Converbs in an African perspective

_Azeb Amha and Gerrit J. Dimmendaal_

1. The issue

The frequent use of converbs, or non-finite verb forms marking a clausal dependency relation, is a well-known property of languages in a linguistic zone identified by Masica (1976) the core of which coincides with the Indo-European and Altaic language area. In our contribution, we intend to have a closer look at converbs in African languages. This type of construction is found in Afroasiatic languages of Ethiopia, as already noted in Masica (1976). Less well known apparently among general linguists is the fact that this feature is also attested in a variety of Nilo-Saharan languages spoken mainly west of the Ethiopian region, and extending into Nigeria and Niger.

Below, we present an initial survey of morphosyntactic, semantic and functional properties of converbs in these Afroasiatic and Nilo-Saharan languages. In addition, and related to the more general purposes of the volume in which the present contribution appears, we intend to look at the way verb constructions have been described by Africanists in different grammars. More specifically, the question is raised to what extent the analytical and descriptive practices inherited amongst Africanists have influenced the treatment of these phenomena in the different genetic groupings where they occur, thereby illustrating a specific tradition of grammar writing in African linguistics with respect to such syntactic strategies. We also address the question whether these phenomena in the two language phyla are best explained as historically independent phenomena or, alternatively, as the result of areal diffusion.
2. Distribution of the phenomenon in Africa

In his investigation of Ethiopia as a linguistic area, Ferguson (1976: 75) pointed towards the presence of converbs (or “gerunds” as the author calls them) as one outstanding property of the region. Tosco (2000) has questioned the validity of Ferguson’s claim that Ethiopia constitutes a linguistic area as such, but the author concedes that converbs are indeed prominent in a number of Afroasiatic languages in the area. Tosco (2000: 345) further suggests that the presence of converbs in Ethiopian Semitic languages may be “… the result of old Cushitic influence”.

It is a well-known fact that converbs are particularly common in verb-final languages cross-linguistically (cf. the studies in Haspelmath and König 1995). On the African continent, verb-final languages are common in particular in north-eastern Africa, as well as in the Sahel region west of this area; languages in this area, belonging to Afroasiatic as well Nilo-Saharan, indeed all appear to have converbs (see Map 1). A verb-final ordering also occurs in a group of Niger-Congo languages spoken in the Niger Delta, known as the Ijo-cluster, as well as in Central Khoisan languages in southern Africa, as argued by Heine (1976) in his survey of constituent order in African languages. However, neither the verb-final Ijo languages nor the Central Khoisan languages appear to have converbs. In our discussion below, we therefore focus on the typological zone involving Afroasiatic and Nilo-Saharan languages in north-eastern Africa as well as the eastern Sahel zone.

At least two basic requirements are met by converb constructions in the languages surveyed below: firstly, the morphological requirement, namely that they are morphologically distinct from main verbs as well as dependent verb forms occurring in conditional, purposive, or reason clauses. Secondly, they cover two or more of the semantic roles of the converb which are attested cross-linguistically (cf. Haspelmath 1995; König 1995), including the expression of adverbial modification of manner and conjoining of series of events usually anterior to or simultaneous with the event expressed by the main verb.
Map 1. The areal distribution of converbs
3. Converbs in Afroasiatic

3.1. Omotic

When translating a sentence from German such as the following, *Nachdem die Polizei ihn hartnäckig befragt hatte, zeigte der Dieb den Platz an dem das Geld verborgen war* into a proto-typical Omotic language such as Wolaitta, one notices major differences in strategies used to enhance the storyline in narrative discourse. Where German or other Germanic languages would use adverbial clauses, followed by a main clause, Wolaitta would use a main clause with one main verb occurring in sentence-final position, preceded by dependent clauses containing finite verbs which are formally distinct from the main verb (or verbs in adverbial clauses). Unlike the main verb, these dependent verbs cannot form a clause by themselves; moreover, in Wolaitta this type of dependent verb, hereafter converb, does not inflect for aspect, whereas main verbs do. Also, contrary to main (i.e. final) verbs, converbs in Wolaitta and other African languages with converbs do not take illocutionary force or epistemic modality markers.

\[(1)\]

\begin{align*}
\text{polisee} & \quad \text{mint-i} & \quad \text{?oicc-in} \\
\text{police.DEF:NOM} & \quad \text{strong:CAUS-CNV} & \quad \text{ask-DS:CNV} \\
\text{kaisi} & \quad \text{miissaa} & \quad \text{k’ott-ido} \\
\text{thief.M:NOM} & \quad \text{money.M:ACC} & \quad \text{exist-PF:REL} \\
\text{soh-uu} & \quad \text{bess-i} & \quad \text{g-iisi} \\
\text{place.M:ACC} & \quad \text{show-M:CNV} & \quad \text{say-3MSG:PF}
\end{align*}

‘After the police interrogated him thoroughly, the thief showed them where he had hidden the money’

As illustrated by this example, converb constructions may also be used where English or German would use a manner or degree adverb (‘thoroughly’). When comparing converb constructions in Wolaitta with other Omotic languages, one notices that these dependent verb forms or converbs may be subject to restructuring in terms of their “finiteness”. Whereas subject agreement markers on converbs are common, these markers do not necessarily alternate for gender or number, contrary to main
verb paradigms in this Afroasiatic branch; also, tense or aspect may or may not be expressed on the converb, as the following comparison of Omotic languages should illustrate. Below we present a survey of functionally similar non-final verb types that we consider to be converbs in Omotic languages, regardless of the exact term used by the original author; a similar approach will be followed in the discussion of data from Cushitic, Ethio-Semitic as well as Nilo-Saharan languages.

Breeze (1990) is the first exhaustive documentation of the Omotic language Bench. As in many other domains of its grammar, Bench exhibits some unique features in its converb form. This involves the fact that it has four paradigms of converbs (or ‘particiles’ as Breeze calls them), which are formed on the basis of the “past stem” or “future stem” of the verb. The distinction between the basic verb root, the past tense and future tense stem of verbs is characterized by specific morphophonemic alternations often affecting the final consonant of these three verb forms. The list of the four converb/participle forms of Bench is taken from Breeze (1990: 27–29). The superscripted numbers in the examples indicate tone-levels; this language is reported to have six distinct phonemic tones: five level or register tones numbered from 1 to 5 beginning with the lowest, and one rising glide from level 2 to level 3.

– The past participle: past stem + -i₅ (for 3MSG, 1PL inclusive, 2PL and 3PL) or -a₄ (for 3FSG, 1SG, 2SG and 1PL exclusive) or -o₄ (as an alternative marker for 1PL exclusive).

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ham}^j & \quad \text{‘go’} \\
\text{han}^k i₅ & \quad \text{‘he having gone’} \\
\text{compare:} & \\
\text{han}^k e₅ i₅ & \quad \text{‘he went’}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{gaz}^j & \quad \text{‘take out’} \\
\text{ga}^z a₄ & \quad \text{‘she having taken out’} \\
\text{ha} n^k e₅ i₅ & \quad \text{‘she went’}
\end{align*}
\]

– The present perfect participle: past stem + aspect markers -Ns₄-, -ng₄ or -ankæ₄- + person-gender markers -i₅ or a₄.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ṣer}^j & \quad \text{‘be frightened’} \\
\text{ṣer}^k n^t g-a₄ & \quad \text{‘she having become frightened’} \\
\text{sur}^j & \quad \text{‘sleep’} \\
\text{sur}^k a₄ n^t k-i₅ & \quad \text{‘he having fallen asleep’}
\end{align*}
\]

– The imperfect participle: future stem + stative suffix -ag₄- + person-gender markers -i₅ or -a₄.
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- The negative participle: future stem + negative suffix \(-\text{arg}^\text{a} + -u^1\) or \(-i^5\) or \(-a^1\) (+ tone alternation??)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ham}^d & \quad \text{‘go’} \\
\text{ha}^d\text{m-} & \quad \text{‘he going’} \\
\text{ik}^d & \quad \text{‘grow’} \\
\text{i}'k^- & \quad \text{‘she growing’}
\end{align*}
\]

With respect to the distribution of the four converb forms above, Breeze (1990: 55) makes the following observation: “While the final participle in a series or a lone participle can be any one of the four different participle forms, the non-final ones in a series always have the past participle form. The tense of these is determined by that of the final participle in the series.” In other words, converb formation in Bench potentially involves two layers of dependency. Some examples:

(2) \(\text{go}^3\text{dab}^2\text{ind}^5\ \text{han}^1\text{k}^\text{t-i}^5\ \text{ko}'\text{yi}^5\ \text{e}^1\text{ti}^5\)

Godab.CON go-3M search-3M take-3M

\(a^1\text{-tsi}^5\ \text{ta}^2\text{am}^4\ \text{pa}^2\text{si}^5\ \text{ts}'\text{ya}^2\text{ts}'\text{u}^2\)

bring-3M 1-ABL together tie-3M

‘He went and searched for Godab, took and brought him and tied him together with me’

(3) \(\text{ha}^4\text{kn}^5\ \text{no}^1\text{t-i}^5\ \text{ya}^2\text{s-k-n}^4\text{s-i}^5\ \text{wo}^4\text{ts}'\text{-i}^5\ \text{ye}^2\text{?i}^5\ \text{a}'\text{t-i}^1\)

far.LOC see-3M find-PF-3M run-3M come-3M arrive-3M

\(\text{nor}^2\text{gn}^1\ \text{its}^5\ \text{ku}^6\text{kan}^1\ \text{go}'\text{cu}^2\text{e}^1\)

butter 3+3POS hand-LOC pull-3M-FIN

‘Having seen from far, he came running and snatched the butter from their hand’

The tense-aspect and negation marking morphemes which occur preceding \(-\text{a}^1\) (masculine) and \(-i^5\) (feminine) in Bench are identical in main verbs and converbs. (See also Hayward 1991 for an in-depth study of the synchronic and historical role of the suffixes \(-\text{a}^1\) and \(-i^5\) in the inflectional paradigms of a large number of Omotic languages.) In other Omotic languages, more specifically in Gamo, Kullo (i.e., Dawro) and Wolaitta, these very same agreement morphemes (\(-\text{a}^1\) and \(-i^5\)) are directly attached to the verb root to form the converb yielding proto-typical converbs with reduced tense-aspect marking. Still other Omoto languages, e.g. Dime, Maale and Zayse use
only one of these two morphemes thereby failing to show the gender and number distinction which is indicated in Bench. Thus, in Dime the converb is invariably marked by -\(a\) and in Maale and Zayse it is marked by -\(i\).

As Hayward (1990) shows, Aari is unique within Omotic in marking person as well as number distinctions on the converb; other Omotic languages show a reduction in the person, number and/or gender distinction in converbs. On the other hand, like many other Omotic languages, Aari does not show tense-aspect distinctions on the converb. Compare the inflection of the verb \(\text{ba}^-\) ‘bring’ in the affirmative perfect and imperfect main verb (from Hayward 1990: 475) and the converb paradigm of \(\text{its}^-\) ‘eat’ given in Hayward (1990: 488).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Comparison of the verb (\text{ba}^-) ‘bring’ and the converb (\text{its}^-) ‘eat’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Verb</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>perfect</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1SG (\text{ba}^-)-(\text{t})(\text{it})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2SG (\text{ba}^-)-(\text{t})(\text{ay})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3SG (\text{ba}^-)-(\text{ta})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1PL (\text{ba}^-)-(\text{t})(\text{o})(\text{it})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2PL (\text{ba}^-)-(\text{t})(\text{et})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3PL (\text{ba}^-)-(\text{t})(\text{ek})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Wolaitta there are three converb types: 1) same subject anterior converb, 2) different subject anterior converb, and 3) the simultaneous converb (cf. Adams 1983; Azeb Amha 2001a; Lamberti and Sottile 1997). Of these, the same-subject anterior and simultaneous converbs show partial agreement with the subject (i.e. they indicate only gender and number properties of
the subject) whereas the different-subject converb is an invariable morpheme -(i)n. Furthermore, negation cannot directly be marked on the same-subject anterior and simultaneous converb form in Wolaitta. Rather, in Wolaitta the parallel of ‘without-Verb’ converb type shown for Bench above involves a main verb inflected for person, negation and (future) tense plus a different-subject converb marker -(i)n, e.g. famm-ídi ‘(he/we/you.pl/they) having bought’ versus famm-énndá’-n ‘with out buying’ (the latter form may be used for all person/number or gender). In contrast to the converb, main verbs in Wolaitta show subject agreement for each person, number and gender as well as for aspect and negation.

Table 2. Aspect and person inflection on Wolaitta main verbs and converbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Same Subject Converb</th>
<th>Anterior</th>
<th>Simultaneous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>short form</td>
<td>full form</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1SG</td>
<td>wot’t’-á</td>
<td>wot’t’-áddá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2SG</td>
<td>wot’t’-á</td>
<td>wot’t’-áddá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3FSG</td>
<td>wot’t’-á</td>
<td>wot’t’-áddá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3MSG</td>
<td>wot’t’-í</td>
<td>wot’t’-ídi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1PL</td>
<td>wot’t’-í</td>
<td>wot’t’-ídi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2PL</td>
<td>wot’t’-í</td>
<td>wot’t’-ídi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3PL</td>
<td>wot’t’-í</td>
<td>wot’t’-ídi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Main Verb

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perfective</th>
<th>Imperfective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1SG</td>
<td>wot’t’-ádísí</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2SG</td>
<td>wot’t’-ádásá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3FSG</td>
<td>wot’t’-ádásu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3MSG</td>
<td>wot’t’-íísí</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1PL</td>
<td>wot’t’-íísá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2PL</td>
<td>wot’t’-ííséta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3PL</td>
<td>wot’t’-íísósóna</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The same-subject anterior converb in Wolaitta has short and long forms. The short form is mainly used in verb compounding (i.e., in complex predicates) whereas the long converb may be used for a number of functions including the expression of manner, sequentiality, aspectual
distinctions and clause chaining. The verb root used in Table 2 is \textit{wot’r’-run’}.

With respect to Maale, Azeb Amha (2001a) shows that this Omotic language has three distinct types of converbs: 1) same-subject anterior converb, which is used only to express events taking place prior to the event expressed by the main verb, as in example (4a), and 2) what can be called a general converb, which fulfils various functions including anteriority, simultaneity, clause-chaining and marking the first component of a complex-predicate (4b). This latter type is also used when the subject of the converb and the main verb are coreferential; 3) the different-subject anterior converb is used when the subject of the converb and the main verb are different, as in (4c). All converb types are directly attached to the verb root, and they do not distinguish tense, person, number or gender.

\begin{enumerate}
\item \begin{flushright}
\textit{\textbf{a.} ìzí mís’-ó tik’-á?í ò’ád-d-é-ne}
\end{flushright}
\textit{3MSG:NOM tree-ABS cut-CNV₂ left-PF-A:DCL}
\texttt{‘He left, having cut the wood’}
\item \begin{flushright}
\textit{\textbf{b.} ta ?ìndá tik-ó burk’-íf-i}
\end{flushright}
\textit{1SG:GEN mother-NOM coffee-ABS boil-CAUS-CNV₁}
\textit{káts-ó kats-i ?as-ó ?ééll-é-ne}
\texttt{food-ABS cook-CNV₁ people-ABS call-PF-A:DCL}
\texttt{‘My mother made coffee and she prepared food and invited the people (who were working on the farm into the house)’}
\item \begin{flushright}
\textit{\textbf{c.} ìzí mís’-ó tik-ém núúní makiin-aa}
\end{flushright}
\textit{3MSG:NOM wood-ABS cut-CNV₁ 1SG:NOM car-LOC}
\textit{c’aan-é-ne}
\texttt{load-PF-A:DCL}
\texttt{‘He having cut the wood, we loaded it on the car’}
\end{enumerate}

Zayse has a cognate converb to the Maale general converb (illustrated in 4b). As Hayward (1990, 1991) demonstrates, the converb in Zayse is interesting in that it is expressed by one and the same form as one of the paradigms of the main verb which he labels the “short perfect”. Regarding this Hayward (1991: 550) writes: “... the short perfect occurs in clauses where there is no constituent under focus, i.e., in a situation of neutral focus. Significantly, it is this very same form which functions as a converb
in the language. Thus, the same form occurs as a final verb and as a non-
final verb”. The following two examples from Hayward (1991: 550)
illustrate the interaction between focus marking and the grammatical use of
converbs.

(5) tai ʔesa kallonna ǧwiidi
   I-NOM him stick.with hit (short perfect)
   ‘I hit him with a stick’

(6) ʔe-ʔatsi ǧeli ʔuttottesin
   the man.NOM enter (Converb) sit.copula.3MSG-PF
   ‘Having entered, the man sat’

The dual syntactic behaviour of the verb root + -i form in Zayse is a rare
phenomenon both typologically as well as in view of the synchronic
converb-main verb distinction in other Omotic languages. Hayward (1991
and in subsequent publications) has offered a convincing historical
explanation for this development which will not be further discussed in this
paper.

As this preliminary survey of a variety of Omotic languages should
make clear, there is a continuum with respect to the type and degree of
inflection found on converbs: number (singular versus plural) or gender
(feminine versus masculine) may or may not be distinguished, as are tense
or aspect; also, coreferentiality versus disjunctive reference may or may
not be distinguished, whereas negation marking may or may not be used in
combination with some converb marking morphemes. This type of
restructuring historically of course is also common with main verbs
occurring sentence-finally in an independent clause. In order to be able to
develop a general comparative grammar, however, one needs a cross-
linguistically useful set of concepts which form bench-marks for
comparing language structures. Consequently, the proto-typical verbal
nature of these forms in dependent clauses which cannot constitute an
independent utterance by themselves are central taxonomic characteristics.
As shown through additional examples below, these forms may grade into
consecutive (medial) verbs on the one hand, and participles and gerunds on
the other.
3.2. Cushitic

Although the converb construction is often regarded as one of the characteristic features of Cushitic languages, it does not seem to be found in all members of this family. For example, no converb constructions have been reported for the southern-most Cushitic languages, spoken in southern Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania (see also Map 1). Sasse (1976) and Tosco (2001) do not mention any converb or participial construction for Dhasanech. Also, in the closely-related language Tsamakko, which is spoken north of Dhasanech, there is no converb (Savà 2005). Similarly, in Iraqw, a Southern Cushitic language spoken in Tanzania, the “consecutive” suffixes are not attached to the dependent verb, but rather occur in combination with pronominal markers preceding the dependent verb (cf. Mous 1993: 146–147).

In this section we briefly discuss data from Cushitic languages where the converb is well documented and languages where this is less clear; moreover, these languages represent different morphological strategies in marking converbs. Thus, Awngi formally distinguishes the converb from main verbs and within the paradigm of the converb it distinctly marks each person, number and gender. In Oromo on the other hand, the converb is distinguished from the main verb through the lengthening of the final vowel of the inflected indicative verb; apart from this phonological process, there is little difference between the converb and the main verb. In Hadiyya, as in Oromo, the tense-aspect and agreement marking is not reduced in the converb. As a matter of fact, some main-verb forms are in fact formally simpler than the converb.

Awngi is one of the four Agaw (or Central Cushitic) languages in addition to Bilin, Kemant and Khamtanga, which are spoken in northern Ethiopia and southern Eritrea. Official figures in Ethiopia show that there are about 500,000 speakers for the Agaw languages, although some of these languages are being replaced by the Semitic languages: Tigrinya and Amharic, e.g. Kemant, which has only around 1,600 speakers (Zelealem Leyew 2003).

In Hetzron’s (1969) monograph on the verb in Agaw languages, there is also a section on converbs. Hetzron outlines the form and function of the converb in Awngi in a clear manner, and he presents a number of illustrative examples extracted from texts (most of which, to our regret, are not inter-linearized). According to Hetzron (1969: 14) the converb in Awngi “mainly expresses that the action contained in it simply precedes
the one of the following verb. It has only one form, but semantically its tense, aspect, and mood are the same as those of the subordinating verb”. Hetzron further lists the main uses of the converb:

- Simple succession of actions.
- The content of the converb expresses information on the manner in which the event expressed in the subordinating verb is carried out, e.g. zuuk-amā ‘turning’ in zuuk-amā fayngo jemerūmi ‘turning, they started searching’. Hetzron notes that in this context the converb may occur after the main verb. In all other cases, subordinate (dependent) verbs occur preceding the main verb.
- Verbal government, i.e. a converb might be required by the subordinating verb for expressing aspectual distinctions, e.g. widing ‘to finish’ as in gis̱kamlawidingakamī ‘and when they finished digging’. A similar use of the converb to express aspectual meaning is recorded for Omotic languages.
- Direct speech is always followed by the verb niŋ ‘to say’ and if there is another verb of speaking, the converb of niŋ ‘to say’ is used, e.g. namawā niŋxawā ‘saying, he asked’.

As Hetzron (1969: 15) shows, the converb in Awngi distinguishes person, number and gender (except in the case of the second person singular and the third person feminine). In addition to these properties, the main verb in Awngi distinguishes four main (affirmative) indicative paradigms, based on the combination of two tenses (present and past) and two ‘aspects’ (sometimes called ‘definite’ and ‘indefinite’). Compare the paradigms of the “imperfect indefinite” (which expresses an action in the present or future) and the converb form of the verb des-, ‘study’ cited from Hetzron (1969; gloss by AA & GJD) and shown in Table 3 below.

The Cushitic language Hadiyya together with Libido, Kambata, Alaba, Sidamo and Burji forms the Highland East Cushitic branch of the Cushitic family. Sim (1989) presents a detailed study of predicate conjoining in Hadiyya where the so-called converb construction is central. The converb in Hadiyya is interesting since the main and converb form of the verb in this language exhibit no ‘asymmetry’ in tense-aspect and agreement marking. In fact, Sim (1989: 150) claims that the present perfect form of the main verb in Hadiyya is derived from the converb, through back-formation.
Table 3. Imperfect indefinite and converb form of the verb des- ‘study’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Main Verb</th>
<th>Converb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1SG</td>
<td>des-é</td>
<td>des-ata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘I study /shall study’</td>
<td>‘I having studied’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2SG</td>
<td>des-té</td>
<td>des-tata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘you study /shall’</td>
<td>‘you having studied’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3MSG</td>
<td>des-é</td>
<td>des-amá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘he studies /shall study’</td>
<td>‘he having studied’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3FSG</td>
<td>des-té</td>
<td>des-tata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘she studies /shall study’</td>
<td>‘she having studied’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1PL</td>
<td>des-né</td>
<td>des-nana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘we study /shall study’</td>
<td>‘we having studied’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2PL</td>
<td>des-tánà</td>
<td>des-tókamá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘you study /shall study’</td>
<td>‘you having studied’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3PL</td>
<td>des-ánà</td>
<td>des-kamá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘they study /shall study’</td>
<td>‘they having studied’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the paradigms in Table 4 taken from Sim (1989: 143 and 154) show, there is no morphological reduction in the dependent converb verbs. Both in the main verb (column 2) and converb forms (specifically converb 2 forms in column 3) the vocalic elements -oo-, -u- and -aa- indicate imperfect, simple perfect and present perfect forms respectively, whereas the consonants of the suffixes co-vary with person, number and gender of the subject. The verb root presented in Table 4, is mass- ‘take’.
Table 4. Haddiyya main and converb forms of the verb *mass- ‘take’*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Imperfective</th>
<th>Simple PF</th>
<th>Present PF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1SG</td>
<td><em>mass-oomo</em></td>
<td><em>mass-ummo</em></td>
<td><em>mass-aamo</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2SG</td>
<td><em>mass-itootto</em></td>
<td><em>mass-itiito</em></td>
<td><em>mass-itaatto</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3MSG</td>
<td><em>mass-ookko</em></td>
<td><em>mass-ukko</em></td>
<td><em>mass-aakko</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3FSG</td>
<td><em>mass-itamo</em></td>
<td><em>mass-ito?o</em></td>
<td><em>mass-ito?ookko</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3POL/PL</td>
<td><em>mass-akkamo</em></td>
<td><em>mass-akko?o</em></td>
<td><em>mass-akko?ookko</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1PL</td>
<td><em>mass-inoommo</em></td>
<td><em>mass-inummo</em></td>
<td><em>mass-inaammo</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2PL</td>
<td><em>mass-itakkamo</em></td>
<td><em>mass-itakko?o</em></td>
<td><em>mass-itakko?ookko</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CNV₁</th>
<th>CNV₂=Simple PF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1SG</td>
<td><em>mass-aamma</em></td>
<td><em>mass-ummaare</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2SG</td>
<td><em>mass-itaa</em></td>
<td><em>mass-itaare</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3MSG</td>
<td><em>mass-aakka</em></td>
<td><em>mass-ukkaare</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3FSG</td>
<td><em>mass-itaa?a</em></td>
<td><em>mass-ito?aare</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3POL/PL</td>
<td><em>mass-akka?a</em></td>
<td><em>mass-akko?aare</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1PL</td>
<td><em>mass-inaamma</em></td>
<td><em>mass-inummaare</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2PL</td>
<td><em>mass-itakka?a</em></td>
<td><em>mass-itakko?aare</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following example derives from a story about ‘two cheats’ in Hadiyya (Sim 1989: 383). The converb forms are here presented in boldface:

(7) *dabassanta?a ki?la?a lamim amatt’ita?a ki?la?a googoom*
    exchanging rising both taking after the road

*matto?ko?o yakkamo matta?a ki?la?a toconne*
    they.went one.says going rising at-side

*fissita?a ki?la?a fook’a?lam ammane marabo*
    taking.out rising opened time honey
massukkaannik oreeta buuro massukkaanik bucca
one.who.took dung butter one.who.took earth

both seeing rising weakening rising howling

utta?a lamim min mine matto?o yakkamo
quiting both house house they.went one-says

′After they traded, they took (their goods) and went on their way, it is said. After going, they took it out at the side (of the road), and the one who took honey – dung; he who took butter – earth. The two, after seeing, after being deflated, stopped howling about it and went to their separate houses, it is said.′

Sim (1989) argues that the term “serial verb construction” is a more appropriate term for the Hadiyya converb construction because, according to him, the definition of this term subsumes most functions of converb constructions. As Bisang (1995) shows, there is a high degree of functional similarity between converbs and verb serialization. However, there are also some clearcut syntactic and morphological distinctions between these two. Apart from the fact that (African) serial verb languages tend to be verb-second or SVO languages, there are differences in cross-reference marking. As we saw for the Omotic language Wolaitta, for example, the subjects of converbs and main verbs are not necessarily identical (or coreferential). In fact, Hadiyya also marks switch-reference, as Sim points out (1989: 154). Switch-reference does not seem to be a characteristic of languages with verb serialization.

Although the converb in Hadiyya is morphologically cumulative, i.e. is clearly marked for aspect and person just like main verbs, it cannot occur in the syntactic position of main verbs (i.e. as a sentence-final element) and it cannot form a sentence on its own. Secondly, the morphological forms marking nominal and verbal inflection on converbs and main verbs are not identical.

Oromo is an East Cushitic language spoken in central, south-east and western Ethiopia, each region representing a distinct dialect. This language belongs to the sub-group of Cushitic which is reported not to have converbs (cf. Tosco 1996: 84). However, a number of descriptions on this language include a verbal form whose function is similar to that of the converb in other Ethiopian languages. For our purpose here, we consider two studies on this language which furnish complementary information on the converb. Gragg’s (1976) documentation of the structure of the Wollega
dialect shows the morphological contrast between main verbs and converbs, but unfortunately it does not contain much information about the function of the latter category. Griefenow-Mewis and Tamene Bitima (1997) on the other hand is a study fully focused on the functions of the converb, with illustrative material from texts.

Gragg (1976: 192–193) describes – what he calls – ‘consecutive clauses’ in Oromo as follows:

[f]or simultaneous action Oromo can use the present participle: *hojjetaa ŋaata* ‘he eats while working.’ For posterior action Oromo uses the converb: *mana adeemnaan rafi* ‘having gone home, sleep/ Go home and sleep!’ However, the most frequent way to indicate that the action of one clause is simultaneous with or immediately prior to the action of a second clause is to use the simple past, with a lengthened final vowel. This construction corresponds to the converb construction in Amharic, and frequently corresponds to conjunction in English ...

Note that in the above quote, two types of “simultaneous” clauses are identified, one which is based on the “present participle”, and the second which is based on the simple past tense. In both types lengthening of the final vowel is obligatory, and this vowel lengthening seems to be crucial in distinguishing the converb from main clauses with the present and past tenses.

Griefenow-Mewis and Tamene (1997) analyse dependent clauses with verb-final long vowels in Oromo in more detail. Using examples from Oromo texts, Griefenow-Mewis and Tamene identify four functions for the construction in question. It is clear that these functions correspond to the function of converbs in other Afroasiatic languages (compare the Awngi and Hadiyya forms above as well as the case of Omotic and Semitic languages elsewhere in this paper) but also cross-linguistically (cf. Haspelmath and König 1995).

– ‘The co-ordination of actions that follow each other’, as in the bolded verb below:

(8)  *haati  tulluu ganama  saʔaati  tokkotti  kaatee  bultee*

  *mother  Tullu  morning  clock  one.at  got.up.F  breakfast*

  *k’oppheessiti*

  *she.prepares*
‘Tullu’s mother gets up in the morning at 7 o’clock and prepares breakfast’

– ‘Serial verbs’ in constructions where the two co-ordinated verbs result in a new functional unit, e.g. dheessanii deemani ‘they escaped and went away (i.e. they left unnoticed)’. The authors further report that this type of construction often involves ‘verbs of speaking’.

– ‘Adverbial constructions’ in ‘co-ordinated verbs … the first verb of which describes a manner or situation or sometimes a place, that is characteristic for the action expressed by the second verb’, as the converbs weeddisaa ‘singing’ and figee ‘run’ do in example (9).

(9) bantiin weeddisaa figee isaan bira darbe
    Banti singing ran them near passed by
    ‘Banti passed by them singing and running’

– ‘Compound verbs’ formed by lengthening the final vowel of a conjugated verb plus a conjugated present or past form of the verb ‘to be’ (i.e. jira and tura respectively in 10a and 10b).

(10) a. inni adeemee jira ‘he went’ (lit.: ‘He went he is’)
    b. inni adeemee ture ‘he has left’ (‘lit.:’He went he has been’)

In forming the converb from a tensed verb, Oromo thus is similar to Bench (Omotic) above. The Oromo verbs illustrated above are used in order to express the simple perfect and the pluperfect in the same way as converbs in Ethio-Semitic languages are used in forming compound tenses. This suggests that the notion of “asymmetry” in marking tense-aspect and subject agreement between the converb and main verbs does not apply to Oromo (cf. Bisang 1995, where asymmetry in the inflection of converb vs. main verbs is demonstrated to be crucial for distinguishing “converb languages” and “serializing languages”).

3.3. Semitic

The converb construction is also attested in several Ethio-Semitic languages. Since this construction is generally absent in other Semitic languages of the Middle East, its presence in the Ethio-Semitic languages
is attributed to Cushitic (and/or Omotic) influence. The following extensive quote from Hetzron (1975a: 113) summarizes the origin and the distribution of the converb construction in Ethio-Semitic languages.

A number of features common to ALL the Ethiopian Semitic languages but not found elsewhere in Semitic are probably all due to the early influence of Cushitic and argue for monogenesis ... Some features are not found in all the languages, but they are found in representatives of each branch while not in the closest relatives of these. Such a feature is the use, employing a Semitic form according to a Cushitic pattern (i.e. calqued on Cushitic), of the converb (gerund) instead of sentence coordination. The converbial constructions are common in all the Ethiopian Semitic languages and were already so in Ge’ez, but the original converbial forms (based on the Semitic pattern (sābir(ā)-) are found today (in addition to Ge’ez) in Tigrinya, (but not in Tigre), Amharic, Argobba and, with a limited application, in central and western Gurage (with a modified pattern sībitā-) and Gafat.

An example of the “original converbial form” as stated in the above quote can be seen from the Amharic paradigm in this section in which the unique converb stem CāCC- (for first person CāC(C)ïCC-) is followed by inflectional morphemes which indicate the person, number and gender of the subject of the converb. In contrast to these, Harari (which is spoken in the south-eastern part of Ethiopia) and some of the Gurage languages have an invariable form for the converb. For example, Leslau (1945: 70) writes: “Harari, and probably also Gafat [an extinct Ethio-Semitic language, AA & GJD], express the gerundive by the element -ma suffixed to the first verb: (Harari) fac’āma rākābā ‘having looked for (or looking for), he has found’. Hetzron (1975b: 40) also states that in these South Ethio-Semitic languages, i.e., Harari, Silt’i, Wolâne and Zway the original form of the converb (attested e.g. in Ge’ez and Amharic) is lost and “a partially tense-marked converb was adopted: past, nonpast or jussive/imperative forms followed by a converbial particle -m(a) or -ane/i.”

In a remarkably concise and clear paper, Goldenberg (1988) distinguishes between Ethio-Semitic languages which according to his criteria have either converbs (Con.) or gerund (Ger.), or both. Thus, according to this author, Amharic has both gerunds and converbs, Tigre has converbs but no gerunds, and Tigrinya has gerunds but it has no converbs, as shown in Table 5 adopted from Goldenberg (1988: 91).
Goldenberg’s grouping of the above Ethio-Semitic languages seems to depend on the type of inflectional markers the verbs take. That is, those languages in which a finite verb takes an invariable co-ordinating morpheme are said to have converbs whereas those that have a non-tensed verb which is marked for nominal inflection are said to have gerunds. Goldenberg illustrates the gerund and converb in Amharic respectively as säbro ‘he having broken’, säbra ‘she having broken’ and säbbära-ïnna ‘he broke and ... ’, säbbäräcc-ïnna ‘she broke and ... ’ [the triliteral root s-b-r- means ‘break’; AA and GJD]. He also demonstrates that in Amharic these forms may be used interchangeably without a change in meaning. Consider the following example:

(11) a. líju tammämä-ïnna  
    child:M:DEF be.sick:3MSG:PAST-COORD
    hakim bet wässädut  
    doctor house take:3PL:PAST
    ‘The child got sick and they took him to the hospital’

b. líju tamm-o hakim bet  
    child:M:DEF be.sick:3MSG:CNV doctor house
    wässädut  
    take:3PL:PAST
    ‘The child having been sick, they took him to the hospital’

However, there are contexts in which converbs and co-ordinate verbal forms are not interchangeable, e.g. where the converb is used as an adverbial modifier and in compound verbs. In our view, at least in the case of Amharic verbal forms säbbära-ïnna ‘he broke and ... ’ etc., it would not be appropriate to use the term converb since this is clearly a simple coordination of two main clauses by means of ïnna ‘and’ which can also be used for co-ordinating two noun phrases as in, mäs ‘iḥaf ïnna ʿirsas ‘a book and a pencil’. Such consecutive (as against converb) forms are used when focusing on the sequencing or temporal ordering of specific events. The
converb in Amharic on the other hand has a distinct stem: \( C\dot{a}C(C/i)C- \) (for the first person singular \( C\dot{a}C(C/i)CC- \)) to which person, gender and number markers of the subject noun are added. Consider the form of näggårä ‘tell’ below.

Table 6. Amharic näggårä ‘tell’

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1SG</td>
<td>nägïrr-e</td>
<td>‘I having told’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2MSG</td>
<td>nägr-åh</td>
<td>‘you (m) having told’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2FSG</td>
<td>nägr-aś</td>
<td>‘you (f) having told’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3MSG</td>
<td>nägr-o</td>
<td>‘he having told’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3FSG</td>
<td>nägr-a</td>
<td>‘she having told’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1PL</td>
<td>nägr-än</td>
<td>‘we having told’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2PL</td>
<td>nägr-accïhu</td>
<td>‘you (pl) having told’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3PL</td>
<td>nägr-åw</td>
<td>‘they having told’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hetzron (1972: 99–100) identifies three ‘major functions’ for the above converb forms in Amharic. According to this author, each of the three functions is distinctively signalled by word-final pitch/stress.

– *Consecutive*, where the action of the converb takes place prior to the event expressed in the next verb. In this function, the final syllable of the converb has ‘high pitch stress’.

(12) a. \( k\textquoteleft om-ó tänaggärä \) get.up-3MSG:CNV speak:3MSG:PAST
‘He got up and talked’

b. \( bâlt-ó hedá \) eat-3MSG:CNV go:3MSG:PAST
‘He ate and went’

– *Serial*, where a chain of actions, each marked by a converb, takes place, constituting one activity and the final verb is the conclusion of the activity. In this function, the final syllable of the converb has ‘rising stress’.
(13) bärr-u-n käft-‘ô õ-bet gäbt‘-ô
door-DEF-ACC open-3MSG:CNV LOC-house enter-3MSG:CNV
ïk’awîn azzägajt‘-ô bet-u-n
goods.DEF-ACC arrange-3MSG:CNV house-DEF-ACC
t‘ärg-‘ô hedă
sweep-3MSG:CNV go:3MSG:PAST

‘He opened the door, entered the house, arranged the things, swept the house, and left’

This prosodic distinction on the intonational-phrase-final syllable, however, does not appear to be made by all native speakers, according to our information.

– Coextensive, where there is no subsequent relation. In this function, the converb does not carry special stress. Three sub-functions are included under the coextensive: 1) the actions of the converb and the final verb occur simultaneously (and the converb is a stative verb), as in ex. (14); 2) the contents of the two verbs (converb and final) make up one verbal meaning, as in (15); 3) the use of the converb is governed by the lexical nature the subsequent verb, as in (16):

(14) k‘om-o tännagGAra
get up-3MSG:CNV speak:3MSG:PAST
‘he talked standing’

(15) tămällîs-o hedă
return-3MSG:CNV go:3MSG:PAST
‘he went back [=returning]’

(16) t‘ät’t‘ît-o c‘ärräsä
drink-3MSG:CNV finish:3MSG:PAST
‘he finished drinking’

Hetzron (1972) also discusses the structure of the so called m-converb in some south Ethio-Semitic languages, which is formed from a tensed verb (see above) and the t-converb in some Gurage languages, which is similar to the converb paradigm in Amharic but with an additional t- within the inflected converb. For reasons of space and also because the functions are essentially similar to that of Amharic above (i.e. consecutive, serial and coextensive), we will not discuss Ethio-Semitic any further, and instead move on to another major African language phylum where converbs are attested, Nilo-Saharan.
4. Converbs in Nilo-Saharan

In his comparative study of “Sudansprachen” (Sudanic languages), the great Africanist Westermann (1911: 61) made reference to a morphosyntactic property which he called verbal compounding (“Verb-Anhäufungen”). For Westermann, Sudanic languages constituted an areal and genetic grouping, roughly corresponding to Niger-Congo and Nilo-Saharan in modern terms, and contrasting with Hamito-Semitic (or Afroasiatic in more modern terms) mainly towards the north as well as with Bantu mainly towards the south of this belt.

As observed in our survey of Afroasiatic languages with converbs above, verbal compounding is also prominent in these languages. But Westermann was quite right in pointing out that Nubian languages (now classified as Nilo-Saharan), for example, also tend to form complex predicates on the basis of two or more verbal roots or stems. As we know today, Nilo-Saharan languages in which this typological property is attested also tend to use converbs in order to mark dependency relations. In fact, verbal compounding seems to be the outcome of a rather permanent drift or slant from collocations of converbs plus main verbs in Afroasiatic as well as Nilo-Saharan languages (Azeb Amha and Dimmendaal 2005).

There is no general consensus on the genetic classification of Nilo-Saharan languages (the interested reader is referred to Ehret 2001 for further details). At the same time, lower-level units such as Nilotic, Nubian or Saharan have been accepted for decades by most scholars working on these languages. Below, we present a survey of converb constructions in these lower-level genetic units from an areal perspective, starting from the westernmost Nilo-Saharan languages where converbs are attested, the Saharan languages spoken in the region around Lake Chad, and moving eastwards towards the Afroasiatic area in north-eastern Africa. Unfortunately, this listing cannot be exhaustive. There are a number of subgroups belonging to the Eastern Sudanic group within Nilo-Saharan where converbs may in fact be common, but where data are inconclusive, e.g., Nyimang and Afitti, two closely related languages spoken in the Nuba Mountains, and possibly, a number of Surmic languages spoken in an area adjacent to Omotic (Afroasiatic) languages in Ethiopia. A proper investigation of converbs and related properties in these languages can only be undertaken once more detailed data become available.
4.1. Saharan

The westernmost languages on the African continent with converb constructions probably are to be found in Saharan, a Nilo-Saharan subgroup situated in a region comprising north-eastern Nigeria, eastern Niger, Chad, and to a lesser extent northern Cameroon. The Saharan group consists of Kanuri, Tibu, Beri and Beria (or Zaghawa).

The first detailed analysis of a Saharan language was presented by Lukas (1937) for Kanuri. Lukas gives an extensive discussion of verb morphology (1937: 35–126), and makes reference to the so-called “conjunctive”, which is used “… to connect actions with other actions which carry them on.” The Kanuri conjunctive, which is fully conjugated for person and which never stands alone, is treated as a tense form by Lukas, next to the continuous, optative, predicative and other verb forms. In addition, the author makes reference to dependent verb forms used in adverbial temporal clauses (Lukas 1937: 70–71), as well as participial tense forms (Lukas 1937: 72–73) and verbal nouns (Lukas 1937: 75–76), playing various roles as nominalized forms in the tense-aspect system. Cyffer (1978), in his study on the verb in Kanuri, refers to this dependent verb form as the consecutive.

Similar structures appear to occur in Teda-Daza, a Saharan language spoken in Chad, Libya, Niger and Nigeria. In their description of the Tibu variety of Teda-Daza, Ch. and M. le Coeur (1956) point out that Teda often uses clausal juxtaposition in order to express a sequence of actions. The semantic interpretation as either involving anteriority or cause/effect relations, is expressed either through aspectual oppositions or by way of distinct verb forms (e.g. relative, conditional, or gerunds), according to Ch. and M. le Coeur (1956: 104).

One thus observes a syntactic strategy in these languages which is reminiscent of converb constructions elsewhere. But in the absence of a full identification of the verbal (as against nominal) nature of these constructions, and possible alternative verb forms in other dependent clauses, their status must remain somewhat ambiguous as yet.

The first clear-cut reference to the grammatical concept of converb within Saharan studies, or Nilo-Saharan linguistics for that matter, is to be found in a recent study by two linguists working in a project on language contact in north-eastern Africa and Southeast Asia at the University of Mainz (Germany). In their highly interesting description of the Saharan language Beria (also known as Zaghawa), Crass and Jakobi (2000) make
reference to the sequencing (“Sequentialisierung”) of event structures, which is formally marked by way of a suffix -\(e\) on the verb of the dependent clause (presumably the same suffix historically as the Kanuri consecutive marker -\(e\) described by Cyffer 1978).

\[(17)\]
\[\text{āi} \ bāgāra \ ēgī \ nāṣg-\(e\) \ gēnīr \ jūgī\]
\[1SG \ friend \ my \ visit:1SG-CN\ V \ village:DAT/LOC \ go:1SG:PF\]
\['I went (in) to the village to visit my friend’\]

The order of event description in the example above appears to be anti-iconic, in that the visit follows going to the village in event sequencing, but is mentioned before it in the sequencing (although this could also be a translation problem). As pointed out by the authors, the same suffix is used in order to express an adversative meaning.

\[(18)\]
\[kìè \ ēgīr \ bāgāra \ ēgī \ kār-\(e\) \ āī\]
\[place \ my:DAT/LOC \ friend \ my \ come:3SG:PF-CN \ 1SG\]
\[bìèr \ ū-\(e\)\]
\[house:DAT/LOC \ 1SG:be-NEG\]
\['my friend came to me, but I was not there (at home)’\]

Crass and Jakobi distinguish this type of construction from other types of dependency relations, e.g. those expressing a temporal relation:

\[(19)\]
\[ūū \ bāgāra \ ēgī \ kār-\(d\)\]
\[TEMP \ friend \ my \ come:3SG:PF-REL \ 1SG \ already\]
\[ēkāldo \ kīgī\]
\[school:DAT/LOC \ leave:1SG:PF\]
\['when my friend came, I had already gone to school’\]

Apparently, the authors were advised with respect to terminological use by a typologist with distinctive knowledge about Asian as well as Ethiopian languages with converbs, Walter Bisang, himself a contributor at the time to the volume on converbs edited by Haspelmath and König (1995). Here, then, is the first instance of in-depth research into the use of converbs in a Nilo-Saharan language.
4.2. Maban

The Maban group within Nilo-Saharan constitutes a poorly understood cluster of languages spoken in Chad, Sudan, and northern Congo (Brazzaville). It consists of Maba, Masalit, Runga and Mimi. Trenga (1947) constitutes one of the first sources on these languages, more specifically on Maba or Bura Mabang. As pointed out by the author (Trenga 1947: 94), a sentence like ‘the lion left, ate, became satiated, came back and entered’ involves one main verb ‘entered’, occurring in sentence-final position; all remaining forms expressing events are expressed by way of, what the author calls, “participial” verb forms in Bura Mabang. The texts (Trenga 1947: 141–209) in fact contain numerous examples of this type of (converb) construction:

(20) soltūn ʿabdūlkērīm ʿulīd ǧamē ǧāk makkagīnēr
    sultan Abdulkérīm son of Djame when Mecca from

tarānu dār tongūr-na karan iokoīn tuğuno
    he came land Toundjou-GEN come:CNV seen:CNV he returned

‘When Sultan Abdulkérīm Ould Djame came from Mecca, he went to explore the land of the Toundjou and returned.’

In their survey of the Maban group, Tucker and Bryan (1966: 197) again use the term “participle” (formed by way of a suffix –Vn in the Maban group) in their description of this syntactic phenomenon. The authors also point out that “[w]here several Verbs are involved, the Participle … is used for all except the last” (Tucker and Bryan 1966: 204). An example from Bura Mabang, where the ‘ing’ in the interlinear glossing, retained from Tucker and Bryan, marks off converbs:

(21) tī ja torrombosi tenen nar-an nemere ka-dau-an
    he then camels his bringing well saddling

timsīg-go ka majetu tene ka torrombosi-nūn
    Princess-the and slaves her and camels-on

ta-ndan-a
    he caused to mount

‘Then he, having brought his camels and saddled them well, mounted the Princess and her slaves on the camels’
Interestingly, Tucker and Bryan draw attention towards typologically similar constructions in Nilo-Saharan groups such as Barya, Kunama, as well as to the Cushitic language Bilin (1966: 589) and the Semitic language Amharic; clearly, then, the authors were fully aware of the fact that similar strategies are found in these other languages.

In a more recent study, Edgar (1989: 34–35) has presented a list of suffixes in Masalit, Maba’s closest relative within the Maban group, which are added to verbs in order to express semantic notions such as condition, but also a sequence of actions, or simultaneous actions. In a sequel with Masalit texts (Edgar 1990), the author gives various examples of this morphosyntactic strategy:

(22) a. **mására** forta ráyin kóí yásin**
Masalit Furs:ACC driving all killing

gámárdìdìnìwò ìbìná
Qamruddin:ACC they.seized
‘the Masalit drove the Fur out and killed them all and took Qamruddin’

b. **màdu láñān nùngú nàñ sà tàarágù**
millet.beer drinking meat eating rain it.finished

kòrnàn sir ènà
going.away they.did
‘they drank the beer and ate the meat and when the rain stopped, they got up and went on their way’

c. **kààmbò kiyècdè mààmà tùyà**
people.with walking rabbit he.killed
‘while walking with the people, he killed a rabbit’

In his description of another Maban language, Aiki (Runga), Nougayrol (1989) focuses on phonology and lexical categories, rather than on complex clauses. But when studying the texts included in his description (Nougayrol 1989: 87–103), one gets the impression that this language does not use converbs. Aiki as well as the Maban language Kibet are spoken in the border area between the Central African Republic and Congo (Brazzaville), where mainly Central Sudanic languages are spoken. Converbs do not seem to occur in this latter Nilo-Saharan group. Only historical-comparative research can help to clarify whether the absence of this feature is due to loss (or “negative borrowing”) in Aiki and Kibet, or
whether, alternatively, converbs in other members of the Maban group spoken further towards the north are to be explained as the result of diffusion across the group after they had split up. The situation accordingly would be similar to that observed for Ethiopian Semitic above.

The Maban group shares many morphosyntactic properties with other Nilo-Saharan groups in the area, e.g. Fur (or Amdang) as well as the Taman languages. These features include a verb-final syntax, extensive case marking, adverbial clauses preceding the main clause, as well as morphophonemic alternations involving metathesis and consonant mutation. It is not clear whether Fur (or the closely related Amdang language) use converbs. But for Tama, one of the members of the Taman cluster, there is clearcut evidence for verb construction as a strategy expressing dependency relations within a complex clause.

4.3. Tama

The Tama(n) cluster, situated in the border area between Sudan and Chad, includes at least the following languages: Erenga, Sungor, Merarit, and Tama. Since these languages are spoken in an area adjacent to the Saharan cluster, where converb constructions are common, and since the Tama languages share many morphosyntactic properties with these and other neighbouring languages, one would expect these languages to use converbs in complex clauses. This indeed turns out to be the case. As yet unpublished fieldnotes collected by the second author of the present contribution show that at least one language from this cluster, Tama, uses this strategy in order to express a sequence of actions. Tama distinguishes between imperfective and perfective aspect in main verbs; also, person marking is expressed on such verbs. In a corresponding converb paradigm in Tama person marking is retained as a formal inflectional category (although the actual person-marking morphemes are not necessarily identical between main verb and converb), but aspect does not appear to be marked, as the following paradigms for the verb ‘go’ illustrate:
Table 7. Paradigm of the verb ‘go’ in Tama

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IMPERFECTIVE</th>
<th>PERFECTIVE</th>
<th>CONVERB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1SG</td>
<td>n-ôôî</td>
<td>n-ôô!rü-ŋó</td>
<td>n-âw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2SG</td>
<td>ôôî</td>
<td>ôô!rü-ŋó</td>
<td>âw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3SG</td>
<td>löî</td>
<td>wâ!rü-ŋó</td>
<td>k-âw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1PL</td>
<td>k-ôôî</td>
<td>k-ôô!rü-ŋó</td>
<td>k-âw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2PL</td>
<td>ôôye</td>
<td>ôô!rö-ŋó</td>
<td>âwô</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3PL</td>
<td>löê</td>
<td>wâ!rö-ŋó</td>
<td>kâwô</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tama is a verb-final language with core as well as peripheral case marking, where dependent clauses including those containing converbs precede the main clause.

(23) wâ n-âw  âmnûn  gi  âmnûn
     1SG:NOM 1SG-go:CNV  mother:ACC  with father:ACC
gi sâlââm  n-âscê
     with greeting 1SG-perform
‘I am going to see/visit my father and mother’

Converb paradigms in Tama are formally distinct from other types of verbs in dependent clauses, e.g. in adverbial clauses of time. The latter are characterized by a suffix -se on the final verb in the dependent clause:

(24) tûn-se  Khartoum  wô!rü-ŋó
     3SG:eat-PF  Khartoum  3SG:go-PF
‘after having eaten, (s)he went to Khartoum’

Within Nilo-Saharan, the Nubian languages probably constitute Tama’s closest relatives. Their closest relative in turn appears to be Nara (in Eritrea). As shown next, converbs are extremely common in at least one variety of Nubian as well as in Nara.

4.4. Nubian

The Nubian languages are spread over a large area of the northern Sudanese Nile Valley with an extension into Egypt, the Nuba Mountains, and Darfur. To date, there is only one Nubian language for which converb
constructions have been described in considerable detail. Given the fact that several Nubian languages are closely related, it is to be expected that varieties other than Dongolese Nubian have converbs as well. Unfortunately, however, not enough positive evidence is available for this morphosyntactic property in the remaining Nubian languages. For example, Werner (1987) presents an extensive description of verb paradigms in Nobin (Nile Nubian), but their role in discourse is not further discussed. We will therefore restrict the discussion to Dongolese Nubian as described by Armbruster (1960). In his impressively detailed study, Armbruster describes how constructions in at least one variety of Nubian, Dongolese Nubian (spoken mainly in the Upper Nile valley region of northern Sudan and southern Egypt), may consist entirely of verbal stems or parts of verbs. As noted by the author (p. 261) with respect to the types of verb-complex where all components are verbal stems, the former part, though formally verbal, is functionally adverbial, and so is grammatically subordinate to the latter part, the verb:

\[(25) \quad \text{aw wic\text{\'}t\text{\'}ki} \quad \text{sokke-\text{\'}g\text{\'}omkori} \]
\[1\text{SG.stick.ACC} \quad \text{take.up:CNV-strike}\]
\[\text{‘taking up my stick I struck him/her/it’}\]

Armbruster also contrasts what would today be called converb constructions with consecutive or subsequent event descriptions, pointing out that when verbs are to be coordinated, distinct consecutive verb forms are used, each of which is conjugated (Armbruster 1960: 262).

### 4.5. Nara and Kunama

Several hundred miles east of the region where Dongolese Nubian is spoken, another Nilo-Saharan language with converbs, Nara (also known as Nera or Barya), is found. In their survey of languages of north-eastern Africa, Tucker and Bryan (1966: 334) have pointed out with respect to this language in western Eritrea that “where several verbs are involved, the gerund… is used in all except the last …” The authors give a number of examples in their description.

\[(26) \quad a. \quad o \quad go \quad mes\text{-}ing \quad oto \]
\[\text{me to speak-ing he.came}\]
\[\text{‘he came to speak to me’}\]
b. bel-ling oto
   forget-ing he.came
   ‘(I) having forgotten, he came’

In a subsequent study, Thompson (1976: 490) arrived at similar conclusions with respect to the use of Nara “participles”, as the author calls them; the latter are not inflected for tense, aspect or mood, unlike the last verb. Adjoining the Nara region in western Eritrea, another genetically isolated Nilo-Saharan language cluster with converbs is spoken, Kunama. Tucker and Bryan (1966: 346) with respect to this group: “where several Verbs are involved the Participial form is used in all except the last…” The authors distinguish between a Present Participial (or Gerund) form, and a Past Participial form (or ‘Permansive’, following a tradition in Semitic studies).

In a more recent study, Thompson (1989: 338) points out that subordinate clause markers in the Kunama group are added to verbs, and that they are used for clauses in sequence or simple compound sentences. Thompson further points out (p. 338) that “Bender [i.e. the editor of the volume; AA and GJD] calls such dependent verb forms “converb”, on the suggestion of Hetzron after Polotsky”. Bender himself published a sketch of the same language cluster, and in fact uses the term converb (Bender 1996: 36-38), moreover pointing out that converb constructions are in contrast with auxiliaries and compound verbs. Also, converbs are contrasted with participles and gerunds in his Kunama sketch; the latter two categories use the full range of demonstratives, possessive suffixes, and thus are more referential or nominal in character than converbs, as pointed out by Bender.

5. A note on diffusion versus genetic inheritance

African languages with converbs have a clear-cut areal distribution. First, they occur in Afroasiatic languages of Ethiopia belonging to Omotic, Cushitic, and Semitic. In the case of Semitic it is clear that converbs are the result historically of areal adaptation to the structure of neighbouring Cushitic and Omotic languages. What about Nilo-Saharan then? Nilo-Saharan languages in which converbs are attested do not form a genetic subgroup within the phylum, in fact several of them are only distantly related, e.g. Saharan and Nubian. Nevertheless, as these Nilo-Saharan languages share other typological properties with Afroasiatic languages,
Converbs in African perspective

...
Azeb Amha and Gerrit Dimmendaal

Map 2. The Wadi-Howar diaspora
characterized by mountains and watersheds. Due to the relative isolation of these areas and paucity of contact with other languages or language types, these languages appear to have retained these archaic diffusional traits.

6. Catching African languages with converbs: Some cross-linguistic generalisations

In the previous sections we illustrated the structure and use of the converb in two African language phyla. In this section we present a synthesis of the main findings by listing the main characteristics or recurring features of converbs reported for these African languages. In doing so, we will indicate whether or not these findings are different from languages outside the continent. The descriptive data emerged from different Africanist streams at times isolated from one another as well as from language typology in general. We will begin therefore with a more general point about the effect of these various research traditions on the understanding of converbs from a general linguistic point of view.

In studies on Afroasiatic languages there has been a strong tendency to focus on morphological properties of the converb, whereas its function has been described mainly in terms of conjoining relations. Although the morphosyntactic properties reported in the various languages appear to be similar, the terms used by different authors to designate this category in the extant languages are quite diversified, as Table 8 (below) shows.

The nomenclatural differences observable between various authors with regard to the dependent-verb type discussed in this paper at times has led to opposing claims regarding the structure of languages in the area. Thus, where one author claimed that a certain language lacks converb constructions, e.g. Goldenberg (1988: 91) with respect to Tigrinya, other authors e.g. Hetzron (1975b) make an assertion to the contrary. Similarly, Tosco (1996: 84) states that “East Cushitic languages other than Highland East Cushitic do not have a converb”. In contrast to this latter assertion studies on some of the languages belonging to the East Cushitic group report a special dependent verb form which has functions parallel to the converb in Amharic. Among these we find Gragg (1976) and Griefenow-Mewis and Tamene (1997) on Oromo, or Bliese (1976) on Afar. It seems that the difference in opinion is based on the emphasis attached to some morphological aspect. Thus, Goldenberg’s (1988) view that Ge’ez, Amharic and Tigrinya have gerunds seems to depend on the fact that the
verbal form under consideration – our converb – is non-tensed (containing just a verb stem plus nominal inflection), whereas the forms he does label as converbs in Tigre, Harari, Chaha, etc. are tensed (i.e. verb stem-aspect-conjunctive particle). Exactly the opposite view is expressed with respect to East Cushitic languages, which – in spite of the functional parallel – are said to have no converbs because the verbs in question are morphologically marked for tense.

Table 8. Alternative terms for converb constructions in Afroasiatic studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oromo</td>
<td>Consecutive</td>
<td>Gragg 1976,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amharic</td>
<td>Constructive mood</td>
<td>Isenberg 1842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amharic</td>
<td>Short imperfect</td>
<td>Cotterell 1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amharic, Argobba</td>
<td>Conjunctive verbs</td>
<td>Hudson 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadiyya, Oromo</td>
<td>Serial verbs</td>
<td>Sim 1989, Griefenow-Mewis and Tamene 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadiyya</td>
<td>Medial verbs</td>
<td>Sim 1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burji, Gedeo, Sidamo</td>
<td>Dependent verbs</td>
<td>Wedekind 1990</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The use of these various labels appears to have hindered comparative studies aiming at properly establishing the morphological, syntactic and pragmatic features of converb constructions. The distinctive functions of converbs as against “gerunds” and “participles” as found in Indo-European languages was observed as early as 1842, when Isenberg wrote the following in his grammar of Amharic:
This is a singular mood, which has nothing corresponding, either in our European or in the other Semitic languages; although its form, as far as the simple one is concerned, answers the Ethiopic infinitives gäbir and gäbro; but this mood is not an infinitive. It has nothing of a substantive character; whereas the infinitive is the first verbal substantive, possessing both the character of substantive and verb. Nor is there any other mood to which it exactly corresponds: neither participle or gerund, nor finite verb, will answer it; although it may be occasionally translated by either, and sometimes by an adverb.

Isenberg coined the term “constructive mood” for constructions now commonly referred to as converbs. However, the use of terms such as “gerund” and “participle” persisted. In a number of publications on Ethio-Semitic and Cushitic languages, Hetzron insisted that the term “converb” is more appropriate than other terms in describing dependent verb forms which are used in order to “conjoin” sentences and to form complex predicates (cf. Hetzron 1975b, 1976). More specifically, Hetzron (1976: 59) criticized the use of the terms “participle” and “perfectum subordinatum” in studies of Agaw (Cushitic) languages:

This is a typical translation-oriented nomenclature rendering the pseudo-literal translation of the form into European languages, rather than recognizing its true function within Agaw. The same is true for the use of the term “gerund” (French “gérondif”) in Ethiopian-Semitic, inspired by the “petit nègre” translation “en faisant” rather than by analysis of its true function.

Hayward (1991) makes similar observations about terms and traditions in this respect. He also points towards the apparent functional similarity between participles and converbs, and states that the alternative use of these two terms obscured the functional difference among these forms, namely that “… while participles have both verbal and nominal characteristics, converbs are only ever verbals” (Hayward 1991: 548). The term “gerund” is also rejected for a similar reason: “Many earlier, and some more recent, Ethiopianist linguists refer to these forms as ‘gerunds’ (Italian gerundio, French gérondif, etc.). In view of the entirely non-nominal properties of these forms, this term seems singularly inappropriate” (Hayward 1991: 547).

In his survey of morphosyntactic strategies across languages, Payne (1997: 320) states “... in clause-chaining languages, ... the sequentially final in a clause chain is inflected for tense or aspect while the other clauses are not”. Indeed, cross-linguistically, the temporal, aspectual or
modal interpretation of the converb construction often depends on the main verb. According to Masica (1976: 112) one of the possible collective characteristics of conjunctive participles is “lack of such features of the finite verb as personal endings – attribution of subject and also absolute tense deriving from the finite verb on which it is dependent”. The condition that the converb should be a non-finite (especially non-tensed) form is also considered to be essential in the definition of the term ‘converb’ in the typological study by Haspelmath (1995). However, a number of languages which do not adhere to this restriction are reported, e.g. Huallega Quechua (Haspelmath 1995: 9). In a number of African languages the converb is also marked for tense and/or aspect, as we saw above. Among the Afroasiatic languages there appear to be two types of languages with respect to finiteness. In some languages the suffix marking the converb may occur in combination with tense-aspect markers. Languages that form the converb from a tensed verb include Oromo, Hadiyya and Sidamo (Cushitic languages), and Bench (Omotic), Silt’i and Zway (East Gurage within Ethio-Semitic) and Outer South Ethiopic languages such as Soddo, Goggot and Muher (cf. Hetzron 1997: 547). In other Afroasiatic languages the converb is formed by affixing nominal inflectional morphemes (i.e. person, number and/or gender markers or case) to a verb root or a verb stem without tense-aspect or modality marking morphemes. It is still the case, however, that the morphemes marking subject agreement in converbs are distinct from those which mark subject agreement in main verbs, as can be seen from the paradigms of Awngi (Cushitic); Bench and Wolaitta (Omotic). In Amharic, Argobba, Ge’ez and Tigrinya (Ethio-Semitic) most of the agreement markers on converbs are similar to possessive suffixes (cf. Leslau 1995, 2000).

The situation appears to be equally diverse in Nilo-Saharan languages with converbs, but detailed analyses are still lacking in this respect. Crass and Jakobi (2000) point out that in the Saharan language Beria the converb is inflected for person as well as aspect, in other words it has the same inflectional properties as independent or main verbs. Dongolese Nubian and Tama on the other hand appear to belong to the first type, where only the last stem in such a complex predicate is conjugated (Armbruster 1960: 260 for Dongolese Nubian; Dimmendaal, unpublished fieldnotes, for Tama).

In terms of the actual temporal relation between the converb and the main verb most studies have shown that the converb expresses a situation that is anterior (consecutive) or simultaneous with that expressed by the
main verb. However, languages differ in the morphological treatment of the temporal relation between anterior and simultaneous verbs, e.g. by related but distinct morphemes (Wolaitta, Maale), by unrelated morphemes (e.g. Amharic), or by using verbs belonging to different modal paradigms (as in Oromo).

Another feature which received attention in many studies is the syntactic position of converbs. In Afroasiatic and Nilo-Saharan languages with converbs the latter usually precede the main verb regardless of the temporal relation between the two verbs. This contrasts, for example, with what has been reported for Russian, e.g. by Jacobsson (1969: 54), where it is observed that “... the gerund normally stands after the main verb if it expresses a contemporaneous action ... while it stands before the main verb if it expresses a preceding action”. In Afroasiatic and Nilo-Saharan languages with converbs, word order is not employed for distinguishing between co-temporality (simultaneous) and sequentiality (anterior or posterior). Rather, most of these languages (though not all, e.g. Oromo, which only changes the modality of the verb) use morphological means for such temporal distinctions.

One additional characteristic feature of converbs, attested in all the languages surveyed but not discussed further here for reasons of space, is their role in the formation of complex predicate or compound verb forms, whereby the converb plus a main verb construction express a single event or situation. For example, Adams (1983: 168-173) and Azeb Amha (2001b: 60-62) show that in Wolaitta the function of such verb compounding varies from lexical to adverbial (e.g temporal) modification of V₁ by V₂ and more grammaticalized (aspectual interpretation) in which the lexical meaning of V₂ does not seem to (directly) contribute to the meaning of the compound verb. Similar uses of the converb in verbal compounding are also reported for Maale (Azeb Amha 2001a), Zayse (Hayward 1990), and Amharic (Leslau 1995, 2000). Masica (1976) includes a similar kind of verb compounding in his typological study and in his areal map involving eastern (Asian), western (Indo-European) and southern (East African) languages. (See also Azeb Amha and Dimmendaal 2005 for a survey of this phenomenon in African converb languages.)

Some of the languages examined distinguish between same-subject converb markers and different-subject converb markers (e.g. most of the Omotic languages), whereas others do not make this distinction. For example, the first person singular converb marker in the Amharic examples
below remains the same although the subject of the converb and the matrix verb are identical in (27a) and disjunct in (27b).

(27) a. wädïk’k’e tänässahu
    fall.1SG:CNV get.up.1SG:PAST
    ‘Having fallen, I got up’

    b. wädïk’k’e anässa-ñ
    fall.1SG:CNV raise:3MSG:SUBJ:PAST-1SG:OBJ
    ‘I having fallen, he helped me to stand up’

Compare also the example from the Nilo-Saharan language Nara in (26) above, showing how one and the same converb is used for either type. By contrast, in Wolaitta, the form of the converb differs depending on whether the subject of this verb and that of the matrix verb is the same or not, as can be seen from the equivalent forms of the above Amharic sentences. The different subject marker (DS) -iñ(i) is invariable for person, number or gender.

(28) a. künd-ádá dend-aśi
    fall-1SG:CNV get.up-1SG:PF
    ‘Having fallen, I got up’

    b. tánñi künd-in ṇi tánñá dent-iiśi
    1SG:NOM fall:DS:CNV 3MSG:NOM 1SG:OBJ raise-3MSG:PF
    ‘I having fallen, he helped me to stand up’

The use of such morphological distinctions needs to be further studied on the basis of text analyses and spontaneous dialogues. At present, most of the material available on the converb suggest that more studies focusing on the syntactic and discourse-pragmatic aspects of this verbal form are needed. There are already some publications along these lines, but these are limited to a few well-documented languages. One such example is Gasser (1983), a study on topic continuity reporting on the role of converbs and other dependent verbs in maintaining text coherence with data from one of the oldest novels in Amharic. Leslau (1995, 2000) presents a remarkably detailed analysis of the converb on Amharic. Similarly, Wedekind (1990) on Gedeo, Burji and Sidamo (Highland East Cushitic languages) departs from the morphology-centred tradition of (Afroasiatic) linguistics, instead basing himself on historical narratives and stories.
thereby dealing not only with morphological, but also with syntactic as well as pragmatic features such as focus strategies.

Studies based on larger text corpora can make important contributions to our understanding of additional interesting aspects of converbs, e.g. frequency of use (cf. Masica’s 1976: 130 observation on this). In many of the languages surveyed, the converb is reported to be used extensively in narratives. In his description of the Nilo-Saharan language Bura Mabang, Trenga (1947) also included texts with interlinear glossing (pp. 144-209). When studying these, one notices that converb (“participial”) forms are indeed frequently used. For example, in the first text containing thirteen lines, there are twelve converbs. Breeze (1990: 54-55) reports that in the Omotic language Bench “participles” are extremely frequent: “In fact, their occurrence outnumbers that of other verb forms in a ratio of approximately 3:1. They often occur in series with up to four different participles following one after the other”; also, “[t]he same participle may be reduplicated up to four times to indicate repetitive action.” (Breeze 1990: 55). Similarly, Bliese (1998) shows that in a discourse analysis of Amharic narrative texts, a converb or a series of converbs followed by a main verb in the perfective aspect is the most preferred strategy of showing main events. In contrast to this, Kapeliuk (1997: 496) observes that “in contemporary Amharic there has been a sharp decline in the use of the historical gerund as a subordinate verb form.” The author refers to a statistical study undertaken by F.P. Cotterell, who demonstrated that the use of the gerund dropped from almost one hundred in a sample of one thousand words in a text from 1880 to twenty four per thousand words in a text written 85 years later.

Another poorly understood aspect of the pragmatic role of converbs is their use as main predications. No examples are available as yet for Nilo-Saharan languages in this respect. But for Afroasiatic languages there are various indications. For Amharic Leslau (1995: 363) observes the following: “At times the gerund stands alone at the end of the sentence without a principal verb. ... This usage of the gerund occurs when it refers to, or is a continuation of, a thought expressed in the preceding statement, or in an answer to a question”. Consider the responses in (29b) and (30b) for the questions in (29a) and (30a):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(29) a. } & \quad \text{kass} \text{"ucc y"tt all} \text{"ucc} \\
& \quad \text{K. where exist:F:Q} \\
& \quad \text{‘Where is Kasech?’}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(29) b. } & \quad \text{hed-a} \\
& \quad \text{go-3FSG:CNV} \\
& \quad \text{‘Why, she has already left’}
\end{align*}
\]
Alternatively, a strong wish may be expressed this way in Amharic (from Leslau 1995: 363)

(31) \[ \text{yih miskin bãdãnb bãlt-o ayêcc-e-w} \]
    \[ \text{this:M poor.person well eat-3MSG-CN V see-1SG-CN V-3MSG:OBJ} \]

‘I wish I could see this poor person well fed’

Similar strategies have been observed for Tigrinya by Kogan (1997: 438), and for the Omotic language Maale by Azeb Amha (2001a). What these strategies seem to express is an antecedently existing common ground or engagement in a prior statement in a speaker-hearer interaction. As pointed out by Du Bois (2002),

In the syntax of engagement, words and structures and other linguistic resources invoked or constituted by the first speaker-including stances-are frequently reused by the second, whether the second speaker’s stance is parallel, opposed, or simply orthogonal to the first’s.

The independent use of converbs in these African languages would seem to constitute an almost perfect example of the type of dialogic syntax alluded to by Du Bois. Compare also Evans (to appear) for a cross-linguistic survey of this phenomenon. Such pragmatic strategies may only be discovered through the collection of various types of discourse, e.g. connected speech or texts, or, alternatively, by learning to speak the language, which may also create a critical awareness of contrasting strategies; compare, for example, the discoveries made by Armbruster or Ch. and M. Le Coeur, who were fluent speakers of the languages they investigated. To this, we may now add knowledge derived from the study of converbs outside of Africa. There appears to have been no general awareness among most Africanists of any typological similarities with the better known converb languages of Asia, or Papuan languages using medial verbs. On the other hand, the fact that Nilo-Saharan languages in particular have not played a role in the typological discussion on converbs so far (e.g. in the volume edited by Haspelmath and König 1995) appears to have been largely due to the fact that typologically similar phenomena in these languages have been couched in a plethora of distinct terminologies. As we saw above, it was only during the second half of the 1990s that
authors started using the term converb in the context of Nilo-Saharan studies, although in Afroasiatic studies it was introduced forty years earlier.

Only by cross-breeding between these descriptive traditions from Asia, America and Africa with language typology (as a heuristic device) may we begin to understand the range of morphosyntactic, semantic and pragmatic possibilities allowed for in converb constructions, and thus ultimately catch the grammatical structure of these languages.

Notes
1. The full form of the converb (as well as the main verb paradigm) actually is derived historically from a complex form, i.e. converb plus the existential verb de/- which itself is inflected like the converb (cf. Hayward 1984).

2. It is not that scholars who worked in earlier grammars did not collect texts or did not use them in their analysis. On the contrary, most of these scholars lived among the speech community, spoke their subject language fluently and collected a number of texts (Goldenberg, Drewes, personal communication). The fact that more exhaustive syntactic, pragmatic and comparative or typological study of converbs and perhaps other related categories was not carried out could be due to some extent to the priority given to family-internal comparison.

Acknowledgements

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comments as well as to Norbert Cyffer for feedback on Kanuri, and to Martina Ernszt for editorial assistance.

**Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>affirmative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABL</td>
<td>ablative</td>
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<td>ABS</td>
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<td>accusative</td>
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<td>causative</td>
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<td>CNV</td>
<td>converb</td>
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<td>CON</td>
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