Chapter 21
Bilin Morphology
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1. Introduction—the Bilin Language

Bilin (from the self-name for the language *bəlin*)[1] is spoken in Eritrea and is the northernmost of the Agaw (or Central Cushitic) family of languages, the other members of which are spoken entirely in Ethiopia. This small family of languages comprises four distinct branches which may be identified by and named after the four principal languages: Bilin, Khamtanga, Kemant (Kemanteney) and Awngi. Agaw is in turn one of the branches of the Cushitic macro-family, itself part of the larger phylum generally called Afroasiatic. All of the Agaw languages have for some time been under pressure from one or more of the dominant Semitic languages of the region, Tigre and Tigrinya in the case of Bilin, and all show the pervasive influence of their dominant neighbours. This is mostly typified by the varying extent of borrowed vocabulary, but is also apparent at other levels of linguistic structure. For instance, in Bilin the phoneme sometimes transcribed as /q/ is realized as a glottalized velar [k']. This realization is in contrast to a uvular stop [q], which comparative evidence would suggest to be the nature of the proto-phoneme, and which still occurs in Awngi (cf. Bilin [k'af], Awngi [qap] 'bark').[2] At the level of morphology, the presence of a set of pronoun object suffixes added to verbs is also blatantly of Ethiopian Semitic (in fact Tigre) origin; not only is a category of pronoun object suffixes absent from the other Agaw languages, but also the forms of the Bilin suffixes are themselves overtly Tigre. However, the interaction between the Agaw languages and Ethiopian Semitic has not been simply one-way. The importance of the Agaw languages to the historical and comparative linguist lies not only in their representing a distinct and clearly defined branch of the Cushitic macro-family, but also in the evident fact that Agaw forms the most important substratum of Ethiopian Semitic; the development of modern Ethiopian Semitic from the ancient stage that may be represented by Ge'ez (Ethiopic) can only be understood by reference to structures, especially morphological and syntactic, found in the Agaw languages.

   The number of Bilin speakers is today estimated at around 100,000 in the region traditionally known as Bogos in and around the Eritrean town of Kärän. There are also small but significant expatriate communities living

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   1. Also called *bəlina gab* or 'language of the Bilin'; the ethnonym is *bəlina* (sg.), *bəlin* (pl). In the Roman orthography now in use this is spelled *Blin*.
   2. In some instances, the voiced uvular stop *ɣ* = [ɢ] in Awngi corresponds to Bilin initial *q* = [k']: Bilin *k'ir* : Awngi *ɣar* 'night'; Bilin *k'ʷixʷ* : Awngi *ɣuɣʷà* 'he ate'.

abroad, notably in Scandinavia and Germany. Aside from a late 19th century Gospel of Mark, a Bilin catechism dating from the middle of the 20th century (Woldeyohannes Habtemariam 1950), and collections of Bilin texts published in scholarly works (see especially Reinisch 1883, and Conti Rossini 1907), Bilin remained an essentially unwritten language until the close of the 20th century. Bilin speakers living outside Eritrea have more recently been instrumental in producing Bilin language materials, including a monolingual dictionary and a short grammar (see especially Hamde and Zeremariam 1992; Alibekit 1992), and now that the Eritrean government has begun introducing school instruction in Bilin, at least at the primary level, the publication of language materials is progressing. Unlike earlier sources, including the recent dictionary and grammar published outside Eritrea which use the Ethiopian script for writing the language, the Eritrean government has adopted the policy of writing Bilin in an adapted Roman script. In the description of Bilin morphology that follows, however, the usual Ethiopianist system of transcription is used with some slight modification.[3]

There are two dialects of Bilin associated with the division of the people into two groups with supposed different historical origins, the *Täʔakʼʷər* (or *Takʼʷər*) and the *Tärkʼekʼʷər*, more usually called Senhit today. The two dialects are mutually intelligible, and differ mostly in details of vocabulary. There is, however, some slight morphological variation between the two dialects, most notably the simplification of the three conjugation patterns of verbs to one in *Täʔakʼʷər*.

Like all the Agaw languages, Bilin has an extremely complex morphology. Nominals show inflection for gender, number and case, the last in a seven-term system, while verbs have an exceptionally rich morphology, inflecting not only for person and tense-mood-aspect, but also having separate affirmative and negative inflections, a host of subordinate "tenses" formally distinct from main-clause forms, including different paradigms for relative verbs according to whether the subject of the latter is identical to the head noun of the clause or not. In addition to all of these, verbs also have a developed system of stem derivation marking such categories as passive, causative, reciprocal, etc. Indeed, it has been estimated that a single lexical verb in Bilin has a potential scatter, in theory at least, of over 10,000 forms (Palmer 1957: 131).[4] It is usually possible to identify an ordered

3. This differs from IPA in the following details: *ə* for [ɨ], *ä* for [ə], *š* for [ʃ], *čʼ* for [tʃʼ], *j* for [dʒ].

4. Palmer's analyses of the Bilin noun and verb (1958 and 1957, respectively) include what he calls varying prominence patterns, i.e., varying patterns of accent placement, which contribute to the number of paradigms. There does, however, seem to be considerable variation in accent placement between Palmer's data and Reinisch's, and again between what I have been able to observe. It is also evident that accent placement is subject to the effect of sentence rhythm patterns (Lamberti and Tonelli 1997: 82). Therefore, in this brief description of Bilin morphology stress-accent has not been marked. Occasionally, Palmer indicates that accent placement distinguishes otherwise identical verbal forms, and requires the setting up of contrasting nominal inflection paradigms or "declensions," distinctions that have therefore been excluded from the description here.

string of inflectional categories for a given form; for example, the morpheme string in a verb form such as *k'ʷaləstägdänäxər* 'you who are not seen' may be roughly categorized as ['see' + PASSIVE + IMPERFECT + NEGATIVE + 2 PL + SUBJECT RELATIVE]. However, it would be wrong to say that Bilin is an agglutinating language in the sense that, say, Turkish is. In this example, the negative marker (actually imperfect aspect + negative) *-äg-* falls in the position immediately after the verb stem (lexical base + any derivational extension, here passive *-əst-*), whereas in the corresponding main clause form, *k'ʷaləstədänni* 'you are not seen', the negative marker (here *-ni*, by assimilation from *-li*) follows the person marker *-dän-*. Additionally, the person marker in this instance is also marked for aspect, and the negative marker shows variation according to person (see section 3.5). Further evidence that Bilin is not a straightforward agglutinating language can be seen by contrasting the following two forms: *gərwäs* 'the man' (object case) and *ʔəxʷinät* 'the woman' (object case), where in the former *-s* marks both object case and masculine gender, while in the latter *-t* marks both object case and feminine gender in nouns. Bilin, therefore, like the other Agaw languages (and indeed Cushitic languages), is also partly an inflecting language, in which there is not necessarily a one-to-one relationship between a morphological category and the morpheme.

2. Nominals

To the class of nominals in Bilin, identifiable morphologically by shared sets of markers for case and, to some extent, gender and number, belong nouns, adjectives and pronouns. For Bilin, as with the other Agaw languages, it is descriptively more appropriate to treat gender and number as a single category inasmuch as only three features are marked in all nominals: masculine, feminine, and plural—*gədən* 'dog', *gədəni* 'bitch', *gəšən* 'dogs, bitches'; *bähär, bähäri, bähäləl* 'big' (masc., fem., pl., respectively); *ni* 'he', *nəri* 'she', *naʷ* 'they'. This contrasts with the situation in the neighbouring Semitic languages, Tigre and Tigrinya, where gender and number may be regarded as separate (though interlocking) categories in that the masculine-feminine distinction is maintained in the plural. The three-feature system in Bilin is evident not only in its morphology, but also its syntax, by the concord between nouns and adjectives, and between noun subjects and verbs: *gərwa kəxin* 'a clever man', *ʔəxʷina kəxini* 'a clever woman', *gərəw kəkin* 'clever men', *ʔəkʷin kəkin* 'clever women'; *gərwa ʔəntəxʷ* 'a man came', *ʔəxʷina ʔəntəti* 'a woman came', *gərəw ʔəntənəxʷ* 'men came', *ʔəkʷin ʔəntənəxʷ* 'women came'.

2.1. Nouns

Nouns inflect for case and gender-number. While from a structural point of view, as we have seen, gender and number form a single category, because the formal marking of masculine and feminine, on the one hand, and of the plural, on the other, are largely unconnected, it is simpler to describe the two processes (gender and number) separately. Secondly, not all nouns formally mark all three values, even where this would be semanti-

cally feasible. Thus, in the instance of gender, *jäma* is both (masc.) 'brother-in-law' and (fem.) 'sister-in-law', *dəxna* is both 'old man' and 'old woman', *səkma* (masc.) is 'barley' and *səkma* (fem.) is 'a grain of barley'. On the other hand, some nouns have no separate plural form (e.g., *ʔäddam* 'person, man', *gʷangʷi* 'thunder', *ʔärämu* 'weeds'), and others are treated as plurals but have no singular (e.g., *ʕakʼʷ* 'water', *sələx* 'beer'). In such cases as these a feminine is distinguished from a masculine, for example, both in its case-marking and in its concord patterns: *yə jämäs kʼʷaləxʷlu* 'he saw my brother-in-law' but *yə jämät kʼʷaləxʷla* 'he saw my sister-in-law'.

2.1.1. Masculine-feminine

In Bilin the masculine may be considered the default gender. Nouns are generally masculine unless they denote females, or belong to a small number of specialized categories such as diminutives or what may be called singulatives.[5] Feminine nouns may be primary or derived from masculine nouns. Examples of primary feminine nouns lexically unrelated to their masculine counterparts are *gäna* 'mother', *ʔankʼi* 'girl', *ləwi* 'cow', *ʔəxʷina* 'woman', *taxri* 'aunt' (FaSi), *ʔəkʼʷi* 'wife', *sərgʷi* 'bride'. Feminine nouns may be derived from a masculine counterpart by a specific suffix, the commonest of which is -*i* (*gədəŋi* 'bitch', *gədəŋ* 'dog'; *ʔabəni* 'female guest', *ʔabən* 'male guest'; *kʼafi* 'piece of bark', *kʼaf* 'bark'; but *ʔara* 'grain of corn', *ʔar* 'corn' and *ʕakʼʷa* 'drop of water', *ʕakʼʷ* 'water'), or by an internal change (*ʔəkʼʷra* 'daughter', *ʔəxʷra* 'son'), or by a combination of these (*šani* 'sister', *dan* 'brother'). However, it is not by any means possible to say that the suffixes -*i* and -*a* are exclusively signs of the feminine gender. A large number of masculine nouns end in -*a*: *gərwa* 'man', *ʔəxʷra* 'son', *gänjina* 'slave', *kərma* 'neck', *bira* 'ox', *wäräba* 'river', etc. Similarly, there are masculine nouns that end in -*i*, at least in the citation form: *wändi* 'relatives', *lankʼi* 'tongue', *ʔərkʷi* 'tooth', *kamfi* 'wing'. This -*i*, however, is demonstrably an epenthetic vowel: all masculine nouns ending in -*i* have stems ending in two consonants, which are not permitted word-finally in Bilin; the epenthetic vowel appears word-internally as *ə*; feminine nouns ending in -*i*, on the other hand, maintain this vowel throughout their oblique case forms: *yə tänit kʼʷaləxʷla* 'he saw my grandmother' (*täni*), but *yə wändəs kʼʷaləxʷlom* 'he saw my relatives' (*wändi*). The suffix -*i* is therefore a true feminine formative. Other feminine nouns are indistinguishable from their masculine counterpart in the citation form (*šiwana* 'female beggar', *səkma* 'grain of barley', *bəkʷana* 'little cloud'), but are identifiable as feminine only by certain case forms and by their concord. As can be seen from these examples, the feminine gender is not exclusively sex-related. As in many other languages of the Eritrean-Ethiopian region, the feminine gender is used to denote a diminutive.

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5. Some singulatives in the true sense, as found elsewhere in Cushitic, do exist in Bilin as a productive pattern (*dəmmura* 'one cat, a single cat' as against generic *dəmmu* 'cats' and plural *dəmmut* 'several cats'). See below, under 2.1.2.1. Also included here as "singulatives" are instances such as *kʼafi* 'piece of bark' as against *kʼaf* 'bark', or *šəkma* (fem.) 'grain of barley' as against *šəkma* (masc.) 'barley'.

2.1.2. Singular-plural

The formation of noun plurals in Bilin is very heterogeneous. The plural of any given noun cannot be predicted from its singular form, and as such noun plurals are a matter for the lexicon. Noun plural formation may involve any of four devices: suffix addition, suffix deletion, internal stem modification, or partial stem reduplication. In terms of these devices, six classes or types of noun plural formation can be identified, several of which may be further divided into sub-types according to whether more than one of the above devices is involved.

Class A. Internal modification (consonantal ablaut) alone

One of the distinctive features of the morphologies of the Agaw languages within the Cushitic macro-family is the use of consonant alternation or consonant "ablaut" as a morphological device. In Bilin and the languages most closely related to it (Khamtanga, Kemanteney, but not Awngi), consonant alternation is used mostly in the morphology of the noun. Bilin, in turn, has the largest number of alternations or ablaut sets:

b-f	*d-t*	*j-š*	*g-k*	*gʷ-kʷ*			
	d-s		*x-k*	*xʷ-kʷ*	*x-k'*	*xʷ-k'ʷ*	*w-kʷ*
	d-š						
	r-t						
	l-t						
	r-l						

In Bilin noun plural formation consonant ablaut may occur either on the penultimate or the final consonant of the stem, or occasionally on both:

singular	plural	gloss	singular	plural	gloss
ʔabən	*ʔafən*	'guest, stranger'	*kidəŋ*	*kišəŋ*	'field'
gʷädəgʷ	*gʷäsəkʷ*	'belly'	*gär*	*gäl*	'calf'
ʔəxər	*ʔəkəl*	'father'	*dan*	*šan*	'brother'
gäräb	*gäräf*	'bush'	*mašər*	*mašət*	'sickle'
läxän	*läkän*	'wound'	*šəmar*	*šəmat*	'tail'

Class B. Suffix deletion alone: -a : Ø

One of the commonest patterns of noun plural formation devices in Bilin involves the deletion of the final vowel *-a* of the singular, either without any further change, or in combination with penultimate or final stem consonant ablaut. If the resulting stem ends in two consonants, then the epenthetic final vowel *-i* is added.

singular	plural	gloss	singular	plural	gloss
bəkʷana	*bəkʷan*	'cloud'	*fädäna*	*fädän*	'seed'
ʔämära	*ʔämär*	'year'	*gaba*	*gab*	'word'
gərwa	*gərəw*	'man'	*fənt'ira*	*fənt'ir*	'goat'
wända	*wändi*	'relative, relation'	*ləxənja*	*ləxənji*	'weevil'
šinša	*šinši*	'fly'	*ʔəwänta*	*ʔəwänti*	'donor'

Class C. Reduplication alone

The final consonant of the stem is repeated preceded by the vowel ə:
$C_1V[C]C_2 > C_1V[C]C_2əC_2$:

singular	plural	gloss	singular	plural	gloss
ʃəl	ʃələl	'eye'	ləkʷ	ləkʷəkʷ	'leg, foot'
naš	našəš	'bone'	kamfi	kamfəf	'wing'
gäš	gäšəš	'face'	lank'i	lank'ək'	'tongue'
ʔərkʷi	ʔərkʷəkʷ	'tooth'	ʔän	ʔänən	'grandfather'

Class D. Suffix addition alone: Subtype (i) Ø : -tət

singular	plural	gloss	singular	plural	gloss
nan	nantət	'hand'	raŋ	raŋtət	'husband'
yäw	yäwtət	'(lower) back'	ləŋən	ləŋəntət	'house'
mam	mamtət	'penis'	jän	jäntət	'water-pot'

Subtype (ii) Ø : -t

singular	plural	gloss	singular	plural	gloss
ləŋən	ləŋənti	'house'	ħalti	ħaltət	'aunt' (MoSi)

2.1.2.1. Complex plural formations

Class E. Suffix deletion: -a : Ø + consonantal ablaut

singular	plural	gloss	singular	plural	gloss
wäräba	wäräf	'river'	bira	bil	'ox'
gira	git	'mountain'	bäxla	bäkəl	'mule'
gänjina	gänšin	'slave'	ʔəxʷina	ʔəkʷin	'woman'
mada	mas	'friend'	sabra	safəl	'ditch'

Class F. Suffix addition: Ø : -t + consonantal ablaut

singular	plural	gloss
nəxʷaxʷ	nəxʷak'ʷti	'father-in-law' (HuFa)

Class G. Reduplication + consonantal ablaut

singular	plural	gloss	singular	plural	gloss
ʔäb	ʔäfəf	'mouth'	kad	kasəs	'stomach'
manji	manšəš	'grindstone'	gib	gifəf	'shield'
jər	jələl	'intenstine'	gix	gikək	'horn'

Class H. Suffix deletion + reduplication + consonantal ablaut

singular	plural	gloss	singular	plural	gloss
ʔarba	ʔarfəf	'moon, month'	dənga	dənkək	'vein, nerve'
sarda	sardət	'knife'	lämba	lämfəf	'type of horse'

Class I. Change of suffixes: -a : -t/-tət

singular	plural	gloss	singular	plural	gloss
mərawa	mərawti	'snake'	dula	dultət	'club'
bəra	bərtət	'land, field'			

Tigre plural formations (class J)
Many nouns of Tigre origin employ their respective Tigre plurals:

singular	plural	gloss	singular	plural	gloss
gar	*garat*	'affair, law suit'	*fəǰan*	*fəǰanat*	'coffee cup'
gor	*ʔägʷar*	'neighbor'	*näwid*	*näwayəd*	'lamb'
ħəbət'	*ħəbut'*	'small flask'	*dəgge*	*dägäggit*	'village'
wäräk'ät	*wərak'*	'paper'	*ħoǰəb*	*ħəwəǰǰəb*	'eyebrow'

Particularly interesting are a few nouns whose singulars are purely Agaw, and have cognates in other Agaw languages, but whose plurals follow Tigre or Tigre-like patterns, as recorded by Palmer (1958: 387–88):[6]

singular	plural	gloss	singular	plural	gloss
färda	*ʔäfrus*	'horse'	*sər*	*ʔäslul*	'root'

2.1.2.2. Singulative
In addition to simple singular : plural pairs, some nouns that denote items that typically occur in groups or classes, especially animals and plants, also have a singulative form ending in *-ra*. The corresponding plurals (where they exist) typically end in *-t* or *-tat*.

generic	gloss	singulative	plural
gänji	'species of tree'	*gänjira*	*gänjit*
sənsa	'species of shrub' (Boscia Reticulata)	*sənsara*	
dəmmu	'cats'	*dəmmura*	*dəmmut*
jäggu	'baboons'	*jäggura*	*jäggut*
märʕawi	'bridegrooms'	*märʕawira*	*märʕawitat*

2.1.3. Case
Nouns in Bilin inflect for seven case forms: nominative (or better, absolute), accusative (or definite object), genitive, dative, comitative, locative, and ablative. These are merely conventional labels, and the functions of some of the oblique case forms extend beyond what these names may suggest. For instance, the locative case (ending in *-l*) may indicate both goal and location: *giril fixʷ* 'he went out to the mountain', *giril mändärtäkʷ* 'he lives on the mountain'. The absolute case marks both subject and indefinite object: *fənt'ira sansəʕa k'ʷixʷ* 'a goat ate (the) bread', *fənt'ira kədəxʷən* 'I bought a goat'. In complex noun phrases, the case markers in Bilin occur only on the last item: *ħayəs yə mada Yusefti ʔəwəxʷlu* 'he gave (it) to my dear friend Yusef'. To this extent, the indigenous grammars (Alibekit 1992; Hamde and Zeremariam 1992) regard the oblique case formatives as postpositions, though they are better regarded as true case markers added to the whole noun phrase because they exhibit specific and predictable junction features that "true" postpositions do not. For instance, all case markers

6. Reinisch (1887), however, records the plurals of these two nouns as *färəš* (class E) and *šələl* (class G), respectively. The Tigre plurals may be explained inasmuch as both nouns also have cognates in Tigre, *faraš* and *šər*, respectively, probably of common Afroasiatic origin.

except that of the absolute (which in effect has zero marking) and the co-mitative are gender-sensitive. The object and locative markers for both genders have predictable variants to conform with syllabification patterns. The locative and ablative, however, can indeed in turn be analyzed as original postpositions suffixed to genitive case forms, and "true" postpositions (e.g., *jabəl* 'in front of') also combine with genitive case forms. Postpositions, however, are mostly demonstrably nouns in oblique cases: *jabəl*, for instance, is the locative case of an old noun *jab* 'front (part)'.

Case markers in the following paradigms, as indicated above, are sensitive to the gender of the noun. Plural nouns have the same case markers as the masculine, except for the genitive of one sub-class of plurals: genitive plural in -*a* is restricted to plurals whose absolute ends in a single consonant. Reinisch (1882: 674), however, records a couple of examples of genitives in -*a* on what he calls "collective" nouns: *šək'a bälən* 'the (two) halves of the rainy season' (abs. *šək'*), *nanta ʔəmmərtən* 'a handful' (*nant* [*sic*] 'the fingers, what can be grasped between the fingers').

There are some consonant-final nouns (e.g., *ʔäddam* 'person') and loans from Tigre ending in vowels -*u*, -*e*, and -*o* (e.g., *dəgge* 'village') that follow the feminine pattern of inflection, but which are syntactically (and semantically) masculine: *dəggetəl färti* 'she went to the village'. Many proper names also belong to this type (e.g., *Gərgisər ʔaxʷra* 'Girgis' son', *Gərgisti järäbnäkʷən, ʔawət ni*? 'we're looking for Girgis; where is he?') This type may be called "pseudo-feminine."

The underlying forms of the case markers are as follows:

	masculine	plural	feminine and "pseudo-feminine"
Absolute	Ø	→	→
Object	-s	-s	-t
Genitive	Ø/-i	Ø/-a	-ər
Dative	-əd	-əd	-si
Comitative	-di	→	→
Locative	Gen + -l	→	→
Ablative	Gen + -ləd	→	→

The underlying shapes of the case markers therefore fall into four categories: -C, -V, -VC, and -CV[C]. The monoconsonantal markers (object -*s*, -*t*, and locative -*l*) have predictable variants according to the ending of the base to which they are added, conforming with the regular syllable rules of the language. Thus, added to a vowel-final base the endings have the shape -C (*gərwä-s, gänä-t, gərwi-l*). Added to a base ending in a single consonant the endings have the shape -C*i* (*gərəw-si, ʔäddam-ti, gədəŋ-li*). The only exception to this is that the feminine locative has the shape -*əl* added to the genitive base, whether or not the resultant stem ends in one or two consonants (*gänät-əl, tänit-əl, ʔäddamt-əl*). Added to a base ending in two consonants the endings have the shape -*əC* (*wann-əs, šinš-əl*).

The genitive case suffix shows the most amount of variation from one type of noun to another. The four formatives, Ø, -*i*, -*a*, and -*ər* are distributed as follows: the genitive of masculine nouns the stem of which ends in

one (e.g., *gədəŋ-* 'dog') or two consonants (e.g., *kamf-* 'wing') is unmarked (i.e., has zero suffix) and is thus identical to the absolute. It also occurs on plural nouns whose stems end in two consonants (e.g., *šinš-* 'flies'). Stems ending in two consonants are required to add the epenthetic final vowel *-i* in order to conform with the syllable rules of the language (abs. and gen. *šinš-i*). This *-i* is, however, readily distinguishable from the genitive suffix *-i* in the locative case forms (gen. + *-l*), for instance, where the epenthetic vowel is word-internally *ə* and the genitive *-i* remains (*gərwi-l* but *šinš-əl*). The genitive ending *-i* is confined to masculine nouns whose stems end in the vowel *-a* (e.g., *bira-* 'ox', *šinša-* 'fly'), which it replaces (*bir-i, šinš-i*). The genitive ending *-a* is confined to plural nouns whose stems end in a single consonant (e.g., *gərəw-* 'men', *ʔək'ʷər-* 'sons', *ʔək'ʷin-* 'women'). The genitive ending *-ər* is confined to feminine nouns, the stems of which may end in a vowel (e.g., *gäna-* 'mother', *täni-* 'grandmother') or a consonant (e.g., *ʔäddam-* 'person'), and in the former instance the suffix vowel is elided before the stem vowel (*gänä-r,*[7] *täni-r*, but *ʔäddam-ər*). Additionally, the feminine genitive ending has the allomorph *-t-* before the locative and ablative case suffixes (e.g., loc. *gänä-t-əl, täni-t-əl, ʔäddam-t-əl*).

The dative case suffix has the shape *-əd* for masculine and plural nouns, and *-si* for feminine nouns. The vowel *-ə-* of the masculine is elided after vowel-final stems (e.g., *gərwä-d*). The dative case is often used in the function of genitive, especially with nouns denoting kinship terms: *ni danəd ʔək'ʷi* 'his brother's wife'.

Some sample paradigms of different noun classes (*ləŋən* 'house', *gərəw* 'men', *šinši* 'flies', *mada* 'friend', *ʔäddam* 'person', *gäna* 'mother', *täni* 'grandmother') appear in the table on p. 490.

2.1.3.1. Adjectival genitive

There is an additional type of genitive case construction to the simple genitive described above. Genitives formed with the suffixes Ø, *-i, -a, -ər* alone may only be used when the possessive noun precedes its head noun (e.g., *bəlina gab* 'the language of the Bilin'). Alternatively, the possessive noun may be placed after its head noun, but in this instance the simple genitive cannot be used. Instead, a derived, adjectival form of the genitive is used which agrees in gender-number with the head noun, and is formed by means of the addition of the gender suffixes (masc. *-əxʷ*, fem. *-ri*, pl. *-əw*) to the simple genitive (e.g., *gərwa bəlinixʷ* 'a man of the Bilin'). For a fuller discussion of these and related forms, see 2.2.

2.2. Adjectives

There are two inflectional types of adjectives in Bilin, primary and secondary (or derived), with different methods of indicating gender-number. Case marking in adjectives is the same as that in nouns. Indeed, many items such as *dəxna* 'old (person)', *ʕawäd* 'stupid (person)', *ʔaräba* 'black (color)', can be classified as both nouns and adjectives. As with nouns, it is simpler

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7. It seems to be a rule of Bilin morphophonemics that a stem vowel *-a* is centralized to *-ä-* in word- and phrase-internal position.

Masculine-plural

	stem in -C (masc.)	stem in -C (pl.)	stem in -CC (masc./pl.)	stem in -a (masc.)
absolute	ləŋən	gərəw	šinši	mada
object	ləŋənsi	gərəwsi	šinšəs	madäs
genitive	ləŋən	gərəwa	šinši	madi
dative	ləŋənəd	gərəwəd	šinšəd	madäd
comitative	ləŋəndi	gərəwdi	šinšədi	madädi
locative	ləŋənli	gərəwäl	šinšəl	madil
ablative	ləŋənləd	gərəwäləd	šinšələd	madiləd

Feminine and "pseudo-feminine"

	stem in -C	stem in -a	stem in -i	stem in -e, etc.
absolute	ʔäddam	gäna	täni	dəgge
object	ʔäddamti	gänät	tänit	dəgget
genitive	ʔäddamər	gänär	tänir	dəgger
dative	ʔäddamsi	gänäsi	tänisi	dəggesi
comitative	ʔäddamdi	gänädi	tänidi	dəggedi
locative	ʔäddamtəl	gänätəl	tänitəl	dəggetəl
ablative	ʔäddamtələd	gänätələd	tänitələd	dəggetələd

to deal with masculine-feminine and singular-plural marking separately. Primary adjectives distinguish two sub-types of masculine-feminine marking: adjectives ending in the masculine in a consonant form their feminine by means of the suffix -i (*bähär–bähäri* 'big', *kəxin–kəxini* 'clever', *ʔəmun–ʔəmuni* 'faithful'); adjectives ending in the masculine in the vowel -a do not distinguish a separate feminine form (*məkʼʷla* 'bad', *ʔaräba* 'black', *walwa* 'white'). Primary adjectives employ the same various devices as nouns to form their plurals (*bähär–bähäläl* 'big', *məkʼʷla–məkʼʷəl* 'big', *kəxin–kəkin* 'clever', *ʔaräba–ʔaräf* 'black', *gənay–gənaytət* 'small'). Many primary adjectives of Tigre origin form their plurals by means of the suffix -*an* (*ʔəmun–ʔəmunan* 'faithful', *kabər–kabran* 'proud').

Secondary or derived adjectives mark gender-number by means of the suffixes masc. -*əxʷ*, fem. -*ri/-di*,[8] pl. -*əw*. Adjectives of this type are mostly either relative forms of the verb (e.g., *säxäntäxʷ* 'merciful' lit., 'who is merciful', *širaxʷ* 'long', *dərəɲaxʷ* 'short', *čʼaʕədaxʷ* 'white'), or are derived from nouns, i.e., are adjectival genitives (e.g., *gərwixʷ* 'a man's, pertaining to a man', *gədəɲəxʷ* 'a dog's, canine', *läbbäkixʷ* 'wise' lit., 'of the heart', *bəlinixʷ* 'Bilin, of the Bilin'). A few adjectives of this type do not appear to be derived from a noun or verb, at least not in the current language (e.g., *gärixʷ* 'much, many', *säraxʷ* 'red').[9]

8. The variant -*di* occurs when the ending is added to a stem ending in a dental-alveolar sonorant (*l, r, n*). The same alternation between *r* and *d* under the same conditions can be observed in some of the personal endings of the verb .

9. The roots of these (*gär-, sär-*) do occur in derived verbal forms: *gäräsna* 'be able', *särärna* 'be red', *säräsna* 'redden'.

2.3. Pronouns

2.3.1. Personal pronouns

Bilin has seven personal pronouns that distinguish first, second, and third persons, singular and plural, with a gender distinction between masculine and feminine in the third person only. In common with the other Agaw languages and many Cushitic languages, Bilin has different bases for the absolute (nominative) case and the oblique cases. The oblique base is also used as the possessive, without further addition when preceding the noun, and with the gender suffixes *-əxʷ*, *-ri*, *-əw* when following the noun or used independently (e.g., *yə bira* / *bira yəxʷ* 'my ox', *kʷə ʔəxʷina* / *ʔəxʷina kʷəri* 'your wife', *ni was* / *was niw* 'his cattle'). The oblique cases are built on the oblique base by means of the feminine case endings (object *-t*, dative *-si*, comitative *-di*) with the oblique base itself functioning as genitive and base for the locative in *-l* and the ablative in *-ləd*.

	absolute	oblique base ~ possessive prefix	object
1 sg.	ʔan	yə	yət
2 sg.	ʔənti	kʷə	kʷət
3 sg. m.	ni	ni	nit
3 sg. f.	nəri	nər	nərti
1 pl.			
2 pl.	yən	yəna	yənät
3 pl.	ʔəntən	ʔənta	ʔəntät
1 sg.	naw	na	nat

Alone among the Agaw languages, Bilin also has a set of object suffix pronouns added to the verb. Both the construction and the forms themselves are borrowed directly from Tigre even to the extent that as in Tigre the 2nd person distinguishes masculine and feminine, a contrast that is not made in Bilin elsewhere, neither in the independent pronoun nor in the subject marking of the verb.

sg.	1	-lä	pl.	1	-na
	2 masc.	-ka		2	-kum
	2 fem.	-ki			
	3 masc.	-lu		3	-lom
	3 fem.	-la			

Reinisch also records a gender distinction in the 3rd plural (masc. *-lom*, fem. *-län*), which is not noted in Hamde's grammar (1986).

2.3.2. Demonstratives

Bilin, like the other Agaw languages, has two degrees of demonstratives, near and far. Like other nominals, the demonstrative pronoun distinguishes three gender-number categories. The specifying demonstrative, which precedes its head noun, however, is unmarked for gender-number. There is, however, some variation in the forms of the demonstratives, especially the far demonstrative, across the Bilin-speaking area. The forms

below are those given in Alibekit's grammar (1992), where Hamde (1986) records *ʔənč'ändin*, etc., as well as an invariable *ʔəndän*, and Reinisch (1882) recorded *ʔənjähänni*. Indeed, Reinisch's dictionary lists a host of demonstrative forms built on the bases *ʔən-* and *ʔənja-* (1887: 32–33).

	near		far	
	independent	specifier	independent	specifier
masc.	nin		ʔənč'adin	
fem.	nini	ʔəna[a]	ʔənč'adini	ʔənč'a
pl.	nän		ʔənč'adän	

a. A shorter form *ʔən* also occurs as a weak demonstrative, almost in the function of a definite article: *ʔən gərwa ʔəntəxʷ* 'the man came', *ʔən gərwa ʔənjäni k'ʷalnəxʷ* 'they saw the man yesterday'.

The independent near demonstratives may optionally be added after the noun preceded by *ʔəna*: *ʔəna gərwa nin* 'this man'.

3. Verbs

The verb in Bilin, as in all the Agaw languages and indeed all Cushitic languages, is morphologically the most complex part of the language structure, distinguishing valency or "voice" with eight markings, tense-mood with four markings for main clause forms and at least thirteen markings for subordinate clause forms (divided into relative verbs, i.e., adnominal, and adverbial subordinate paradigms), affirmative and negative, and person with seven markings. Relative verbs also mark a formal contrast between subject relatives, in which the head noun is identical to the subject of the relative verb, and oblique relatives, where it is not, and the latter type further indicates gender-number concord with the head noun. Underlying the whole finite verb system is also a two-feature aspect contrast marked by different vocalizations. Unlike the other Agaw languages, Bilin also has two fundamental "conjugations" or inflectional patterns which are contrasted in many but not all of the forms itemized so far. In addition, there are two freely formable verbal nouns.

While the component morphemes of the verbal string do not always occur in exactly the same sequence, as for instance in the examples *k'ʷaləstədänni* 'you are not seen' and *k'ʷaləstägdänäxər* 'you who are not seen', cited in the introductory remarks in section 1,[10] there is for many parts of the verbal paradigm a general commonality of ordering of constituents. Thus, the lexical root of the verb always occurs in initial position and there are no prefixes, *k'ʷal-*; any verbal extension or marker of voice occurs in second position, *-əst-*; person markers (or person + aspect markers) usually occur in the following position, with the proviso that the subordinate negative marker *-Vg-* precedes the person marker, *(-Vg-)-dVn-*; following

10. Thus, in the former the negative marker *-ni < -li* occurs in final position after the person marker *-dVn-*, while in the latter the negative marker *-Vg-* occurs immediately after the verbal extension or voice marker and before the person marker *-dVn-*.

the person marker usually come any of a number of markers of tense-mood and subordinators, such as -*äxər* in the second example above.[11]

3.1. Voice

The verb root, which also usually functions as the base form, may be intransitive (*gänj-* 'sleep', *kər-* 'die', *gaŋ-* 'run'), stative (*färħ-* 'be happy', *kämb-* 'be cold'), or transitive (*kʼʷal-* 'see', *ʔənkäl-* 'love', *jəb-* 'buy'). Derived from the base form are seven "voices" or verbal extensions, which may be given the following conventional labels: causative, passive, reciprocal, causative-reciprocal, frequentative, frequentative-causative, and frequentative-passive. Derivation is by means of suffixes or a combination of consonantal reduplication and suffixes. As with noun plurals, consonant reduplication is normally manifested by the repetition of the final consonant of the base form preceded by the vowel *ə*. The verbal extension suffixes, most notably the causative, show some lexically conditioned variation in form: e.g., causative -*s*-/-*is*- or -*d*- (*gab-s-* 'cause to speak', *kʼʷal-is-* 'cause to see, show', but *läb-d-* 'cause to fall, fell').

In addition to the productive verbal extensions, there are a number of verb bases which in their simple form end in an old, no longer productive verbal extension -*t* or -*r*, which is replaced in the derived stems by the appropriate verbal extension (*ʕamäkʼ-ər-* 'be dirty' but *ʕamäkʼ-d-* 'make dirty', *səxan-t-* 'pity, have mercy' but *səxan-d-* 'cause to pity'). This formative appears to have a number of functions: denominative (*kəxan-t-* 'marry'[12] from *kəxan* 'wedding'), reflexive (*gäb-t-* 'defend oneself; reach manhood' from *gäb-* 'refuse, impede') or autobenefactive (*gʷäd-ət-* 'plough for oneself' from *gʷäd-* 'plough'), and stative (*šəxʷis-t-* 'be ill' from *šəxʷis-* 'hurt'), etc.

3.1.1. Causative

The simple causative is marked by the formative -*s*- or -*is*-, the latter applied to all Conjugation 2 verbs and a handful of Conjugation 1 verbs (see section 3.4 for a discussion of conjugation types), or by -*d*-. There is apparently no formal criterion for the employment of -*s*-/-*is*- or -*d*-, and Reinisch, at least, records instances of the same root forming both an -*s*- and a -*d*- causative (*šir-d-* or *šir-(ə)s-* 'take far away' from *šir-* 'be far away, be long').

däkʷ-s- 'let pass'	*kʼʷal-is-* 'show'	*läb-d-* 'let fall, fell'
təw-s- 'let in, let enter'	*bar-is-* 'let leave'	*färħ-əd-* 'make happy'
jəʔ-s- 'give to drink'	*däb-is-* 'help to bury'	*wäʕab-d-* 'let play'

A double causative may be formed by adding -*is*- to the simple causative:

bər- 'be hot'	*bər-s-* 'heat, cook (tr.)'	*bər-sis-* 'let heat, let cook'
ʕaräb- 'be blind'	*ʕaräb-d-* 'blind'	*ʕaräb-dis-* 'cause to blind'

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11. This is actually a composite ending comprising a primary subordinator -*ä* followed by the marker of the Subject Relative (non–3rd person).

12. That is, for a man marrying a woman; the passive derivative in -*s*, *kəxan-s-*, is used for a woman marrying a man.

3.1.2. Passive

The passive is marked by the formative *-əst-*, or by *-s-*. The former is commoner with verbs whose base stems have the shape CVC- or CVCC-, and the latter is more frequent with all others. The passive marker *-s-* is, of course, formally identical to the causative *-s-*. The two are, however, not confused, as passives in *-s-* form their causatives in *-is-* (*bän-s-* 'be divided' : *bän-is-* 'divide, cause to divide'; *ʔənkäl-s-* 'be loved' : *ʔənkäl-is-* 'cause to love'), or *-d-* (*läxän-s-* 'be wounded' : *läxän-d-* 'wound').

k'ʷal-əst- 'be seen'	*wänk'är-s-* 'be asked'
gäb-əst- 'be refused'	*wäʕab-s-* 'be played'
ʔärʔ-əst- 'be known'	*k'äräč'-s-* 'be cut'
jəʔ-əst- 'be drunk'	*ʔär-s-* 'be found'

There are also several examples of the non-productive formative *-t-* being used in a passive sense:

ʔəs-t- 'be done'   *däb-t-* 'be buried'   *käb-t-* 'be cut, defibulated'

3.1.3. Reciprocal

The reciprocal is marked by a combination of the passive formatives and the additional element *-əŋ-*:

k'ʷal-əstəŋ- 'see one another'	*ʔənk'ʷar-səŋ-* 'laugh together'
gäb-əstəŋ- 'refuse one another'	*wänk'är-səŋ-* 'ask one another'
ʔärʔ-əstəŋ- 'know one another'	*wäkkäl-səŋ-* 'offer to one another'

3.1.4. Causative-reciprocal

The causative-reciprocal is marked by a combination of the causative formative *-is-* and the additional element *-əŋ-*. No examples of other causative markers combining with *-əŋ-* are recorded in the available data. Interestingly, Reinisch records the combination of these two formatives in the reverse sequence *-əŋis-* rather than *-isəŋ-* as noted by Palmer (1957: 157), and Alibekit (1992: 75) notes only the triple combination *-əstəŋis-* (passive + *-əŋ-* + *-is-*).

k'ʷal-isəŋ- / *k'ʷal-əstəŋis-*   'cause to see one another'

3.1.5. Frequentative and derivatives

The frequentative is formed either by reduplication alone, or by a combination of reduplication and the additional element *-ən-*. In the latter instance, reduplication is realized as the repetition of the final consonant of the base stem preceded by the vowel ə, while reduplication occurring alone is realized as the medial repetition of the CV components of final syllable of the base stem: $C_1V[C]C_2VC_3- > C_1V[C]C_2VC_2VC_3-$. The latter is commoner only with disyllabic bases.

k'ʷaləl-əŋ-	*wänk'äk'är-*
jəbəb-əŋ-	*ʔəkəkəb-*
barər-əŋ-	*k'äräräč'-*

Reinisch records some different patterns of reduplication involving, for instance, complete repetition of CVC bases (*bərbər-* from *bər-* 'be hot', *läbläb-* from *läb-* 'fall', etc.).

The frequentative base may further have added to it causative and passive markers:

Frequentative-Passive	*k'ʷaləl-əŋ-əst-,*	*k'äräräč'-s-*
Frequentaive-Causative	*k'ʷaləl-əŋ-is-,*	*k'äräräč'-is-*

3.2. Person and gender-number

The finite verb in Bilin inflects for person and gender-number: first, second, and third persons, singular and plural, with a further distinction in the third person (singular) between masculine and feminine. The seven personal markers in Bilin are not universal to the whole finite verb paradigm, but three basic patterns may be identified, with varying degrees of commonality between them. These three patterns do not correlate exactly with different functional categories, and are thus best labeled schematically as A, B and C. For instance, Set B occurs only on the affirmative imperfective and perfective main clause tenses, while the corresponding negative forms use a variant of Set A (Set A$_2$), and the affirmative future main clause tense employs the endings of Set C. Set A is used in the majority of subordinate verb paradigms, and it is also possible to abstract Set A as the underlying system of personal marking for the other two sets, which can be shown, for the most part, to derive from the former by means of the addition of suffixes (in the case of Set B) or prefixes (in the case of Set C). The personal markers of Set A are also the most directly relatable to the personal marking systems in other Cushitic languages.

	Set A	Set B	Set C	Set A$_2$
1 sg.	-Ø	-Ø+ -n	-r ~ -y	-Ø+ -i
2 sg.	-r/-d	-r/-d	-t	-C
3 sg. m.	-Ø	-Ø	-r	-Ø
3 sg. f.	-r/-d	-Ø+ -ti	-t	-C
1 pl.	-n	-n+ -n	-n	-C+ -i
2 pl.	-dVn	-dVn	-tVn	-dVn+ -i
3 pl.	-Vn	-Vn	-dVn	-Vn+ -i

The variant forms of the 2nd singular and 3rd feminine (Set A only) in *-d* occur after stems ending in *r*, *l*, or *n*: *gäb-rän* 'if you/she refuse(s)' but *k'ʷal-dän* 'if you/she see(s)'. The alternate variant of the 1st singular (Set C) in *-y* occurs in one tense only, the purposive: *gäb-iya* 'so that I refuse', *gäb-to* 'so that you refuse', etc., but with 1st singular in *-r*: *gäb-ri* 'I shall refuse', *gäb-ta* 'you will refuse', etc.

The forms of the person markers are to some degree abstractions, and not all of the above are immediately recognizable in the verbal string as realized. Thus, while there is no difficulty in abstracting the marker of the 2nd plural (*-dVn-*) in the form *k'ʷaləstəgdənäxər* 'you (pl.) who were not seen', or even the corresponding singular (*-r-*) in *k'ʷaləstəgräxər* 'you (sg.)

who were not seen', in the corresponding main verb form of the latter, *k'ʷaləstəlla* 'you (sg.) were not seen', the marker of person (-*C*-) surfaces only in the doubling of the consonant *l* of the negative suffix (contrast *k'ʷaləstəla* 'he was not seen'). In addition, the person markers to some extent fuse with the markers of tense, and are not always immediately describable as discrete components in the verbal string: cf. *k'ʷaldänäkʷ* 'you (pl.) see' and *k'ʷaldənəxʷ* 'you (pl.) saw'. It is therefore more convenient not to abstract person marking from the markers of tense, but to treat the two together in the discussion of the various paradigms.

3.3. Aspect

The two-feature category of aspect runs throughout the whole of the finite verb in Bilin, in both main-clause and subordinate-clause verb paradigms. The two terms correlate in part with incomplete (imperfective) and complete (perfective) action, though there are exceptions, particularly among the subordinate verb forms, which are mostly of fixed aspect. Thus, *gäbdänän* 'if you (pl.) refuse' and *gäbdänaka* 'when you (pl.) refused' are "imperfective," but *gäbdənənädik* 'if you (pl.) refused' and *gäbgədənin* 'in order that you (pl.) do not refuse' are "perfective." There are in addition a few contrasting aspect forms from the same paradigmatic set: *gäbdänäxər* 'you (pl.) who refuse' but *gäbdənäxər* 'you (pl.) who refused'. The labels "imperfective" and "perfective" may be retained here as they are familiar from other Cushitic and indeed Afroasiatic languages.[13] The two aspects are essentially manifested by different vocalizations of the variable vowel parts of the person marker system (2pl. -*dVn*-, and 3pl. -*Vn*-) and the subordinate negativizer (-*Vg*-). The vocalizations may be further subject to vowel-quality harmony governed either by the verb class (or conjugation type), or by the tense suffix; however, as a general statement, imperfective aspect paradigms mostly show *ä*-vocalization and perfective aspect paradigms show *ə*-vocalization (alternating with zero at stem-ending junction points) or *i*-vocalization.[14] A handful of verb roots also has aspect-sensitive stems:

imperfective	perfective	gloss
ʔəntär-	*ʔənt-*	'come'
ʔärär-	*ʔär-*	'find'
nak-	*näx-*	'give here'
šak-	*šäx-*	'take'
ʔak-	*ʔäx-*	'be'

3.4. Conjugation type

The vocalization of variable-vowel personal endings and tense suffixes is also governed to some extent by the lexically conditioned factor of inflectional or conjugation type. Thus, the verbs *gäb-* 'refuse', *k'ʷal-* 'see' belong

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13. Palmer (1957), however, prefers the neutral labels Aspect A (= perfective) and Aspect B (= imperfective).

14. This statement is somewhat simplified, and for a more comprehensive and detailed discussion the reader is referred to Palmer 1957.

to one type (Conjugation 1) and produce main-verb past-tense forms *gäbəxʷ* 'he refused', *kʼʷaləxʷ* 'he saw', while *ʔəs-* 'do' and *jəb-* 'buy' belong to the second main type (Conjugation 2) and have the corresponding forms *ʔəsixʷ* 'he did' and *jəbixʷ* 'he bought'. Compare also *gäbo* 'he having refused' and *jəbe* 'he having bought', or *kʼʷaldənäxʷ* '(he) whom you (pl.) saw' but *jəbdinexʷ* '(that) which you (pl.) bought'. Contrastive conjugation forms do not, however, run through all tenses; the formal distinction is neutralized, for instance, in the main-verb present-tense forms: *gäbäkʷ* 'he refuses', *kʼʷaläkʷ* 'he sees', *ʔəsäkʷ* 'he does', *jəbäkʷ* 'he buys'.

A third conjugation type comprises a handful of mono-consonantal roots: *b-* 'lack', *f-* 'go out', *gʷ-* 'stand up, rise', *k-* 'spend the night' and *kʼʷ-* 'eat'. The mono-consonantal root *y-* 'say', however, belongs to Conjugation 1. Conjugation 3 verbs show different vocalization preceding the person markers from the other two types, with some variation within paradigms. Compare the following examples with the paradigms given below in section 3.6.1: *kʼʷakʷən* 'I eat', *kʼʷəräkʷ* 'you (sg.) eat', *kʼʷakʷ* 'he eats'; *kʼʷixʷən* 'I ate', *kʼʷərəxʷ* 'you (sg.) ate', *kʼʷixʷ* 'he ate'.

3.5. Negation

Negative marking in Bilin is always incorporated into the verb complex and follows two discrete patterns: suffix *-la* following the person markers in the main-verb Present. Future, and Past tenses; infix *-Vg-* preceding the person markers in all other tenses. The main-verb suffix *-la* fuses with the person markers of Set C (see section 3.6.1 below for details), and in the Present/Future further involves neutralization of the 2nd and 3rd persons of the singular to Ø. Furthermore, in the 1st singular and all three persons of the plural the negative suffix ends in the vowel *-i*, which may be regarded either as a discontinuous part of the person marking (as in 3.2., above), or as part of a distributionally conditioned variant *-li* of the negative marker *-la*.

The negative infix *-Vg-*, on the other hand, is invariable for person but aspect sensitive, appearing as *-äg-* in the imperfective and *-[ə]g[ə]-* in the perfective. In the latter instance, the vowel *ə* may be dropped in juncture position to comply with the syllable structure rules of the language: *gäbgäxʷ* 'he who did not refuse', *gäbgəräxər* 'you (sg.) who did not refuse', *gäbgin* 'so that he does not refuse', but *gäbəg* 'do not refuse!' and *gäbəstəgäxʷ* 'that which was not refused'.

3.6. Tense

The term "tense" is used here to refer to any finite verb paradigm inflecting for person and gender-number, and thus includes both forms such as *kʼʷaläkʷən* 'I see' and *kʼʷaləxʷən* 'I saw', and others such as *kʼʷaliya* 'so that I see', *kʼʷalən* 'let me see', *kʼʷalo* 'I having seen', *kʼʷalän* 'if I see', *kʼʷaläxər* 'I who see/saw', and so on.

3.6.1. Main-verb tenses

There are three main-verb ("indicative") tenses, indicating present, past and future time, respectively. A fourth tense used in main-verb position is

the command form (Jussive and Imperative), for which see section 3.6.4. In the affirmative, the Present and Past tenses mark person and gender-number by means of Set B and the tense formatives are *-äk^w* (present, imperfective aspect) and *-əx^w* (past, perfective aspect). The Future tense has personal markers of Set C and the tense formative is *-a* (~ *-i*, *-ri*), perfective aspect. The equivalent negative tenses, of which there are only two, the Present and the Future contrast being neutralized, have personal markers of Set A$_2$, and are distinguished throughout the paradigm by different aspect vowels (Present and Future = imperfective; Past = perfective). Additionally, in the Present-Future, person and gender marking in the singular is neutralized. Neutralization of person marking also occurs in the same place in one other Agaw language, Awngi, and is also found in parts of the verb paradigm in other Cushitic languages.

The following table shows the three main-verb indicative tenses of Conjugation 1 (*gäb-* 'refuse') and Conjugation 2 (*kab-* 'help') verbs:

| | affirmative | | | | | |
	Present		Past		Future	
1 sg.	gäbäk^wən	kabäk^wən	gäbəx^wən	kabix^wən	gäbri	kabiri
2 sg.	gäbräk^w	kabräk^w	gäbrəx^w	kabrix^w	gäbta	kabita
3 sg. m.	gäbäk^w	kabäk^w	gäbəx^w	kabix^w	gäbra	kabira
3 sg. f.	gäbäti	kabäti	gäbti	kabiti	gäbtäri	kabitäri
1 pl.	gäbnäk^wən	kabnäk^wən	gäbnəx^wən	kabnix^wən	gäbna	kabina
2 pl.	gäbdänäk^w	kabdänäk^w	gäbdənəx^w	kabdinix^w	gäbtəna	kabitəna
3 pl.	gäbänäk^w	kabänäk^w	gäbnəx^w	kabinix^w	gäbdəna	kabidəna

| | negative | | | |
	Present-Future		Past	
1 sg.	gäbäli	kabäli	gäbli	kabili
2 sg,	gäbäla	kabäla	gäbəlla	kabilla
3 sg. m.	gäbäla	kabäla	gäbla	kabila
3 sg. f.	gäbäla	kabäla	gäbəlla	kabilla
1 pl.	gäbnäli	kabnäli	gäbənni	kabinni
2 pl.	gäbdänni	kabdänni	gäbdənni	kabdinni
3 pl.	gäbänni	kabänni	gäbənni	kabinni

3.6.2. Subordinate verbs (relatives)

All of the Agaw languages distinguish two separate sets of relative verb paradigms, one used when the head of the relative clause is identical to the subject of the relative verb (Subject Relative): *k'^waläxər* 'I who see/saw', *gərwa fint'əra jəbex^w* 'the man who bought a goat'; and the other used when the head of the clause and the subject of the relative verb are not identical (Oblique Relative): *gərwa ʔan k'^waläx^w* 'the man whom I see/saw', *gərwa sansəʕäs nid ʔəwäx^w* 'the man to whom I give/gave the bread'.[15] Personal markers in both types are of Set A. Negative marking is by means of

15. Lit., 'the man whom I give the bread to him'.

the infix -*Vg*-, which precedes the person markers. Imperfective and perfective aspects are differentiated, but the distinction only surfaces, of course, in the 2nd and 3rd persons plural (the latter Oblique Relative only) and in the negatives: *k'ʷaldänäxər* 'you (pl.) who see' but *k'ʷaldənäxər* 'you (pl.) who saw', *ʔəxʷra ʔənkälägäxʷ* 'the son whom he does not love' but *ʔəxʷra ʔənkälgäxʷ* 'the son whom he did not love'.

The Subject Relatives are marked by the ending -*äxər* (Conjugation 1) or -*exər* (Conjugation 2) in the 1st and 2nd persons, and by endings formally identical to the adjectival gender-number suffixes in the 3rd persons: -*ä/exʷ*, -*ä/eri*, -*ä/ew*, respectively.[16] Additionally, in the 3rd plural there is zero person marker.

	perfective		imperfective	
	(Conj. 1)	(Conj. 2)	(Conj. 1)	(Conj. 2)
1 sg.	gäbäxər	kabexər	gäbäxər	kabäxər
2 sg.	gäbräxər	kabrexər	gäbräxər	kabräxər
3 sg. m.	gäbäxʷ	kabexʷ	gäbäxʷ	kabäxʷ
3 sg. f.	gäbräri	kabreri	gäbräri	kabräri
1 pl.	gäbnäxər	kabnexər	gäbnäxər	kabnäxər
2 pl.	gäbdənäxər	kabdinexər	gäbdänäxər	kabdänäxər
3 pl.	gäbäw	kabew	gäbäw	käbäw

The Oblique Relatives further show agreement with the gender-number of the head noun by means of the adjectival gender suffixes -*xʷ*, -*ri*, -*w* (see 2.1.3.1.): *gərwa k'ʷaldäxʷ* 'the man whom you see', *ʔəxʷina k'ʷaldäri* 'the woman whom you see', *gərəw k'ʷaldäw* 'the men whom you see'. However, if the relative verb precedes the head noun, the gender agreement markers are omitted: *ʔənti jəbre fint'ära* 'the goat which you bought' = *fint'ära (ʔənti) jəbreri*; (*ʔan*) *nili ʔəxʷarsa ləŋənli* 'in the house in which I was born' = *ləŋən (ʔan) nili ʔəxʷarsäxʷli*.

The following paradigm illustrates the affirmative imperfective Oblique Relative (either Conjugation 1 or 2):

	singular masculine	singular feminine	plural
1 sg.	gäbäxʷ	gäbäri	gäbäw
2 sg.	gäbräxʷ	gäbräri	gäbräw
3 sg. m.	gäbäxʷ	gäbäri	gäbäw
3 sg. f.	gäbräxʷ	gäbräri	gäbräw
1 pl.	gäbnäxʷ	gäbnäri	gäbnäw
2 pl.	gäbdänäxʷ	gäbdänäri	gäbdänäw
3 pl.	gäbänäxʷ	gäbänäri	gäbänäw

3.6.3. *Subordinate verbs (adverbial)*

The inventory of adverbial subordinate verb paradigms in Bilin is extensive and comprises at least thirteen distinct forms, more if extensions of

16. Strictly speaking, the vowel *ä/e* is in origin the primary subordinator and the endings -*xər* and -*xʷ/-ri/-w* are additional relativizers.

the "basic" set (e.g., *gäbror* 'in order that he refuses' from *gäbro*) are included. Adverbial subordinates indicate person variously by Set A and Set C markers, are often either imperfective or perfective aspect specific, though there are some aspect pairs (*gäbdänät* 'that you [pl.] refuse' : *gäbdənät* 'that you [pl.] refused'), and have negative marking in -*Vg*-. A handful of negative subordinate forms do not have directly corresponding affirmative counterparts: *gäbgi* 'without his having refused' functions as the negative of the gerundive (converb) *gäbo* 'he having refused'.

The following table lists the commonest adverbial subordinate paradigms by person marking type and aspect. All forms are in the 3rd masculine. Only Conjugation 1 examples are given. The glosses are approximations; the same forms are occasionally given slightly different functions by Reinisch and Palmer.

| Set A paradigms | | Set C paradigms | | | |
affirmative	negative	affirmative	negative	aspect	gloss
		gäbro, gäbror		perf.	so that he refuses
			gäbgin, gäbgindu	perf.	so that he does not refuse
gäbän	*gäbägän*			impf.	if he refuses, if he does not refuse
gäbnädik	*gäbgənädik*			perf.	if he (had) refused, if he did/had not refuse(d)
			gäbrəd	perf.	if he were to refuse/ he would refuse
		gäbgid		perf.	if he were not to refuse/ he would not refuse
gäbnädin	*gäbgənädin*			perf.	because he refused, because he did not refuse
gäbaka				impf.	when he refused
gäbäsäna				impf.	just as he refused
gäbek				impf.	as soon as he refused
		gäbrasik		perf.	until he refuses
gäbo				perf.	he having refused
	gäbgi			perf.	without his having refused
gäbät				perf. ~impf.	that he refused/ refuses
	gäbgät			perf.	that he did not refuse
	gäbägät			impf.	that he does not refuse
gäbu				impf.	while he refused

3.6.4. Other primary tenses

In addition to the tenses described so far, there remain the two command forms used in main-clause position, the inflection of which diverges somewhat from the remaining tenses: the Jussive and the Imperative. The Jussive has no 2nd person forms, indicates the remaining persons with Set A markers, and is Imperfective aspect in the 3rd plural but perfective in the other persons (according to Palmer 1957). The Imperative occurs only in the 2nd person, is perfective in aspect, and has its own number marking system. In Bilin, both the Jussive and the Imperative have negatives in -*Vg*-. This is clearly an innovation in Bilin, as all the other Agaw languages have a special negative imperative with a special negative marker.

	Jussive		Imperative	
	affirmative	negative	negative	affirmative
1 sg.	gäbən	gäbgin		
2 sg.			gäbi	gäbəg
3 sg. m.	gäbən	gäbgin		
3 sg. f.	gäbrən	gäbgərin		
1 pl.	gäbnən	gäbgənin		
2 pl.			gäba	gäbga
3 pl.	gäbinin	gäbgənin		

As is common in the Ethiopian-Eritrean language area, the verb 'to come' (*ʔənt(är)*-) forms its Imperative from a separate stem: *laxʷ, laxʷa*.

3.6.5. Compound tenses

In main-verb position Bilin also possesses a number of compound tenses typically denoting continuous actions or ongoing states, comprising usually an adverbial subordinate tense form of the lexical verb followed by an appropriate tense of an auxiliary, which may be either one of the verbs 'to be' (e.g., *sän-, wan-, həmb-*) or another (usually stative) verb, such as *gəj-* 'wait', *ʔərg-* 'spend the day', *ʔənkʷ-* 'keep', etc. Other languages of the Ethiopian-Eritrean region show exact parallels to these constructions. The details of various compound tenses, however, differ in Reinisch's and Alibekit's grammars. For instance, in the latter, a continuous action in present time is expressed by a compound of the Present main-verb tense and the Past main-verb tense of the verb *ʔənkʷ-* 'keep': *ʔan nan kätäbäkʷən ʔənkʷəxʷən* 'I am writing now', *ni ʔasmära färäkʷ ʔənkʷəxʷ* 'he is going to Asmara'. Reinisch, on the other hand, indicates a present continuous by means of a compound of the Gerundive (or Converb) and the Present main-verb tense of *həmb-* 'be': *waso həmbäkʷ* 'he is listening'. The following are some further examples from Alibekit (1992: 79–80): *yəšani kätäbru ʔərgəti* 'my sister has been writing' (lit. '. . . spent the day while writing'); *käw ʔəmaniw ħilätunu sänänäkʷ*[17] 'the people of ancient times used to be

17. The form as given is actually . . . *ħilätu sänänäkʷ*, which would seem to have a singular verb followed by a plural auxiliary agreeing with the plural subject.

strong' (lit., '. . . remain while they were strong'; *ni kätäbu ʔərgəro gən* 'he will have been writing' (lit., '. . . is that he spends the day while writing').

3.7. Verbal nouns

Completing the inventory of parts of the verb in Bilin are two verbal nouns, the action noun (or Infinitive) and the agent noun (or Participle), which can be derived from all verbs. The action noun is formed by the suffix *-na* added to the stem: *gäbna* 'to refuse', *kabna* 'to help', *kʼʷalna* 'to see', *ʔənkälna* 'to love', *kʼäräčʼna* 'to cut', *wänkʼärna* 'to ask', *färħəna* 'to be happy', *jəbəstəna* 'to be bought', *kʼʷaləstənna* 'to see one another', *jəbisna* 'to cause to buy', *kʼʷalələnna* 'to keep seeing', *ʔəntärna* 'to come', *ʔakna* 'to be', etc.

The agent noun is formed by means of the suffix *-änta* (pl. *-änti*): *ʔənkälänta* 'lover', *gʷädänta* 'ploughman', *jəbänta* 'purchaser', *kinsänta* 'teacher', *kintänta* 'student', etc.

A number of other formatives of verbal nouns occur, though it is not apparent to what extent they are freely usable: *səwäna* (var. *səwana*) 'thief' (*səw-* 'steal'), *säräna* 'clothing' (*sär-* 'wear, dress oneself'), *səwan* 'theft' (*səw-* 'steal'), *ʔəwən* 'gift' (*ʔəw-* 'give'), *fädän* 'seed' (*fäd-* 'sow'), *kəra* 'death' (*kər-* 'die'), *həmba* 'existence' (*həmb-* 'remain, stay'), *gaba* 'word' (*gab-* 'speak'), etc.

3.8. Composite verbs

A type of verb that is found in almost all the languages of the Ethiopian-Eritrean area is that comprising an invariable particle, that is usually an independent lexical form, not derived and occurring only in this composition, which carries the lexical-semantic meaning of the composite, followed by the ordinary lexical verb 'to say' which inflects for person, number, aspect, mood, etc. In some languages, especially Tigrinya and Amharic from among the Semitic languages, and Qafar from Cushitic, the invariable particle may also be derived from an existing verbal root. In Bilin, however, only the underived type occurs. The meaning of these composites often relates to sound, movement, or the action of light and color. To this extent, though far more than strictly onomatopoeic, it is not unreasonable to compare them to the ideophones that occur in other languages of the world. Some examples from Bilin are: *fuf yəna* 'blow', *kʷa yəna* 'bray', *ʃuħuʔ yəna* 'cough', *bärgäg yəna* 'leave, go away', *šägäg yəna* 'get drunk', *mäxʷ yəna* 'be on fire', *täš yəna* 'move slowly', *dəb yəna* 'fall down'.

3.9. The copula and the verb 'to be'

The affirmative copula in Bilin is strictly speaking not a true verb as it does not inflect for person but is invariable: *ʔan kinsänta gən* 'I am a teacher', *ʔənti yə mada gən* 'you are my friend', *yən šan gən* 'we are brothers', *ʔəna kətab nin ʔäwrəxʷ gən* 'whose is this book?' The negative copula, on the other hand, does inflect for person and is built on the base *ʔäx-*, inflecting similarly to the Past-tense (perfective) main-verb negatives: *ni yə dan ʔäxla* 'he is not my brother'.

In common with the other Agaw languages, Bilin does have a number of other roots that can be glossed as 'be': *ʔak-* ~ *ʔäx-*, *wan-*, *həmb-*, *sän-*, which fill out the paradigm. Additionally, the verbs *ʔak-* ~ *ʔäx-* and *sän-* are also used in the function of copula: *ni yəwända ʔakäkʷ* = *ni yəwända gən* 'he is my relative'. The former of these roots also supplies the regular negative copula. A peculiar feature of the verb 'to be' in Bilin, shared with the other Agaw languages, is the reversal of aspect, whereby a perfective aspect (past tense) form is used in imperfective (present time) function, and vice versa, as for instance: *ni gərwa kəxin sänäkʷ* 'he was a clever man'. Several of these verbs are also used in compound tenses.

In the sense of 'be' as a locative verb, *həmb-* or *wan-* is used for present reference and again *sän-* is used for past reference: *kʷə ləŋən ʔawət həmbäkʷ* 'where is your house?', *ʔənjäni ʔawət sänräkʷ* 'where were you yesterday?' For the negative of present time statements a special verb is used built on the stem *ʔəl-*, which inflects like a perfective main-verb negative: *nəri ʔasmära ʔələlla* 'she is not in Asmara'. (See Palmer [1965] for details.)

4. Further reading

The most complete grammar of Bilin today is still Reinisch (1882). Alibekit's grammar (1992) is clearly based on an English-language model and thus misses some important parts of Bilin morphology, especially that of the verb, which is sparsely treated. It has the additional disadvantage for the linguist not familiar with the language in that it is written in Bilin with only occasional English terminological glosses. The articles of Palmer (1957 and 1958) are excellent treatments of verbal and nominal morphology, respectively. A concise comparative discussion of the Agaw language family is Hetzron (1976), and discussions on specific topics using Bilin material can be found in Appleyard (1984, 1986, 1988, 1993).

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