
Different Marking, Same System: Similarities in the Copular Constructions of Oromo, Geez and Amharic

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Abstract

In Oromo, copular constructions appear only as a juxtaposition of the subject and the predicate, or they show up with *-da* (in predicative and equative clauses) and *-ti* (in possessive and locative clauses). The presence/absence of *-da* and *-ti* depends on the length of final vowel of the predicate: they appear when final vowel is long, and disappear when the predicate ends in short vowels/consonants. In Geez, pronouns and prepositional copulas are used. The distribution of the pronoun and prepositional copulas is similar to that of Oromo in that the former are used in predicative/equative clauses while the latter in locative/possessive clauses. The use of the copulas in Geez is also optional like in Oromo. In Amharic, similarly, the copulas *näw* and *allä* are used in predicational/equative and locative/possessive clauses. However, in Amharic, the copular elements are not optional. Rather, there is nominative vs. accusative case alternation in the predicate/identity clauses. In this paper, I argue that the optional use of copular elements in Oromo and Geez as well as the case alternation in Amharic are exhibitions of a similar system: distinguishing between more permanent and less permanent/temporary predications, which could be a retained property from their Afroasiatic origin. This has wider implication that case alternation and variation in copular elements could be various strategies employed by languages for same purpose. Yet more extensive research on languages from different families is required.

Key words: [*copula, predicate, stage level and individual level predicates*]

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1. Introduction

Oromo (Afaan Oromoo as it is called by its speakers) is a Cushitic language spoken mainly in Ethiopia with some speakers in Kenya. Amharic and Geez are Semitic languages spoken in Ethiopia². The Semitic and the Cushitic language families are genetically related. They belong to Afroasaitic super family (Greenberg 1963, Diakonoff 1965, Bender 1976, Hayward 2000, Demeke 2018).

Copular constructions in each of these languages seem to be of different in nature. Oromo has copular particles whose presence and absence is dependent on the length of the final vowel of the predicate. Geez has pronoun and prepositional copulas which are optional. Amharic has copular verbs which are obligatory, but alternates nominative and accusative predicates. In this paper, I will argue that despite the difference in marking, all the three languages have an astonishingly similar system which also manifests in a number of languages and has been explained theoretically. Specifically, I show that different marking in each language involves a system of making a distinction between less permanent/temporary vs. more permanent predication, which is found in a number of languages and could be retention from the grammar of the proto-Afroasiatic.

The paper is organized as follows. In section 2, I discuss Oromo. In section 3, I discuss Geez. Section 4 focuses on Amharic. In section 5, I summarize the similarities between the copular constructions between the three languages and conclude the paper.

In each section, I argue based on data drawn from various sources (my intuition for Amharic, grammar books for Geez, native speakers and secondary sources for Oromo) that the presence and absence of copular elements in Geez and Oromo, as well as the nominative vs. accusative alternation in Amharic have a similar role. Based on this, I suggest that this could be a universal phenomenon; i.e., copular

² Actually, Geez does not have native speakers now. It is mainly the liturgical language of Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Churches. It has been mainly taught by traditional church schools and some universities.

variation and case alternation in copular constructions could be different marking strategies employed for the same purpose.

2. The copular system in Oromo

In Oromo, copular constructions show up with the particles *-da* (in predicative and equative clauses) and *-ti* (in possessive and locative clauses), or they appear only as a juxtaposition of the subject and the predicate (Kebede 1981). *-da* and *-ti* show up when the predicate ends in long vowel as in (1)-(4):

- (1) č'alaa-n ddeeraa- da
Chala-NOM tall.MASC.- COP³
'Chala is tall.'
- (2) č'áltuu-n barat-tuu- da
Chaltu-NOM tudent-FEM-COP
'Chaltu is a student.'
- (3) č'aalaa-n namaa amboo-ti
Chala-NOM man Ambo.GEN-COP
'Chala is a man from Ambo.' lit. 'Chala is Amboo's man.'
- (4) kun kitabaa koo-ti)
This book I.GEN-COP
'This is my book.'

The subject and the predicate are juxtaposed if the predicate ends in short vowels/consonants as in (5)-(7). In this case the use of *-da* and *-ti* is unacceptable:

- (5) č'alaa-n gurra-čča (*-da)
Chala-NOM black-MASC.
'Chala is black.'
- (6) kun bishani (*-da)
This water
'This is water.'

³ The glossing abbreviations used in this paper are found at the end of the article.

- (7) č'aalaa-n namaa harar (*-ti)
Chala-NOM man Harar (COP)
'Chala is a man from Harar.' lit. 'Chala is Harar's man.'

There is a continuous dispute over the nature and distribution of these particles⁴. The arguments forwarded so far primarily focus on two issues: (1) proposing a function/role for the copular particles, and (2) explaining why they show up with long final vowels and disappear with short final vowels. Accordingly, some consider them as predicative case markers (Banti 1988), many as copulas (Gragg 1976, Owens 1985, Bender 1986, Stroomer 1987, Kebede 1988, Ali & Zaborski 1990, Crass, Demeke, Meyer & Wetter 2005), and some others again as epenthetic elements inserted to support copular elements (Lloret-Romanyach 1988, Youssef 2019). The presence/absence of these particles, is then considered, as a mere phonological condition (Kebede 1981), others as determined by the nature of the copulas, i.e., low tone for Lloret-Romanyach (1988) and short vowels for Youssef (2019).

What is lacking in all the arguments made so far is to investigate the phenomena from the nature of the predicate; that is, if vowel length plays any role in the semantics of predicates in the language. Lloret (1988) is the only attempt to look in to the role of vowel length in Oromo. However, the description is mainly on the morphophonological level, not related to the semantics of the predicates and copular clauses. In this paper I will show the issue from this perspective and explain the role and distribution of the copular elements.

Closer look in to the nominal elements with short and long final vowels indicates that vowel length in Oromo plays a central role in determining the semantics of nominal predicates, particularly indicating whether they are inherent or non-inherent (contingent) predicates.

By inherent and non-inherent (contingent) predicates, I refer the reader to Asratie (2014a: 186-87) for detailed discussion on this. Inherent and non-

⁴ In fact, the disagreement is not only on the explanation of these elements. There is also disagreement on the number of the particles. For example, Kebede (1981) included *-tu* and *miti* along with *-da* and *-ti*. Youssef (2019) accepted *-hi* and rejected *-tu* and *miti*. In this paper I consider only those particles which are accepted universally.

inherent predicates differ in terms of the duration that the property attributed by the predicate covers. Consider the following examples from Asratie (2014a: 186):

- (8) John is a human being
- (9) John is a man.

The predicate *a human being* is an inherent property of John. John has been and will be a human being throughout his life time. The predicate *a man*, on the other hand, is not inherent to John. John becomes *a man* after reaching some stage in his life time. Inherent vs. non-inherent predicates should not be confused with the widely known stage level vs. individual level predicates stated in Milsark (1974), Carlson (1977), Diesing (1992), Kratzer (1995), and Krifka et al (1995). Both *a man* and *a human being* in the above examples are individual level predicates, but only one of them is inherent. In the same token stage level predicates can also be inherent as follows.

- (10) My room is dark during summer and bright during winter.

In Oromo, predicates which end with short vowel are inherent predicates, as opposed to predicates which end with long vowels that are non-inherent predicates. The use and distribution of copular elements can better be explained from this interesting fact. I will show this in details in the sections that follow.

In 2.1, I present the evidence that final vowel length indicates the semantics of the predicates (whether they denote inherent or acquired properties). In 2.2, I show how the function and distribution of copular elements in Oromo copular constructions can be deduced from the discussion we saw in section 2.1.

2.1. The semantics of vowel length in Oromo

The first piece of evidence which shows that vowel length indicates the semantics of nominal predicates is found in the vowel length alternation, which is observed in a number of words. The following is a list of words collected from Gutama (2004).

| Words with short final vowels | Meaning | Words with long final vowels | Meaning |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| c'ooma | fat (substance) | c'oomaa | fat (One which acquires fat) |
| daafa | despair, panic | daafaa | frightened (one who acquires panic) |
| dfuma | end | dfumaa | tattered, finished |
| ga'a | destination | ga'aa | enough |
| guba | arson | gubaa | brand, branding iron |
| ifsa | explanation, statement | ifsa | light, lump |
| himata | litigation | himataa | plaintiff |
| jarjara | hastiness | jarjaraa | hasty |
| leet'a | blank | Leet'aa | bare, lonely |
| k'arama | Intelligence, sharpness | k'aramaa | intelligent, sharp |
| ido | plus | idoo | additional |
| imima | secretion | imimaa | permeable |
| bita | problematic, awkward | bitaa | left, awkward |
| barsisa | teaching | barsisaa | teacher |
| dfala | generation | dfalaa | female, (bringer, bearer of generation) |
| dargaggessa a | young | dargaggeessaa | teenager |

Table 1: List of words with short and long vowel alternation

At first glance the difference between words with short and long final vowels (the words in the right and left column) seem to be that of nouns vs. adjectives. i.e., vowel length apparently seems to change nouns to adjectives. However, this is not the case. For example both *guba* and *gubaa*, as well as *barsisa* and *barsisaa* are nouns. Closer observation on the semantics of these predicates rather witnesses another vivid semantic difference. The nominal with short final vowels (those on the left) denote inherent property; while the nominals with long final vowels (those in the right) denote non-inherent property. Take for example the first two nominals *c'ooma* and *c'oomaa*. The first is the name of the substance. For the substance, fatness is inherent. *c'oomaa*, on the other hand, denotes entities which contingently acquire the property of fatness. This distinction holds true for all the vowel alternations in the list. All nominal predicates with short final vowels are inherent predicates as opposed to those with long final vowels which are non-inherent.

The second evidence comes from nominals which denote developmental stages. Consider the nominal in the two columns below:

| (11) Short vowel | | long vowels | |
|------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| a. | ilma 'son' | muc'aa | 'baby boy' |
| b. | intala 'daughter' | muc'ayyoo | 'baby girl' |
| c. | durba 'girl, virgin' | k'arree | 'virgin, girl' |
| d. | <u>gurbaa</u> 'lad, guy' | k'eerroo | 'bachelor, boy' |
| e. | nama 'human' | | |
| f. | haada 'mother, owner' | harmee | 'mother, feeder' |
| g. | dīra 'human male' | niitii | 'human female' |
| h. | | dargaggoo ⁵ | 'youth (PL?)' |
| i. | | dargaggeettii | 'young woman' |
| j. | | dullaccaa | 'elderly man' |
| k. | | dullattii | 'elderly woman' |

The nominals in the two columns in the above examples end with short and long vowels. Most of the words in the list have similar meaning. Yet, they differ in terms of being inherent vs. non-inherent. The words with long final vowels are non-inherent. They are attained at a particular level due to age/role. Those which end with short vowels, on the other hand, are inherent.

⁵ For the similar word *dargaggeessa* vs. *daragaggeessaa*, see: table 1.

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enter a location relationship. The lengthening of the final vowels of nominals due to their relation (their role as a possessor and location in the syntax) is thus indicative of vowel length in marking acquired/non-inherent predicates.

Similarly, benefactive and instrumental relations are also other grammatical relations which are marked in the grammar. Unlike the possessive and the locative (from) relations, they involve postpositions. Yet, if the final vowel of the nominal is short, final vowel lengthening is obligatory before the postpositions are added:

(14) benefactive

a. kenna intalaaf binne (cf. intala= girl)

present girl.BEN buy.PERF-1PLS

'We bought a present to the girl.'

b. kenna gurbaaf bin-ne (cf. gurbaa= boy)

present boy.BEN buy.PERF.1PLS

'We bought a present to the boy.'

c. kenna intala kan beeknaaf binne (cf. beekna= we know)

present girl that know.IMPERF.1PLS.BEN buy.PERF-1PLS

'We bought a present for the girl that we know.'

(15) Instrumental

a. kana harkaan gode (cf. harka= hand)

this.acc hand.INST do.perf.3MSG

'He did this with hand.'

b. kana haaduun gode (cf. haadu= knife)

this.ACC knif.INST do.PERF.3MSG

'He did this with knife.'

(Lloret-Romanyach 1988:125)

The second evidence from the morphophonemics of the language also provides another undeniable support. Oromo does not allow long vowels in two successive syllables unless the second syllable is word final (Lloret-Romanyach, 1988: 79). Consequently, the affixation process involves a rule known as vowel *length dissimilation* (Gragg 1976, Lloret-Romanyach 1988), by which derivational and inflectional affixes exhibit vowel length alternation depending on the length of the preceding vowel.

- | | | | |
|----------------------|---------|---------------|-----------------------------|
| (16) Singular | | plural | (cf.: plural marker: -oota) |
| a. nama | 'man' | namoota | 'men' |
| b. gaala | 'camel' | gaalota | 'camels' |
-
- | | | | |
|----------------------|----------|----------|----------------------------|
| (17) verb formatives | | | (cf.: verb formative:-oom) |
| a. lugna | 'coward' | lugnoom | 'be coward' |
| b. afšaala | 'kind' | afšaalom | 'be kind' |
- (Lloret-Romanyach, 1988: 77-78):

Interestingly, this vowel dissimilation does not affect final vowels:

- (18) Obboleē - ttiii= obboleettii
sister

The reason why final vowels are exempted from this kind of morphophonemic alternation (vowel length dissimilation) could not be anything other than the role of final vowel length in the semantics of the nominal. If vowel dissimilation appeared here, it would change the nature of the predicate unnecessarily.

Generally, the pieces of evidence which we saw so far provide a strong witness about the role of final vowel length in the semantics of predicates in the language. That is predicates with long final vowels are inherent while predicates with short final vowels are inherent.

Of course, there are some words which present an apparent challenge to this claim. The words below seem to denote inherent properties. Yet they are marked with long final vowels:

- (19) a. ableē 'kitchen knife'
 b. waangoō 'fox'

However, we should not forget about the possibility that there could be some ambiguous predicates. That is, the possibility that such predicates could be conceived as being non-inherent is not out of choice. *ableē* can be denoting the instrumental and *waangoō* denoting the animal as having some kind of acquired role like an attacker rather than mere animal. But this needs further investigation⁶.

⁶ An anonymous reviewer also provides me with words with long vowel endings such as *garbuu* 'barley', *k'amadii* 'wheat', *farsoo* 'ale, local beer', *saree* 'dog' and *dadaa* 'butter'

Generally, depending on the final vowel length, nominals in Oromo can be classified under two large semantic groups: those that end in short vowels (inherent predicates) and those that end in long vowels (non-inherent predicates). In addition to final vowel marking in the lexicon, final vowel lengthening occurs in the morphosyntax/ morphophonemics when nominals enter into grammatical relations and acquire new roles/become non-inherent predicates.

2.2. Back to the copular system

As we saw earlier, the copular constructions in Oromo vary depending on the final vowel of the predicate. If the final vowel of the predicate ends in a short vowel, no additional element is added. The subject and the predicate simply juxtapose as in (20)-(22). If the final vowel of the predicate is long, two particles, namely *-da* and *-ti* are suffixed to the predicate as in (23)-(26):

(20) Č'alaa-n gurraa-ČČa (*-da)
Chala-NOM black-MASC.(COP)
'Chala is black.'

(21) kun bishani (*-da)
This water
'This is water.'

(22) Č'aalaa-n nama harar (*-ti)
Chala-NOM man Harar (COP)
'Chala is a man from Harar' lit. 'Chala is Harar's man'

(23) Č'alaa-n deeraa- da⁷
Chala.NOM tall-MASC - COP
'Chala is tall.'

(24) Čáltuu-n barat-tuu- da
Chaltu.NOM tudent-FEM-COP
'Chaltu is a student.'

(25) Č'aalaa-n nama amboo-ti
Chala-NOM man Ambo.GEN-COP
'Chala is a man from Ambo', lit. 'Chala is Amboo'ss man'

which he assumes are unlikely to represent acquired property. Indeed, the issue needs further research.

⁷ One should not hastily generalize that adjectives of color end in short vowels while adjectives of size end in long vowels based on gurračča 'black' vs. deeraa' tall'.

- (26) Kun kitaba koo(-ti)
 This book I.GEN-COP
 ‘This is my book.’

Given that final vowel length plays a central role in indicating the semantics of the nominal, it goes without saying that the role of the particles *-da* and *-ti* is related to the semantics of the predicate. If the predicates have short final vowels, they are inherent. In this case, the copular particles play no role. The juxtaposition of the subject and the predicate by itself is enough. When the predicate ends in long vowels, on the other hand, they are acquired predicates. The juxtaposition of the subject and the predicate in this case is not enough. Thus, the copular particles are sought.

What do the copular particles do? There are two options for this. The first is to assume that they change the predicates in to short final voweled ones. The second is to assume that they change, not the predicate, but the predication relationship. If we follow the first option, the addition of the particles would be a word formation process. This would lead us to consider the particles as affixes. But, the particles are different from real affixes in that they take phrasal hosts. They are rather clitic elements. Secondly, if the role of these particles were to change the nature of the predicate, their role would have been the same as that of vowel length, and that they would have been unnecessary. The most viable option is that they are copular particles which play a role in changing the predication relationship in to more individual level. If these particles were not added, the clause would not have been an individual level reading. It would rather have been a stage level reading. However, stage level reading in Oromo does not involve copula construction. It is expressed in verbal constructions. Typical stage level copular constructions such as *I am sick*, *I am tired*, *I am hungry* all involve verbal clauses in Oromo as demonstrated by the following examples.

- (27) a. dukkubsadēera
 be. sick.PERF.AUX
 ‘I am sick.’
- b. Ani dadābeera
 I be. tired.PERF.AUX
 ‘I am tired.’

- c. beela'eera
be.hungry. PERF.AUX
'I AM HUNGRY.'

Copular constructions in Oromo are sought to express only individual level predication. To bring the individual level reading, support from the particles is required only for predicates that end in long vowels. For those that end in short vowels the juxtaposition alone is enough to bring such a reading.

This is not a system unique to Oromo. As I will discuss shortly, a system similar to this is also attested in other Ethiopian languages: Geez and Amharic to which I will return back in the next sections.

3. The copular system in Geez

Copular constructions in Geez exhibit two types of clauses like that of Oromo. The first juxtapose of the subject and the predicate. The second involve copular elements. The copular elements also differ along the predication/identity vs. possessive/locative line similar to that of Oromo. Unlike the copular particles in Oromo, however, the copular elements in Geez are pronoun copulas for predicative and identity clauses and prepositional copulas for locative and possessive clauses (Teklemariam 1899, Dillmann 1907, Kifle 1948, Fenta 1986, Demeke 2007, Asratie 2014a):

- (28) a. mämhir/näwwiha p'awlos
teacher/tall Paul
'Paul is/was a teacher/tall.'
- b. igzi?abher misle-ki
God with-2FM_{GEN}
'God is with you.'
- (29) a. antimu mämhir-an/ näwwiha-n/ wistä bet antimu
you.MPL teacher-PL/ tall-PL/inside house you.MPL
'You guys are/were teachers/ tall/ at home.'
- b. b-o maj wist'ä bahr
in-3MSG.GEN water inside sea
'There is/was water in a sea.'

Whether the presence and absence of a pronoun and prepositional copulas in Geez has a semantic effect similar to Oromo is not easy to prove as we do not

have native intuition for the language which has ceased to be spoken. Yet as argued in Asratie (2014a) at length there is ample evidence which suggest so. One of these examples, is the presence of similar distinction in other related Semitic languages like Hebrew. Greenberg (2002: 269), citing Bendavid (1971), notes that there is a semantic distinction in Hebrew depending on the presence and absence of the pronominal copula. For example, (30)a expresses the notion that the sky in general is blue while (30)b is interpreted as the sky is blue now:

- (30) a. ha-šamayim hem kxulim
the-sky they blue
'The sky is generally blue/blue by its nature.'
- b. ha-šamayim kxulim
the-sky blue
'The sky is blue now/today.'

The distribution of copula-less clauses as opposed to clauses with pronominal and prepositional copulas in Geez written documents like in the bible suggests a similar distinction also exists in Geez. Compare the following:

- (31) a. rak'u-yä ana
naked-1SGPOSS I
'I am naked.'
- c. bā-k'ādami k'al wi?tu
at-beginning word he
'At the beginning it is/was a word.'

Being naked is a stage level or an acquired level property. Thus, (31)a comes without a copula. God's property is eternal. It is an individual level property. Thus (31)b comes with pronoun copula⁸.

⁸ Stage levels vs. individual level predications do not always correspond to acquire vs. inherent predications. Stage level can be inherent (example (10)) and individual levels can be acquired ናሁ አቡነ አረጋዊ ውሳቱ (Now our father is old). What is true rather is that the difference between the two pairs involve duration. Stage and acquired properties denote less durable properties than inherent and individual level ones. Pronoun and prepositional copulas are sought to bring the predication more durable.

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Moreover, Generic and identity clauses in Geez obligatorily require pronoun and prepositional copulas. The reason why the copulas are obligatory here is that the clauses cannot be interpreted as stage level:

- (32) a. nämr *(wi?tu) arwe
tiger he wild
'Tiger is wild.'
- b. ana *(wi?tu) bīrhanu lä-ʔalām
I he light-3MSG.GEN to-world
'I am the light to the world.'

Another trace of undeniable evidence to this is also found in Dillmann (1907: 498) as can be learned from the following example:

- (33) a. .ismä räḥab yi?ti midr k'idme-homu
for empty she land before-3MPLGEN
'FOR THE LAND BEFORE THEM IS SPACIOUS.' (THE LAND IS GENERALLY SPACIOUS)
- b. .ismä räḥab midr k'idme-homu
for empty land before-3MPLGEN
'FOR THE LAND BEFORE THEM IS SPACIOUS.' (THE LAND IS SPACIOUS FOR THEM)

What can be concluded from Geez copular constructions is that the pronoun and prepositional copulas are associated with an inherent predication or individual level predication similar to the copular particles in Oromo. The difference between Oromo and Geez is in the copula-less clauses. Copula-less clauses in Geez have stage level reading unlike Oromo which reserves copular constructions only for individual level predication.

4. The copular construction in Amharic

Unlike Oromo and Geez, Amharic copular elements are verbs, and they are not optional (Goldenberg 1964, Haile 1974, Yimam 1987, Demeke and Meyer 2001, Demeke 2003 among others). Copular constructions obligatorily employ copular verbs. Parallel to Geez and Oromo, Amharic distinguishes between more permanent and temporary/stage level predications in copular clauses. But this involves alternating predicates between nominative (34) and accusative cases (35):

- (34) a. $l\dot{i}j\text{-o}\check{c}\check{c}\text{-u}$ $t\ddot{a}mari\text{-wo}\check{c}\check{c}$ /Ethiopiaw-yan n- \emptyset -aččäw(Nom)
 child-PL-DEF student-PL /Ethiopian-PL is-3MSS-3PLO
 ‘The children are students/Ethiopians.’
- b. $l\dot{i}j\text{-o}\check{c}\check{c}\text{-u}$ $t\ddot{a}mari\text{-wo}\check{c}\check{c}\text{-u}$ /Ethiopiaw-yan-u n- ϕ -aččäw
 child-PL-DEF student-PL-DEF/Ethiopian-PL-DEF is-3MSS-3PLO
 ‘The children are the students/the Ethiopians.’
- (35) a. $l\dot{i}j\text{-o}\check{c}\check{c}\text{-u}$ $t\ddot{a}mari\text{-wo}\check{c}\check{c}\text{-in}$ /rak’ut-aččäw-in n- ϕ -aččäw (Acc.)
 child-PL-DEF student -PL-ACC/naked-3PLGEN-ACC is-3MSS-3PLO
 ‘The children are just like the students/The children are naked.’
- c. $l\dot{i}j\text{-o}\check{c}\check{c}\text{-u}$ $t\ddot{a}mari\text{-wo}\check{c}\check{c}\text{-u}$ -n/Ethiopiaw-yan-u-n n- ϕ -aččäw
 child-PL-DEF student-PL-DEF-ACC/Ethiopian-PL-DEF-ACC is-3MSS-3PLO
 ‘The children are just like the students/the Ethiopians.’

When Predicates are marked nominative, they have the standard predicational interpretation which states either group membership or a property ascription:

- (36) a. $saba$ $t\ddot{a}mari$ /Ethiopiawi n- \emptyset -at
 Saba student /Ethiopian is-3MSS-3FSO
 ‘Saba is a student/Ethiopian.’
- b. $l\dot{i}j\text{-o}\check{c}\check{c}\text{-u}$ $t\ddot{a}mari\text{-o}\check{c}\check{c}$ /gobäz-očč n- ϕ -aččäw
 child-PL-DEF student -PL/clever-PL is-3MSS-3PLO
 ‘The children are students/clever.’

Copular clauses with two nominative DPs have the identity reading:

- (37) a. $Saba$ $t\ddot{a}mari\text{-wa}$ /Ethiopiawi-wa n- ϕ -at
 Saba student-DEF/Ethiopian-DEF is-3MSS-3MSO
 ‘Saba is the student/the Ethiopian.’
- c. Cicero Tully n-ä-w
 Cicero Tully is-3MSS-3MSO
 ‘Cicero is Tully.’

Predicates are obligatorily marked accusative when they are stage level APs:

- (38) a. $bunna\text{-w}$ $tikus\text{-u}^*(-n)$ n-ä-w
 coffee-DEF hot-3MSGEN-ACC is-3MSS-3MSO
 ‘The coffee is hot.’

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- b. lĭj-očč-u rak'ut-aččäw*(-n) n-ϕ-aččäw
 children-DEF naked-3PLGEN-ACC is-3ms_S-3PLO
'The children are naked.'
- c. iññä bado-accin*(-in) n-ä-n
 we empty-1PLGEN-ACC is-3MSS-1PLO
'We are empty' to mean 'We don't have anything.'

In NP and individual level AP predicates, accusative marking is possible, and it forces a stage level reading (cf. (39)a&b, (40)a&b):

- (39) a. lĭj-očč-u tāmari-očč-n n-ϕ-aččäw
 child-PL-DEF student-PL-ACC is-3MSS-3PLO
'The children are just like students.' (They are not real students).
- b. lĭj-očč-u tāmari-očč n-ϕ-aččäw
 child-PL-DEF student-PL is-3MSS-3PLO
'The children are students.' (They are real students).
- (40) a. Johannīs inna Saba Ethiopiaw-yan-in n-ϕ-aččäw
 John and Saba Ethiopian-PL-ACC is-3MSS-3PLO
'John and Saba are just like Ethiopian.' (They are not real Ethiopian citizens.)
- b. Johannīs ina saba Ethiopiaw-yan n-ϕ-aččäw
 John and Saba Ethiopian-PL is-3MSS-3PLO
'John and Saba are Ethiopian.' (They are real Ethiopian citizens.)

The difference between (39)a and (39)b is that while the children are real students in the later, they are not in the former. In (39)a, the children are said to be students not because they are real students, but because they accidentally/at this particular stage show the properties associated with students. Similarly, (40)a and (40)b are different in that *John* and *Saba* are Ethiopian citizens in the former, but they are not in the latter. In the latter case, they are said to be Ethiopia because they behave so on the spot.

Copular clauses which have accusative DP predicates are also different from clauses which have nominative DP predicates in that the later state an identity in which there is only one referent with two identifications while the former state a 'just like' relation in which there are two referents with the same property. Suppose one of us says the clauses in (41) to the readers of this paper. (41)a means that the readers and the students refer to the same

individuals. This is false since it is not the case in reality. (41)b means that the readers and the students show identical properties to the extent that they look almost the same. This can be true since the readers may behave in the same way as one's students, for example, in terms of the way they sit and the way they take notes. Similarly, (42)a is false since Paris and Rome are different cities. (42)b on the other hand can be true if the two cities behave the same way in some respects, say their architecture or beauty for example:

- | | | | | |
|---------|----------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|-------|
| (41) a. | tāmari-wočč-e | n- ϕ -aččihu | False | |
| | student-PL-1SGEN | is-3MSS-2PLO | | |
| | 'You are my students.' | | | |
| b. | tāmari-wočč-e-n | n- ϕ -aččihu | May be true | |
| | student-pl-1SGEN-ACC | is-3MSS-2PLO | | |
| | 'You are just like my students.' | | | |
| (42) a. | Paris | Rome | n- ϕ -at | False |
| | paris | rom | is-3MSS-3FSO | |
| | 'Paris is Rome.' | | | |
| b. | Paris | Rome-nn- ϕ -at | May be true | |
| | Paris | rom-ACC | is-3MSS-3FSO | |
| | 'Paris is just like Rome.' | | | |

Generally, the nominative vs. accusative alternation in the predicates of Amharic copular constructions forces a more permanent/durable vs. temporary reading similar to that of the use of copular elements in Oromo and Geez. This is suggesting a very interesting parallelism between the three languages.

5. Concluding remarks

Although the mechanisms employed by the languages differ, the observations we saw so far witness one truth: all the three languages employ a system to separate more permanent and durable predication on the one hand and less permanent and temporary predication on the other hand in their copular constructions.

Amharic and Oromo use predicate alternation to distinguish more permanent vs. less permanent predication. Oromo uses final vowel alternation to

distinguish between inherent/more permanent and acquired/less permanent predicates. As copular constructions in the languages are sought to express only more permanent predication, copular particles are used to support the less permanent predicates to have more permanent reading. Amharic uses nominative vs. accusative alternation to distinguish between more permanent and less permanent readings in its copular constructions; that is, nominative predicates express more permanent predication while accusative predicates express less permanent predication.

On the other hand, Oromo and Geez employ optional use of copular elements. The role of Oromo copular particles *-da* and *-ti* is similar to that of pronouns and prepositional copulas in Geez. In both languages, the use of the copular elements is associated with bringing more permanent reading for the predication.

This phenomenon is not unique to these three languages. Two types of semantic differences, namely less permanent (stage level) and more permanent (individual level) distinctions, usually associated with presence/absence of a copula, different copular elements or different predicate markings (case or any other form of marking) exist in a number of languages throughout the world including Arabic (Mouchaweh 1986, Edwards 2006), Hebrew (Doron 1983, Rapoport 1987), some Germanic languages (Maling and Sprouse 1995), Russian (Pereltsvaig 2001, Bailyn 2001, Matushansky 2008), Scottish Gaelic (Adger and Ramchand 2003), Slavic Languages (Richardson 2007), Polish (Citko 2008), Dene language (Welch 2021) and other languages (Comrie 1997).

Theoretically speaking, various proposals have been forwarded by different scholars to explain the phenomena particularly with in the generative linguistics (Doron 1983, Rapoport 1987, Maling and Sprouse 1995, Comrie 1997, Pereltsvaig 2001, 2002, 2008, Bailyn 2001, Adger and Ramchand 2003, Edwards 2006, Citko 2008, Matshansky 2008, Richardson 2007, Asratie 2014a, 2014b, Welch 2021). The various proposals usually tend to argue for the presence of a functional head in less permanent copular clauses. This functional head is assumed to be (1) headed by the copular elements used in such clauses, (2) responsible for the case marking of predicates, and (3) responsible to bring evenitive (less permanent/stage level) readings as

opposed to individual level/more permanent readings of copular clauses. Viewed from this theoretical perspective, the syntactic analysis of Amharic, Geez and Oromo copular clauses could not be different from the above analysis.

Whichever the analysis be, the presence of the system of distinguishing between more permanent and less permanent readings in copular constructions in all the three languages, as well as in Arabic and Hebrew as mentioned above, is a witness that this was part of the proto-Afroasiatic. Moreover, the finding suggests that case alternation and copular variation could be different manifestations of the same phenomena.

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Glossing Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|--------------------|
| 1 | First person |
| 2 | Second person |
| 3 | Third person |
| ACC | Accusative |
| AUX | Auxiliary |
| BEN | Benefactive |
| COP | Copula |
| FEM | Feminine |
| FSG | Feminine singular |
| GEN | Genitive |
| IMPERF | I imperfective |
| INST | Instrumental |
| MPL | Masculine plural |
| MSG | Masculine singular |
| NOM | Nominative |
| O | Object |
| PERF | Perfective |
| PL | Plural |
| POS | Possessive |
| S | Subject |