

COPULA CONSTRUCTIONS IN GƏ'ƏZ AND TIGRE

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1 INTRODUCTION

Ethiosemitic languages provide a number of interesting features with regard to copula constructions, which can be constructed without a copula morpheme, with a verbal copula, or with a pronoun copula. All these different realizations of a copula clause can even be observed in a single language, namely Amharic (South Ethiosemitic). Actually, Amharic is a language that uses a copula in most nominal clauses but we find no morpheme that can be referred to as a copula in embedded nominal clauses (cf. (1b)). This is also the case in so-called presentative constructions as shown in example (1a).

- (1) a) *mäs'haf-u yih-äw-[ill-ih]!* (Amharic)
book-DEF this-3smO-[APL-2msO]
'Here is the book for you'
- b) *man sänäf tāmari (*nāw) yi-mäsl-ih-all?*
who lazy student (COP:3sm) 3msS-seem-2msO-AUX:PRES
'Who do you think is the lazy student?'

This article will focus on main clause present tense copula constructions in the North Ethiosemitic languages Gə'əz (extinct) and Tigre (spoken). I consider all types of nominal clauses where no verbal element with its own semantic content is found as a copula clause. A copula is a verbal-expletive or a nominal-expletive which carries verbal features such as tense and subject agreement. Nominal clauses with no overt morphological copula morpheme are also considered to be copula constructions. The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 examines language data of present tense copula construction in Gə'əz and Tigre; section 3 discusses word order in copula constructions and provides possible explanations for word order variations from a derivational point of view; and section 4 presents the concluding remarks.¹

2 STRUCTURE OF COPULA CLAUSES IN GƏ'ƏZ AND TIGRE

2.1 Copula clauses in Gə'əz

In most nominal clauses Gə'əz does not have a verbal copula in the present tense. Affirmative present tense nominal clauses are constructed in two ways: either by using the nominative case form of the personal pronouns or by juxtaposing the subject and the predicate nominal without any marker.

¹ I would like to thank Thomas Belay for proofreading the manuscript and the editors for their comments on a former version of this article.

- (2) a) *daniel nābiy wiʔitu.* b) *daniel nābiy.*
 Daniel prophet 3sm:PROC Daniel prophet
 ‘Daniel is a prophet.’ ‘Daniel is a prophet.’
- (3) a) *sosna śānayit yiʔiti.* b) *sosna śānayit.*
 Sosna beautiful:f 3sf:PROC Sosna beautiful:f
 ‘Sosna is beautiful.’ ‘Sosna is beautiful.’ (Getachew n.d.: 8)

In examples (2b) and (3b) there is no copula, whereas in (2a) and (3a) the third person personal pronouns function as copula agreeing with the subject. In the literature, such pronouns are called “pronoun copulas” (cf. Doron 1986).

The exact semantic difference between the constructions with and without the pronoun copulas in the above examples is not clear since Gə‘əz ceased to be a spoken language sometime before the 10th century AD and we have, thus, to rely on written sources only. One of the possible differences that we can imagine is focus reading of the constructions involving a pronoun copula. In many instances, however, there seems to be no difference between the two types. Although focusing pieces of information is closely connected with pronoun copula constructions, not all of them have a focus reading. Focusing of a constituent is accompanied by moving this constituent followed by the pronoun copula into the clause-initial position, as in (4):

- (4) a) *?anä wiʔitu māmhir.*
 1s 3sm:PROC teacher
 ‘It is me who is a teacher’
- b) *?anti wiʔitu fiq-ä gännät.*
 2sf 3sm:PROC tree-CST Garden_of_Eden
 ‘It is you who are the tree of the Garden of Eden.’ (Getachew 1974: 149)

The personal pronouns *?anä* ‘I’ and *?anti* ‘you (sf)’ are focused in (4a) and (4b), respectively. The focus-neutral construction, i.e. the pragmatically unmarked order of constituents, would have been *Subject-Complement-PROC* as in the examples (2a) and (3a) (see also section 3 below). The focus-neutral counterpart constructions for the examples (4) are thus (5).

- (5) a) *?anä māmhir wiʔitu.*
 1s teacher 3sm:PROC
 ‘I am a teacher.’
- b) *?anti fiq-ä gännät wiʔitu.*
 2sf tree-CST Garden_of_Eden 3sm:PROC
 ‘You are the tree of the Garden of Eden.’ (Getachew 1974: 149)

A positional change of constituents within a copula clause matters also in copula constructions without a pronoun copula.

- (6) a) *dawit nigus.* b) *nigus dawit*
 Dawit king king Dawit
 ‘Dawit is a king’ ‘King Dawit’

- (7) a) *p'awlos mämhir.* b) *mämhir p'awlos*
 Paul teacher teacher Paul
 'Paul is a teacher' 'Teacher (i.e. an honorific title) Paul'

In examples (6a) and (7a) the nouns *nigus* 'king' and *mämhir* 'teacher' have a predicative reading, whereas in (6b) and (7b), respectively, the same nouns have an attributive reading (see below for further discussion).

In Gə'əz, the third person personal pronouns can function as copulas referring to subjects in the first or second person. Consider the following examples which are all taken from Getachew (n.d.).

- (8) a) *?anä wi?itu.* b) *?anä yi?iti.*
 1s 3sm:PROC 1s 3sf:PROC
 'It is me.' (lit. 'I am (m/f).') 'It is me (f).' (lit. 'I am (f).')
- (9) *?antä wi?itu.*
 2sm 3sm:PROC
 'It is you (sm).' (lit. 'You (sm) are.')
- (10) a) *?anti wi?itu.* b) *?anti yi?iti.*
 2sf 3sm:PROC 2sf 3sm:PROC
 'It is you (sf).' (lit. 'You (sf) are.')
- (11) *wi?itu wi?itu.*
 3sm 3sm:PROC
 'It is he.' (lit. 'He is.')
- (12) a) *yi?iti wi?itu.* b) *yi?iti yi?iti.*
 3sf 3sm:PROC 3sf 3sf:PROC
 'It is she.' (lit. 'She is.')

When the subject of the copula clause is plural, then the plural form of the third person pronoun must be used:²

- (13) *niḥnä ?imuntu.*
 1p 3pm:PROC
 'It is us.' (lit. 'We are.')
- (14) *?antimu ?imuntu.*
 2pm 3pm:PROC
 'It is you (pm).' (lit. 'You (pm) are.')
- (15) *?antin ?imantu.*
 2pf 3pm:PROC
 'It is you (pf).' (lit. 'You (pf) are.')

² In the third person plural two optional forms for the personal pronouns exist, namely *?imuntu* or *wi?itomu* 'they (pm)', and *?imantu* or *wi?iton* 'they (pf)'.

(16) *wiʔitomu ʔimuntu / wiʔitomu.*
 3pm 3pm:PROC
 'It is they (pm).' (lit. 'They (pm) are.')

(17) *wiʔiton ʔimantu / wiʔiton.*
 3pf 3pf:PROC
 'It is they (pf).' (lit. 'They (pf) are.')

In Gə'əz, every personal pronoun can function as a copula if it agrees with the subject. Consider example (18):³

(18) a) *ʔismä ʔanä(-hi) her ʔanä.*
 because 1s(-FOC) good 1s:PROC
 'Because I am good.' (St. Matthew 20, 15)

b) *wiʔitu mämhür wiʔitu.*
 3sm teacher 3sm:PROC
 'He is a teacher.' (Getachew 1974: 149)

c) *ʔantä wäld-iyä ʔantä.*
 2sm son-POSS:1s 2sm:PROC
 'You are my son.' (ibid.)

So far we have seen two distinct types of copula constructions in Gə'əz: with and without a copular morpheme. The copular morphemes are pronoun copulas with the following characteristic features: (a) every personal pronoun may act as a copula, if it is in full agreement with the subject, and (b) the third person personal pronouns may act as invariant copulas with various subjects.⁴ In the latter case, number agreement instead of person and gender is crucial. In generative linguistics, a category can be considered as defective if it lacks person agreement but not number (see, for instance, Chomsky 2000). Therefore, the most prominent agreement feature is assumed to be person but not number or gender. The Gə'əz data, however, do not support this assumption. The agreement hierarchy of the phi-features in Gə'əz is as follows:

number > gender > person

The three optional feature agreement realizations in Gə'əz are summarized in (19).

(19) a. full agreement for person, number and gender
 b. partial agreement for gender and number only (but not for person), and
 c. partial agreement for number only (but not for gender and person)

The past equivalent of the present tense copula constructions in Gə'əz is expressed by the inflected verb *näbär-* 'exist, live'. A negative present tense copula construction

³ The biblical examples throughout this work are taken from Dillman (1899) and Weninger (1993).

⁴ In Gafat, a recently extinct language, the 3sm personal pronoun functions as an invariant copula as in Gə'əz. But unlike Gə'əz, we do not find the other option, i.e. using all pronouns as copulas (cf. Leslau 1945).

is marked by the particle *?akko* ‘be not’. Note that besides pronoun copula or juxtaposition of subject and predicate nominal, Gə‘əz, like other Ethiosemitic languages, too, can use the verb *konä* ‘be, become’ for non-locative constructions and the verb-like morpheme *bo* ‘exist’ for locative constructions.

2.2 Copula clauses in Tigre

In Tigre,⁵ too, present tense nominal clauses are expressed by pronoun copulas or by juxtaposition as in Gə‘əz. However, there are some striking differences between Gə‘əz and Tigre. In Tigre, the pronoun copula must obligatorily occur in most present tense nominal clauses and must fully agree with the subject in affirmative and non-interrogative copula constructions. Consider example (20):

- (20) a) *?ana ?innas ?ana.* (Beni Amer Tigre)
 1s man 1s:PROC
 ‘I am a man.’
- b) *?anta ?innas ?anta.*
 2sm man 2sm:PROC
 ‘You (sm) are a man.’
- c) *?inti ?iseit ?inti.*
 2sf woman 2sf:PROC
 ‘You are a woman.’ (Beaton and Paul 1954: 18)

In (20) the subject and the pronoun copula are identical in shape. This is also the case with the first and second person plural pronouns.

- (21) a) *heena sub heena.*
 1p men 1p:PROC
 ‘We are men.’
- c) *?intum sub ?intum.*
 2pm men 2pm:PROC
 ‘You are men.’
- d. *?intin ?ans ?intin.*
 2pf women 2pf:PROC
 ‘You are women.’ (Beaton and Paul 1954: 18)

In the third person, plural and singular as well as feminine and masculine, we only find the final syllable of the corresponding pronouns as copula. They are encliticized to the preceding predicate nominal as shown in (22) and (23).

- (22) a) *heito ?innas-to.*
 3sm man-3sm:PROC
 ‘He is a man.’

⁵ Tigre has two main varieties: Beni Amir and Mansa’.

b) *heita ?iseit-ta.*

3sf woman-3sf:PROC

‘She is a woman.’

(Beaton and Paul 1954: 18)

(23) a) *hotom sub-tom.*

3pm men-3pm:PROC

‘They are men’

b) *heitan ?ans-tan.*

3pf women-3pf:PROC

‘They are women.’

(ibid.)

The third person pronoun copulas are prosodically incomplete. They are phonologically reduced forms of the corresponding personal pronouns. In this regard, third person pronoun copulas differ from the first and second person pronoun copulas, which are phonologically identical with their counterpart personal pronouns.

While the use of pronoun copulas in affirmative statements is obligatory, they are optional in yes-no questions as shown in (24).

(24) *?anta ?innas (?anta)?*

2sm man 2sm:PROC

(Beni Amer Tigre)

‘Are you a man?’

(Beaton and Paul 1954: 35)

Example (24) can also be regarded as a declarative sentence, especially when the pronoun copula appears. Interrogation in such types of clauses is marked by a rising intonation towards the end.

In negative equative clauses the pronoun copulas must occur:

(25) a) *?anta ?innas ?i-?anta.*

2sm man NEG-2sm:PROC

(Beni Amer Tigre)

‘You are not a man.’

(Beaton and Paul 1954: 35)

b) *?ana ?innas ?i-?ana.*

1s man NEG-1s:PROC

‘I am not a man’ (Beaton and Paul 1954: 35)

The difference between negative questions and negative statements is a matter of intonation; interrogation is marked by a rising intonation. Consequently, the examples in (25) can be understood as interrogatives if they are marked by a rising intonation. Consider (26) where a rising intonation is indicated by the question mark:

(26) a) *?anta ?innas ?i-?anta?*

2sm man NEG-2sm:PROC

(Beni Amer Tigre)

‘Are you not a man?’

b) *?ana ?innas ?i-?ana?*

1s man NEG-1s:PROC

‘Am I not a man?’

The negative marker is a prefix *?i-* that is attached directly to pronoun copulas. It is probably due to this fact that it is impossible to drop pronoun copulas in negative

interrogative copula clauses. On the other hand, the personal pronoun as subject nominal can be dropped in negative copula construction if the complement is suppressed as in (27).

- (27) a) *?i-?ana.* (Mansa‘ Tigre)
 NEG-1s:PROC
 ‘It is not me’ lit. ‘I am not’
- b) *?i-?inta.*
 NEG-2sm:PROC
 ‘It is not you (sm).’ (lit. ‘You (sm) are not.’) (Raz 1983: 46)

I argued that it is the subject personal pronoun that is dropped from constructions such as in (27) because when two pronouns occur, one as a subject and the other as a pronoun copula, it is the pronoun copula that can carry the negative marker,⁶ as seen in (25). In negative copula constructions, the negative marker is attached to the pronoun copulas, except when it refers to third person subjects which do not have the corresponding personal pronouns as copulas. Instead, an invariant verb *kon* which is most likely translated into English as ‘be’ or ‘become’ is used.

- (28) a) *heito ?innas ?i-kon.* (Beni Amer Tigre)
 3sm man NEG-be
 ‘He is not a man.’
- b) *heita ?iseit ?i-kon.*
 3sf woman NEG-be
 ‘She is not a woman.’ (Beaton and Paul 1954: 35)

It seems that the non-existence of the negative form of third person pronoun copulas is due to prosody. Recall that in affirmative third person constructions the copula is the final syllable of the corresponding personal pronoun, which is suffixed to the preceding predicate nominal. Since the third person pronoun copulas lack (lexical) stress, they cannot host another affix such as the negative marker *?i-*. Thus, the pronoun copula and the negative marker cannot form a prosodic word by themselves. The negative marker needs a complete prosodic element; hence, another strategy, namely the usage of a verb, is applied in negative copula expressions with third person subjects.

The above explanation may raise two major questions. Why does not the complete form of the personal pronoun appear as a copula instead of a verb? It is reasonable to ask this question here because all non-third person pronoun copulas in Tigre appear together with the negative marker. Further, in the genetically related language Gə‘əz, the complete form of the third person personal pronouns (and not only their last syllable as in Tigre) acts as a pronoun copula. The second question is: Why

⁶ In the work of Beaton and Paul (1954) the negative marker in Beni Amer Tigre is transcribed as the long vowel *i*. To the best of my knowledge, however, vowel length is not attested in any dialect of Tigre. I, therefore, transcribe the negative marker of Beni Amer dialect in the same way as the Mansa‘ dialect, recorded by Raz (1983).

cannot negation be realized attached to other constituents, say to subject, for instance?

I do not have a satisfactory answer for the first question, but I assume that it has to do with the parametric property of Tigre. As for the second question, I suggest that the negative marker is a “true” affix and, hence, needs to be attached to a prosodically complete element either in syntax or in the lexicon (cf. Chomsky 1993). This means that the attachment of the negative marker to its host is not a phonological process that takes place in a post-syntactic operation at the phonetic form layer. This has an implication for the assumption that it is the subject, and not the pronoun copula, that is dropped in clauses similar to (27). The obligatory appearance of a verbal copula with third person subjects strengthens this suggestion since the attachment of the negative marker to its host does not take place in the phonetic form layer.

3 COPULA CLAUSE AND ORDER OF CONSTITUENTS

The unmarked order of constituents in a verbal clause is VSO in Gə'əz but SOV in Tigre. In present tense copula constructions, however, Gə'əz and Tigre most frequently have the order *Subject–Predicate–PROC*, i.e. the pronoun copula occurs clause-finally.

As we have already seen in section two, negated present tense copula clauses in Tigre with a first or second person subject have the word order *Subject–Predicate–NEG–PROC*. This word order is identical to verbal clauses in Tigre. Since verbal and copula clauses in Tigre seem to follow the same syntactic patterns, I will limit myself to Gə'əz.

The most frequent word order in Gə'əz is *Subject–Predicate–PROC*, as we saw in section two. Another order of constituents, as shown in (29), is also attested.

- (29) c) *?anä wi?itu mämhir.*
 1s 3sm:PROC teacher
 ‘It is me who is a teacher. / I am a teacher.’ (Getachew 1974: 149)
- d. *?anti wi?itu fiḏ-ä gännät.*
 2sf 3sm:PROC tree-CST Garden_of_Eden
 ‘It is you who is the tree of the Garden of Eden / You are the tree of the Garden of Eden.’ (Getachew 1974: 149)

In (29) we have *Subject–PROC–Predicate* as the order of constituents, i.e. the pronoun copula does not occupy the sentence final position (at least in the phonetic form layer). The order *Subject–PROC–Predicate* seems pragmatically marked, i.e. when subject and pronoun copula are followed by the predicate nominal, the subject of the clause is emphasized. The copula at the end of a clause does not procure an emphatic (focus) reading to the subject as seen in examples (30a/c) versus and (30b/d), respectively.

- (30) a) *?anä mämhir wi?itu.*
 1s teacher 3sm:PROC
 ‘I am a teacher.’ (Getachew 1974: 149)
- b) *?anä wi?itu ?amlak-u lä-?abriham.*
 1s 3sm:PROC God-POSS:3sm DAT-Abraham
 ‘I am the God of Abraham.’ (Genesis 34, 21)
- c) *?anti fiq-ä gännät wi?itu.*
 2sf tree-CST Garden_of_Eden 3sm:PROC
 ‘You (sf) are the tree of the Garden of Eden.’ (Getachew 1974: 149)
- d) *zati yi?iti mas’haf-ä zikr-ä mulad-u*
 this:f 3sf:PROC book-CST commemoration-CST genealogy-POSS:3sm
lä-?adam.
 DAT-Adam
 ‘This is the book of the generations of Adam.’ (Genesis 5, 1)

The assumption that the S-PRED-PROC order in Gə‘əz is actually the unmarked order of constituents is supported by additional facts. When the pronoun copula is identical to the personal pronoun occurring as subject, then most commonly the pronoun copula occupies the clause-final position.⁷

- (31) a) *?anä mämhir ?anä.*
 1s teacher 1s:PROC
 ‘I am a teacher.’ (Getachew 1974: 149)
- b) *? ?anä ?anä mämhir.*
 1s 1s:PROC teacher
 ‘I am a teacher.’
- (32) *?ismä ?anä her ?anä.*
 because 1s good 1s:PROC
 ‘Because I am good’ (St. Matthew 20, 15)
- (33) a) *wi?itu mämhir wi?itu.*
 3sm teacher 3sm:PROC
 ‘He is a teacher.’
- b) *? wi?itu wi?itu mämhir.*
 3sm 3sm:PROC teacher
 ‘He is a teacher.’
- (34) a) *?antä wäld-iyä ?antä.*
 2sm son-POSS:1s 2sm:PROC
 ‘You are my son.’ (Getachew 1974: 149)

⁷ The question mark in the following and in any other Gə‘əz examples throughout this work means that there is no evidence for the grammaticality of the structures in question.

- b) ? *ʔantä* *ʔantä* *wäld-iyä.*
 2sm 2sm:PROC son-POSS:1s
 ‘You are my son.’

In constructions without a pronoun copula, ordering of subject and predicate nominal is crucial for their interpretation. Recall examples (6) and (7) above, where the position of the nouns *nīgus* ‘king’ and *māmhir* ‘teacher’ with regard to the subject either yields a predicative or an attributive reading. The predicative reading can only occur when they are preceded by another nominal. These data, too, are evidence for the assumption that the unmarked order of constituents in a copula clause in Gə‘əz is *Subject-Predicate-PROC*. Recall that, in Gə‘əz, the third person pronouns may act as “true” copulas being an alternative to other pronoun copulas. When this is the case, the position of these “true” pronoun copulas is usually clause-final, as seen in examples (8) to (17).⁸ If it is correct that the unmarked word order is *Subject-Predicate-PROC* in copula clauses, then the order *Subject-PROC-Predicate* must be the pragmatically marked order in Gə‘əz. Recall that, in copula constructions formed by juxtaposition, the predicate nominal must follow the subject. In negative copula clauses, however, we find the order *NEG-Predicate-Subject*. Consider the following examples from Getachew (n. d.: 7-8):

- (35) *ʔakko nīgus dawit.*
 NEG king Dawit
 ‘Dawit is not a king.’
- (36) *ʔakko śānayit sosna.*
 NEG beautiful:f Sosna
 ‘Sosna is not beautiful.’
- (37) *ʔakko śānayit sosna wä-sälome.*
 NEG beautiful:f Sosna and-Salome
 ‘Sosna and Salome are not beautiful.’

Although the translation given to the above examples (35) to (37) imply an unmarked reading, it seems that the order *NEG-Predicate-Subject* is pragmatically marked in Gə‘əz, i.e. the predicate nominal can be interpreted as emphatically focused. This suggestion seems to hold true because in verbal clauses, the order VSO has an unmarked reading and not (V)OS. The order *NEG-Subject-Predicate*, i.e. (V)SO as with verbs, is also broadly attested in negated present tense copula clauses:

- (38) *ʔakko dawit nīgus.*
 NEG Dawit king
 ‘Dawit is not a king.’

⁸ This is especially true if there is no predicate nominal involved.

- (39) *?akko sosna śānayit.*
 NEG Sosna beautiful:f
 ‘Sosna is not beautiful.’
- (40) *?akko sosna wā-sālome śānayit.*
 NEG Sosna and-Salome beautiful:f
 ‘Sosna and Salome are not beautiful.’

Note that here I have considered the invariant negative marker *?akko* as a copula because it is in complementary distribution with the pronoun copula.

- (41) *? ?akko nīgus dawit wi?itu.*
 NEG king Dawit 3sm:PROC
 ‘Dawit is not a King.’
- (42) *? ?akko śānayit sosna yi?iti.*
 NEG beautiful:f Sosna 3sf:PROC
 ‘Sosna is not beautiful’
- (43) *? ?akko śānayit sosna wā-sālome wi?iton.*
 NEG beautiful:f Sosna and-Salome 3pf:PROC
 ‘Sosna and Salome are not beautiful.’ (Getachew n. d.: 7-8)

The negative marker *?akko* does not co-occur with other ~~the~~ copulas such as the locative copula *bo* or the past tense copula *nābārā*. The negated form of *bo* is expressed by prefixing the negative marker *?al-* to it, yielding *?al-bo* ‘there is not’. The past tense copula *nābārā* is negated by prefixing the common negative marker *?i-* to it, as in *?i-nābārā* ‘he was not’.

4 DERIVATION OF COPULA CLAUSES IN GƏ‘ƏZ

In the above section, we have seen that the word order differs between verbal and copula clauses, and between affirmative and negative copula clauses in Gə‘əz. The pronoun copula occupies the clause-final position but the negative copula *?akko* occurs clause-initially. A verb, too, is usually found in the clause-initial position. This is also true for the past tense verbal copula *nābārā* and for the locative copula *bo*.

I assume that the order VSO in Gə‘əz is derived by moving the underlyingly clause-final verb to the head of a functional category. The other constituents either stay in-situ or move to the specifier position of the functional categories that are syntactically lower than the one in which the verb occurs at the phonetic form layer (cf. Girma 2003). It seems that the negative copula *?akko* occupies the clause-initial position by head movement in a similar way as verbs. However, in pronoun copula constructions it seems that there is no such movement. In other words, *?akko* behaves exactly like a verb, while pronoun copulas do not. This may suggest that the negative copula is a sort of verb. The difference between pronoun copula and the negative copula is, thus, a difference between being verb-like or not, or, more precisely, between having strong versus weak verbal features. The negative copula has strong verbal features whereas pronoun copulas do not. If we put this finding in

terms of the minimalist program (cf. Chomsky 1995), it means that the movement of the negative copula to a syntactically higher functional category is done in order to check its strong verb-features. A pronoun copula does not move to this position because it has only weak verb-features. This strengthens the principal idea of minimalism (cf. Chomsky 1995), which states that movement – covert or overt – is strongly associated with the strength and weakness of features. If we assume, as is widely done in the generative linguistic literature, that the order VSO is the result of verb movement to a functional category outside the domain of its argument structure, it is reasonable to suggest that all verbs in Gə'əz have strong verbal features, whereas all pronoun copulas have weak verbal features. Consequently, pronoun copulas remain in-situ; i.e. they do not leave the verb phrase shell in overt syntax.

5 CONCLUSION

Although Gə'əz and Tigre use pronouns as copulas, there are some interesting differences between these languages: While in Tigre the pronoun copula must obligatorily agree with the subject of the clause, this is not the case in Gə'əz. In Gə'əz, most frequently the 3sm personal pronoun is used as the copula.⁹ Although Gə'əz has VSO as the unmarked order of constituents in a verbal clause, it has together with Tigre the order *Subject-Predicate-PROC* in nominal clauses. In the case of clauses with copulas which are more verb-like than a pronoun copula – such as the negative copula *ʔakko*, the past tense copula *nābārā* and the locative copula *bo* – the order of constituents is the same as in verbal clauses, i.e. VSO. I explained this difference in constituent ordering by the minimalist program, which suggests that movement is strongly associated with the weakness and strength of features. According to this theory, a strong feature triggers overt movement whereas a weak feature does not. I have also suggested that the difference between pronoun copula and other copulas in Gə'əz resides in being or not being a verb. Every verb in Gə'əz can be regarded as having strong verbal features. Pronoun copulas, however, are rather taken as having weak verbal features or even as lacking basic verbal features. This is the reason why the negative copula and verbs in Gə'əz are found in a clause-initial position, but not pronoun copulas.

⁹ Note that the use of pronouns as copulas is not attested in other Ethiosemitic languages, with the exception of Gafat (cf. Leslau 1945).

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

? unclear grammatical status / undocumented form	NEG negative marker
1, 2, 3 person	O (accusative) object
APL applicative suffix	p plural
AUX:PRES present tense auxiliary	POSS possessive suffix
COP present tense copula	PRED predicate
CST construct state	PROC pronoun copula
DEF definite article	s singular
f feminine	S subject
m masculine	V verb

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