                      < ʔijj-u >
```

Note that a similar analysis was also put forth in Höhle (1992) and Lohnstein (2014). In the first work, Höhle claims that the head of a left peripheral φP projection, merged right above FinP, carries a feature [+VER] (Lohnstein 2014, 294). This head position can be filled by either complementizers or finite verbs (in German). The second work builds on Höhle's analysis and replaces the φP projection with MoodP, claiming that the relevant feature is Focus, not Verum (Lohnstein 2014, 296).

More specifically, when *ʔijju* marks Verum Focus, it encodes focus "on the [affirmative] polarity of the sentence" (Breithbarth, De Clercq and Haegeman 2013) and
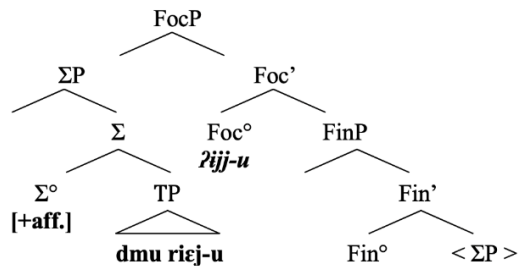
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[24] For example, in Gbe the particle/complementizer *wé* marks Focus (Aboh 1999).
[25] I take this XP to be higher than the lexical verb.

thus attracts a lower projection ΣP[26] (Laka 1993) - headed by an empty affirmative morpheme and containing the rest of the clause - in its specifier (ending up in final position), as shown in (46) below.[27]

(46) a. dmu   riɛj-u   **ʔijju**
          cat   see.GER-S.3MS   VER-S.3MS
          'He **did** see a cat.'

b.

```
                        FocP
                     /        \
                  ΣP            Foc'
               /      \       /      \
                      Σ      Foc°      FinP
                   /    \    ʔijj-u   /     \
                 Σ°     TP                  Fin'
               [+aff.]  dmu riɛj-u        /      \
                                        Fin°    < ΣP >
```
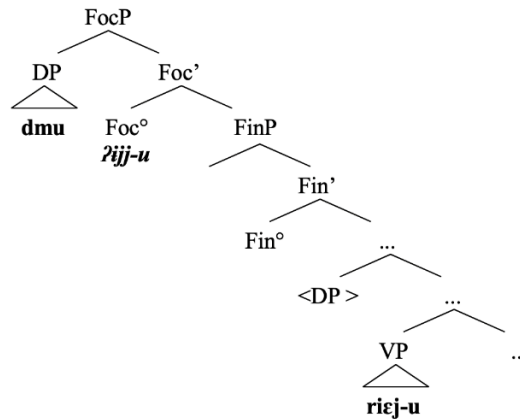
Whereas, in the case of Contrastive and Exhaustive Focus, *ʔijju* encodes focus on a different constituent than ΣP (i.e. a DP) that it attracts to Spec,FocP (ending up adjacent to and on the right of it), as illustrated in (47). In this case ΣP is not merged in the structure.

(47) a. dmu   **ʔi-jju**   riɛj-u
          cat   VER-S.3MS   see.GER-S.3MS
          'I saw A CAT (not a dog).'

b.

```
                    FocP
                  /      \
               DP         Foc'
              dmu       /      \
                     Foc°       FinP
                     ʔijj-u    /    \
                               Fin'
                             /      \
                          Fin°       ...
                                   /     \
                               <DP>       ...
                                        /     \
                                      VP       ...
                                    riɛj-u
```

This analysis clarifies several points. Firstly, merging *ʔijju* low in the structure explains why it agrees with the subject of the sentence. In fact, if it were directly merged in the left periphery, we would not be able to explain how it gets agreement.

Secondly, claiming that *ʔijju* moves to the Foc° head explains why *ʔijju* is suffixed and not prefixed to the *do* particle (cf. example (35) in section 3.2.5). In fact, I suggest that

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[26] Also PolP for Lipták (2013).
[27] Cacchioli (2023) proposes a syntactic analysis of declarative clauses in Tigrinya.

this interrogative particle is merged in the Int° projection (Rizzi 2001) and therefore placed higher than *ʔɨjju*. As a consequence, being placed hierarchically lower than *do*, *ʔɨjju* can only be suffixed to it.

Lastly, suggesting that *ʔɨjju* lands in Foc° clarifies why it cannot occur in a *wh*-question (cf. example (37) in section 3.2.5): a *wh*-element (carrying a [Q] feature) is in complementary distribution with a Foc° head (Rizzi and Cinque 2016, 146).

We have seen that this analysis can account for several phenomena concerning emphatic *ʔɨjju*. Now, before concluding, I would like to briefly address some other issues that were identified in the data in section 3. Firstly, in section 3.2.2, I showed that emphatic *ʔɨjju* cannot appear with the copula *ʔɨjju* - cf. example (24) - and the copula *ʔallo* - cf. example (25). This could be simply the result of morphological haplology (Stemberger 1981; cf. also Kramer 2023 on haplology in Amharic): in the case of the cooccurrence of emphatic *ʔɨjju* and the copula *ʔɨjju* because these elements are actually the same element, and in the case of the cooccurrence of emphatic *ʔɨjju* and the copula *ʔallo* because these elements are both *present* tense copulas. It is not surprising then that emphatic *ʔɨjju* is predictably compatible with a *past* tense copula such as *neyru* - cf. (28) - and a modal auxiliary such as *tɨxɨwwɨn* - cf. (29).

In the same section, I also showed that emphatic *ʔɨjju* cannot cooccur with the progressive auxiliary *ʔallo* - cf. (26). On the one hand, this could be explained in prosodic terms. In English, for example, emphatic *do* cannot appear in a sentence in progressive (**We do are eating injera*). It has been claimed that this is because emphatic *do* is prosodically prominent and finite auxiliaries realize affirmative morphemes which are also prosodically prominent (Wilder 2013). There is therefore a clash in the derivation, probably at spell-out. On the other hand, this could also be explained in syntactic terms. In English, emphatic *do* (like *do*-support) can only appear in a sentence when there are no auxiliaries. This is because, presumably, auxiliaries in English move to T° and this would be the first merge position of emphatic *do*. We could extend this to Tigrinya and claim that when progressive auxiliary *ʔallo* is present there is "no space" for emphatic *ʔɨjju*. But then how can we account for the fact that emphatic *ʔɨjju* can occur with the auxiliaries *neyru* and *tɨxɨwwɨn*? This will be left to further research.

Finally, what needs to still be explained is the fact that emphatic *ʔɨjju* can occur in subordinate clauses in the presence of the complementizer *ʔɨlu*, but not in the presence of the complementizer *kɛmzɨ-*. I also leave this issue to future investigations (cf. Cacchioli in preparation).

5. Conclusions

In this short paper I have shown that Tigrinya possesses a phonologically overt element that marks Verum Focus. This marker morphologically corresponds to the element *ʔɨjju*, also used in this language as a copula in the context of individual-level predicates and to construct future tense. I have further shown that this marker is also used to convey other focus meanings, namely Contrastive and Exhaustive Focus.

To explain the data and the behavior of emphatic *ʔɨjju*, an attempt at a preliminary analysis was made. I suggested that *ʔɨjju* is a verbal head that raises to the left periphery and lands in Foc°: it attracts to its specifier either the entire sentence (in the case of Verum Focus) or a single constituent (in the case of Contrastive/Exhaustive Focus).

To conclude, future research will need to provide a more comprehensive analysis and, also, a comparison will need to be drawn between Tigrinya and other Ethio-Semitic

languages. Consider for example the following sentences in Amharic, (48), and Zay, (49), below.

(48) yəhən wät' man särraw? əne **nänn-a**
      stew this who cooked I BE.PRES-S.1S
      'Who cooked this stew?' 'I, of course'
(from Leslau 1995, 272)

(49) it wot'i särətə-**n**-u
      she sauce made- BE.PRES-DCM
      'She [did] prepare[] sauce.'
(from Crass et al. 2005, 25,(71))

The Amharic and Zay datapoints above are strikingly similar to the data in Tigrinya: in these languages a copular element also seems to have the function of marking Verum Focus.

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