



## Blessing Expressions in Rayya Tigrinya: Semantic and Pragmatic Aspects

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### Abstract

The Rayya speech community, a speaker of the North Ethio-Semitic Tigrinya language and inhabiting the Southern Tigray Zone in Ethiopia, has a long tradition of blessings ingrained in their social fabric. A blessing, which is an inclusive, efficacious, and power-oriented speech act, deals with benedictions and compliments and is used to demonstrate the good disposition of the addressor to the addressee/s. In light of this, this study attempted to provide a descriptive account of the semantics and pragmatics of blessing expressions in Rayya Tigrinya, a variety of Tigrinya. Accordingly, blessing expressions' denotative and connotative meanings used in general and particular contexts were presented and discussed. To this end, a total of twenty-four key partakers, ten males and fourteen females, aged 45-85, were purposefully selected. The obtained natural data via semi-structured interviews and participant observation were checked out and validated through introspection. The collected data were then described and analyzed through a linguistic descriptive method. The results revealed that blessing expressions are predominantly metaphorical, devoid of their literal meanings. Security, peace, love, health, wealth, success, happiness, lineage, and unity, all of which are basic, are the most general and recurrent subjects expounded in the blessing expressions used in both contexts. Throughout the given instances, blessing expressions are made either implicitly or explicitly appealing to the supernatural for the good wishes to be effective, which also makes them religious.

**Key words:** Blessings; Rayya Tigrinya; Speech acts; Performative utterance; Expressive speech act; Universal power

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Tigrinya, one of the widely spoken Ethio-Semitic groups, belongs to the North Ethio-Semitic group (Hetzron, 1972; Faber, 1997; Tsehaye, 1979; Ullendorff, 1985; Voigt, 2011a, 2011b). It employs the Ethiopic script and uses a subject-object-verb (SOV) word order, which is also used by some Ethio-Semitic languages (Leslau, 1966; Kogan, 1997; Tesfay, 2002). Besides, Tigrinya, which is one of the cross-border languages, is used in literature, education, politics, and media domains (Kogan, 1997).

The variations in vocabulary (lexicon), pronunciation (sound), and grammar (morphology and syntax) among speakers of a language due to geographical (regional) and social is a socio-linguistic and universal phenomenon. Hence, Rayya Tigrinya, whose total speakers was estimated to be 1, 006,504 (CSA, 2010:7), is distinct from the standard Tigrinya in phonology, morphology, lexicon, and syntax (Niguss, 2021; Dagneu, 2019) even though more researches are needed on the Tigrinya's dialects.

Blessings, which are "performative speech acts" (Austin, 1962 & Searle, 1969), are universal phenomena even if they are distinct in linguistic expressions and manner of practice among different societies. Societies use blessings in their daily conversations and interactions and reflect their traditions, norms, philosophies, religions, etc. Likewise, the Rayya speech community has a long

tradition of blessings ingrained in their cosmology and has been using them to positively influence their families, neighbors, and community. Besides, blessings like curses are implemented to enforce the speech community's law and order far better than the country's constitution. There is a long-held traditional and spiritual belief that parents' elders', and religious leaders' blessings are believed to be more powerful and efficacious than those of juniors in the speech community.

Even though there are a fair number of researches conducted on structures (phonetics and phonology and morphology and syntax) in Tigrinya, few works were done on meanings (semantics and pragmatics). There is no especially a research work done on the semantics and pragmatics of blessing expressions in Rayya Tigrinya as far as the correspondent researcher's best knowledge is concerned, which also makes this study a novel. For this reason, the researchers were intrigued to conduct this study on the issue. This study thus attempted to describe and analyze the semantics and pragmatics of blessing expressions used in general and particular contexts in Rayya Tigrinya. The findings will also fill the identified knowledge gap and will contribute to the language's documentation and development.

Following the introduction, section 2 discusses the literature review; section 3 presents the theoretical framework, and section 4 deals with research methodology. Section 5 discusses the results and discussion, and finally, section 6 makes a conclusion of the whole discussion.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The verbal root "BRK", a Hebrew, which is also found in several Semitic languages, makes up of three distinct meanings, one of which is "to bless" (Mitchell, 1987), and of which meaning is "to give the power of deity to the addressee", "to command the addressee to a deity for blessing", "to bestow a power and strength to the person being blessed" (Botterweck & Ringgren, 1975, p. 281). Besides, Sharifi & Amir (2012) define blessing as "an invoking of God's favor upon a person" (p. 55).

A blessing, in Rayya Tigrinya *mirχ'at*, a noun, and *mimrax'*, a verb, is both ritualized and religious. It is also defined as "the speaker who has a higher social status declares benediction upon another person wishing a future life with protection from harm, happiness, and prosperity" (Vanderveken, 1990, p. 203). Blessing is power-oriented like cursing. For blessings to be authentic and efficacious there must be extra-linguistic institutions like family, descent groups, religious institutions, etc. with distinctive social roles and status. In other words, it is "Only certain individuals may principally utter out the blessings" (Westermann, 1978, p. 21). Besides, the blessing is speech acts related to some future action and it often functions as

a "performative speech act" (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969).

Furthermore, a blessing, which is a mechanism of inclusion, either individual or collective in its manner of execution, deals with doing good by fulfilling the expectations of own for individuals or society. As a tradition, individuals need to have the blessings of their parents, elders, and religious leaders to live a secure and prosperous life.

## 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study used the *speech act*, which was originally coined by Austin (1962), as a theoretical framework to describe and analyze the semantic and pragmatic meanings of blessing expressions used in general and particular/special contexts in Rayya Tigrinya, a variety of Tigrinya. In other words, Austin was usually considered the pioneer of the speech act and further developed it by his industrious student, Searle (1969), and the speech act is now used widely in linguistics as one of the theories of linguistics in general and pragmatics in particular. The speech act theory, (henceforth SAT), is used to analyze "the role of utterances about the behavior of speaker and hearer in interpersonal communication" (Crystal, 2003, p. 427).

SAT confirms that words/utterances we utter do not merely "say" something, but they also "do" something. In other words, words we speak out do not only have actions, but also they have illocutionary forces and effects on the addressee/s. We can perform actions like making statements, asking questions, giving orders, making promises, apologizing, thanking, congratulation, praising, etc. via the speech act.

Austin (1962) in his influential book entitled "*How to Do Things with Words*" classified speech acts into three, namely "locutionary act", which is the words' actual meaning, "illocutionary act", the intention of the speaker by uttering words, and "perlocutionary act", which is the effect of the words uttered by the speaker. A lot of linguists and philosophers have proposed many classifications for speech acts, but many of whom have started from Austin's (1962) work.

Even though speech acts are divided into three basic linguistic terms, several speech act theorists have given great attention to an illocutionary act for it has a performative and communicative nature. Accordingly, based on the illocutionary force, Austin (1962, p.151) invented five different classes of speech acts, namely "verdictives", which is giving of a verdict (e.g., estimating, reckoning, expecting, etc.), "exercitives" which is the exercising of power or rights (e.g., appealing, appointing, directing, etc.), "commissives", illocutionary acts that commit the speaker to do something (e.g., announcing, promising, vowing, etc.), "behabitives", which expresses attitudes and social behavior (e.g., congratulating, condoling, thanking, etc.), and "expositives" which is

used to elucidate positions in arguments or conversations (e.g., refuting, believing, affirming, etc.).

Of which the above five divisions, Austin (1962) classified the speech act of blessing in a sub-class of “performatives”, which is “behabitives” and elaborated it as “the notion of reaction to other people’s behavior and fortunes and attitudes and expressions to someone else’s past conduct or imminence conduct” (p. 159).

Differing from Austin’s classifications, Searle (1979, p. 10) divided speech acts into five groups, calling “assertive” which occurs when the addressor commits him/herself to the truth of the expressed propositions (e.g., stating, reporting, showing, etc.), “directive” which happens when the addressor endeavors to get the addressee to do something (e.g., ordering, demanding, asking, etc.), “commissive” which occurs when the addressor commits him/herself to perform a future act (e.g., promise, swear), “expressive” which is an utterance expressing a psychological attitude towards the addressee (e.g., thanking, apologizing, complaining, etc.), and “declarative” which is an utterance altering the state of affairs of something (e.g., deciding, prohibiting, forgiving, etc.). Accordingly, the speech act of blessing is classified in the sub-group of “expressive” (Searle, 1969, p. 23). Blessing is also classified in a sub-group of “acknowledgments” (Bach & Harnish, 1979).

In light of the above theoretical framework, the speaker’s utterances producing to bless and the literal meanings of these utterances, the act of blessings and the intended meanings they bring about, and the effect of blessings on the blessed were described, analyzed, and discussed in this study.

#### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the semantics and pragmatics of blessing expressions in Rayya Tigrinya, a variety of Tigrinya spoken in the Southern Tigray Zone in Ethiopia. To do so, the study employed a descriptive design within a qualitative research method since the method was found to be feasible to describe and analyze the expressions in which they are used.

The primary source of this study was native Rayya Tigrinya speakers living in the Southern Tigray Zone in Ethiopia. The study area is ethnically and linguistically diversified. Along with Rayya Tigrinya, there are other Ethiopian languages like Amharic (Semitic), Afan Oromo (Cushitic), Afar (Cushitic), and  $\gamma$ amt’ $\alpha$ na (Cushitic) which are spoken to various degrees in Rayya. Hence, Rayya people are bilingual and/or multilingual (Niguss, 2021; Dagnew, 2019) due to the language contact phenomenon. Consequently, the researcher employed purposive sampling to select both a representative area and key informants to obtain authentic information. Hence, ten males and fourteen females altogether twenty-four key

informants, aged 45-85, were purposefully selected from a Hugumbrida, a small district.

Semi-structured interviews and participant observation were mainly employed to obtain the pertinent data. Based on the interview guide, the informants were asked to produce blessing expressions used in general and particular/special contexts/occasions. The informants were also requested the underlying meanings or the illocutionary force the expressions inferred and their responses were audio recorded according to their consent (see the Appendix). Besides, the correspondent researcher spent a year with the speech community and then he observed and participated in some special ceremonies and audio recorded the blessing expressions the parents and elders made. When recording was found to be inconvenient, the researcher was taking notes while the informants were blessing. Eventually, the recorded data were verified and validated through the introspective method as the correspondent researcher speaks Rayya Tigrinya variety.

Three procedures were done to present, interpret, and analyze the gathered data. Firstly, the recorded data were transcribed phonemically with IPA and presented in the first tier. Secondly, the transcribed blessing expressions were glossed morpheme-by-morpheme with the Leipzig glossing rule and were done in the second line. Next, free and/or literal English translations were given in the third line. Finally, the transcribed, glossed, and translated data were analyzed qualitatively.

#### 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Rayya people use blessings in different contexts. The contexts can be generally classified into two broad categories which are referred to as general and particular in which blessings are performed. The blessings performed in a general context are those that are done anytime and in any informal circumstance without the involvement of any group of people or organized ritual. The issues of blessing address things that apply to everyone. On the other hand, the blessings done in a particular context are those that are performed on specific occasions like weddings, maternity, parting in a long journey, etc. are formal and are performed by parents, elders, and other senior members of a family. There might be several other contexts in which blessings are performed. For this study, however, the two classifications were used to analyze the data.

Hence, blessings in both contexts/occasions were done in two sections. The blessings in general contexts were presented and analyzed in the first section followed by the blessings in particular/special occasions in the second one.

##### 5.1 Blessings in General Contexts

Rayya’s elders, both male and female, give blessings wishing for good things to happen to their families, homesteads, neighbors, and the country. They wish for

security, health, long life, love, unity, prosperity, fertility, etc. to prevail and be secured. It is traditionally and culturally believed that the elders' blessings are believed to more efficacious than those of the juniors in Rayya culture which are also common in other Ethiopian societies. The utterances in (1a-b) recorded from informants, for instance, are performed by the elders wishing for security, peace, love, and health to be bestowed upon the blessed.

(1).

a. *kab* [kav] *himmaχ'* *ji-səwɾ-ə-nna*  
 from bad 3MS-hide.IPFV-3MS-1PLO  
 "May He protect (lit. hide) us from bad things!"

b. *səlam-ij fiχ'r-ij t'ifinna-j ji-hab-ə-nna*  
 [jihavenna]  
 peace-CONJ love-CONJ health-CONJ 3MS-give.IPFV-3MS-1PLO  
 "May He give us peace, love, and health!"

The elders make the blessing locutionary act *kab himmaχ' jisəwɾənnə* "May He protect us from bad things" in (1a) wishing for bad things not to happen to their families, neighbors, homesteads, community, and country in the future. Contextually, the word *himmaχ'* "bad" in the expression refers to natural and man-made problems like disease, famine, poverty, migration, war, death, etc., all of which make one's life devastating. The speaker gives the blessing in (1a) interacting face-to-face with the blessed. The blessed in turn react to the addressor's blessing act by uttering "amen" which means "Let it be so" to show their agreement and to confirm their power. The word is also pervasive in other Ethiopian languages despite its origin. Besides, the expression in (1b) is made wishing to have *səlam* "peace", *fiχ'ri* "love", and *tifinna* "health", all of which are most fundamental or essential for humans' co-existence. These three words are so essential and inclusive that everyone wishes to have them all to live a good life.

To put it in a nutshell, the inflectional morpheme {*ji-*}, a third person masculine singular, in the optative clauses *jisəwɾənnə* "May He protect us" and *jihabənnə* "May He give us" in (1a-b) implicitly refers to "God" whose divine power the addressor/speaker appeals to for the benedictions to be efficacious, which also makes the expressions religious. In other words, the expressions' illocutionary force implies that man is so powerless and dependent that he/she needs the supernatural's help. Besides, the first person plural object marker morpheme {- *nna*} "us" in both expressions indicates that the blesser is also part of the blessed. The applicative morpheme {- *ll-*} in the transcription in (1a) also shows that the beneficiaries are the blesser and the blessed ones. The expressions in (1a-b) are also made to the plural audience in a general context, which also makes them inclusive.

In light of the above discussion, the elderly people in Rayya are worried about and care for people who are out of their homes, those who are sick and bedridden, and

those who are in prisons. The blessing expressions in (2), all of which are inclusive, are given for good things to be bestowed upon the blessed.

(2)

a. *di-ʔofər-u bi-səlam ji-ʕablil-ə-ll-i-nna*  
 [jiʕaviləllinna]  
 REL-go out.PFV-3PL with-peace 3MS-turn back.IPFV-3MS-BEN-EP-1PLO  
 "May He turn back with peace those who have gone out of home!"

b. *di-ħaməm-u ji-mħar-ə-ll-i-nna*  
 REL-get sick.PFV-3PL 3MS-heal.IPFV-3MS-BEN-EP-1PLO  
 "May He send His mercy for those who have got sick!"

c. *di-ti-ʔasər-u miħrət ji-ləʔaχ-ə-ll-om*  
 REL-PASS-sentence.PFV-3PL mercy 3MS-send.IPFV-3MS-BEN-3PLO  
 "May He send His mercy for those who have been sentenced!"

The focus of the expression in (2a) is on the safe return for those who have gone out of their homes. People might go out of their homes for different purposes like looking for jobs, defending/protecting the country from an enemy, hunting, etc. They do not also know what problems/accidents they might come across on their way. The expression in (2a) thus implies that there are problems that the traveler might face in his/her ways and it is a wish not to face bad things, and to reunite with his/her families with peace. The expressions in (2b-c) are also good wishes for those who have gotten sick and bedridden to recover, and for those who have been sentenced to get clemency respectively. Hence, the elders care for other people's well-being while practicing their daily blessings. In all examples (2a-c), it is the power of a universal which is invoked. The expressions are also made for the plural audience in general contexts.

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## 5.2 Blessings in Particular Contexts

Blessings are performed on particular/special occasions like at a wedding ceremony, at maternity, on a journey, on a festive occasion, and at a coffee ceremony in Rayya. There are however several other special occasions in which blessings are made. In this paper, the blessing expressions performed in the randomly selected five particular/special occasions were emphasized and discussed. In what follows, each of them was presented, described, and discussed in each section.

### 5.2.1 Blessings at a Wedding Ceremony

A wedding is one of the main cultural occasions at which formal blessings are given in Ethiopian societies in general and Rayya people in particular. It has its procedures and norms especially performed in societies that live in rural areas. First, there is an engagement step where three or four elders from the groom's side are selected and sent to

the bride's parents for their consent. The other is the ring and/or wedding ceremony where the bride and groom and their parents gather and celebrate the occasion.

Besides, our informants told us that blessings are mainly offered in three instances during the wedding occasion. First, it is when the groom sets off to the bride's house in which his parents and elders bless him to face good things on his way and at the bride's house. Next, giving the bride to the groom, the bride's parents and elders give blessings to the couple at the bride's house before departing to the groom's house. Finally, blessings are given to the couple by parents and elders when they arrive at the groom's home. However, there are some blessings recurrently performed by parents and elders despite the settings. The couples are blessed to be bestowed upon them love, peace, health, wealth, success, offspring, etc. in their future life. The expressions in (3), for instance, are performed wishing for the couple to have a child and successors on their wedding day at the bride's home.

(3)

a. *wuləd-u*                      *χibəd-u*                      [*χivədu*]  
 beget-2PL                      be great-2PL

“Have a baby (lit. beget); be great!”

*zər?-χum*                      *ʃih*                      *ji-χun*  
 seed-POSS:2PL                      thousand                      3MS- be. IPFV

“Let your successors (lit. seed) become many (lit. thousand)!”

Interacting face-to-face with the couple, parents and elders perform the blessing act *wulədu χibədu* “have a baby; be great” in (3a) implying that bearing a baby can make the couple happy and great. The expression also confirms that parents highly need to see a baby from his/her married child/children. The expression's illocutionary force implies that when the couple has a child, the community can respect them as well and their marriage will be sustained for many years. On the other hand, there is a belief that if a married woman is not able to give birth to a baby for a long time, she is considered “barren” and “abnormal.” Besides, she is mistreated and hated by the groom's parents, relatives, and neighbors. Hence, she feels left out, disrespected, and excluded from the community. The expression in (3a) is given directly to the couple without appealing to external power.

Parents also need to have several bloodlines. Hence, the expression in (3b) is made wishing for successors. The expression implies that if there is a successor, the name, fame, good deeds, etc., of the parents cannot be forgotten after their death. The expression is therefore made for the sake of the continuity of heredity.

Moreover, parents and elders wish for the couple to have a blessed marriage, to live long together, and to have wisdom in their future life with the blessing expressions in (4).

(4)

a. *mərʕa-χum*                      *di-ti-χ'addəsə*                      *ji-χun*  
 marriage-2PL.POSS                      REL-PASS-bless.PFV                      3MS-be.

IPFV

“Let your marriage be blessed!”

b. *ʔaj-ji-fləj-χum*

NEG-3MS-separate.IPFV-2PL

“Let Him not separate you!”

c. *s'inʕat-ij*                      *tiʕgist-ij*                      *t'ibəb-ij* [*t'ivəbij*]                      *ji-ʕadli-χum*

courage-CONJ                      patience-CONJ                      wisdom-CONJ  
 3MS-bestow.IPFV-EP-2PLO

“May He bestow upon you courage, patience, and wisdom!”

In example (4a), the expression is made wishing for the couple to have a blessed marriage which also makes it religious. In other words, marriage is traditionally and religiously believed to be a blessing. Hence, the expression implies that the couple can live together for long years and can make a family if their marriage is *ditix'addəsə* “blessed” by the supernatural whose divine power the speaker calls upon for the benediction to come true. Besides, there is a belief that if the marriage is blessed, the couple's home is filled with peace, love, and happiness so that they cannot be separated. Parents and elders thus make the expression in (4a) wishing the couple to have a good and everlasting life together. On the other hand, it is believed that people will have a negative attitude toward the couple if they get a divorce.

The blessing act *ʔajji-fləj-χum* “Let Him not separate you” in (4b) is made to the couple implicitly appealing to the supernatural power, which is expressed by the object pronoun “Him.” The expression is a good wish for the couple to get through several problems and to live long together. It implies that marriage is not a contract. The newly married couple might face several hardships while living together. But they are highly expected to be strong enough to endure all the challenges and problems they might face to sustain their marriage. The informants also said that marriage should be sustained till death even if it has a lot of obstacles.

The expression *s'inʕatij tiʕgistij t'ibəbij jiʕadliχum* “May He bestow upon you courage, patience, and wisdom” in (4c) is also given indirectly attributing the power to supernatural. The expression's underlying meaning is that marriage is not always comfortable and it has a lot of challenges. Hence, *s'inʕat* “courage”, *tiʕgisti* “patience”, and *t'ibəb* “wisdom”, all of which are believed to be fundamental for sustaining a marriage, are wished to be bestowed upon the couple.

In light of the above discussion, the couple is blessed to be endowed with pure love, peace, health, long life, and wealth to live a good life in their future with the expressions in (5).

(5)  
*a. fiχ'r-ij salam-ij ji-ṣadil-χum*  
 love-CONJ peace-CONJ 3MS-endow.IPFV-2PLO  
 “May He give you love and peace!”

*b. t'ifinna-j ṣidmə-j mis ṗindzəra ji-hab-χum*  
 [jihavχum]  
 health-CONJ long life-CONJ with bread 3MS-  
 give.IPFV-2PLO  
 “May He give you health and long life with wealth (lit. bread)!”

In example (5a), the expression is a wish for love and peace to be bestowed on the couple. The expression implies that the couple can live for long years, and they will have a family if they have true love and peace between them. Hence, parents and elders give the blessing for the fact that marriage needs pure love and peace to be sustainable. Besides, the blessing expression in (5b) is made wishing for the couple to have full health and long life with wealth and they will be able to live a good life. The word *ṗindzəra* “bread” in the expression figuratively refers to “wealth.” The word is Amharic which is also similarly used in the Rayya Tigrinya variety. It is the main diet of the majority of Ethiopians. The expression’s underlying meaning is that one might live a secure life if he/she has been given health, long life, and wealth. In both examples (5a-b), the power is attributed to the supernatural for the good wishes to be effective.

### 5.2.2 Blessings at Maternity

It is traditionally and spiritually believed that having a baby or child is the most precious gift that God or Allah endows for a woman. The Rayya speech community like other Ethiopian societies therefore has their ways of blessing expressions to a woman who has given birth to a baby and who is in bed recovering from her labor. During this occasion, families, neighbors, and relatives (near and distant) come to visit the new mother, and they give special congratulatory and blessing expressions. The visitors also give the blessings before and after departing from the new mother. The expression in (6) is, for instance, made by visitors to express their happiness and good wishes.

(6)  
*a. ṗink<sup>w</sup>aṣ marjam məharə-ti-ki* [məharətixi]  
 good-that Mary save.PFV-3FS-2FSO  
 “Good that Mary has saved you from death!”

The blessing act in (6a) is a congratulation made by both men and women while visiting a woman who has given birth to a baby in Rayya culture and the expression given on the first visit to the new mother. The blessing locutionary act *ṗink<sup>w</sup>aṣ marjam məharətiki* “good that Mary has saved you” is given explicitly appealing to the Virgin Mary whose divine power is believed to bring about mercy and relief to the new mother, which also makes the expression religious and gender-specific. The

word *ṗink<sup>w</sup>aṣ* “good that” is contrastive which implies that the woman in labor might have died unless the Virgin Mary had helped her. There is a spiritual belief in the Rayya speech community that the Virgin Mary’s divine power can send mercy to a mother in labor and so the mercy and relief are attributed to her (the Virgin Mary).

Furthermore, the visitors bless the new mother when they depart from her with the expressions given in (7), both of which are good wishes for her (the new mother).

(7)  
*a. bi-fullum ti-ṗa-ws'ṗ-χi* [taws'ṗχixi]  
 in-beauty 3FS-CS-help out.IPFV-2FSO  
 “May Mary help you out in beauty!”

*b. ṗissa ti-ṗa-ṗ'aw-ti-χi* [taṗ'awtiχixi]  
 she 3FS-CS-chat.IPFV-3FS-2FSO  
 May She be your companion (lit. chat with you)!”

The visitors also express their good wishes by uttering *bi-fullum tiṗaws'ṗχixi* “May Mary help you out in beauty” in (7a) implying that the life of the new mother might still be in danger without the help of the Virgin Mary. The belief here is that the Virgin Mary can protect and save the new mother from bad things like evil eyes and evil spirits. Besides, there is a belief that the Virgin Mary makes the new mother, who is weak and tired due to labor, strong both physically and morally.

The blessing in (7b) is a wish for the new mother to have companionship while she stays at home alone. The pronoun *ṗissa* “she” in the expression pragmatically refers to the “Virgin Mary.” The Rayya speech community, especially women believe that the Virgin Mary exists beside the new mother even if she is invisible physically. Here the new mother is expected to stay for almost forty days at home. During these days, she might not always have families, relatives, and friends who could chat with her. She often spends time with her baby alone. It is during this time that the Virgin Mary is sought to come and chat with her. Besides, mothers put steel materials like a knife beside the bed where the new mother sleeps for they believe that such a material has the power to protect the new mother from evil spirits like a snake or Satan.

Besides, the new mother is visited and blessed by near and far relatives after weeks of giving birth. The expressions in (8) are, for instance, performed for the new mother and her baby’s full well-being.

(8)  
*a. mulu? fis'um ti-gbər-ə-ll-i-χi* [tigvərellixi]  
 full absolute 3FS-make.IPFV-3FS-BEN-EP-2FSO  
 “May Mary get you fully recovered”

*b. ṗat'ṗa-χi ji-ṗa-t'at'ṣ-ə-ll-i-χi* [jat'at'ṣəllixixi]  
 baby-POSS.2FS 3MS-CS-grow.IPFV-3MS-BEN-EP-  
 2FSO  
 “May He make your baby grow!”

*c. ruhus-ij ləmləm-ij ji-gbər-o* [jigvəro]  
 wet-CONJ green-CONJ 3MS-make.IPFV-3MSO

“May He make your baby lucky (lit. wet) and rich (lit. green)!”

In example (8a), the expression is a wish for the new mother’s absolute well-being. The expression’s underlying meaning implies that the new mother might get other health problems even if she has already given birth. Hence, the expression is made indirectly calling upon the divine power of the Virgin Mary whom the mothers call “The compassionate mother.” In other words, the power is attributed to the Virgin Mary. The blessing expressions in (8b-c) are also given wishing for the new baby’s growth, luck, and richness respectively. In (8c), the words *ruhūs* “wet” metaphorically refers to “good luck” and *ləmləm* “green” figuratively refers to “rich.” The authority in (8b-c) is attributed to God for the good wishes to come true.

### 5.2.3 Blessings at Making a Journey

People travel to different places for different purposes. They travel for instance to make a living or for other purposes. The traveler who has especially decided to travel a long journey is therefore blessed by parents, families, neighbors, and/or elders to have a good journey and to fulfill his/her goals in the Rayya speech community which is also prevalent in other Ethiopian societies. The expressions in (9) are made wishing for the traveler to have a good journey. The expressions are performed during the traveler’s departure.

a. *məngəd-χa χ’inuŋ ji-gbər-ə-ll-i-χa*  
[jigvərəlliχa]  
path-2MS.POSS straight 3MS-make.IPFV-3MS-BEN-EP-2MSO

“May He make your journey safe (lit. straight)!”

b. *məla?ixti ji-χatəl-u-χa*  
angel-PL 3PL-follow.IPFV-3MPL-2MSO

“May angels protect (lit. follow) you from any danger!”

c. *wuk’abə [wux’avə] ?abbo-tat-əj ji-halw-u-χa*  
spirit father-PL-1S.POSS 3PL-keep.IPFV-3MPL-2MSO

“May my fathers’ spirits keep you from any danger!”

Parents, families, and neighbors get together and prepare a ceremony like coffee on the eve of the traveler’s journey. There they give blessings wishing for the person to have a good and safe journey and to accomplish the goals he/she has thought of. The expression in (9a) is thus a wish for the traveler’s safety. The expression implies that the traveler might face an unexpected accident on his journey. Hence, the blessing act *məngədχa χ’inuŋ jigbərəlliχa* “May He make your journey safe” is commonly uttered wishing for bad things not to happen to the person on the journey. The word *χ’inuŋ* “straight” figuratively refers to “safe or free of an accident.”

The blessing in (9b) is performed explicitly appealing to *məla?ixti* “angels”, the messengers of God, to protect the traveler from the accident or danger that might happen on the journey, which also makes the expression

religious. There is a spiritual belief that God has bestowed supernatural power to angels so that they can protect human beings who are strong believers from bad things.

The traveler’s safety in (9c) is explicitly attributed to *wuk’abə* “spirit.” The expression’s underlying meaning implies that spirits like angels have protective power. As a tradition, it is strongly believed that the forefathers’ and mothers’ spirits have such powerful power that they protect and save anyone that strongly believes in their divine power from any unexpected accidents.

Furthermore, there are blessings given to the person who has got back to his/her homeland after a long separation/absence. The performed expressions are a kind of welcome to the person and for reuniting with his/her family, neighbor, and community. The expressions in (10a-c) are made to welcome the person.

(10)

a. *?ink’af bi-səlam məs’u?-χa*  
good-that with-peace come.PFV-2MS

“Good that you have come back with peace!”

b. *?ink’af di-ƣaddi-χa ?a-bχ’əŋ-ə-ka*  
good- that to-home-2MS.POSS CS- enable.PFV-3MS-2MS

“Good that He has enabled you to get back home!”

*?ink’af ƣajni di-ƣajni ?a-ra?əj-ə-nna*  
good-that eye to-eye CS-see.PFV-3MS-1PLO

“Good that He made us meet (lit. see eye to eye) each other!”

The expressions in (10a-c) are performed to welcome the person to his/her home/country. The focus of the expressions is on the safe arrival of the person. The first word *?ink’af* “good that” in all examples (10a-c) is contrastive which implies that the traveler might have been unable to come back home safely unless God had made it happen, which also reflects that man is so weak, powerless, and dependent. Hence, the person’s safety or security is attributed to God.

### 5.2.4 Blessings at Festive Occasions

There are several religious and cultural holidays practiced by both Orthodox Christians and Muslims in Ethiopia. The New Year, Meskel, Christmas, Epiphany, and Easter are the holidays celebrated by Christians. On the other hand, festivals like Mewuld, Id AL Fit’r, and others including the New Year are celebrated by Muslims. On these occasions, families, neighbors, and relatives visit one another with the congratulatory and blessing expressions performed in (11).

(11)

a. *?ink’af ?a-bs’əh-ə-kum*  
good-that CS-reach.PFV-3MS-2PLO

“Good that He has enabled you to reach this day!”

b. *ruhūs bəƣal ji-gbər-ə-ll-i-nna*  
[jigvəlliinna]

wet holiday 3MS-make.IPFV-3MS-BEN-EP-1PLO

“May He make us a peaceful (lit. wet) holiday!”

c.  $\zeta am\acute{a}t$       *di- $\zeta am\acute{a}t$*       *ji- $\eta a-bs'ih-\acute{a}-nna$*   
 [jabs'ihanna]  
 year    to-year    3MS-CS-reach.IPFV-3MS-1PLO  
 "May He help us reach this day again!"

The expression in (11a) is congratulatory. Families, neighbors, and relatives make the expression on the holiday's eve or in their first meeting before eating and drinking are served. As stated earlier in (6a), the word  $\eta ink'af$  "good that" has a contrastive meaning. Hence, the expression in (11a) implies that one would have been unable to reach any special day or holiday had God not helped him/her, which also shows that man is so weak and powerless that he always needs God's help and willingness.

Besides, the expression in (11b) is a wish for a peaceful holiday. It is a good wish for everyone to have a holiday free from unexpected accidents and problems while celebrating. The expression in (11c), which is made when the festival is over, is also a wish for everyone to live years and celebrate several special festivals. It is a good and optimistic wish to reach the coming festival. In all the examples (11a-c), the power is indirectly attributed to God for the good wishes to be effective.

### 5.2.5 Blessings at Coffee Ceremony

Having a coffee ceremony or drinking coffee is one of the most popular cultures in Ethiopia in general and the Rayya speech community in particular. While drinking, people might chat and discuss their country's social and/or political phenomena.

The clause *bunna nistaj* "let us drink coffee" is a common saying in the Rayya. Women especially in rural areas make coffee and call for their neighbors and drink together. There they give blessings at the end of the ceremony. The elder or senior among the women is, however, allowed to make the first blessing and the others follow after. Peace, love, health, unity, and prosperity are the recurrent themes that are raised in their blessings. The expressions in (12) are, for instance, made wishing for happiness, health, wealth, satisfaction, peace, and love to prevail.

(12)  
 a.  $\zeta addi$      $\acute{h}agos-ij$     *t'ifinna-j*    *ji-gbär-ä-ll-i-nna*  
 [jigvərəllinna]  
 home    happiness-CONJ    health-CONJ    3MS-make.IPFV-3MS-BEN-EP-1PLO  
 "May He bestow upon us happiness and health!"  
*səlam-ij*                      *fi $\chi$ 'r-ij*                      *ji-hab-ä-nna*  
 [jihavənnə]  
 peace-CONJ    love-CONJ    3MS-give.IPFV-3MS-1PLO  
 "May He give us peace and love!"

The women's blessings predominantly focus on social and economic aspects since they are the most vulnerable ones among other people when natural and/or man-made problems occur. The women wish therefore for bad things

not to happen to their families, neighbors, and the country. The expression in (12a) is a wish for  $\acute{h}agos$  "happiness" and *t'ifinna* "health", both of which are basic for living. The word  $\zeta addi$  "home" pragmatically refers to "a country" in the Rayya Tigrinya. Hence, the women wish for good things to prevail in their homes as well as in their country so that families, neighbors, and the community will be able to live harmoniously. Besides, the expression in (12b) is made wishing for *səlam* "peace" and *fi $\chi$ 'ri* "love" which are also vital for human co-existence. In both examples (12a-b), the power is attributed to the universal power.

More specifically, the women also give blessings to one who has made coffee and made them gathered at her home. The expressions in (13) are some of the examples used to expound their good wishes.

(13)  
 a.  $\zeta idm\acute{a}-j$      $\eta indz\acute{a}ra-j$     *ji-hab- $\chi i$*     [jihav $\chi i$ ]  
 long life-CONJ    bread-CONJ    3MS-give.IPFV-2FS  
 "May He give you long life and wealth (lit. bread)!"  
 b. *mis*    *seb* [səv]    *ji- $\eta a-nbir-\chi i$*     [jambir $\chi i$ ]  
 with human    3MS-CS-live.IPFV-2FSO  
 "May He make you live with people!"  
 c.  *$\chi iffu?$*      $\eta aj-ji-n $\chi a?$ - $\chi i$   
 bad    NEG-3MS-touch.IPFV-2FSO  
 "Let you not face (lit. touch) bad!"$

The expression in (13a) is given wishing for the woman's long life and wealth. The expression implies that if a person has been given a long life and wealth, he/she might be able to live a good life. Besides, society gives a high value to the one who is rich and healthy. Hence, the expression is made wishing for the woman to live a secure life in the future. The expression in (13b) is also made wishing for the woman to live with good people. It implies that people are highly needed both in the happy and sad moments of anyone. In other words, it is when a person lives with people that he/she shares with them his/her happiness or sadness/sorrow. Besides, the expression in (13c) is performed for bad things not happen to the woman. There are several bad things in a person's life that make him/her feel desperate and pessimistic. Hence, the blessing is given to the woman to have all good things protected from the bad ones.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

From the data presented and the explanations forwarded, it is possible to make conclusions that blessing expressions are power-oriented. The person's age and status matter to make the blessings. Traditionally and religiously, elders, parents, and religious leaders are believed to be more appropriate to make the blessings than those of the juniors and whose blessings are also thought of as powerful and efficacious. Blessing expressions are used both literally

and pragmatically. In most cases given in the discussion, however, the expressions are devoid of their literal meanings; they are figurative. Syntactically, the expressions are optative/jussive. The blessing expressions, believed to be executed in the future, are good wishes for the blessed. In almost all cases, the blessing expressions are made either explicitly or implicitly appealing to the external force. The divine power of God (dominantly), ancestral spirits (to some extent), and the Virgin Mary (in the maternal period) is invoked for the benedictions to be materialized. The most general and recurrent blessing expressions' themes are security or peace, love, unity, wealth, fertility, lineage, humanity, etc., all of which are basic for humans' co-existence. Generally, the Rayya speech community's tradition, philosophy, religion, and values have been expressed in both contexts (general and particular).

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

1	first person	2	second person	3	third person		
BEN	benefactive	FS	feminine singular	PASS	passive	PFV	perfective
CAUS	causative	IMPF	imperfective	PL	plural	REL	Relative clause
COND	conditional	MS	Masculine singular	PRE	preposition	lit.	literal translation
CONJ	conjunction	NEG	negation	PROG	progressive	EP.	epenthesis
DEF	definiteness	O	Object marker	POSS	possessive		

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## APPENDIX

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These were semi-structured questions originally prepared in English and they were then translated into the Rayya Tigrinya to get the pertinent/natural data.

- How do you bless your families, homesteads, neighbors, and country as an elder? What are your common good wishes in your day-to-day blessings? To whom do you appeal while you are blessing?
- How do you bless the bride and groom on their wedding day as a father or a mother of the couple? To whom do you appeal? Why?
- What are your good wishes to the couple as a family or relative in their wedding ceremony?
- What are your blessings to a person who has decided to make a journey? To whom do you appeal for your wishes to come true?
- How do you bless a person who has come back to his/her home after a long separation from his/her family?
- How do you make blessings at the coffee ceremony? Who blesses first and comes latter? Why?
- Why do you bless particularly the woman who has made coffee?
- How do you bless a mother who has given birth to a baby? What blessings expressions do you make before and after departure from the new mother? To whom do you appeal for your wishes to be effective?