

The Copula and Existential Verbs in Qiang

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1. Introduction

Qiang is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken by 70,000-80,000 people classified as Qiang or Tibetan nationality in Northern Sichuan Province, China.

The language is verb final, agglutinative (prefixing and suffixing), and has both head-marking and dependent marking morphology.

Nouns can be defined as underived forms which can take (in)definite marking, numeral-classifier phrases and/or number marking, all of which follow the head. Aside from being the head of an NP, nouns can be used to modify other nouns directly (appearing immediately before the modified noun) or in a genitive phrase (also pre-head, with or without a genitive postposition), and an NP can appear as the complement of a copula clause.

Verbs are defined as those forms which can take the directional prefixes, the negative prefix, person marking, and the causative suffix. They are generally clearly transitive or intransitive, though there are some ambitransitive verbs (both of the S=A and S=O types), and intransitive verbs can be made transitive by use of the causative suffix. Reduplication of transitive verbs can result in an intransitive reciprocal predicate. Verbs can modify nouns in NPs, though they must take a nominalizing suffix to do so, forming a pre-head relative clause.

A class of adjectives can be distinguished from the other (intransitive and transitive) verbs as by the semantics of the members of the set (intransitive stative verbs for dimension, age, value, color, quality, and shape) and their

morphosyntactic behavior, but they behave as verbs, and so do not require a copula when predicative.

2. Verbless and copula clauses

Generally predicates are verbs, adjectives, or noun + copula, but in some equational sentences, most noticeably statements of the date or of human relationships, the copula is optional, and so the NP alone acts as predicate, as in (1) and (2):

(1) pəs xsə-çə-tçə-ko-tçu.
 today three-month-GEN-five-beginning
 'Today (is) March fifth.'

(2) khumtsi akua-wutçin-tçə-sətsim.
 Khumtsi uncle-Wutçin-GEN-wife
 'Khumtsi is Uncle Wutçin's wife.'

Clauses (1) and (2) could also take the copula. There is only one copula, /ŋuə/, as in (3) and one possibility in (4), which is used in equational, identifying (attributive), naming, and cleft constructions, one type of possessive relation, and after nominalized verbs. As it is used only in relational constructions and not in existential constructions, there must be two arguments, that is, there are no clauses of the type *God is*. The verb /zɪmə/ 'be called' (for naming), as in the other possibility in (4), or the verb /pe/ 'become' (for change of identity), as in (5) and (6), might also be considered relational like the copula.

(3) the: mi ŋuə.
 3sg person COP
 'He is a person (man).'

(4) the:-ŋuəŋi khumtsi ŋuə / zmə.
 3sg-TOP Khumtsi COP / be.called
 'She is (is called) Khumtsi.'

(5) the: sum-(ke:) pe.
 3sg teacher-INDEF:CL become
 'He became a teacher.'

(6) butʂqha xtʂampha-(ke:) pe.
 caterpillar butterfly-INDEF:CL become
 'The caterpillar became a butterfly.'

The formal treatment of the initial NP of an equational or attributive copula clause in Qiang does not differ from that of the direct argument of an intransitive verb. The NP representing this referent must appear in clause-initial position, and no semantically-based postpositions can be used after the NP. Only the topic marker can be used, as in (4) and (7).

(7) the:-ŋuəŋi ʂpe ŋuə.
 3sg-TOP Tibetan COP
 'He is a Tibetan.'

If the copula complement (CC) is attributive, it is often followed by the indefinite marker /ke/ plus a classifier (or the classifier is represented as a lengthened vowel on the indefinite marker: /ke:/), as in (5) and (6). If it is identificational, then it can be followed by the definite marker (/le/ or /te/), as in (8). There is no other formal difference between equational and identifying

- (11) tɕile the: fɪa-staqə-ŋi linthau ŋuə-zɑ:. (< zə)
 1pl 3sg OR-choose-ADV leader COP-CAUS:PRS
 'We chose him to be leader.'

- (12) khuə-le puŋu hɑ-ŋuə-zǝ.
 dog-DEF cat OR-COP-CAUS
 'Make the dog replace the cat.'

In (11), the verb /staqə/ 'choose' appears in a manner adverbial phrase modifying the main verb of the sentence, the causativized copula, to express how the causee became the leader. In this example it would also be possible to use an orientation prefix on the copula (i.e., [hɑ-ŋuǝ-zə]), if the person had already assumed the office, as the orientation prefix can mark perfective aspect. As it stands, with no orientation prefix and prospective aspect marking on the verb, the sentence assumes the person has been chosen, but has not yet assumed office. That is, the prospective aspect is relative only to the becoming, not to the choosing. In (12) a different function of the orientation prefix is involved, that of marking an imperative.

The copula complement can be quite complex, as in (13), where the copula subject is understood to be the boy under discussion, and so the whole clause except for the copula is the complement NP.

- (13) ep lə me-zɪ ew lə me-zɪ ke:
 father also NEG-exist mother also NEG-exist INDEF:CL
 ŋuə-kəi-tɕu.
 COP-INF:HS-PART
 '(He was an orphan), one who didn't have a father or mother.'

Copula clauses can be negated in the same way as other verbs, taking the negative prefix, as in (14), and can also appear in interrogative form using the same interrogative suffixes as other verbs, as in (14) and (15). (The interrogative suffixes differ with person.)

- (14) qa zme ma-ɲua-ja?
 1sg Qiang NEG-COP:1sg-Q
 ‘Am I not Qiang?’ (‘Aren’t I Qiang?’)

- (15) qupu ɲiɣi-bələ-m ɲuə-ɲua?
 3sg what-do-NOM COP-Q
 ‘What kind of work does he do?’ (Lit.: ‘He is person who does what?’)

3. Complement clause constructions

There are two basic complement types in Qiang, one that has no overt nominalization and one that has a clitic nominalizer. The copula can also take a non-nominalized complement. This has an emphatic sense, somewhat similar to a cleft construction, as in (16).

- (16) paŋə-tse: qa-wu zə-pə̌-ji ɲuə.
 thing-this:CL 1sg-AGT OR-buy-CSM COP
 ‘This thing was bought by me.’

In some cases, this structure has the sense of an on-going state resulting from a change of state or action, as in (17), similar to one use of middle voice in some languages that have middle voice.

- (17) dzy-le de-z_lgə-ji ηuə.
 door-DEF OR-open-CSM COP
 'The door is open.'

The non-nominalized clause with the copula is often used for achieving the affect of clefting for highlighting adverbials, as in (18):

- (18) the: hama-η_i kue-jy ηuə.
 3sg secretly-ADV transport-ASP COP
 'S/he was transported *secretly*.'

Another construction with almost the same structure, but with a nominalized complement clause, is used for making strong assertions. This is in fact pragmatically also like a cleft, in that a particular NP is focused, as in (19).

- (19) the:-(ηuəη_i) tɕile topu-s ηuə.
 3sg-TOP 1pl like-NOM COP
 'The ones s/he likes are us.' ('We are the ones s/he likes.')

The position of the focused element is variable, that is, the focused NP can precede or follow the nominalized verb. Compare (20a-b):

- (20) a. tɕile-(ηuəη_i) pə-s pies ηuə.
 1pl-TOP buy-NOM meat COP
 'What we need (to buy) is meat.'
- b. tɕile-(ηuəη_i) pies pə-s ηuə.
 1p-TOP meat buy-NOM COP
 'What we need (to buy) is meat.'

A variant of this construction has something of an epistemic sense. To make a strong statement of certainty, or of information that was not recently discovered, but known for some time, then a complement clause nominalized by /-s/ is used, as in (21).

- (21) pəs zmu tsu-s ηuə.
 today meeting hold-NOM COP
 'There is a meeting today.' (set beforehand)

Another use of this structure is expressing the optative mood. In this structure the complement is nominalized by /-s/ and the copula takes the particle /-ηi/ in the positive, as in (22a), or /-tci/ in the negative, as in (22b) (both particles normally mark adverbial phrases). No aspect or person contrasts are marked in sentences with /ηuə-ηi/ or /ma-ηuə-tci/.

- (22) a. the: tʃhetsə-le fiα-χə-s ηuə-ηi.
 3sg car-DEF OR-bad/broken-NOM COP-ADV
 'I hope his/her car has broken down.'
- b. təp-ηi me:¹ ɕe-s ma-ηuə-tci.
 tomorrow-ADV rain fall-NOM NEG-COP-PART
 'I hope it won't rain tomorrow.'

A copula construction with a nominalized complement, or in some cases a complement that is a relative clause with [la-han ~ la-hən] (definite marker + 'kind'), [ka-han ~ ka-hən] (indefinite marker + 'kind'), or /tan/ ('appearance') as the head noun, used to express contingent situations, as in (23) and (24).

(23) the: tha-z_i-m-tan ηυə.
 3sg there-exist-NOM-appearance COP
 'S/he might be there.'

(24) me:¹ ci-m-la-hən ηυə.
 rain fall-NOM-DEF-kind COP
 'It might rain.'

This then brings us to what might be considered a pseudo-cleft construction, where the sort of relative clause plus noun construction discussed above is used as a complement of a copula clause. The topic marker can optionally be used after this complement, as it is the topic of the construction, while the NP in immediate preverbal (focus) position identifies the referent represented by the head of the relative clause, as in (25)-(27).

(25) qa-zə-pə-tɕə̌-pənə tse: ηυə.
 1sg-OR-buy-GEN-thing this:CL COP
 'This is the thing I bought.'

(26) pənə-tse:-zə-pə-m qa-(wu) ηυə.
 thing-this:CL-OR-buy-NOM 1sg-AGT COP:1sg
 'I am the one who bought this thing.'

(27) ke¹lə-m lə η_i: ηυə-kəi,
 ask-NOM also himself COP-INFR:HS
 he-z_gue-m lə η_i: ηυə-kəi,
 OR-answer-NOM also himself COP-INFR:HS
 'The one who asked was himself, the one who answered was himself.'

A structure similar to that used in the optative construction, but with the copula followed optionally by /ʂɑ/ in the first person, /sɑn/ in the second person, or [ŋũǎ ~ wə] in the third person, is used to express obligation to perform an action (debitive). These forms are the non-actor person marking suffixes. (The form /ŋũǎ/ is an alternate form of the third person non-actor marker /wə/, which by assimilation to /ŋuə/ becomes /ŋũǎ/.) Person marking on the verb is optional in this construction, but if it appears it is the non-actor marking that is used. Examples are given in (28)-(29)

- (28) the: tɕəu-lɑ lu-s ŋuə-ŋũǎ.
 3sg home-LOC come-NOM COP-3sgU
 'S/he must come home!'

- (29) a. qɑ zɕme-zɕ nɑ-ji su-s ŋuə-(ʂɑ).
 1sg Qiang-language well-ADV learn/teach-NOM COP-1sgU
 b. ʔũ zɕme-zɕ nɑ-ji su-s ŋuə-sɑn.
 2sg Qiang-language well-ADV learn/teach-NOM COP-2sgU
 c. the: zɕme-zɕ nɑ-ji su-s ŋuə-ŋũǎ.
 3sg Qiang-language well-ADV learn/teach-NOM COP-3sgU
 'I (you, s/he) must learn Qiang well.'

An interesting feature of this construction is that if there is only one human referent referred to in the clause, as in the examples just given, then the person marking on the verb reflects the person and number of that referent, but if there are two human referents referred to in the clause, then the person marking reflects the non-actor argument. The initial NP of this construction is the topic of an identificational structure, and it seems the topic is treated as a non-actor, as it is marked the same as the true non-actor in sentences where two human

referents are referred to. In (30)-(31) are examples where two human referents are referred to:

- (30) a. the: ʔũ ʔua-s ŋuə-san.
 3sg 2sg help-NOM COP-2sgU
 'S/he should help you.'
- b. tɕile the: ʔua-s ŋuə-ŋũǫ̃.
 1pl 3sg help-NOM COP-3sg
 'We ought to help him/her.'
- (31) c. tɕile tɕy:mi-le-χuaŋi z botɕu-s ŋuə-(ŋũǫ̃).
 1pl child-DEF-BEN consider-NOM COP-3sg
 'We must consider the interests of the child.'

In two of the traditional stories that were recorded, the nominalization part of this structure appears in a non-final clause without the copula, but the sense of obligation or determination is the same. In (32), from 'The Creation of the World', the structure appears twice, in the first line with the copula, followed by the particle /χuaŋi/ 'because', and in line four, as simply a nominalization, but with the sense '(they) should (become a family)'. In (33), from 'The Story of a Lazy Man' three nominalized clauses seem to be subordinated to one copula.

- (32) steke-ta mi **pe'zə-s** **ŋuə-χuaŋi**, . . .
 later-LOC people raise(child)-NOM COP-because
- 2 ŋutɕuku dzuaɒl e-xʂe fei-bi-ŋi,
 each stone.mill one-CL OR-carry.on.back-ADV

3 ku-qə̌-ta-wu fi-o-γlu, dzuaɁl jə-xʂe e-tʂetup tu,
 mountain-head-LOC-ABL OR-roll stone.mill two-CL OR-bump LNK
 4 ɲizzi oqpi **pə-s**, dzuaɁl jə-xʂe fi-o-γlu-s-ta,
 3dl one.family become-NOM stone.mill two-CL OR-roll-NOM-LOC
 5 qhuat e-tʂetup-wei, fi-a-tsəi ɲike,
 as.it.happens OR-bump.into-HS INT-this.manner after
 6 mə ɲa γlu lə-zi oqpi fi-o-pə-i.

older.brother COM yngr.sister DEF-CL one.family OR-become-HS
 'Later, in order to propagate descendants, (the brother and sister decided that) each would carry a stone mill on his or her back and roll it down from the mountain peak. If the two stone mills joined together, the two should get married. As it happened, when the two stone mills rolled down (to the river bank) they joined together, and so the brother and sister married.'

(33) zmətʂi-le-tɕ tsi-le-ɲuəɲi χuan-tɕhianme¹-ta
 emperor-DEF-GEN daughter-DEF-TOP Huang-Qianmen-DAT
 2 **γzə-s**, χuan-tɕhianme¹-ɲuəɲi zmətʂi **dzu-s**, zmətʂi-le
 marry-NOM Huang-Qianmen-TOP emperor sit-NOM emperor-DEF
 3 tsi-le-ɲuəɲi fiatha **de-lə-s**, fiakə **ɲuə**-ku tu, . . .
 daughter-DEF-TOP there OR-give-NOM this.manner COP-NAR LNK
 '(Because the emperor had said he would marry his daughter to whoever found the parrot,) the emperor had to marry his daughter to Huang Qianmen, and Huang Qianmen became the emperor, (he had to) give (him) the daughter.'

In (34), from the story 'An Orphan', the sense of the nominalization construction is of obligation in terms of the best thing to do in that situation.

We can see in the fourth line of this example that even the copula can be nominalized and subordinated to the copula.

- (34) the-maha-ηuən̩i (tɕiu) s̩əʒeː¹-wu ɲiəntɕi
 that-night-TOP †(INT) whole-all together
- 2 ganphai-tu-p̩k̩ai-stu, χa-le-ηuən̩i tɕa-lə **je-s**
 arrange-OR-do-INFR:HS-PART needle-DEF-TOP where-LOC stay-NOM
- 3 **ηuə**, tɕa-lə tɕa-lə **nə-s** **ηuə**, tɕa-lə tɕa-lə
 COP where-LOC where-LOC sleep-NOM COP where-LOC where-LOC
- 4 ɲiɿi **ηuə-s** **ηuə**, fiə tsəi ganphai-tu-p̩k̩ai-tɕu.
 what COP-NOM COP INT this:manner arrange-OR-do-INFR:HS-PART
- 'That night everybody made a plan together, where the needle should stay, where (each of them) should sleep and what not and it was all settled.'

Although we find the copula nominalized in this sort of situation, we do not find the copula nominalized in relative clauses, as usually some other verb would be nominalized. For example, in English we could relativize an equational clause such as *He is the teacher*, which would become *The one who is the teacher*, but in Qiang 'teacher' [su-m] is already an agentive nominalization of the word for 'teach', and so there is no need to relativize using the copula.

4. Possession and existence

In a clause in which the predication expresses possession, the form that the elements of the clause take depends on the type of relationship involved, that is, temporary possession or ownership, and on the nature of the possessed referent. The verb involved in all cases is one of the five existential verbs, the use of which depends on the semantics of the referent being located or shown to exist, or on

the nature of its location:¹ /ʂə/ and /xu/ for inanimate referents that are not in containers or immovable or inalienably connected to some larger entity, /le/ for a referent located in a containment of some type, including the age of a person or thing and certain internal abstract concepts such as 'strength' or a tendency to do something often; /z̥i/ for animate referents, and /we/ for immovable referents, referents inalienably connected to a larger entity, and happenings. The form /we/ is also used to express the possession of qualities seen as less internal, such as being blessed.

If the relationship is inalienable possession and the referent is something that does not normally exist apart from the possessor, such as a body part, then the clause takes the form of a simple existential clause, and the possessor appears as a genitive possessor of the body part in a single NP with the body part, and the verb is intransitive (with that one NP as its sole argument), as in (35a). The person marking on the verb reflects the person and number of the possessor, not the possessed.

If instead the relationship is one of temporary physical possession, and not ownership, and the referent is able to exist independently of the possessor, then the NP representing the (temporary) possessor takes the locative/dative marker /-ta/, as in (35b). Here again the verb is intransitive, with the NP representing the possessed referent as the single direct argument in an existential clause, but with the NP representing the possessor appearing as an oblique argument and the person marking reflecting the person and number of the possessed referent rather than those of the possessor (inanimates are unmarked).

- (35) a. qa-dzoqu-ji-tua wa. (< we)
 1sg-leg-two-CL have/exist:1sg (connected to main entity)
 'I have two legs.'

¹See also Huang 2000, LaPolla with Huang, to appear.

as in example (12), and can take the intensifying adverbs [gən ~ kən], /wa/, and /qusu/, and in the negative can take the adverb /tsan/ 'too', as in examples (39a-b), but differ from adjectives in that they cannot directly modify a noun and the meaning of reduplication is different. With adjectives, reduplication has the sense of intensification, but with existential verbs, reduplication can transitivize the verb, at least in some cases, as in (40).

- (39) a. tsa mi z_i-wa.
 here person exist-very
 'There are many people here.'
- b. tsa mi tsan me-z_i.
 here person too NEG-exist
 'There are not too many people here.'

- (40) a. le 'exist (inside)' > ləle 'put inside'
 b. sə 'exist (inanimate)' > sə sə 'put (someplace)'

These transitive forms can then take the orientational prefixes, with the sense of perfective action or direction of action, as in the rightmost forms in (41).

- (41) a. ləle 'put inside' > de-le / ze-le / i-le 'give / take / insert'
 b. sə sə 'put (someplace)' > ə- sə 'put (perfective)'

Aside from the verbs given above, which are inherently intransitive and have both existential and possessive uses, there is one verb, /qəqe/, which is inherently transitive and used only for possession, and particularly for personal ownership of some important or valuable entity, as in (42a-c). With this verb the NP

- (44) a. the: qhu-s we. (connected to main entity)
 3sg hate-NOM have/exist
 ‘S/he is very mischievous.’
- b. the: qəpatʂ le. (inside vessel)
 3sg head have
 ‘S/he is very brainy.’ (cf. English *She’s got a head on her shoulders*)

The use of a relative clause structure is also possible, as in (45).

- (45) the: ɕtɕimi na-tɕ mi ŋuə.
 3sg heart good-GEN person COP
 ‘S/he is (a) good hearted person.’

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