



Season 4, Episode 3 The Passive Form

ሰላም ሰላም and welcome to a new episode of Bereka Buna. I'm going to have to beg your patience in advance because what we're going to cover in this episode and the next is truly complex material. I will try my best to explain and exemplify as usual but remember that this is meant as a supplementary resource to further Amharic study. I'd recommend reviewing the transcript for this episode as you listen or relisten, as well as bringing any questions you might have to your Amharic teacher. For transcripts go to our website at berekabuna.org. I'd also suggest letting the explanation percolate as you continue to listen to native speakers, which will allow you to begin noticing how this form is being used in practice. Now, full disclosures aside, let's get right into it!

The passive form is used to indicate that an action has been done but without necessarily knowing who has performed the action. For example, "She painted the wall", is active, while "the wall was painted", is passive (here the action has been done, but we don't know by whom).

In Amharic the basic form of the passive is constructed by prefixing ተ to the root form. Listen to the following examples to understand the pattern.

Kefete ከፈተ – he opened	Zega ዘጋ – he closed	Bela በለ – he ate
Tekefete ተከፈተ – it was opened	Tezega ተዘጋ – it was closed	Tebela ተበለ – it was eaten

If the root verb starts with the prefix አ, the ተ is sometimes modified to become ታ.

አየ – he saw	አጠበ – he washed	አሰበ – he thought
ታየ – it was seen	ታጠበ – it was washed	ታሰበ – it was thought

Sometimes, however, the አ is replaced by ተ.

አደረገ – he did [an action]	አገኘ – he found	አከበረ – he honored
ተደረገ – it was done	ተገኘ – it was found	ተከበረ – it was honored

Let's listen to a few simple sentence examples using these verbs in their active and passive forms:

በሩን ከፈተ – he opened the door
በሩ ተከፈተ – the door was opened

ቁልፉን አገኘ – he found his/the keys
ቁልፉ ተገኘ – the key was found

ስጦታውን አየ – he saw the gift
ስጦታው ታየ – the gift was seen



The passive form is also used in a reflexive sense. A reflexive verb refers to an action which is done by the subject upon themselves, like “to wash oneself”, “to hurt oneself”, “to introduce oneself”, etc. Listen to the following examples to hear how active verbs can be made reflexive and/or passive in Amharic:

Active	Passive	Reflexive
ሰኒዎቹን አጠባ – he washed the cups	ሰኒዎቹ ታጠቡ – the cups were washed	ሰውነቱን ታጠባ – he washed his body
ቤቱን ቀለም ቀባ – he painted the house	ቤቱ ቀለም ተቀባ – the house was painted	ሎሽን ተቀባ – he put lotion on himself
ሰከርቢቶውን አነሳ – he picked up the pen	ሰከርቢቶው ተነሳ – the pen was taken/picked up	ከእንቅልፉ ተነሳ – he woke (lit. lifted himself) up from sleep
ብሬን መለሰ – he returned (gave back) my money	ብሬ ተመለሰ – my money was returned (given back)	ከገበያ ተመለሰ – he returned from the market

Note that not all verbs that are reflexive in English would be so in Amharic, and there are some verbs that are reflexive in Amharic that wouldn’t sound so in English. For example, “he dressed himself” in Amharic would remain in the active form ለበሰ – እሱ ልበሰ ለበሰ.

Conversely, “to return” appears active in English but in Amharic is said in the reflexive sense: ተመለሰ.

There are also many verbs in Amharic that are passive in form but active in meaning. For example:

Active Verb
ተሸከመ – he carried
ተቀበለ – he received
ተከተለ – he continued or followed
ተሻገረ – he crossed
ተቀመጠ – he sat
ተናገረ – he spoke
ተመለከተ – he saw or looked at

There are also some verbs which naturally begin with ተ in their root form, which should not be confused with the passive form. You might notice how these are different from the previous set of verbs by paying attention to their infinitives. The following verbs can still be made passive by adding and additional ተ as a prefix.

Verbs beginning with ተ (past tense and infinitive)	Passive
ተረከ (መተረክ) – he told a story or recounted history	ተተረከ – the story was told
ተረጎመ (መተርጎም) – he translated	ተተረጎመ – it was translated
ተከለ (መትከል) – he planted	ተተከለ – it was planted
ተኮሰ (መተኮስ) – he ironed or shot	ተተኮሰ – it was ironed
ተነፈሰ (መተንፈስ) – he breathed	ተተነፈሰ – it was breathed (not often used)



In the next episode, we'll go over how to conjugate the passive in various tenses. But for now, let's finish up with some practice exercises.

Exercise 1: translate from Amharic to English

1. ተማሪው ወደ ርእሰ መምህር ቢሮ ተላከ:
the student was sent to the principal's office.
2. ወላጆቹ ብዙ ጥያቄ ተጠየቁ:
the parents were asked many questions.
3. ጠቅላይ ሚኒስትሩ ብዙ ሃላፊነት ተሸክማለች:
the prime minister carries many responsibilities.
4. ከአዲስ አበባ ተመለሳችሁ? ከአዲስ አበባ አልተመለስንም:
have you returned from Addis Ababa? No we haven't returned.
5. ተጠንቅቀህ ንዳ! የመንገድ ፖሊሲ ተቀይሮል:
[you, m.] drive carefully! The road policy has changed.
6. እግር ኳስ ተጫወተ እና ሲጨርስ ወደ ቤት ተመልሶ ታጠበ:
he played football and, when he finished, he returned home and showered [washed himself].
7. የሰፈሩ ሌባ ማንነት በግልጽ ታወቀ:
the identity of the neighborhood thief has become publicly known.
8. በባለፉት ሳምንት የሴቶች የአለም ዋንጫ ጨዋታ አውስትራሊያ በእንግሊዝ ተሸነፈች:
At last week's Women's World Cup match, Australia lost to [was beaten by] England.
9. በጣም ትልቅ ሰርግ ተዘጋጅቷል:
a very large wedding has been prepared.
10. ችግር ተፈጥሮ ስለ ነበር ወደ ፖሊስ ጣቢያ ተጠራሁ:
because a problem occurred [was created], I was called to the police station.

Exercise 2: translate from English to Amharic

1. While playing rugby I was hit on the head:
ራግቢ ስጫወት ራሴን ተመታሁ
2. In Ethiopia a new Palace is being built:
ኢትዮጵያ ውስጥ አዲስ ቤተ መንግስት እየተገነባ ነው
3. While on a trip, all of their bags were stolen from them:
ጉዞ ላይ ሳሉ ሁሉም ቦርሳቸው ተሰረቀባቸው
4. Why are you (pl.) angry? Did you fight with each other?
ለምን ትናደዳላችሁ? ተጣላችሁ እንዴት?
5. The waiter was ordered to bring a lot of food:
አስተናጋጁ ብዙ ምግብ እንዲያመጣ ታዘዘ
6. In preparation for the big evening event his wife put makeup on [painted herself].
ለማታው ትልቅ ዝግጅት ሚስቱ ሜካክፕ ተቀባች
7. The guests sat down and were served:
እንግዶቹ ተቀመጡ እና ተስተናገዱ
8. We had our hair cut:
ጸጉራችንን ተቆረጥን
9. The vegetables went bad so they were thrown out
አትክልቶቹ ተበላሹ ስለዚህ ተጣሉ
10. My dear listeners, welcome back, you were missed:
ወድ አድማጮቼ እንኳን ደህና መጣችሁ ተናፍቃችሁ ነበር



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And that's all for today. If you're finding this content difficult, I'd always recommend going back over previous episodes, and most especially practicing with friends and/or Amharic teachers. Best of luck and until next time, bye!