Mohammed Ali, ʿƎmanini ("Trust me"): Linguistic features of a novel in Tigre

Gianfrancesco Lusini, Università degli studi di Napoli "L'Orientale"

The Tigre language has had its share of scholarly attention since the second half of the 19th century. In 1865 Werner Munzinger published his *Vocabulaire de la langue tigré* as an appendix to the *Lexicon Linguae Aethiopicae* of August Dillmann[1]. This collection of words gathered in Massawa by the Swiss politician, diplomat and explorer can be regarded as the first scientific work in the field of the Tigre lexicography. In 2005 Musa Aron, an Eritrean teacher, clergyman and educator, completed and sent to press his *Kəbt-Qālāt Həggyā Təgre*, a monolingual dictionary of the Tigre language[2], which is the most recent and remarkable step in the research field unveiled by Munzinger. In the one and a half centuries between those two milestones such prominent scholars as Enno Littmann, Carlo Conti Rossini, Karl Gustav Rodén, Wolf Leslau and Shlomo Raz contributed to the study of the Ethio-Semitic language spoken by almost one million people in northern and central Eritrea. They produced collections of oral literature, grammars and vocabularies a great part of our knowledge about this language relies upon[3]. However, all these scientific efforts, culminating in 1962 with the *Wörterbuch der Tigre-Sprache* by Enno Littmann and Maria Höfner[4], were focusing on the linguistic variant of Tigre spoken by the Mansāʿ and the Māryā, living in and around the ʿAnsabā valley. In fact, due to the presence of the Swedish Evangelical Mission in the area around Galab, north of Karan, and the linguistic fieldwork accomplished in the same region by Enno Littmann as the director of the Deutsche Aksum-Expedition, this part of the Tigre linguistic area was the one Europeans became familiar with since the beginning of the 20th century.

---

[1] Werner Munzinger, *Vocabulaire de la langue tigré*, in appendix to August Dillmann, *Lexicon Linguae Aethiopicae*, Lipsiae, T.O. Weigel, 1865.

[2] *Kəbt-Qalat Həggya Təgre, əb Musa Aron lätadallä*, [Asmärä], Aḥtämti Hədri (Hdri Publishers), Ṭerri 2005.

[3] Shlomo Raz, *Source Materials for the Study of the Tigre Language*, in: *Ethiopian Studies Dedicated to Wolf Leslau*, ed. by S. Segert – J.E. Bodrogligeti, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1983, pp. 307–322.

[4] Enno Littmann – Maria Höfner, *Wörterbuch der Tigre-Sprache*, Wiesbaden, Steiner, 1962.

Ever since the time of Munzinger it has been known that there is a distinct dialect of Tigre spoken by the Beni ʿAmər, the group of Beǧa origin inhabiting the northern Eritrean lowlands between the rivers Bārkā and Gāš and the Sudanese belt from Kassala to Port-Sudan and Tokar[5]. Among the Beni ʿAmər sections and clans, partially still depending on sheep-breeding, the use of *Təgrāyət* (the most correct spelling for Tigre) is widespread, even if accompanied by bilingualism in *Ḥədārab*, i.e. the Cushitic language called by its speakers *tu Beḍawiɛ* or *ti Beḍaawiɛ* and commonly known under its Arabic designation Beǧa. The linguistic variant of Tigre spoken by the Beni ʿAmər is little known. In 1982 Aki'o Nakano published *A Vocabulary of Beni Amer Dialect of Tigre*[6], a collection of words belonging to this language called *ḥasā* or *ḥāsā* in Eritrea, and *al-ḫaṣṣā*, "the special (language)", by the Arabic speakers of Kassala, Port Sudan and Tokar.

A chance to greatly improve our knowledge of Tigre, specifically its dialect spoken among the Beni ʿAmər, is now offered by the new novel *ʿƎmanini* ("Trust me") by Mohammed Ali Ibrahim Mohammed, the first work written in Tigre by a native speaker, and therefore a true literary and linguistic experiment. The author, born in 1966 in the Māryā region, in the lowlands between the Bārkā and the ʿAnsabā, north-west of Karan, to a family originating in northern Eritrea, speaks and writes the Beni ʿAmər dialect of Tigre. My ultimate aim is to prepare a translation and a scientific edition of the novel, while in this paper I will present some preliminary results of my study of Mohammed's work. During my recent research visit to Eritrea (April–May 2006) I had the opportunity to meet Mohammed and to discuss with him many questions arising in the work process.

The novel tells the story of Walat, an Eritrean girl from a small village of Šarʾit not far from the Sudanese border, in the region crossed by the two major Eritrean rivers, ʿAnsabā and Bārkā, and traditionally occupied by the ʿAd Okkud fraction of the Beni ʿAmər. Her untroubled life is disrupted by the sudden contact with war and violence. After she has to witness her family being killed and her home village destroyed, she discovers her new identity as an Eritrean patriot and decides to part in the anti-Ethiopian resistance, with the fight-name of Sarat ("flame"). Her experiences, however, let her eventually recover her trust in humanity and in power of the people to prevail over all hardships.

The literary principles of Mohammed's work are described synthetically in the introduction to the novel (መእተዩ), which I commented upon in an

---

[5] MUNZINGER, *op. cit.*, p. iv: *c'est dans le Barka que le Tigré possède beaucoup de racines particulières.*

[6] AKI'O NAKANO, *A Vocabulary of Beni Amer Dialect of Tigre*, Tokio, Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA), 1982; DIDIER MORIN, "Y a-t-il un lexique beni-amer?", *Israel Oriental Studies* 16, 1996, 251–261.

earlier paper[7]. From the very beginning, the author declares the intention to produce a historical novel set in modern times: "This story, starting from a particular fiction, while it is not a story which originated either from history or from a person, is an example which explains a reality which was existing in Eritrea." Yet, the ʿƎmanini is also a political piece, a reflection over the material and cultural changes occurring in the African country: "As to its content, it is based on three big matters. Among them, perhaps there will be pieces of information which explain habits and customs of the Eritrean nation and its revolution." The ʿƎmanini is certainly a work of propaganda as well, a contribution to the recently acquired Eritrean independence, with a special attention to the role of women during the war for independence: "As to the main matters, the first explains the role of the Eritrean nation in the struggle for freedom and the atrocities of the colonization which was existing against it. As to the second, while it was not a struggle only by weapons, it shows that it was by brain, that is by cleverness too; similarly, while the colonization was not a control only over the property and the people, it shows that it was a control also over the will, the conviction and the thoughts of the people. As to the third part, it explains the role of young women in all kinds of struggle." Finally, the ʿƎmanini is a didactic book meant for all Tigre speakers, including schoolchildren and all those lacking higher education, a fact that explains the instructive tone adopted by the author at the end of the introduction: "Yet, while it is not that all these points are written one after the other in the story, for all of them I will declare later that they are present in the content of the story."

The language of the novel shall significantly enrich our knowledge of the Tigre grammar and vocabulary. The numerous phonetic, morphological, syntactical and lexical peculiarities of the text require a close scholarly attention and genuine research that would reveal whether they are dictated by linguistic constraints, whether lexico-semantic, grammatical or pragmatic, or have been chosen by the author as stylistic devices for reasons of expressiveness. In fact, the Tigre of the novel is neither a standard language nor a vernacular, but an idiom purified and corrected: whereas the grammar rules are largely the same as described by Western scholars, the choice of phonetic and lexical elements is often made in accordance with the Beni ʿAmər use.

In this paper I would like to comment upon some of the language features of the prologue of the novel, describing Walat's happy childhood in the pastoral paradise of her idyllic village, in the fertile region abundant in

---

[7] *The first Tigre novel: ʿƎmanini ("Trust me") by Mohammed Ali*, paper presented on the occasion of the "XII Incontro Italiano di Linguistica Camito-Semitica", held in Ragusa, June 2005, forthcoming.

flora and fauna at the confluence of the ʿAnsabā river and its tributary Zara. In keeping with the standard established in my previous publication, the transliterations are given according to the rules applied in the grammar by Shlomo Raz. Words used in forms or meanings not registered by the *Wörterbuch* are italicized; those completely unknown to the *Wörterbuch* are in bold type[8].

ሸርኢት እግል ዘረ ወዓንሰባ ለተኣትራክብ ክምሰልሁ–ማ በርካ ተሓት ወሳሕል ለተኣትጋንን ሰበት ታ፤ ዕምር ወእምር መስከብ ንዋይ ታ። ስጋድ ዘረ ወዓንሰባ ለለእ ትራክብ ሐሊል እባ ክብዶ እንዴ ሸገ ሰበት ለሐልፍ ህዬ፤ ፍንቲት ዐማር ወገማለት ለሀይባ።

šarʾit	ʾəgəl	zara	waʿānsabā	*lataʾatrākkəb*	kəmsalhu-mā
Šarʾit	to	Zara	and ʿĀnsabā	R+makes-meet(FS)	like this-too

barkā	taḥāt		wasāḥəl	**lataʾatgānnən**	sabbat	tā
Bārkā	Lower		and Sāḥəl	R+makes-join(FS)	reason	is(FS)

ʿəmər	waʾəmər	maskab	nəway	tā
wealthy	and known	abode	of cattle	is(FS)

səgād	zara	waʿānsabā	*lalaʾatrākkəb*	ḥəlil
slope	Zara	and ʿĀnsabā	R+makes-meet(MS)	stream

ʾəbbā	*kabda*	ʾənde	**šagga**	sabbat
in+P(FS)	interior	while	stays(MS)	reason

laḥalləf	*həyye*	*fəntit*	ʿamār	*wagamālat*	lahayyəbā
passes through (MS)	however	particular	wealth	and vegetation	gives(MS)+P(FS)

Since Šarʾit is the meeting point of the rivers Zara and ʿĀnsabā, and likewise it is the joining place of the regions Lower Bārkā and Sāḥəl as well, it is a wealthy and well-known abode of cattle. As it passes through the slope which is the meeting point of the rivers Zara and ʿĀnsabā, penetrating in its interior, however, the stream gives it particular wealth and vegetation.

Orthographies like *lataʾatrākkəb* and *lataʾatgānnən* are worth mentioning. According to the grammar, we should expect *latatrākkəb* (from *ʾatrākaba*, *ʾat*-C = AT₃) and *latatgānnən* (from *ʾatgānna*, *ʾat*-C = AT₃), respectively. Since the pronunciation is in any case *latatrākkəb* and *latatgānnən*, the inser-

8 The reference works are abbreviated as: K–Q = *Kəbt-Qalat Həggya Təgre, əb Musa Aron lätadallä*, [Asmärä], Aḥtämti Hədri (Hdri Publishers), Ṭerri 2005; W = Enno Littmann – Maria Höfner, *Wörterbuch der Tigre-Sprache*, Wiesbaden, Steiner, 1962; Nakano = Akiʾo Nakano, *A Vocabulary of Beni Amer Dialect of Tigre*, Tokio, Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA), 1982; and Raz = Shlomo Raz, *Tigre Grammar and Texts*, Malibu, Undena Publications, 1983.

tion of a glottal stop between the person marker and the verbal prefix reveals the author's intention to apply his own convention, i.e. a graphic separation between the two grammatical categories. It must be noted that the dictionaries report neither *ʾatrākaba* from *rakba* (W 156–7, K–Q 66), nor *ʾatgānna* from *ganna* (W 588; not in K–Q). Moreover, in the second case, the relationship between *ganna* and the derivative stem *ʾatgānna* is not sure, since the basic form means "to exceed the measure, to be impetuous, haughty, obstinate", so that possibly we have here two different roots. As a matter of fact, earlier in the same work Mohammed makes use of the form *salaʾas* for the numeral *salas* "three", with a non-etymological glottal stop between the 2nd and the 3rd radical. If this can be seen as a feature of the Beni ʿAmər dialect, it should be registered together with forms like *ʾorot*, a phonetic variant for the numeral *worot* "one" (Nakano 136) and *ʾande* for the conjunction *ʾando* (W 23, K–Q 185; Musa reports both variants).

Frequently words and forms employed in the novel are not registered in the *Wörterbuch*, or are registered with different meanings. Such is the case of the verb *šagga* "to penetrate", reported by Musa with another meaning (K–Q 96: *ʾat ʾakānu baṭra, ʾəb kahalāt təṣabbara* "to remain in his own place, to suffer with patience"). *ḫəlil* was already known with the meaning of "orifice of the teat, the urethra" (W 53; not in K–Q), but not with the value of "stream". *fəntit*, reported in the *Wörterbuch* as "separation" (W 667), is regularly used here with the meaning and function of *fəntuy* "particular" (in K–Q 280 it is treated as a synonym of the participle *matfantāy*).

The dictionaries register neither *həyye*, "however", different from *hayye*, "also, now" (W 23, K–Q 6), nor *gamālat*, as a synonym of the participle *gāməl* (from *gamla*: W 567, K–Q 250). On the complex *ʾəbbā kabda* "in its interior" (W 411–412, K–Q 194) it must be noted that the normative grammar gives only the form *ʾat kabəd* "in(side)" (Raz 84), e.g., *ʾat kabdan* "in their interior".

The use of the word *sabbat* ('reason, cause') as a subordinating conjunction ('as, since, because') is reported both by the normative grammar (Raz 91: *sabbat dangarko bəḫəl bal ʾəlye*, lit. 'because I was late, excuse me') and by the *Wörterbuch* (W 184, K–Q 77; Musa treats it as a synonym of *matān, ʾat ʾakān* "instead of, at the place of"), but here we must take note of two different syntactic uses. In the sentence *ḫəlil … sabbat laḫalləf … lahayyəbā …*, "the stream … because passes through … it gives …", the general rule is observed: *sabbat* is followed by the verb. However, in the sentence *Šarʾit … lataʾatrākkəb … sabbat tā …*, "Šarʾit … that it is the meeting point … is the reason …" we find a more elaborate syntax: a relative clause comes first and *sabbat* is followed by the copula. This analytical construction, with *sabbat* in the postposition to the verb, has not been registered before.

ከረም ወሓጋይ ለኢፈንቴ ንቀዕ እባ ሓሲል እንʾዘሬ፤ ምስላ እብ ድማኑ ወድገለቡ ለከለበዩ
ጋምል ያበል፤ ዐዳይ፤ ሸልሸለ ወ ወድማይ ክማ እክል ስነይ፤ አክል ሸማል ከብሀየካ፤
ጀመም ደውኄ፤ «ጨጫዕ፤ ከሽከሽ፤» እት ወዴ፤ ፍንቲት ግር መት ሀይባ።

karam	waḥaggāy	laʾifante	nəqaᶜ	ʾəbbā	ḥəlil	ʾənʾzarre
winter	and summer	R+N+changes(MS)	spring	in+P(FS)	stream	while-flows(MS)

məsəllā	ʾəb dəmānu	wadəggalabu	lakallabayu	gāməl
with+P(FS) in	right+P(MS) and left+P(MS)	R+surrounds(MS)+P(MS)		vegetation

ᶜobal	ᶜaddāy	**šalšala**	wa wadmāy	kəmmā	ʾəkəl	sənnay
ᶜobal	ᶜaddāy	šalšala	and wadmāy	like+P(FS)	corn	summer

ʾakəl	šamāl	kabhayu	*kā*	ğamam	dawhe
as long	cool wind	hits(MS)+P(MS)	as	ready	here and there

čačāᶜ	kaškaš	ʾət	wadde	fəntit	gərmat	hayyəbā
čačāᶜ	kaškaš	while	doing	particular	beauty	gives(MS)+P(FS)

A spring which does not change in rainy and dry season, flowing into the stream, with the vegetation surrounding it on its right and its left – the *ᶜobal*, the *ᶜaddāy*, the *šalšala* and the *wadmāy* – while doing "*čačāᶜ kaškaš*" here and there, like the summer corn as long as a cool wind hits it when it is ready, gives to it a particular beauty.

The writing *ʾən-zarrē* for *ʾənde (lə)zarrē* reveals the assimilation of the dental stop before the alveolar fricative. The contact between the two sounds is allowed by the omission of the prefix of the verb in the imperfect (Raz 56). For *(lə)zarre* it should be recalled that Musa writes the basic stem of this kind of verbs with a final first order (*zara*, K–Q 228), the same adopted by the normative grammar (Raz 62). This use diverges from the *Wörterbuch*, where the final consonant of the verbs with etymological final semivowel appears always in the fourth order (*zarā*, W 497; so the verbal form coincides with the derivative noun *zarā* "flowing water, stream, brook"; *māy latafaggər ʾakān* "place which makes a water come out", according to Musa). Being a general rule, the same can be observed for the verb whose form is here *laʾi(lə)fantē* "which does not change", listed as *fanta* by Musa (K–Q 280), but as *fantā* in the *Wörterbuch* (W 667).

Incidentally, for quadriradical verbs with etymological final semivowel, like the same *fanta*, Musa clearly reports a three-tense system *fanta* (perfect) *(lə)fantē* (imperfect) *ləfəntē* (jussive), while the normative grammar only gives one form *ləfantē* for the imperfect/jussive (Raz 65).

An important feature of the language of Mohammed, and possibly of the Beni ᶜAmər dialect, is the use of "long" forms of prepositions and adverbs, resulting from the addition of a long vowel –ā (apparently the feminine pronominal suffix) at the end of the "short" forms, with the consequent redu-

plication of the last consonant: ˀəgellā, ˀəttā, ˀəbbā, məsəllā, kəmmā. Several examples of these "long" forms are also given in Nakano's vocabulary (e.g., ˀəttā: Nakana 6,41; 8,46; 8,49; 12,73; 13,78 e 81; 22,126; ˀəbbā: 9,57; 17,109; and so on), but it seems that we are only dealing with an alternation between free variants.

For *lakallabayu* the *Wörterbuch* gives *kallaba* "to expect, to hope, to wait, to care" (W 391; not in K–Q). Here, however, we are dealing with *kellaba* "to surround" (W 422), confirmed by the example given by Musa (K–Q 200: ˀət dəwār bet wok lagaˀat ˀakān lalətənaddaq ḥačir mandaq "a short wall which is built around a house or in some other place"). One should take into account the possibility that *kallaba* is nothing but a derivative (0_2 = B) from the quadriradical verb *kellaba* (Raz 66), so that the writing *kallaba* would be a mere graphic variant of *kellaba*, both forms being phonetically equivalent. A similar alteration between different vocalic orders can be seen in *nəqaᶜ* "spring", a word which is reported as *nəqāᶜ* by the *Wörterbuch* (W 328), but as *nəqəᶜ* by Musa (K–Q 150). Likewise, *kabha* is reported by the *Wörterbuch* as "to clean a milk-vessel on the fire", and its derivative stem *kābha* (0_3 = C) means "to butt, to assail" (W 409); in the novel the same basic stem *kabha* means "to hit" as registered by Mohammed (K–Q 194, with reference to *kamha*, K–Q 189).

Of the four plant names mentioned in this sentence three are known: ᶜo*bal* (W 469, K–Q 227: ˀət ǧafar maḥāz labaqqəl rayāyəm ᶜačay "long trees which grow on the borders of the rivers", i.e., the *Tamarix nilotica*), ᶜ*addāy* (W 485, K–Q 221: ǧəns ˀabqālāt ᶜačay na'āyeš "kind of plants, being small trees"; i.e., the *Salvadora Persica*); and *wadmāy* (W 430, K–Q 210: ˀət dayn maḥāz labaqqəl ǧəns saᶜar "kind of herbs which grow on the shores of the rivers", lit. "water sons", i.e., the *Cyperus sp.*); only *šalšala* is not registered as a noun by the *Wörterbuch* (W 205), but it is reported by Musa (K–Q 72: ˀət ǧafar maḥāz labaqqəl qānči lamassəl qaṭṭin ᶜačay "thin trees, looking like the halms of the durra (*qānči*), which grow on the borders of the rivers", i.e., the *Penisetum unisetum*).

In the subordinate clause ˀakəl šamāl kabhayukā one can notice the syntactic complex resulting from the conjunction ˀakəl (W 375, K–Q 175), followed by –kā postponed to the verb (possibly to be compared with ka–; W 389, K–Q 187), a construction not given by the dictionaries. The adverb *dawhe* "here and there" is attested for the first time in Mohammed's work. About *ǧamam* "ready, mature", not registered before, both dictionaries give the verb compound *ǧamam bela* (or *waddā*) with the meanings "to be apathetic (on account of morning or sickness), to be silent" (W 548) and *saˀana*, *ḥamqa*, *takma*, *ḥilat*, *ḥagla* "to be tired, to be weak, to be sick, to want in strength" (K–Q 244). We can reconstruct an original idea of "complete,

ended, exhausted" (*ğamam*), from which several verbs expressing the lack of strength arose.

ለግ ሕሊል ዘረ ወዓንሰባ ሳረሕ ለመስል ከረቢት፤ እብ ድማና ወገለባ እንዬ ከለበያ ምሴ ወፈጅር እብ ተርተረት ጽላል ለዐድላ ነብር።

lammā	ḥəlil	zara	waʿānsabā	*sārraḥ*		lamassəl	karabbit
even	stream	Zara	and ʿĀnsabā	accompanies(MS)		it seems(MS)	hills

ʾəb	dəmānā	wagalabā		ʾənde	kallabayā		məse	wafağər
in	right+P(FS)	and left+P(FS)		while	surrounds(MS)+P(FS)		evening	and morning

ʾəb	*tartarat*	ṣəllāl	laʿaddəllā	nabbər
in	turn	shadow	distribute(FP)	AUX

It seems that even the hills accompany the stream of the rivers Zara and ʿĀnsabā; while surrounding it on its right and its left, they distribute the shadow alternatively in the evening and in the morning.

The verbal form *(lə)sārraḥ* "accompanies" exhibits a couple of features: one phonetic, i.e. the vocalic change *ə > a* (from mid-central to low-central) before the pharyngeal *ḥ*, a fact not registered by the normative grammar (Raz, 11 and 60); and one morphological, i.e. the assimilation into the 3rd person under the influence of *lamassəl* "it seems", in spite of the plural subject *karabbit* "hills". The same assimilation can be seen in the following *kallaba* "surrounds", while the grammatical accordance between subject and verb is provided only by *laʿaddəlā nabbər* "distribute". The adverb *lammā* is not registered by the dictionaries, neither is the adverbial complex *ʾəb tartarat* "alternatively", corresponding to *ʾəb tartarā* "one after the other" of the *Wörterbuch*, from the verb *tartara* "to alternate, to split, to drag" (W 309), which is explained by Musa as *ʾəb ḥilat šaṭṭa (ʾəgəl ləbbās, ʾəgəl waraqat)* "to rend/tear with strength (dress or paper)", without a reference to *ʾəb tartarā/at* or similar (K–Q 139).

ሸርኢት እግል ስግም ጀሀት አውለት ወስብክ እት ሳሕል ምግብ ሰበታ፤ ሰበእንሳ ወዓጣል ሰኒ ሐርወ። ምስሉ-ማ እብ ቅዱር ማይ፤ ጋምል ዐጨይ ወዳሊሰዐር፤ እምር ሰበት ታ፤ ንዋይ ብዙሕ ልተወብ እታ።

šarʾit	ʾəgəl	səgəm	**ğahat**	ʾawlat	wasəbək		ʾət	sāḥəl
Šarʾit	to	ascending	toward	highlands	and descending		in	sāḥəl

məgəb	sabbattā	sabʾənsā		waʿāṭal	sanni	ḥarrəwā
middle	reason is	owners of camels		and goats	much	prefer(MP)+P(FS)

məslu-mā	ʾəb	qədur	māy	gāməl	ʿəčay	*wadālisaʿar*
with this-too	for	abundant	water	vegetation	trees	and groves

ʾəmər	sabbat	tā	nəwāy	bəzuḥ	ləttawwab	ʾəttā
known	reason	is	cattle	many	is produced(MS)	in+P(FS)

Šarʾit, for the reason that it is the centre of the ascending to the highlands and of the descending in the Sāḥəl, the owners of camels and goats prefer it very much. Moreover, because it is known for the water abundance, vegetation, trees and groves, a lot of cattle is produced there.

The preposition *ǧahat* "toward" is not registered by the dictionaries, neither is the word compound *dālisaᶜar* "groves". Musa registers the entry *dāli səfa* as *ʾəb ᶜəčay wadəbaᶜ latəgalbaba ʾard*, "earth which is covered with trees and forests", with the gloss **mədər dāli* meaning *ʾard dəbaᶜ*, "land of forests" (K–Q 240).

ሔዋናት በድ ሌጣ እንዴ ኢገብእ፡ ሔዋናት ከደን-ማ፡ ሓድራ ወነብራ በለ ።ለሻፍቅ ድበዕ እብ ዐረቱ ኮለረሐም ሰበት ለሐበዕ፡ ሔዋናት ከደን፡ እምበል ጸገም ነቡራ በለዉ ። ክሱሰን ክምከረ ሓረውያታት፡ ሓጉል፡ መነትል፡ አጠሪ ወለመስሎም ህዬ፡ ክምሰል ዳመር አብዕቦም እብ ዕሸል ነብሮ እታ በለዉ ።

hewānāt	ᶜad	leṭā	ʾande	ʾigabbəʾ	hewānāt	kadan-mā
animals(Pl)	domestic	only	while	N+is(3MS)	animals(Pl)	wild-too

haddərrā	wanabbərrā	ᶜala	lašāfəq	dəbāᶜ	ʾəb	ᶜarratu
staying	and living	was(3MS)	D+thick	forest	in	meadow+P(MS)

kullaraḥom	sabbat	lahabbaᶜ	hewānāt	kadan
whole-body+P(MP)	reason	hides(3MS)	animals(Pl)	wild

ʾəmbal	ṣaggam	naburā	ᶜalaw	**kəsusan**
without	problem	settled	were(3MPl)	particularly

kəmkarra	harawəyātāt	ḫāgul	manattəl	ʾaṭṭari
species	boars	guinea-fowls	hares	and dwarf-antelopes

walamassəllom	*həyye*	kəmsal	dāmar	ʾabəᶜəbom
and R+look-like(3MPl)+P(MPl)	as to	like	settlement	forefathers+P(MPl)

ʾəb	ᶜəšəl	nabbəro	ʾəttā	ᶜalaw
in	bulk	living	in+P(FS)	were(3MPl)

While it is not only domestic animals, wild animals too were staying there and living there. Because over its meadows the thick forest hides their whole bodies, the wild animals were settled there without problems. Particularly, as to species like boars, guinea-fowls, hares, dwarf-antelopes and other similar to them, they were living in it in bulk as the settlements of their forefathers.

The form *kullaraḥom* exhibits important phonetic features: the form *kulla* instead of *kəlla*, possibly a feature of the Beni ᶜAmər dialect; the articulation *raḥ* instead of *rəḥ*, owed to the presence of the following pharyngeal fricative (Raz 11). For the word *rəḥ* the *Wörterbuch* gives only the religious meaning "spirit, soul" (W 158), while Musa (K–Q 70) reports both "breath, life, soul" (*tənfās*, *ḥayot*, *nafs*) and body (*garob*). The words *kesusan* and *kəmkarra* are not registered by the dictionaries.

ስካን ሸርኢት ሕዳረብ ወትግሬ–ማ፡ ምን ገብኦ፡ እት ድጌሆም ለለኣጥሞ እቡ ወለኣምሮ፡ ለፈርሐ እቡ ወልትረይሐ፡ ለገሙ እቡ ወለሀድጎ፡ ናይ ሕበር ዓዳት ቦም።

sǝkān	šarᵓit	ḥǝdārab	watǝgre-mā	mǝn	gabbǝᵓo	ᵓǝt	dǝggehom
dweller	šarᵓit	Ḥǝdārab	and Tǝgre-too	though	are(3MPl)	in	village+P(3MPl)

lalaᵓaṭṭǝmo	ᵓǝbbu	walaᵓammǝrro	lafarrǝḫo	ᵓǝbbu
R+say-good(3MPl)	by+P(3MS)	and say-bad (3Mpl)	R+celebrate(3Mpl)	by+P(3MS)

walǝtrayyǝḫo	*lagammu*	ᵓǝbbu	walahaddǝgo
and enjoy(3MPl)	R+decide(3MPl)	by+P(3MS)	and discuss(3MPl)

nāy	ḥǝbar	ᶜāddāt	bom
in	common	habits(Pl)	have(3MPl)

The dwellers of Šarᵓit, though they are both Ḥǝdārab and Tǝgre, saying positive and negative things, celebrating and enjoying, deciding and discussing in their village, they have habits in common.

ውላድ ሸርኢት ብዳዌት ወሃሳይት እት ልብሎ፡ ዶል ሕዳረብ ወዶል ትግራይት እግል ልትሀገው፡ ሐዲስ እቶም ኢኮን።

wǝlād	šarᵓit	bǝdāwet	wahāsāyǝt	ᵓǝt	lǝbǝllo	dol	ḥǝdārab
native	šarᵓit	Bǝdāwet	and Hāsāyǝt	while	speak(3MPl)	once	Ḥǝdārab
wadol	tǝgrāyǝt	ᵓǝgǝl	lǝthāggaw	ḥaddis	ᵓǝttom	ᵓikon	
and once	Tǝgrāyǝt	that	talk(3MPl)	unusual	for+P(MPl)	N+COP	

The natives of Šarᵓit, while they speak Bǝdāwet and Hāsāyǝt, it is not unusual for them to talk once the Ḥǝdārab and once the Tǝgrāyǝt language.

In this sentence one can remark the use of two couples of synonyms: *Ḥǝdārab* and *Bǝdāwet* to indicate the Beǧa language (*tu Beḍawiɛ* or *ti Beḍaawiɛ*), *Tǝgrāyǝt* and *Hāsāyǝt* to indicate Tigre. As a matter of fact, *Ḥǝdārab* and *Tǝgrāyǝt* are the more common words used by the Tigre speakers, while *Bǝdāwet* is an adaptation of a word of foreign (Beǧa) origin, and *Hāsāyǝt* is made from the word *hāsā* (indicating properly the Beni ᶜAmǝr dialect), constructed with the suffix for the names of the language, the same employed in *Tǝgrāyǝt* and *Bǝdāwet*.

እብሊ እት ትልሀያ–ማ ነኣይሽ ወሸባባት እት ሕድ እንዴ ተሐበረው፡ ውሂቦች፡ ሶምያ፡ ኣካስ፡ ሸሊል፡ ዶኒ ወለመስሉ እት ለሐብሮ ልተልሀው።

ᵓǝbbǝlli	ᵓǝt	tǝlhǝyā-mā	naᵓāyǝš	wašabābāt	ᵓǝt	ḥǝd
so	in	dancing-too	young girl	and young men	in	one

ᵓǝnde	tahābaraw	wǝhiboč	somyā	ᵓakās	šalil	doni
while	join-together(3MPl)	wǝhiboč	somyā	ᵓakās	šalil	doni

walamassǝllu	ᵓǝt	laḫābbǝro	lǝtallǝhaw
and R-seem(3MPl)	while	mix(3MPl)	dance(3MPl)

So, even when they dance, young girls and young men, while they join all together, they play dances while mixing *wəhiboč*, *somyā*, *ʾakās*, *šalil*, *doni* and so on.

The *wəhiboč*, the *ʾakās* and the *doni* are peculiar to the Beǧa communities, while the *somyā* and the *šalil* are dances of Tigre tradition. In the last sentences, one can recognize a typical attitude of Mohammed Ali, an author deeply interested in unveiling the common cultural features of the people of northern Eritrea. Whether they speak Beǧa or Tigre, no matter if they are nomadic pastoralists or sedentary agriculturists, in the first place they share a common land since thousands of years, and this is more important than any linguistic or cultural difference.

Summary

The novel *ʿƎmanini* ("Trust me") by Mohammed Ali Ibrahim Mohammed (born 1966) is the first work written in Tigre by a native speaker. This is a true literary and linguistic experiment, which will greatly enrich our knowledge of the *Təgrāyət* grammar and vocabulary, specifically its little known variant spoken among the Beni ʿAmər. Several phonetic, morphological, syntactical and lexical peculiarities of the text are here examined in order to reveal whether they are dictated by linguistic constraints (lexico-semantic, grammatical or pragmatic), or have been chosen by the author as stylistic devices for reasons of expressiveness. Passages of *ʿƎmanini* are here published, translated and commented.