Article

Copula Constructions in Arbore[*]

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Abstract

This study provides a detailed analysis of copula constructions in one of the most endangered languages spoken in Ethiopia, Arbore. It is a Cushitic language spoken by about 7000 native speakers in the south-western part of Ethiopia closer to the border of Kenya around lake Chew Bahir. It has been noted that copula constructions in the affirmative employ what Curnow (2000) referred as a 'zero' copula construction strategy, in which a verbal or verb-like element is absent. Yet, the copula complement undergoes some changes depending on the characteristics of the terminating sound segment. If the noun terminates in a vowel, the copula complement remains unchanged. However, if it ends in a consonant, it takes the suffix **–a** or **–ta**. Unlike the affirmative, the verb-like element **maala** occurs in the negative copula constructions. It has been observed that the negative copula element is neither inflected for tense/aspect nor for grammatical person. Unlike the affirmative copula constructions, the negative one employs 'verbal' copula construction. This makes the language interesting typologically as it uses two different copula construction strategies, namely 'zero' and 'verbal' for affirmative and negative sentences respectively.

1   Introduction

This paper deals with copula constructions in Arbore. The study provides detailed analysis of the grammatical features of copula constructions in the language with specific examples. Arbore is one of the most endangered languages in Ethiopia and spoken by around 7000 people in the south-western part of the country bordering

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[*] This working paper is part of an effort to continuously make data and analysis available on Arbore, one of the endangered languages spoken in Ethiopia. Data for the study is collected from the native speakers of the language Shiferaw Boru and Arniro Arsha in Jinka town. I appreciate their kind help in providing me with data on their native language. In addition, I want to express my deepest gratitude to Prof. Hideyuki Inui of Yamguchi University for his usual and continued support to continue the study I am conducting on the language, including Binyam (2016).

Kenya near lake Chew Bahir. The majority of the speakers live in the Hamar Wereda, South Omo Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPR), but pockets of speakers are found in Oromiya Regional State as well.

According to Mous (2012), Arbore is an Eastern Cushitic language of the West-Omo-Tana language group. Arbore is one of the least known and highly endangered Cushitic languages in Ethiopia. There are not many previous linguistic investigations on Arbore, except a few articles and Hayward's sketch grammar of the language published in 1984. Although there are bits and pieces of discussions provided by Hayward (1984) regarding copula constructions in his study, the topic has not been discussed and investigated in its own right. Yet, there are some aspects of copula construction that have received particular attention by Hayward (1984). For example, copula constructions in the declarative mood are described. Concerning copula constructions in the declarative (i.e. both affirmative and negative), there is an overall agreement with the findings of this study and that of the analysis provided by Hayward (1984) with slight differences. However, the description and analysis provided in this study is quite different when it comes to copula construction in the interrogative mood.

The aim of this study is to fill the existing knowledge and information gap on linguistic research of the Arbore language by thoroughly investigation the syntactic and grammatical structure of copula constructions. As Arobre is one of the seriously endangered languages spoken in Ethiopia, this study hopefully contributes to expand our knowledge and understanding of the grammar of the language, and respond to the clarion call made by various linguists to document and describe the endangered language.

2   Copula Constructions in Arbore

This section presents the syntactic and grammatical analysis of copula construction is Arbore According to Curnow (2000:2) seminar study, copula constructions are employed in languages to express 'identity of two participants' and 'group membership or classification'. The study went on to suggest that, typologically, there are four types of strategies commonly employed to form copula constructions. These are:

(a) Verbal copula construction: the use of copula verb
(b) Particle copula construction: the use of an additional particle
(c) "Inflectional" copula construction: the copula complement is inflected

(d) "Zero" copula construction: the simple juxtaposition of copula subject and copula complement[1]

Curnow's (2000) typological observation in connection to the use of different copula construction formation strategies will be employed to explain the grammatical system of Arbore. In relation to this, it is worthwhile noting that a language may employ more than one strategy in different varieties of copula constructions.

2.1   Copula Constructions in the Affirmative, Declarative

Copula constructions in the affirmative, declarative in Arbore do not employ a verbal copula construction. The copula subject and the copula complement occur side by side devoid of any verbal element. This strategy is what is referred by Curnow (2000) as 'zero' copula construction. The copula subject occurs first followed by the complement. When the copula complement terminates in a vowel, there is no morpheme added to the complement. However, when the complement ends in a consonant, the morpheme **–a or –ta** is suffixed to the copula complement depending on the nature of the terminating consonant. This study agrees with Hayward (1984, 136) that all nouns or adjectives that terminate in the consonants **n, r** and **l** take the morpheme **–ta**, and the rest of them take **–a**. In other words, it is suggested in this study that **–a** and **–ta** are two allomorphs of the affirmative copula morpheme, which are phonologically conditioned. Hayward (1984) goes on and suggests that there are some instances in which the morpheme **–ɗa** occurs as an additional allomorph, but that could not be attested in this study.

To begin with, let us look at examples of constructions that have copula complements that terminate in a vowel.

(1)　　(a)　　**ʔusu**　　　　**erbore**

　　　　　　he　　　　　　Arbore

　　　　　　'He is Arbore.' (cf. erbore)

　　　　(b)　　**ʔese**　　　　**erbore**

　　　　　　she　　　　　　Arbore

　　　　　　'She is Arbore.' (cf. erbore)

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[1] It should be noted that the study is not taking these terms as "giving any particular theoretical status" other than mere elements in noun phrases, as in Curnow (2000: 2).

(c) **ʔoso**   **erbore**

    they   Arbore

    'They are Arbore.' (cf. erbore)

In the examples above, no morpheme is suffixed to the copula complement. The speakers of Arbore use the word **erbore** to refer to themselves and the word ends in a vowel. The copula subject and copula complement are simply juxtaposed to make the copula construction.

Additional examples of copula complements that terminate in a vowel in the affirmative, declarative are provided below.

(2) (a) **ʔese   gojto**

        She   Goyto

        'She is Goyto.' (cf. Goyto is a name of a girl)

    (b) **jehe   an^2 arŋiro**

        I   PVS   Argniro

        'I am Argniro.' (cf. Argniro is a name of boy)

In all the examples provided above in (1) and (2), the copula complements are V-final and no change is seen in their form when they serve as a copula complement. In other words, no morpheme is suffixed to the copula complement when the word terminates in a vowel.

The situation gets more complicated when the copula complement terminates in a consonant. As described above, the morpheme **–a** that has two allomorphs, i.e. **–a** and **–ta** is added to the noun or adjective. In general, the morpheme **–a** is added as a copula marker to the C-final nouns, except when the terminating consonants are **l, n** and **r** (cf. Hayward 1984). Due to its wider distribution, the copula element **–a** is considered in this study as the main morpheme with **–ta** as its allomorphic variant. Some examples are provided below:

(3) (a) **waalo   neek'-a**

        This   lion-COP

        'This is a lion.' (cf. neek' 'lion')

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[2] According to Hayward (1984: 247), the element **ʔan** that occurs as **ʔa** and **ʔin** in second person singular and plural pronouns respectively is a preverbal selector (PVS).

(b) **waalo** **ʧ'ilig-a**
This elbow-COP
'This is an elbow.' (cf. ʧ'ilig 'elbow')

As could be noted from the examples in (3), the nouns that terminate in the consonants in **k'** and **g,** among others, take the declarative, affirmative copula morpheme **–a**. When the terminating consonant of the noun or adjective is **r, l** or **n**, which are more sonorant, then the copula marker appears as **–ta**. Illustrative examples are given below:

(4) (a) **waalo** **boolan-ta**
This cloud-COP
'This is a cloud.' (cf. boolan 'cloud')

(b) **waalo** **gasar-ta**
This buffalo-COP
'This is a buffalo.' (cf. gasar 'buffalo')

The examples in (4) illustrate that when the copula complement terminates in the consonant **n** as in (4a) and in **r** as in (4b), the allomorph variant of the morpheme **–a**, i.e **–ta** is suffixed.

2.2 Copula Constructions in the Affirmative, Interrogative

Interrogative copula constructions in the affirmative are distinguished from their declarative counterparts through high intonation at the end of the sentence. There is a clearly-audible raising intonation at the end of the sentence and this is how interrogative, affirmative copula constructions are formed. Some examples are given below:

(5) (a) **ʔese** **gojto↗**
She Goyto
'Is she Goyto?'

(b) **waalo** **neek'-a↗**
This lion-COP
'Is this a lion?' (cf. neek' 'lion')

(c) **waalo** **boolan-ta↗**
This cloud-COP
'Is this a cloud?' (cf. boolan 'cloud')

The examples provided in (5) are different from their declarative counterparts due to a raising intonation at the end of the sentence. That is how they are distinguished from their declarative counterparts provided in earlier examples above.

2.3   Copula Constructions in the Negative, Declarative

Unlike in the affirmative constructions analyzed in sections 2.1 and 2.2, copula constructions in the negative employ a verb-like element, which is **maala** 'be_not'. The negative copula element in Arbore is neither inflected for tense/aspect nor for person. It remains the same in all the persons and tense/aspect categories. The copula construction forming strategy employed by the negative copula construction in the language is different from the affirmative ones, since there is the negative copula verbal element **maala** 'be_not' now. Therefore, it can be concluded that the typological strategy used by negative copula construction is different and it is what Curnow (2000) referred as 'verbal' copula construction. Illustrative examples are provided below:

(6)   (a)   **ʔese   gojto   maala**
            She   Goyto   be_not
            'She is not Goyto.'

      (b)   **waalo   neek'   maala**
            This   lion   be_not
            'This is not a lion.'

      (c)   **waalo   boolan   maala**
            This   cloud   be_not
            'This is not a cloud.'

As could be noted in example (6), the negative copula **maala** occurs following the copula complement to express negative copula constructions. The element **maala** remains unchanged in different tenses and persons. The historical and diachronic source of this negative copula element has not been traced in this study and it is open for further research.

2.4   Copula Constructions in the Negative, Interrogative

Akin to affirmative copula constructions, intonation is the main strategy employed to convert interrogative negative copula constructions out of their declarative counterparts. Once again, the intonation is raised towards the end of the sentence. In

this case, the intonation raised-up in the verb-like element to show that it is a question. Examples are provided below:

(7)   (a)   **ʔese   gojto   maala↗**
            She   Goyto   be_not
            'Is not she Goyto?'

      (b)   **waalo   neek'   maala↗**
            This   lion   be_not
            'Is not this a lion?'

      (c)   **waalo   boolanmaala↗**
            This   cloud   be_not
            'Is not this a cloud?'

The illustrative examples provided in (7) reveal that intonation is once again what is employed in Arbore to convert declarative copula constructions to interrogative ones.

3   Summary

This study investigates copula constructions in Arbore, one of the least-studied and highly endangered Cushitic languages of Ethiopia. Hayward (1984) is an excellent contribution on the study of the language, but copula constructions in different modalities are not fully treated in the study. In particular while copula constructions in the declarative, affirmative are well accounted for in Hayward (1984), there is knowledge gap in the interrogative and negative modalities. This study analyzes copula constructions in both declarative and interrogative sentences as well as affirmative and negative sentences. This study complements earlier studies made on Arbore by providing fresh data and a detailed analysis, and new analysis of copula constructions in the interrogative mood.

In the present paper, it is noted that in the affirmative, copula constructions do not employ any verbal or verb-like element. Rather a simple juxtaposition of copula subject followed by copula complement is used to construct copula constructions. This is a copula construction forming strategy that Curnow (2000) described typologically as 'zero' copula constructions. However, depending on whether the copula complement terminates in a vowel or consonant different copula elements are suffixed to the complement. For example, if a copula complement ends in a vowel, there is no change in the copula complement. On the other hand, if it terminates in a consonant,

it takes either the morpheme **–a** or **–ta**. The morpheme **–ta** is used when the terminating consonant is **l, n** or **r**; and all the remaining ones take the suffix **–a**.

   In the negative, the verb-like element **maala** appears in the copula constructions. Structurally, following the copula complement, the negative copula **maala** occurs and it remains the unchanged irrespective of changes in grammatical tense and person. In other words, **maala** is not inflected neither for tense/aspect nor for person. It is however noted that the typological strategy employed in the negative is different due to the presence of the verb-like copula. This leads us to conclude that the typological strategy employed in the case of negative copula construction is rather 'verbal' as described by Curnow (2000). Interestingly enough, two typologically different copula formation strategies are employed by the language for affirmative and negative sentences. On the other hand, interrogative copula constructions in both the affirmative and negative are formed through raising intonation at the end of the sentence.

Abbreviations

COP   copula

PVS   preverbal selector

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