

**LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES**

**ULPA**

**University of Leipzig Papers on Africa**

**No. 25**

**Copula and Focus Constructions  
in selected Ethiopian  
Languages**

**Joachim Crass, Girma A. Demeke,  
Ronny Meyer & Andreas Wetter**

Leipzig 2005

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Languages and Literatures Series No. 25

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ISBN 3-935999-46-1

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ACC	accusative
ABS	absolutive
AgrO	agreement object morpheme
AgrS	agreement subject morpheme
APPL	applicative morpheme
AUXNP	auxiliary non-past
COP	(verbal) copula
CST	status constructus
DAT	dative
DCM	declarative sentence marker
DEF	definite article
EMPH	emphatic
f	feminine
FOC	focus
GEN	genitive
INF	infinitive
m	masculine
NEG	negative, negation marker
NOM	nominative
p	plural
PARCOP	particle copula
Pl	plural
PROCOP	pronoun copula
REL	relative clause marker
s	singular
Sg	singular
SING	singulative

## INTRODUCTION

The major aim of this work is to give an overview of present tense copula constructions in selected Semitic and Cushitic languages spoken in Ethiopia.<sup>1</sup> In particular, we deal with languages spoken in the central parts of the country, namely Gurage languages of different genetic affiliations, Wellegga Oromo and K'abeena. In addition we discuss data from Ge'ez, the liturgical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Tigre, Tigrinya, Argobba, Amharic and Harari.<sup>2</sup>

Copula constructions in these languages show considerable structural diversity. They are used to form nominal clauses in which two nominal constituents are conjoined. According to Payne (1997: 114ff), nominal clauses can be classified typologically into three major groups.<sup>3</sup> Payne's first group is characterized by the simple juxtaposition of subject and predicate without a copula element. The second group exhibits a copula (both in present and non-present tenses); the third group has a copula only in non-present tenses. Since it is not clear whether group one involves a zero copula (i.e. juxtaposition) only in present tense clauses, we will consider it as part of the third group; namely, no copula in present tense and a copula in non-present tense clauses. As regards copulas used in both present and non-present tenses (group two), Payne distinguishes four types: (a) the copula is a verb, (b) the copula is a pronoun<sup>4</sup>, (c) the copula is an invariant particle and (d) the copula is a derivational operation.

For our discussion types (a) to (c) and zero copula constructions in present tense clauses are relevant. The main difference between types (a) and (b), on the one hand and type (c), on the other, is that the latter type (c) does not inflect whereas the former two agree with the subject. In this paper we distinguish two groups of copulas, namely verbal copulas and non-verbal copulas. The latter group consists of pronoun copulas, particle copulas and zero copulas.

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<sup>1</sup> This work is part of ongoing research on language contact in Ethiopia within the framework of the multidisciplinary research project *SFB 295 Kulturelle und sprachliche Kontakte: Prozesse des Wandels in historischen Spannungsfeldern Nordostafrikas/Westasiens* at Mainz University. The German Research Council (DFG) has supported this project since 1997. We express our gratitude to the German Research Council and the University of Mainz. We also thank the *Institute of Ethiopian Studies* at Addis Ababa University for its kind cooperation during several field trips of the authors. Furthermore, we are indebted to Orin Gensler for editing this paper and for his critical comments.

<sup>2</sup> Non-attributed data were gathered by the authors of this paper during several field trips between 2000 and 2004. The Oromo data were provided by Dabala Goshu in 2001 and represent Wellegga Oromo (West-Central Oromo).

<sup>3</sup> For a slightly different typology of copula constructions see Curnow (1999). An overview of non-verbal copula constructions is presented in Stassen (1997: 76ff).

<sup>4</sup> See also Doron (1986) for a discussion of pronominal copulas.

With regard to Ethiopian languages, very often certain elements have been claimed to be present tense copulas which also occur in other domains, such as personal pronouns, demonstratives or focus markers.<sup>5</sup> In the following sections we present data for the different copula construction types in the Ethiopian languages mentioned above. We will also discuss problematic cases of elements that have been alleged to be copulas.

## OVERVIEW OF COPULA CONSTRUCTION TYPES

The most common type of copula clauses in our sample involves the occurrence of a copula in both present and non-present tenses. Here we find various elements functioning as copula. Most of the Ethiosemitic languages have a verbal copula, whereas in Cushitic languages particle copulas predominate. Pronoun copulas occur only in Ge'ez and Tigre.

### Verbal copulas

The main feature of verbal copulas (like pronoun copulas) is their agreement with the subject. In Ethiosemitic languages of this type, verbal copulas show agreement with the subject by suffixes which elsewhere are used either as subject agreement markers on non-copula perfective verbs or as object agreement markers:

(1) (Muher)

ädi mammo-n-k<sup>w</sup>.  
 I Mammo-COP-1s[AgrS]  
 'I am Mammo.'

(2) (Amharic)

əne kebbede nä-ññ  
 I Kebbete COP-1s[AgrO]  
 'I am Kebbete.'

In example (1) the suffix *-k<sup>w</sup>* belongs to a set of morphemes which indicate subject agreement with perfective verbs. The suffix *-ññ* in example (2) normally represents an object agreement marker; here, however, it is used to refer to the subject of the copula clause. There seems to exist no "pure" set of agreement markers on verbal copulas consisting either of subject or object agreement markers. All languages of this type that we have investigated usually have object agreement markers in the 3rd person. In the second person object and subject agreement markers cannot be distinguished. In the first person either the subject or the object agreement marker may occur.

The most common present tense copula in Ethiosemitic is built on the morpheme *-n(ä)*. The following table lists the conjugation of the copula in several Gunnän-Gurage languages,

<sup>5</sup> For the grammaticalization of non-verbal copulas from demonstrative pronouns see Diessel (1999: 143ff).

which usually make use of a verbal copula inflected with subject agreement markers in the first person (cf. Hetzron 1977: 106):<sup>6</sup>

**Table 1 Conjugation of the copula *n* in several Gunnän-Gurage languages**

		Dobbi	Muher	Mäsqañ	Gumer	Ennämor	
Sg	1	-näw (< *nä <sup>w</sup> )	-nh <sup>w</sup>	-nku	-nh <sup>w</sup>	-nh <sup>w</sup>	
	2	m. -nähä	-nha	-nhä	-nhä	-nh	
	f.	-näš	-nh <sup>y</sup>	-nš	-nh <sup>y</sup>	-nšua	
	3	m. -n	-n	-u	-w	-n	
	f.	-na	-ya	-ya	-nyä	-ni	
Pl	1	-nənnä	-nənä	-nnənnä	-ndä	-nəra	
	2	m.	-nä <sup>həm</sup> <sup>w</sup>	-nh <sup>əm</sup> <sup>w</sup>	-nhu	-nhu	-nhua
		f.	-nähma	-nhəma	-nhäma	-nhəma	-nhaa
	3	m.	-nä <sup>m</sup> <sup>w</sup>	-nä <sup>m</sup> <sup>w</sup>	-no	-lo <sup>7</sup>	-noa
		f.	-näma	-näma	-nnäma	-läma	-nna

The hyphens in the forms in Table 1 indicate that the copula *-n(ä)* is suffixed to the predicate in all the languages. In Amharic, on the contrary, the copula *n(ä)* is not a suffix but a prosodically free morpheme. It takes the object agreement markers for the identification of the subject (contrast the endings in Table 1):

**Table 2 Conjugation of the copula *n(ä)* in Amharic**

1s	näññ	'I am'
2sm	näh	'you are'
2sm	näš	'you are'
3ms	näw	'he is, it is'
3fs	nat/ näcc	'she is'
1pl	nän	'we are'
2pl	naccəhu	'you are'
3pl	naccäw	'they are'

<sup>6</sup> The Muher data in this table represent the *ädi-bet* variety of Muher spoken near the town Wolkite and were recorded by Meyer in 2004. Hetzron (1977: 106) claims a copula *en* for Muher instead of *n*. Actually the alleged copula *en* consists of a noun *qe~?e* 'thing', which is a dummy element occurring in nominal phrases having no overt head noun, plus the copula *n*. Muher thus does not differ from the other Gurage languages. Furthermore, while Hetzron (1977: 106) provides a verbal copula *-nä* for Gumär, Meyer recorded a copula *-n* without the final vowel *ä* for this language. The data for Muher and Gumär are based, therefore, on Meyer's data elicited in Wolkite in 2004 and not on Hetzron (1977).

<sup>7</sup> The change from *n* to *l* in the copula of the 3rd person plural forms occurs regularly in Gumär even in sentences without the alleged dummy noun *gar* 'thing' (cf. Hetzron 1972: 83).

In the 3rd person singular feminine two alternative forms exist in Amharic. They differ in the agreement marker: While in *nat* the object agreement marker *-at* is used, in *näcc* the subject agreement marker *-äcc* of perfective verbs occurs.

Table 3 displays the subject and object agreement markers in Amharic.

**Table 3 Markers of subject and object agreement in Amharic**

	Subject Agreement (perfective aspect)	Object Agreement
1 s	-h <sup>w</sup> / -k <sup>w</sup>	-(ä)ññ
2 sm	-h/-k	-h
2 sf	-š	-(ä)š
3 sm	-ä	-(ä)w / -t
3 sf	-äcc	-at
1 pl	-n	-(ä)n
2 pl	-accəhu	-accəhu
3 pl	-u	-accäw

The situation is slightly different in the very closely related language Argobba. In the third person singular feminine, in contrast to Amharic, only the subject agreement marker occurs; the third person singular feminine object agreement marker is the quite different suffix *-ya* or *-ba*. In Argobba two dialectal varieties are documented, namely Aliyu Amba (Leslau 1997) and T'ollaha/Shonke (Wetter to appear). Copula clauses in the two varieties are structurally identical but the copulas differ in their phonological representation:

**Table 4 Conjugation of the copula *n* in Argobba**

	Aliyu Amba	T'ollaha/Shonke	
1 s	näññ	näñ	'I am'
2 sm	nah	näx	'you are'
2 sf	nih	näš	'you are'
3 sm	ne	näy	'he is, it is'
3 sf	näd	näcc	'she is'
1 pl	nänna	näna	'we are'
2 pl	nəhum	näxum	'you are'
3 pl	nem	näyem	'they are'

In Argobba of T'ollaha/Shonke the copula is always represented by *nä-*, followed by the respective agreement marker. In Aliyu Amba, however, the copula is either *nä-* or *n-*; the latter occurs in the second person singular feminine and in the second person plural. Another difference is the palatalization of the copula vowel *ä* > *e* in the third person singular masculine and in the third person plural in the Aliyu Amba variety. Furthermore, there are different stages of palatalization of the agreement markers in the second person singular feminine and in the third person singular feminine.

The reason why the copula exhibits object agreement in the first person in Amharic and Argobba is not clear. Getachew (1974) suggests that the copula in Amharic is a transitive verb, which behaves similar to experiential verbs. According to him the copula clause consists of a dummy subject in the third person singular masculine represented by the vowel *-ä*. The experiencer is referred to by the object agreement markers. The proposed analysis of the copula construction in Amharic is thus as follows:

n+AgrS+AgrO.

The copula for the third person singular masculine, for example, is to be analyzed as:

- (3) (Amharic)  
 n-ä-w  
 COP-3sm[AgrS]-3sm[AgrO]  
 'he/it is'

According to Getachew (1974: 147) the semantics of *n* can be understood as involving a causative construction meaning 'to make someone to do something or be something' as in:

- (4) (Amharic)  
 yonas mämhər n-ä-w  
 Jonas teacher made-3sm[AgrS]-3sm[AgrO]  
 'It made Jonas a teacher' / 'Jonas is a teacher' (Getachew 1974: 147)

Getachew's (1974) analysis, however, does not seem to be correct for a number of reasons. First, experiential verbs can have subjects other than the third person singular masculine:

- (5) (Amharic)  
 a. t'ämma-(ä)-ññ [t'ämmaññ]  
 thirst-(3sm[AgrS])-1s[AgrO]  
 'I am thirsty.' ('lit. It thirsts me.')
- b. t'ämma-ccə-ññ  
 thirst-3sf[AgrS]-1s[AgrO]  
 'I am thirsty.' (lit. 'She (i.e. a nice drink) thirsts me.')

By contrast, the copula *n* always occurs with the vowel *-ä*, i.e. it can only represent third person masculine subjects in Getachew's analysis.

Second, a true experiencer is clearly an accusative object and hence is marked with the accusative suffix *-n* when it is overt:

- (6) (Amharic)  
 əne-n t'amma-(ä)-ññ [t'ammaññ]  
 I-ACC thirst-(3sm[AgrS])-1s[AgrO]  
 'I am thirsty.' ('lit. It thirsts me.')

Accusative object marking, however, is impossible in constructions with the copula *n*. The subject of the copula clause, which represents an experiencer in Getachew's analysis, can only be marked with the nominative. This is a strong indication that it truly is the subject of the copula clause:

- (7) (Amharic)  
 a. əne mämhər nə-ññ  
 I.NOM teacher COP-1s  
 'I am a teacher.'  
 b. \*əne-n mämhər nə-ññ  
 I-ACC teacher COP-1s  
 'I am a teacher.'

Third, there is no strong evidence for treating the vowel *-ä* as an independent agreement marker in the inflection of the copula *n*, since this vowel *ä* can in fact be considered to be an integral part of the object agreement marker (see Table 3):

- (8) (Amharic)  
 säbbär-k-äw  
 broke-2sm[AgrS]-3sm[AgrO]  
 'You broke it.'

Fourth, in the third person singular feminine, the element *n* may occur with a *subject* agreement marker, as mentioned earlier:

- (9) (Amharic)  
 aster mämhər näcc  
 Aster teacher COP:3sf[AgrS]  
 'Aster is a teacher.'

Finally, in his argumentation Getachew does not consider genetically related languages which use a cognate morpheme as present tense copula. As discussed above, the copula *n* exists in the Gunnän-Gurage languages, but here, unlike Amharic and Argobba, it inflects with subject agreement markers in the first person singular and plural.

The reason why the copula *n* inflects with object agreement markers remains unclear, even if genetically related languages like Berber and Egyptian also have particles meaning 'there is' which inflect using object markers (p.c. Orin Gensler). We cannot consider the origin of the copula *n* to be an experiential verb as suggested by Getachew (1974). Rather, we propose a connection with a morpheme used as focus marker in several languages such as Harari, Kistane and Zay. The connection between the copula *n* and a phonologically identical focus marker may be the reason for the use of object agreement markers to refer to

the subject. In Ethiosemitic an overt object referred to by an object agreement marker on the verb is emphasized in the discourse (cf. Getachew 1970, Girma 2003: 60ff). Usually object agreement markers in present tense copula clauses in Amharic do not refer to predicate nominals. However, object agreement markers without a copula do occur in emphatic presentative constructions as in (10):

- (10) (Amharic)  
 mäs'haf-u      yəh-äw-(əll-əh)  
 book-the      this-3ms[AgtrS]-(APPL-2ms[AgtrO])  
 'Here is the book for you' (Girma 2004: 2)

The occurrence of object agreement markers together with the present tense copula may be a result of focus expressions in Ethiosemitic. Focus marking is syntactic obligatory in at least one Ethiosemitic language, namely Zay. Furthermore, additional reference to a definite object on the verb by object agreement markers implies a focused reading of the object.

In Tigrinya, Amharic and Argobba the verbal copula is a free morpheme and differs in this regard from the other languages. In Tigrinya, however, the copula morpheme is not *n* but \**i-/əy-*:

**Table 5 Present tense copula in Tigrinya**

		Singular	Plural
1		'əyyä	'ina
2	m.	'ixa/'əxa	'ixum/'əxum
	f.	'ixi/'əxi	'ixən/'əxən
3	m.	'əyyu	'əyyom
	f.	'əyya	'əyyän

(Kogan 1997: 444)

Apart from the different copula morphemes, there is no main structural difference in copula clauses vis-à-vis Amharic:

- (11) (Tigrinya)  
 haw-oy      dəxa      'əyyu  
 brother-my      poor      COP:3sm  
 'My brother is poor' (Kogan 1997: 444)

In contrast to Amharic and Argobba, Tigrinya uses possessive suffixes as agreement markers with the copula (cf. Praetorius 1871: 158).

In Harari, too, yet another copula morpheme *t* inflects with object agreement markers for the identification of the subject (cf. Wagner 1997: 507):

**Table 6 Conjugation of the copula *t* in Harari**

		Singular	Plural
1		tañ	tana
2	m .	tax	taxu
	f .	taš	-
3	m .	ta	tayu
	f .	te	-

For negation of present tense copula clauses different morphemes are used. In all Gunnän-Gurage languages, in Argobba and in Wolane the negated verb 'be/become' is used instead of the verbal copula:

(12) (Wolane)

ihe tämari-n-ku.  
I student-COP-1s  
'I am a student.'

ihe tämari alon-ku.  
I student NEG:become:PV-1s  
'I am not a student.'

Amharic has a special verb meaning 'to be not':

(13) (Amharic)

əssu astämari näw.  
he teacher COP:3sm  
'He is a teacher.'

əssu astämari aydällä-(ä)-m.  
he teacher NEG:COP-(3sm)-NEG  
'He is not a teacher.'

### Non-verbal Copulas

In this section we discuss pronoun copulas, particle copulas and zero copulas, all of which we subsume under the heading of non-verbal copulas. This is due to the fact that all languages belonging to this group exhibit a mixed pattern, e.g. they use at least two types of non-verbal copulas.

With regard to pronoun copulas, there are two sources: personal pronouns and demonstrative pronouns. The former type appears only in the Ethiosemitic languages Ge'ez and Tigre; the latter is found in the Cushitic languages K'abeena and Sidaama.

*Ge'ez*

Affirmative present tense copula sentences in Ge'ez can be constructed in two different ways: either by using the personal pronouns or by asyndetically juxtaposing the subject and the predicate:

(14) (Ge'ez)

a. dani'el nābiy wə'ətu.  
Daniel prophet PROCOP:3sm  
'Daniel is a prophet.'

b. dani'el nābiy.  
Daniel prophet  
'Daniel is a prophet.'

(15) (Ge'ez)

a. sosna sänayit yə'əti.  
Sosna beautiful PROCOP:3sf  
'Sosna is beautiful.'

b. sosna sänayit.  
Sosna beautiful  
'Sosna is beautiful.'

(Getachew n.d.: 8)

While in (14a) and (15a) the third person pronouns function as copulas agreeing with the subject, there is a zero copula in (14b) and (15b). The exact difference between these two constructions is unclear. According to Tropper (2002: 215) constructions with a pronoun copula are much more frequent than zero copula constructions.

The position of the pronoun copula is not fixed. It can either follow both the subject and the predicate (cf. (14a) and (15a)) or occur between subject and predicate.

The pronoun copula can either show (full or partial) agreement with its subject, or appear in the invariant third masculine singular form *wə'ətu*. The latter occurs following the subjects in (16a) and in (16b), represented by the pronouns *'anä* 'I' and *'anti* 'you(f)'.  
(16) (Ge'ez)

a. 'anä wə'ətu mämhər.  
I PROCOP:3sm teacher  
'It is me who is a teacher.'

b. 'anti wə'ətu 'əs'-ä gännät.  
you(sf) PROCOP:3sm tree-CST paradise  
'It is you who is the tree of the garden of Eden.'

(Getachew 1974: 149)

The pronoun copula can also occur sentence-finally, as illustrated by the following examples:

- (17) (Ge'ez)
- a. 'anä mämhər wə'ətu.  
I teacher PROCOP:3sm  
'I am a teacher.'
- b. 'anti 'əs'-ä gännät wə'ətu.  
you(sf) tree-CST Eden PROCOP:3sm  
'You are the tree of (the garden of) Eden.' (Getachew 1974: 149)

Tropper (2002: 215) mentions that the word order subject-copula-predicate is more infrequent than the order subject-predicate-copula. However, the word order in zero copula constructions is what determines whether the two nouns constitute a copula clause or a noun phrase. This is illustrated in the examples below:

- (18) (Ge'ez)
- a. dawit nəgus.  
Dawit king  
'Dawit is a king.'
- b. nəgus dawit  
king Dawit  
'King Dawit'

- (19) (Ge'ez)
- a. p'awlos mämhər.  
Paulus teacher  
'Paulos is a teacher.'
- b. mämhər p'awlos  
teacher Paulus  
'Teacher (title) Pawlos'

In examples (18a) and (19a) the nouns 'king' and 'teacher' represent the predicate, whereas they are modifiers in (18b) and (19b). The two readings are probably connected with the definiteness status of the nouns. While proper names are referential, common nouns are not. It seems that a order of a referential noun followed by a non-referential noun is interpreted as two distinct noun phrases. The opposite order, non-referential noun followed by a referential noun, however, seems to represent a single noun phrase.

In Ge'ez, the third person personal pronouns *wə'ətu* and *yə'əti* are commonly used even if the subject is represented by another person (cf. Tropper 2002: 215):

- (20) (Ge'ez)
- a. 'anä wə'ətu.  
I PROCOP:3sm  
'I am.' (male/female person)
- b. 'anä yə'əti.  
I PROCOP:3sf  
'I am.' (female person) (Getachew (n.d.))

Based on example (20) it seems that the form of the copula pronoun reflects the gender of the subject pronoun. Since the pronoun *'anā* may refer either to a male or to a female, both of the pronoun copulas, *wə'ətu* 'he/it is' or *yə'əti* 'she is', can be applied. Pronouns of the second and third person singular masculine can only take the masculine copula pronoun:

(21) (Ge'ez)  
 'antä wə'ətu.  
 you(sm) PROCOP:3sm  
 'You(sm) are.' (Getachew (n.d.))

(22) (Ge'ez)  
 wə'ətu wə'ətu.  
 he PROCOP:3sm  
 'He is.' (Getachew (n.d.))

With the corresponding singular feminine pronouns, however, both the masculine and feminine pronoun copulas can be used:

(23) (Ge'ez)  
 a. 'anti wə'ətu.  
 you(sm) PROCOP:3sm  
 'You(sf) are.'

b. 'anti yə'əti.  
 you(sf) PROCOP:3sf  
 'You(sf) are.' (Getachew (n.d.))

(24) (Ge'ez)  
 a. yə'əti wə'ətu.  
 she PROCOP:3sm  
 'She is.'

b. yə'əti yə'əti  
 she PROCOP:3sf  
 'She is.' (Getachew (n.d.))

When the pronominal subject of the copula clause is plural, either the plural form of the third person pronoun (see examples (25) to (29)) or the pronoun copula of the third person singular can be used (see example (30)):

(25) (Ge'ez)  
 nəh'nä 'əmuntu.  
 we PROCOP:3pm  
 'We are.' (Getachew (n.d.))

(26) (Ge'ez)  
 'antəmu 'əmuntu.  
 you(pm) PROCOP:3pm  
 'You(pm) are.' (Getachew (n.d.))

(27) (Ge'ez)  
 'antən 'əmantu.  
 you(pf) PROCOP:3pf  
 'You(pf) are.' (Getachew (n.d.))

(28) (Ge'ez)  
 wə'ətomu 'əmuntu.  
 they(pm) PROCOP:3pm  
 'They(pm) are.' (Getachew (n.d.))

(29) (Ge'ez)  
 wə'əton 'əmantu.  
 they(pm) PROCOP:3pf  
 'They(pf) are.' (Getachew (n.d.))

(30) (Ge'ez)  
 'antəmu wə'ətu s'adəqan.  
 you(pm) PROCOP:3sm righteous  
 'You(pm) are righteous/just.' (Tropper 2002: 215)

The high frequency of third person pronoun copulas and the loss of the gender distinction in the pronoun copula *wə'ətu* are indications that the pronoun copula is developing into a particle copula. However, any personal pronoun can in fact occur as pronoun copula if it is in full agreement with the subject. Tropper (2002: 215) considers this clause type as highly emphatic:

(31) (Ge'ez)  
 a. 'əsmä 'anä-hi ḥer 'anä.  
 because I-EMPH good PROCOP:1s  
 'Because I am good.' (Mt 20, 15)  
 b. wə'ətu mämhər wə'ətu.  
 he teacher PROCOP:3sm  
 'He is a teacher.' (Getachew 1974: 149)  
 c. 'antä wäld-əyā 'antä.  
 you(sm) son-my PROCOP:2sm  
 'You are my son.' (Ibid.)

Negative present tense copula constructions use the uninflected negative particle *'akko*. This particle precedes the negated sentence constituent (cf. Tropper 2002: 221):

(32)

(Ge'ez)

- a. 'akko nəgus dawit.  
 neg king Dawit  
 'Dawit is not a king.'
- b. 'akko sänayit sosna.  
 neg beautiful Sosna  
 'Sosna is not beautiful.'
- c. 'akko sänayit sosna wä-sälome.  
 neg beautiful Sosna and-Selome  
 'Sosna and Selome are not beautiful.'

(Getachew n.d.: 7-8)

The examples in (32) represent negated zero copula constructions. The unmarked order in zero copula constructions is predicate-subject. In negation the negative particle occurs sentence-initially. In (32a) the noun *nəgus* 'king' is therefore the predicate and not a modifier of 'Dawit' as was the case in example (18b).

In the above presentation we have seen two distinct types of copula constructions in Ge'ez, namely zero copula and pronoun copula constructions. With regard to pronoun copulas, the agreement hierarchy of the phi-features (person, number and gender) in Ge'ez is as follows: number > gender > person. The three optional feature agreement situations can be summarized as:

- a. agreement in full; i.e. in all phi-features,
- b. agreement in number and gender (nonagreement with person) and;
- c. agreement only in number (nonagreement with gender and person).<sup>8</sup>

### *Tigre*

In Tigre, as in Ge'ez, the present tense copula constructions are also expressed either by pronoun or by zero copulas. However, there are some differences between Ge'ez and Tigre. In Tigre pronoun copulas are much more common than the zero copula. Furthermore, pronoun copulas usually show full agreement with the subject in person, number and gender:

<sup>8</sup> In generative linguistics, a category can be considered as defective if it lacks the feature of person but not number (see Chomsky 2000). Thus the most prominent feature of the phi-features is assumed to be person but not number or gender. The Ge'ez data do not support such an assumption.

(33) (Beni Amer Tigre)

- a. ana      innas      ana.  
 I          man      PROCOP:1s  
 'I am a man.'
- b. anta      innas      anta.  
 you(sm)   man      PROCOP:2sm  
 'You are a man.'
- c. inti      iseit      inti.  
 you(sf) woman   PROCOP:2sf  
 'You are a woman.'

(Beaton & Paul 1954: 18)

(34) (Beni Amer Tigre)

- a. heena      sub      heena.  
 we          men      PROCOP:1p  
 'We are men.'
- b. heena      ans      heena.  
 we          women   PROCOP:1p  
 'We are women.'
- c. intum      sub      intum.  
 you (pm)   men      PROCOP:2pm  
 'You are men.'
- d. intin      ans      intin.  
 you(pf)   women   PROCOP:2sf  
 'You are women.'

(Beaton & Paul 1954: 18)

In (33) and (34) the subject pronouns and the corresponding pronoun copulas are identical. In the third person forms, however, only the final syllable of the respective pronoun is used as copula, as exemplified in (35) and (36):

(35) (Beni Amer Tigre)

- a. heito      innas-to  
 he          man-PROCOP:3sm  
 'He is a man.'
- b. heita      isei-ta  
 she          woman-PROCOP:3sf  
 'She is a woman.'

(Beaton & Paul 1954: 18)

(36) (Beni Amer Tigre)

- a. hotom      sub-tom  
 they(m)      man-PROCOP:3pm  
 'They are men.'
- b. heitan      ans-tan  
 they(f)      woman-PROCOP:3pf  
 'They are women.'

(Beaton & Paul 1954: 18)

In negative copula constructions in the first and second persons, the negative marker *ii-* precedes the pronoun copula:

- (37) (Beni Amer Tigre)  
 ana innas ii-ana.  
 I man NEG-PROCOPI:1s  
 'I am not a man.' (Beaton & Paul 1954: 35)

The third person, however, does not take a pronoun copula in negative constructions. Instead, a verb is used, which can be translated into English as 'be / become':

- (38) (Beni Amer Tigre)  
 a. heito innas ii-kon.  
 he man NEG-be:PV  
 'He is not a man.'  
 b. heita iseit ii-kon  
 she woman NEG-be:PV  
 'She is not a woman.' (Beaton & Paul 1954: 35)

It seems that the lack of a pronoun copula in the third person in negative clauses is due to prosody. As we have shown, in affirmative third person copula constructions only the final syllable of the respective pronouns functions as copula. These suffixed elements lack (lexical) stress, i.e. they cannot host another, further clitic such as the negative marker *ii ~'i*. The negative marker, therefore, requires a complete prosodic element to which it can be attached.<sup>9</sup> Thus the verb 'be / become' is applied in negative copula expressions in the third person.

The subject pronoun can be dropped in Mansa' Tigre when it is identical with the pronoun copula and no additional overt constituent is present:

- (39) (Mansa' Tigre)  
 a. 'i-'ana.  
 NEG-PROCOPI:1s  
 'I am not.'  
 b. 'i-'enta.  
 NEG- PROCOPI:2sm  
 'You are not.' (Raz 1983: 46)

On the other hand, affirmative interrogative clauses may occur without a pronoun copula:

- (40) (Beni Amer Tigre)  
 anta innas?  
 you(sm) man  
 'Are you a man?' (Beaton & Paul 1954: 35)

- (41) (Mansa' Tigre)  
 man 'enta?  
 who you(sm)  
 'Who are you?' (Raz 1983: 46)

In negative interrogative clauses, the pronoun copula is realized sentence-finally:

<sup>9</sup> In other words the attachment of a negative marker to its host takes place neither in syntax nor in post-syntax, but in the lexicon — along the lines of lexicalism (cf. Chomsky 1993).

- (42) (Beni Amer Tigre)  
 anta innas ii-anta?  
 you(sm) man NEG-PRO COP:2sm  
 'Are you not a man?' (Beaton & Paul 1954: 35)

Examples (40) and (42) have the same structure in both declarative and interrogative clauses; interrogation is expressed by a rising intonation.

### *Wellegga Oromo*

In Wellegga Oromo, a Lowland East Cushitic language, a particle copula is used. There are two kinds of particle copulas, *-dha* and *-ti*. The particle copula *-dha* is in complementary distribution with a zero copula or the vowel *-i*. The allomorphic distribution of these particles is as follows: *-dha* occurs after long vowels, *-i* after consonants, and  $-\emptyset$  after short vowels (cf. Ishetu 1989):

- (43) (Oromo)  
 kun saree-dha.  
 this:NOM dog:ABS-PARCOP  
 'This is a dog.'
- (44) (Oromo)  
 kun annaan-i.  
 this:NOM milk:ABS-PARCOP  
 'This is milk.'
- (45) (Oromo)  
 kun farda- $\emptyset$ .  
 this:NOM horse:ABS  
 'This is a horse.'

In present tense copula clauses a focus marker can occur, which is always attached to the subject:

- (46) (Oromo)  
 a. isa-tu c'aalaa-dha .  
 he:ABS-FOC Chala:ABS-PARCOP  
 'It is he who is Chala.'
- b. ishee-tu gaarii-dha.  
 she:ABS-FOC good-PARCOP  
 'It is she who is good.'
- c. isa-tu barsiisaa-dha.  
 he:ABS-FOC teacher:ABS-PARCOP  
 'It is he who is a teacher.'

If a subject is focused with *-tu*, the agreement strategies in verbal and in copula clauses differ. While in verbal clauses with a focused subject the verb is invariant in the third person singular masculine – regardless of the person, number and gender of the subject (cf.

Griefenow-Mewis 2001: 53) – in copula clauses an adjectival predicate agrees with the focused subject in number and gender. Thus the adjective *guddaa* ‘big, tall’ is used with masculine singular nouns, in the feminine singular the form *guddoo* appears, and in the plural *gudguddoo*. Examples of copula sentences with a focused subject are:

(47) (Oromo)  
 c’aaltuu-tu                    guddoo-dha.  
 Chaltu:ABS-FOC            big:f-PARCOP  
 ‘It is Chaltu [a woman’s name] who is big.’

(48) (Oromo)  
 ijoollee-tu                    gudguddoo-dha.  
 children:ABS-FOC    big.PI-PARCOP  
 ‘It is the children who are big.’

The above type of agreement with a focused subject seems only to exist between a subject nominal and a predicate, but not with verbal predicates. In the negative, a focus marker appears only in copula clauses of attribution; it does not appear in negative copula clauses of identification. Negative present tense copula clauses are constructed with a free morpheme *miti* ‘to be not’ which takes the position of the affirmative copula *-dha*. The morpheme *miti* is invariant and appears in all phonetic environments:

(49) (Oromo)  
 a. ishee-tu                    gaarii    miti.  
    she:ABS-FOC            good    NEG:PARCOP  
    ‘It is she who is not good.’  
 b. isa-tu                    barsiisaa    miti.  
    he:ABS-FOC teacher    NEG:PARCOP  
    ‘It is he who is not a teacher.’

(50) (Oromo)  
 a. inni                    c’aalaa            miti.  
    he:NOM            Chala:ABS            NEG:PARCOP  
    ‘He is not Chala.’  
 b. ?? isa-tu                    c’aalaa            miti.  
    he:ABS-FOC            Chala:ABS            NEG:PARCOP  
    ‘It is he who is not Chala’

A sentence like (50b) is not ungrammatical but very unusual. This construction appears only in very specific discourse situations. If it is elicited without any context, the speaker considers it as ungrammatical; instead a sentence like (50a) is provided.

Some focus structures also appear in sentences where the complement of the copula is a genitive or possessive construction. In these clauses focusing is only possible with the subject, not with the predicate:

- (51) (Oromo)  
 kana-tu            mana        keessan-i.  
 this:ABS-FOC    house        your(p)-PARCOP  
 'THIS is your house.'

- (52) (Oromo)  
 kana-tu            mana            keessan        miti.  
 this:ABS-FOC    house:ABS        your(p)        NEG:PARCOP  
 'THIS is not your house.'

According to Ishetu (1989) there is an additional particle copula *-ti* whose distribution is restricted to predicates expressing possession; it may occur after genitive constructions and after possessive suffixes.<sup>10</sup> Bender (1986) argues against Ishetu and says that the element *-ti* cannot be considered a "genitive copula". According to Bender and Mulugeta (1976) and Bender (1986), the element *-ti* is simply a genitive marker and not a copula. Bender (1986) provides examples where the element *-ti* occurs without having copula function:

- (53) (Oromo)  
 obboleesa-saa-tii-f<sup>11</sup>        dubbet-e.  
 brother:ABS-his-ti-for        talk-3sm:PV  
 'He talked for his brother.' (Bender 1986: 129)

Ishetu's (1989) interpretation of the possessive marker *-ti* as a genitive copula may stem from the fact that there is probably a zero copula in this construction. The particle copula, as explained earlier, has three allomorphs. As the possessive marker *-ti* ends in a short vowel, the zero allomorph of the copula is indeed what is expected (cf. Bender 1986). However, some contradictory facts must be considered.

The element *-ti* does not occur obligatorily in every genitive construction (cf. example (54)). It usually appears in genitive constructions involving a suffixed possessive pronoun, as in example (55):

- (54) (Oromo)  
 man-ni            namaa        gaarii-dha.  
 house-NOM        man:GEN        good-PARCOP  
 'The house of the man is good.'

- (55) (Oromo)  
 iddoo-n        hojii-saa-tii<sup>12</sup>        dhiyoo-dha.  
 place-NOM    work:ABS-his-ti:GEN    near-PARCOP  
 'His working place is near.'

<sup>10</sup> Ishetu (1989) also considers the focus marker *-tu* to be a copula (for a contrary argument see Bender (1986)).

<sup>11</sup> The suffix *-f* 'for' triggers lengthening of preceding vowels.

<sup>12</sup> The genitive is expressed by lengthening of a final vowel; in this example it is the lengthening of the vowel of the suffix *-ti* which expresses the genitive.

Griefenow-Mewis (2001: 44) describes the distribution of *-ti(i)* as follows: “If a possessive of a genitive construction is formed the suffix *-tii* may be added at the end of the genitive construction to possessive pronouns terminating in a long vowel”. Note that the genitive in (54) is expressed by the lengthening of the final vowel of the modifier *nama* ‘man’, not by *-ti(i)*. Furthermore, the morpheme *-ti* does not occur in negative copula clauses:

(56) (Oromo)

- a. kun            mana-koo-ti.  
     this:NOM    house-my-ti  
     ‘This is my house.’
- b. kun            mana-koo    miti.  
     this:NOM    house-my    NEG:PARCOP  
     ‘This is not my house.’
- c. \*kun mana-koo-ti miti.

In (56) the morpheme *-ti* is in complementary distribution with the negative particle copula *miti*. This distribution, and the fact that the genitive can also be expressed only by a long vowel as in (54), have led Ishetu (1989) and others to suggest that the element *-ti* is actually a copula rather than a genitive marker. We take no position on this issue in the present article.

#### *K’abeena*

Crass (2005) identifies the morphemes *-ha*, *-ta* and *-ti* as copula morphemes in *K’abeena*. The copulas *-ha* and *-ta* are in complementary distribution, marking masculine and feminine gender, respectively; the copula *-ti* is invariant. Accordingly, the former two are considered to be pronoun copulas, while the latter is a particle copula. The morphemes *-ha* and *-ta* are used as demonstrative pronouns, as gender-case markers and as copulas.

In *K’abeena* nouns are classified into masculine and feminine; the masculine gender is morphologically unmarked, while feminine gender is marked with the suffix *-ta* or its syntactically conditioned variant *-ti*.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 7 Gender marking in *K’abeena***

	ACCUSATIVE	NOMINATIVE	GENITIVE	GLOSS
m .	mancú	máncu	mancí	‘man’
f .	mancú-ta	máncu-ti	mancó	‘woman’

<sup>13</sup> The morpheme *-ti* as a gender marker is phonologically identical with the particle copula *-ti*. It is unclear whether there exists a historical connection between the two morphemes.

Masculine nouns generally lack gender markers in the accusative, nominative and genitive cases. However, we do find explicit masculine gender markers in the other cases. In the dative, for example, masculine nouns are marked by *-ha*, feminine nouns by *-ta*.

(57) (K'abeena)

kook-ii-ha      gizza      aassiyoommi.  
 blind.man-DAT-m    money:ACC    give:PV:1s  
 'I gave money to a blind man.'

(58) (K'abeena)

saati      muummi-se    muluul-oo-ta    mizaahu-se    hangaritaa.  
 cow.NOM    head:GEN-her    leech-DAT-f    rib:ACC.her    scratch:IPV:3sf  
 'The cow scratches her rib because of a leech on her head.'

Note that *-ha* and *-ta* cannot be considered case markers here, for they do not occur with proper names in the dative.

(59) (K'abeena)

- a. imaam-oo  
 Imaam:m-DAT  
 'for Imaam'
- b. nafiis-aa  
 Nafisa:f.-DAT  
 'for Nafisa'

This means that dative is marked by the long vowels only, and the morphemes *-ha* and *-ta* thus can only be gender markers. In fact, these gender markers are also attested in the instrumental and in the locative when a definite or a possessive marker is suffixed. These facts clearly indicate that the morphemes *-ha* and *-ta* are basically gender markers.

In copula clauses these morphemes are suffixed to the predicate. They agree in gender with the predicate and not with the subject (although of course in many cases the gender of the subject is identical to that of the predicate):

(60) (K'abeena)

- a. isu    c'uulo-ha.    (citation form: c'uulu)  
 he    child-PROCOP:m  
 'He is a boy.'
- b. ise    c'uule-ta.    (citation form: c'uuli-ta)  
 she    child-PROCOP:f  
 'She is a girl.'

- (61) (K'abeena)
- a. mubaaraki      rosisaanco-ha.  
 Mubarek:m      teacher-PROCOP:m  
 'Mubarek is a teacher.'
- b. haasha      milkaame-ta.  
 Hasha:f      beautiful-PROCOP:f  
 'Hasha is beautiful.'

When the predicate nominal is plural, the feminine gender marker *-ta* is used because plural nouns generally are treated grammatically as feminine:

- (62) (K'abeena)
- kuri 'ama      'ooso-ta.  
 they mother:GEN child-PROCOP:f  
 'They are brothers and sisters.'

Negation, possessive and tense markers follow the morphemes *-ha* and *-ta*, as shown in (63), (64) and (65), respectively:

- (63) (K'abeena)
- ku    c'iffitu      baa-ha-ba'.  
 this    pouring.in    right.way.to.do- PROCOP:m-NEG  
 'This (way of) pouring in is not the right way to do (it).'

- (64) (K'abeena)
- hikku    'ameetanu      mancu      'ana-ha-'i.  
 that      come.REL      man      father-PROCOP:m-my  
 'The man who is coming is my father.'

- (65) (K'abeena)
- bereta      lali      geboo      t'uma-ha-qqi.  
 yesterday    cattle    market    good-PROCOP:m-PAST  
 'Yesterday, the cattle market was good'

Example (65), which is in the past, clearly shows that the morpheme *-ha* and its allomorph *-ta* are not present tense copulas. In this respect K'abeena differs from all the other languages discussed in this paper.

The particle copula *-ti* is used when the predicate of the copula clause is a proper name, a personal pronoun, a *wh*-word, an adverb or a noun ending in *-e* or in *-o* (Crass 2005). It is also used when the predicate is marked with dative, instrumental, locative or ablative:

- (66) (K'abeena)
- a. 'ise    c'aaltoo-ti.  
 she    Chaltu-PARCOP  
 'She is Chaltu.'
- b. 'ii    kodati    teesoo-ti  
 my    turn      now-PARCOP  
 'My turn is now.'

## Zay

Leslau (1999) describes several morphemes as present tense copulas in Zay. These are *-nu*, *-u*, *-tä*, *-to*, *-t* and *-wo*. Meyer (2002), on the contrary, argues that none of these elements can be considered to be copulas in Zay. According to Leslau (1999: 55ff), *-nu* is used for the expression of quality and placed at the end of the sentence, *-tä* is used with nouns of relationships, and *-to* ~ *-t* is used in sentences in which possession is expressed by a genitive construction including a pronoun. For the other two morphemes, i.e. *-u* and *-wo*, Leslau claims that both are placed invariably, i.e. without any agreement marking, at the end of a copula clause. We exclude the element *-wo*, whose existence in the language cannot reliably be ascertained (cf. Meyer 2002). The element *-to* can be analyzed as consisting of two morphemes, *-tä* and *-u*. The occurrence of *-tä* or *-t(ä)* is phonologically conditioned, so that the two are allomorphs. We are left now with only the elements *-u* and *-nu*. Leslau's *-nu*, in fact, can be dissected into the two elements *-n* and *-u*. The morphemes *-n* and *-t(ä)* can also be considered as allomorphs, since their distribution is determined by the flexional class to which the respective noun belongs (cf. Meyer 2005: 217ff). We are thus left with three elements that can be put into two groups: *-n* and *-t(ä)* on the one hand, and *-u* on the other. The element *-u* can appear with both *-n* and *-t(ä)*, giving rise to variants such as (*-tä* + *-u*) *-to* and (*-n* + *-u*) *-nu*. The very fact that morphemes of both groups appear together suffices to disprove the claim that they represent different copulas.

Meyer (2002) argues that *-nu* should be analyzed as consisting of an obligatory focus marker *n-* and a declarative clause marker *-u*. Looking only at examples like (67) it is difficult to decide whether *-nu* is a single morpheme or consists of two different morphemes.

- (67) (Zay)  
 ihiiy gaarə-nu.  
 this house-nu  
 'This is a house.' (Meyer 2002: 1800)

However, the situation becomes clearer in example (68) where *-nu* breaks apart into two morphemes appearing in two different positions: *-n* and *-u*, the former appearing on the adjective 'big' and the latter on the head noun of the predicate. If the predicate has an additional modifier, *-n* moves further left so as to appear on the left-most modifier whereas *-u* always remains in its fixed position sentence-finally, as can be observed in (69).

- (68) (Zay)  
 ihiiy giddiirə-n gaar-u.  
 this big-n house-u  
 'This is a big house.' (Meyer 2002: 1800)

- (69) (Zay)  
 ihiiy bät'aamə-n giddiir gaar-u  
 this very-n big house-u  
 'This is a very big house.'  
 (Meyer 2002: 1800)

Besides the positional difference between *-n* and *-u*, the distribution of *-u* is further restricted by the type of the clause. Since *-u* is a declarative clause marker, it cannot appear in interrogative clauses:

- (70) (Zay)  
 a. ihiiy gaarə-n?  
 this house-n  
 'Is this a house?'  
 b. ihiiy giddiirə-n gaar?  
 this big-n house  
 'Is this a big house?'  
 (Meyer 2002: 1801)

Furthermore, we also find Leslau's so-called "copulas" *n* and *t* in verbal clauses.

- (71) (Zay)  
 it wot'i särətə-n-u.  
 she sauce made-n-DCM  
 'She prepared sauce.'  
 (Meyer 2002: 1804)

The morpheme *-n* in (71) cannot be considered a copula, since there is no copula function that it can be fulfilling. Example (71) expresses a perfective action in Zay. If the element *-n* were a present tense copula we ought not to find it in this context. Even in past tense copula clauses, we find the element *-n* along with the past tense auxiliary:

- (72) (Zay)  
 ihiiy gaar naarä-n-u.  
 this house was-n-DCM  
 'This was a house.'  
 (Meyer 2002: 1803)

Meyer (2002) argues that the morphemes *n* and *t* are actually assertive focus markers. They can be suffixed to any constituent of the sentence, which then gets a focus reading:

- (73) (Zay)  
 a. it wot'ii-n<sup>14</sup> särə-t-u.  
 she sauce-FOC made:PV-3sf-DCM  
 'She prepared SAUCE.'  
 b. ahu-n it wot'i särə-t-u.  
 now-FOC she sauce made:PV-3sf-DCM  
 'A MOMENT AGO, she prepared sauce.'  
 c. it-tä wot'i särə-t-u.  
 she-FOC sauce made:PV-3sf-DCM  
 'SHE prepared sauce.'  
 (Meyer 2002: 1804)

In (73a) the noun *wot'i* 'sauce' is in focus, in (73b) the adverbial phrase *ahu* 'now', and in (73c) the subject of the clause *it* 'she'.

<sup>14</sup> The morpheme *-n* triggers lengthening of the preceding vowel.

In closely related languages, particularly in Kistane and Dobbí, both Northern Gurage languages, so-called main verb markers occur (cf. e.g. Hetzron 1968, 1972, 1977, Goldenberg 1968) which are sensitive to polarity, i.e. these marker do not occur in negative clauses. The element *-u* in Zay, on the contrary, is not sensitive to polarity. It appears in negative clauses, too, but not in interrogative clauses:

(74) (Zay)

a. ihiiy unku gaar-u.  
 this NEG house-DCM  
 'This is not a house.'

b. ihiiy unku gaar?  
 this NEG house  
 'Is this not a house?'

(Meyer 2002: 1801)

In Girma (2003) the so-called main clause markers of Kistane and Dobbí are considered as portmanteau affixes that contain two features: polarity and (illocutionary) force, assuming force as a clause-type feature (cf. Poletto & Pollock 2000). In this regard the declarative marker *-u* in Zay differs from Kistane and Dobbí in that it expresses only illocutionary force and not polarity.

We have already shown that *-n* and *-t(ä)* are syntactic allomorphs. The element *-tä* appears in copula clauses where the predicate belongs to a special word class consisting of proper names, personal and demonstrative pronouns, the *wh*-words 'which' and 'who' and certain kinship terms, while *-n* appears elsewhere (cf. Meyer 2005: 198ff, Leslau 1999):

(75) (Zay)

a. ihiiy mammoo-too.  
 this Mammo-FOC:DCM  
 'This is Mammo.'

b. ihiiy gaarə-n-u.  
 this house-FOC-DCM  
 'This is a house.'

(Meyer 2002: 1803)

Based on the data it is clear that there is no present tense copula in Zay. This seems also to be the case with Silt'e, a language closely related to Zay which we discuss in the following section.

### *Silt'e*

Gutt (1997a) identifies three elements as copulas in present tense copula constructions, namely *-n*, *-ta* and *-ma*. The elements *-n* and *-ta* are in complementary distribution. As in Zay *-ta* appears with predicates that are personal pronouns and proper names, whereas *-n* is used in all other cases. The appearance of *-ma*, on the other hand, is strongly associated with pragmatics:



- (80) (Silt'e)  
 babari ya-qaanan-ku-y ihee-ta naar.  
 door REL-stand:PV-1s-DEF:m I-ta was:3sm  
 'It was me who was standing at the door.' (Gutt 1997a: 934)

In Silt'e the past tense copula is the verb *naar* 'was', whose cognate is also found in other Ethiosemitic languages. The proposed present tense "copulas" *n* and *t(a)* appear in examples (79) and (80) together with the explicit copula verb *naar* – a very strong argument against their being copulas. Furthermore, since Silt'e is an SOV language the position of the morpheme *n* in copula clauses is unexpected. If *n* were truly a copula, we might expect it to occur clause-finally in this SOV language. If a predicate consists of a head noun only, the morpheme *n* does indeed appear in final position, suffixed to the predicate. However, if the predicate consists of a modifier and a noun, the morpheme *n* is attached to the modifier:

- (81) (Silt'e)  
 addadd-ii zeegaa-n sab.  
 some-DEF:m poor-n man  
 'Some are poor people' (Gutt 1997b: 533)

If the predicate has more than one modifier, the morpheme *n* is attached to the left-most modifier. If the predicate nominal is determined by a following definite article or by a possessive suffix pronoun, or by both, the morpheme *n* again attaches to the leftmost constituent in the NP, i.e. it immediately follows the noun and precedes the determiners:<sup>15</sup>

- (82) (Silt'e)  
 likki-n-ee.  
 measure-n-my  
 'It is my measure/ size.' (Gutt 1997b: 512)

- (83) (Silt'e)  
 mutoot-in-ka-y.  
 die:INF-n-his-DEF:m  
 'He is going to die.' (lit. 'It is his dying.') (Gutt 1997b: 533)

Since the so-called present tense copulas *n* and *t* appear in both present and non-present nominal clauses, and since they can cooccur with an explicit copula verb, and since *n* does not exhibit clause-final ordering, we suggest that they cannot be considered as copulas. Their appearance is rather strongly associated with focus.

## DISCUSSION OF THE MORPHEMES *N* AND *T*

Ishetu (1989), on the one hand, and Bender (1986) and Bender & Mulugeta (1976), on the other hand, discuss the controversial status of the morpheme *-ti* in Oromo. Leslau (1999) claims the existence of several copulas in Zay, among them the morphemes *n* and *t(ä)* while Meyer (2002) considers these to be focus markers. Goldenberg (1976) claims that

there is a copula *t(t)* in Old Amharic, which he also postulates to be found in the Gurage languages Kistane, Dobbi, Silt'e, Zay and in the Cushitic language Sidaama. Crass (2005) describes the existence of a similar morpheme *-ti* in K'abeena. The morphemes *n* and *t* are thus very common in the languages in question. However, their actual status or function is controversial.

Goldenberg's (1976) description of *t(t)* as a present tense copula in Old Amharic is debatable and is based on a limited amount of data. Most of the examples Goldenberg presents involve cleft constructions. Moreover, the morpheme *t(t)* is often found together with the verbal copula *n*. If the morpheme *t(t)* were a present tense copula it should not cooccur with the present tense copula *nä-* (cf. Getachew 1983).

- (84) (Old Amharic)  
 yəhə-tt nə-w?<sup>16</sup>  
 this-*t* COP-3sm  
 'Is it (just) this?' (Getachew 1983: 167, also quoted in Goldenberg 1987: 79)

Furthermore, the morpheme *-t(t)* is also found in non-copula clauses:

- (85) (Old Amharic)  
 a. ... əne-tt agäba-w-allä-hu.  
     I-*tt* 1s[AgrS]:make.enter:IPV-3sm[AgrO]-AUXNP-1s[AgrS]  
     'would I let him in.' (Getachew 1983: 168, also quoted in Goldenberg 1987: 79)  
 b. əne-tt al-hu-t  
     I-*tt* say:PV-1s[AgrS]-3sm[AgrO]  
     'I said (it) to him.' (Getachew 1983: 167)

Since the clauses in (85) are verbal declarative sentences, no copula function can be attributed to the morpheme *t(t)*. Hence, we argue against Goldenberg (1976) in accordance with Getachew (1983) that the morpheme *t(t)* is not a copula in Old Amharic. It probably functions as a focus marker with pronouns, as can be concluded by comparison with the other Ethiosemitic languages.

According to Goldenberg (1968) there are two different morphemes functioning as copulas in Kistane. One is the morpheme *tt*, which is uninflected; the other is *n*, which inflects for person, number and gender like regular verbs in the perfective aspect. The morpheme *n* is the most common form of verbal copulas found in South-Ethiosemitic languages, as we have shown above. The morpheme *tt* occurs in sentences like:

<sup>15</sup> This morpheme order is identical to that of Zay (cf. Meyer 2002, 2005, and the above discussion of Zay).

<sup>16</sup> There is no language internal evidence for treating the morpheme *t(t)* as geminated consonant because the Amharic script does not mark gemination.

- (86) (Kistane)  
 y-əñña-tt bayy.  
 GEN-we-*t* son  
 'It is our son.' (Goldenberg 1987: 4)

- (87) (Kistane)  
 bä-zi-ttə-c' aynät.  
 in-this-*t*-SING type  
 'It is just in this manner.' (Ibid.)

In similar copula clauses the morpheme *tt* does not occur:

- (88) (Kistane)  
 yä-hayle-n abi.  
 GEN-Hayle-COP:3sm father  
 'He is Hayle's father.' (Ibid.)

However, Goldenberg's analysis of *tt* and *n* as copulas in Kistane is questionable, as can be shown by the same arguments already adduced for Zay and Silt'e. The copula *-n* in Kistane takes sentence-final position only if the predicate consists of a single noun. If a head noun is modified, the copula is attached to the left-most modifier, as can be seen from (88). This is unexpected if *-n* is considered to be a copula. Furthermore, although the above clauses represent similar syntactic constructions, they differ in their informational structures. Clauses (86) and (87) can be considered as having a focus reading whereas clause (88) is focus-neutral.

Just as in Old Amharic, the morpheme *t(t)* can occur together with the copula *n* in a single clause:

- (89) (Kistane)  
 kʷa-ttə-n.  
 she-*tt*-COP:3sm  
 'It is she.' (Ibid.)

As we can see from (89), the morpheme *tt* occurs together with the present tense copula and gives the construction a reading of contrastive focus. Therefore, it is doubtful that *tt* should be considered as a present tense particle copula. First, it is quite unusual that two copulas should cooccur in a single clause. Second, the morpheme *tt* adds an additional piece of information to the respective copula construction, namely focus. However, if *tt* is not a particle copula, the question arises what makes clauses (86) and (87) copula constructions? An explanation could be that a zero copula is involved, as in Silt'e or Zay. In fact, there are indeed cases where the appearance of the morpheme *n* is optional in copula clauses:

- (90) (Kistane)
- a. k<sup>w</sup>a-ttə-n.  
he-FOC-COP:3sm  
'It is he (not somebody else).'
- b. k<sup>w</sup>a-tt.  
he-FOC  
'It is he (not somebody else).'
- (Ibid.)

This distribution yields a further question in regard to the function of *n*. If it is a (verbal) copula, why does it not occur in examples (86) and (87)? A possible explanation could be that the element *n*, though it is often used in the function of a copula in Kistane, conveys an additional piece of information, namely to mark the clause for assertive focus. The morpheme *n* also may occur in verbal clauses. Here, however, its appearance is optional:

- (91) (Kistane)
- a. i. yə-mat'a-wə-n. = ii. yə-mat'a-w  
3sm-come:IPV-DCM-*n* 3sm-come:IPV-DCM  
'He comes.'
- b. i. matt'a-wə-n. = ii. matt'a-w  
come:PV:3sm-DCM-*n* come:PV:3sm-DCM  
'He came.'
- (Leslau 1992: 172)

According to Leslau (1992: 172) the morpheme *n* seen in (91) can appear with any verb. Although the morpheme *n* in (91) is phonologically identical to the copula *n* of the third person singular masculine, we cannot assume that they are synchronically identical in function. The copula agrees for person, number and gender with the subject (cf. Goldenberg 1968: 71), but the focus marker *n* does not.

In the above sections we saw that in Silt'e and Zay two different morphemes have been referred to in the literature as present tense copulas, namely *n* and *t(alä)*. In both languages these morphemes are in complementary distribution. The morpheme *t(alä)* usually occurs with pronouns, proper names and certain *wh*-words; the morpheme *n* with all other nouns. The same morphemes also exist in Wolane and Harari. Less frequently the morpheme *t(ä)* can occur in Gunnän-Gurage as well. Here it is uninflected and generally attaches to pronouns in predicate position:

- (92) (Muher)
- bä-hə-ttə-n?  
in-that-*t*-COP:3sm  
'Is it there?'
- (93) (Wolane)
- yihe-tä-n-ku.  
I-*tä*-COP-1s  
'It is me.'

In both of these examples the morpheme *t* cooccurs with the verbal copula *n*. The situation in Wolane differs from Silt'e and Zay because in Wolane the morpheme *-n* is used only as a copula and less frequent as an assertive focus marker. The element *t* in Wolane (cf. (93)), however, seems to have the same focus function as in Zay and Silt'e.

It seems extremely probable that the Wolane verbal copula *n* is connected diachronically to the focus marker *n* in Zay and Silt'e. In the latter two languages the focus marker agrees in person, number and gender with the subject of the sentence (as would be expected for a copula):

**Table 8 Conjugation of the morpheme *n* in Silt'e and Zay**

			Silt'e (Gutt 1997b: 532)	Zay (Meyer 2005: 292)
Sg.	1		-nku	-näh <sup>w</sup>
	2	m.	-nk	-näh(ä)
		f.	-nš	-näš(ä)
3	m.	-n	-n	
	f.	-nt	-nät	
Pl.	1		-nna	-nän
	2		-nkumu	-näh <sup>w</sup> m(ä)
	3		-niimu	-näm <sup>w</sup>

There is no major syntactic difference between the present tense copula constructions in Silt'e and Zay. The languages differ in two respects: (a) the element *-t(a/ä)* in Silt'e is restricted to proper names and personal pronouns (not demonstratives, question words and kinship terms as in Zay) and (b) the morphemes *n* and *t(a/ä)* are restricted to copula sentences in Silt'e.

Based on the assumption that the focus marker *n* and the verbal copula *n* represent the same morpheme diachronically, we thus find a continuum whose extremes are marked by the languages Zay and Wolane, which are closely related genetically. The morpheme *n* in nominal sentences is clearly a focus marker in Zay, and clearly a copula in Wolane. In the languages Kistane and Silt'e, it can fulfill both functions. Now the question arises in which direction the morpheme *n* developed, i.e. did a copula develop into a focus marker or vice

versa? Based on the above facts, it seems more likely that a focus marker has grammaticalized into a verbal copula in Silt'e, Kistane and Wolane.<sup>17</sup>

The morpheme *t* in Harari differs from its counterpart in all the other languages because it inflects for person, number and gender and is not restricted to certain predicate nominals. The morpheme *t*, therefore, represents a present tense verbal copula in Harari; it has the same function as the verbal copula *n* found in other Ethiosemitic languages (see Wagner 1997: 507). The morpheme *n*, however, also exists in Harari:

- (94) (Harari)
- |    |                                                        |       |        |                   |         |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------|-------|--------|-------------------|---------|
| a. | yittaawaqaazaal                                        | gaar  | ḥawaaz | sum-bee-n         | ta.     |
|    | 3sm:know:IPV:REL                                       | house | family | name-by- <i>n</i> | COP:3sm |
|    | 'It is by the family names that they know each other.' |       |        |                   |         |
- 
- |    |                                         |                 |         |  |  |
|----|-----------------------------------------|-----------------|---------|--|--|
| b. | tixitaatalaazaat                        | indooc-in       | te      |  |  |
|    | 3sf:supervise:IPV:REL                   | women- <i>n</i> | COP:3sf |  |  |
|    | 'Those who supervise it are the women.' |                 |         |  |  |
- (Wagner 1997: 507)

There are some basic differences between Harari and the other Ethiosemitic languages with a verbal copula discussed above. First, the elements *n* and *t* are either allomorphs in the above-discussed languages or *t* is restricted to certain word classes but not in Harari. In Harari these elements do not show any complementary distribution. As we can see from example (94) both morphemes may cooccur in a single clause. Second, in Harari, the appearance of the element *t* is restricted to present tense copula construction whereas *n* is not:

- (95) (Harari)
- |  |                             |                |         |
|--|-----------------------------|----------------|---------|
|  | imtiḥaan                    | lihim-in       | naara.  |
|  | examination:DEF             | easy- <i>n</i> | was:3sm |
|  | 'The examination was easy.' |                |         |
- (Wagner 1997: 507)

As we can see from examples (94) and (95) the element *n* is found in both past and present tense clauses while *t* is found only in present tense copula clauses. According to Wagner (1997) the morpheme *n* in Harari occurs only in affirmative matrix clauses. It is found neither in subordinate (cf. (96)) nor in negative clauses (cf. (97)):

- (96) (Harari)
- |  |                                |            |           |
|--|--------------------------------|------------|-----------|
|  | tumtu                          | zi-t-ayu   | qabiilaac |
|  | blacksmith                     | REL-COP-3p | tribe:Pl  |
|  | 'tribes which are blacksmiths' |            |           |
- (Wagner 1997: 507)
- 
- (97) (Harari)
- |  |                          |          |             |
|--|--------------------------|----------|-------------|
|  | zari                     | bajiiḥum | al-ta.      |
|  | grain:DEF                | much     | NEG-COP:3sm |
|  | 'The grain is not much.' |          |             |
- (Wagner 1997: 507)

<sup>17</sup> The grammaticalization of focus marker into a copula is quite seldom but attested, e.g. for Swahili (cf. McWhorter 1994).

The predicate copula *-ti* in K'abeena is almost identical in distribution to the morpheme *t* in Ethiosemitic languages. It is restricted to predicates consisting of proper names or pronouns. It does not inflect for either gender or case. The morpheme *-ti* also occurs in past tense sentences:

- (98) (K'abeena)  
 isu sommoo-ti-qqi.  
 he namesake-PARCOP-PAST  
 'He was my namesake.'

In K'abeena, too, it is not clear exactly what the function of *-ti* really is. This is also the case for *-ti* in Oromo, which has been considered in the literature to be either a copula (Ishetu 1989) or a genitive marker (Bender 1986 and Bender & Mulugeta 1976).

### CONCLUSION

Four types of copula have been identified in our data: verbal copulas (e.g. Amharic, Argobba, West-Gurage), pronoun copulas (Ge'ez, Tigre), particle copulas (e.g. K'abeena, Oromo) and zero copulas (Zay). While there are languages which have only a verbal, a pronoun or a zero copula, languages having only a particle copula do not occur. This may indicate that particle copulas represent a transient state in the development of certain morphemes into copulas. Furthermore, if a language has a verbal copula in the affirmative it uses a suppletive negated and inflected verb in the negative. In Ethiosemitic and in Oromo, languages with pronoun, particle and zero copulas also have an inflected negative particle copula in the negative. K'abeena and Harari are exceptions because they simply add a negative marker to the affirmative copula morpheme.

The data presented here show that the morphemes *n* and *t* occur in copula and focus constructions in all the languages in question. The base of the verbal copulas in Amharic, Argobba, Gunnän-Gurage and Wolane is an *n*; in Harari it is a *t*. The same morphemes are found as inflected focus markers in zero copula constructions in Zay and Silt'e. A morpheme *-ti* is used as a particle copula in K'abeena and probably in Oromo, and as a focus marker in Gurage languages and in Old Amharic.

The use of identical morphemes as copulas and focus markers in all these languages is quite intriguing. It strongly suggests that language contact may be an explanation for the existence and partly similar function of these morphemes in the different languages.

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