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Morphological and semantic deformation of the ?afo (Azmari) Argot in Tigrai

Article

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ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to describe the morphological structure, syntactic pattern, and semantic systems of the ?afo Argot in Tigrai. To achieve these objectives, a purposive sampling technique was used to select the informants. Elicitation, interview, and participatory observation methods were used to collect the data which was then audiotaped. A qualitative method was employed to analyze the data. The ?afo Argot was found to use most of the time Tigrigna affixes (-ka, -o, -ki, mə-) and sometimes Amahric affixes (-ima and -imma) to make the words obscure communication. In addition, the onomatopoeic system played an important in creating new expressions. Semantic and form deformation is significantly used in the ?afo Argot's expressions development, such as semantic load, connotative meaning, generic naming of specific terms, paraphrastic descriptions, and using instrumental nouns, similar to those in the Tigrigna language. Finally, some words whose origins are unknown were found in the ?afo Argot.

Keywords: Argot, secret language, morphology, semantics, Azmari, Asho (?afo)



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INTRODUCTION

In one language, people may come to the same organized group or into hierarchically ordered social groups (viz., high, middle, or low), economic status, cross-cultural group, and specifically, to related family lineage, rank, occupation, age, sex, regional background, etc. by different criteria (Kellers, 1997, p. 320). Thus, as Trask (2010, p.196) and Fasold (1984, p. 158) state, in the large-scale society of a language, every social group, profession, sub-sociocultural group, and generation distinguishes itself to some degree by its choice of vocabulary. Furthermore, every one of us needs to be recognized by outsiders as members of that group concerning politeness, prestige, misunderstanding, analogy, etc. Thus, we develop a language that is one of the most powerful ways of maintaining and displaying membership in a group (Trask, 2010, p. 1; Fasold, 1984, p. 1; Flexner, 1967, p. 189).

In terms of language use, there are formal and informal languages. Informal language is a language for a specific group named differently such as slang, jargon, cant, lingo, and secret language. Flexner (1967, p. 191) says that “Cant, jargon, and Argot are the words and expressions peculiar to special segments of the population”. Throughout the world, people have invented Argot or secret languages. They have been using these special languages to identify with a special group, for fun, or to prevent others from knowing what is being said (Fromkin, et al., 2003, p. 487-488).

Argot is one type of informal language, and it is also known as, secret language, disguising speech, lundling, and language game and play. However, these names may be used as different aspects in diversified areas. As Gil (2002, p. 1) pointed out, “Lundlings are also known as secret languages, language disguises, language genres, or backward languages, involving rule-governed phonological manipulations of ordinary speech.” Argot serves its speakers in different ways. Stephenson and Scarpitti (1968, p. 384) noted that Argot is used as an expression of solidarity, identification of in-group members, utilitarian symbolization of the complexities and subtleties of group life, exclusion of non-members, and maintenance of secret, and veiled expressions of hostility.

Society is classified into different groups according to various social factors such as types of occupation, generation, economic status, kinship, etc. (Garcia, 2005, p. 137). In Tigray, there is one societal group of minstrel called Azmari in Tigrigna or ʔafo in their secret language. Leslau (1952) and Ashenafi (1975, p. 41) indicated that the word “Azmari” is derived from the Ethiopian Semitic word *zmr*, meaning “sing”, *zəmərə* “sang”, and the noun form (i.e, s Azmari) refers to “a person who sings a song”.

Argot has similar phonology, syntax, and discourse with the standard language of the mainstream of the community. Thus, the users of Argot deform standard languages in different ways to form disguised speech. In the formation of secret language (Argot), different systems are used to restrict communication to an “in-group” and exclude others. To make Argot incomprehensible speech, the users use standard language (like Tigrinya, Amharic, English, etc.) words and transform them through various phonological and morphological procedures or by giving them new meanings out of changing their forms, or by borrowing from other languages of the neighbor communities (Leslau, 1964a, p. 7; Leslau, 1949b;

Chesterton, 2010, p. 227). Therefore, the systems of Argot formation, such as morphological and semantic distortions as well as borrowing, have been discussed below one by one as follows.

In Morphological Deformation, affixes serve to derive words or to express grammatical meanings in standard languages. In contrast, morphological deformation means the affixes of the standard languages function to distort the communication between the “in-group” and the outsiders in secret language creation or Argot. Leslau (1964a, p. 9) states that various affixes are added or distorted to the words of the standard language to construct a secret language (Argot).

Some words of Argot are used through various meaning types to express huge terms or expressions of a standard language. Thus, to solve the problems associated with the limited number of words, the Argot uses different procedures of semantic aspects out of changing the form of the words. In semantic aspects, the Argot may use paraphrases, descriptions, transferred meaning, and expressive connotation. In addition to this, the speakers of the Argot may use expressing the name of the part for the whole, or vice versa, pejorative meaning, and onomatopoeic expressions from a standard language without changing the form of the words (Leslau, 1964a, p. 60; 1964b, p. 1-12).

In a semantic change of language, metaphor in semantic change involves extensions in the meaning of a word that involves semantic similarity or connection between the new sense and the original one. Semantic widening or the range of meaning of a word can be used in more contexts than were appropriate for it before the change (Campbell, 2004, p. 254). Therefore, this semantic feature of language may be similar to the semantic change of Argot. With contextual meaning, expansion of meaning is logical, and semantic relationships between events (Halliday, 2003, p. 127).

A loanword is a lexical item (a word) that has been borrowed from another language. Put differently, it is a word that originally was not part of the vocabulary of the recipient language but was adopted from some other language and made part of the borrowing language (Campbell, 2004, p. 63). Loanwords as features of language are also common features in secret language. As Leslau (1964a, p. 64) states, “Nearly every Argot has loanwords, and the borrower language depends on the nature of the Argot and its geographic position.” Thus, Argots borrow words from different languages which are spoken by the neighboring people.

It should be noted that Argots may have words whose origins are not known. Such a feature is reflected in m^wijət Argot (Leslau, 1964a, p. 62). Perhaps, those unknown origins of the words may have diachronically changed their nature totally.

The analysis of Argot speakers and their secret language has both methodological and theoretical significance for sociolinguistic investigators which is used as a means of penetrating the inner life of the speakers (special roles, problems, and other concerns) arising from their sociolinguistic background, and to see the social functions of the Argot and language structures (Stephenson and Scarpitti, 1968, p. 384).

Objective of the Study

The purpose of the research was to study the morphological and semantic aspects of the ?afo Argot of Tigrinya speakers that are found in Tenben areas, particularly Bega Shexa. The specific objectives are:

- 1) describing the ?afo Argot expressions formed using standard affixes, morphological deformation;
- 2) describing onomatopoetic words in ?afo Argot;
- 3) investigating semantic and form deformation in the ?afo Argot.

METHOD AND MATERIALS

Procedures of Data Collection and Data Analysis Method

A major challenge during the data collection was the unwillingness of the informants to talk about their secret language. This problem was solved by making frequent contacts with the informants and establishing rapport to show them that there was no plan. The informants were informed about the purpose of the study, which did not include disclosing their language or training anyone whatsoever. Therefore, they were willing to provide the necessary data about their Argot. That said, a random sampling was employed as some were unwilling to participate in the study.

First, the elicitation method was used to collect data from the informants. Before the fieldwork, around 2000 words that indicate lexical and morphological features and 200 phrases and sentences were prepared through Tigrinya (intermediary language), but only about 400 words of the ?afo Argot were found. Then, the raw data was audiotaped. These words and phrases were important to use as guidelines or standing points to collect different additional words, phrases, and sentences, as well as morphological information in semi-structured interviews and semi-natural communication.

The elicited method was employed to easily understand the same isolated words (elicited words), phrases, and sentences of the ?afo Argot initially from the five elder informants and one young informant. Participatory observations, in line with the elicited method and recording through an audio-tape recorder, were also employed. Then, data were collected from 14 informants through discussions and participatory observations. Attempts were made to create situational contexts and to communicate with the informants using the ?afo Argot to construct a natural communication.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select informants. The purpose was to collect reliable data from informants who have better knowledge than to collect data about the linguistic features of the Argot, and, to see the fluency and accuracy of the speakers in their Argot.

Population and Research Area

This research was conducted in the northern part of Ethiopia, particularly Tigray Region, Kollatenben district, Begashxa kebele. The estimated total population of Kollatenben is 148,282, with 73,873 males and 74,409 females. The research area of the study is Begashxa, found in the central zone of Tigray, the southern part of the Kollatenben. This research studied the ?afo (Azmar) group. However, the actual

number of the Azmari group in Begashexa is unknown due to a lack of statistical data that indicates the specific number of the group (source from statistical workers of Kollatenben sub-districts).



Map of K'olatenben, and Begashexa (cited BoFED GIS-cartographic unit 2001E.C)

Data analysis

Morphological deformation

Morphology deals with the study of the internal structure of words. All languages have words and, in all languages, some words, at least, have an internal structure and consist of one or more affixes (Spencer, 2007, p. 1). The affixes can be either bound or free. The bound affixes have derivational and inflectional functions in any language. However, in Argot, the bound affixes have the function of obscuring communications. Argot speakers conceal their communication by adding the bound affixes into different positions of the words of the standard languages (Tigrinya, Amharic...). The ?afo Argot uses various additions of bound affixes in deforming words from Tigrinya and Amharic. It adds suffixes and prefixes. Besides, the ?afo Argot uses different affixes to deform the words of the languages.

Suffixation -ka

-ka marks possessions in 2nd person. Singular and male in Tigrinya. For clarification, let us see the examples below.

Table 1.

dəftər-ka exercise book –your.Sg.M “your exercise book”	gənzəb –ka money – your.Sg.M “your money”
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The addition of –ka in the ?afo Argot is found in the final part of the syllable of the words. It serves to make unintelligible communication between ?afo group and outsiders by adding it to numeral words taken from Amharic as stated below:

Table 2.

Amharic	?afo Argot	gloss
and	?andika	one
aratt	?arattika	four
siddist	siddistika	six
simmint	simmintika	eight

Rule Ø → ka/ [numeral word]-

As the above examples reveal, all the words are taken from Amharic. The ?afo Argot speakers add the Tigrinya bound affix /-ka/ at the final position of the numeral words. It has also been added to Amharic adjectives and nouns to disguise speech in the ?afo Argot as:

Table 3.

Amharic	?afo Argot	gloss
nəṭṭʾ	nəṭṭʾika	white
addis	?addiska	new
afər	?afərka	soil

Rule Ø → ka/ [adjective and noun]-

From the above examples, one can easily realize that the words ?afərka “soil”, nəṭṭʾika “white”, and ?addiska “new” of the ?afo Argot are formed from the Amharic terms afər, nəṭṭʾ, and addis, respectively through the addition of -ka.

Suffixation /-ma/

The -ma serves as a discourse marker in Amharic and Tigrinya when the speakers of the two languages admire and/or reflect a sense of respect or hate about any part of the human body or other expressions. It can also serve as an interrogative pronoun “who” when it is considered as a word (Amsalu, 2010, p. 33). -ma is added to nouns and adjectives of Amharic terms to construct the ?afo Argot words. The function of the -ma suffix, therefore, is to disguise speech between ?afo group and the non-?afo group, and almost m is geminated in the ?afo Argot terms. The ?afo Argot adds the /-ma/ suffix to Amharic words as follows:

Table 4.

Amharic	?afo Argot	gloss	Amharic	?afo Argot	gloss
səfed	səfədimma	basket work disc	fit	fitimma	face

angət	ʔangətimma	neck	k'əj	k'əjimma	red
irguz	ʔirguzimma	pregnant	təfər	təfərimma	rope
ingida	ʔingiddimma	guest	mint't'af	mint'əfimma	carpet

Rule Ø → imma / [noun]-

Based on the above data, the speakers of the ʔafo Argot add the /ma/ suffix with the gemination of the /m/ sound into Amharic words to construct incomprehensible words. And the words of the ʔafo Argot are added extra syllables. All the ʔafo Argot words of the above data are formed from Amharic words.

In addition to this, the -ma suffix is added to non-geminated Amharic sounds at the word-final with the addition of some vowels. Specifically, the /-ma/ suffix is appended to non-geminated Amharic sounds at the word final as shown in the following examples:

Table 5.

Amharic	ʔafo Argot	gloss
ʔaf	ʔafomma ²	mouth
g ^w az	g ^w azimma	goods
dʒoro	dʒorimma	ear

Rule Ø → (im)ma / [non-geminated sound at word final]-

From the above data, the sounds of words final like ʔaf “mouth”, g^waz “goods” and dʒoro “ear” are non-geminated. The speakers of the ʔafo Argot form ʔafoma “mouth”, dʒərimma “ear” and g^wazimma “goods” from the above Amharic words ʔaf “mouth”, dʒəro “ear” and g^waz “goods” respectively through the addition of -ma suffix. The ʔafo Argot ʔafoma “mouth” is also derived from the Tigrinya and Amharic word ʔaf by adding /o/ vowel to the nucleus of the second syllable of the word.

The /-ma/ is also attached to geminated Amharic sounds at word final with gemination of m speech sound as shown in the data below:

Table 6.

Amharic	ʔafo Argot	gloss	Amharic	ʔafo Argot	gloss
idɜɜ	ʔidɜɜimma	hand	nəʃʃ ³	nəʃʃimma	white
dədɜɜ	dədɜɜimma	outside	biʃʃa	biʃʃimma	alone, only

Rule Ø → imma/ [geminated nouns final]-

As we can see from the above examples, the ʔafo Argot words are deformed from Amharic words through the addition of /-ma/ where /m/ is geminated. For instance, the suffixation of /-ma/ and the gemination of /m/ have also taken place in the ʔafo Argot words such as ʔidɜɜimma “hand”, nəʃʃimma³ “white”,

² Mouth is termed ʔafa:n/ʔaf in Oromo (Mahdi, 1995:494), and ʔaf/lisan in Geez (Desse, 2002:14)

³ nəʃʃika may also be possible as different natural communication of ʔafo people in their argot.

dəɖɖɪmma “outside” and bɪtʃɪmma “alone, only” taken from ɪɖɖɪ, nətʃʃ, dəɖɖɪ and bɪtʃɪ respectively, which are Amharic words with gemination of /ɖɖ/, /tʃ/ and /tʃ/ sounds at word final.

Amharic allows consonant clusters at the word final. The ʔafo Argot speakers also add the /-ma/ suffix with gemination of the /m/ sound into these Amharic consonant clusters at the word final, and the consonant clusters are changed to non-consonant clusters of the ʔafo Argot words as stated below.

Table 7.

Amharic	ʔafo Argot	gloss
məlk	məlkimma	appearance
nəbs	nəbsimma	body, soul
ajtʰ	ʔajtʰimma	mouse
tʰirs	tʰirsimma	teeth

Rule Ø →imma/ [consonant clusters of word final]-

From the above data, we can understand that the speakers of the ʔafo Argot add -ma suffix into Amharic consonant clusters at the word final. The speakers of the ʔafo Argot change the CVCC syllable structure of Amharic words to CVC or CV. For instance, the Amharic word məlk “appearance” has a CVCC syllable structure. However, this word is changed to CVCCVCCVC due to the addition of the -ma suffix with the gemination of /m/ as well as vowel epenthetic /i/.

In general, the speakers of the ʔafo Argot add -ma with and without gemination of /m/ sound into Amharic geminated and non-geminated sounds at word final. In addition to this, -ma is also attached into Amharic consonant clusters and non-consonant clusters at word final with gemination of m.

Suffixation -o

The morpheme -o is a third person, singular, masculine object marker in Tigrinya as we can see in the final position of the word xʰətil-u-w-o “he killed him” (Daniel, 2000, p. 77). In ʔafo Argot, there are terms whose final vowel is -o suffix as stated below:

Table 8.

Tigrigna/Amharic	gloss	ʔafo Argot	gloss
x'is's'a	pan cake	məx'ofo	enjera
ʕatər	chickpea	məʕitro	chick pea
təlba	linseed	tilimbo	linseed
ʕ'innət	load	ʕ'innno	pouch
zələl bəllə	being hanging	zəllo	genital organ of male
wiha	water	waʕʕo	genital organ of male
miʕʕəhri	maize	maʕʕingo	grain
set	woman	sitto	genital organ of female

From the above examples, we can understand that non-/o/ final words of Tigrinya and Amharic become the -o final ones in the ʔafo Argot. For instance, the ʔafo Argot words sitto “genital organ of female”, tilimbo “linseed”, ʕ'annno “pouch” and waʕʕo “water” are taken from Amharic non -o final words set “woman”, təlba “linseed”, ʕ'innət “load” and wiha “water” respectively. In addition to this, the words of the ʔafo Argot məx'ofo “enjera”, məʕitro “pea” and maʕʕingo “grain” are derived from Tigrinya non-/o/ final words x'is's'a “pancake”, ʕatər “chickpea” and miʕʕəhri “maize” respectively. On the other hand, there is a meaning change between the ʔafo Argot words and the words Tigrinya and Amharic as stated in the above data. The semantic change will be discussed in the next part of the research.

Suffixation -na

The morphological function of the suffix -na, in Tigrinya, is to mark possession in the first-person plural (Mason, 1996, p. 35). However, the ʔafo Argot speakers add it into some Tigrinya and Amharic words to conceal their communication. Now, let us see how the -na suffix works in the following data.

Table 9.

Tigrigna/Amharic	ʔafo Argot	gloss	Tigrigna/Amharic	ʔafo Argot	gloss
t'ef/ t'af	t'ifna	t'ef	ʔuf	ʔifna	fire
səw/ səb	səwna	person	das	disna	shed

Rule Ø→na/##-

From the above examples, we can realize that the -na suffix is attached to the final position of Tigrinya and Amharic words. In addition to this, changes or substitutions of vowel sounds by the ʔafo speakers have been noticed. For instance, the ʔafo word t'ifna ‘t’eff’ is taken from Amharic t'ef through vowel change of /e/ by /i/ or from Tigrinya t'af through substitution of /a/ by /i/. The ʔafo Argot word ʔifna is derived from the Tigrinya/Amharic word ʔuf “releasing an air out to burn wood” through replacement of /u/ by /i/. The ʔafo Argot word simkinna “name” is formed through the addition of /ki/ syllable and /nna/ suffix.

Suffixation -ki and a Tigrinya preposition

The -ki functions as a possessive marker of 2SgF in Tigrinya like məs'haf-ki “your (Singular female) book”, and Ge'ez such as ?igzi?ki “your (SgF) lord” (Desse, 2002, p. 76). On the other hand, the ?afo Argot speakers add prepositions and -ki⁴ suffix into the Tigrinya word mən “who” to create unintelligible words between the in-group and outsiders as we can observe in the following data:

Table 10.

Tigrigna	?afo Argot	gloss	Tigrigna	?afo Argot	gloss
mən	minki	who	ni-mən	ni-minki	whom
nab-mən	nab-minki	to where	kab-mən	kab-minki	from where
?ab-mən	?am-minki	at where			

Rule $\emptyset \rightarrow ki / \#\#-, \text{ə} \rightarrow i / \text{word medial and } \emptyset \rightarrow [\text{preposition}] / -\#\#$

As mentioned in the above data, there is a multiplicity of meanings of “mən” that serve as all interrogative pronouns by adding prepositions in Tigrinya. The Tigrinya prepositions include ni- an indicator of the object or receiver of an action, nab- an indicator of movement or goal, kab- an indicator of the source of movement, and ?ab- an indicator of the existence of things. The ?afo Argot word minki “who” is derived from the Tigrinya word mən “who” through vowel substitution of /ə/ by /i/ and the addition of ki suffix. And the ?afo Argot speakers also add the Tigrinya prepositions: nab “to”, kab “from” and ni “for” into ?afo Argot word minki “who” taken from Tigrinya word mən “who”. For instance, nabminki “to where”, niminki “whom” and kabminki “from where” are formed from minki “who” which are also taken from Tigrinya mən “who” through the addition of -ki suffix, vowel change as well as the addition of Tigrinya prepositions nab “to”, kab “from” and ni “for” respectively.

Prefixation mə-

Prefixation is the addition of affixes into the word-initial. The mə- prefix is used as a marker of instrumental nouns in Tigrinya and the ?afo Argot. In addition to this, the ?afo Argot speakers add the mə- prefix to Tigrinya words to construct some words of the ?afo Argot as stated below:

Table 11.

Tigrigna	?afo Argot	gloss	sound changed
x'is's'a	məx'is'	pan cake	$\emptyset \rightarrow m\text{ə} / -\#\#$ and $a \rightarrow \emptyset / \#\#-$
ʕarki	məʕrəxurux	friend	$\emptyset \rightarrow m\text{ə} / -\#\#$ and $CVCCV \rightarrow CCVCVCVC\#\#-$
?atər	mə?itro	pea	$\emptyset \rightarrow m\text{ə} / -\#\#$ and $\emptyset \rightarrow o / \#\#-$

4 The /-ki/ suffix is a 3SgF possessive marker in Soddo (Leslau, 1965:5).

As the above data reveals, the ʔafo Argot word məx'is' "pancake" is derived from Tigrinya x'is's'a through the addition of /mə-/ prefix, deletion of /a/ and degemination of /s's'/ to /s'/. Moreover, the ʔafo Argot word məʔrəxurux "friend" is formed from the Tigrinya word ʔarki through the addition of /mə-/ prefix and reduplication of the word consonants as well as vowel changes. Furthermore, the term məʔitro "pea", in the Argot, is formed from Tigrinya ʔatər by adding /mə-/ at the word-initial as well as vowel changes.

Onomatopoeic words

The onomatopoeic property of words sounds like the noise associated with their referent. Languages may approximate each other in their onomatopoeic words but rarely agree exactly on how to imitate a barking dog, the wind in the trees, and so on. Onomatopoeic words from different languages may sound similar to one another because they are imitating things in nature (Campbell and Mixco, 2007, p. 9-10). Similarly, in the ʔafo Argot, there are assumed words that are created through imitation of their situation, sound, or nature.

Table 12.

Tigrigna	gloss	ʔafo Argot	gloss
ʃəxəx ʔabbillom	make them slaughtering	ʃəkʷijjom	slaughter them, butcher them
ʔuf	a process of burning fire	ʔifna	fire
x'ax'	sound of wood breaking	x'ax'ma	wood
kuf	sound of dried things	ʔatərək'waf	red pepper
zələl bələ	being hanging	zəllo	genital organ of male
səfəf bələ	being over	sənfəf	trouser
lənk'ət' bələ	being melted	ʔank'at'o	butter
xuruf	the sound of donkey	xurif	donkey
fit bələ	he sipped (boiled liquid)	fəʃʃijjom	he drank

From the above data, we can understand that the words of the ʔafo Argot are derived from Tigrinya-imitated words. These include ʃəkʷijjom⁵ "you (SgM)! slaughter them" is created from the imitated word ʃəxəx ʔabbillom "make them ʃəxəx (the action of slaughtering)" by deleting /x/, changing the compound descriptive verbs to single word and substitution of /x/ by /kʷ/. The ʔafo Argot word ʔifna "fire" is taken from the Tigrinya word ʔuf "the action of realizing an air out to burn wood" by adding /-na/ suffix of Tigrinya. In addition to this, the ʔafo Argot word x'ax'ma "wood" is formed from x'ax' "sound of wood breaking" and the addition of the /-ma/ suffix. The ʔafo Argot word ʔatərək'waf "red pepper" is formed from kuf "sound of breaking of dry red pepper". xurif "donkey" is also derived from Tigrinya xuruf "the sound of donkey" through vowel change as well as substitution of /f/ by /ʃ/.

Furthermore, the speakers of the ʔafo Argot form words by relating the names and the manner of the animals and things with their names. For instance, the ʔafo Argot word zəllo "genital organ of male" is

⁵ ʃəkʷijjom also means (you) break them as one informant said.

derived from the compound verb *zələl bələ* “being hanging” by relating the nature of the genital organ of the male. Similarly, the *ʔafo* Argot word *sənfəf* “trouser” is also formed from the Tigrinya compound word *səfəf bələ* “being over” by adding /n/ speech sound and relating the nature of trouser being hanging. The *ʔafo* Argot word *ʔank’at’o* “butter” is formed from the Tigrinya compound word *lənək’ət’ bələ* “is being melted” by relating the manner of which butter is melting. *bənəbən* “sheep” can come from *bin...bin* or *bən... bən* which is a manner of sheep fright of enemy, and *ʔirgan*⁶ “God” derived from the Tigrinya verb *ʔarəgə/ ʕarəgə* “go up into heaven” concerning God’s going up into heaven when he had been killed in Israel.

Semantic and form deformations

Semantic deformation means the changing of the semantic representation of the standard language words in the Argot or secret language. Form and semantic deformation also mean the changing of the physical or pronunciation as well as the semantic representation of the standard language words together in the Argot. Semantic and form deformation takes place in the *ʔafo* Argot. From these form changes, first, let us see the substitution of the initial part of the words and then convert the basic meaning of the words. It should be noted that the original meaning and the changed meaning have similarities in their semantic representations to some extent. Let us see some possibilities of this issue in the following examples.

Table 13.

Tigrigna	gloss	ʔafo Argot	gloss
<i>tixəwəni</i>	give alms	<i>ləkkiwəni</i>	(you) give me
<i>judən</i>	bull	<i>mudən</i>	big
<i>ʕəxwəna</i>	the foot of a beast	<i>ʔaxəna</i>	horse

As stated in the above examples, the words of the *ʔafo* Argot are derived from Tigrinya by changing the form as well as the meaning of the words. The speakers of the *ʔafo* Argot substitute the initial sounds of the Tigrinya words. For instance, the *ʔafo* Argot word *ləkkiwəni* “(you.Sg.M) give me” is taken from the Tigrinya word *tixəwəni* “give alms to me” through substitutions of /t/ by /l/ and semantic change of “give alms” to “give me”. The *ʔafo* Argot word *mudən* “big” is taken from the Tigrinya word *judən* “bull” through the replacement of the initial sound of the word /j/ by /m/ and the semantic change of the word “bull” to “big”. Finally, the *ʔafo* Argot word *ʔaxəna* “horse” is formed from the Tigrinya word *ʕəxwəna* “the foot of beast” through the replacement of the initial syllable /ʕə/ by /ʔa/ as well as meaning change of “the foot of beast” to “horse”.

In addition, the speakers of the *ʔafo* Argot substitute the medial sounds of the Tigrinya words and change their meaning. For instance, the *ʔafo* Argot word *wələza* “begging” is derived from Tigrinya *wədəsa* “praising” by substituting /d/ and /s/ by /l/ and /z/ respectively and changing the meaning “praising”

⁶ It is pronounced as *ʔargan* may be due to regressive assimilation of /a/ on /i/ in different informants’ communication. *ʔargan* means also *waw!!!* or *wəjne* in Amharic.

into “begging” about their tradition. Concerning this, the ?afo Argot word *menzo*⁷ “cattle” may be derived from the Tigrinya word *mezzo* “twenty-five cents” by replacing /z/ with /n/.

The speakers of the ?afo Argot substitute the Tigrinya sounds at word-final and change the representation of the words as shown in the following data:

Table 14.

Tigrigna	gloss	?afo Argot	gloss
k'ir tʃat	basket of grain	x'irtʃin	crop
miʃʃihari	maize	maʃʃingo	grain
təʃənifu	he became severely sick	təʃəddiwu	he was ill
tətaxəsə	he became sleeping	təkkojə	he slept
gudday	ceremony	gullas	marriage, bride/groom
tʃinʃa	very small stone	tʃanʃo	baby
dəkkərə	he highly fulfilled	dəkkəjə	added

From the above data, we can realize that the speakers of the ?afo Argot use semantic change and substitution of the Tigrinya sounds of the word final. For instance, *x'irtʃin* “crop” formed from Tigrinya *k'ir tʃat* “basket of grain” through substitution of /t/ by /n/ and /a/ by /i/. The ?afo Argot word *maʃʃingo* “grain” is formed from Tigrinya words *miʃʃihari* “maize” or *miʃʃəla* “white sorghum” through substitution of the sounds at word-final /hari/ or /əla/ by /ngo/ respectively and semantic change of the specific names to general names. The ?afo Argot word *x'oftə* “cloth” is derived from the Tigrinya word *x'omif* “a dress of female” through the substitution of the final sounds /mif/ by /ftə/ and semantic change of the specific name “a dress of female” to general name “cloth”. The ?afo Argot word *gonno*⁸ “slave” is formed from the Tigrinya word *gila* “servant” through the substitution of /l/ by /n/ and gemination /n/, vowels change and meaning change from “servant” to “slave” by relating the hardworking of “slave”.

The speakers of the ?afo Argot delete Tigrinya sounds at word-final and medial and change the meaning of the words. Now let us see some examples of this issue in the following data:

Table 15.

Tigrigna	gloss	?afo Argot	gloss
s'əlmət	dark	wəłmi	evening
gənzəb	money, animal	gizna ⁹	birr
s'aʃda	white	t'ada	wheat

⁷ *Manzə* means “animal fat that is eaten” in Gurage - *tʃaha* (Lesau, 1979:77).

⁸ *ganjen* “devil (lit. black)” is the nearest terms of Tigrinya with the ?afo argot term *gonno* “slave”.

⁹ *gizna* means “money” in the Azmari argot of Amharic speakers (Lesalu, 1952).

11. *gizna* means “money” in the Azmari argot of Amharic speakers (Lesalu, 1952).

As mentioned in the above data, the ʔafo Argot word wəlmī “evening” is formed from the Tigrinya word s’əlmāt “dark” by deleting the final sound /t/, substituting /s’/ by /w/ and /a/ by /i/ and changing the meaning from “dark” to “evening”. The ʔafo Argot word gizna “birr” is also taken from the Tigrinya or Amharic word gənzəb “money, animal” through deletion of /b/, metathesis of /nz/ to /zn/ and vowels substitutions. The ʔafo Argot word gizna “birr” is changed its meaning from Tigrinya or Amharic word gənzəb “money, animal” from the general name “money” to the specific name “birr”. Moreover, the ʔafo Argot word t’ada “wheat” is taken from the Tigrinya word s’afda “white” by deleting /ʃ/ sound and changing the meaning from “white” to “wheat” as well as the substitution of /s’/ by /t’/.

The ʔafo Argot uses the form and semantic change from Amharic words. This includes deletion, gemination, and addition with semantic change of the Amharic words as revealed in the following data:

Table 16.

Amharic	gloss	ʔafo Argot	gloss
ʧ’innət	load	ʧ’ənno	pouch made of leather
set	female/woman	sitto ¹⁰	genital organ of female
t’əfər	space	t’əfərɪmma	tying and wrapping

As we have seen in the above data, we can understand that the speakers of the ʔafo Argot form the words from the Amharic words through deletion, addition and gemination as well as change of semantic representation of the Amharic words. For example, the ʔafo Argot word ʧ’ənno “pouch made of leather” is taken from Amharic ʧ’innət “load” through deletion of the sound /t/ and gemination of /n/ as well as a vowel change. The semantic representation of the word changes from “load” to “pouch”. The ʔafo Argot word sitto “genital organ of female” is derived from the Amharic word set “woman” through gemination of /t/, vowel addition and substitution as well as meaning change from “woman” to “genital organ of female”. Finally, the ʔafo Argot word t’əfərɪmma “tying and wrapping” is formed from the Amharic word t’əfər “space” through the addition of /ɪmma/ sounds and change of meaning from “space” to “tying and wrapping”. The ʔafo Argot word fəgə “man” may come from the Tigrinya dialect (Rayya dialect) or Amharic fəggə “beautiful” by changing the function of the term and degemination of /gg/ to /g/ phonologically.

The ʔafo Argot word fərk’ix’u “he smelt” is possibly formed from Tigrinya fix’ax’ “toilet” through the addition of /r/ sound and meaning change. The ʔafo Argot word tələza¹¹ “speech” is taken from Tigrinya ləzəba “discussion” through the transposition of /t/ from the word-initial to word-final and then substitution of /t/ by /b/ as well as changing the function of the word from “discussion” to “speech or speaking”.

¹⁰ sitto means “woman” in the Azmari argot of Amharic speakers (Lesalu, 1952).

In addition to deforming the form of standard language's words, the speakers of the ?afo Argot change the semantic representation of the Tigrinya words without form change as revealed in the following data:

Table 17.

Tigrigna	gloss	?afo Argot	gloss
xunano	condemnation	xunano	dog
miɸʃʃuw	good, attractive	məɸʃʃiwu	he laughed

From the above data, we can comprehend that the speakers of the ?afo Argot derive words from Tigrinya words by changing the meaning of the Tigrinya words. For instance, the ?afo Argot word xunano “dog” is derived from the Tigrinya words through meaning change from “condemnation” to “dog” because “dog” means “prostitution” connotatively and, therefore, prostitution is also “condemnation” in the Orthodox Church. And, the ?afo Argot word məɸʃʃiwu “he laughed” is taken from the Tigrinya word miɸʃʃuw “good, attractive” probably by relating that the cause of laughing is being attractive.

Using different semantic aspects

Argots use different semantic aspects because of having inadequacy of terms or expressions (Leslau, 1964b, p. 60). The ?afo Argot also uses various semantic aspects such as multiplicity meaning, paraphrastic description, generic naming of specific terms, instrumental nouns and connotative meanings, etc.

Semantic load (multiplicity of meaning)

?afo Argot uses semantic load or multiple meanings of one word. Semantic load means one word signifies many things or concepts (Zealelem, 2006, p. 118). But the signified things have similarities in their color, measurement, and so on. In the ?afo Argot, some words have multiple meanings of signified things by their similar color as:

Table 18.

Amharic	?afo Argot	gloss
t'ik'ur	t'ink'urk'ur	coffee, black
nəɸʃʃ	nəɸʃʃimma	paper, white, parchment, become grey hair

As the above data demonstrates, the ?afo Argot word t'ink'urk'ur means “coffee, black” taken from the Amharic word t'ik'ur, and nəɸʃʃimma meaning “paper, white, parchment, become grey hair” is derived from Amharic word nəɸʃʃ. The signified objects have similarities in their color and are named by the same word.

In addition to the above idea, there are general terms that signify things that are similar in their measurement semantically in the Argot. For instance, mudən which means “big, large, old, tall and heavy” and mənif which means “small, little, few, young and baby” are related in their measurement.

There are also general terms of the different concepts of the ?afo Argot whose implication is similar as stated below:

Table 19.

?afo Argot	gloss	?afo Argot	gloss
ʃɪrk'wi	light, bad smell and ugly	t'ək'wi	bad, envious, and wicked
gərtə	good, beautiful, handsome, and pretty	dəngob	stone, ice and wall
ʃ'ənno	pouch and bag	?afərka	earth and soil
gallɪʃʃa	rich, lord, master and owner	x'ax'ma	gun, stick, wood, tree and bush
gullas	bride, bridegroom and marriage	waʃʃo	urine, water, holy water and rain
xurɪʃ	donkey and zebra	x'əʃtam	snack, fly and ant

As mentioned in the above examples, “light, bad, smell and ugly” are represented by ʃɪrk'wi, and “good, beautiful, handsome, and pretty” are signified by gərtə in the ?afo Argot. “bad, envious, and wicked” are represented by t'ək'wi and “rich, lord, master and owner” are represented by gallɪʃʃa in the ?afo Argot. In addition to this, “stone, ice, and wall” are known as dəngob; “pouch and bag” are also called ʃ'ənno, and “gun, stick, wood, tree and bush” are called x'ax'ma. “Earth and soil” are known as ?afərka. These termed things by the same words are similar in their manner, situation, structure, and/or others. In the same way, “urine, water, holy water, and rain” are represented by waʃʃo because they are liquid; “donkey and zebra” are called by xurɪʃ, since they are from one kingdom, and “bride, bridegroom and marriage” are represented by gullas because they are specific terms of one general term marriage in the ?afo Argot.

Connotative Meaning

Connotative meaning is a hidden meaning of the word. In contrast, denotative meaning is the direct meaning of the word. Many terms of the ?afo Argot have connotative meanings. Let us see the connotative and denotative meanings of the ?afo Argot words in the following data.

Table 20.

?afo Argot	denotative meaning	connotative meaning
wərdix'u	it is failed down	it became cheapest
?afərka	soil	too much, dirty
ʃ'ənno(am)	pouch	liar
wurama	hyena	glutton
məgaxa	your house	your wife
lənɲi	foolish	harmless
t'əfərɪmma	tying and wrapping	thin

As we have shown in the above data, the connotative meaning of ʔafərka “soil” is “too much /many”. Moreover, ʔafərka means “dirty” in its expressive meaning. In this case, ʔənnə means “pouch” directly or denotatively. But ʔənnə is a connotative euphemism that indicates “liar”. It should be noted that when the speakers of the ʔafo Argot want to insult someone, they add /-am/ bound affix to ʔənnə becoming ʔənnam to say “liar”. Similarly, gurama or wurama means “hyena”, and it is used to insult someone as “glutton” connotatively.

Generic Naming of Specific Terms

General terms are used to name particular things or parts of the whole body in the ʔafo Argot. These whole terms are used to signify specific parts by using certain contexts. However, out of context or situation, understanding the specific parts is difficult. For this issue, we can see the following data:

Table 21.

ʔafo Argot	generic (whole)	specific (part)
ʔamoma	eye	eyelid, eyebrow, iris...etc
ʔidzɔɪmma	hand	finger, arm

As the above data elaborates, both the whole and parts are named by the same term.

For example, the eye and all the parts of the eye are represented by ʔamoma. The hand and the parts of the hand are represented by ʔidzɔɪmma.

Paraphrastic Description

In ʔafo Argot, due to a shortage of direct expressions, the speakers of the Argot employ paraphrastic descriptions to communicate and signify things. They describe different concepts by grouping them according to their distinctive features or attributes, enabling clear communication despite the language's limited vocabulary. For instance, the speakers of the ʔafo Argot use the following paraphrastic descriptions:

Table 22.

Phrases in ʔafo Argot	gloss	meaning
waɪɪfo ʔarfat'o	water milk	buttermilk
waɪɪfo ɪazəlo	water carried	pumpkin
gərtə tələzaʔ-u	good speak- his	wise person

From the above data, the group of the ʔafo Argot words expresses relevant concepts. For instance, the ʔafo Argot phrase or compound word waɪɪfo ʔarfat'o represents “buttermilk” by relating the thinnest of the “buttermilk” and by combining waɪɪfo “water” and ʔarfat'o “milk” words of the Argot. The ʔafo Argot compound word or phrase waɪɪfo ɪazəlo signifies “pumpkin” by relating the feature of “pumpkin” with the ʔafo Argot words waɪɪfo “water” and ɪazəlo “carring”. Finally, the concept “wise person” is expressed

by gərtə tələzaʔu through a combination of the ʔafo Argot words of gərtə “good” and tələzaʔu “his speech”.

In the ʔafo Argot, things or animals are also named through modifiers (nouns or adjectives) and general terms like the following examples. Individually, the meaning of the terms is ʃəgə “male”, ʔagəfno “female”, menzo “cattle”, t'int'o “goat” and ləwəz “young”. But these words, coupled with other words are used as specific names of things as:

Table 23.

Phrases in ʔafo Argot	gloss	meaning
ʃəgə menzo	male cattle	ox
ʔagəfno menzo	Woman cattle	cow
ləwəz t'int'o	young goat	kid
ləwəz menzo	young cattle	bull

As mentioned in the above examples, the concepts, things, or animals are expressed by using phrases or compound words. For instance, the ʔafo Argot phrase ʃəgə menzo “ox” is derived from the Argot words ʃəgə “male” and menzo “cattle”. ʃəgə “male” is the determiner word of the menzo “cattle”. The counting system of the ʔafo Argot is also similar to the counting system of Tigrinya speakers in a note of ten birr and the number of ten. This issue is shown in the following data:

Table 24.

Phrases in ʔafo Argot	gloss	meaning
waʃiri ʔandika	ten one	eleven
waʃiri gitti	ten two	twelve
waʃiri sostika	ten three	thirteen
gitti waʃir	two ten	twenty
sostika waʃir	three ten	thirty
ʔarattika waʃir	Four ten	forty
siddistika waʃir	six ten	sixty
ʔammistika waʃir	five ten	fifty

As it has been seen in the above data, the ʔafo Argot has phrasal expressions or words to express the cardinal numbers. There is /-i/ between the term waʃir and one up to eight. /-i/ taken from /j/ that serves as a connector of the numbers like Tigrinya ʃasərtə hədə-j həmsa-j “eleven birr and fifty cents”, and /-j/ serves as a connector of the numbers in Tigrinya. In general, the speakers of the ʔafo Argot use paraphrastic descriptions or compound words to solve inadequate expressions of the Argot.

Using Instrumental Nouns

Using instrumental nouns or adjectives is important in the ?afo Argot to solve a shortage of terms. This Argot uses the /mə-/ bound affix which is the derivational affix of instrumental nouns in Tigrinya. Things are named by their functions. These instrumental nouns are derived from the verbs and /mə-/ affix as stated below:

Table 25.

Instrumental noun in ?afo Argot	gloss	verbs in ?afo Argot	gloss
mətəkkoji	tool used to sleep (bed)	təkkujom	they slept
məddaməj	tool used to walk (leg)	təddam	(you) go, run
məbaʃəji	The tool used to eat (hand)	baʃijən ¹²	they(female) ate
məgobəti	The tool used to sit down (chair)	təgobətə	he sits down
məməʃʹʃəwi	The tool used to laugh (mouth)	məʃʹʃixum	you (Pl) laughed
mə t'əsəja	The tool used to grind (gridding tool)	t'asija	she floured

As we can understand from the above data, the materials used to perform different actions are expressed by the verbs changed to instrumental nouns. For example, təkkujom meaning “they slept” is changed to mətəkkoji “a tool used to sleep or bed” by changing from a verb to an instrumental noun. Parts of the body are named by their function such as məməʃʹʃəwi “laughing tool or mouth” which is derived from the verb məʃʹʃixum means “you (Pl) laughed” in the ?afo Argot.

Unknown Origin of Terms of the ?afo Argot

In ?afo Argot, there are terms whose etymological origins are not known. Probably, these words may be created arbitrarily. Let us see the following examples.

Table 26.

?afo Argot	gloss	?afo Argot	gloss
maʃʹʃo	abdomen	təkko ¹³	head
gəʃʃinu	he watched	ʃəx'unam	afraid
gallifʃa	rich, lord	?ammoma	eye
?altinaj ¹⁴	my relative	dəʃʃo	't'ella'
wajjitu	he came	tinkab	One-stringed violin

¹² x'afəjə also means to eat; it may be a complex form of the ?afo argot terms.

¹³ tokko means “one” in Oromo (Mahdi, 1995:523). In the Tenben dialect of Tigrinya, the word for ‘hen’ is dərikko

¹⁴ ?altinana means also zars in the ?afo argot.

bakko ¹⁵	hen		
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As we have seen in the above data, the base of the above words is obscured.

Loanwords from Tigrinya and Amharic

The ?afo Argot includes borrowed words from Semitic languages because the speakers of the ?afo Argot move to different areas to generate income, and since they are speakers of the Semitic languages (Tigrinya...). As we observed in this chapter, from Semitic languages, the speakers of the ?afo Argot mainly use Tigrinya and Amharic roots by changing the form, and form as well as meaning of the words. In addition to this, several Tigrinya terms are used directly without any change. From these words, the determiner words of Tigrinya, such as ?izi “this”, ?izom “these”, ?iti “that”, and ?itom “those” are included in ?afo Argot directly. Timali “yesterday”, mɔsaz “when” hizi “now”, all terms of each month, day, season, moon, sun, etc are used directly from Tigrinya. In ?afo Argot, not only Tigrinya terms but Amharic terms are also used, like ?agwat “whey”.

CONCLUSION

From the data analysis of this research, morphological and semantic aspects of the ?afo Argot were discussed. Based on the discussions made so far, the words of the ?afo Argot are formed from Tigrinya and Amharic words through form change, form and meaning change, use of different semantic aspects, and direct terms of the Tigrinya words.

Morphological deformation is used in the ?afo Argot word formations. Especially, Tigrinya affixes and some Amharic affixes such as /-ka/, /-ma/, /-na/, /-ki/, /-o/ suffixes mainly, and /mə-/ prefix are used in the derivation or making disguise speech of the ?afo Argot. In the ?afo Argot, there are words that are assumed to have come from onomatopoeic words and the compound verbs of Tigrinya.

The ?afo Argot has a shortage of expressions, and to solve the inadequate expressions, the ?afo Argot speakers use different semantic aspects. From these semantic aspects, the semantic load is important in solving the inadequate terms by relating things in their color, manner, situation, size, and signifying them by a single term. Furthermore, the ?afo Argot uses connotative and denotative meanings of the words, and names whole and parts similarly. Instrumental nouns and paraphrastic descriptions are also basic in solving the inadequate expressions of the ?afo Argot.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

Ethical approval is not applicable to this manuscript.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the author.

¹⁵ lukku: means “hen” in Oromo (Mahdi, 1995:362). Tenben dialect of Tigrinya dərikko means “hen”

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