

Current Trends in Tigrinya Punctuation

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Abstract

This study looked into trends in Tigrinya punctuation which, in large part, is Ethiopic (better known as Ge'ez, locally) but has adopted several marks as some, such as the word divider, ceased to be used. Data was collected from purposefully selected Tigrinya textbooks, books, newspapers, and proceedings; text analysis was employed to describe the names, number, uses as well as possible trends. A critical look into the selected materials shows a continued use of both Ethiopic and English punctuation as well as an influence of the latter over the years. Though the Ethiopic marks are often aligned with similar ones in English, such correspondence often leads to needless usage and/or inappropriate use owing to differences in the languages and versatility of the pairs of marks. Problems that are attributed to lack of knowledge and guidelines for punctuation, among other things, include inconsistent use within and across texts, misuse, disuse, and underuse of marks. Such problems are coupled with renewed desire to use Ethiopic marks in the face of the influence of Western practices, differences in the use of some marks in Tigray and Eritrea as well as current trends (often times, irregularities). Given the importance of the orthographic aspect in structuring and fully understanding written language as well as the prevailing problems, it is imperative to specify the marks to be used along with explicit functions and roles and diffuse such knowledge in all levels of education.

Keywords: Tigrinya, orthography, Ge'ez, punctuation, trend

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1. Introduction

Punctuation is one of the key components in any language. It establishes the cadence of a sentence, telling the reader where to pause, stop, or take a detour (American Psychological Association [APA], 1994). According to Say and Akman (1998), punctuation marks have morphological, delimiting, separating, or distinguishing roles which in one or another help to resolve ambiguities. Similarly, Doran (1998) says that “punctuation helps us to structure, and thus to understand, texts.” Thus, punctuation marks have semantic roles. Accordingly, there are marks that differ in appearance and indicate various functions or roles.

Yohannes (1947-8), who adopted three marks (i.e., ?, !, and ’) and suggested another for gemination in his Tigrinya-Amharic dictionary, underscored the importance of specific marks, by extension all, to mark parts and direct how texts should be read or understood. “Punctuation of a sentence usually denotes a pause in thought, and different kinds of punctuation indicate different kinds and lengths of pauses” (APA, 1994, p.87).

The use of punctuation marks may go as far back as the beginning of writing. “Some of the first marks of punctuation were probably used by playwrights and speech-writers to aid the speaker by indicating vocal pauses” (Geradot, 2014, p.3). Likewise, Ethiopic marks had been used in ancient writing in Ge'ez. The Ethiopic punctuation, according to Kahssay (2016), has evolved from classical times. The same name and/or names and marks are used to refer to those used in Tigrinya, the North Ethiopic language that is widely spoken (and used as an official one) in Tigray and Eritrea. Apart from inheriting the *Giiz* punctuation, Tigrinya and Amharic have added [...] including those

from European orthographies, which are necessitated by modern communication (Kahssay, 2016, p.31).

Except some loan marks adopted from English (or European, as cited earlier), the Ge'ez proper marks have at least two points. Most of the loan marks (viz., !, ;, ?, ..., ") as well have at least a point or a dot. In addition, there are some multi-point marks (3-9 points) that used to be commonly used in Ge'ez and rarely in Tigrinya of which one, though it is full of variations and inconsistencies (at times, page after page), example is Fisseha's (1899) ታሪክ ኢትዮጵያ, *Tarik Etiop'ia (History of Ethiopia)*. For example, a single or multiple (and at times a combination of) three-dot, four-dot, five-dot, six-dot, seven-dot, or nine-dot may appear at the end of a paragraph or section. Thus, it makes sense to use the term "sər'ate net'əbi" (meaning, a system of point), not just mark (for *tə'amrte* or *mələkt*) when referring to Tigrinya punctuation. It is also important to remark that the word "point" as in "two-point" is used by Dillman (2005), whereas "dot" as in "nine-dot" is used by Delamater & Vulgon (2016).

Previous work on Tigrinya punctuation (e.g., Ataklti, 1990; Tadelle, 2008; Abate, 2009b; ATL, 2010) focused more on indicating their names and functions along with a couple of examples, more like the Tigrinya dictionaries (Yohannes, 1947-48; Academy of Ethiopian Languages, [AEL], 1987; Kassa & Emanuel, 2000). Despite their importance, these works slightly differ in the number, names, and functions of the marks each addresses. Another study (e.g., Abate, 2009a) shows a number of confusables and/or differences in the use of punctuation marks in Tigrinya, partly due to lack of awareness and/or

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lack of guidelines for use. Such works and the desire to standardize the marks have led to renewed attention and recommendations.

Considering the current use of marks, Kahssay (2016) lists nine marks of which the source of the two (viz., ፡ and ።) is ancient Ethiopic, while five (፣, ፤, ፥, ፦, and ፧) and two (፨ and ፩) others are labeled Ethiopic and Modern Ethiopic, respectively. The first one (፡) is included as abbreviation and decimal mark, not as a word-divider. In addition to the nine marks whose source is Ethiopic, six loan or “European” marks (viz., !, (), ‘ ’ or « », /, –, and ...) are identified as part of the prominent Ethiopic punctuation. Kahssay also made two important points about the question mark (?) and the slash (/): the European question mark (which is more popular in Tigrinya) is used more than the Ethiopic equivalent (፤) and the latter (i.e., /) is “often used for punctuation of words, especially with proper names.” However, the question mark (?) is not among the list of proposed or retained Ethiopic marks (p.135).

In light of the points raised above, this study was carried out to look into trends in the use of punctuation marks in Tigrinya, by way of assessing their uses in selected works. Thus, attempts were made to describe the specific marks (both Ethiopic and Western ones) that are found in prominent works.

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2. Problem Statement

Punctuation marks have over the years been used, adapted and/or adopted in Ethiopic languages – Tigrinya, Tigre, Amharic, etc. This is made evident in the list of marks proposed by Kahssay (2016) who says that “modern Ethiopic punctuation includes more marks adopted from European orthography” (p.162). Thus, it is essential to find out which, how, when, etc. (if possible) marks have made it, particularly into Tigrinya (literature or language, in general). This may partly indicate a trend in the use of marks as well as reasons for doing so since they might indicate lack or gaps that writers have faced (or continue to do so) in the course of writing.

There is a renewed interest in indigenous knowledge, and this has led to a tendency or movement to use marks that are either being exclusively used in Ge'ez or have been out of use (at times because of being replaced by English marks) due to lack of knowledge of the local marks or familiarity with those used in English. A critical look into such tendencies is critical as it might shed light on trends and associated challenges in punctuation use.

One of the first (or more popular) works in Tigrinya are those written by the likes of Fisseha (1899) who wrote his works abroad (in Italy), or foreigners who learnt (or studied) Ge'ez and Tigrinya. That has been the case in Eritrea (particularly) as the first Tigrinya grammar book, according to Yohannes (1947-8), was produced by a foreigner. While they are likely to have used the marks (not just the language), it is also possible that they might have used marks from their primary languages for different reasons.

The short-lived role of Tigrinya as medium of instruction and an official language in Eritrea had contributed to the development of the language (Kassa & Emanuel, 2000; Hailu, 2017). There was no such opportunity in Tigrai, at least not until the late 1970's. As a result, Tigrinya users had to learn Amharic and English, not to mention the fact that they had to do that leaving their own (or at the expense of Tigrinya and with more focus on English). Again, like the foreigners, they are likely to use (have used) styles, marks, organization, etc. from English.

It is important to know the specific punctuation marks, including their names as well as how they are being used. Some marks appear to have a couple of names—there appears to be no consensus and uniformity as far as their names are concerned. These might at times entail or lead to confusion and/or differences in use/usage.

It is also important to assess specific changes, developments, and/or general trends in so far as their names and functions are concerned. Calhoun (2015) says “as we expect language to develop over time and change from place to place, such is the case when it comes to punctuation.” However, this aspect of language is often not well addressed (not subjected to critical assessment), necessitating a close look into instances of use across different materials in a longer span of time. Such documents include but are not limited to a sample of textbooks, magazines, newspapers, dictionaries, and other published materials.

There are challenges that users often face when using punctuation marks. This is made evident in the variations of the labels they assign as well as their specific functions and actual uses. Other more serious and common problems include improper use, not using

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them (some or all) at all, inconsistencies, misusing as well as carelessness in using the marks. These problems may be attributed to lack of knowledge and guidelines for using punctuation marks.

3. Objectives

While the general objective is describing the current trends in Tigrinya punctuation, the specific ones are to:

1. Identify the punctuation marks that have been and are currently being used in Tigrinya;
2. Assess the practice of using punctuation marks in Tigrinya;
3. Describe the challenges associated with the use of marks in Tigrinya.

4. Methodology

The prominent Tigrinya works of (Debtera) Fisseha (1899), who is dubbed as the father of Tigrinya literature, (Aba) Yohannes (1947-48), and (Haleka) Tsige (1986), if not in their entirety, were purposefully considered to explore the use of punctuation marks in Tigrinya. In addition, using the same techniques, two Tigrinya dictionaries and six Tigrinya Language textbooks which were developed by a team of professionals involving teachers, curriculum specialists, and language experts and are being used were considered to look into present trends. Similar attempts were also made to assess the use of marks in other recent publications both from Tigrai and Eritrea, including books and two copies of a Tigrinya newspaper from Eritrea (ሓዳስ

ኤርትራ, *Hadas Eritrea*), selected using availability sampling technique, as well as proceedings of the Academy of Tigray Languages (hereafter, ATL).

A qualitative approach, more specifically a text analysis, was employed to describe the different punctuation marks that are used in Tigrinya. This was done to indicate possible trends in the practice of using the marks over an extended period of time, starting from the possible earlier works (the first three) to current ones. The selected textbooks, dictionaries, newspapers, and books are thought to mirror the current practice of punctuation use in the language. Attempts were also made to put some marks into categories in order to describe the different shades of functions.

5. Results and Discussion

1. The word-divider (:)

According to Dillmann (2005), a perpendicular stroke (i.e., |) was used as a word-divider (:) in ancient Ethiopic writing. The use of the mark in Ge'ez is particularly evident in Axumite inscriptions. The mark was later replaced by two or a pair of points or square dots (:), or better *kälte net'äbi* in Tigrinya. The use of the two points after initial or two opening letters in shortened words (as in ቐ: for ቐዱስ, i.e., *k'ädus*, meaning *Saint*) indicates the same function, implying that a short form stands for and/or is equivalent to a complete word. For this reason, Dillmann (p. 34) cites this (in this case, the absence of a mark and/or use of the word-divider after initial letter) as evidence for saying that the “Abyssinians have no abbreviation marks” as the word-divider appears where a period should be.

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The word-divider is seen after abbreviations in Fisseha (1899) as in ሐ፡ ቲ፡ ሮ፡ ስ፡ (p.84, 85), *Emp. Tedros*, and numbered lists as in, ፩፡ ... ፪፡ ... (p.120), meaning 1. ... 2. ..., etc. Again, numerals, like any other words, used to be separated by two-dots (in the same way a space is used in English). The same trend is observed in Yohannes (1948-9) who abbreviated his full name (along with his title, ኣባ or *Aba*, i.e., *Father*) as ኣ ፡ ሆ ፡ ገብ ፡ ኣግዚ ፡ (i.e., *A.Y. Geb. Egz., for Aba Yohannes Gebregziabher*). It is important to note that there is a space on either side of the word-divider in the instances. Thus, it is possible to argue that both the word-divider and space were used in Ethiopic writing as well as in Tigrinya. Thus, despite Dillmann's claim, there had been a mark for abbreviation for some time.

Though there is no mention of it, Yohannes' Tigrinya-Amharic dictionary work seems to mark the beginning of using the period for abbreviations as ዓ. ም. as well as ዓ፡ም፡ (E.C., *Ethiopian Calendar*) are found in his work. That there is no mention of it may, at the same time, imply the use of the mark in previous works. In fact, as some of the texts found in the front matter of the dictionary show, the period appears to have been introduced much earlier. That said, there are no traces of the slash as a date separator and letter separator in abbreviations, implying the fact that the mark must have been adopted sometime after the aforementioned period (i.e., 1948-9).

Nowadays, a single space, not the two points (and, of course, a space before and after the mark), is used to separate words as in English. Consequently, consecutive words are close to one another than before. From the mid first millennium B.C., space was used to separate words in

West Semitic instead of dots, and this practice began to be followed by printers of modern Ethiopic texts (Delamater & Vulgan, 2014). Kahssay (2016) considers the word separator (፣) as “being phased out”, except in stylistic writings and liturgical text. As a result, the two-dot is not any more a *word-divider* nor the most frequent one in Tigrinya. However, as discussed in the next section, the same pair (or better *colon* [:]) is being used (chiefly in Eritrea) to show pauses in lieu of the Ethiopic comma (፣).

A point, not the two-point (nor a space), is used to mark abbreviations, and the rules for using (as well as not using) this mark to indicate abbreviations in English are generally applicable in Tigrinya, including not doubling up periods and all. In addition, there is no more space between consecutive single letters in an abbreviation, apart from a mark itself. Adane (2008) labels the one-dot mark *hade net'abi* (Tigrinya) and *nek'ut'* (Ge'ez) and states two functions, namely, after numerals and letters (the first forms of the *fidels*) in lists and abbreviations. Both functions are widely seen in most of the sample texts, but, as indicated below, other marks (e.g., the slash) continue to be used.

Often times, a period is not placed after the terminal character in abbreviations, unless the first two or initial letters are used, in which case, the period is applied at the end as in መም. (for መምህር, *memhər*, meaning *teacher*). Otherwise, it is common to see ዓ.ም (instead of ዓ.ም., E.C., Ethiopian Calendar). (Though the period is commonly being used nowadays, the mark, to be exact, in older texts appears to be a *Middle Dot*.) The absence of a mark after the final character is unsurprising given that it is used in place of (or interchangeably used with) the forward slash (/), particularly when the first part of compound words and

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phrases is abbreviated. This has been the case for single-word abbreviations, like መ/ር (መምህር, *teacher*) and ዶ/ር (ዶክተር, *doctor*).

Considering, how single words are abbreviated in English (e.g., *Doctor and Mister, as Dr. and Mr., or better Dr and Mr*), the words (መምህር and ዶክተር), according to the ATL (2010b), are written as መር and ዶር, respectively, with the possibility of dropping the period altogether. The problem is that such abbreviations (those made using the first initial letters or the first and the last letters of words) may be misread or mistaken for acronyms. Worse is that once the period (e.g., in the first one – መር.) is dropped and is mistaken for acronym, it may turn out to be a different word. Even so, both marks (the one dot and the forward slash) continue to be used in tandem.

As cited earlier, the period is often not placed (perhaps forgotten or used in lieu of the slash) after terminal characters. The ‘missing’ period in each of the following (underlined> abbreviations shows how widespread and acceptable it is (or better has been) in Tigrinya, all in Yemane (2018):

ኣብ መጀመርታ 1975 ዓ.ም ናይ ሁ.ግ.ሓ.ኤ ወኪል ኩይነ ሰሪሑ።
ፓ.ሓ.ኤ

Ab mejemerta 1975 a.m Nai H.G.H.E wekil koine serihe T.H.E

*At the beginning of 1975 E.C I worked as an EPLF representative
TLF*

It is like writing “E.C, E.P.L.F and T.L.F” respectively. Nowadays, a period is applied after each letter in abbreviations, as is the case in the Tigrinya Language textbooks recently published by MoE-

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FDRE (2006; 2007; 2008) as well as those published in Eritrea (e.g., ቍ.ሳ.ፖ. – P.O. Box – (Solomon, 2012). In fact, if the abbreviations are common and are less confusing, no period or periods are applied. Thus, ዓም instead of ዓ.ም. (i.e., E.C. or EC for Ethiopian Calendar), ህግሓኤ instead of ህ.ግ.ሓ.ኤ. (i.e., E.P.L.F. or EPLF for Eritrean People’s Liberation Front), and ተሓኤ instead of ተ.ሓ.ኤ. (E.L.F or ELF (i.e., Eritrean Liberation Front) may be acceptable.

Other than the period, a forward slash (/), the right parenthesis and/or the parentheses may to a lesser extent appear, depending on largely preferences of writers among other things. There may sometimes be just a space after a letter or numeral. As the following instances from Tsigie (1986) show, all the possibilities (including inconsistencies, as in the last three) may appear in a book:

(ሀ) ኣቦ ዓል ... (52)

፩/ ምእንቲ ምልዖ ... (82)

፪) ምእንቲ መቐዕ ... (83)

፬. ምእንቲ ዓጋም ብግጥሚ (85)

The forward one (/) is commonly used as a date separator (e.g., 22/1/2011) and in abbreviations of nouns, as ቤ/ክ (for ቤተ ክርስቲያን, *church*) and ገ/ህይወት (for *G/hiwot, Gebrehiwot*). While abbreviations of two-letter words (or even three) are often considered not reasonable, the use of both marks (a period or a forward slash) for the same function is

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often cited as a problem. The period is also used in decimals. In other words, the one-dot has the same functions as the period in English, except one (i.e., marking end of a statement). The functions and uses of the word-divider and the abbreviation mark can be summarized as follows:

Table 1. Trends in the use of the word-divider and abbreviation marker

	<i>perpendicular</i>	<i>two-dot</i>	<i>Space</i>
Word forms	<i>stoke</i>		
	ዓመተ ምሕረት	ዓመተ: ምሕረት	ዓመተ ምሕረት
	<i>word-divider</i>	<i>One-dot</i>	<i>One-dot or a slash</i>
Letter forms	ዓ: ምሕረት or ዓ: ም:	ዓ. ም*	ዓ. ም. ዓ/ም

** A single dot (a forward slash) is used despite both being abbreviations.*

However, the two-dot has assumed the non-grammatical uses of the colon, namely, to separate hour from minutes and chapter from verse and express the ratio of two numbers. Kahssay (2016), on the other hand, while describing it “almost archaic two-dot” in so far as being a word separator is concerned, has included it in the list of prominent Ethiopic punctuation and goes on to label and propose it as an abbreviation mark and a decimal mark. Apart from those mentioned above, the colon is used to mark pauses (after phrases and dependent clauses), chiefly in Eritrea. By contrast, the Ethiopic comma (i.e., ፣) is widely used in Tigrai, but some writers prefer the Ethiopic colon (፥) to denote pauses. The latter as discussed in subsequent sections is part of a renewed trend to incorporate marks that are (had exclusively been) in Ge’ez.

2. The Ethiopic Preface Colon

As for the grammatical functions of the colon, the Ethiopic preface (i.e., :-) is used. In contrast to the marks that are simply named based on the number of dots, Delamater & Vulgan (2014, p.46) note that some marks (e.g., the Ethiopic preface) suggest syntactical function. While *aste'emro* (as it is called in Ge'ez) means “to explain,” and *ak'rbot* (or አቅርቦት) means “to introduce” or “to present.” Put differently, the Ethiopic preface has the same meaning as the western colon, which means “that is to say” or “here’s what I mean.”

In practice, the preface colon is mainly used after titles, heading and subheadings, as in ምልክት አንክሮ (!):- እዚ ዘገርዎ ወይ ዘደንቕ ነገር ንምምልካት... (MoE FDRE, 2007A), *Exclamation mark: This is used ...*), when giving examples or after words which mean “example” or “for example”, and stating introductory remarks which are followed by a list of items or points as in:

- አብነት:- ..., meaning example, ... ንአብነት:- ..., meaning for example, ...
- ተምሃሮ ነዚ ምዕራፍ'ዚ ምስተምሃርኩም:- After learning this chapter, students:
 - እንታይነት ቋንቋ ትገልፁ። describe the meaning of language. (MoE-FDRE, 2007A)

The mark (:-) also appears in references between place of publication and publisher (e.g., መቐለ:- ቤት ሕትመት ዘመናዊ, Mekelle: Zemenawi Printing House) and after names of characters in dialogues (e.g., አቴሎ:- መንዲል..., Othelo: Mendil..., meaning *handkerchief*...). Likewise, Solomon (2012, p.48-49) uses the mark as in ዳረፊ ንመርዓት:- (meaning, *ridiculing a bride*:) and ሰበይቲ:- ... (meaning, *Woman*:).

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However, some writers (mainly those in Eritrea) and very few in Tigrai use the colon (:) as is used in English. The following are just some examples:

Table 2. Example uses of the colon in Tigrinya

ፀሓፍቲ፡ ... ኤዲተር፡ ... (ሚትፌዴራሊዥ፣ 2008ሀ፣ 2008ለ)	Authors: ... Editor:
ምዕራፍ 1፡ ቋንቋን ሕብረተሰብን... (ሚትፌዴራሊዥ፣ 2008ሀ)	Chapter 1: Language and Society
ፍልፍል፡ ቋንቋን ኣለማምድኡን ... (ሚትፌዴራሊዥ፣ 2008ለ)	Source: Language and how its acquired ...
ሓጋዝ፡ ማሕበራዊ ኣገልግሎት ብግቡእ ክጥቀማሉ ምኽንያት ... (ሓዳስ ኤርትራ፣ 2013)	Hagaz: They need to utilize social services ...
ፋክስ፡ 127749 - ቍ.ሳ.ጳ. 247 (ሓዳስ ኤርትራ፣ 2013)	Fax: 127749 – P.O.B. 247

As the first two examples from two Tigrinya textbooks from Tigrai show, the colon is used (only in the front matter: inside cover and Table of Contents) in lieu of the preface colon. This is the case in the said sections of 9-12 Tigrinya textbooks, possibly owing to the different organizations that were involved in the development of the materials. That said, the latter one (:-) consistently appears in the Tigrinya textbooks across all grade levels. Similarly, the preface is consistently used by ERiTV, as in the following examples (in news bars):

ዜና ወጻኢ፡- ... (meaning, Foreign News: ...)

ዜና ውሽጢ ሃገር፡- ... (meaning, Local News: ...)

ሓበሬታ፡- ... (meaning, Information: ...)

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Thus, there appears to be a great deal of inconsistency in the use of the colon and the preface colon in both Tigrai and Eritrea. The preface colon and the colon are used by *ERiTV* and *Hadas Eritrea*, respectively; both marks are used in Tigrinya textbooks that had been published by the same organization in Tigrai though the preface colon is the most preferred and predominant one.

However, the Ethiopic comma (፣) and the Ethiopic colon (፥) are sometimes seen (mistakenly) where the preface colon (or the western colon in English) is normally expected, such as in dialogues (the first one [between Haben and Nahom] in Grade 2, page 47; the second one [Selam and Lemlem] from posts on Facebook) as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1) ሓበን፣ ሕንቅልሕንቅሊተይ | 2) ስለም፥ አብ ዓደይ? ... |
| ናሆም፣ ሰናቢተይ | ለምለም፥ ንምንታይ? |

The mark after the names in the second dialogue is called ንኡስ ሰረዝ (*nə'us särəz*) or Ethiopic colon. It is, at times, dubbed *ecclesiastical mark* since it is common in religious works (e.g., *ወንጌል ቦሃንስ 1፥1*, for *Chapter 1: verse 1*), and some writers have begun using it (in some cases) like the Ethiopic comma (in fact, asserting the equivalence of the two marks) or the western equivalent and (at other times) just like a colon. For instance, Halek'a Tsige (1986) uses it (i.e., ፥) to denote pauses after phrases. For example,

እምበኣርከስ፥ ናብቱ በኹሪ ሓሳቢይ ክምለስም፥ ብዛዕባ ኣረጋዊ ወሲኽ ክዘረብ።

Thus, let me turn to my first idea, and talk more things about the elderly (p.12)

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The use of Ethiopic colon in lieu of the Ethiopic comma or using both interchangeably shows the confusions and differences as well as the difficulty to come up with some kind of congruence between the Ethiopic and Western punctuation (See Table 5). In modern usage, as is made evident in all (Grades 1-12) Tigrinya text books in Tigrai, the Ethiopic comma is appropriate in place of both colons (the Ethiopic and the western) in the extracts. Some, however, prefer the Ethiopic comma (፣) in serial lists, but not to indicate pauses. The problem is that nor the Ethiopic word-divider (፡) and Ethiopic colon (፥) nor the colon (:) in English is used to indicate pauses. After all, the comma (in English) is used both to indicate pauses as well a series of items, implying why some argue the Ethiopic comma should serve in the same way as its western equivalent. However, the Ethiopic colon appears to be the most appropriate (considering its equivalence with the western equivalent and all) in such instances:

1a. እንስሳት ኣብ ክልተ ይኸፈሉ፡ ዓፃማትን ዘይዓፃማትን ከዓ ይበሃሉ። (Atkalti, 1990, P.75)

1b. *Animals are divided into two: they are called vertebrates and invertebrates.*

2a. ትግራይ ክልተ ዓበይቲ ሩባታት ኣለዋ፡ ተኸዘን መረብን።

2b. *Tigrai has two big rivers: Tekeze and Mereb.*

3a. እቲ ህዝቢ ድሕሪ መረር ቃልሲ ድልዖቱ ረኺቡ፡ ሰላም

3b. *After a bitter struggle, the people got what it wanted: peace.*

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Thus, there is every reason to use the Ethiopic colon in such instances. As for introducing examples, subheadings, list of items (e.g., objectives) and setting off publisher's name are concerned, the preface colon appears to have widespread and well-established usage, while other possibilities (such as using the Ethiopic comma, colon, and semicolon) are rarely seen.

3. *The Sentence Divider*

Citing lines from Henoch—an ancient Ethiopic book—Dillmann (2005) reports that the Ethiopic period (፥) is used to indicate the end of a sentence, the Ethiopic semicolon (፤) to list similar items and separate a set of words, and the sign markers (፥፥ or ፥፥፥፥) to end paragraphs and/or separate sections (p. 33); hence, a “paragraph separator” and/or “Section separator.” The latter marks also appear as an Ethiopic period (i.e., in Tigrinya to be exact). This is evident in none other but *Fisseha's (1899) Tarik Itiyop'ya*. The function of the four-dot to mark end of a sentence is consistent to date in Ge'ez and Tigrinya writing. The Ethiopian writing system uses four square dots arranged in a square pattern as a sentence divider (Lipiński, 2001, p. 97). According to Delamater & Vulgan, (2014), the function and the use of the two-dot as a word-divider and the nine-dot as a full stop signaling the end of a paragraph are quite uniform.

Fisseha (1899), on the other hand, also (apart from marking end of a sentence) used the Ethiopic period at the end of headings as in ሣባ፥, *Saba* (p.7) and ብዛዕባ፡ምካዳ፡ንግሥተ፡ዓኔብ፥፥, *About Makda, Queen of Azeb* (p.24). However, this use of the Ethiopic period is becoming a thing of the past or, at the most, rarer. The period is replaced by an Ethiopic preface colon or a colon or, as is common in English, no

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punctuation at all. Likewise, the paragraph and section separators, which come in different appearances and number of points, appear to be cumbersome and unknown to many and are not used at all. However, as indicated above, Kahssay (2016) has included the paragraph separator and section marker as part of his proposed list of marks to be used in Ethiopian writings.

The other sentence dividers are the exclamatory mark (!), the question mark (? or ፣), ትእምርተ ስላቕ, that is *ti'imrte slaq* (Ethiopic sarcasm), which looks like an inverted exclamation mark (¡), and rare though its use is, the *interrobang* (i.e., ? or !? or even ?!). The exclamation one is consistently used since its introduction into the language by Yohannes (1947-48). As for the second, the presence of two marks is leading to some kind of confusion or differences in Eritrea where the Ethiopic equivalent, which has been (is) out of use in Tigrai, is being used as in the following instances, all in Solomon (2012), show:

ስለምንታይ ... ዘይጸንሐ፣ (ገጽ 114) ... በየናይ ቅጥዒ ይግበር፣ (ገጽ 116) እንታይ ድኡ ዝመስል፣ (ገጽ 247)

Despite such instances (not to mention very few ones by some Facebook users), the Ethiopic question mark is uniformly being used as the following instances, the first two from the *Hadas Eritrea* and the last one from *EriTV*, show:

... “ያኸ’ቲ ዘንጋር ኣይረኣኹን? ኣበይ ከይዱ ይኸውን? ጀሪበ (ደልዮ) ቀቢጸዮ - ገለ ኣይፈለጥኹን?” (2013, 3)

... ምስ መን? ኣበይ? (2020, p.5)

... ማዕረ ክንደይ እዩ? (ERiTV, 2018)

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From the instances above, it appears that the western question mark continues to be used by state-owned organizations, implying the possibility that this may as well be the mark that is (formally) taught. The Ethiopic question mark, as a result, is being applied despite lack of uniformity among users and/or in written products as well as reactions against its use. That said, while the Ethiopic question mark (፣) is being reintroduced in Eritrea, the Ethiopic colon (፥), if not correctly, is enjoying a similar practice and popularity in Tigray as discussed above.

The last two marks seldom occur in texts, and their usage largely depends on the wishes or decisions of the writers. The following example is found in Yohannes (1948-9):

አዩ፡ግሩም! የኹርዐናዶ፡ነበረ!፡። How strange! Were we proud of it?

As can be seen, three marks, with the last one marking the end, are used. The sentence marker (፡፡) is not seen in modern usage, but the order of the two marks may at times be reversed (e.g., ?!). Likewise, as current instances show, there may even be one mark, namely the *interrobang* (?), and an equivalent name ኣንኸቶ (an'hito), using the same coinage. Despite the inconsistency, the use of the marks shows the continued adoption of western marks (along with their functions).

4. Sentence Part Markers

As mentioned earlier, punctuation marks inform the reader where to pause and detour (APA, 2010, p.87). While the comma, the colon and the semicolon have the first role, punctuation marks like the dash, parenthesis, and brackets perform the second. Thus, the Ethiopic semicolon, for example, is used to indicate a pause at the end of clause

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or separate independent clauses, as in እንተ፡ዳጎሮዎች፡አዕራብ፡ [...] ሐበሻ፡ ይብልዎ፤እንካብ፡ስዊስ፡[...] ባሕር፡አልሐበሻ፡..., meaning *The Arabs call [...] Habesha; they call [...] bahir Al Habesh* (Fisseha, 1899, p. 2).

The Ethiopic comma (፣), on the other hand, is used to indicate a pause or separate a phrase as in ናብ፡መስኢ፡ወገን፡ንደሬት፣ (p.1), meaning *the place adjacent to Southwest to Yafet* (person’s name). This mark continues to be used to denote pause in Tigrai, as is made in the Tigrinya textbooks that are currently being used in schools in Tigrai. (See the following table.)

Table 3. The Ethiopic comma in Tigrinya textbooks

ንአብነት፣ “ራህዋ ትማሊ መዲአ” ኣብ ዝተበል፣ ... (5 ^ይ , p.50)	For instance, in (the sentence) “Rahwa came yesterday,”
ብተወሳኺ፣ ኣህፅሮተ ቃላት ንምፅሓፍ ንጥቀመሉ። (6 ^ይ , p.139)	In addition, we use it for writing abbreviations.
... ኣባላት እቲ ማሕበር ስለዝስማምዑሉ ከዓ፣ ... (9 ^ይ , p.39)	What the members of the association agree,
ከም ኣመለኸኽታ ሓሳባውያን፣ ቋንቋ ... (10 ^ይ , p.11)	According to idealists, language ...

However, the two-dot (chiefly in Eritrea and to a lesser extent in Tigrai) and the Ethiopic colon (i.e., ፥, *nə’us sārəz*) are also used to denote pauses. The latter mark is seen in the proceedings published by ATL though there is no mention of it in the aforementioned textbooks from Grade 1-12. The two-dot seems to be consistently used by Eritrean

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writers in recent times. One notable example is the book published by Solomon Tsehaye in 2012. In fact, as the following instances show, not only is the mark used in serial lists, but the conjunction -ን (for “and”) is, at times not seen at all (e.g., እዚያታ፡ ልቦና፡ ጥበብ፡ ታሪኽ ከምዘይነበረ [p. 115]) though it is put in the first two and last two items (ዝለዓለ ክብሪ ዝወሃቦ መርዓን ቀብርን፡ ታሪኽ፡ ሞያ፡ ትውልድን ቅያን... [p. 115]). In Tigray, the Ethiopic comma is used in all the instances as well as the ones in Table 3. For instance, in the first one below, the first colon is used to indicate a pause, but the second shows a serial list. Likewise, in Tigray (as per the Tigrinya textbooks) the first comma would indicate a pause and the second a list.

Table 4. The two-dot in example texts

ተሰተፍቲ ብወገኖም፡ ኣገልግሎት ጥዕና፡ ትምህርትን ማይን ክሰፍኡ፡ (ሓዳስ ኤርትራ፣ 2013፣ 1)	The participants on their part, to expand health, education and water services ... (Hadas Eritrea, 2013, p.1)
ኣብ መወዳእታ፡ ኣብ ጸብጻብ ገበናትን (ሓዳስ ኤርትራ፣ 2020፣ 2)	Finally, on reporting crimes and (Hadas Eritrea, 2020, p.2)
እዚ ቐዳማይ መጽሓፍዚ፡ ከም መሰረት ... (ሰሎሞን፣ 24)	This first book, as a basis... (Solomon, 24)
... ክሰዕ እዚ ቐረብ ጊዜ፡ (ሰሎሞን፣ 115)	... till recently, (Solomon, 115)

However, the Ethiopic semicolon (፣) is used (not necessarily) to pause at items (e.g., a list of words or a serial list) as in ግእዝ፣ ኣግአዚ፡ (p.8),

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Ge'ez; Ag'azi. The mark that is currently being used here (in place of the Ethiopic semicolon is a comma (፣) or a connector like “and.”

An important note to be made here is that while the comma is rarely seen where a semicolon is proper, the latter is used where a comma or a connector would normally be expected. In fact, the use of Ethiopic comma in tune with the English comma appears to be a modern or recent trend as is more made evident in Fisseha’s (1899) preface (which was added in 2000) and, of course, in recent usage. (See the Table 5.) That said, there appears to be confusion and a dilemma between two marks (i.e., ፣ and ፥) of which the latter was chiefly frequented in religious writings. However, since its resurgence, it (i.e., ፥, and at times erroneously ÷, the division mark) is being used to do certain functions of the *nə'us näṭəb*, Ethiopic comma.

Table 5. Ethiopic and English punctuation marks

	Com ma	Semicol on	Preface Colon	Colon	Full stop	Ques. mark	Para separator
Ethiopic	፣	፥	፡-	፥	፡፡	፤	፡፡
Ge'ez	<i>nə'us näṭəb</i>	<i>'äbiy säraz</i>	<i>'ästä' 'ämro</i>	<i>nə'us säraz</i>	<i>'äbiy näṭəb</i>	<i>sälästä näṭəb</i>	<i>säb'ätä näṭəb</i>
English	,	;	:	:	, ;	.	?

5. Loan Marks

Including those adopted from other languages (mainly, English), Tigrinya has several punctuation marks. Some of the loan marks have made their way into the language as the Ethiopic ones ceased to be used,

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while others were included considering their importance. For example, Yohannes (1947-48) explains why he used (adopted) three marks (i.e., ?, !, and ') in his dictionary that was published in 1948-49 as follows:

As we don't have interrogatory and exclamatory marks, I have inserted (adopted) the two English marks. [...] Likewise, as using contractions is common in our language and rejecting something for the simple reason that it is not ours won't do us good, I have added the mark hoping that we will be appreciated for doing so.

Yohannes (1947-48) also suggested the square dots $\ddot{\text{ }}$ to indicate a consonant that is “strengthened” or “dwelt upon”, according to Stephen Wright, cited by Asteraye et al. (1999), or as some say, the doubling of a consonant sound. Despite the sound argument made for using the square dots (in the introductory section of the book), the pair was not used in the dictionary due to some technical reasons (related to additional expenses) described by the author. The same mark, however, is seen in a Tigrinya dictionary that was published (40 years later) by the AEL in 1989. The mark is important to differentiate confusables (i.e., homographs), a pair of words that are spelled in the same way as in $\text{ጠጠሽለ} /m\text{əss}\text{ə}l\text{ə}/$, ('he cited a saying') and $\text{ጠጠሰለ} /m\text{əs}\text{ə}l\text{ə}/$, ('he resembled or appeared'). According to Asteraye et al (1999), the mark is used in linguistic works, dictionaries, and material aimed at language education. However, ATL (2010) has not only replaced the mark that Yohannes (1947-48) introduced and the AEL (1987) adopted for contracted forms by the apostrophe (') as a diacritical mark, but it also started to be applied irrespective of the text type. It is like putting a stress marker (or a diacritical mark) on the first syllable when using the words “rebel”,

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“present”, “produce”, “convert”, etc. and on the second when using them as verbs as in:

The 'rebel re'belled. ሰመረ መስመር ሰመረ።

As the hyphen and the dash (with a great deal of insistency) are used by Yohannes, they must have been introduced or adopted for quite some time (any time prior to his book), if not during the period of Fisseha (1899) as not any one of the three is found in both books (i.e., *Tarik Itiyop'ya; T'oblahta*). The hyphen is used in names like *Gebre-egziabher*, *kidane-wold*, *mezgbe-kalat*, etc., but the word-divider (:) is also used in between *Gebre* and *egziabher* (ገብረ፡አግዚአብሔር) as well as *kidane and wold* (ኪዳነ፡ወልድ). The dash, on the other hand, appears after numbers (in a list) and headings, as opposed to a period (.) and the Ethiopic preface (:-) as is the case nowadays, respectively.

Contrary to the use of the hyphen by Yohannes (1947-48) and a period by ATL (2010), Kahssay (2016) suggests that the slash (/) be used for contraction of words, especially with proper names, the latter practice (of using the slash as an abbreviation marker) continues to be prevalent. As the slash is nowhere to be found in Yohannes' (1947-48) መዝገብ ቃላት (*mezgbe-k'alat*, i.e., dictionary), it appears to be a recent addition (in contrast to those he adopted) in the same way as the period is used for abbreviations (e.g., G.egziabher). Otherwise, it would have been used to shorten names as in *Gebre-egziabher as G/egziabher* (as Kahssay's proposal).

Round brackets (also called parentheses) are found repeatedly in Fisseha (1899). The mark is used to separate non-essential information.

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However, it may as well be a definition and/or an alternative term that is believed to assist readers to certain words. For example, in the preface section, brackets are used to indicate more familiar place names (such as, Yeha la'elai Zufan (Adwa) and Adi Zenu (Seraye)) and cross references (e.g., ገፅ 146 ረጅ, See page 146). The mark is chiefly used to offer synonyms, equivalent terms, forms, and periods or years (in both local and European), homographs, additional information, full forms (e.g., ማይ :በላ (ማይ :አምፅኡ: በላ), She said water (She said, “bring me water”), definitions, etc. throughout the book. In addition, when the information to be added is a bit long (a series of sentences or a paragraph), it is provided with a pair of parentheses on both sides, as in the following example (p. 40): (*The title of the wife of ancient Tigraian emperors was called Hindekie...*).

In the preface (written by Yacob Beyene and included in 1993) in the same book, a period is used for abbreviations (e.g., ዓ.ም.ፈ. for E.C.) and double quotation marks (“ ”) to mark emphasis as well as to indicate book titles and quotes and the Ethiopic comma (፣) to list and separate phrases and dependent clauses. Examples of the third one are also widely, if not consistently, found in the main text. For example, ... ናይ: ስሜንን፣ናይ:በጌምድርን፣ናይ:ደምብያን፣ገዛኢ... (p.102), The ruler of Semien, of Begie Midir and of Dembia was ...; ሐፀይ:ዮሐንስ፣ጥሪ:ዝነገሡ: ንሰኔኡ፣አብ:... (p.103), in the month of June following the coronation of Emperor Yohannes in January, he was..., and ንጉራዕ:እንኪሞፅኡ:እንከ፣... (p.112), while they were coming to Gura’e. Likewise, in the other book

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by the same author, the Ethiopic comma is used in a serial list as in ... the month, the day, and the hour...) after a dependent clause.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1. Conclusions

As discussed in the previous sections in detail, there have been changes in the use of some punctuation marks in Tigrinya. These include a uniform use of some Ethiopic marks (e.g., the full stop as a sentence divider), coupled with additional functions (e.g., after headings and entry elements in references), adoption of a number of loan marks (e.g., the end marks ! and ? and intra-sentential ones like, the apostrophe for contracted forms, parenthesis, ellipsis, etc.) as the need arises, reintroduction of Ethiopic marks (e.g., the Ethiopic question mark, the Ethiopic colon and the paragraph and section signs) that are commonly found in Ge'ez writing as well as attempts of standardizing their functions in the language on both sides of the Mereb, in Tigray and Eritrea. That said, the slight variations observed highlight the need to consider the orthographic aspect in describing dialectal variations in the language.

As is always the case, parallel with the aforementioned efforts and trends are a great deal of inconsistencies, differences, idiosyncrasies, etc. here and there — including misusing, disusing, and underusing of marks among users. The inappropriate, inconsistent, etc. use of the marks are partly or wholly attributed to differences in the languages (e.g., English, Tigrinya, and Ge'ez), limited function and versatility of other marks in contrast to those used in English (e.g., the different functions of the comma and the restricted one of the Ethiopic

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equivalent), and the knowledge and preferences of individual writers and groups or organizations. For instance, writers who have Ge'ez background tend to use limited number of marks and cling more to Ge'ez (at times, conforming to punctuation use in Ge'ez writings). This, again, is coupled with a renewed interest in indigenous knowledge and in Ge'ez among the general public. The reintroduction of the Ethiopic question mark (chiefly in Eritrea) and the Ethiopic colon as well as the paragraph and section signs or marks are instances of such trend. Such trends by individual writers (e.g., Solomon 2012; Yemane, 2018) appear to be consistent with parts of the proposals by Kahssay (2016), but these (e.g., :) are not seen in most of the textbooks in Tigrai nor in *Hadas Eritrea* (2013; 2020) and EriTV.

In line with the continued use, reintroduction, and adoption of marks, new functions are also incorporated, thereby making the marks more versatile in their use or applicability. The sentence marker (::), for example, as indicated in ATL (2010, P. 105) and in its proceedings, is used to separate entry elements. Such attempts are part of the need to develop the language and conform to conventions as in the American Psychological Association, Modern Language Association, etc. Included in this league are the parentheses, the preface colon, and the period in citations and references.

With the replacement of the word-divider (:) by space, Tigrinya texts appear to be short of punctuation marks. This is often to the deterrent of readers who are forced to make own decisions in so far as where to stop, pause, etc. are concerned, thereby slowing their reading speed, and by extension their reading fluency. Nor does it help writers

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as they have limited options on their disposal as they attempt to communicate through their writings. This is partly attributed to versatility of Ethiopic marks and/or limited functions, both of which are leading to new usage and trends.

6.2.Recommendations

As described in the previous sections, there seems to be little or no problem as far as using the Ethiopic period and the Ethiopic semicolon are concerned as there is more uniformity in their functions. The same can be said about most of the loan marks, including parentheses, the end marks, colon (when denoting time). However, amidst and as part of the general trend(s), a number of variations and inconsistencies in the selection and use of marks have been observed.

In light of the results, it is important to have forums on the choice of alternative punctuation marks and inconsistencies in written products by individual writers and/or organizations. For example, whether or not a period or a forward slash or in fact both should be used for abbreviations, whether or not it is worth reintroducing marks that have been out of use for a long time, and the inconsistencies and/or mix-up surrounding the functions and uses of the hyphen, the dashes, Ethiopic comma, colon and preface are areas that deserve attention. In addition, given the specific trends in Tigray and Eritrea, writers need to make appropriate choices and informed decisions when using marks. Last but not least, scholars and concerned authorities need to consider punctuation use as part of the concerted efforts to ensure uniformity, by extension standardization and/or better understanding among academicians and the general populace.

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References

የኢትዮጵያ ቋንቋዎች አካዳሚ። (1989)። መዝገበ ቃላት ትግርኛ ብትግርኛ። አዲስ አበባ፡
- ንግድ ማተሚያ ድርጅት።

አባተ ካሳሁን። (2009a)። መጋገይቲ ባእታታት ኣብ ትግርኛ። ውፅኢት ምርምራት ካልኣይ ሃገራዊ ሲምፖዚየም ቋንቋታት ትግራይ (1^ይ ሕታም)። አዲስ አበባ፡- ደራሲ።

አባተ ካሳሁን። (2009b)። ኣጠቓቕማ ስርዓተ ነጥቢ ኣብ ትግርኛ፡- ኣስማት፣ ግልጋሎትን ኣብነታትን። ኣብ ውቕሮ (ትግራይ) ብዛዕባ ኣጠቓቕማ ስርዓተ ነጥቢ ኣብ ዝተሰለጠ ዘተ ዝቐረበን ዝተመሓየሸን።

(አባ) ዮሃንስ ገብረ - እግዚአብሔር። (፲፱፻፵፰-፲፱፻፶፱)። መዝገበ-ቃላት ትግርኛ ኣምሓርኛ፡-አስመራ፡- ቤት ሕትመት ኣርቲግራፊክ ኤሪትሪያ።

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