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The morphosyntactic integration of English words into Afaan Oromoo

1. Introduction

Ethiopia is one of Africa’s most linguistically diverse nations, home to over 80 languages spoken by over 100 million people (Ado et al., 2021; Meyer et al., 2023). These languages span the Afroasiatic, Nilo-Saharan, and Omotic families, creating a rich environment for multilingual interaction. Among them, Afaan Oromoo — a Cushitic language — is the most widely spoken indigenous language, serving as a primary means of communication for a substantial portion of the population. Amharic, a Semitic language, holds official federal working language status and has historically played a dominant role in government, national media, and education. It remains a widely used lingua franca across many urban and multiethnic settings in Ethiopia. English is Ethiopia’s primary international and educational language, introduced from early schooling and used extensively in secondary and tertiary education, media, and administration (Heugh et al., 2007). Many Ethiopians are multilingual. This study will focus on data from speakers of Afaan Oromoo who also speak English and, in many cases, Amharic.

The multilingual environment has led to frequent linguistic contact, especially among educated bilinguals, where English lexical items are commonly embedded into Afaan Oromoo speech. Such insertions typically occur in informal settings — conversations at universities, in offices, or among friends — and raise questions about grammatical integration and syntactic dominance in bilingual discourse. Understanding how these insertions are structured within host-language clauses requires an analytical framework capable of accounting for morphosyntactic asymmetries.

One of the most widely applied models for such analysis is Myers-Scotton’s Matrix Language Frame (MLF) model (1993, 2002, 2006), which posits that in

mixed-language utterances, the Matrix Language (ML) provides the morphosyntactic frame — such as word order and system morphemes — while the Embedded Language (EL) contributes content morphemes like nouns and verbs. Crucially, these content morphemes from the EL are morphologically integrated into the ML, adapting to its inflectional patterns through processes like affixation and agreement. This means that even when English lexical items are inserted into Afaan Oromoo, they behave grammatically according to the rules of Afaan Oromoo.

Myers-Scotton (2002) further refines the MLF framework with the 4-M model, which classifies morphemes based on their function in clause structure. In particular, it distinguishes system morphemes — those that reflect grammatical relations and structure — from content morphemes, which carry semantic content. Among system morphemes, late outsider morphemes — such as subject–verb agreement markers — are rarely transferred from the EL and are considered reliable indicators of the Matrix Language. These insights provide a theoretical foundation for the current study, which investigates the morphosyntactic integration of English content morphemes into Afaan Oromoo clauses, testing the predictive power of the MLF and 4-M models in this understudied bilingual context.

The model has been validated across various language pairs, including Swahili–English (Myers-Scotton, 1993), Turkish–Dutch (Backus, 1998), and Welsh–English (Deuchar, 2006), but has not yet been systematically applied to Afaan Oromoo–English bilingual conversations. Given the typological differences between these two languages and the sociolinguistic context in which they are spoken, the application of the MLF model in this setting offers important theoretical and empirical insights.

This paper builds on such frameworks by analysing the morphosyntactic integration of English words into Afaan Oromoo, focusing on word order and grammatical morphology. Rather than treating structural differences in abstraction, the paper explores how these differences play out in actual bilingual utterances.

Key to glosses: *1/2/3PL* – first/second/third person plural; *1/2/3SL* – first/second/third person singular; *POSS* – possessive pronoun; *DET* – determiner; *DAT* – dative; *ACCO* – accusative; *Q* – question mark; *ART* – article; *NEG* – negative/negative particle; *IMPV* – imperfect verb; *IMPV* – imperative verb; *PRV* – perfective verb; *CNV* – converb; *FOC* – focus marker; *COP* – copula; *NOM* – nominative marker; *LOC* – locative marker; *M* – male; *F* – female; *Pass* – passive marker. Additionally, Afaan Oromoo words appear in standard font, English words **in bold** with @eng, and Amharic words *in italics* with @amh.

(1) Kun **file**@eng -tti hidh -am -a.
This file -LOC tie -PASS -IMPV
'This is tied to a file.'

In Example 1, the English noun *file* is inserted into an otherwise grammatical Afaan Oromoo clause. It appears with the locative case marker *-tti*, showing that the English item is not merely borrowed but integrated into the morphosyntactic system of Afaan Oromoo. Such examples illustrate how English insertions are adapted to the matrix language structure using case markers, verbal morphology, and word order.

Drawing on two informal audio conversations among bilingual speakers in Dambi Dollo, Western Ethiopia, the study seeks to demonstrate that despite frequent English insertions, the grammatical integrity of Afaan Oromoo remains intact. The core research questions guiding this investigation are:

1. How are English lexical items morphosyntactically integrated into Afaan Oromoo speech?
2. Does Afaan Oromoo retain syntactic and morphological dominance in clauses with English insertions?

2. General contexts of Afaan Oromoo and English in Ethiopia

2.1. Afaan Oromoo

Afaan Oromoo, which is translated as *the Oromo language* in that language itself, appears under various alternative spellings in the literature, including *Oromo*, *Oromic*, and *Oromiffa* (Bulcha, 1997, p. 326; Alemayehu–Mawadza, 2017, p. 1; Eberhard et al., 2020; Youssouf, 2024). It is a member of the Lowland East Cushitic branch of the Afroasiatic language family and is classified as a macro language, encompassing a wide range of dialects. Predominantly spoken in Ethiopia, Afaan Oromoo is officially coded as *orm* under the ISO 639-3 standard, which assigns unique three-letter identifiers to languages for consistent referencing in linguistic documentation and technological applications. While recent national census data is unavailable, the former Central Statistics Agency reported that approximately 34% of Ethiopia's population spoke Afaan Oromoo as their first language (CSA, 2012). More recent estimates from Ethnologue suggest a speaker population of around 45.5 million, reinforcing its status as the most widely spoken language in Ethiopia and neighbouring countries (Eberhard et al., 2020).

The speakers, who identify as Oromo, refer to their language as *Afaan Oromoo*, which is translated as "Mouth of the Oromo" and metaphorically as "Oromo Language" (Ali–Zaborski, 1990; Alemayehu–Mawadza, 2017, p. 1). In academic usage, we follow the community's convention by referring to the language as *Afaan Oromoo*, its speakers as *Oromo*, and *Oromia* as the regional state. However, it is important to note that in many English-language publications, the term *Oromo* is used interchangeably to refer to both the people and the language (Wakweya, 2017). Afaan Oromoo includes several major

dialects, such as Mecha (West), Tulama (Central), Qottu (East), Borana (South), and Rayya (North) (Alemayehu–Mawadza, 2017). For this study, we focus on the Mecha dialect spoken in western Oromia, particularly in the Kellem Wallaga zone. As Wakweya (2017) provides a detailed analysis of inflectional morphology in Mecha Oromo, showing that nouns, pronouns, verbs, and adjectives are richly inflected for grammatical categories such as number, gender, case, aspect, mood, voice, and agreement, confirming Afaan Oromoo as a fusional language. While earlier studies often assumed mutual intelligibility among Afaan Oromoo dialects (for example, Ali–Zaborski, 1990, p. IX), more recent scholarship provides a nuanced view. Banti and Mazengia (2023), in their chapter in *The Handbook of Ethiopian Languages*, emphasise that mutual intelligibility among dialects is not uniform but varies based on geographical proximity and sociolinguistic exposure. For example, speakers of neighbouring Western varieties (e.g., Mecha and Leqa) generally understand each other, whereas communication across geographically distant dialects, such as Mecha and Harar Oromo, can be significantly hindered. Thus, blanket statements about uniform intelligibility are misleading: Afaan Oromoo is best seen as a dialectal spectrum, and mutual intelligibility varies by distance and exposure (Banti–Mazengia, 2023).

The choice of the Mecha dialect is motivated by a combination of factors. As a native speaker of this variety, the first author of this study is particularly interested in examining its specific linguistic features, which are under-represented in linguistic research. This familiarity allows for a more nuanced and in-depth analysis of the data. Moreover, studying the Mecha dialect offers insights into the internal variation within Afaan Oromoo and contributes to a broader understanding of its dialectal landscape.

Historically marginalised, Afaan Oromoo gained official status after the 1995 constitution of Ethiopia, which has led to its increasing use in education and media. The language has been granted official status as one of the official languages of the Ethiopian Federal Government, alongside Amharic, Tigrinya, and Somali, and is used in administration within the Oromia region and other Kamise zones in the Amhara Regional State (Adamu, 2013, p. 22; Bulcha, 1997). This reflects Ethiopia's broader constitutional commitment to linguistic equality and its recognition of all local languages (Ado et al., 2021). In educational settings within Oromia, Afaan Oromoo is the medium of instruction, with curricula and textbooks developed in the language. This integration into the educational system reflects efforts to promote the language and ensure its continued use among younger generations. Walga (2021) further indicates that the academic status of Afaan Oromoo has significantly advanced, particularly within major public universities — including Addis Ababa University, Jimma University, Haramaya University, and Wollega University — beginning to offer undergraduate and

graduate programmes in Afaan Oromoo. More recently, doctoral (PhD) programmes have been established at Addis Ababa University and Wollega University in Afaan Oromoo (Walga, 2021; cf. Chali–Parapatics, 2024). The implementation of Afaan Oromoo into higher education represents a critical step in the institutionalisation of the language, ensuring its development not only as a medium of instruction but also as a subject of scholarly research and intellectual production. This linguistic reality forms the broader sociolinguistic context in which this study of Afaan Oromoo–English code-switching is situated.

Furthermore, Afaan Oromoo has a significant presence in media, including radio, television, and print, which plays a crucial role in maintaining and expanding the language's reach (Adamu, 2013; Woldemariam–Lanza, 2014; Wakjira–Shiferaw, 2023). However, its prominence varies across different regions of Ethiopia, where it often competes for visibility and influence with Amharic, a Semitic language that historically served as the sole official language of the federal government and remains a dominant lingua franca across much of the regions. Amharic continues to function as the working language of several regional states and major urban centres, and it maintains a strong institutional presence in national media, administration, and education (Ado et al., 2021; cf. Chali–Parapatics, 2024). This widespread usage gives Amharic a symbolic and practical prominence that sometimes overshadows other Ethiopian languages, including Afaan Oromoo.

Although Afaan Oromoo has gained formal recognition and increasing institutional support, it continues to face challenges such as limited standardisation, uneven resource allocation, and marginalisation in federal institutions (Midega, 2014; Jibril, 2024). Nonetheless, the language's sociolinguistic presence has expanded due to internal migration, which has increased the demand for Afaan Oromoo in urban centres like Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa (Bulcha, 1997). Including Afaan Oromoo in federal media platforms like the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation has enhanced its national visibility (Gerencheal–Mishra, 2019).

2.2. English in Ethiopia

Though Ethiopia was never fully colonised, English plays a significant role in education, media, and international communication. Introduced during the British occupation (1941–1944), English became the dominant language in higher education and business (Gerencheal–Mishra, 2019). Its continued prestige, especially in academic and global contexts, drives the frequent use of English among bilingual speakers. Ethiopia's unique position in African colonial history, as one of the few countries to resist Western colonisation, has shaped its linguistic landscape. While Ethiopia was not colonised, it experienced significant Italian and British influence, indirectly impacting its language policies (Leyew, 2012).

According to Gerencheal and Mishra (2019), the Italian occupation (1936–1941) and the subsequent British administration (1941–1944) introduced European languages and educational systems to Ethiopia. However, these colonial influences did not lead to the establishment of English as a primary language (Bachore, 2015). Nonetheless, English has since emerged as the principal medium of instruction at the tertiary level and is widely regarded as essential for academic and professional advancement in Ethiopia.

This development reflects a broader trend identified by scholars such as Coleman (2011), Eshetie (2010), Ngatu (2018), and Xhemaili (2022), who argue that English functions as a *lingua franca* within Ethiopia's educational and professional spheres. It facilitates access to global knowledge and participation in international networks (Ngatu, 2018, p. 89; Gerencheal–Mishra, 2019, pp. 1432–1433).

English is introduced in grade one in the Ethiopian school system, underscoring its significance in higher education. Although Amharic remains the official working language of the nation, English occupies a prominent — albeit unofficial — role across multiple sectors. This historical context is crucial for understanding the current status of English in Ethiopia, as it highlights the intricate interplay between historical legacies and evolving national identity.

Educational reforms aimed at integrating Ethiopia into the global economy have further shaped the role of English in Ethiopia. As discussed by Gerencheal and Mishra (2019), recent reforms have emphasised the importance of English for international competitiveness and global engagement. As these scholars outlined further, the increasing globalisation of Ethiopia's economy and society has amplified the demand for English proficiency, aligning with broader trends observed in other developing countries. Ethiopia's role in international organisations, particularly the African Union (AU), headquartered in Addis Ababa, underscores the significance of English in diplomatic and international contexts (Leyew, 2012, p. 20). English is often used as the working language in such forums, reflecting its importance in global diplomacy (Coleman, 2011; Xhemaili, 2022, p. 323). Furthermore, the influence of international development agencies and NGOs, predominantly in English, highlights the language's role in development and humanitarian efforts (Eshetie, 2010, p. 8; Leyew, 2012, p. 22).

In the media landscape, English plays a prominent role. English-language newspapers, such as the "Ethiopian Reporter", "Addis Fortune", "Jimma Times", and "The Ethiopian Herald", cater to a segment of the Ethiopian population that is proficient in English (Coleman, 2011, p. 5). Moreover, radio and television channels often use English to reach international audiences and educated Ethiopians (Bachore, 2015, pp. 186–188). The dominance of English in digital platforms and communication technologies further emphasises its role in connecting Ethiopia with global trends and information (cf. Leyew, 2012).

2.3. Previous studies on morphosyntactic integration

The morphosyntactic integration of embedded language elements into the structural framework of a matrix language has been a central topic in code-switching research. The Matrix Language Frame (MLF) model (Myers-Scotton, 1993, 2002) and the related 4-M model (Myers-Scotton–Jake, 2000) provide the primary theoretical framework for understanding how such integration occurs. In this model, the Matrix Language (ML) supplies the morphosyntactic structure of a bilingual clause, including word order, system morphemes, and agreement markers, while the Embedded Language (EL) contributes lexical (content) morphemes such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Morphosyntactic integration is achieved when embedded items fit into the grammatical structure of the matrix language and are governed by its morphosyntactic rules.

Empirical studies across a range of typologically diverse languages have supported this model. In their analysis of Pashto–English code-switching, Khan and Khalid (2017) demonstrate that English verbs and nouns are morphosyntactically integrated into Pashto through light verb constructions and inflectional morphology provided by Pashto. English verbs where the Pashto verb supplies tense and agreement markers. The matrix language, Pashto, retains control over grammatical inflections and morpheme order, confirming the predictions of the MLF model.

Similarly, Deuchar (2006), in her study of Welsh–English code-switching, shows that Welsh provides the morphosyntactic frame into which English content morphemes are inserted. English nouns frequently appear with Welsh determiners, and the overall clause structure conforms to Welsh syntax. In her later position paper (Deuchar, 2020), she reaffirms that inflection on a finite verb indicates the matrix language in a code-switched clause.

Akinrẹmi (2016) provides additional support for these principles through his investigation of Igbo–English code-switching. In his data, English verbs are fully integrated only after receiving Igbo tense and aspect morphology, behaving like native verbs within the Igbo grammatical system. All system morphemes, including negation verb suffixes, come from Igbo, and the morpheme order follows Igbo syntax, confirming that structural integration is governed by the matrix language.

In a study of Cree–English intrasentential code-switching, Al-Bataineh and Abdelhady (2019) found that Cree provides the morphosyntactic frame for almost all bilingual clauses. English elements mostly act as content morphemes, while Cree provides all the system morphemes, such as case and agreement affixes. Their in-depth study supports the Matrix Language Frame model's predictions, especially the Morpheme Order and System Morpheme Principles. It

also shows that structural integration is not equal, with system morphemes always coming from the matrix language.

These studies provide strong comparative evidence for the systematic and rule-governed nature of the morphosyntactic integration of items from the embedded language in bilingual speech. They collectively demonstrate that in code-switching contexts involving a morphologically rich matrix language, embedded English items are structurally subordinate and integrated into the matrix language's grammatical framework. The present study builds on these findings. Given that Afaan Oromoo is an agglutinative language with complex verbal morphology, case marking, and verb-final word order, it is expected to function as the matrix language. This study examines how English lexical items are integrated into the morphosyntactic structure of Afaan Oromoo in spontaneous conversation, with particular attention to word order, system morphemes, and agreement — the same features found to determine integration in the reviewed studies.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

The data analysed in this study were from two informal, naturally occurring conversations among multilingual speakers in Dambi Dollo, a town in Western Ethiopia where Afaan Oromoo is the primary language of daily communication. This study employed a social network approach (Milroy, 1987) to recruit participants, ensuring a diverse sample representing various social and occupational backgrounds. Speakers, aged 20 to 40, included government employees, students, and local community members. All participants spoke the Macca Oromo dialect of Afaan Oromoo and had lived in the Kellem Wollega Zone for over 20 years. The participants were fluent in Afaan Oromoo, and most had at least basic competence in English and Amharic. These conversations occurred in semi-public settings such as school recreational areas, local cafés, and workspaces.

The two audio recordings analysed totalled approximately 90 minutes of informal speech. The recordings were transcribed. The analysis focused on bilingual clauses where English words were inserted into otherwise Afaan Oromoo utterances. The remainder of the data was largely monolingual (in Afaan Oromoo) and is not the focus of this analysis.

For this paper, only clauses containing English insertions were extracted for analysis, as they provide insight into how English lexical items are morphosyntactically integrated into the host language. These instances of switching are primarily intra-clausal, involving the insertion of English lexical

items into single clauses that are otherwise made up of material in Afaan Oromoo. Amharic insertions have not been analysed here.

Languages marking in the transcriptions used the following conventions: words in Afaan Oromoo were rendered in standard font; English words were transcribed in bold and tagged as *@eng*, while Amharic words were italicised and tagged as *@amh*. Each example was glossed with detailed syntactic information, including grammatical features such as tense, aspect, and number.

The data analysis process involved breaking down the utterances into clauses, which were the main focus for figuring out the Matrix Language, based on the Matrix Language Frame (MLF) model created by Myers-Scotton (2002) and explained further by Deuchar (2006). Each clause was examined to determine its linguistic composition and was classified as monolingual (Afaan Oromoo, Amharic, or English); bilingual (Afaan Oromoo–English or Afaan Oromoo–Amharic); or trilingual, in cases where elements from all three languages occurred within the same clause. This classification was systematically recorded in an Excel spreadsheet, which included interlinear glosses and English translations for reference. We counted how often each type of clause — monolingual, bilingual, or trilingual — appeared and looked at how the different languages were used in the dataset. This numeric breakdown complements the qualitative analysis by revealing patterns of language dominance, thereby facilitating a more detailed application of the MLF model to the multilingual interactions observed in the data.

3.2. Distinguishing code-switching from loanwords/borrowing

It is crucial to establish clear criteria for differentiating between lexical loanwords or borrowings and single-word switches to analyse language contact accurately. We have included single-word switches and differentiated them from loanwords based on their predictability (Pieter, 2000, p. 71; cf. Deuchar, 2006). This predictability is associated with "listedness", which indicates how well an element is incorporated into the vocabulary of monolingual speakers. We relied on established dictionaries, particularly the "Elellee Bilingual Afaan Oromoo and English Dictionary", to assess borrowing versus switches. If an English-origin term is included in a recognised Afaan Oromoo dictionary, the term is classified as a loan or borrowed; if absent, it is treated as a switch. We recognise that this approach may be somewhat arbitrary, as dictionaries may not fully reflect current usage, leading to potential misclassifications. In the context of this study, we aim to identify the matrix language in code-switching instances between Afaan Oromoo and English.

4. Analysis

4.1. Morphosyntactic differences between Afaan Oromoo and English

This section outlines key morphosyntactic contrasts between Afaan Oromoo and English, emphasising the key structural features of Afaan Oromoo as a Matrix Language (ML). Based on data from the audio conversation used in the current study, this analysis focuses on word order and system morphemes, which are central to the Matrix Language Frame (MLF) model (Myers-Scotton, 1993, 2002; Myers-Scotton–Jake, 2000).

Afaan Oromoo follows a basic Subject–Object–Verb (SOV) word order, while English adheres to Subject–Verb–Object (SVO). This contrast becomes particularly salient in bilingual clauses, where the matrix language usually determines the syntactic structure of the entire clause, regardless of inserted elements (see Example 2). However, the data also reveals alternative structures. In some declarative clauses, the object can appear in the initial position, where the object is fronted for topicalisation or emphasis. This object-initial construction, while marked, is pragmatically motivated and aligns with information structures (see Examples 3 and 7). Similarly, in imperative clauses, object-initial constructions are more common and functionally motivated (see Example 8). Recognising these structural variations is crucial in analysing bilingual clauses, as the matrix language imposes morphosyntactic constraints and influences pragmatic structuring in clause construction. The following monolingual and bilingual examples illustrate this contrast:

(2) Nam-ni amantii isaa sodaat-a. (Maccaa-OC01 EYN 544)
Man-NOM religion his fear -IMP
'Man fears his religion.'

(3) Amma ijoollee **batch**@eng keenyaa yoo gaafatt -ee…
Now children batch our if ask -2P. CONV
'Now, if you ask the students of our batch.' (Maccaa-OC016 BOO 307)

In Example 2, the monolingual clauses *Nam-ni amantii isaa sodaat-a* in Afaan Oromoo and its translation *Man fears his religion* in English highlight significant morphosyntactic differences rooted in the typological properties of the two languages. The structure of the Afaan Oromoo clause follows a Subject–Object–Verb (SOV) word order. The subject *nam-ni* ('man') is marked with the nominative case marker *-ni*. The object *amantii isaa* ('his religion') consists of the noun *amantii* ('religion') followed by the third-person masculine possessive pronoun *isaa* ('his'), reflecting a post-nominal possessive structure. The verb *sodaat-a* ('[he] fears') appears at the end of the clause and carries agreement morphology, with the suffix *-a* marking third person masculine singular

imperfective aspect. In contrast, the English clause *Man fears his religion* exhibits a Subject–Verb–Object (SVO) word order. The subject *man* is uninflected for case, and the object *his religion* employs a pre-nominal possessive construction, where the possessive pronoun *his* precedes the noun. The verb *fears* agrees with the third-person singular subject by taking the inflection *-s*. These differences in word order, possession structures, and subject–verb agreement highlight the morphosyntactic contrasts between the two languages.

This contrast is further illustrated in the bilingual clause (Example 3), which reflects a mix of morphosyntactic structures embedded within a main Afaan Oromoo grammatical frame. The clause begins with the temporal adverb *amma* ('now'), followed by the object noun phrase *ijoollee batch keenyaa*, which combines Afaan Oromoo morphological patterns with an embedded English noun (*batch*). The noun *ijoollee* ('children' or, more contextually, 'students') follows the head noun with the possessive marker *keenyaa* ('our'), maintaining the post-nominal possessive structure typical of Afaan Oromoo. The English noun *batch* is inserted into this construction without internal modification, but it is integrated syntactically and morphologically into the more extensive Afaan Oromoo noun phrase. The conditional clause *yoo gaafatt-ee* ('if you ask') consists of the conditional marker *yoo*, the verb root *gaafat-* ('ask'), and the second person singular converbal suffix *-ee* (Wakweye, 2017, p. 137). Although the lexical item *batch* is English in origin, the entire clause follows the Afaan Oromoo object-initial position and inflectional morphology, preserving its identity as a grammatically coherent clause within the morphosyntactic rules of Afaan Oromoo.

(4) *Mastaaweqiiyaa*@amh godh-ee achi kaa'-e **factory Blue Magic**@eng-tu.
Advertisement do-3SL.M.PRV there put-3SL.M.PRV factory Blue Magic-FOC
'The Blue Magic factory placed it there as an advertisement.'

(5) Xaafii nam-ni **export**@eng hin godh -u.
Teff.ACCO man-NOM export NEG do -IMPV
'The man does not export teff.' (Maccaa-OC12 EYS-326)

(6) **Daily**@eng hin -qaam -u.
Daily NEG -chew -1SL.IMPV
'I do not chew daily.' (Maccaa-CO04 GAE 667)

(7) **Attendance**@eng guut -aa -n jir -a.
Attendance fill -CONV -1SL exist -IMPV
'I am filling out attendance.' (Maccaa-OC016 SIB 96)

In Example 4, the clause illustrates how Afaan Oromoo accommodates inserted English elements while retaining its morphosyntactic integrity. Although Afaan Oromoo typically follows a Subject–Object–Verb (SOV) order, this example

displays an Object–Verb–Subject (OVS) structure. The object (*mastaaweqiiyaa,* 'advertisement') appears clause-initially, followed by the verb complex (*godh-ee achi kaa'e*, 'did and placed'), with the subject (*factory Blue Magic-tu*) occurring at the end. In contrast, the English equivalent — *The Blue Magic factory placed it there as an advertisement* — follows a Subject–Verb–Object (SVO) structure, in which word order determines grammatical roles. Moreover, while the internal word order of the English noun phrase (*Blue Magic factory)* reflects standard English modifier–noun structure, it contrasts with the noun–modifier pattern of Afaan Oromoo exemplified in *factory Blue Magic*. This shows how Afaan Oromoo word order applies even with a noun phrase consisting entirely of English words.

In Example 5, *Xaafii nam-ni export@eng hin-godh-u* ('Teff, the man does not export'), the object precedes the subject, resulting in an OSV structure. While SOV is the unmarked word order in Afaan Oromoo, OSV ordering is attested and commonly used for pragmatic purposes, such as topicalisation or emphasis. Here, the fronting of *Xaafii* ('teff') serves to foreground the object for contrastive or topical focus, highlighting *teff* as emphasis.

In terms of morphology, in this clause, the English word *export* is inserted without any inflectional morphology. Instead, the functional features of the verb — negation and aspect — are expressed entirely in Afaan Oromoo through the auxiliary light verb construction *hin-godh-u*. This form combines the negation marker *hin*, the light verb root *godh-* ('do'), and the imperfective suffix *-u*, encoding the negative imperfective meaning 'does not do'. The inserted English word *export* contributes only to the lexical content, while the morphosyntactic requirements are fulfilled by the matrix language. The contrast with the English equivalent, *The man does not export teff*, is instructive. In English, tense and negation are marked analytically through the auxiliary *does* and the bare verb *export*, and the word order is SVO (Subject–Verb–Object). Another interesting difference here between the languages is that the Afaan Oromoo example marks aspect, while the English equivalent marks tense in the clause. In the bilingual clause, however, grammatical features are conveyed via affixation in the matrix language. This example shows how the structural integrity of the matrix language Afaan Oromoo is preserved, even when embedded lexical items from English are inserted.

In Example 6, in the Afaan Oromoo clause, the verb *qaam-* ('to chew') is marked for negation with the prefix *hin* ('not') and for person and aspect with the suffix *-u*, demonstrating the agglutinative capacity to encode multiple grammatical features on the verb. In the English equivalent, *I do not chew daily*, negation and tense are expressed analytically through the auxiliary *do*, which carries tense and agrees with the subject. The main verb *chew* and the pronoun *I* mark the subject role by position.

Example 7 offers further insight into how the habitual is expressed across the two languages. It provides a clear instance of morphosyntactic integration of an English word into Afaan Oromoo. In this example, the English noun *attendance* is inserted in the preverbal object, which is possible in Afaan Oromoo. The verb *guut-aa-n* ('to fill') appears with the converb suffix *-aa*, which indicates an ongoing or habitual action in the present. The verb *jir-a* ('to exist') completes the clause with an imperfective marker *-a*. The use of the converb *-aa* here plays a crucial role in expressing aspectual relationships within the clause, a typical feature of Afaan Oromoo verb morphology (Wakweya, 2017).

The contrast with the English equivalent *I am filling out attendance* illustrates key differences in the syntactic structures of the two languages. In English, tense and subject agreement are conveyed analytically through the auxiliary verb *am* and the nonfinite gerund *filling*. The use of auxiliary verbs in English to express grammatical information stands in contrast to the agglutinative structure of Afaan Oromoo, where grammatical relations are encoded through inflectional suffixes. The example underscores the morphosyntactic asymmetry between the two languages, with the matrix language, Afaan Oromoo, maintaining its agglutinative nature while integrating English lexical items without altering the grammatical structure of the clause.

4.2. Morphosyntactic integration of English words

Having outlined the key morphosyntactic contrasts between Afaan Oromoo and English, this section provides further examples that demonstrate the morphosyntactic integration of English lexical items into Afaan Oromoo within bilingual clauses, based on naturally occurring spoken data. Drawing on examples from actual conversation, the analysis focuses on two principal features of structural integration: (1) the retention of established Afaan Oromoo word order (typically Subject–Object–Verb) and (2) the attachment of Afaan Oromoo grammatical morphemes — such as aspect, case, and subject agreement markers — to English-origin words. These features demonstrate that English nouns, verbs, and adjectives can be morphologically adapted to fit the grammatical architecture of Afaan Oromoo. The consistent application of Oromoo affixation rules to inserted English elements suggests the predominance of Afaan Oromoo as the matrix language of most clauses. The following examples provide additional illustration of how morphosyntactic elements of Afaan Oromoo govern clause construction even when English lexical items are present, highlighting the guiding role of Afaan Oromoo grammar in shaping bilingual utterances.

4.2.1. English words inserted while preserving Oromo word order

This section examines how English lexical items are inserted into Afaan Oromoo clauses without disrupting the underlying Afaan Oromoo word order, thereby illustrating the dominance of the matrix language in maintaining morphosyntactic structure.

The clause *Attendance@eng guut-aa-n jir-a* ('I am filling out attendance'), previously introduced as Example 7, illustrates how the word order of Afaan Oromoo is preserved despite the insertion of an English noun. Here, the English word *attendance* is the topic and a clause-initial position is acceptable for an object in Afaan Oromoo if the object is the topic. The following examples further demonstrate how the matrix language consistently retains its morphosyntactic structure.

(8) *Birrii*@amh dhibba lama **transfer**@eng na -a godh -i.
Birr hundred two transfer me -DAT do -2PS.IMP
'Do transfer two hundred birrs to me.' (Maccaa OC010 YOT 350)

Here, the English verb *transfer* is used with the native Oromo light verb *godh-i* ('to do' in the imperative mood). This construction, often referred to as a light verb construction, enables the incorporation of an inserted lexical verb while retaining the verb morphology in the matrix language. The verb *godh-i* bears imperative marking, and the dative pronoun *naa* ('to me') also follows Afaan Oromoo syntactic rules of imperative sentences, which is the object-initial position in the clause. The overall word order (Object → Verb) is maintained, and the inserted verb does not disrupt the syntactic structure. In addition, the noun phrase *birrii dhibba lama* ('two hundred birrs') reflects the noun–numeral order typical of Afaan Oromoo, where the numeral (*dhibba lama*) follows the head noun (*birrii*). This contrasts with the numeral–noun order in English (*two hundred birrs*), highlighting a key structural difference between the two languages.

(9) **Photo**@eng hin qab -uum
Photo NEG have -3SL. IMPV.CONV
'It does not have a photo.'

This example illustrates how the syntactic structure of Afaan Oromoo is maintained even when an English lexical item is inserted. The English noun *photo* serves as the object of the negated verb *qab-uum* ('to have' with third-person singular agreement). While *photo* does not carry any overt morphological marking, its grammatical role is indicated by its initial position in the clause as a topic preceding the verb, which is marked for person. The presence of the negation prefix *hin* and the converbial suffix *-uum* reflects grammatical integration of the verb into the morphosyntactic system of Afaan Oromoo. Despite the lexical insertion, the clause maintains its (S)OV word order.

These examples confirm that English lexical insertions do not disrupt the syntactic framework of Afaan Oromoo. Instead, the matrix language maintains grammatical control over word order and clause structure, with English words functioning as syntactic insertions within a firmly Oromo morphosyntactic template.

4.2.2. English words inserted with Oromo grammatical affixes

In addition to preserving its word order, Afaan Oromoo also integrates English lexical items morphologically. This involves the attachment of grammatical affixes directly onto the inserted English words. These morphosyntactic strategies allow the language to incorporate foreign lexemes.

(10) Kun **file**@eng -tti hidh -am -a.
This file -LOC tie -PASS -IMPV
'This is tied to a file.'

In this example, previously introduced as Example 1 and referred to here as Example 10, the English noun *file* is morphologically integrated into the clause via the locative case marker *-tti*. This affix attaches directly to the English noun, demonstrating that the inserted term is treated as a morphologically bound unit. The verb *hidh-am-a* ('to be tied') appears in the passive form, further reflecting the agglutinative nature of the language and its accommodation of other-language insertions.

(11) *Mastaaweqiiyaa*@amh godh-ee achi kaa'-e **factory Blue Magic**@eng-tu.
Advertisement do-3SL.M.PRV there put-3SL.M.PRV factory Blue Magic-FOC
'The Blue Magic factory placed it there as an advertisement.'

This example (a repetition of Example 4) exhibits multiple layers of integration. While *Blue Magic* remains lexically unchanged, the noun *factory* is the focus of the clause and takes the Afaan Oromoo focus marker *-tu*, emphasising its pragmatic prominence. The verbs *godh-ee* and *kaa'-e* are fully inflected for aspect and gender, following standard Afaan Oromoo morphosyntax. This instance shows that even when complex noun phrases are inserted, Afaan Oromoo grammatical markers are applied to maintain structural alignment.

(12) Kanaaf **percent**@eng jaatam -ni kun gaafa haf -u
So, percent sixty -NOM this when leave -IMPV
yoo xiqqate **percent**@eng soddom -ni *ch'aka*@amh gal -a
minimum percent thirty -NOM forest enter -IMPV
jech -aa -dha.
Say -CNV.IMPV -COP
'So, it means that when this sixty percent remains, at least thirty percent goes into the forest.'

In this example, the complex clause exhibits two subordinate clauses embedded within a main clause. The syntactic hierarchy is best represented using bracketing [ ] to clarify clause boundaries. The entire complex clause is enclosed within a pair of black brackets to indicate the scope of the main clause, while each subordinate clause is enclosed in its own pair of black brackets to mark its internal boundaries and status. The full bracketing is thus:

[[Kanaaf percent@eng-iin jaatam-ni kun gaafa haf-u] [yoo xiqqate percent@eng sodom-ni ch'aka@amh gal-a] jech-aa-dha.]

Here, the main clause *jech-aa-dha* ('it means that') appears at the sentence-final position, serving as the matrix predicate and taking the two preceding clauses as its complement. The first subordinate clause, *Kanaaf percent@eng-iin jaatam-ni kun gaafa haf-u*, is a temporal clause introduced by *gaafa* ('when'), translated as *when this sixty percent remains*. The second subordinate clause, *yoo xiqqate percent@eng sodom-ni ch'aka@amh gal-a*, functions as an assertion and translates as *at least thirty percent goes into the forest*. This clause structure reflects the morphosyntactics of Afaan Oromoo, in which the main clause occurs after the embedded dependent clauses — a pattern unfamiliar in English but grammatically common in Afaan Oromoo.

Lexically, the English noun *percent* occurs twice in this construction. In the first instance, it bears the Oromo nominative case suffix *–iin*, indicating syntactic integration and case assignment. In the second occurrence, however, the noun appears without any overt morphological marking. Upon analysis, at this stage, we can interpret this variation as evidence of a degree of flexibility available to speakers, possibly influenced by semantic emphasis, syntactic role, or discourse-pragmatic considerations such as topic status or information structure. However, it would be premature to draw definitive conclusions. As such, further empirical investigation across a larger sample of data is required to determine the conditions under which morphological integration is applied or omitted in bilingual utterances.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the integration of English lexical items into Afaan Oromoo follows a systematic and rule-governed process. As observed in the analysed data, inserted English words do not disrupt the syntactic structure of Afaan Oromoo clauses but are instead adapted to fit within the matrix language's grammatical framework. This pattern aligns with the core predictions of the Matrix Language Frame (MLF) model, which posits that the matrix language supplies system morphemes and governs clause structure.

One of the key indicators of morphosyntactic integration in the data is the consistent retention of the (S)OV (Subject–Object–Verb) word order, which is characteristic of Afaan Oromoo. Even when English-origin lexical items are inserted, the expected clause structure is maintained.

However, the agglutinative nature of Afaan Oromoo allows for variation in surface word order, as grammatical relations are marked through affixation rather than strict positional rules. This flexibility enables inserted elements to be accommodated without disrupting grammatical interpretation. The overall pattern underscores the syntactic influence of the matrix language, not through structural rigidity, but through a morphologically governed system that maintains clarity and cohesion across code-switched utterances.

In the data, English-origin verbs predominantly appear in non-finite forms, lacking the full inflectional morphology required of finite verbs in Afaan Oromoo. Notably, there are no instances in the two audio conversations where English verbs appear in fully inflected finite forms; thus, Afaan Oromoo consistently serves as the matrix language. For instance, in Example 5 (*Xaafii nam-ni export hin-godh-u* [Gloss: *Teff. ACCO man.NOM export NEG do-IMPV*; its translation: *The man does not export teff*]) and Example 8 (*Biri dhibba lama transfer naa godh-i* [Gloss: *Birr hundred two transfer for me do-2PS.IMP*; its translation: *Do transfer two hundred birrs to me*]), the English items *export* and *transfer* remain morphologically uninflected. While these words could also function as nouns in English, their co-occurrence with the light verb *godhu/godh-i* ('to do') suggests verbal interpretation within the clause. In such constructions, the inflectional requirements — such as aspect, mood, and person — are carried entirely by the Afaan Oromoo light verb, not by the English-origin element. This pattern aligns with the light verb construction frequently described in the literature (Butt, 2010), which allows borrowed verbs to be used without violating the morphosyntactic constraints of the host language. These findings reinforce the observation that, unlike nouns, English verbs are not morphologically integrated but are instead accommodated syntactically through this light verb strategy.

However, it is important to note that among the English insertions observed in the data, almost all are nouns, with only two examples involving verbs. This suggests a possible asymmetry in how different lexical categories are integrated: whereas nouns are morphologically and syntactically adapted into the Afaan Oromoo system, verbs are accommodated only syntactically through juxtaposition with a light verb. Further analysis of this difference in treatment is needed to establish whether this is a community-wide phenomenon.

These patterns collectively reflect the agglutinative nature of Afaan Oromoo and illustrate how its morphosyntactic system accommodates foreign elements. While English verbs tend to remain morphologically bare and are accommodated

syntactically via light verb constructions, English nouns are more readily integrated through the addition of obligatory grammatical markers such as case and focus. This is evident in examples such as Example 10 (*Kun file@eng-tti hidh-am-a* ['This is tied to a file']), where the locative suffix *-tti* is added to the English-origin noun *file*, and in Example 12 (*Kanaaf percent@eng-iin jaatam-ni kun gaafa haf-u...* ['So, when this sixty percent remains...']), where the nominative markers *-iin* and *-ni* are added to the nouns *percent* and *jaatam* ('sixty'), respectively. Similarly, in Example 4 (*Mastaaweqiiyaa@amh godh-ee achi kaa'-e factory blue magic@eng-tu* [Gloss: *Advertisement do-3SL.M.PRV there put-3SL.M.PRV factory Blue Magic-FOC*; its translation: *The Blue Magic factory placed it there as an advertisement*]), the focus marker *-tu* is added to the English phrase *Blue Magic*, which follows the canonical Afaan Oromoo word order. This dual strategy enables speakers to preserve the grammatical integrity of Afaan Oromoo while engaging in code-switching. Taken together, the data underscore the adaptability of bilingual speakers and the structural resilience of the matrix language.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the morphosyntactic integration of English words into Afaan Oromoo within bilingual conversation, drawing on empirical data from naturally occurring conversations in Dambi Dollo. The analysis demonstrated that the grammar of Afaan Oromoo controls clause structure and inflections when English lexical items are inserted. English words and phrases are inserted without disturbing the native (S)OV word order and are affixed with Oromo grammatical morphemes as required, including markers for nominative, locative, and focus.

These findings affirm the central predictions of the Matrix Language Frame model in multilingual situations that after one language — Afaan Oromoo, in this case — supplies system morphemes and determines grammatical structure while the embedded language contributes content morphemes.

This study contributes to the growing research on code-switching and morphosyntactic integration, particularly within underexplored Ethiopian linguistic contexts. It demonstrates that bilingualism in Ethiopia is not characterised by chaotic mixing but rather by structured, linguistically principled integration. In the future, our further analyses of data will provide a fuller picture of community-wide patterns. The findings have implications for language planning, bilingual education, and the theoretical modelling of language contact phenomena in multilingual societies.

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The morphosyntactic integration of English words into Afaan Oromoo

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The present study investigates the morphosyntactic integration of English lexical items into Afaan Oromoo within multilingual conversations recorded in Dambi Dollo, Oromia regional state, Western Ethiopia. Drawing from the field of contact linguistics, the study examines how English words and phrases are incorporated into Afaan Oromoo conversation while maintaining the grammatical structure and integrity of the matrix (or dominant) language. The analysis explores how English lexical items are inserted into Afaan Oromoo clauses while preserving the grammatical integrity of the matrix language. The analysis is grounded in the Matix Language Frame (MLF) model and the 4-M framework, which together provide a theoretical basis for explaining how bilingual speakers organise and integrate lexical insertion within mixed language utterances. The study examines the syntactic and morphological behaviour of English insertions in bilingual clauses extracted from two transcribed audio recordings of informal conversations among bilingual speakers of the Mecha dialect of Afaan Oromoo. The findings demonstrate that Afaan Oromoo consistently maintains (Subject)–Object–Verb ([S]OV) word order and supplies all system morphemes, such as agreement, case and aspect markers even when English content morphemes, such as nouns, verbs and adjectives, are present. English insertions are morphologically adapted through Oromo affixation processes, ensuring grammatical conformity within the MLF model. These results confirm that bilingual speakers integrate English lexical items in a structurally predictable manner, affirming Afaan Oromoo's dominant grammatical role in bilingual utterances, reinforcing its grammatical dominance and structural resilience rather than producing random or unstructured linguistic blends. The study contributes to our understanding of morphosyntactic integration in Ethiopia's multilingual linguistic landscape and provides empirical support for the applicability and explanatory power of the MLF in Africa, particularly the Ethiopian sociolinguistic context.

Keywords: *Afaan Oromoo, English insertions, Matrix Language Frame (MLF), morphosyntactic integration, bilingualism.*

Морфосинтаксична інтеграція англіцизмів у мову оромо

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У дослідженні розглянуто морфосинтаксичну інтеграцію англійських лексичних одиниць у мові оромо на основі багатомовних розмов, записаних у місті Дамбі Долло (регіон Оромія, Західна Ефіопія). Методом контактної лінгвістики проаналізовано, яким чином англійські слова та вирази входять у мову оромо, зберігаючи при цьому граматичну структуру та цілісність матричної (домінантної) мови. Увагу зосереджено на тому, як англіцизми вкраплюються у мову оромо із дотриманням граматичної цілісності матричної мови. Теоретичну основу дослідження становлять Модель матричної мови (Matrix Language Frame, MLF) та 4-М модель, які разом забезпечують пояснення того, як білінгви адаптують лексичні елементи у змішане мововживання. Вивчено синтаксичну та морфологічну функцію англіцизмів на основі двох аудіозаписів неформальних розмов білінгвів. Учасниками спілкування були носії діалекту меха мови оромо. Результати показують, що в мові оромо послідовно збережено порядок слів (підмет)–додаток–присудок ([S]OV) і забезпечено вживання всіх системних морфем, таких як показники узгодження, відмінка та виду навіть тоді, коли наявні змістові морфеми з англійської (іменники, дієслова або прикметники). Англіцизми адаптуються до морфологічної системи мови оромо за допомогою афіксів, що забезпечує граматичну відповідність у межах моделі MLF. Результати підтверджують, що білінгви пристосовують англійські лексичні одиниці у структурно передбачуваний спосіб, що засвідчує домінантну граматичну роль мови оромо у процесі спілкування білінгвів. Це зміцнює граматичне домінування мови оромо та його структурну стійкість. Результати дослідження є внеском у розуміння морфосинтаксичних процесів пристосування запозичень у багатомовному просторі Ефіопії та надає емпіричні докази застосування моделі MLF в Африці, зокрема в ефіопському соціолінгвістичному контексті.

Ключові слова: *мова оромо, перемикання кодів, англіцизми, модель матричної мови (MLF), морфосинтаксична інтеграція, двомовність.*

Az angol szavak morfoszintaktikai integrációja az afaan oromó nyelvbe

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A jelen tanulmány az angol lexikai elemek morfoszintaktikai integrációját vizsgálja az afaan oromó nyelvbe többnyelvű beszélgetéseken keresztül, amelyeket a nyugat-etiópiai Oromia régióban, Dambi Dollóban rögzítettek. A kontaktusnyelvészet megközelítésére építve a kutatás azt elemzi, hogyan épülnek be az angol szavak és kifejezések az afaan oromó nyelven folytatott diskurzusba, miközben megőrzik a mátrix- (vagy domináns) nyelv grammatikai szerkezetét és integritását. Az elemzés azt vizsgálja, hogyan illeszkednek az angol lexikai elemek az afaan oromó nyelv mondataiba a mátrixnyelv grammatikai rendszerének megőrzésével. Elméleti keretét a Mátrixnyelvi Keret Modell (MLF) és a 4-M keretrendszer adja, amelyek együtt magyarázatot nyújtanak arra, hogyan szervezik és integrálják a kétnyelvű beszélők a lexikai elemek beillesztését a kevert nyelvhasználatú megnyilatkozásokban. A tanulmány az angol kódváltások szintaktikai és morfológiai viselkedését vizsgálja olyan kétnyelvű mondatokban, amelyeket két, informális beszélgetéseket tartalmazó hangfelvétel átirataiból emeltek ki a szerzők. A beszélgetések résztvevői az afaan oromó nyelv Mecha dialektusát anyanyelvként beszélő kétnyelvűek voltak. Az eredmények azt mutatják, hogy az afaan oromó következetesen megtartja az (Alany)–Tárgy–Állítmány/Ige ([S]OV) szórendet, és biztosítja valamennyi morféma (például esetrag- és aspektusjelölők) használatát még akkor is, amikor angol tartalmi morfémák – főnevek, igék vagy melléknevek – jelennek meg. Az angol kódváltások morfológiailag alkalmazkodnak az oromó affixációs folyamatokon keresztül, így biztosítva a grammatikai megfelelést az MLF-modell keretében. Ezek az eredmények megerősítik, hogy a kétnyelvű beszélők strukturálisan előre jelezhető módon integrálják az angol lexikai elemeket, ami alátámasztja az afaan oromó domináns grammatikai szerepét a kétnyelvű megnyilatkozásokban. Ez a nyelv grammatikai dominanciáját és szerkezeti stabilitását erősíti ahelyett, hogy véletlenszerű vagy strukturálatlan nyelvi keverékeket hozna létre. A tanulmány hozzájárul az Etiópia többnyelvű nyelvi környezetében zajló morfoszintaktikai integrációs folyamatok jobb megértéséhez, valamint empirikus bizonyítékot szolgáltat az MLF-modell alkalmazhatóságára és magyarázó erejére Afrikában, különösen az etióp szociolingvisztikai kontextusban.

Kulcsszavak: *afaan oromó, angol kódváltások, Mátrixnyelvi Keret Modell (MLF), morfoszintaktikai integráció, kétnyelvűség.*