

Chapter 12

The Mehweb “assertive” copula $g^w a$: a sketch of a portrait

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Mehweb Dargwa features a particle $g^w a$, a peculiar element which is basically used for emphasizing the assertion. The paper explores some grammatical characteristics of this particle. It is shown that, in both verbal and non-verbal clauses, $g^w a$ serves as a predicative marker forming a complete predication and is an equivalent of a copula (even though, unlike the neutral copula in Mehweb, it lacks inflection). Similarly to typical East Caucasian predicative markers, $g^w a$ may occur in different positions, though its place is syntactically constrained (e.g., it cannot be embedded within syntactic islands). Still, Mehweb speakers allow $g^w a$ not to be adjoined to either the predicate or the focus. This makes the distribution of the particle surprising as compared with similar predicative markers in well-described East Caucasian languages, where they may either occur on the predicate or immediately follow the focused element.

1 Introduction

This paper presents a preliminary description of the particle $g^w a$ in Mehweb, a language of the Dargwa branch of the East Caucasian family. The following examples illustrate the use of this marker in a verbal clause (1) and in an equative clause (2):

- (1) *ʔudidi-li ħark^w-li ar-χ-uwe* *g^wa!*
under.EL-ATR river-ERG away-bring:IPFV-CVB.IPFV ASRT

‘The river carries away the one who is downstream!’ (Molla Rasbaddin goes to the market place: 1.11)



- (2) *hel čudu g^{wa} di-la.*
this chudu ASRT IOBL-GEN
'This chudu (a kind of pie) is mine.'

The function of *g^{wa}* is not at all obvious. Etymologically, this particle is likely to originate from the imperative of the verb 'see' (which, as an imperative, is not fully felicitous – see Dobrushina 2019 [this volume]). Magometov (1982: 128) translated *g^{wa}* by the Russian particles *ved'* and *že*, whose semantics are by no means clear. The speakers often suggest that *g^{wa}* is frequent in disputes and emphasizes a claim. Given this, I will label it an *assertive* marker. Further research is needed for an exhaustive description of the rules that govern its use. What I will argue are the following two specific points:

- (i) *g^{wa}* is a copula,
- (ii) the position of *g^{wa}* does not necessarily depend on the position of the predicate or of the focus.

The latter makes *g^{wa}* look quite peculiar against the background of what we know about copulas in many East Caucasian languages and in Dargwa languages in particular.

The issue of copula-ness is addressed in §2. In §3, I discuss the use of the marker in verbal predications and describe syntactic restrictions on its position. §4 describes the use of *g^{wa}* in non-verbal predications. The last section presents conclusions.

2 The assertive marker as a copula

Many East Caucasian languages have elements which are described as copulas or predicative markers, i.e. as markers which are normally added to some lexical material in order to form complete predications (finite, unless these copulas themselves take a subordinate form).¹ Although their individual morphological and syntactic properties vary, these elements are clearly distinguishable from verbs. There are typically several predicative markers in a single language: for

¹Some important studies addressing the behaviour of predicative markers in East Caucasian (especially with respect to their interaction with focus) include Harris (2000; 2002) on Udi, Kazenin (2002) on Lak, Sumbatova (2011) and Sumbatova & Lander (2014) on Tanti Dargwa. Forker (2013) discusses question particles which typically represent a kind of predicative markers in these languages. Testelets (1998), Kalinina & Sumbatova (2007) and Forker & Belyaev (2016) describe the influence of the position of some predicative markers on the overall clause structure.

example, many languages have dedicated predicative markers used in questions in addition to those used in simple declaratives.

Predicative markers appear both in verbal and non-verbal predications. Below I will illustrate their use with a few examples from Udi, a language belonging to the Lezgi branch of the East Caucasian family, thus only distantly related to Mehweb.²

Predicative markers in Udi are highly grammaticalized and now commonly described as clitics (Harris 2000, 2002). They include personal markers which usually show agreement with the subject (S or A) and the question marker, which only appears in interrogative contexts and is not discussed here (but see Harris 1992). The following examples illustrate the use of the 1st person plural personal marker *=jan* in a non-verbal predication (3) and in verbal predications (4–5):³

- (3) *jan=al t:e χalg-aun mand-i χalg=jan.*
 we=ADD that nation-ABL remain-AOR(PTCP) nation=1PL
 ‘We are the nation that continues (lit. remains from) that nation.’
- (4) *me äš-urχo lap mat mand-e=jan.*
 this affair-PL(DAT) very surprised remain-PRF=1PL
 ‘We really remained surprised at these facts.’
- (5) *pajiz-e dirij-a=jan kaš^ʕ-e.*
 autumn-DAT vegetable.garden-DAT=1PL dig-LV:PRS
 ‘In autumn, we dig in the vegetable garden.’

Note that predicative markers attach not only to the lexical predicate (4) but also to the focused element (5). This can be viewed as a kind of competition for acquiring head properties between the semantic head (the predicate) and the most relevant element of the clause (i.e. focus).⁴

In Dargwa languages, predicative markers are less grammaticalized than in Udi. In particular, they show some properties of autonomous words. Many such markers readily constitute autonomous expressions (such as ‘yes’ or ‘no’). Some of them take attributive and adverbial morphology and hence are akin to content words.

²Here I omit some important details of the Udi system, including the existence of a series of dative clitics and a more verb-like copula-like element used in existential, possessive predication, and identificational clauses, which also takes a predicative marker.

³The Udi examples are from the corpus of text in the Nizh dialect of Udi collected by Dmitry Ganenkov, Timur Maisak and the author.

⁴See Lander (2009) for some discussion of competition between semantically obligatory elements and the most relevant elements for the head properties.

The primary Mehweb predicative marker is the copula *le-CL* (for morphology, see Daniel 2019 [this volume]), with a gender agreement slot controlled by the absolutive argument. Its use in non-verbal predications is shown in (6–7), while its use in verbal predications is illustrated in (8–9).

- (6) *bača ħa-la ahin, di-la le-b.*
 calf you.sg.OBL-GEN be:NEG I.OBL-GEN be-N
 ‘The calf is not yours, (it) is mine.’ (A blind judge: 1.11)
- (7) *arci-ze-b le-b-re ħa-la da^sH-la surat.*
 money-INTER-N(ESS) be-N-PST you.sg.OBL-GEN face-GEN picture
 ‘On the coin (lit., money), there was a picture of your face.’ (The Story of Akula Ali, 1.21)
- (8) *xunuj-s ruzi ħa-d-ig-es d-aʔ-i-le le-r.*
 wife.OBL-DAT sister NEG-F1-love:IPFV-INF F1-start:PFV-AOR-CVB AUX-F
 ‘The wife disliked (her husband’s) sister.’ (A brother and sister: 1.6)
- (9) *wallahi, k’as le-b q’-o^swe*
 Allah big.fish AUX-N go:IPFV-CVB.IPFV
 ‘My God, a whale is going (here).’ (Two sons: 1.65)

Like in Udi, the Mehweb predicative marker in verbal clauses can follow either the verb or the focused constituent. However, unlike in Udi, the Mehweb copula requires that a verb *be* in a non-finite (participial or converbal) form, while finite verb forms do not combine with the predicative marker. In fact, combinations of a copula and a lexical verb look like periphrastic forms, although the issue of monoclausality of these constructions is tricky.⁵

Turning to the assertive marker *g^wa*, it can be shown that it has the distribution of a copula. There are two pieces of evidence for this. First, similarly to *le-CL*, the assertive marker cannot appear in clauses that contain finite verb forms (10):

- (10) a. *do^sHi ar-b-ik-ib (*g^wa).*
 snow PV-N-fall:PFV-AOR ASRT
 ‘The snow fell.’
- b. *mator b-uz-an (*g^wa).*
 engine N-work:IPFV-HAB ASRT
 ‘The engine works.’

⁵See Sumbatova & Lander (2014) for a detailed discussion of this issue in Tanti Dargwa, another Dargwa variety.

Second, the assertive marker cannot combine with a copula (11a–b), unless the latter does not appear in a non-finite form, as in (11c). If we assume that $g^w a$ is a copula, this is explained: a clause cannot contain two copulas.

- (11) a. *dag it derbenti-ze-la w-ak'-i-le le-w*
 yesterday that Derbent-INTER-EL m-come:PFV-AOR-CVB AUX-M
 ($*g^w a$).
 ASRT
- b. *dag it derbenti-ze-la w-ak'-i-le g^w a*
 yesterday that Derbent-INTER-EL M-come:PFV-AOR-CVB ASRT
 ($*le-w$).
 AUX-M
- c. *dag it derbenti-ze-la w-ak'-i-le*
 yesterday that Derbent-INTER-EL M-come:PFV-AOR-CVB
le-w-le g^w a.
 AUX-M-CVB ASRT
 ‘Yesterday he came from Derbent.’

It is worth mentioning, however, that $g^w a$ differs from $le-CL$ in that it does not take any morphology.

3 Verbal predications

Just like the copula $le-CL$, the assertive marker need not follow the verb but can appear after focused elements:

- (12) a. *nuša-jni g^w a kulubi-s remont b-aq'-i-le*
 we-ERG ASRT club-DAT renovation N-do:PFV-AOR-CVB
 ‘It was us who made the renovation for the club.’
- b. *nuša-jni kulubi-s g^w a remont b-aq'-i-le*
 we-ERG club-DAT ASRT renovation N-do:PFV-AOR-CVB
 ‘It was the club for which we made the renovation.’

I will distinguish between the wide scope use of $g^w a$, where it has a scope over the whole sentence or over the predicate and follows this predicate, and the narrow scope use of $g^w a$, where it should follow exactly the focused phrase. In verbal clauses, the wide scope $g^w a$ is found with the neutral converb (13) and with

the infinitive (14–15) but not with the participle (cf. the infelicitous (16) with (19) below):⁶

- (13) *q^we b-iq'-uwe* *g^wa, ħu ħa-k-i-le*
 VOW N-do:IPFV-CVB.IPFV:IPFV ASRT you.sg NEG-bring:PFV-AOR-CVB
ħa-w?-iša.
 NEG-M.be-FUT.EGO
 'I swear I will take you (as a wife).' (Widow)
- (14) *durʔa uh-ub-i-li* *derq^w uh-ub-i-s*
 lose M.LV:PFV-AOR-ATR-ERG winning M.become:PFV-AOR-ATR-DAT
ca dus-li quli-w w-at-ul-le
 one year-ERG house.ESS-M(ESS) M-put:IPFV-PTCP-ADVZ
uz-es g^wa.
 M.work:IPFV-INF ASRT
 'The one who will lose will work as a servant for the one who will win,
 for one year.' (Widow)
- (15) *ħad hete ħunt'a-l qul-le-šu u^ʔq'-es g^wa.*
 you.sg.DAT there(LAT) red-ATR house-PL-AD(LAT) M.go:PFV-INF ASRT
 'You should go there, to the red houses.'
- (16) **musa-ni po^ʔro^ʔm b-o^ʔrʔ-aq-ib-i g^wa.*
 Musa-ERG glass N-break:PFV-CAUS-AOR-ATR ASRT
 ('Musa broke the glass.')

If the assertive marker follows a constituent other than the predicate, the choice of the verb form is less restricted. In this construction not only a con-
 verbal form (17) and an infinitive (18) but also a participial form (19) is allowed:⁷

- (17) *mahmud-ini g^wa b-ilt'-uwe heš surat.*
 Mahmud-ERG ASRT N-take.out:IPFV-CVB.IPFV that picture
 'It was Mahmud who is drawing that picture.'
- (18) *rasuj-ni g^wa nu k-es.*
 Rasul.OBL-ERG ASRT I bring:PFV-INF
 'It is Rasul who will bring me here.'

⁶Presumably, the assertive marker should combine with the participle where it functions as the head of the nominal predicate in a nominal clause. However, I lack relevant examples.

⁷These combinations stand in parallel with similar combinations of converbs, infinitives and participles with the standard copula (cf. Daniel 2019 [this volume]).

- (19) *musa-ni g^wa po^oro^om b-o^orʔ-aq-ib-i.*
 Musa-ERG ASRT glass N-break:PFV-CAUS-AOR-ATR
 ‘It was Musa who broke the glass.’

In examples (17–19) we observe the assertive copula following focused NPs. (20–22) demonstrate that *g^wa* can follow other kinds of constituents, such as adverbs and embedded clauses:

- (20) *išbari g^wa nuni praznik b-aq’-ib-i / b-aq’-i-le.*
 today ASRT I.ERG feast N-do:PFV-AOR-ATR / N-do:PFV-AOR-CVB
 ‘It was today that I organized the feast.’
- (21) *it q’a^oju g^wa w-aš-uwe.*
 that slowly ASRT M-go:IPFV-CVB.IPFV
 ‘He is moving SLOWLY.’
- (22) *musa rasuj-šu quli w-ak’-ib-i-jabe*
 Musa Rasul.OBL-AD(LAT) house.ESS(LAT) M-come:PFV-AOR-ATR-ANTE
g^wa xamis g-ub-le.
 ASRT Khamis see:PFV-AOR-CVB
 ‘After MUSA’S COMING TO RASUL, he saw Khamis.’

Still, we do find restrictions on what can be focused by means of *g^wa*.⁸ For example, the assertive marker cannot immediately follow postpositional objects, but rather occurs after the whole postpositional phrase:

- (23) a. **heč’ dubur-li-če g^wa aqu-r dirig^w xa?*
 that mountain-OBL-SUPER(LAT) ASRT up-NPL(ESS) cloud appear
d-uh-ub-le.
 NPL-become:PFV-AOR-CVB
- b. *heč’ dubur-li-če aqu-r g^wa dirig^w xa?*
 that mountain-OBL-SUPER upper-NPL(ESS) ASRT cloud appear
d-uh-ub-le.
 NPL-become:PFV-AOR-CVB
 ‘It is over that mountain that the cloud appeared.’

Further, the assertive marker cannot be embedded in an NP. In particular, it cannot occur immediately after an adjective attribute (24), an attributive demonstrative (25) or a quantifier (26) when they precede the head noun:

⁸I hypothesize that these restrictions hold for the neutral copula as well, but I lack the necessary data.

- (24) a. **ħunt'a-l g^{wa} burχa-li-če-r varv-ube.*
 red-ATR ASRT roof-OBL-SUPER-NPL(ESS) stone-PL
- b. *ħunt'a-l burχa-li-če-r g^{wa} varv-ube.*
 red-ATR roof-OBL-SUPER-NPL(ESS) ASRT stone-PL
 ‘There are stones on the RED roof.’
- (25) a. **heš g^{wa} B^{wet}'i-če-r d-aq-il inc-be*
 that ASRT tree-SUPER-NPL(ESS) NPL-much-ATR apple-PL
d-urh-uwe.
 NPL-become:IPFV-CVB.IPFV
- b. *heš B^{wet}'i-če-r g^{wa} d-aq-il inc-be*
 that tree-SUPER-NPL(ESS) ASRT NPL-much-ATR apple-PL
d-urh-uwe.
 NPL-become:IPFV-CVB.IPFV
 ‘There are many apples growing on THAT tree.’
- (26) a. **har-il g^{wa} urši-li-s midal g-i-le.*
 each-ATR ASRT boy-OBL-DAT medal give:PFV-AOR-CVB
- b. *har-il urši-li-s g^{wa} midal g-i-le.*
 each-ATR boy-OBL-DAT ASRT medal give:PFV-AOR-CVB
 ‘He gave a medal to EACH boy.’

One natural way to focus an attribute is to place the assertive copula after the whole NP. Alternatively, one can split the description of a participant into two NPs with a semantic attribute being nominalized and taking its own case marker. Since the semantic attribute itself constitutes a complete NP in this construction, it becomes possible to place *g^{wa}* immediately after it (27). Notably, for absolutive NPs this results in the illusion of the embedding of the assertive marker in an NP (28), but this is likely to be a consequence of the fact that absolutive NPs do not receive overt case marking, so the two adjoined absolutive NPs look as a single phrase.

- (27) *ħunt'aj-če-r g^{wa} burχa-li-če-r varv-ube.*
 red.OBL-SUPER-NPL(ESS) ASRT roof-OBL-SUPER-NPL(ESS) stone-PL
 ‘There are stones on the RED roof.’
 (Lit., ‘There are stones on the red one, on the roof.’)
- (28) *b-urq'-il g^{wa} bartbisu iχ-ini ħa-s-i-le.*
 N-old-ATR ASRT carpet that-ERG NEG-take:PFV-AOR-CVB
 ‘He did not buy the OLD carpet.’

Further, *g^{wa}* cannot occur within syntactic islands. For example, it cannot be embedded in a coordination construction (29) or in a converbial clause (30).

- (29) **rasuj-ni=ra* *g^{wa}* *nu-ni=ra* *past’an*
 Rasul.OBL-ERG=ADD ASRT I-ERG=ADD vegetable.garden
b-erb-u-le.
 N-dig:PFV-AOR-CVB
 (‘RASUL and I digged the vegetable garden.’)
- (30) a. **b-urq’-il* *bartbisu* *g^{wa}* *b-ic-i-le*, *d-aq-il*
 N-old-ATR carpet ASRT N-sell:PFV-AOR-CVB NPL-much-ATR
arc *d-aq’-i-le*.
 money NPL-do:PFV-AOR-CVB
- b. *b-urq’-il* *bartbisu* *b-ic-i-le* *g^{wa}*, *d-aq-il*
 N-old-ATR carpet N-sell:PFV-AOR-CVB ASRT NPL-much-ATR
arc *d-aq’-i-le*.
 money NPL-do:PFV-AOR-CVB
 ‘After selling THE OLD CARPET, he got much money.’

Unlike most Dargwa varieties, Mehweb has developed a biabsolutive construction⁹ (see also Daniel 2019 [this volume] and Ganenkov 2019 [this volume]). In this construction, a transitive verb appears as a converb and requires a copula but the actor appears in the absolutive, as does the undergoer. This construction is possible with *g^{wa}* (31a–b), yet the assertive copula cannot occur between the P-argument and the converb (31c).¹⁰ This contrasts the biabsolutive construction with a simple combination of the converb with a copula and suggests that this pattern contains an embedded converbial clause which is an island, at least with respect to *g^{wa}*:

- (31) a. *musa kaš* *d-uk-uwe* *g^{wa}*.
 Musa kasha NPL-eat:IPFV-CVB.IPFV ASRT
 ‘Musa is eating kasha.’

⁹Biabsolutive (binominative) constructions are quite widespread in the East Caucasian family, but are not typical for the Dargwa branch, where they have been previously only reported for Itsari Dargwa (Mutalov & Sumbatova 2003). See Forker (2012) and Gagliardi et al. (2014) for surveys of some properties of this kind of constructions as well as for a discussion of their diversity and possible analyzes.

¹⁰The same set of facts is observed for the simple copula *le-CL*.

- b. *musa g^wa kaš d-uk-uwe.*
 Musa ASRT kasha NPL-eat:IPFV-CVB.IPFV
 ‘It is Musa who is eating kasha.’
- c. **musa kaš g^wa d-uk-uwe.*
 Musa kasha ASRT NPL-eat:IPFV-CVB.IPFV
 Intended ‘It is kasha that Musa is eating.’

With clausal complements, the situation is less obvious: some (but by no means all) speakers allow positioning *g^wa* within a clausal complement (32–33).¹¹

- (32) *%it kaltuška g^wa d-elʔ^w-eʔs d-aʔ-i-le.*
 that potato ASRT NPL-seed:IPFV-INF NPL-start:PFV-AOR-CVB
 ‘She started to plant potatoes.’
- (33) *%heš k^wiha g^wa b-eq^w-es aħmad-ini di-ze*
 that ram ASRT N-cut:PFV-INF Ahmad-ERG I.OBL-INTER(LAT)
hari b-aq^ʔ-i-le.
 request N-do:PFV-AOR-CVB
 ‘Ahmed asked me to cut this ram.’

While the placement of *g^wa* after a constituent other than the predicate usually indicates focus shift, even in this case it does not need to follow the constituents that are (likely to be) focused. Consider the following examples:

- (34) a. *ħadižat-ini=ra heš kung g^wa b-elč-u-we.*
 Khadizhat-ERG=ADD that book ASRT N-read:PFV-AOR-CVB
- b. *ħadižat-ini=ra g^wa heš kung b-elč-u-we.*
 Khadizhat-ERG=ADD ASRT that book N-read:PFV-AOR-CVB
 ‘Even Khadizhat has read that book.’

In (34) one can hypothesize that the focused constituent is the ergative NP, since it is marked with the additive clitic meaning ‘even’. Yet as shown by these examples, the assertive copula may but need not be adjacent to the focused phrase: indeed, in (34a) it follows the absolutive argument. These examples suggest that focus is possibly not the only factor which determines the position of *g^wa*. More generally, we conclude that in verbal clauses the grammatical position of *g^wa* should be determined neither by the predicate nor by focus.

¹¹The superscripted % in these examples refers to the fact that there is considerable variation among speakers in the acceptance of such examples.

4 Non-verbal predication

Non-verbal predication is represented by two types, namely existential clauses and non-existential clauses with non-verbal predicates (nouns, adjectives, numerals, demonstratives, etc.). In Mehweb, the latter type allows the absence of a copula while the former normally does not.¹² The assertive copula can appear in both types.

(35–36) show examples of the use of *g^wa* in existential predication that assert the existence of entities or events described by an NP. Note that, in Mehweb, this type includes possessive predication (37).

- (35) *ɓuni-b g^wa muzej!*
 in.Gunib-N(ESS) ASRT museum
 ‘There is a museum in Gunib!’
- (36) *išbari meħ^we-b beɓ g^wa!*
 today in.Mehweb-N(ESS) wedding ASRT
 ‘There is wedding in Mehweb today!’
- (37) *pat’imat-la q^wa^l g^wa!*
 Patimat-GEN COW ASRT
 ‘Patimat has a cow!’

The assertive copula is also found in clauses emphasizing the existence of the already known entities (sometimes in combination with the converbal form of the copula; cf. (38)) or describing the location of the already known entities (39):

- (38) *meħ^we (le-b-le) g^wa!*
 in.Mehweb be-N-CVB ASRT
 ‘Mehweb does exist!’
- (39) *musa ɓuni-w g^wa.*
 Musa in.Gunib-M(ESS) ASRT
 ‘Musa is in Gunib.’

(40–41) show examples of the use of *g^wa* in clearly non-existential predications.

¹²An important exception is the use of NPs denoting events, which allow the absence of copula, as in (i):

- (i) *išbari meħ^we-b beɓ.*
 today in.Mehweb-N(ESS) wedding
 ‘There is a wedding in Mehweb today.’

- (40) *heš-di hum-be g^wa ha^ʔb dek'ar-i.*
 that-PL road-PL ASRT three different-ATR
 'These roads are three different (roads).' (Two sons)
- (41) *ħa-la k'unġ'ul-li-?ini b-aq'-ib-il k'unġ'ur g^wa*
 you.sg.OBL-GEN cauldron-ERG N-do:PFV-AOR-ATR cauldron ASRT
iš.
 that
 'This (cauldron) is the cauldron originating from (lit., made by) your
 cauldron.' (Molla Rasbaddin and the neighbour's cauldron, 1.5)

At least if the assertive marker follows the demonstrative, their combination can be embedded within the alleged subject phrase. In (42) the phrase *heš g^wa* 'that is' is embedded within the relative clause construction 'the house which Rasul built'.

- (42) *rasuj-ni [heš g^wa] b-aq'-ib-i qali.*
 Rasul.OBL-ERG that ASRT N-do:PFV-AOR-ATR house
 'The house that Rasul built is that one.'

Negative non-verbal predication in Mehweb contains a dedicated negative copular verb. If *g^wa* is needed, this copula appears in a converbal form:

- (43) *it učitel aħi-je g^wa.*
 that teacher be:NEG-CVB ASRT
 'He is not a teacher!'

In equative clauses, determining what the predicate is presents a complex issue because of the formal similarity between the subject and the nominal predicate. Still, one can find indirect evidence for the predicate status of one of the noun phrases based on various semantic and syntactic tests. By using these tests, it is possible to show that the assertive marker does not have to immediately follow the predicate.

First, if a nominal phrase in an equative clause includes a reflexive pronoun bound by the other part of the clause, it is likely that it is a predicate and the reflexive is bound by the subject. However, *g^wa* need not follow such a nominal predicate:

- (44) *šamil g^wa sune-s-al we^ʔ?*
 Šamil ASRT self.OBL-DAT-EMPH master
 'Šamil is a boss of himself.'

Second, in an equative clause, an expression with a true distributive quantifier arguably should not function as a predicate (Partee 1987; but see Arkadiev & Lander 2013 for counterevidence). Yet, *g^wa* is possible with the quantified NP:

- (45) *har insan g^wa sune-s-al uĥna-w rasul*
 every person ASRT self.OBL-DAT-EMPH M.inside-M(ESS) Rasul
ĥamzatow
 Gamzatov.
 ‘Everyone is Rasul Gamzatov (a famous Daghestanian writer) deep inside.’

Finally, if an equative clause contains an adjunct, the assertive copula may follow this adjunct:

- (46) *anwar meĥ^we-ja uškuj-ĥe-w g^wa učitel.*
 Anwar in.Mehweb-GEN school.OBL-IN-M(ESS) ASRT teacher
 ‘Anwar is a teacher at the Mehweb school.’

Thus, the assertive marker need not follow the predicate. At the same time, it is not obvious that *g^wa* always follows the focus. For instance, in the elicited dialog (47), *g^wa* is attached to the first part of the clause ‘Shamil is a singer’, while its focus is constituted by its second part. In answers to content questions, *g^wa* is by default attached to the part of the utterance which does not contain new information, as in (48) and (49).

- (47) *šamil učitel. – aĥin! šamil g^wa dalaj uk’-an-či!*
 Shamil teacher be:NEG Shamil ASRT song M.say:IPFV-HAB-AG
 ‘Shamil is a teacher. – No! Shamil is a singer!’
- (48) *meĥ^we-la χ^walajli či-ja? – meĥ^we-la χ^walajli g^wa*
 in.Mehweb-GEN chief who-Q in.Mehweb-GEN chief ASRT
israpil.
 Israpil
 ‘Who is the head of Mehweb? – The head of Mehweb is Israpil.’
- (49) *israpil či-ja? – israpil g^wa meĥ^we-la χ^walajli.*
 Israpil who-Q Israpil ASRT in.Mehweb-GEN chief
 ‘Who is Israpil? – Israpil is the head of Mehweb.’

Thus, we find that, in non-verbal predications as well as in verbal predications, the assertive copula does not necessarily follow the predicate and the focused element.

5 Conclusion

To sum up, the assertive marker *g^wa* has the distribution of a copula (though lacking non-finite forms which are available for the copula), but its position does not fit into the picture that is usually documented in East Caucasian languages in that it does not need to be adjacent to the predicate or focus. At the same time, we observe some constraints on its distribution in complex constructions (in particular, its reluctance to syntactic islands). I conclude that more research is needed both to approach the functions of *g^wa* and to understand the principles that govern its syntactic position.

Further, it seems that our assumed knowledge of the principles regarding other kinds of predicative markers is overestimated. Indeed, while the idea of focus-determined positions of copulas is important for East Caucasian, I am aware of no detailed corpus-based study of the position of predicative markers for any language of the family. Given the fact that during the last years the amount of corpora of East Caucasian languages has been increasing, one may hope that such studies will soon appear.

Moreover, as I emphasized in §2, predicative markers differ in their behavior, both within a single language and cross-linguistically. For East Caucasian, we need a more elaborated intragenetic typology of predicative markers. The present paper is to be considered a contribution to this line of investigation.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to all my consultants in Mehweb for their patience and to Michael Daniel, Nina Dobrushina and two anonymous reviewers for their useful comments on earlier versions of the paper.

List of abbreviations

1PL	first person plural
ABL	ablative
AD	spatial domain near the landmark
ADD	additive particle
ADVZ	adverbializer
AG	nomen agentis
ANTE	anteriority converb
AOR	aorist

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ASRT	assertive particle
ATR	attributivizer
AUX	auxiliary
CAUS	causative
CL	gender (class) agreement slot
CVB	converb
DAT	dative
EGO	egophoric
EL	motion from a spatial domain
EMPH	emphasis (particle)
ERG	ergative
ESS	static location in a spatial domain
F	feminine (gender agreement)
F1	feminine (unmarried and young women gender prefix)
FUT	future
GEN	genitive
HAB	habitual (durative for verbs denoting states)
IN	spatial domain inside a (hollow) landmark
INF	infinitive
INTER	spatial domain between multiple landmarks
IPFV	imperfective (derivational base)
LAT	motion into a spatial domain
LV	light verb
M	masculine (gender agreement)
N	neuter (gender agreement)
NEG	negation (verbal prefix)
NPL	non-human plural (gender agreement)
OBL	oblique (nominal stem suffix)
PFV	perfective (derivational base)
PL	plural
PRF	perfect
PRS	present
PST	past
PTCP	participle
PV	preverb (verbal prefix)
Q	question (interrogative particle)
SUPER	spatial domain on the horizontal surface of the landmark

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