



The Copula in the Oromo Language (Oromic)

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Abstract:

Not much attention is paid to the concept of copula in the Oromic grammar. Even among those few who incidentally raise it, there is little agreement on its existence or what represents it. The case of copula that attracts attention is the one in the simple present tense. Many authors consider particles like dha, ti and tu as well as null (∅) and also miti 'not' in some cases, while few consider the flying low tone on the final vowel on the prepausal nominals. In this article I argue that, whether we call it a copula or a predicative case, its representation is neither by the particles nor by the low flying tone but by the short vowel at the end of a predicative nominal. I further argue that some of the components or some of the particles considered as copulas are only epenthetic added to introduce the actual representation of copula which is a short vowel that cannot directly be added to an existing vowel at the end of the nominal. I disagree with those who consider tu or miti 'not' as copula.

Keywords: Copula, oromo grammar, flying low tone, copula particles, epenthetic

One of the unsettled issues in the Oromo language (Oromic) grammar is that of what constitutes a copula, “a word linking the noun/subject and modifier/predicate” (Grande, 2013, p.1); or what Banti (1988) calls a predicative case. The currently glaring difference lies between those on one hand who claim certain particles -- albeit with no agreement on the number of such particles -- constitute the copula, like Gragg (1976); Owens (1985); Bender (1986, 99); Stroomer (1987); Kebede (1988); Ali & Zaborski (1990); Mewis (2001); Crass, Demeke, Meyer, & Wetter, (2004), and on the other Lloret (1988), Banti (1988), and Jankoⁱⁱ who opt for a low tone on the final syllable.

Banti rightly argues that since there is no ‘word’ in Oromic to represent copula as such Oromic does not have a true copula but a predicative case. He also agrees that whether it is marked by copula or a case marker the phrase has the same function.ⁱⁱⁱ Since the focus in this paper is on what signals that function, I will continue using the term copula.

The above authors who argue that the Oromic copula consists of particles agree that it is represented by the particle [dha] /dā/ when the predicate nominal ends in long vowel and by the particle [ti] in the genitive case, while null [∅] represents the copula on the short vowel final nominal in the predicate phrase. The first group also agrees that there is a negative copula *miti* ‘not’, with which Lloret (1988) also basically agrees when she wrote “*miti* is not a simple copular verb but rather is a negative particle to which the low tone floating copula is added” (p. 127).

The Oromic copula I deal with here consists of what Owens (1995, pp. 74-82) refers to as “equative markers”, genitive and ablative that “are used to form nominal clauses in which two nominal constituents are conjoined” (Crass et al., 2004, p. 4). I only describe in this paper the simple present tense copulae because “all other tenses are formed with true verbs, namely *tur-* in the past tense and *taa?* in the other tenses” Lloret (1988, p. 128). Besides, since many authors used writing rules different from the standard current Oromic orthography I use the IPA version, doubling the segments for the long sounds instead of IPA /:/^{iv}. Finally, some authors write the particles *dā*, *ti*, and even *miti* as suffixes while others prefer writing them disjunctively, and I am with the latter group.

Coming to the copula markers, I start with the position held by the above authors who consider it to be segmentally represented. In 1) below *dā* was used because the adjective *dēeraa* ‘tall’ is long vowel final. In 2) the copula is assumed to be indicated by ‘null’ since *gurraacha* ‘black’ is short vowel final. In 3) *k'oont'ar* ‘lentils’, which is actually a consonant /r/ final is assumed to be /i/ final which they consider is optionally left out and hence ends in short vowel. Therefore, the copula in 2) and 3) is considered ‘null’. In 4) *ti* is assumed to be a version of *dā* to represent the genitive case. Kebede (1988) alone adds *tu* to this list of particles to represent copula as in 5).

- | | | | | | |
|-------------------|----------------|----------|----------------|------------------|-------------|
| 1) | <i>gurbaa-</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>dēer-</i> | <i>aa</i> | <i>dā.</i> |
| boy/son | NOM tall | M | COP | | |
| the boy is tall. | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| 2) | <i>gurbaa-</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>gurraa-</i> | | <i>cha.</i> |
| boy/son | NOM black | | M | | |
| the boy is black. | | | | | |

3) *kun missir- i.*

this M lentils is.
this is lentils.

4) *man- a (i)saan- ii ti.*
home ABS they of is.

it is their home.

5) a. *Fajjisaa-tu dufe.v*
Fajjisaa + it is + came^{vi}

it is Fajjisa who came.

b. *Fajjisaa-tu muc'aa k'aba.*
Fajjisaa + it is + child + has

It is Fajjisa who has a child. (I. Kebede, 1989, p. 86).

On the other hand, Lloret and Janko's as well as in part Banti's argument says that it is the low tone that is marked on the final vowels of the particles *da*, *ti*, and on the final short vowels of the other nominals. Banti (1988) differentiates cases where both tone and segments represent the case (pp. 27-28). Copying the above examples with the low tones marked appears as follows.

1. *Gurbaan dēeraa dā.vii*

2. *Gurbaan gurraachā.*

3. *Kuni missirī.*

4. *Mana isaanii tī*

As for the stated negative copula, here are the two examples that Lloret (1988) cited:

6) a. *inni gurbaa miti + `/*
he boy not COP
'he is not a boy'

b. *iseeni intala miti + `/*
she girl not COP
'she is not a girl' (p. 86)

In this paper I argue that the copula or the predicative case as defined earlier is represented by the final short vowel. I partially agree with Lloret (1988) in that it bears low tone alone. However, this is not enough to say that the copula is represented by a low tone because there are other cases that have low tone final vowels. Additionally, in contrast to Lloret who wrote "I will refer to the *Da* [dā] particle as an epenthetic morph, because it does not have any specific meaning per se but rather occurs to overtly mark certain elements (1988, 122)", I will argue that not *da*, the syllable, but the phoneme /d/ is an epenthetic that fulfils certain functions. I also argue that in the cases of *ti* which many see as a copula itself and *hi* which seems not to have been noticed except by Owens (1985, p. 80), the /t/ and /h/ are also epenthetics. Finally, I disagree with all who consider *miti* 'not' as a sort of copula and with Kebede (1988) who considers particle *tu* as a copula.

Oromic is an agglutinating language with dependent roots that can hardly stand alone. Banti (1988:47) writes "No Oromo noun can exist [?] in its bare root." Gragg (1976) observed of Oromic nouns that "Basic nouns, apart from a few which ends in -n ...all have a stem formative, which usually consists of a vowel: -a, -aa, -ee, -ii, -uu, -oo" (p. 194). Lloret (1988, p. 99) further extended this, writing, "[l]ong final vowels, whatever the vowel quality, are pronounced in pre-pausal position as medium length with final glottal stop" including the base nouns. Hence most of the words we see are complex ones. Therefore, all nouns and hence nominals can have many forms. We need to select the form we use as a base for citation. Banti (1988) specified the citation form of Oromic nouns as being "the absolute forms that occur before imperative or negative verb forms" (p. 26).

The base of the nominals considered in this paper, therefore, will be the absolute cases. Building on Gragg's findings, I add that the final sound of any word can be non obstruents (excluding the implosive /d/ but including the ejectives), a short vowel or a long vowel. There are words like *qarrafa* 'wild animal', *daamaankillic* 'a type of bird', *k'oont'ar* 'lentils', *fiiik* 'a river in the east', *ees* 'oats', *Ingliz* 'English', *sagal* 'nine', *fantam* 'fifty'.

Even though the shortening of long vowels of the nominals in prepausal position that Lloret (above) observed is difficult to generalize, the observation that they are of /ɪ/ final is well taken. This is clearly audible in the base form and vocative for nouns and adjectives. The shortening has completely different applications that I will discuss later. It is also related to dialect.

There are certain morphophonological requirements in inflection or derivation of nouns when composing a statement. The accusative case, for example, requires the nominal to be a short or no vowel final. If the nominal base is

already long vowel final, something has to be done to obtain this short vowel final. Otherwise there will be ambiguities since length is strictly phonemic in Oromic. We cannot simply delete one of the vowels from a long vowel final or directly add a third one. As 7) shows *mala* 'method' is already short vowel final so no need to change. However, *malaa* 'pus' is a long vowel final. So, we need a way to get it a short vowel final. Here is one of the places where /d/ comes in as an epenthetic.

- 7)
- a. *mal- a na- a- f daw- e.*
 method ACC me LongV DAT devise AGR.
 [he] devised a way out for me.
- b. *malaa d- a na- rra- a haq- e.*
 pus EPEN ACC me on from clean AGR.
 [he] cleaned pus from me.

There is dialect variation in the case of /d/, especially in this case and the word *ɣed*^{viii} 'say'. In the east, as well as in parts of the centre and northwest, it is totally substituted by /ʔ/.ix The southeast also shares the substitution of the epenthetic /d/ by /ʔ/ and shorten the preceding vowel. Thus in 7) instead of saying *malaada* they say *malaʔa*.xBanti (1988, p. 31) observed that "[a]ll D2 nouns [whose absolutive case are VV final] end in -VʔVV where D1 nouns [whose absolutive case final is -/a/] have inflectional endings in -aa. The genitive of *gurbaa* is thus *gurbaʔaa*, of *ilillii*, is *ililliiʔii*, etc." This apparently is where Lloret (1988) observed the shortening of the long vowel before /ʔ/.

There are many factors that require lengthening the final vowel of a nominal inflection including some suffixes and some clitics. Table 1 gives a good summary of thesexi. When an already long vowel final nominal is followed by one of these elements, /d/ or /ʔ/, has to be epenthised with the appropriate adjustments, depending on the dialect. Whether /d/ or /ʔ/ is just introduced from the blue or is the surfacing of the /ʔ/ on the long vowel final that appears in the prepositional position raised by Lloret (above) is another issue.

o.	Phoneme	Gloss	Example
1	---	---	isa 'he' ABS (base). isaa achi 'beyond him'
2	as	this, here, LOC	isaa as 'closer than him'
3	gad	down, LOC	isaa gad 'down from him'
4	ol	up, LOC	isaa ol 'from him up'
5	-f	dative (for, to)	isaaf kenni 'give him'
6	huu	even ...	isaa huu fide 'I/he brought even him'
7	-m	you know ...	kun isaam! 'this is him you know!'
8	miti	not	kun isaa miti 'this is not him'
9	-n	1sg NOM marker	isaan barbaada 'I want him' ^{xii}
0	-n	instrumental ^{xiii}	isaan guddate 'he grew by him'
1	-n ^{xiv}	akka V-n	akka c'iiseen duʔe 'he died as he lied down'
2	ree	tag question, doubt	isaa ree? 'is it really him?'
3	-s	as well	isaas jaami 'call him as well'
4	sa	Is that? surprise	isaa sa? 'is that him?'
5	--	possessor, locator	kitaaba isaa/ɣalaa 'his book/the book under'
6	ti ^{xv}	action link	c'iisee ti rafe 'he lay down and slept'
7	tu	subject focus	isaa tu duʔe 'it is HE who died'.

Table 1: Elements That Require Lengthening Of the Preceding Nominal Finals

As can be seen from the examples, the absolutive case isa 'him' has to have the final /-a/ lengthened before the elements 1-17 [11 and 16 bases are verbs], whether the elements are suffixed or disjoined.

Accordingly, if we substitute isa 'he/him' with isii 'she/her' we will have to insert *daa* between isii and the following morpheme. Thus row 1, in the table above will be isii *daa* achi 'beyond her'. Since isii is already a long vowel [ii] final, we cannot directly add achi. To use word analogy, we see minimal pairs if we write the following sentences:

- 8)
- a. *isii achi geess- i.*
 she/her ABS there take IMP 2s
 take her there.
- b. *isii d- aa achi geess- i.*
 she/her ABS EP LongV beyond take IMP 2s
 take beyond her.

This distinction between “she” as the beginning point of a location and “she” as a direct object is shown by the epenthetic /d/ to make way for the additional long vowel. This shows that *dā* is far from being a copula. The finding of Lloret (1988, p. 122) quoted above that *dā* is ‘an epenthetic morph’ is a big step forward except that she considered the morph [dā], but with no meaning, not the phoneme /d/ as an epenthetic. This cannot explain why we have *dā* and *daa*, used to obtain short or long vowel final on an already long vowel final nominals.

Thus, epenthesis /d/ is needed when a nominal is required to be short vowel final, like the accusative case, and the nominal happens to be inherently long vowel final. *Ablee* ‘knife’ is a long vowel final while *waraana* ‘spear’ is a short vowel final. Thus, answering the question “what does he do?”

- 9)
- | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|----------------|------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|
| a. | <i>inni</i> [is+ni] | <i>ablee</i> | <i>d-</i> | <i>a</i> | <i>k'ar-</i> | <i>a.</i> |
| he NOM | knife EP | Short V | sharpen AG | | | |
| he sharpens a knife. | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| b. | <i>inni</i> | <i>waraana</i> | | <i>k'ar-</i> | <i>a.</i> | |
| he | spear | sharpen AGR | | | | |
| he sharpens a spear. | | | | | | |

There are suffixed morphemes, postpositions in this case, that require shortening the base nominal. One of such morphemes that requires shortening the preceding long vowel is the allative marker suffix *-tti* ‘at, towards’. This can alternatively be dropped and compensated by the gemination of the initial consonant of the following verb. Even in the case of its dropping, the epenthesis /d/ and the short vowel will persist. Thus

- 10)
- | | | | | | | |
|--------------|-------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|-----------|
| a. | <i>isii</i> | <i>d-</i> | <i>a-</i> | <i>tti</i> | <i>kenn-</i> | <i>i.</i> |
| | she | EPEN | Short V | to | give | IMP 2s. |
| give to her. | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| b. | <i>isa-</i> | <i>tti</i> | <i>kenn-</i> | <i>i.</i> | | |
| | he | to | give | IMP 2s. | | |
| give to him. | | | | | | |

The other morpheme that requires to be preceded by a short vowel is *-rra^{xvi}* ‘on, over’ which can directly be substituted in place of *-tti* in 10 above. Thus, in both cases of shortening or lengthening the preceding vowels by the morpho-phonological rules, /d/ is epenthesis and the long or short /a/ is added as required.

The other particle considered to be a copula is [ti]. This one follows possessor nominal which is predicated. Like the other *ti*'s lined above in Talbe 1, it lengthens the preceding vowel. Its case is the same as *dā*, with /t/ being the epenthetic, as will be demonstrated later. If the nominal is consonant final a ling /i/ will be epenthesis.

As stated in the table above, there are three homophonic [ti]'s. One is a strict suffix that is attached to a short vowel final base noun to denote the feminine subject^{xvii}. The nominative case of a long vowel final, which is phonetically /ʔ/ final, is denoted by /n/ for both gender, and by [ø] on consonant final^{xviii}, and by [-ni] on short vowel /a/ final preceded by a single consonant, and by /i/ if precede by a double consonant in the absolutive case for masculine. The final short /a/ is dropped before adding these markers as the case is now.

- 11)
- | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------|-----------|-------------|------------|
| a. | [<i>nama</i>] → | <i>nam-</i> | <i>ni</i> | <i>raf-</i> | <i>e.</i> |
| | man ABS → | man | NOMm | sleep | AGR |
| [the]man/human slept. | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| b. | [<i>intala</i>] → | <i>intal-</i> | <i>ti</i> | <i>raf-</i> | <i>te.</i> |
| | girl ABS → | girl | NOMf | sleep | AGR |
| [the] girl slept. | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| c. | [<i>galma</i>] → | <i>galm-</i> | <i>i</i> | <i>jig-</i> | <i>e.</i> |
| | hall ABShall | NOM | fall | AGR | |
| the hall fell. | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| d. | <i>ees</i> | <i>goggog-</i> | | | |
| | oats | dry | AGR | | |
| oats dried. | | | | | |

The other [ti] shows chain of action or conjunction of actions similar to ‘and’, like:

12)

a. *deem-* *e-* *e* *ti* *fid-* *e.*
 go AGR LongV CON bring AGR.
 he went and brought.

This [ti] can be dropped but the preceding long vowel is maintained while the initial consonant of the following word will be geminated. Since the phonotactics of the language do not allow geminate consonant either word initially or finally, the two words are conjoined at least in speech. Thus 12) a. becomes;

b. *deemee-ffide.*

This *ti* is represented by *too* in a central dialect.

c. *kaa-* *ne-* *e* *too* *wan-* *ni* *geeddar-* *ru-* *u-* *f...*
 get up 1p LongV CON cause NOM change 1p AGR for
 the reason why we get up and change.

In c. above *ka?*- 'get up, start' conjugated as *kaane* 'we got up' is considered as a full verb and *geeddar-* 'change' is a second verb. The two verbs are connected by *too* like the *ti* in 12) a. where the two verbs of *deem-* 'go' and *fid-* 'bring' are connected.

The other *ti* is the focus marker for the genitive case nominal in the accusative. It also bears a high tone *tí*. The absolutive case of such a nominal is marked by lengthening the final vowel of the possessor nominal. Thus:

13)

a. *miila nama.* → *miila nam- áa d'ík'- an.*
 leg human. leg human GEN wash AGR
 they washed a human leg.

b. *miila hoolaa.* → *miila hoolaa d'- áa d'ík'- an.*
 leg sheep. leg sheep EPEN GEN wash AGR
 they washed a sheep's leg.

With added emphasis^{xix} or focus, the statements in 12 a. b. above become:

c. *miila nam- aa tí d'ík'- an.*
 leg human GEN FOC wash AGR.
 they washed a human leg.

d. *miila hoolaa d'- aa tí d'ík'- an.*
 leg sheep EPEN GEN FOC wash AGR.
 they washed a sheep's leg.

Like the verbal conjunctive *ti*, this one also can be dropped with the same phonological consequence as in 12) b. The fact that we cannot say **miila namaa tí d'ík'i* but only *miila namaa d'ík'i* shows that *ti* is not the genitive marker but only adds focus here.

Authors so far have referred to *ti* only as a genitive marker, except Lloret (1988) who claimed "that *ti* is part of the source marker, not just part of the genitive marker (P.131). The function of source is taken from certain areas in western Oromo dialect where the source suffix *-irraa* and an epenthesis /h/ for a copula in 16) a. and 19) c. and d. are switched with /t/. It is therefore acceptable to say as in 14) in the west contrasted with 16) in other regions.

14)

a. *in- ni Finfinnee ti- i d'uf- e.*
 he NOM Fifinnee from LOC come AGR
 he came from Fifinnee.

b. *in- ni Finfinnee- rra- a d'uf- e.*
 he NOM Fifinnee on LOC come AGR
 he came from Fifinnee.

The other particle considered by at least one author, Kebede (1988), to represent a copula is *tu*, a position which I think no one has shared so far. The fact that it requires the preceding vowel to be long may make it look like *dā* and *tí* which are considered by others to be copulae. It is easy to find out that *tu* is not a copula from the following example. Assuming there cannot be two copulae in one simple sentence, would disallow:

15)

a. *hark-* *i* *is-* *aa* *d'eer-* *aa* *d'* *a.*
 hand NOM he GEN long m EPEN COP.
 his hand is long.

b. *hark-* *a* *is-* *aa* *tú* *d'eer-* *aa* *d'* *a.*
 hand ACC he GEN FOC long m EPEN COP
 it is his hand that is long.

However,

c. **hark-* *a* *is-* *aa* *ti* *d'eer-* *aa* *d'* *a.*
 hand ACC he GEN ? long m EPEN COP;

This sentence is not acceptable because two copular markers cannot coexist in one sentence. The fact that *ti* may be acceptable with other copula shows that they are homophones as shown earlier. It can also be left out without making any change in the meaning.

Now I turn to another element that the majority of the authors have not so far recognized as a copula. This is *hi*. It is clearly audible in the eastern dialect. Mohammad (1994) puts it as a suffix. It is a focus particle like *tu* and *ti* in the sense of 15) above if followed by a regular verb. When a predicate is composed of the ablative then it serves as a copula. It also serves as such in some rare cases without following the ablative, as in 16).

16)

a. *kan* *as* *jir-* *u* *nu* *hi.*
 which here exist AGR us COP
 who are here is us. The ones here are ourselves.

b. *nu-* *ti* *as* *jir-* *ra.*
 we NOM here exist AGR.
 we are here.

It is also very likely possible that *nu* 'we', underlyingly being *nuh* and the /h/ shows up as in the following case.

17)

a. *kan* *as* *jir-* *u* *sadih-* *i.*
 which here exist AGR three COP.
 what is here is three.

b. *as* *sadih-* *i-* *i* *tu* *jir-* *a.*
 here three ABS LongV FOC exist AGR
 here are three or what is here is three.

However, if we substitute *nu* in 16) b. it reads *nuu tu as jira*, not **nu hii tu as jira* which shows that the /h/ after *nu* 'lp' is an epenthetic unlike the one in *sadih* 'three' which is part of the word.

Another point for the underlying *nuh* case is the copula formation for consonant-final base nominals. They only add -/i/ at the end. Thus;

18)

a. *kun* *fuyɲaan-* *i.*
 this nose COP
 this is a nose.

b. *sun* *sagal-* *i.*
 that nine COP
 that is nine.

c. *kan* *jala* *jir-* *u* *ees-* *i.*
 which, m under exist AGR oats COP.
 the one that is under is oats.

In the case of ablative predicates however, /h/ can only be considered as an epenthesis to connect the final -/i/ as /d/ is to connect the final short or long /a/. It is important to note that the ablative locative base suffix *-rra* 'on' can be omitted and the long vowel, that actually represents the ablative case, remains. Other locatives like *bira*, 'near', *jala*, 'under', *gubbaa*, 'on top', *dura* 'front', *duuba* 'behind' cannot be omitted.

19)

a.	<i>isii-</i> she	<i>n</i> NOM	<i>Dadar-</i> Dadar	<i>i-^{xx}</i> EPEN	<i>rra-</i> on	<i>a</i> ABL	<i>duf-</i> come	<i>te.</i> AGR
she came from Dadar.								
b.	<i>isii-</i> she	<i>n</i> NOM	<i>Dadar-</i> Dadar	<i>ij^{xxi}</i> ABL	<i>duf-</i> come	<i>te.</i> AGR		
she came from Dadar.								
c.	<i>isii-</i> she	<i>n</i> NOM	<i>Dadar-</i> Dadar	<i>i-</i> EPEN	<i>rra-</i> on	<i>a</i> ABL	<i>hi.</i> COP	
she is from Dadar.								
d.	<i>t'alayaa-</i> paper/letter	<i>n</i> NOM	<i>isaan</i> they	<i>bira-</i> near	<i>a</i> ABL	<i>hi.</i> COP		
the paper/letter is from them.								

In the case of ablative *hi* can also be used to focus. Thus 19 a.-d. can optionally be

a.	<i>isiin Dadarirraa [hi]dufte.</i>
b.	<i>isiin Dadarii [hi]dufte.</i>
c.	<i>isiin Dadarirraa hi [dufte].</i>
d.	<i>t'alayaan isaan biraah [dufte].</i>

Either *hi*, as in a-b, or the main verb *duf-*, as in c-d, can be left out without any effect on the meaning. However, when used as a focus marker the *hi* has to bear a high tone like *tu*.

The other *hi* that is around is the justification indicator, why something happened. This one follows a verbal, the action which is the cause for or the excuse for the following action where the final vowel of the verb is lengthened to indicate continuation. Here again *hi* bears a high tone.

20)

a.	<i>ni</i>	<i>sodaa-</i>	<i>te-</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>hi</i>	<i>hin</i>	<i>raf-</i>	<i>in-</i>	<i>i.</i>
	FOC	fear	AGR	LongV	REAS	not	sleep	NEG	COP
it is because he was scared that he did not sleep.									

The other way to convey this same message is;

b.	<i>waan</i>	<i>sodaa-</i>	<i>tee-</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>hin</i>	<i>raf-</i>	<i>in-</i>	<i>i.</i>
	which	fear	AGR	for	not	sleep	NEG	COP
it is because he was scared that he did not fall sleep.								

This shows that *hi*, like *ti*, has more than one function besides acting like a homophone. This should not be confused with *hii* which shows quotation. When conveying an inquisitive message of someone, which ends in long vowel on the final verb, the conveyor adds *hii* with the inquisitive tone.

c.	<i>bor(u)</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>duf-</i>	<i>taa</i>	<i>hii^{?xxii}</i>
	tomorrow	FOC	come	AGR	QUOT
"Are you coming tomorrow?" [Someone asked]					

This same statement in 20) c. conveys a direct question with emphasis in a central dialect, but with H tone on *hii*. This same emphasis is conveyed in the eastern dialect by substituting *sa* for *hii*. Thus;

d.	<i>bor(u)</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>duf-</i>	<i>taa</i>	<i>hii?</i> [Centre]
	<i>bor</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>duf-</i>	<i>taa</i>	<i>sa?</i> [East]
	tomorrow	FOC	come	AGR	FOC
are you coming tomorrow?					

e.	<i>gaaffii-</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>bor</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>duf-</i>	<i>taa</i>	<i>hii</i>	<i>da.</i>
	question		NOM	tomorrow	FOC	come	AGR	QUOT COP
the question is "are you coming tomorrow".								

One more element that has been considered as copula by many authors is Ø. Lloret (1988, p. 97) quoting Gragg (1976) and Owens (1985) stated that "nothing is added and no change occurs when the non-verbal predicate ends in a short vowel." The assumed non-verbal predicate is one of the nominals. The short vowel final case of the nominal must refer to the absolutive case referred to as "the base form of the words — what are often referred to as non-case or absolute form" Lloret (P. 95). This base form itself is considered to have already been inflected. This is so because as Banti (1988) quoted above noted "[n]o Oromo noun can exist in its bare root." Thus, since that short /a/ is not part of the root it is an inflectional morpheme with different functions.

Owens (1985, p. 241) argues that there is not enough reason to regard the /a/ on arba 'elephant' and the /aa/ on xeesummaaxxiii 'guest' as an extra morpheme. If a root is "[a] base that cannot be analysed any further into constituent morphemes" Haspelmath (2010, p. 21), *arba* is only an absolute and accusative case while *arbi* is the nominative form showing that arba can be analysed as *arb+a*. Similarly, for *keessummaa* the plural is *keessumm+oota* and the singlative form is *keessumm+icha* (m) and *keessumm+ittii* (f). This shows that *keessummaa* can be analysed as *kessumm+aa*. Therefore, I think there is enough reason to consider the root is_C. Accordingly that short vowel /a/ represents the copula as well. Therefore, the copula is not null.

Lloret's argument that "the copula in Oromo is a floating low tone /`/" does not exclusively explain the copula. All the main verbs and non-predicate nominals also can carry the low tone in prepausal positions, depending on the emphasis. In 21 a), *intala* 'girl, daughter' has a low final tone, unmarked. But it is not a copula. In b) it has H tone final showing emphasis on the final vowel as *intalá*. The copular one had H tone on the antepenultimate syllable. Thus, the low tone does not guarantee the copular nature of a nominal. It is true that all the short vowels I suggested bear low tone when they are in copular function while their tone changes with the other functions.

21)

- a. *abbaa- n* *intal-* *a* *gál-* *ch-* *e.*
 father NOM girl/daughter ACC go home CAUS AGR
 father made the girl/daughter go home
- b. *abbaa- n* *intal-* *á* *gal-* *ch-* *e.*
 father NOM girl/daughter ACC go home CAUS AGR.
 father made the daughter go home, (not the son for example)
- c. *tan* *durá-* *a* *íntal-* *a.*
 which, f first/ahead GEN girl/daughter COP.
 the first one, or the one ahead is the girl/daughter.

Now I want to come to what I think constitutes copula in Oromic. From my observation I think copular function in Oromic is represented by a short vowel, generally /a i/ on the nominals^{xxiv}. Regular verbs can end in consonant final inflection like in 2P and 3P *bar-tan* 'you learned' and *bar-an* 'they learned' or long vowel final as in the 2P imperative case *bar-aa* 'you p learn'.

The arguments so far show that the short vowel /a/ at the end of nominal base, which also represents the accusative case and the absolute, also serves as a copula. I can safely hypothesize that the only short vowel that can be at a base final is /a/. All the other ones are long. It is to attain this short /a/ that /d/ is epenthesised as shown in 7) b., when the predicative nominal ends in long vowel. Thus in 22) a., we do not need *d* epenthesis because the adjective *dardara* is short vowel final while the other two *guddaa* and *guddoo* are long vowel final requiring the epenthesis /d/:

22)

- a. *gurbáa-* *n* *dardár-* *a*
 boy/son NOM adolescent COP
 the son is adolescent.
- b. *gurbáa-* *n* *gúdd-* *aa* *d-* *a*
 son NOM big (m) EPEN COP
 the son is big.
- c. *intal-* *tí* *gúdd-* *oo* *d-* *a*
 girl/daughter NOMf big (f) EPEN COP
 the girl is big.

The next short vowel to serve as a copula is /i/ added on consonant final nominals. Example 18) is the best case for this. Just as /d/ epenthesis is needed to introduce a short /a/, so also epenthetic /h/ or /t/ are needed to introduce short /i/ after the long vowel final of the nominals. The length could be *daa* added on inherently long ones like *mataa* 'head' or short /a/ final base lengthened by some morphophonological rules like genitive, ablative, dative and similar cases. In 23 a. *miila*, which is a short vowel, final base is lengthened by the requirement of the genitive case. The rule requires that a short vowel to be added on this case is /i/ with /t/ epenthetic not /a/ with /d/ epenthetic.

In 23 b. *gama* 'beyond' is a locative and when indicating a source, the final vowel is lengthened. A short vowel is needed to introduce copular construction which again is a short /i/. The rule here requires epenthesis /h/, not /t/^{xxv} or /d/.

23)

- a. *k'eensa* *k'ubá* *miila-* *a* *t-* *i*
 nail finger foot GEN EPEN COP

it is a toe nail. [Lit: it is the nail of a foot finger]

b. *isáan laga gáma- a h- i*
 they river beyond ABL EPEN COP
 they are from beyond the river.

One further case to support the rule that the copula in Oromic is a short vowel is that of the short vowel final personal names. These names are usually derived from the time of the day the person is born or analogous to the names of certain material or event. Consequently, the name *Bariiso*, is from *bariisaa* 'dawn' while *Halango* is from *halangaa* 'whip' and *Wadaajo* is from *wadaaja* 'feast'. Unlike consonant final nouns where /i/ is suffixed, or *da* or *?*, mutatis mutandis, is suffixed to the long vowel final ones for copular predicate, nothing is added to these short vowel final names. Thus:

24)

a. *tan reefu dáf- t- e* Halángo
 who f just come f AGR Halango+COP
 who just came is Halango.

b. *kan amma deem- e* Baríiso
 who m now leave/go AGR Bariiso+COP
 who left right now is Bariiso.

In conclusion it is important to notice that copula is limited in Oromic to the simple present tense while the other cases are explained by ordinary conjugated verbs. However, many people taking the syllable *da* as a copula marker and comparing it with the English verb 'to be' or the Amharic *nawis* try to introduce *da* in many inappropriate positions. Considering the phoneme /d/ as an epenthesis for lengthening or shortening an already long vowel final as shown in this article will clarify many issues. Similarly considering the /t/ in *ti* and the /h/ in *hi* in the copular construction of the genitive and ablative cases respectively as epenthetic will clarify many more issues. As shown in the article these particles, *da*, *ti*, and *hi* also have homophones either as suffixes in the case of *ti* or otherwise. In any case where these particles are involved, the copula is the short vowel /a/ or /i/ which cannot directly be suffixed to the preceding nominal because of the phonotactical requirement of the language that does not allow diphthongs or more than two consecutive segments.

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ⁱQuoted by Lloret (1988, p. 98)

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ⁱⁱⁱ Professor Giorgio Banti, personal correspondence. Sep. 25, 2017.

^{iv} Since IPA uses /c'/ for the ejective affricate I prefer /c/ and /ɟ/ instead of ligatures /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ respectively for the voiceless and voiced counterparts.

^v I converted the consonants in the original text to IPA.

^{vi} Note the different glossing formats under both 5) and 6) which are direct quotations.

^{vii} There is no agreement on whether to write 'da' conjunctively or disjunctively with the preceding nominal.

^{viii} Since the corresponding nasal /ɲ/ and the ejective /c'/ are represented by a single grapheme, I prefer to use /c/ and /ɟ/ for the voiceless and voiced stops instead of the ligature tʃ and dʒ respectively.

^{ix} In this case of *jed*, however, the vowels are also harmonised so that the vowel before ? will match with the vowel after ?.

jedē → *je?e*; *jedī* → *ji?i*; *jedaa* → *ja?aa*; *jedū* → *ju?u* and so on.

^x The final /a/ in this word is so short that one could easily hear only *mala?*. However, *malaa?* is also another form.

^{xi} This is not the case in the *Ituu* version of the eastern part and *Tuulama* version of the centre where the suffixes and the clitics are directly added on the absolutive. Thus, *isa+f* → *isaf* instead of *isaaf* as in the other parts of Oromia.

^{xii} This does not apply to the southeastern dialect where the /n/ is omitted, hence no change.

^{xiii} To stress /i/ can be added on this /n/ but not on the other ones.

^{xiv} a. These homophonic /n/'s should not be confused with the subject marker one added on an already long vowel final nominal as in: *gurbaan dufe* 'the boy came' with different allomorphs depending on the final phoneme of the subject. b. Yes No question is also formed by lengthening the final vowel. *isaa?* 'is it he?'.
^{xv} These [ti] should not be confused with the feminine short vowel final subject marker suffix like *intala* 'girl' ABS *intalti* 'girl' NOM.

^{xvi} Both *-rra* and *-tti* have a disjunctively written version *irra* and *itti* with different meaning.

^{xvii} Some short vowel final proper nouns, where the vowel is part of the root, like *Ganamo M*, *Halango F*, *Gololle F* *Bariiso M*, *Bidu M*, *Iggu M*, do not take any, for both gender. Short vowel, /e i o u / final nominals are extremely rare.

^{xviii} All consonant final nominals, like *afaan* 'mouth', *?ees* 'oats', *koont'ar* 'lentils' have masculine grammatical gender.

^{xix} It can also be argued that the *ti* is there but omitted since the high tone is preserved on the long vowel. If the high tone is moved to the first syllable of the following verb it indicates the omission of *-f* (Tble 1, 5) meaning 'for the benefit of'

^{xx} This /i/ is needed because more than 2 consonant clusters are not allowed.

^{xxi} Whenever a vowel is needed after a consonant it is /i/ and lengthening is also /ii/.

^{xxii} This should be distinguished from the interrogative formation in the absence of interrogative pronouns by lengthening the final short vowel of the copula and the regular verbs and raising the tone of the last two syllables. Thus *isarraa hi* 'it is from him' will be *'isárráahí?* 'is it from him?'; *inni dufe* 'he came' will be *inní dufée?* 'did he come?'

^{xxiii} Note that Owens uses [x] as a phoneme while it is in complementary distribution with [k].

^{xxiv} It is true that regular verbs also have short or no vowel sentence finally. This has to be distinguished from copular construction which never takes consonant final.

^{xxv} See notes, 14 and 18 above.