Notes on Agreement Marking in Borna (Shinasha)

Binyam Sisay Mendisu
Department of Linguistics and Philology
Addis Ababa University
b.s.mend@gmail.com

&

Tsehay Mengesha
Department of Linguistics and Philology
Addis Ababa University

1 Introduction

The present contribution deals with subject agreement marking elements in Borna (Shinasha). Borna[1] is a North Omotic language which belongs to the Kefa group (Fleming 1976). The language is predominantly spoken in Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State of Ethiopia by about 51,000 native speakers. The self designation of the people is *Boro*; and they call their language *Borna*. There are two main dialects of Borna which are considered to be mutually intelligible (Ashenafi and Wedekind 1990): *Tari Bora* (lowland) and *Gaya Bora* (highland). This study is based on the *Tari Bora*[2] dialect which is spoken in *Debati*, *Bullen* and *Mandura*.

---

[1] Although the term *Shinasha* is established in the linguistics literature, we prefer to use the self-given name of the language: *Borna.*

[2] The data for this study was provided by the co-author of this paper Tsehay Mengesha, a native speaker of Borna who is currently MA student in Linguistics at Addis Ababa University.

The paper is organized as follows. The first section gives a general introduction about the Borna language and its speakers. In the second section, a short account of previous attempts on subject agreement marking in Borna is provided. Then, a detailed examination of the agreement marking system in Borna will be presented. Finally, in the fourth section, the main findings of the paper will be summarized.

2 Previous Studies on Agreement Marking in Borna

Rottland (1990) and Lamberti (1993) attempted to identify and describe person marking elements in Borna. However, there is some discrepancy between the findings of the two scholars with regard to the agreement markers of Borna.

According to Rottland (1990), there are two sets of subject agreement marking suffixes. The first set of suffixes is reported to occur in indicative sentences, while the other in jussive and subjunctive sentences. Table 1 summarizes the person marking suffixes of Borna as given in Rottland (1990: 201):

Table 1: Person marking suffixes in Borna (Rottland 1990: 201)

Person	I (indicative)	II (jussive, subjunctive)
1SG	-e	-a
2SG	-i	-i
3MS	-é	-a
3FS	-ā	-i
1PL	-ó	-o
2PL	-it /út	-no
3PL	-no	-no

Lamberti (1993), too, gives two paradigms of subject agreement marking suffixes for Borna. As to Lamberti, the use of either set depends on the sentence type, i.e. one set is used for declarative sentences but the other set for interrogative sentences. The suffixes are provided below in Table 2 (Lamberti 1993: 93-95).

Table 2: Person marking suffixes in Borna (Lamberti 1993: 93-95)

Person	Declarative	Interrogative
1SG	-è	-tá(á)
2SG	-ì	-yá
3MS	-é	-á(á)
3FS	-à	-ná
1PL	-ò	-nò(wá)
2PL	-it/ìt	-é(yá)
3PL	-nóó	-no(wá)

Comparing the suffixes presented in Table 1 and Table 2, it can be observed that the findings of the two scholars are not exactly the same. While Rottland (1990) gives a set of agreement suffixes for jussive / subjunctive sentences, Lamberti (1993) instead provides a set for interrogative sentences. There are also minor variations regarding the shape of some of the morphemes. In addition to this, Borna has short pronouns that are employed as person markers. Taking note of the previous two works, the present study attempts to give an in-depth description of the various markers for subject agreement in Borna.

3 Subject Agreement Marking in Borna

In Borna, person is indicated by means of agreement suffixes and shortened pronouns. As to the agreement markers, there are three sets which vary according to declarative, interrogative and imperative / optative sentences. Furthermore, the language has shortened pronouns that occur in two sets.

3.1 Agreement Suffixes

In Borna, the distribution of the agreement markers is limited to occurrences, in which the suffixes are directly attached to the main verbs. This study identifies, as pointed out above, three sets of agreement markers in Borna: declarative, interrogative and imperative/optative. The use of two or more sets for subject agreement is common among Omotic languages (cf. Koorete, Binyam 2008 or Gamo, Hayward 1998). In relation to this, Hayward (2003: 247) states that an "unusual feature appearing in several Omotic languages is that the morphological expression of agreement in the verb is completely different for the declarative and the interrogative categories, and neither of them look at all like the independent pronouns."

The three sets of subject agreement markers that are identified in the present study are summarized below in Table 3:

Table 3: Agreement marking suffixes in Borna

Person	Agreement suffixes		
	Declarative	**Interrogative**	**Imperative/Optative**
1SG	-è	-(i)tá	-tà /-à
2SG	-i	-(i)né	**
3MS	-é	-á	-á
3FS	-à	-(i)nà	-ì
1PL	-ò	-(i)nò	-ó
2PL	-(i)t	-(i)tè	-àr
3PL	-(i)nó	-(i)nó	-nó

** Various morphemes or syntactic techniques are employed to show agreement with the 2SG in the imperative / optative (cf. example 6-11 below)

As can be observed in Table 3 above, Borna has three different sets of person markers that vary according to sentence type. In comparing the three sets of agreement suffixes, the following points should be considered.

(a) The third person plural marker (3PL) -nó remains the same across the three paradigms;

(b) The suffix -á that marks third person masculine singular (3MS) is the same in the interrogative and imperative / optative paradigms;

(c) The first person plural (1PL) suffix in declarative and imperative/optative verbs is distinguished by tone. Accordingly, while the former has low tone, the latter carries high tone;

(d) There is no single morpheme to show agreement with second person singular (2SG) subjects in the imperative / optative mood, instead different morphemes and techniques are employed (cf. example 6-11 below);

(e) The declarative agreement suffixes given in the present study are similar to the ones given as declarative agreement markers in Lamberti (1993) or as indicative agreement suffixes in Rottland (1990). Yet, there is visible difference between the present study and the findings of the two scholars with respect to the interrogative and imperative / optative sets.

Borna is a pro-drop language. In example (1) the affirmative, declarative paradigm of the verb úf- 'drink' in the simple past is provided to illustrate the use of the subject agreement markers provided in Table 3. The subject agreement suffix is attached to the past-tense suffix -r which immediately follows the verb stem.

Affirmative Declarative (Simple Past Tense)

1 (a) *(tà)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf-r-è*
    I   water-ACC   drink-PA-1SG
    'I drank water.'

    (b) *(nèè)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf-r-í*
    You (sg.)   water-ACC   drink-PA-2SG
    'You (sg.) drank water.'

    (c) *(bì)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf-r-é*
    He   water-ACC   drink-PA-3MS
    'He drank water.'

    (d) *(bì)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf-r-à*
    She   water-ACC   drink-PA-3FS
    'She drank water.'

    (e) *(nòò)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf-r-ò*
    We   water-ACC   drink-PA-1PL
    'We drank water.'

    (f) *(?ìtt)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf-r-ìt*[3]
    You (pl.)   water-ACC   drink-PA-2PL
    'You (pl.) drank water.'

    (g) *(bó)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf-r-ìnó*
    They   water-ACC   drink-PA-3PL
    'They drank water.'

The same set of suffixes akin to example (1) is employed in the negative[4], declarative paradigm of the verb *úf-* 'drink' in the simple past. Observe the examples in (2).

Negative Declarative (Simple Past Tense)

2 (a) *(tà)*   *ààts-ó*   *úy-áts-è*
    I   water-ACC   drink-NEG-1SG
    'I didn't drink water.'

    (b) *(nèè)*   *ààts-ó*   *úy-áts-í*
    You (sg.)   water-ACC   drink-NEG-2SG
    'You (sg.) didn't drink water.'

    (c) *(bì)*   *ààts-ó*   *úy-áts-é*
    He   water-ACC   drink-NEG-3MS
    'He didn't drink water.'

---

[3] The vowel *i* is considered an epenthetic element in this study. However, further research is required to determine its exact status.

[4] In the negative, the verb *úf-* 'drink' exhibits root alternation and appears as *úy-*.

(d) *(bì)*   *ààts-ó*   *úy-áts-à*
She   water-ACC   drink-NEG-3FS
'She didn't drink water.'

(e) *(nòò)*   *ààts-ó*   *úy-áts-ò*
We   water-ACC   drink-NEG-1PL
'We didn't drink water.'

(f) *(ʔitt)*   *ààts-ó*   *úy-áts-ìt*
You (pl.)   water-ACC   drink-NEG-2PL
'You (pl.) didn't drink water.'

(g) *(bó)*   *ààts-ó*   *úy-áts-ìnó*
They   water-ACC   drink-NEG-3PL
'They didn't drink water.'

From the paradigms of the verb *úf-* 'drink' given in examples (1) and (2), it can be concluded that Borna employs a single set of subject agreement markers in declarative affirmative and negative sentences.

Unlike examples (1) and (2) above, a different set of agreement suffixes occurs in interrogative sentences, regardless whether they are in the affirmative or negative. Let us look first at the affirmative, interrogative paradigm of the verb *úf-* 'drink' in the simple past.

Affirmative Interrogative (Simple Past Tense)
3 (a) *(tà)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf-r-ìtá*
I   water-ACC   drink-PA-1PL
'Did I drink water?'

(b) *(nèè)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf-r-ìné*
You (sg.)   water-ACC   drink-PA-2SG
'Did you (sg.) drink water?'

(c) *(bì)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf-r-á*
He   water-ACC   drink-PA-3MS
'Did he drink water?'

(d) *(bì)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf-r-ìnà*
She   water-ACC   drink-PA-3FS
'Did she drink water?'

(e) *(nòò)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf-r-ìnò*
We   water-ACC   drink-PA-1PL
'Did we drink water?'

(f) *(ʔitt)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf-r-ìtè*
You (pl.)   water-ACC   drink-PA-2PL
'Did you (pl.) drink water?'

(g) *(bó)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf-r-ìnó*
They   water-ACC   drink-PA-3PL
'Did they drink water?'

The same set of agreement markers as in example (3) above are used in negative.

Negative Interrogative (Simple Past Tense)

4 (a) *(tà)*   *ààts-ó*   *úy-áts -ìtá*
       I   water-ACC   drink-NEG-1SG
       'Didn't I drink water?'

    (b) *(nèè)*   *ààts-ó*   *úy-áts -ìné*
       You (sg.) water-ACC   drink-NEG-2SG
       'Didn't you (sg.) drink water?'

    (c) *(bí)*   *ààts-ó*   *úy-áts-á*
       He   water-ACC   drink-NEG-3MS
       'Didn't he drink water?'

    (d) *(bì)*   *ààts-ó*   *úy-áts-ìnà*
       She   water-ACC   drink-NEG-3FS
       'Didn't she drink water?'

    (e) *(nòò)*   *ààts-ó*   *úy-áts-ìnò*
       We   water-ACC   drink-NEG-1PL
       'Didn't we drink water?'

    (f) *(ʔitt)*   *ààts-ó*   *úy-áts-ìtè*
       You (pl.) water-ACC   drink-NEG-2PL
       'Didn't you (pl.) drink water?'

    (g) *(bó)*   *ààts-ó*   *úy-áts-ìnó*
       They   water-ACC   drink-NEG-3PL
       'Didn't they drink water?'

It can be noted from the paradigms presented in example (1) / (2) vis-à-vis (3) / (4) that Borna uses different subject agreement sets in declarative vs. interrogative sentences in the simple past tense.

A third set of subject agreement markers occurs with verbs in the imperative / optative mood, as exemplified in the imperative / optative paradigm of the verb *àm-* 'go'.

5 (a) *àm-tà / àm-à*   'Let me go!'
       go-1SG

    (b) *àm*   'Go (sg.)!'
       go (2SG)

(c)	*àm-ər*	'Go (pl.)!'
	go-2PL	
(d)	*àm-ó*	'Let us go!'
	go-1PL	
(e)	*àm-á*	'Let him go!'
	go-3MS	
(f)	*àm-ì*	'Let her go!'
	go-3FS	
(g)	*àm-nó*	'Let them go!'
	go-3PL	

In Borna, different verbs employ different ways and morphemes to express reference to second person singular (2SG) subject in the imperative/optative mood, as shown in examples (6) - (11) below.

6	*úw-í*	'Drink!'	(cf. *úf-* 'drink')
7	*dùù*	'Sing!'	(cf. *dùùb-* 'sing')
8	*ʒòd*	'Hit!'	(cf. *ʒòt'-* 'hit')
9	*k'éw-ù*	'Sleep!'	(cf. *k'éy-* 'sleep')
10	*kéw-á*	'Buy!'	(cf. *kéw-* 'buy')
11	*bèw-ù*	'Sit!'	(cf. *bèy-* 'sit')

As can be noted, there is no one suffix or way that expresses the second person singular in the imperative / optative mood. Some verbs exhibit root alternation (cf. example 8) but other verbs add various elements to the root (cf. examples 6, 9-11).

3.2 Shortened Pronouns

Besides subject agreement suffixes, Borna employs another way of referring to subjects. In some verbal constructions, Borna uses shortened personal pronouns for this purpose. In this study, two different set of shortened personal pronouns were found which are named short pronoun I and short pronoun II. Both types of short pronouns occur in complex verbal constructions (i.e. constructions with a main verb and an additional element like an auxiliary or a copula); yet in different distributions. The two types of shortened pronouns are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Shortened pronouns in Borna

Person	Short Pronouns		Independent Personal Pronouns
	Short Pron I	Short Pron II	
1SG	*t(ì)-*	*tà-*	*tà*
2SG	*n(ì)-*	*nèè-*	*nèè*
3MS	*b(ì)-*	*-à* (Dec) */-é* (Int)	*bí*
3FS	*b(ì)-*	*-i* (Dec) */-né* (Int)	*bì*
1PL	*nò-*	*nòò-*	*nòò*
2PL	*ʔì-*	*ʔìt-*	*ʔìtt*
3PL	*bó-*	*-nó*	*bó*

3.2.1 Short pronoun I

The short pronouns which are included under short pronoun I occur in complex verbal constructions which consist of a main verb and an auxiliary verb or a second occurrence of the main-clause verb.

These pronouns occur in the past perfect, present progressive and past habitual in Borna. While the short pronouns are prefixed to the auxiliary in the past perfect, they are suffixed to the second occurrence of the main verb in the present progressive and past habitual. Consider the past perfect paradigm in (12) below.

Affirmative Declarative (Past Perfect)

12 (a) *(tà)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf*   *dèk'-ìní*   *tì-tàf*
    I   water-ACC   drink   take-PF   1SG-remain
    'I had drunk water.'

   (b) *(nèè)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf*   *dèk'-ìní*   *nì-tàf*
    You (sg.)   water-ACC   drink   take-PF   2SG-remain
    'You (sg.) had drunk water.'

   (c) *(bì)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf*   *dèk'-ìní*   *bì-tàf*
    He   water-ACC   drink   take-PF   3MS-remain
    'He had drunk water.'

   (d) *(bì)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf*   *dèk'-ìní*   *bì-tàf*
    She   water-ACC   drink   take-PF   3FS-remain
    'She had drunk water.'

   (e) *(nòò)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf*   *dèk'-ìní*   *nò-tàf*
    We   water-ACC   drink   take-PF   1PL-remain
    'We had drunk water.'

   (f) *(ʔìtt)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf*   *dèk'-ìní*   *ʔì-tàf*
    You (pl.)   water-ACC   drink   take-PF   2PL-remain
    'You (pl.) had drunk water.'

(g) *(bó)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf*   *dèk'-ìní*   *bó-tàf*

They   water-ACC   drink   take-PF   3PL-remain

'They had drunk water.'

In example (12), it can be noted that the shortened pronouns are prefixed to the auxiliary verb *tàf* 'remain'.

In cases of a repeated main-clause verb, like the present progressive of example (13), the short pronouns I are prefixed to the repeated verb that occurs in the right-most position of the sentence.

13 (a) *(tà)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf-à*   *t-úf-ìr*

     I   water-ACC   drink-INF   1SG-drink-PROG

     'I am drinking water.'

(b) *(nèè)*   *ààts-ó*   *úf-à*   *n-úf-ìr*

     You (sg.)   water-ACC   drink-INF   2SG-drink-PROG

     'You (sg.) are drinking water.'

Note that the first instances of the repeated verb *úf-* 'drink' does not occur as unmarked verb stem but as a verbal noun marked by the suffix *-à*.

3.2.2 Short Pronoun II

The short pronouns II set occurs in complex verbal constructions of a main verb and a copula. The third person subject markers are suffixed to the main-clause verb, while the remaining subject markers are prefixed to the copula which follows the main-clause verb. Interestingly, the third person singular suffixes make a distinction between declarative and interrogative.

The short pronouns II occur in negative sentences of the present, future and present habitual. Examples for the present habitual are provided below.

Negative Declarative (Present Habitual)

14 (a) *(tà)*   *ààts-ó*   *úy-ák*   *tà-ná*

     I   water-ACC   drink-NEG   1SG-COP:DEC

     'I don't drink water.'

(b) *(nèè)*   *ààts-ó*   *úy-ák*   *nèè-ná*

     You (sg.)   water-ACC   drink-NEG   2SG-COP:DEC

     'You (sg.) don't drink water.'

(c) *(bì)*   *ààts-ó*   *úy-ák-à*

     He   water-ACC   drink-NEG-3MS

     'He doesn't drink water.'

(d) *(bì)*   *àats-ó*   *úy-ák-í*
She   water-ACC   drink-NEG-3FS
'She doesn't drink water.'

(e) *(nòò)*   *àats-ó*   *úy-ák*   *nòò-ná*
We   water-ACC   drink-NEG   1PL-COP:DEC
'We don't drink water.'

(f) *(ʔìtt)*   *àats-ó*   *úy-ák*   *ʔìt-ná*
You (pl.) water-ACC   drink-NEG   2PL-COP:DEC
'You (pl.) don't drink water.'

(g) *(bó)*   *àats-ó*   *úy-ák-nó*
They   water-ACC   drink-NEG-3PL
'They don't drink water.'

As can be observed in (14), the short pronouns are prefixed to the copula except in the third person. In all the third person verb forms, the person marker suffixes are added directly to the main verb and the copula does not appear in the sentences.

The interrogative counterpart of example (14) is given in (15) below. The comparison of the two paradigms shows that the morphemes for third person masculine singular (3MS) and third person feminine singular (3FS) subjects differ.

Negative Interrogative (Present Habitual)

15 (a) *(tà)*   *àats-ó*   *úy-ák*   *tà-nè*
I   water-ACC   drink-NEG   1SG-COP:INT
'Don't I drink water?'

(b) *(nèè)*   *àats-ó*   *úy-ák*   *nèè-nè*
You (sg.) water-ACC   drink-NEG   2SG-COP:INT
'Don't you (sg.) drink water?'

(c) *(bì)*   *àats-ó*   *úy-ák-é*
He   water-ACC   drink-NEG-3MS
'Doesn't he drink water?'

(d) *(bì)*   *àats-ó*   *úy-ák-né*
She   water-ACC   drink-NEG-3FS
'Doesn't she drink water? '

(e) *(nòò)*   *àats-ó*   *úy-ák*   *nòò-nè*
We   water-ACC   drink-NEG   1PL-COP:INT
'Don't we drink water?'

(f) *(ʔìtt)* *àats-ó*   *úy-ák*   *ʔìt-nè*
You (pl.) water-ACC   drink-NEG   2PL-COP:INT
'Don't you (pl.) drink water?'

(g) *(bó)*   *àats-ó*   *úy-ák-nó(wà)*
They   water-ACC   drink-NEG-3PL(-FOC:INT)
'Don't they drink water?'

— 175 —

Note that the morphemes -é and -né indicate 3MS and 3FS subject agreement in the interrogative sentences in (15c) and (15d) above, while in declarative sentences the morphemes -à and -í are used, respectively (cf. example 14c-d). The third person plural suffix -nó remains the same in both the declarative and interrogative sentences. Yet, interrogative sentences have a different intonation or may add an optional focus marker -wà

.

4. Summary and Conclusion

The study looks at the subject agreement markers that appear in the verbs of Borna. Two sets of elements have been found to mark subject agreement in the language. On the one hand, there are agreement suffixes which appear in simple verbs. The language exhibits three sets of agreement markers depending on whether the sentence is declarative, interrogative or imperative / optative. On the other hand, Borna employs shortened pronouns to mark person in complex verb constructions. Two sets of shortened pronouns have been identified, which are in complementary distributions. The summary of all the subject agreement markers in Borna is provided in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Summary of subject marking elements in Borna

Person	Agreement suffixes			Short Pronouns		Independent Personal Pronouns
	Declarative	Interrogative	Imperative/ Optative	Short Pron I	Short Pron II	
1SG	-è	-(ì)tá	-tà/-à	t(ì)-	tà-	tà
2SG	-í	-(ì)né	**	n(ì)-	nèè-	nèè
3MS	-é	-á	-á	b(ì)-	-à (Dec) /-é (Int)	bí
3FS	-à	-(ì)nà	-ì	b(ì)-	-í (Dec) /-né (Int)	bì
1PL	-ò	-(ì)nò	-ó	nò-	nòò-	nòò
2PL	-(ì)t	-(ì)tè	-àr	ʔì-	ʔìt-	ʔìtt
3PL	-(ì)nó	-(ì)nó	-nó	bó-	-nó	bó

**Various morphemes and techniques are employed to show agreement with 2SG subjects in the imperative / optative mood.

As can be noted from Table 5, the majority of the short pronouns and the interrogative agreement suffixes are related to the independent personal pronouns. This strongly suggests that the subject agreement markers have developed from the independent personal pronouns. Although there are some changes in the vowel quality of the subject agreement markers, the consonants remain the same. For instance, the

consonant *t*- occurs in all markers of the 2PL in the five subject agreement marker sets. This challenges the claim made by Hayward (2003: 247) that the declarative and interrogative agreement markers in Omotic languages do not "look at all like the independent pronouns."

Symbols and Abbreviations

ACC	Accusative
COP:DEC	Copula: Declarative
COP:INT	Copula: Interrogative
Dec	Declarative
FOC:INT	Interrogative focus
INF	Infinitive
Int	Interrogative
NEG	Negation
PA	Past
PF	Perfect
PROG	Progressive
1SG	First person singular
2SG	Second person singular
3MS	Third person singular masculine
3FS	Third person singular feminine
1PL	First person plural
2PL	Second person plural
3PL	Third person plural

References

Ashenafi Tesfaye and Klaus Wedekind (1990) Characteristics of Omotic tone: Shinasha (Borna). *Studies in African linguistics* 21 (3): 347-367.

Binyam Sisay (2008) Aspects of Koorete verb morphology. Acta Humaniora, PhD Dissertationa. University of Oslo.

Fleming, Harold C. (1976) Omotic overview. In: M. Lionel Bender (ed.) *The non-Semitic languages of Ethiopia*, 299-323. Michigan: African Studies Center.

Hayward, Richard J. (1998) The origins of the North Ometo verb agreement systems. *Journal of African languages and linguistics* 19 (2): 93-111.

Hayward, Richard J. (2003) Omotic: The 'empty quarter' of Afroasiatic linguistics. In: Jacqueline Lecarme (ed.) *Research in Afroasiatic grammar II: Selected Papers from the fifth conference on Afroasiatic languages, Paris, 2000*, 241-261. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Lamberti, Marcello (1993) *Die Shinassha-Sprache*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter.

Rottland, Franz (1990) A sketch of Shinasha morphology. In: Richard J. Hayward (ed.) *Omotic language studies*, 185-209. London: School of Oriental and African Studies.