Copula Construction in Dime*

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Abstract

In this paper we treat copula construction in Dime. We made also some reviews of other Omotic languages. We made a few comparisons with copula clauses in Hamar and Ari, which are much closed to Dime. Moreover, we made also comparison with Maale and Basketo, neighboring languages and other Omotic language such as Koorete to get further information of copula construction in Omotic Languages. The tenseless, past and future copula clauses in Dime is also treated. The equative and attributive copula clauses are tense-less which are marked by the copula –éé or dán. These are used alternatively without any apparent meaning difference. We also discuss the copula clauses in negative and interrogative constructions. The past copula clause is expressed by déen-ká except for first person which employs déébdéé. The future tense Copula clause is expressed by the morpheme –tub. The same morpheme is used for expressing future or imperfective in verbal clauses specifically with first person pronouns. In copula constructions –tub expresses future tense with all subjects, irrespective of the person value of the subject. Interestingly in Dime copula has a number of functions, in nominal as well as in verbal constructions, for instance, the copula following main verb expresses aspects and some focusing structure in the language. The negative nominal clause is headed by the negative copula yi- and the negative marker –káy. The equative, attributive, existential and locative as

* This paper is a revised version of paper presented in the 19th Annual conference of ILS under the title of nominal clause in Dime, Addis Ababa University in 2008. In this study, contrast to the previous work, the title is copula constructions in Dime, some review work on other Omotic languages is conducted, new data analysis and more references are treated.
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well as the possessive copula clauses are expressed by yi-kay. The interrogative marker in copula clause is –áá for second person both in perfective and imperfective aspect. For the other persons, the interrogative in copula clauses indicated prosodically, through a high tone on the final vowel of the aspect markers.

1 Introduction

Dime is an endangered Omotic language which is spoken in the southern region of Ethiopia by a population of 5,400 (1994 census). Siebert (2002) also estimates the population to be 5,000. Surprisingly, the 2007 National Census reports that the population of Dime is 895. Comparing to other pastoralist communities in the area the Dime are constant settlers and horticulturalists. The Dime language and cultures is not exhaustively documented. The main source of information concerning Dime is the work of Fleming (1990) and Mulugeta (2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2009a, 2009b, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013). There are two mutually intelligible dialects in Dime, Us’a and Gerfa. Data in this paper are mainly from the Us’a dialect.

The paper is organized as follows: in section (2) some reviews on copula constructions in related languages. In section (3) copula construction in Dime is discussed. The tenseles copula clause, past copula clause, future copula clause, negative and interrogative form in copula clauses of Dime will be examined, respectively. Finally, the conclusion and references are treated.

2 Some Reviews on Copula Constructions in Related Languages

Mulugeta (2008a: 131-139) discussed nominal clauses in Dime. In his work some of the tense, negative and interrogative features of copula have been treated. In this, paper detail analysis, some comparative issues of Copula in related languages such as Hamer and Ari and also other Omotic languages is consulted and well discussed. More references are reviewed. In contrast to Dime, in related Omotic languages such as Maale, a distinction of the present/tenseless and past copula constructions is not attested. Consider the following example from Maale: ʔizi temaare-ke ‘He is/was a student’ (Azeb 2001: 226). In this example, it is
clearly shown that affirmative non-verbal two adjacent nominal’s expressing copula construction by suffixing a morpheme –ke to a nominal category.

According to Abebe (2002: 8) in Basketo there is no special copula, in this language zero copula and independent lexemes are used to represent negative or past copula constructions as shown below:

(1a) ʔizi tamare
she student
‘She is a student.’

(1b) ʔizi tamare base
she student not
‘She is not a student.’

Moreover, Biniyam (2008: 115) argues that copula constructions in Koorete appear in the present habitual and past habitual. According to his arguments the copula subject and copula complement occur in sequence devoid of any verbal element and they are inflected for nominative and focus marker in affirmative form, respectively, as in example below.

(2a) es-i kaiso-ko
he-NOM thief-AFOC:DEC
‘He is a THIEF.’

Biniyam (2008) further discussed that copula constructions in the past and in negative constructions make use of the verb maak’ - ‘be/become’. Consider the following example.

(2b) es-i kaiso-ko maak’-i-tsha
He-NOM thief-AFOC:DEC be/become-EPN-PAii
‘He was a THIEF/He used to be a THIEF.’

According to his explanation the above copula sentences appear in the past habitual. The past morpheme –tsha is added to the copula verb following the epenthetic vowel –i. The focus morphemes are added to the copula complements. The past habitual sentences in (2b), as shown in the gloss, are ambiguous between a ‘be’ and ‘become’ reading of the verb maak’ - ‘be/become’. Thus, in Koorete Copula a construction is simply show a two-way distinction: present and
past in contrast to Dime future copula clauses. Biniyam (2008: 16) mentioned that in Koorete the two separate existential verbs such as the affirmative verb yes- ‘exist/live’ and the negative verb ba- ‘not exist/disappear’ may create some ambiguities in the interpretation.

Furthermore, Hamer is one of much closed languages to Dime. Biniyam and Moges (2014: 74-79) pointed out that in Hamar copular constructions are expressed through non-verbal sentences as of Curnow (1999: 3) categorization of copula construction. Biniyam and Moges (2014) argued that Hamar typologically employs the ‘zero’ verb copula strategy. According to their Hamar data, it is interesting that the declarative, the negative and the interrogative markers are suffixed to the copular complement as shown below:

(3a) ?inta hamar-ne
I Hamar-DECL
‘I am Hamar.’

(3b) ?inta hamar-u
I Hamar-INT
‘Am I Hamar?’

(3c) ?inta hamar-te
I Hamar-NEG
‘I am not Hamar.’

As we have discussed so far all the above Dime related languages have their own copula construction strategy which is a bit different from Dime.

However, Aari, which is closely related to Dime, has copula constructions that are much similar to Dime. Daniel (1993:39) pointed out that the language uses the morpheme –ye for present tense copula, as in example (3a) and (3b). For existential clauses the verb of existence daye is used as in example (4c).

(4a) kona gabre ey-ye
this gebre house-be
‘This is Gebre’s house.’
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(4b) **yints-ina rotimi-ye**
    boy-M-DEF tall-be
    ‘The boy is tall.’

(4c) **kaʒi ga’aiʃonda daye-e**
    cold big exist-past
    ‘There is a severe cold.’

Furthermore, Daniel (1993:39) also discussed that the negative copula is marked by **dak-aye** as shown below:

(4d) **laqmi dak-ay-e**
    good be-not-past
    ‘It is not good.’

As it is observed in Ari, the copula costruction is much similar to Dime. For instance, The Ari declarative, existence, and Negative copula form – **ye, daye, dakaye**, can be respectively corresponding to the Dime **dan/-ee, deen-ka** and **yi-kay**, in some extent.

3 Copula clauses in Dime

In this section we treat tense-less, past and future copula clauses. We also discuss the nominal clauses in negative and interrogative constructions. The copula may or may not be overt. In the following table, we present overview of the affixes that mark the attributive/equative and existential/possessive copula clauses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Copula</th>
<th>Tense-less</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Future</th>
<th>Negative non Past</th>
<th>Negative Past</th>
<th>Negative Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equative/Attributive</td>
<td>-ée-dán</td>
<td>déébdée</td>
<td>déét-tub</td>
<td>yi-káy</td>
<td>yi-ká-déé</td>
<td>yi-ká-déé-tub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential/Possessive</td>
<td>déén</td>
<td>dééén-ká</td>
<td></td>
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3.1 Tense-less Copula Clause

The equative and attributive copula clauses are tenseless. They are marked by the copula –**ée** or **dán**. These copulas are used alternatively at predicate positions
without any apparent meaning difference. Consider the following equative constructions:

(5)    maikró ʔis-kó wutun-ub ʔišim-ée
      maikro 1MS OBJ-GEN old-M brother-COP
      ‘Maikro is my eldest brother’

(6)    maikró ʔis-kó wutun-ub ʔišim dán
      maikro 1MS-OBJ-GEN old-M brother COP
      ‘Maikro is my eldest brother’

In example (5), the subject of the clause Maikro is the referent that is equated to the nominal predication ‘my eldest brother’. Payne (1997: 114) states “that equative clauses are those, which assert that a particular entity (the subject of a clause) is identical to the entity specified in the nominal predicate. Equative clauses make a close connection between one referent and other referents”.

(7)    k’alób gabar-ée
      k’alób farmer-COP
      ‘K’alób is a farmer.’

(8)    k’alób gabar dán
      k’alób farmer COP
      ‘K’alób is a farmer.’

In this construction gabar ‘farmer’ is in the predicative position and it is used to identify the subject as belonging to a group.

In the examples in (9) and (10) the copula expresses the property that is associated with the subject.

(9)    zób-is wolk’a-b kúf-ó-b-ée
      lion-DEF strong-M wild-LOC-M-COP
      ‘The lion is a strong animal.’

(10)   zób-is wolk’á-b kúf-ó-b dán
       lion-DEF strong-M wild-LOC-M COP
      ‘The lion is a strong animal’
In Dime copula clauses can be constructed in three ways: either by a zero copula without employing any marker as in example (11) or using the copula as in (12) and (13). Thus the copula is optional in equative and attributive clauses.

(11) nú níts ʔah-ó-b
3MS.SUBJ child good-LOC-M
‘He is a good child’

(12) nú níts ʔah-ó-b-éé
3MS.SUBJ child good-LOC-M-COP
‘He is a good child’

(13) nú níts ʔah-ó-b dán
3MS.SUBJ child good-LOC-M COP
‘He is a good child’

Attributive clauses qualify the subject in terms of property, colour, etc., such as ‘beautiful’ and ‘hot’ in examples (14a-16c):

(14a) ná lí-liŋt’-end-éé
3FS.SUBJ RDP:beauty-F-COP
‘She is beautiful’

(14b) ná lí-liŋt’-end dán
3FS.SUBJ RDP:beauty-F COP
‘She is beautiful’

(14c) ná lí-liŋt’-end
3FS.SUBJ RDP:beauty-F
‘She is beautiful’

(15a) ná-r-is sulum-ub-éé
water-DEF hot-M-COP
‘The water is hot’

1 In Ethiopian languages zero copula construction is a common phenomenon, which is attested in Tigre and Ge’ez (Crass, Demeke, Meyer and Watter, 2005). Omotic Basketo can also be mentioned as an example (Abebe, 2002).
In existential and possessive copula clauses, even in non-tensed forms, the copula is obligatory. If the existential verb is missing, the construction becomes ungrammatical. Example:

(17) níts-is déén
    child-DEF exist
    ‘There is a child’

The possessive construction is a special form of the existential construction in which the possessor is expressed with a genitive case suffix and the possessed is the subject of the existential verb déén. Compare the possessive construction in (18a) with the locative one in (18b):

(18a) ከስ-ﮐो ከስ ከለ-ፐ-ብ đéén
    1MS-OBJ-GEN child good-LOC-M exist
    ‘I have a good child’
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(18b) kéní ʔeh-ó déén
dog house-LOC exist
‘There is a dog in the house.’

The copula verb is not inflected for person. For example, if the possessive clause is inflected for person, e.g., by first person marker –t, the construction is ungrammatical as in (19).

(19) *ʔis-ko níts ʔah-ó-b déét
1MS.OBJ-GEN child good-LOC-M exist
‘I have a good child’

The tense of the copula clause is marked only in the past tense. Below, we discuss tense-aspect of equative, existential and possessive constructions in negative and interrogative clauses.

3.2 Past Tense Copula Clause

The past copula clause is expressed by déén-ká, which comprises the existential verb déén and the perfective marker –ká. This form applies to the past tense of attributive/equative caluses (The past tense of locative/posessive form is different, see below) Compare the (20a) and (20b) examples below:

(20a) nú níts déén-ká
3MS.SUBJ child exist-PF
‘He was a child’

(20b) nú níts dan
3MS.SUBJ child COP
‘He is a child’

(21a) yá ?stemare déén-ká
2S.SUBJ treacher exist-PF
‘You were a teacher’

(21b) yá ?stemare dan
2S.SUBJ teacher COP
‘You are a teacher’
Both the existential and equative clauses illustrated above, use the past tense copula déén-ká for second and third person. The existential clause has only copula verb and complement, while the equative one has a subject, a complement noun and a copula verb.

The suffix –déé is used as an imperfective marker in verbal clauses, as we have shown earlier. Surprisingly, in the non-verbal clauses it serves as a perfective aspect marker in combination with a distinct existential verb dééb. This combination, i.e., dééb-déé is used only when the subject is first person as in (23a), whereas in the second and the third person, the form déén-ká is used (20-22, above). The unacceptable sentence in (23c) illustrates that déén-ka cannot be used with first person subject.

(23a) ʔaté níts dééb-déé
       1S.SUBJ child exist-PF
       ‘I was a child’

(23b) ʔaté níts dan
       1S.SUBJ child COP
       ‘I am a child’

(23c) *ʔaté níts déén-ká
       1S.SUBJ child exist-PF
       ‘I was a child’

The past tense of equative/attributive and existential-locative nominal clauses are similar in that all of these use the copula déén-ka. The past possessive however, requires reduplication of the first CV of the verb déén-ká as in (24a). The present existential form is given in (24b) for comparison.
If the copula in (24a) is replaced by déén-ká for these examples, the structure becomes ungrammatical as in (25) below:

(25) *kó-kó níts ?ah-ó-b déén-ká  
3FS.OBJ-GEN child good-LOC-M exist-PF

‘She had a good child’

The past tense copula verb déén-ká is also used in combination with main verbs to indicate the past continuous tense, in which case the main verb is reduplicated before déén-ká.

3.3 Future Tense Copula Clause

The future tense copula clause is expressed by the morpheme –tub. The same morpheme is used for expressing future or imperfective in verbal clauses specifically with first person pronouns. In non-verbal constructions –tub expresses future tense with all subjects, irrespective of the person value of the subject. This is illustrated by the following examples comparing the equative, existential, and possessive future nominal clauses (26), (27), and (28) or (29), respectively. Due to the assimilation process the existential verb déén changes to déét. ²

(26) ná ?ámze déét-tub  
3FS.SUBJ woman Exist-FUT

‘She will be a woman’

² The final consonant –n in déén may assimilitted to –t the sound that is following it (deen-tub > deettub).
As can be demonstrated in the above equative examples (26, 27, 28, and 29) are equative, existential, possessive and possessive, respectively. In verbal constructions –tub occurs as an alternative form of déét. In copula clauses however –tub is directly affixed to déét as in examples (26-29).

3.4 Negative Copula Clause

The negative copula clause is headed by the negative copula yi– and the negative marker –káy. The equative, attributive, existential, locative as well as the possessive copula clauses use yi-kay. In example (30-32) the present negative copula clause is illustrated:

(30) nú kéní yi-káy
    3MS.SBJ  dog COP-NEG
    ‘It is not a dog.’

(31) kéní yi-káy
    dog  COP-NEG
    ‘There is no dog’

(32) ḥaté kéní yi-káy
    1S.SBJ  dog COP-NEG
    I have no dog’

As mentioned earlier, in verbal constructions too, the negative marker –káy is added to the main verb as shown in (33).
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(33) kéní-is ʔád-káy
    dog-DEF come-NEG
‘The dog doesn’t come.’

The past negative copula clause is expressed by the element yi-ká-dée as shown below for equative, locative and possessive copula clauses.

(34) nú kéní yi-ká-dée
    3MS.SBJ dog COP-NEG-PF
‘It was not a dog’

(35a) kéní yi-ká-dée
    dog COP-NEG-PF
‘There was no dog’

(35b) kéní yi-ká-dée-tub
    dog COP-NEG-(PF)-FUT
‘There will be no dog’

(36) nú kéní’ yi-ká-dée
    3MS.SBJ dog COP-NEG-PF
‘He had no dog.’

In connection to the past negative form illustrated in (34-36), two important points should be noted: first, the morpheme –déé, is used as a perfective aspect marker following the negative marker in negative copula clauses, as in (36). Secondly, preceding the perfective marker –déé in negative copula clauses the negative marker is realised as –ká instead of –káy. The –ká in this context can be confused with the perfective aspect marker in affirmative past copula clauses, i.e., déén-ká. However, this is not the case because normally the negative marker –káy is reduced to –ká in medial position.

There is no zero copula in negative nominal clauses. The copula is also obligatorily expressed in tensed nominal clauses in contrast to non-tensed ones.

3.5 The Interrogatives in Copula Clause

The interrogative marker in copula clauses is –áá for second person both in perfective and imperfective aspect. For the other persons, the interrogative is in
copula clauses is indicated prosodically, through a high tone on the final vowel of the aspect markers. Here we will provide a few examples of copula interrogative clauses.

A glide is inserted between the copula and the interrogative marker –áá and the aspect marker –i as in (37-39).

(37) yá ?astemar-éé-y-áá
    2S.SUBJ teacher-COP-y-Q
    ‘Are you a teacher?’

(38a) ?iyiye ?éh-ó déé-y-í
      person house-LOC COP-y-PF:Q
      ‘Was there a man in the house?’

(38b) ?iyiye ?éh-ó déé-
      person house-LOC COP:Q
      ‘Is there a man in the house?’

(39) kó-ko kané déé-y-í
    3FS.OBJ-GEN sister COP-y-PF:Q
    ‘Did she have a sister?’

(40) yá wúdúr dán-áá
    you girl COP-Q:2S
    ‘Are you a girl?’

(41) nú ?ay dá-déé
    he who COP-IPF:Q
    ‘Who is he?’

(42) yín-ko kané déé-y-í
    you-GEN sister COP-y-PF:Q
    ‘Did you have a sister?’

The morpheme –i is an aspect marker which is used in first and third persons for both singular and plural (38a), while the vocalic element –áá is interrogative marker as the second person both in affirmative and negative interrogative clause.

The following table shows the summary of forms that employs in nominal clauses.
Table 2: Summary of Dime Copulas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Copula</th>
<th>Tenseless</th>
<th>PAST</th>
<th>FUTURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equative/Attributive</td>
<td>dán</td>
<td>déeén-ká, déébdée</td>
<td>dééét-tub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possessive</td>
<td>déén</td>
<td>déebdée</td>
<td>déeén-ká</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dééét</td>
<td>déeén-ká</td>
<td>dééét-tub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential/Locative</td>
<td>déeén</td>
<td>déeén-ká</td>
<td>dééét-tub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>déebdée</td>
<td>déeén-ká</td>
<td>dééét-tub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>yi-ká</td>
<td>yi-ká-dée</td>
<td>yi-ká-dée-tub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal–IPF</td>
<td>-déé</td>
<td>déeén-ká-i</td>
<td>-tub</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 Summary and Conclusion

In Dime zero copula, tenseless, past and future, negative and interrogative copula constructions are employed. The zero copula construction has only copula subject and copula complement, which has no copula or verbal construction. The equative and attributive copula clauses are tense-less which marked by the copula –éé or dán. These are used alternatively without any apparent meaning difference. There are also. The past copula clause is expressed by dééén-ká except for first person which employs déebdée. The future tense Copula clause is expressed by the morpheme –tub. The same morpheme is used for expressing future or imperfective in verbal clauses specifically with first person pronouns. In copula constructions –tub expresses future tense with all subjects, irrespective of the person value of the subject.

There are also copula clauses in negative and interrogative constructions. Interestingly in Dime copula has a number of functions, in nominal as well as in verbal constructions, for instance, the copula following main verb expresses aspects and some focusing structure in the language. The negative nominal clause is headed by the negative copula yi- and the negative marker –káy. The equative, attributive, existential and locative as well as the possessive copula clauses are expressed by yi-kay. The interrogative marker in copula clause is –áá for second person both in perfective and imperfective aspect. For the other persons, the interrogative in copulal clauses indicated prosodically, through a high tone on the final vowel of the aspect markers. From the discussion so far
we can conclude that Dime seems to employ mixed strategy for copula construction.

**N.B. Abbreviations used in this paper.**

- 1S first person singular
- 2S second person singular
- INST instrumental
- FUT future
- 3MS third person masculine singular
- PL plural
- 3FS third person feminine singular
- SUBJ subject
- 1PL first person plural
- OBJ object
- 2PL second person plural
- NOM nominative
- 3PL third person plural
- ABS absolutive
- IPF imperfective
- PF perfective
- DEF definite
- NEG negative
- GEN genitive
- LOC locative
- COP Copula
- M male
- F female
- RDP reduplication
- Q question

**References**


