

# Copular Clauses in Tigrinya

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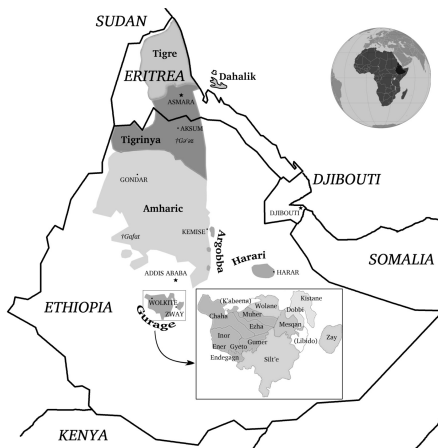
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# Tigrinya



Adapted from The Semitic Languages (Weninger:2011; credit: Ronny Meyer)

# Setting the Scene

## Copular Clauses

Sentences in which the contentful predicate is not a verb, but a category like AP, NP or PP.

In Standard English a verbal copula auxiliary **be** is used to join the subject and the predicate.

- (1)
  - a. The cat is tired.
  - b. Mary is a doctor.
  - c. The books are in the library.

## Setting the Scene

In Standard Arabic there is no verbal element at all in copular clauses.

- (2)
- a.   ʔal-qitt-at-u       mutaʔb-at-u-n  
       DET-cat-FS-NOM   tired-FS-NOM-INDEF  
       ‘The cat is tired.’
  - b.   mariam-u-n        tabībat-u-n  
       Mary-NOM-INDEF   doctor.FS-NOM-INDEF  
       ‘Mary is a doctor.’
  - c.   ʔal-kutub-u        fī l-maktab-at-i  
       DET-book.MP-NOM   in DET-library.FS-OBL  
       ‘The books are in the library.’

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       ‘The books are in the library.’

What about Tigrinya?

# Setting the Scene

In Tigrinya:

- (3) a. ?it-a    dmu dεxεmε-t ?all-a  
 DET-FS cat    tired-FS    BE.PRES-S3FS  
 'The cat is tired.'
- b. mari hakim-a ?i-jja  
 Mary doctor-FS BE.PRES-S3FS  
 'Mary is a doctor.'
- c. ?it-om mεts'hafti ?ab    bet-mεts'hafti ?all-εwu  
 DET-FS book.MP    at/in library                      BE.PRES-S3MP  
 'The books are in the library.'

# Predication

**Stage-Level Predication** : S-level predicates are only true of individuals during a certain period, or at certain stages (hence the name).

- (4)
- a. The cat is **tired**.
  - b. Mary is a doctor.
  - c. The books are in the library.

**Individual-Level Predication** : I-level predicates are true of individuals as a whole.

- (5)
- a. The cat is tired.
  - b. Mary is **a doctor**.
  - c. The books are in the library.



# Predication

**Stage-Level Predication** is expressed with *?allo* in Tigrinya.

- (6)    ?it-a    dm̩ dɛxɛmɛ-t    ?all-a  
 DET-FS cat    tired-FS    BE.PRES-S3FS  
 'The cat is tired.'

**Individual-Level Predication** is expressed with *?ijju* in Tigrinya.

- (7)    mari    h̩akim-a    ?i-jja  
 Mary doctor-FS BE.PRES-S3FS  
 'Mary is a doctor.'

# Predication

What about...?

- (8)
- a. The cat is tired.
  - b. Mary is a doctor.
  - c. The books are in the library.

# Distribution

**Locative Copula** : *?allo* is used in locative constructions.

- (9)    ?it-om   mɛts'hafti   ?ab   bet-mɛts'hafti   ?all-ɛwu  
 DET-FS   book.MP   at/in   library                      BE.PRES-S3MP  
 'The books are in the library.'

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- (9)    ?it-om   mets'hafti   ?ab   bet-mets'hafti   ?all-εwu  
           DET-FS   book.MP   at/in   library                    BE.PRES-S3MP  
           'The books are in the library.'

**Possessive Copula** : *?allo* is used to express possession.

- (10)    han-ti   habti    ?all-at-ni  
           one-FS   sister.F   BE-S3FS-O1S  
           'I have one sister.' (Lit.: 'One sister is to me.')

# Morphology

**Subject Marking** : both copulas show  $\phi$ -agreement with a subject.

- (11)    məʃaʁ ʔi-xa  
          funny    BE.PRES-S2MS  
          'You are funny.'
- (12)    gobyE ʔall-o-ni  
          turtle BE.PRES-S3MS-O1S  
          'I have a turtle.'

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          'I have a turtle.'

**Object Marking** : Only *ʔallo* can show  $\phi$ -agreement with an object, in which case the possessive interpretation emerges.

# Morphology

Tigrinya has two verbal copular auxiliaries that have full or partially suppletive inflectional paradigms.

Present	Past(PFV)	NEG Present	NEG Past(PFV)
ʔɨ-jju	nɛyr-u	ʔay-kon-ɛ-n	ʔay-nɛbɛr-ɛ-n
ʔall-o	nɛyr-u	j-ɛll-ɛ-n	ʔay-nɛbɛr-ɛ-n

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What about TAM information?



# Distribution

In Standard English the copular auxiliary is used in progressive and future constructions.

- (13) a. We **are** eating pizza.  
b. She **is** going/about to leave.

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What about Tigrinya?

# Distribution

**Progressive Auxiliary** : *ʔallo* marks present progressive. *nɛyru* marks past progressive. The verb is an Imperfective form.

- (14)
- a. ʔinɕera ni-bɛɪɪ ʔall-ɛna  
 injera S1P-eat.IPFV BE.PRES-S1P  
 'We are eating injera.'
- b. ʔinɕera ni-bɛɪɪ nɛyɾ-na  
 injera S1P-eat.IPFV BE.PAST-S1P  
 'We were eating injera.'

**Figure:** Injera is a sour fermented pancake-like flatbread with a slightly spongy texture, traditionally made of teff flour.



Link: [HERE](#).



# Distribution

**Past Perfect** : Along with a verb in Gerundive form, *nɛyru* marks past perfect.

- (16)      gaʃat bɛlif-na          nɛyɾ-na  
           gaʃat eat.GER-S1P BE.PAST-S1P  
           ‘We had eaten gaʃat.’

**Figure:** Ga'at is a stiff porridge-like substance that is normally formed into a round shape with a hole in the middle for the dipping sauce, a mixture of butter and red peppers.



Link: [HERE](#).

# Interim Summary

The uses of the verbal copular auxiliaries seen so far:

	<b>?allo</b>	<b>?ijju</b>
AGREEMENT PREDICATION	Subject & Object Stage-Level	Subject Individual-Level
TAM	Progressive Aspect	Future Tense
	Locative Copula Possessive Copula	?



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# Setting The Scene

A: Did you see anything interesting when you were walking around my neighborhood yesterday?

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B: No, I swear! I **did** see a cat!

In Standard English the emphatic **do** is used to add emphasis about the truth of what has been said and, at the same time, to assert that the alternative is false. This is VERUM FOCUS.

# Setting The Scene

The case in Tigrinya:

- (17) a. dmu riεj-ε  
 cat.ms see.GER.1S  
 'I saw a cat.'
- b. dmu riεj-ε           ʔi-jjε  
 cat.ms see.GER-1S VERUM  
 'I **did** see a cat.'

In Tigrinya *ʔijju* is used to mark Verum Focus.

# My research

In my research I am trying to explain some mysterious properties of the Verum Marker in Tigrinya.

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The Verum marker cannot appear in a sentence where the copula *?ijju* or the auxiliary *?allo* are present.

- (18) \*belaḥ            ?i-jja            ?i-jja  
 intelligent.fs COP.PRES-3FS VER-3FS  
 Intended: 'Indeed, she is smart.'
- (19) \*?indzera ni-belɿ    ?alle-na            ?i-na  
 injera    1p-eat.PC AUX.PRES-1p VER-1p  
 Intended: 'Indeed, we are eating injera.'

# My research

But it can occur along with the past copula *neyru* and the auxiliary *konε*.

- (20)    ʔit-a        lam neyr-a                    ʔi-jja  
 DEM-3fs cow COP.PAST-3FS VER-3FS  
 'Indeed, the cow was sick.'

- (21)    Segeŋ seβ    ti-ħiggiz            ti-xiwwin            ʔi-jja  
 Segen people 3FS-help.IPFV 3FS-AUX.might VER-3FS  
 'Indeed, Segen might help people.'



# My research

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- (20)    ?it-a       lam neyr-a                    ?i-jja  
 DEM-3fs cow COP.PAST-3FS VER-3FS  
 'Indeed, the cow was sick.'

- (21)    Segen sεb       ti-ħiggiz                    ti-xiwwin                    ?i-jja  
 Segen people 3FS-help.IPFV 3FS-AUX.might VER-3FS  
 'Indeed, Segen might help people.'

Can the Verum marker appear elsewhere?

# A Focus marker?

- (22)
- a. dmu **ʔi-jɛ** riɛj-ɛ  
 cat.ms FOC-1S see.NSC-1S  
 'I saw A CAT (not a dog).'
- b. ʔit-a mets' haf **ʔi-xa** hibka-jo  
 DEM.3ms book.ms FOC.2MS give.NSC-2MS-OM.3MS  
 'You gave him THE BOOK (not the bottle).'
- c. ʔiz-a g<sup>w</sup>al ʔizi-a **ʔi-jjɛ** ji-fɛlt'-a  
 PROX-fs girl LPROX-fs FOC-1S 1S-know.PC-OM.FS  
 'I know THIS GIRL (not that girl).'

*ʔijju* can appear adjacent (on the right) to the focalized element in a sentence (cf. Zellou 2010 for a discussion of this particular phenomenon).

Zellou, G. (2010). "Tigrinya fronted copula constructions: Focus and evidence of speaker marking information relevant to hearer expectations". *Rice Working Papers in Linguistics*, 2(Spring), 1–16.

# Conclusion

The uses of the verbal copular auxiliaries:

	<b>?allo</b>	<b>?ijju</b>
AGREEMENT PREDICATION	Subject & Object Stage-Level	Subject Individual-Level
TAM	Progressive Aspect	Future Tense
	Locative Copula Possessive Copula	(Verum) Focus

If you have any questions about Tigrinya,  
if you need some references,  
if you want to chat about syntax or Eritrean food:

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