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Verbless Clauses: Revealing the Structure within

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8.1 Introduction

In direct contrast to their frequency amongst the world’s languages, verbless constructions, such as those illustrated in the following examples (taken from Stassen 1997:62-63), have received relatively little attention in the LFG literature.¹

1. Moscow is a city.
   Moscow city
   ‘Moscow is a city.’ (Russian: Raptschinsky 1946: 11)

2. You are a soldier.
   2sg soldier
   ‘You are a soldier.’ (Guaraní: Gregores and Suarez 1967: 158)

3. John is a teacher.
   John teacher-DEF
   ‘John is a teacher.’ (Mokilese: Harrison 1976: 158)

The syntactic analysis of these constructions raises many interesting questions for all theoretical frameworks, for they appear to involve main

¹Each of us would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude and appreciation for the profound influence that Joan has had on our linguistic careers, as a role model, mentor and colleague. Over the years we have especially valued her insightful criticisms, encouraging remarks and above all the example of her own work, combining detailed empirical discussion with careful theoretical analysis.

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clause sentences without overt verbs. The existence of a non-verbal but nonetheless sentential \textit{c}-structure is not in itself at all problematic in LFG, nonetheless the question remains as to what contributes the main \textit{PRED} of the clausal or root \textit{f}-structure.

Constructions such as these are closely related to a variety of copula constructions in different languages. These include, for example, languages in which clauses such as those in (1) – (3) contain a \textit{non-verbal} copula element, often deriving originally from a pronoun or demonstrative. Examples include (4) from Maltese and (5) from Hebrew:

(4) Malta hi gżira.
Malta \textsc{cop}/3sg.fem island
‘Malta is an island.’ (Borg, 1987/8: 67, cited in Stassen 1997: 78)

(5) Pnina hi nora xamuda.
Pnina \textsc{pron}.fem awfully cute
‘Pnina is awfully cute,’ (Falk 2004: 1)

Technically speaking, such clauses are also ‘verbless’ in that they do not contain a verbal copula element, and similar issues arise as to their \textit{f}-structure representation, and in particular, the nature of the clausal \textit{PRED}. See Falk (2004) for detailed discussion of these issues in Hebrew.

In other languages the sorts of propositions expressed in (1) to (3) make use of a verb, sometimes a ‘light’ or bleached version of a lexical verb and often a specialized (auxiliary) verb used in a range of copula or predicative constructions.

(6) John is a doctor.
   Eve is fond of Mary.
   Sandy seems unhappy.
   Kim is Mary’s friend.

The current paper is intended as a small contribution to the analysis of copula constructions in general by focussing on the analysis of verbless clauses themselves and considering what can constitute evidence in favour of or against a particular syntactic analysis of these clause types. Constructions with overt verbal copulas have received some attention in the LFG literature, as has the related matter of the relational structure of non-verbal predicates dependent on copula verbs (see, for example, Dalrymple et. al. 2004). However, with the exception of Rosén (1996), and some recent discussion in Falk (2004), relatively little attention has been paid to the existence of truly verbless predicative constructions, despite the fact that the study of such constructions may cast light on issues concerning the analysis of copula constructions in general and
also of embedded predicational structures.\textsuperscript{2} The flexibility of the LFG architecture allows for two quite different approaches to the structure of these clause types. One possibility is that the non-verbal predicate is itself the clausal predicate, selecting in this case for a subject. On this view, a verbless clause such as (7) would have the \textit{f}-structure given in (8). We refer to this as the \textit{single-tier} analysis.

(7) Ota 
\textsc{3sg fem nom} doctor\textsc{sg nom} 
‘She is a doctor.’ (Russian: Fennell 1961: 288, cited in Stassen 1997: 64)

(8) \[
\begin{align*}
\text{PRED} & \quad \text{‘DOCTOR(SUBJ)’} \\
\text{CASE} & \quad \text{NOM} \\
\text{NUM} & \quad \text{SG} \\
\quad & \quad \begin{align*}
\text{PRED} & \quad \text{‘PRO’} \\
\text{NUM} & \quad \text{SG} \\
\text{SUBJ} & \quad \text{GEN} \quad \text{FEM} \\
\text{PERS} & \quad \text{3} \\
\text{CASE} & \quad \text{NOM} \\
\end{align*}
\end{align*}
\]

Another possible analysis is that these verbless clauses have a more hierarchical \textit{f}-structure in which the \textit{f}-structure of the non-verbal predicate functions as an argument within a higher \textit{f}-structure which itself has a \textit{PRED}, but where there is no overt syntactic element corresponding to this predicate in the c-structure. In LFG terms, this means that the clausal \textit{PRED} information must be contributed to the \textit{f}-structure via some other means, such as by the phrase structure rules (Rosén 1996) or through information lexically associated with another element in the clause (e.g., Nordlinger and Sadler’s (2003) analysis of Tariana verbless clauses). Thus, on this view, the \textit{f}-structure of (7) would have the sort of structure shown in (9).\textsuperscript{3} We refer to this as the \textit{double-tier} analysis.

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\textsuperscript{2}Verbless clauses have received some attention in other theoretical frameworks, see for example Avgustinova and Usakorot (2003).

\textsuperscript{3}There are of course a number of significantly different variants here, differing in terms of the grammatical function assigned to the predicative complement and whether this complement is closed or open (and therefore subject to a functional control analysis). See Dalgrymple et al. (2004) for some discussion. For the moment we abstract away from all of these details and simply represent the attribute which corresponds to the predicative element as \textit{GF}, which may correspond to any of \textit{xcomp}, \textit{comp}, \textit{obl} and \textit{predlink}. 

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Although most analyses in the LFG literature of *verbal copula* constructions adopt some version of the double-tiered approach shown above it should be noted that the single-tier analysis is also (in theory) appropriate for verbal copula constructions. That is, the copula verb and the non-verbal predicate could be taken to be co-heads of the clause, with the non-verbal predicate providing the lexical PRED and the copula verb providing tense, aspect, mood and other finiteness information.

Despite the possibility of these two quite different approaches, previous discussion of verbless clauses in the LFG literature seems to start off from the implicit premise that all such constructions cross-linguistically should have the same basic analysis (e.g., Rosén 1996 – for a contrary view in which one and the same surface copula form in Hebrew maps to divergent f-structures see Falk 2004 on the Hebrew copula). However, the fact that different possibilities are theoretically possible within the LFG framework suggests that there is no a priori reason why all verbless clauses, or indeed all copula constructions cross-linguistically, should have the same syntactic structure – this is very much an empirical issue. In this paper we discuss and exemplify the wide range of morphosyntactic variation in verbless clauses cross-linguistically, and show how this variation reveals that verbless clauses are not a single structural type at all. We show how the different properties of verbless clause types indicate distinct syntactic structures, which can be given a natural and revealing account by exploiting the two options available within the flexible architecture of LFG. In doing so we relate our discussion both to treatment of copula constructions in LFG, and recent work outside LFG on the descriptive semantic classification of types of predicative constructions.
8.2 Types of Copula Constructions

While our focus is on verbless constructions per se, these are generally functionally equivalent (or at least, in functional overlap with) with copula constructions in other languages (or even within the same language), and thus, for the purposes of framing the subsequent discussion, we begin with a discussion of the types of copula constructions more generally.

As noted by Curnow (2000), copula constructions, or those which "encode notions such as identity and classification", are extremely divergent in form (p. 1). In his own study he focusses only on the two core subtypes, which are as follows:

(10) • identity: That man is my father; That woman is Mary.
    • group membership or classification: That woman is a doctor; That man is a teacher.

Other types include existence, location and possession, which are often expressed by the same means. Curnow identifies four main strategies for encoding these core subtypes, as follows:

(11) • use of a copula verb
    • use of a particle copula
    • use of an inflectional copula construction in which a language "treats the copula complement as though it were a verb" - i.e. the predicate takes some sort of inflection similar to what a verb would normally take
    • use of a zero copula, that is, a lack of overt morphological material

This study shows that in very many languages the choice between alternative strategies is often dependent on factors such as tense and aspect, polarity, status of the clause as main or subordinate, person of the subject, and whether the semantic relation expressed is identification or classification. The fact that the choice of strategy in a given language can be influenced by superficial matters of grammatical encoding raises the interesting question as to whether the alternative strategies are externally distinct but correspond to the same f-structure.

In this paper we are concerned primarily with Curnow's latter two strategies, since in these constructions there is no clausal predicate distinct from the non-verbal predicative constituent. The following exemplify the inflectional copula (12) and the "zero copula" (13) respectively.

(12) Ben çetmen-im.
    I teacher-1sg
    I am a teacher (Turkish; Curnow 2000: 4)
(13) Pakarli mapampa.
    man.abs sorcerer.abs
    The man is a sorcerer (Watjarri: Douglas 1981: 238)

In more theoretically oriented work within the framework of HPSG, Avgustinova and Uszkoreit (2003) make much the same descriptive distinctions in their taxonomy of relations holding between a subject and a non-verbal predicate (mediated by a copula verb). Broadly, they distinguish ascriptive predication (with its subtypes as shown, corresponding to Cumow’s classification subtype) from identificational predication (with its subtypes, corresponding to Cumow’s identity subtype) from coupling predication, which groups together existential, locative and possessive uses of the copula.

(14)  
    ascriptive predication    identificational predication

    attributive    classificational    equative    specificational

    coupling

    existential    locative    possessive

Avgustinova and Uszkoreit (2003) observe that in Russian copula-less constructions are permitted in all of these functions – ascriptive, identificational, existential, locative and possessive – where they may alternate with an overt copula verb under certain conditions. Examples include the following, where (15) exemplifies ascriptive clauses and (16) identificational clauses. The ? in (15b) indicates that the overt present tense copula is possible only with appropriate contextual motivation.

(15)  
    a. On durak/tolstyj,
        he.nom.sg.m fool/nom.sg.m /fat.nom.sg.m
        ‘He is a fool/fat,’ (Avgustinova and Uszkoreit 2003: 4)
    b. ?On est durak/tolstyj,
        he.nom.sg.m is fool.nom.sg.m /fat.nom.sg.m
        ‘He is a fool/fat,’ (ibid)

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4For example, Russian short form adjectives such as gord ‘proud’ prd-ad.sg.m are exclusively predicative and never co-occur with the present tense copula, although they occur with the past tense copula.
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(16) a. Boris brat Ivan.
    Boris,NOM.SG.M brother,NOM.SG.M Ivan,GEN
    'Boris is Ivan's brother.' (Avgustinova and Uszkoreit 2003: 4)

b. Boris est' brat Ivan.
    Boris,NOM.SG.M is brother,NOM.SG.M Ivan,GEN
    'Boris is Ivan's brother.' (ibid)

What this data demonstrates is that the possibility of the copula being absent, and therefore of non-verbal syntactic predication, is not limited to one particular semantic subtype of copula construction, but is widely available as a syntactic strategy for the expression of predicational structures of a wide variety of types.

8.3 ‘Single-tier’ languages

Returning to the two possible types of analysis for verbless constructions available within LFG, support for the single-tier analysis comes from languages in which non-verbal predicates carry what would otherwise be (intransitive) verbal morphology, just when they function as the clausal predicate. These languages therefore employ Curnow’s (2000) ‘inflectional copula construction’ strategy.5 In (17a) from Abkhaz, the adjective ‘dead’ is inflected with subject agreement prefixes and tense/mood suffixes just as the intransitive verb is in (17b):

(17) a. De-psš-w-p'.
    3SG.SBJ-dead-PRES-DECL
    'He is dead.'

b. De-cwa-w-p'.
    3SG.SBJ-sleep-PRES-DECL
    'He is sleeping.' (Abkhaz: Spruit 1986: 97)

Other languages with this type of verbless clause structure include Turkish ((18), also (12) above) and Sirionó (Tupí-Guarani) (19):

(18) a. Sen geng-sim.
    2SG young-2SG
    'You are young.'

b. Sen cavus-sim.
    2SG sergeant-2SG
    'You are a sergeant.' (Turkish: Lees 1972: 70, cited in Stassen 1997: 46)

5In Hengeveld's (1992) typology of verbless clauses, these are referred to as zero-1 constructions.
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(19)  
*a. Ǹę́q̱a-he-rae,
    road-REFL-FUT
    ‘It will be a road’

b. Kiḵa̱-rv.
    man-PERF
    ‘It was a man.’ (Sirionó: Firestone 1965: 24, 34)

In Binjin Gun-wok (non-Pama-Nyungan, Australia) predicate nominals (including those in ‘adjective’ function) are inflected for a subset of the regular verbal TAM markers: the past imperfective (which in this context simply marks past tense) and the irreals mood marker (Evans 2003). Consider the following examples:6

(20) Mayh na-mekke nakla bininj-ni.
    bird  MASC-DEM MASC-DEM human-PAST
    ‘Those birds, they were human then,’ (Evans 2003:680, 13.27b)

(21) Na-map-ni.
    MASC-good-PAST
    ‘He was a good man.’ (ibid:682, 13.37c)

(22) Yawkyawk bokenth na-wu
    young-girl two MASC-REL 3.DU-tail-fish-PAST CTRFAC
    bene-berd-djen-ni yimankek
    NEUT-leg-IRR
    ‘There were two young girls who had tails like fish, they didn’t have legs’ [lit. ‘there were no legs’] (ibid: 357, 8.96)

As these examples show, nominal predicates in Binjin Gun-wok can be inflected with both tense morphology and agreement morphology (as in (22)) - both of which are usually found only on verbs. The fact that there is no evidence for a verbal head in these constructions, combined with the fact that the nominal predicate itself is inflected with specifically predicate morphology argues strongly for the single-tier analysis of these verbless clauses. This analysis is supported by the fact that the nominal is inflected with the propositional tense/mood marking which is otherwise found on verbs, but not on nominals which are arguments or adjuncts of other (verbal) heads. Thus, we represent (20) as (23),7

6CTRACF = countefactual, IRR = irreals, MASC-DEM = masculine demonstrative, MASC-REL = masculine relative pronoun.
7Leaving aside for simplicity’s sake the topicalised NP ‘those birds’, which is the topic.
The f-descriptions associated with the tense-inflected nominal are given in (24). We assume that the option for a nominal to behave predicatively and subcategorize for a subject is effected via a lexical rule (or its equivalent):

(24) \textit{bining-ni}:

\begin{align*}
\dagger \text{PRED} &= \text{‘HUMAN < SUBJ’} \\
\dagger \text{TENSE} &= \text{PAST}
\end{align*}

Thus, we generally assume that languages in which non-verbal predicates in verbless clauses are inflected with specifically predicative morphology (such as tense/aspect/mood or subject agreement) provide evidence in favour of the single-tier analysis.\footnote{A subtly different distinction is drawn in Augustinova and Ushakova’s (2003) n'esp approach to non-verbal predicates in Russian. They draw a firm distinction between short form predicative adjectives in Russian and the other cases of predication without a copula. In each case, a copula may or may not be present, depending on other factors. But in the case of the short form adjectives, they take the adjective to be the head, with any present copula treated as a specifier of the adjective, because there is morphological evidence of predicate status (it can’t be used attributively) and therefore can be the output of a lexical rule adding the relevant information. For all other cases, where the copula is present it is the head (of a headed phrase) and when it is absent they adopt a constructional approach in which “the result is a special type of non-headed phrase” (p. 12) (a \textit{silent-copula-phrase}), with two non-head daughters.}

(25) John is Peter’s brother.
This is my house.

(26) Boris (est’ brat) Ivana.
\begin{align*}
\text{Boris.NOM.SG.M (is) brother.NOM.SG.M Ivan.GEN}
\end{align*}

Here we have an identity copula mediating a relation between a SUBJ and a possessed nominal. Suppose that the copula verb, even when it is present in these examples, is a purely functional element expressing tense. These examples would then map to single-tier f-structures as the copula (if present) would not project an f-structure of its own. In this
case, on current assumptions, nominals such as house and brother have to be syntactically two-place predicates, subcategorising a SUBJ and a POSS. Although this might appear somewhat unexpected at first sight, we do not think there are grounds for ruling out this possibility. Building on the work of Barker (1998) and others, Laczkó (2000) proposes in connection with Hungarian examples such as (27) that a lexical process may operate on a predicate name and add a POSS function to an argument list.9

(27) az én kalap-om
  the I hat-1sg
  "mip hat" (Hungarian: Laczkó 2000: 211)

There is no reason in principle not to expect a predicate nominal in certain languages to also undergo this process producing a two-place predicate that subcategorises for both a SUBJ and a POSS:10

(28) hold-π < SUBJ, POSS>
  house-π < SUBJ, POSS>
  brother-π < SUBJ, POSS>

Interestingly, however, verbless sentences which are potentially analysable along these lines do not seem to occur in Bininj Gun-wok, a language in which, as we saw above, predicate nominals and adjectives appear with subjects in verbless constructions. In Bininj Gun-wok all verbless possessive constructions appear to have the possessor nominal in predicate function, as in the following example, which we assume corresponds to the F-structure in (30). Note that the presence of the past tense marker on the possessor pronoun in this example constitutes evidence that it is functioning as the predicate of the clause.

9In Nordlinger and Sadler (2003) we suggest that additional support for this account comes from the frequent systematic ambiguity of nominal tense markers which attach to nouns with possessor arguments in very many languages; the tense marker can temporarily locate either the main nominal predicate or the relation of possession. Thus the Guarani (Tupi-Guarani) b-dga-laxat (his-house-poss) "his former house" can mean either "his thing which used to be a house (e.g., it has burned down)", in which the property of being a house is located in the past and the tense marker is interpreted with respect to the nominal itself; or it can mean "the house which used to be his (but now belongs to somebody else)", in which the possession relation is located in the past, and the tense marker is not interpreted with respect to the nominal house.

10Although, of course, this poses a challenge to the standard assumption thatross is a type of subj function because we would then expect subj and ross to be in complementary distribution with a single para.
(29) Ardul-nil a-dëkë modikka.
    my-PAST VEG-that car
    'That car used to be mine.' (Bininj Gun-wok: Evans 2003:268, 7.32)

(30) [PRED ‘MY (SUBJ)’]
    [TENSE PAST]
    [SUBJ “that car”]

It remains an open question, then, whether there are single-tier languages in which non-verbal predicates can subcategorise for both a subject and a possessor function, although we strongly suspect that such languages exist. In any respect, it is clear that the coexistence of POSS and SUBJ as arguments of the nominal predicate is not necessarily an argument against the single-tier analysis. Clearly, the co-occurrence of non-verbal predication with possession throws up a number of complex and interesting issues concerning the representation of possession and the valency of predicates, which we leave for future work.

8.4 Double-tier analysis

As discussed earlier, a double-tier analysis of verbless clauses requires the positing of a ‘dummy’ predicate – a PRED in the f-structure that does not correspond to anything in the c-structure. It may at first sight seem a little contradictory to suggest that there can be morphological evidence for the existence of this additional layer, since we are essentially looking for overt evidence of non-overt structure, but we believe convincing evidence does in fact come from languages in which verbless clauses exhibit ‘tense stacking’. It is to these languages that we turn in this section. In Bininj Gun-wok we saw nominals inflected for clause-level tense when functioning as predicates of the clause. In other languages dependent nominals (i.e. those functioning as arguments or adjuncts in verb-headed clauses) can also be inflected for tense, in this case a tense which is independent of the tense of the clause. Elsewhere we have referred to this type of tense marking as ‘independent nominal tense’ (e.g., Nordlinger and Sadler 2004a). In languages with dependent nominal tense, nominal tense marking temporally locates the nominal referent independently of the tense of the clause as a whole. This is exemplified in the following example from Tariana (Arawak).\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{11}Although relatively unusual this phenomenon is by no means rare. Other languages with this type of nominal tense marking include Halkomelem (Salish) (Galloway 1980), Iate (Macro-Jê) (Lapenda 1968), Kwakiutl (Northern Wakashan)
(31) Kayu-maka hif waripere unyane-pena
so-AFF DEM:ANIM Wallipere flood-FUT
3sg-NP-plan=REM.P.REP
di-kakwa-pidanaa.
‘Thus Wallipere was planning the future flood.’ (Aikhenvald 2003)

In this example the nominal ‘flood’ is inflected with nominal future
tense -pena (expressing ‘future flood’) despite the fact that the clausal
tense is remote past, as indicated by the clausal tense/evidentiality
ditic -pidanaa.

A language such as Tariana has available two sets of tense affixes –
one set occurring on nominals and marking independent nominal tense,
and another set marking propositional tense on verbs and predicate
nominals (32). The same is true of Guaraní (Tupi-Guarani), as shown
in (33). What is most interesting from the current perspective is that
these can combine on the one nominal, as the following examples show:

(32) Pi-ya-dapana-miki-r-i-naka.
2sg-POSSESS-house-PST-NF-PRES-VIS
‘This is what used to be your house (I can see it).’ (Tariana: Aikhenvald 2003)

(33) Che-rog-a-rá-ta.
1sg-house-FUT1-FUT4
‘It will be my future house.’ (Guaraní: Dagmar Jung, pc)

Such tense stacking data provides evidence that these verbless predic-
tions must be associated with two levels of f-structure: one the locus
of the nominal tense and the other the locus of the propositional tense.
If this were not the case – if these clauses had the single-tier struc-
ture of the Biniŋ Gun-wok examples above – we would have a clash
tense features, since both the nominal tense and the propositional
tense would be unified into the same (clause-level) f-structure. These
two possible structures associated with the predicate nominal in (32)
are shown in (34) and (35). As is clear in (35), the single-tier analysis
is not viable in these tense stacking examples due to the clash of tense
features that results.

(Anderson 1985), Nambiquara (Lowe 1999), Potawatomi (Central Algonquian)
(Hodgett 1958:238), Somali (Cushitic) (Lecarme 1996, 1999); see Nordlinger and
Sadler (2004a) for more detail.
Thus, the presence of the propositional tense marker outside of the independent nominal tense marker in these examples provides evidence for a double-tier analysis of these verbless clauses, in which the nominal predicate has a grammatical function in the clause, rather than serving as the predicate directly (as in Bininj Gun-wok). Otherwise, as we have seen, we would have a clash of tense features in the \( f \)-structure of the nominal. If the propositional tense marker is constructive however, in the sense that it itself contributes the grammatical function that the nominal stem serves in the clause (Nordlinger 1998b), then the two tense markers contribute information to different \( f \)-structures and such a feature clash is avoided. This is shown by the (partial) \( f \)-structure for (32) in (34), which is licensed by the following \( f \)-descriptions associated with the various tense affixes:\(^{12}\) The inside-out statement in (36b) specifies that the \( \text{TENSE} = \text{PST} \) is in the \( f \)-structure within which \( \uparrow \) (the \( f \)-structure of the nominal) appears as the value of the attribute \( \text{GF} \).\(^{13}\)

(36) \[ \begin{align*}
& \text{a. } \text{PST-NF: } (\uparrow \text{TENSE}) = \text{PST} \\
& \text{b. } \text{PRES-VIS: } ((\text{GF } \uparrow) \text{TENSE}) = \text{PRES}
\end{align*} \]

Note that the constructive analysis of propositional tense markers outlined above is needed independently in Tariana (and a number of other languages) because the propositional tense marker can appear on dependent nominals as well as predicative nominals. Aikhenvald (2003)

\(^{12}\)For simplicity, we have only represented the tense information in the following \( f \)-descriptions, and not additional information such as gender and evidentiality. Such information can be incorporated with no impact on the analysis presented.

\(^{13}\)See Dalrymple 2001 and the references cited therein for a formal definition of inside-out function application and discussion of its application in other grammatical analyses.
states that the propositional tense/evidentiality marker in Tariana appears on any focussed constituent in the clause, including dependent nominals; (37) and (38) are examples and provide further support for the analysis above in which the propositional tense constructs a GF for the nominal to which it is attached (see Nordlinger and Sadler 2004b for further discussion).

(37) Kayu-maka dīha nawik-ni-ña ꞌ āmu
    so-AFF he person-PAUS evil-spirit
    na-nite nawiki-mi-ki-ña
    3PL.say- TOP.ADV+CL:ANIM person-PST-NP-PRES:NONVIS
    ‘So this man called evil spirit ꞌ āmu, they say he is the one who used to be a person (lit. he is an ‘ex-person’).’ (Aikhenvald 2003)

(38) Naha-se-pidana na-imu dī-na ini-ri-uku
    they-CONTR-REM.P,REP 3PL-kill 3PL-OBJ traina-TOP
    ‘They killed the traina fish.’ (ibid)

Thus, we take the tense stacking data in Tariana and Guarani to provide strong evidence that in these languages, nominal predicates are the value of a GF within the clause, as shown in (34). It remains to be explained, however, just what this GF is, and where the PRED of the clausal f-structure comes from in these constructions.

As noted by Rossén (1996), analyses of these clause types in the LFG literature differ as to whether such predicative complements correspond to open or closed functions at f-structure. Andrews (1982), for example, treats them as having the open function NCOMP, while Grimshaw (1982) takes NCOMP itself to be a closed function. Dahm ple et al. (2004) argue that these complements may be open or closed at f-structure — depending on both the language and the particular construction — and follow Butt et al. (1999) in calling the closed function PREDLINK. Unfortunately we don’t have the subtle syntactic data required to distinguish between an open or closed function for these predicative nominals in Tariana and Guarani, and so we will likewise treat them as having the closed function PREDLINK, pending further investigation.14

14 Note that agreement between a SUBJ and a non-verbal predicate just falls out under a single-tier analysis and under a double-tier XCOMP analysis as a case of subject-predicate agreement. However under the PREDLINK analysis it is necessary to state this in some sort of non-standard way (for example, by an additional lexical entry for the predicate adjective which constructs the PREDLINK function and the dummy predicate and states an inside-out constraint over the agreement features of the SUBJ in the f-structure containing the PREDLINK, i.e. ((PREDLINK ↑) SUBJ)).
We assume that a dummy clausal predicate is contributed by the propositional marker itself in these constructions. Thus, the lexical f-descriptions for the tense markers, and the full f-structure for (32) is shown in (40).

(39) \textsc{pst-nf:} (↑tense) = pst
\textsc{pres-vis:} ((gf ↑) tense) = pres
((gf ↑) pred) = ‘be (subj, predlink)’
((gf ↑) subj pred) = ‘pro’

(40) \begin{align*}
\text{tense} & \quad \text{pres} \\
\text{pred} & \quad \text{‘be (subj, predlink)’} \\
\text{subj} & \quad \begin{bmatrix}
\text{pred} & \text{‘pro’} \\
\text{tense} & \text{pst} \\
\text{predlink} & \begin{bmatrix}
\text{num} & \text{sg} \\
\text{poss} & \begin{bmatrix}
\text{pers} & \text{2} \\
\text{pred} & \text{‘pro’} \\
\end{bmatrix}
\end{bmatrix}
\end{bmatrix}
\end{align*}

On this analysis, the fact that the propositional tense marker in Guarani constructs a clausal predicate when attached to nominals accounts for the absence of this marker on dependent nominals in verb-headed clauses (since there would then be two clausal pred values). To account for the occurrence of these affixes with dependent nominals in Tariana, we assume that this part of the f-description is optional in this language.

8.5 Paradigmatic Alternations: Some Issues

We have so far argued in this paper that, in different languages and on the basis of overt morphological evidence, both the single-tier and the double-tier analysis of verbless predicative constructions are motivated. Although we have mentioned in passing some data from languages in which both overt copula and zero (or inflectional) copula constructions exist side by side, we have not yet considered what light these cases shed on the range of possible analyses.

In a reasonably large number of languages it is in fact the case that the absence of an overt copula stands in paradigmatic opposition to the presence of non-present tense copula forms within a particular construction.
For example, in Hebrew the copula-less (41) has a present tense interpretation parallel with the past tense (42) (Falk 2004), and similar facts hold in other Semitic languages such as Arabic.

(41) Pnia nora xamuda.
    Pnia awfully cute
    ‘Pnia is awfully cute.’ (Hebrew: Falk 2004: 1)

(42) Pnia hayta nora xamuda.
    Pnia be:PAST:3SG awfully cute
    ‘Pnia was awfully cute.’ (ibid)

Similarly, in Russian, the present tense copula is ungrammatical in combination with the predicative short adjectives, but is required to encode tense in past and future tense constructions (Avgustinova and Uszkoreit 2003).

(43) On (*est*) gord rezulpatami.
    he,NOM,SG,M is proud+PRED+ADJ,SG,M results,INST,PL
    ‘He is proud of the results.’ (Russian: Avgustinova and Uszkoreit 2003: 1-2)

(44) On byl gord rezulpatami.
    he,NOM,SG,M was proud+PRED+ADJ,SG,M results,INST,PL
    ‘He was proud of the results.’ (ibid:2)

Since the two clause types in (41)–(42) and (43)–(44) respectively are apparently functionally equivalent—differing only in temporal features, it seems correct to propose an analysis under which the predication relations will be the same across both clauses. In principle, of course, the requisite parallelism of analysis can be maintained on either the single-tier or the double-tier approach—in the former the overt copula is simply a tense-marking co-head of the non-verbal predicate, while in the latter a dummy PRED is constructionally or lexically introduced in the absence of the copula. Given that the role of the copula is solely functional in these examples, however, we take it that these cases of tense-related paradigmatic alternation are suggestive of a single-tier analysis. In (45) we provide an example of a lexical approach to such cases of paradigmatic alternation, but a constructional approach is also a possibility.15

15 This accords with Falk’s (2004) assumption for the alternation in (41)–(42) (although he does not formalise an analysis of the zero copula case), and with the HS6 analysis of Avgustinova and Uszkoreit (2003) for (43) and (44) in which the copula is taken as an optional specifier (i.e., dependent) of the adjective predicate. It should be noted that both papers take quite different approaches to other copula constructions in Hebrew and Russian respectively.
(45) \textit{gord} \\
\quad (↑\text{PRED}) = \textit{GORD}(\text{SUBJ}, \text{OBL}) \text{ } \checkmark \\
\quad (↑\text{SUBJ NUM}) = \text{SG} \\
\quad (↑\text{SUBJ GEND}) = \text{MASC} \\
\quad (↑\text{TENSE}) = \text{PRES} \\
(46) \textit{byl} \\
\quad (↑\text{TENSE}) = \text{PAST} \\

Treating tense as an instantiated feature (e.g., replacing \text{PRES} by \text{PREP} in (45) above) would prevent present tense being contributed by both the lexical equation introduced by the predicative adjective and also by an overt present tense copula. However the issue of how to ensure (for this construction) that the present tense copula is obligatorily absent, remains. On a constructional view it is of course possible to disjoin \epsilon with \text{V}_{\text{cop}} in the relevant phrase structure rule, and then associate (↑\text{TENSE}) = \text{PRES} with the \epsilon disjunct and (↑\text{TENSE}) = \text{PRES} with the other disjunct. But this in turn would require a "special" c-structure rule. Since our purpose here is not to provide an analysis of Russian copula constructions we leave these matters to one side.

We now turn to a different sort of contrastive opposition which interacts with the means of expression for copula constructions in some languages.

In many Australian languages, such as Wambaya (Nordlinger 1998a) and Martuthunira (Dench 1995), non-verbal predicates form independent propositions, but without any predicate-specific morphology (such as tense marking). Where a copula of sorts is possible, there is a distinct meaning difference between the use and absence of the copula in these constructions. For example, in Martuthunira, Dench (1995) shows that while ascriptive verbless clauses (such as those headed by common nominals in (47) and (48)) are effectively tenseless and imply a characteristic property, the use of a verbal copula allows the setting of temporal bounds on these states, as shown in (49).

(47) Kartungara-pawulu-ngara murtiwarla paju. \\
\quad 2SG,GEN-PL child-PL fast REAL \\
\quad 'Your children are very fast (runners).' (Martuthunira; Dench 1995: 205)

(48) Ngunhara jami panyu ngurntura-a. \\
\quad that,NOM medicine good cold-ACC \\
\quad 'That medicine is good for colds.' (ibid: 209)

(49) Pukarti-ngara nyina-marri-nguru jalya-rru. \\
\quad snakewood-PL be-COLL-PRED rubbish-NOW
‘The snakewood trees are all rubbish now (they weren’t always),’
(ibi: 210)

In Wambaya the verb otherwise meaning ‘sit’ can be used as a copula, normally with a stage level interpretation, while the non-verbal predication again implies a characteristic property. Consider the following contrast:

(50) Gurijbi/bagijbi ini alajii.
goodL.NOM/bad.L.NOM this.LSG.NOM boy.L.NOM
‘This boy is good/bad.’ (Wambaya: Nordlinger 1998a:179)

(51) Alajii gi gurijbi/bagijbi mirra.
boy.L.NOM 3SG.S(PR) goodL.NOM/bad.L.NOM sit
‘This boy feels good/bad.’ (ibi)

A similar type of distinction is also found in Hebrew. Falk (2004) attributes to Shlonsky (1997) the observation that in the present tense the choice between the zero copula or the pronominal copula can encode a stage-level vs. individual-level distinction, respectively:

(52) Ha-dinozaur hu shikor.
the-dinosaur PRON.MSG drunk.MSG
‘The dinosaur is a drunkard.’ (Falk 2004: 11)

(53) Ha-dinozaur shikor.
the-dinosaur drunk.MSG
‘The dinosaur is drunk.’ (ibi)

The question is how this contrast is to be viewed in terms of determining the associated f-structures. Given that non-verbal elements can serve as predicates in these languages, the null hypothesis for the verbless examples would seem to be the single-tier analysis. The question is whether the stage level or temporally bounded/situated examples should be similarly treated as single-tier (with the copula verb taken to be a cohead of the non-verbal predicate), or whether the semantic contrast between the two constructions types should be taken as evidence for them having different syntactic structures – the verbless examples ‘single-tierd’ and the copula examples ‘double-tiered’.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to adequately address this question here, but note that a similar contrast is also found in Bininj Gun-wok (a single-tier language, on our analysis) in the absence of any overt copulas at all. In Bininj Gun-wok the choice of subject-coding prefix on some adjectives has a clear semantic effect. Thus in the examples

16Falk (2004) treats the zero copula as single-tier and the pronominal copula as double-tier with a PREDLINK.
below, the use of a pronominal prefix gives a situational or eventive (stage-level) reading (54) while the use of the gender marker denotes a long term or characteristic property (individual-level), as in (55) and (56).

(54) Kodjok ka-mak.
    (name) 3-good
    ‘Kodjok’s OK (e.g., not upset or sick).’ (Bininj Gun-wok: Evans 2003: 557)

(55) Kodjok na-mak.
    (name) MA-good
    ‘Kodjok’s a good/handsome person.’ (ibid)

(56) Na-mak-ni.
    MA-good-PST
    ‘He was a good man.’ (ibid)

Note that this choice of pronominal or gender morphology has no bearing on the ability to combine with tense markers. The root *ngudjwarre* means ‘bad at walking, bad on one’s feet’; *al-ngudjwarre-ni* (with feminine gender prefix and past tense) was translated to mean ‘she was too old to walk, unable to walk’ (i.e., an individual level predicate), while *ba-ngudjwarre-ni* (with the verbal pronominal prefix and past tense) was translated as meaning ‘she (felt) too tired to walk’ (a stage level predicate) (Evans 2003: 557).

We interpret the Bininj Gun-wok data as showing that both sides of the semantic opposition can be encoded in single-tier f-structures, and can be independent of the use of an overt copula. So there is no reason to expect the verbal copulas above necessarily to be associated with double-tier analyses rather than single-tier co-head analyses.

**8.6 Conclusion**

While there is much work still to be done on the syntax and semantics of verbless clauses cross-linguistically, it is clear that the standard assumption that verbless clauses should all receive the same syntactic analysis is unfounded. Once verbless clauses are examined in detail, syntactic and morphological differences emerge revealing subtly different syntactic structures. In this paper we have shown that verbless clauses across the world’s languages can divided into (at least) two different structural types: one in which the non-verbal predicate is itself the f-structure *fr*. The clause (the single-tier analysis); and another in which the non-verbal predicate has a grammatical function within a higher clause with a nonovert head in the c-structure (the double-tier
analysis). In the absence of positive evidence to the contrary, the single-tier analysis—which is more economical in assuming less structure—is the default hypothesis for verbless clauses cross-linguistically. However, positive evidence for the double-tier analysis is possible, as for example with the interesting cases of tense stacking in the languages of Tariana and Guarani. While these clause types raise interesting and challenging issues for all theoretical frameworks, we have shown how these different syntactic structures can be captured naturally within the flexible architecture of LFG. It is hoped that this discussion will prompt further research into the nature of verbless clauses cross-linguistically, and their relationship to copula clauses of all types.

References


