

**THE MYTH OF CONJUGATED NOUNS**  
TIN-dag 2010, February 6, 2010

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Distinction between verbal and non-verbal predicates: distribution, in particular, inflection.

What is conjugation?

- broadly: the ability to combine with those affixes that verbs combine with (TAM and  $\phi$ )
- narrowly: person agreement

Is it true that nouns can do neither? If yes, why?

**End result:** nouns do not inflect for person. Tense, however, is a different matter.

**1.1. Tense, aspect, mood, etc.**

Received wisdom: An NP (predicate) cannot be inflected for TAM. In the presence of a non-default tense, aspect or mood there has to be a verb.

A non-explanatory syntactic answer: **c-selection**

- Saying that T (Asp, M) c-selects for a verb is just restating the problem

A non-explanatory semantic answer: **eventualities**

- What is the real difference between the verb “do” and the gerund “doing”, besides their distribution? “Death” is just as eventive as “dying” (starting, ending, lasting a long or a short time, etc.), and

Another semantic answer: **sortals**

NB: The “referential index” of Baker 2003 might be another name for “sortality”.

- Saying that TAM heads cannot combine with sortals does not explain why not, or deal with the impossibility of TAM-combination for adjectives in some languages (but this might not be so bad).

NB: Perhaps a *sort* and an *eventuality* are **semantic primitives** corresponding to syntactic categories.

But: **tense can appear inside NPs** (Lecarme 1996, 1999, Nordlinger and Sadler 2000, 2004a, 2004b vs. Tonhauser 2007a, 2007b):

- (1) a. **Jarawara** Nordlinger and Sadler 2004a citing Dixon 2004  
fati -tee- ba- ni -hi.  
wife -HAB-FUT- IMM.PST-[EV<sub>NON-EYE-WITNESS</sub>]-F-DEP  
*She was to become (his) wife.*
- b. **Guaraní** Nordlinger and Sadler 2004a  
Che- róga -rã -ta.  
1SG- house -FUT<sub>N</sub>-FUT<sub>V</sub>  
*It is my future house, it will be my future house.*

Nominal and verbal **tenses** can have distinct morphology and stack on the predicate NP.

**Mood** and **evidentiality** can also be marked on an NP.

Nominal **aspect** is not attested (perhaps, truly something only compatible with eventualities).

Nominal imperatives, infinitives and subjunctives also seem impossible.

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**Acknowledgments:** Many thanks to Eddy Ruys for extremely helpful discussions.

**1.2. Person**

A noun can be inflected for number (gender is less clear; exx. adapted from de Swart, Winter and Zwarts 2007):

- (2) a. Many French teacher\*(s) arrived.  
b. The teacher(s) arrived late.
- (3) a. Jan en Sofie zijn leraar van beroep.  
Jan and Sofie are teacher of profession  
*Jan and Sofie are teachers by profession.*  
b. Jan en Sofie zijn leraren (\*van beroep).  
Jan and Sofie are teachers of profession  
*Jan and Sofie are teachers.*  
c. \*Jan and Sophie are teacher.

Whether this inflection is interpreted (as in (2)) or (perhaps) not (as in (3b)), person can never be marked this way. And yet...

- (4) a. We/you/\*they linguists should not worry about it. adapted from Postal 1969  
b. ¡Qué desgraciad-as somos las mujer-es! Spanish; Corbett 2006:132  
how unfortunate-F.PL be.1PL DEF.F.PL women.F-PL  
*How unfortunate we women are!*

Semantics does not seem to preclude non-third person reference for DPs, and the presence of Tense (or the associated agreement projection, whatever) is not required for agreement.

**Goal of this talk:** check possible exceptions to the incompatibility of nouns with person.

**Conclusion:** phonological cliticization of the copula (Turkish, Erzya and Sumerian) or of the pronominal subject (Akkadian?), or noun incorporation (West Greenlandic).

**2. INCORPORATION: WEST GREENLANDIC**

Apart from the particle *tassa* (used for equative copular sentences), West Greenlandic has the copular verb *-u-*, triggering obligatory incorporation of the post-copular NP, either definite or indefinite. Modifiers, if present, remain behind, with the AP in the absolutive case (Fortescue 1984):

- (5) a. illuqarvi- u- vuq angisuuq. Fortescue 1984:70  
town- be- 3SG.INDIC big-ABS  
*It is a big town.*
- b. uanga Tuumasi- u- vunga.  
I Tuumasi be 1SG.INDIC  
*I am Tuumasi.*
- c. naalakirsuisu-nut ila- a- vuq.  
government-ALL member- be- 3SG.INDIC  
*He is a member of the government.*

Noun incorporation is an attested process in West Greenlandic, involving a number of bound “verbal affixes” and indefinite (or non-specific?) objects (Rosen 1989, Sadock 1980, Malouf 1999):

- (6) a. kavvi- gug- pugut. Fortescue 1984:321  
coffee-desire- 1PL.INDIC  
*We are dying for some coffee.*

- b. ursu- irniar- pugut. Fortescue 1984:323  
blubber-sell- 1PL.INDIC  
*We are selling blubber.*

Sadock 1980: Noun incorporation is West Greenlandic corresponds to antipassive. Stranded object-modifying APs appear in the instrumental case, rather than in absolutive, the subject is marked absolutive and the verb agrees with it:

- (7) a. kusanartu-mik sapangar- si- voq. Sadock 1980:307  
beautiful-INSTR bead- get- INDIC-3SG  
*We bought beautiful beads.*  
b. Suulut timmisartu-lior- poq. Sadock 1980:311  
Søren-ABS airplane- make- INDIC-3SG  
*Søren made an airplane.*

The differences between noun incorporation with the copula and with transitive verbs can be attributed to their different underlying syntax under the assumption that noun incorporation is only possible with non-specific (non-referential) NP complements.

NB: West Greenlandic doesn't have adjectives, only stative verbs and quality nouns (Fortescue 1984).

### 3. PHONOLOGICAL CLITICIZATION

The predicate appears to be conjugated because the copula (a verb) cliticizes onto it.

#### 3.1. Turkish

Turkish is the simplest case: in the present tense the copula (the root *-i-* plus agreement) can be phonologically attached to the preceding XP, be it the predicate, the interrogative particle or negation:

- (8) a. Ev-de-yim. Lewis 1967:98  
house-LOC-1SG  
*I am at home.*  
b. Ev-de mi-yim. Lewis 1967:105  
house-LOC INT-1SG  
*Am I at home?*  
c. Ev-de değil-im. Lewis 1967:103  
house-LOC NEG-1SG  
*I am not at home.*

In the past tense, inferential and conditional the stem *-i-* precedes mood and tense marking (which in turn precede  $\phi$ -feature agreement). These forms can be phonologically cliticized to the preceding predicate (Lewis 1967):

- (9) a. Ev-de i-di-m. free form, Lewis 1967:99  
house-LOC be-PST-1SG  
*I was at home.*  
b. Ev-de-y-di-m. cliticized form, Lewis 1967:99  
house-LOC-be-PST-1SG  
*I was at home.*  
c. Türk mü-y-dü-m. cliticized form, Lewis 1967:105  
Turkish INT-be-PST-1SG  
*Was I Turkish?*

For other tenses the verb *ol-* 'occur/become' is used as a supporting stem:

- (10) Sen zengin ol-acak-sın. Lees 1972  
you rich become-FUT-2SG  
*You will be/become rich.*

The enclitic copula is an independent syntactic node:

- (11) Zengin ve ünlü-y-dü-m. Kabak 2007  
rich and famous-be-PAST-1SG  
*I was rich and famous.*

**Conclusion:** Turkish involves simple phonological encliticization.

#### 3.2. Erzya (Turunen 2006)

In Erzya verbs and non-verbal predicates appear with nearly identical inflection:

- (12) a. Kij-at ton?   
who-2SG you  
*Who are you?*  
b. A ton meže t'ej-at?   
and you what do-2SG  
*And what are you doing?*

Differences:

- 3<sup>rd</sup> person marking is  $\emptyset$  for non-verbal predicates, but not for verbal ones
- in the past tenses non-verbal predicates contain the copular suffix *-l'* (a reduced form of the copula *ul'ems* 'be')
- a plural subject may be marked twice on the nominal predicate: the plurality is expressed first by the nominal suffix *-t-* and then by the predicative plural suffix
- the negation strategies of nominal and verbal predicates are partly the same in the present tense (a negation particle is used), but in the past tense verbal predicates use an inflected negation verb.

Also, this is not a verbalization process: the agreement marker attaches to the right of the entire non-verbal predicate rather to its head, and phonologically cliticizes to the last element of the predicate:

NB: DEF is clearly not (just) a definiteness marker.

- (13) a. išt'akak b'eřaň lomaň-an, išt'akak plohoj lomaň-an.  
such bad man-1SG such wretched man-1SG  
*I am such a bad man, I am such a wretched man.*  
b. mon lomaň-eš b'eřaň-an, mon lomaň-eš plohoj-  
I man-DEF bad-1SG I man-DEF wretched-1SG  
*I am a bad man, I am a wretched man.*

**Conclusion:** "Conjugated non-verbal predicates" of Erzya involve phonological cliticization of the copula, whose root is zero in the present tense and *-l'* in the past. Despite the fact that the root is phonologically null, it can nonetheless take agreement morphology (cf. Zulu).

#### 3.3. Sumerian (Gragg 1968)

Sumerian is an ergative language with case markers cliticizing onto the last element of an NP.

The copula can appear as an independent (obligatorily prefixed) verb or as an enclitic on the NP predicate (exx. from Gragg 1968:89, see also Thomsen 1984):

NB: The meaning of some so-called *conjugation prefixes* has not been established. *-i-* is supposedly the default conjugation prefix, glossed as CNJ.

- (14) a. Lahar Ašnan-bida nin hē-i-me-eš. independent copula  
Lahar Ašnan-and sisters OPT-CNJ-be-3PL  
May Lahar and Ašnan be sisters.
- b. gae ursag- me-en. enclitic copula  
I hero be-1SG  
I am a hero.

The inflectional paradigm of the independent copula is identical to that of lexical verbs. The enclitic copula differs from it only in the 3SG: while the independent copula verb form is *-me* (preceded by prefixes), the enclitic is *-am*.

NB: Foxvog 2009: [a] is epenthetic, as it disappears after vowels. The final [e] of the root (probably a schwa) is either truncated in the third person singular of the enclitic form or epenthetic elsewhere.

Gragg 1968: Transformation rule deleting the default verbal prefixes, thus forcing obligatory encliticization of the copula.

More likely: the copula is a phonological enclitic, and the “default conjugation prefix *-i-*” has some semantic input (e.g., verum focus) or the vowel is used for phonological support.

Adjectives only have the enclitic copula (Gragg 1968):

- (15) a. zae mah-me-en.  
you mighty-be-2SG  
You are mighty.
- b. \*zae maḥ i-me-en.  
you mighty CNJ-be-2SG

Why?

Foxvog 2009:25: (most?) adjectives are really *hamtu* (perfective) participles.

Adjectives can appear with verbal prefixes (here the “neutral” prefix *al-*, excluding all other prefixes):

- (16) giri.zal-bi al-düg. Gragg 1968  
delight-3ISG-POSS NEU-good  
Its delight is good.

It might be that the full copula was used for sortal rather than predicative copular statements (cf. Russian nominative vs. instrumental, Romance and Germanic article-drop).

#### 4. AKKADIAN

A combination of two effects: absolute state (bare NP) and subject/copula cliticization

##### 4.1. The “stative tense”

Huehnergard 1986 via Gianto 1990, Buccellati 1968, 1997: There are three states of a noun:

- *status rectus* (governed state): the grammatical default, consists of a stem and a case affix
- *status absolutus* (absolute state): the morphological default, bare stem
- *status constructus* (construct state): morphologically often (although not always) identical to absolute state

The **absolute state** is used in vocatives, in distributive repetitions, in certain space and time specifications, in some idiomatic expressions and in the so-called “stative tense” (Buccellati 1968, 1997, Satzinger 2007):

NB: Numbers (e.g., *ištēn* ‘one’) and quantifiers (*all, many, few*) also appear in the absolute state.

- (17) a. šarr! vocative  
king  
King!
- b. ana māt māt-ma distributive repetitions  
for country country-FOC  
for every country
- c. ana dār fixed expression (P<sup>0</sup> usually takes GEN)  
for eternity  
forever

Satzinger 2007: absolute state corresponds to “bare nouns”.

Table 1: “Stative tense” (Buccellati 1968, 1997)

	pronoun-NOM	adjective ‘wide’	participle ‘divided’	noun ‘king, queen’
1sg	anāku	rapš-āku	pars-āku	šarr-āku
2sg				
masculine	atta	rapš-āta	pars-āta	šarr-āta
feminine	atti	rapš-āti	pars-āti	šarr-āti
3sg				
masculine	šū	rapš-Ø	pars-Ø	šarr-Ø
feminine	šī	rapš-at	pars-at	šarr-at
1pl	nīnū	rapš-ānu	pars-ānu	šarr-ānū
2pl				
masculine	attunū	rapš-ātunu	pars-ātunu	šarr-ātunū
feminine	attinā	rapš-ātina	pars-ātina	šarr-ātina
3pl				
masculine	šunu	rapš-ū	pars-ū	šarr-ū
feminine	šina	rapš-ā	pars-ā	šarr-ā

The “inflection” on the stative tense strongly resembles personal pronouns (except for the 3<sup>rd</sup> person) and is very different from (prefixal) agreement elsewhere in the verbal paradigm.

Buccellati 1968, Goetze 1942, Huehnergard 1986, 1987 (but see Kouwenberg 2000, Kogan and Loesov 2009): the so-called “stative” corresponds not to a verbal tense, but to a complete copular sentence with a nominal (actually, non-verbal) predicate. The apparent “agreement marker” is actually a cliticized or phonologically reduced subject pronoun.

NB: Under discussion is not the presence of the copula, but rather the (non-)verbal status of verbal statives.

##### 4.2. Akkadian copula

Apart from the existential verb *bašūm* (which can also be dropped) and the demonstrative (or pronominal) copula *šū* (particularly in later stages of the language), the Akkadian copula is null and unspecified for tense, aspect or mood (Buccellati 1968):

- (18) šalm-Ø-aku ina awal anaku. Deutscher 2000:29  
healthy-ABS-1SG in Awal 1SG  
I am well. I am in Awal.

An NP or AP predicate can appear in the absolute (predicative) or governed (cased) state:

- (19) a. **šarr-Ø-aku.** Buccellati 1968  
king-ABS-1SG  
*I am a/the king.*
- b. **hammurapi šarr-um dann-um.** Huehnergard 1986  
hammurapi king-NOM strong-NOM  
*Hammurapi is a strong king.*

Buccellati 1968:5: “The stative <(19a)> is regularly used in Akkadian whenever the predicate of a nominal sentence is not immediately followed by a complement or a qualification.”

Buccellati 1968: an NP consisting of more than just the noun or containing the focus marker *-ma* cannot appear in the absolute state:

NB: The subject may appear before or after the predicate in grammatical examples. N stands for “an unattested form”.

- (20) a. **anaku šarr-um dann-um.** nominative/governed state  
1SG-NOM king-NOM strong-NOM  
*I am a strong king.*
- b. **šarr-um dann-um anaku.**  
king-NOM strong-NOM 1SG-NOM
- c. <sup>N</sup>**šarr-Ø-aku dann-um.**  
king-ABS.1SG strong-NOM

- (21) a. **anaku šarr māt-im.** construct state  
1SG-NOM king-CS country-NOM  
*I am the king of the country.*

- b. <sup>N</sup>**šarr-Ø-aku māt-im.**  
king-ABS-1SG country-NOM

- (22) a. **šarr-ī atta.** construct state/pronominal possessor  
king-CS 1SG.POSS 2MSG  
*You are my king.*

- b. <sup>N</sup>**šarr-Ø-ata-ī**  
king-ABS-2MSG-1SG-POSS

However, if the dependent of the noun precedes it (which a locative PP or a possessor can do, but an AP cannot), the stative becomes possible:

- (23) a. **ina bābilim šarr-Ø-aku.**  
in Babylon-GEN king-ABS-1SG  
*I am king in Babylon.*
- b. <sup>N</sup>**ina bābilim anaku šarr-um.**  
in Babylon-GEN 1SG-NOM king-NOM

NB: The ungrammaticality of (23b) shows that the preposed PP is not interpreted as a frame-setting adverbial.

The pattern in (20)-(23) suggests that **the cliticization of the pronominal subject onto the head of the predicate is purely phonological** and conditioned only by linear order (hence the impossibility of statives with post-nominal dependents and with a PP predicate).

Adjectival predication is “almost invariably” in the absolute state:

- (24) **awāt-um dan- ā.**  
matter-FPL-NOM urgent-ABS-FPL  
*The matters are urgent.*

Hypothesis: AP predicates usually appear without following modifiers or complements, and attested instances of non-predicative state reduce to APs followed by some overt material.

### 4.3. 3<sup>rd</sup> person

In 3<sup>rd</sup> person copular clauses the inflection does not correspond to pronouns:

NB: The third person pronouns are actually demonstratives (*that*) and might be related to the relative pronoun (Gelb 1961).

**Table 2: Gender and number marking**

	status rectus (NOM)	status absolutus	pronoun (NOM)
MSG	mār-um ‘son’	mār	šu
FSG	mār-t-um ‘daughter’	mār-at	ši
MPL	mār-ū ‘sons’	mār-ū	šunu
FPL	mār-āt-um ‘daughters’	mār-ā	šina

**Pronouns** decompose into the deictic *-š-* (third person), gender, *-n-* (plural) and gender again, which is thus marked twice: *u/u* (masculine) and *i/a* (feminine).

NB: Masculine plural is thus *-u-* and feminine plural *-a-*.

*Status rectus*: *-Ø-* is masculine, *-t-* is feminine, *-ū-* is masculine plural, *-ā-* is feminine plural

*Status absolutus*: *-Ø-* is masculine, *-t-* is feminine, plural endings as before

NB: The additional *-a-* in the feminine singular of the absolute state could be epenthesized word-finally, cf. the epenthetic [a] of *šarr-at-um* ‘queen-NOM’ triggered by the geminated stem-final consonant.

The pattern in (25) suggests that the inflection is not the pronoun:

NB: The object pronoun following the subject in (25a) is a clitic, not an agreement marker.

- (25) a. **anāku-ma kabs-āk-šunūti.** Kogan and Loesov 2009  
1SG-FOC stomp-1SG-3PL.ACC  
*It is I who will stomp them out (=destroy them).*
- b. **šina sinnišā.**  
3FPL-NOM women-ABS  
*They are (already grown-up) women.*

Third person forms apparently require an **overt subject**.

Further evidence on the special status of 3<sup>rd</sup> person: **ventive** can only be used in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person statives (Buccellati 1968, except for 3FSG, where it is blocked phonologically, see Kogan and Loesov 2009).

NB: **subjunctive** can only be used in the 3MSG of all tenses (with the zero ending – Kogan and Loesov 2009).

Support: the same inflection in **non-predicative contexts** (e.g., vocatives):

- (26) **šarrū!**  
king-ABS-PL  
*Kings!*

If *-ū-* is a cliticized 3MPL pronoun, what does it do in a vocative?

If *-Ø-*, *-t-*, *-ū-* and *-ā-* are number/gender markers, **why are they absent from the absolute state nouns with the first and second person subjects?**

Perhaps, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person the subject does not have a presuppositional gender, so it has to be encoded on the predicate. What if the subject and the predicate show  $\phi$ -feature mismatches?

**Alternative:** “stative suffixes” correspond to the encliticized conjugated copula *be* with a null root (cf. Zulu and Erzya). Third person marking is simple number/gender default, appearing in the absence of feature [participant].

The language would then be pro-drop in the first and second person (cf. Hebrew, Borer 1980, 1983, 1986, Shlonsky 1997), and *be* would be exceptional in taking agreement suffixes rather than prefixes.

NB: In other tenses it is pro-drop throughout.

However, why are agreement suffixes homophonous to pronouns?

#### 4.4. Summary

Akkadian nouns are not conjugated – if they had been, their distribution wouldn’t have been constrained by linear order (cf. (20)–(23)).

#### 5. CONCLUSION

**Phonological cliticization** is detectable by sensitivity to linear order.

**Noun-incorporation** leaves behind NP-dependents (modifiers and complements).

**What would a conjugated NP look like?**

- (27) a. *I a talented student-am of linguistics* = ‘I am a talented student of linguistics.’  
 b. *She my friend-is and my teacher-is.* = ‘She is my friend and my teacher.’

NPs can contain tense, but can they agree for person?

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