

## Remarks on Constructions with the Copula in North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic Dialects

*Geoffrey Khan* – Cambridge University  
Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies,  
Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge CB3 9DA (U.K.)

[In this paper I shall describe some features of the historical background and the syntax of the copula in North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic (NENA). The examples of its syntax will be taken from one representative dialect of the group, namely the dialect of Barwar. This was spoken by a community of Assyrian Christians in a cluster of villages in the region of Barwar-i Bala in northern Iraq along the Be-Xelapa river between Amedia and the Turkish border, until the destruction of the villages during the *Anfāl* campaign against the Kurds in the 1980s.]

**Keywords:** Aramaic dialects, syntax, copula construction.

### 1.0. *The historical background of the copula in North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic*

The copula in the North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic (NENA) group of dialects<sup>1</sup> has undergone a number of historical developments compared to earlier phases of Aramaic.<sup>2</sup> In this dialect group the copula is generally a clitic. It has an inflection varying for person and number and corresponds, in most respects, to the conjugation of verbs. The form of the paradigm of the present enclitic copula varies across the NENA region. I present here the paradigms of three dialects, which exhibit the main ways in which they differ:

	Jewish	Sanandaj	Qaraqosh	Barwar
3rd pers.ms.		-y, -ye-	-ilə	-ile
fs.		-ya	-ila	-ila
pl.		-yen	-ina	-ile

1. The term was coined by Hoberman (1988, 557) to replace ‘Eastern Neo-Aramaic of earlier classifications (cf. Socin 1882, v; Duval 1896, 125; Tsereteli 1977, 1978). This was necessary in order to distinguish the north-eastern dialects from modern Mandaic, which is as distant typologically from them as the western Neo-Aramaic dialects.

2. A more detailed discussion of the historical development of the copula in the NENA dialects can be found in Khan (2001).

2 <sup>nd</sup> pers.ms.	-yet	-iyət	-iwət
fs.	-yat	-iyat	-iwət, -iwat
pl.	-yetun	-iyetu	-iwitu, -iwetu
1 <sup>st</sup> pers.ms.	-yena	-iyən	-iwən
fs.	-yan	-iyan	-iwən, -iwan
pl.	-yex	-iyax	-iwəx

The inflection of the present copula corresponds to that of present tense verbs. In some dialects, such as Jewish Sanandaj, this applies to the whole paradigm, whereas in others, such as Qaraqosh and Barwar, the verbal inflection is found only in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person forms. The verbal inflection corresponds to that of final -y verbs. The present tense paradigms of *šty* ‘to drink’ in the three dialects in question are as follows:

	Jewish	Sanandaj	Qaraqosh	Barwar
3 <sup>rd</sup> pers.ms.		<i>šate</i>	<i>šatə</i>	<i>šate</i>
fs.		<i>šatya</i>	<i>šatya</i>	<i>šatya</i>
pl.		<i>šaten</i>	<i>šate</i>	<i>šate</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> pers.ms.		<i>šatet</i>	<i>šatət</i>	<i>šatət</i>
fs.		<i>šatyat</i>	<i>šatyat</i>	<i>šatyət, šatyat</i>
pl.		<i>šatetun</i>	<i>šatetu</i>	<i>šatetu</i>
1 <sup>st</sup> pers.ms.		<i>šatena</i>	<i>šatən</i>	<i>šatən</i>
fs.		<i>šatyan</i>	<i>šatyan</i>	<i>šatyən, šatyan</i>
pl.		<i>šatex</i>	<i>šatax</i>	<i>šatəx</i>

The NENA dialects also use the verb *hwy*, which is the descendant of the verb ‘to be’ in earlier Aramaic. This verb, however, is restricted to certain functions. It is suppletive to the copula. Broadly speaking, the copula expresses the indicative present of the verb ‘to be’, whereas forms of the verb *hwy* express the future, irrealis and imperative. The paradigm of the verb *hwy* has the regular inflection of final -y verbs, e.g. Barwar irrealis:

3 <sup>rd</sup> pers.	ms.	<i>hawe</i>
	fs.	<i>hawya</i>
	pl.	<i>hawe</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> pers.	ms.	<i>hawət</i>
	fs.	<i>hawyət, hawyat</i>
	pl.	<i>hawetu</i>
1 <sup>st</sup> pers.	ms.	<i>hawən</i>
	fs.	<i>hawyən, hawyan</i>
	pl.	<i>hawəx</i>

In Ṭuroyo and modern Mandaic, which are the Neo-Aramaic dialect groups adjacent to NENA, the present copula is clearly a pronominal element rather than a verb:

Ṭuroyo:<sup>3</sup>

Independent pronoun		Enclitic copula
3rd pers.ms.	<i>hūwe</i>	<i>-yo</i>
fs.	<i>hīya</i>	<i>-yo</i>
pl.	<i>hinne</i>	<i>-ne</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> pers.ms.	<i>hat</i>	<i>-hat</i>
fs.	<i>hat</i>	<i>-hat</i>
pl.	<i>hātu</i>	<i>-hātu</i>
1st pers.ms.	<i>'uno</i>	<i>-no</i>
fs.	<i>'uno</i>	<i>-no</i>
pl.	<i>'aḥna</i>	<i>-na</i>

These are the forms that are used in the urban centre of Midyat. In the variety of Ṭuroyo that is spoken in the surrounding villages the 3ms. pronoun is *hīye*. The 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular enclitic forms do not appear to be directly related to the independent forms of the pronoun that are in use today, but rather are reflexes of an enclitic 3ms. form of earlier Aramaic. Compare Syriac *-ū*, *-yū*, which is the enclitic form of *hū* 'he' (Jastrow 1985: 33).

Modern Mandaic<sup>4</sup>

Independent pronoun		Enclitic copula
3 <sup>rd</sup> pers.ms.	<i>hūy</i>	<i>-ye</i>
fs.	<i>hīd</i>	<i>-ī</i>
pl.	<i>honnī</i>	<i>-non</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> pers.ms.	<i>at</i>	<i>-at</i>
fs.	<i>at</i>	<i>-at, -et</i>
mpl.	<i>atton</i>	<i>-ton</i>
fpl.	<i>atten</i>	<i>-ten</i>
1 <sup>st</sup> pers.ms.	<i>an, anā</i>	<i>-nā, nan</i>
pl.	<i>anī</i>	<i>-nī</i>

The situation in Ṭuroyo and modern Mandaic corresponds to what is found in the earlier forms of literary eastern Aramaic, such as Syriac and Jewish Babylonian Talmudic Aramaic, in which the present tense copula is pronominal, e.g. Syriac: *'alāhā zaddīk-ū* 'God is righteous' (literally: God righteous-he), *'urhā da-šrārā 'alīšā-y* 'The road of truth is painful' (literally: the-road of-truth painful-it).<sup>5</sup>

3. Cf. Ritter (1990, 1, 7).

4. Cf. Macuch (1989, 50; 1993, 52-53).

5. Nöldeke (1904, 246), Duval (1969, 362).

If we look at the three paradigms above that illustrate the various forms of the present copula in NENA, we can identify in the stem of the forms the elements /i/, // and /w/. These elements have a different distribution in the copula forms across the various dialects.

The /i/ element appears to be in origin a 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular pronominal form. Compare Turoyo -yo and modern Mandaic -ye, -ī. In NENA this 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronominal element has been generalized throughout the paradigm and acts as the base for inflections taken over from the present verbal paradigm. The generalization of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun throughout the paradigm reflects the fact that it has lost its original referential properties and so it is doubtful whether it should be considered to be resuming the subject in an extrapositional type of construction that is clearly the origin of pronominal copula constructions in North West Semitic.

The // element at first sight seems curious in a copula form. In some NENA dialects, such as Jewish Urmi, this element has been generalized throughout the paradigm of the present copula and occurs in all persons (cf. Khan 2008a: 61). It is possible to identify this // element with the // that occurs in the NENA dialects as a marker of the direct object and is found before pronominal direct objects, e.g. Barwar: *xaze-le* 'He sees him', *xaze-la* 'He sees her', *xaze-lu* 'He sees them', etc. The explanation as to why this object marker should appear in a copula paradigm is apparently that such forms were in origin presentative constructions, i.e. 'behold him, behold he is ...', or, at least, developed by analogy with presentative forms. Some NENA dialects have a separate presentative series with object suffixes containing the object marker //, e.g. Barwar: *holi* 'behold me', *holux* 'behold you', *hole* 'behold him', etc. Although the morphology of copula forms with this // element is presentative in origin, the enclitic copula does not generally have a presentative function. This is clearly shown by the fact that the // is retained in many dialects even in the negated form of the copula, e.g. Qaraqosh: *lele* 'he is not', *lela* 'she is not'. In dialects such as Jewish Sanandaj that do not contain an // anywhere in the paradigm of the copula, it is likely that the // existed historically, at least in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person forms, but has now been elided. This is shown by the fact that the // has survived in 3<sup>rd</sup> person forms in certain phonotactic environments, namely where the copula is cliticized to a word ending in -e, e.g. 'o *reš-garele* 'He is on the roof (*gare*)'.

The /w/ element, which we see in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person forms in Jewish Arbel, is likely to have entered the copula paradigm by analogy with the paradigm of the suppletive verb *hwy*. Indeed the assimilation of the inflectional endings of the copula in all dialects to those of verbal paradigms is likely to be specifically to the inflectional ending of the verb *hwy*, since, as we have seen, the verbal inflection of the copula in all dialects should be identified as that of the final -y paradigm of verbs. In a copula paradigm such as that of Jewish Arbel, the assimilation to the verb *hwy* goes one stage further, in that, in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> forms at least, not only are the inflectional endings of *hwy* taken over, but also the /w/ of the base.

The NENA copula, therefore, although pronominal in origin, has now become reinterpreted as a cliticized verbal copula form.

## 2.0. THE SYNTAX OF THE COPULA

### 2.1. PHONOTACTIC FORMS OF THE COPULA

In the Barwar dialect the copula exists in two phonotactic forms, enclitic and independent. These must be distinguished when determining its function. The position of the enclitic copula in the clause must also be taken into account. In the majority of cases the enclitic form is attached to the end of the predicate,

e.g. *brónux spà̄y-ile*<sup>1</sup> ‘Your son is good’,<sup>6</sup> though in some circumstances it is attached to the subject, e.g. *’áw-ile spà̄y*<sup>1</sup> ‘He is good’. The independent form bears its own stress and typically occurs between the subject and predicate, e.g. *brónux ’ile xàwri*<sup>1</sup> ‘Your son is my friend’.

### 2.1.1. Enclitic copula Attached to the Predicate

The enclitic copula attached to the predicate may be regarded as the functionally unmarked form of the copula. It is used irrespective of the time stability of the predicate. The predicate may express a permanent property of the subject, e.g. *brónux spà̄y-ile*<sup>1</sup> ‘Your son is good’. It may identify the referent of the subject with that of the nominal of the predicate, which is typically a permanent relationship, e.g. *’áwáha gáwra brònən-ile*<sup>1</sup> ‘That man is our son’. The predicate may also express a contingent situation that is not necessarily a permanent property of the subject, e.g. *brónux kp̄inele*<sup>1</sup> ‘Your son is hungry’. Further examples:

- (1) *’áθra rába basimele*<sup>1</sup> ‘The country is very beautiful.’ (B5:148)
- (2) *’ána řaxànewən*<sup>1</sup> ‘I am a miller.’ (A32:10)
- (3) *bráta zamàrtela*<sup>1</sup> ‘The girl is a singer.’ (A25:68)
- (4) *řiwən diyən-ile*<sup>1</sup> ‘It is our border.’ (A14:48)
- (5) *’ána ’Abda-Rahmān-iwən*<sup>1</sup> ‘I am Abda Rahmān.’ (A23:26)
- (6) *rába k̄ixewən*<sup>1</sup> ‘I am very tired.’ (A18:32)
- (7) *xòđiwən*<sup>1</sup> ‘I am by myself.’ (A22:32)

The predicate may be combined with the particles *heř* ‘still’ and *har* ‘already, still’, which demonstrate that the situation is not permanent, implying an end-point or starting-point, e.g.

- (8) *brónux heř kp̄inele*<sup>1</sup> ‘Your son is still hungry.’
- (9) *brónux har kp̄inele*<sup>1</sup> ‘Your son is already hungry.’
- (10) *’áw heř màlkele*<sup>1</sup> ‘He is still king.’
- (11) *’áw har màlkele*<sup>1</sup> ‘He is already king.’

It is unmarked with regard to the referential nature of the subject argument, in that it is used both with subjects that have a specific referent, as is the case in examples adduced so far, and also with those that denote a generic class, as in (12)—(13):

- (12) *gilāndi rába gòrele*<sup>1</sup> ‘The scythe is very big.’ (B5:143)
- (13) *řawátta t-pràzlela*<sup>1</sup> ‘The sickle is made of iron.’ (B5:140)

The construction exhibits functional unmarkedness with regard to the topical status of the subject. The subject is normally definite, i.e. its referent is identifiable, but there is no restriction on the topicality of the subject referent. The topicality of this referent depends on the degree to which it has been evoked in the immediately preceding discourse or in the speech situation. If it has been explicitly mentioned in the immediately preceding discourse, it is high in topicality, e.g.

6. In the transcription a grave accent (̀) indicates the nuclear stress of the intonation group and an acute accent (́) marks a non-nuclear stress. An intonation group boundary is marked by the symbol <sup>1</sup>. References after the examples relate to the text corpus in Khan (2008b).

(14) *'ána xzéli brònu.x.<sup>l</sup> brònu.x spà-y-ile.<sup>l</sup>* 'I have seen your son. Your son is good.'

Such nominals can be pronominalized, e.g.

(15) *'ána xzéli brònu.x.<sup>l</sup> 'áw spà-y-ile.<sup>l</sup>* 'I have seen your son. He is good.'

A nominal may also be definite, with an identifiable referent, by virtue of the fact that it is anchored to the preceding discourse by some element within it, such as a pronominal suffix or an annexed noun with a referent that has been evoked previously, although the referent of the nominal itself has not been evoked. In such cases the nominal is lower in topicality and cannot be pronominalized, e.g.

(16) *kut-šéta y-ázən l-màθa.<sup>l</sup> nášət máθa spà-y-ila.<sup>l</sup> yawíli féke mən-kermàne.<sup>l</sup>* 'Every year I go to the village. The people of the village are good. They give me fruit from the orchards.'

A nominal may also be definite by virtue of the fact that it is inferable as being a component associated with the situation evoked in the preceding discourse, although it is not specifically mentioned in it. Also in such cases it is lower in topicality, arguably lower even than when anchored, and cannot be pronominalized, e.g.

(17) *kut-šéta y-ázən l-màθa.<sup>l</sup> náše spà-y-ila.<sup>l</sup> yawíli féke mən-kermàne.<sup>l</sup>* 'Every year I go to the village. The people are good. They give me fruit from the orchards.'

This topicality scale of definite nominals may be summarized by the following hierarchy, in which the symbol > denotes 'of higher topicality than':

Explicitly mentioned > Anchored > Inferable

First and second person pronouns are high in topicality by virtue of the fact that their referents are given in the speech situation, e.g.

(18) *'ána spà-y-iwən.<sup>l</sup>* 'I am good.'

(19) *'áti spà-y-iwət.<sup>l</sup>* 'You are good.'

It can be seen, therefore, that the construction in which the enclitic copula is attached to the predicate is used irrespective of the topicality of the subject nominal.

The construction is also unmarked with regard to the communicative salience of the proposition of the clause as a whole. This is reflected by its usage irrespective of the factivity of the proposition. It is used both in factive and non-factive propositions. Clauses expressing assertive, factive propositions are high in communicative salience in that the speaker is committed to its factuality. Non-factive propositions do not involve such commitment and are low in communicative salience. This applies, for example, to interrogative clauses, in which the proposition is being questioned, e.g.

(20) *bróne díye spà-y-ile.<sup>l</sup>* 'His son is good'

(21) *bróne díye spà-y-ile?<sup>l</sup>* 'Is his son is good?'

The enclitic copula sometimes has a past tense reference in clauses that are syntactically subordinated to or closely associated with a clause with a past verb form, e.g.

- (22) *Fárxo m̀àre*<sup>1</sup> *ʿáp-ʿana m̀tálən m̀ənnəxu*<sup>1</sup> *z̀òrele*<sup>1</sup> ‘Farxo said “I also shall play with you.” He was young.’ (A25:87)
- (23) *ʿu-ʿε-Leliθa θ̀èla*<sup>1</sup> *ʿáy k̀ulla d̀ònela*<sup>1</sup> *d̀òna*<sup>1</sup> *m̀šša*<sup>1</sup> *ʿina θ̀èla l-t̀àra*<sup>1</sup> ‘The Leliθa came. She was all (made of) fat, fat, oil. She came to the door.’ (A19:4)
- (24) *š̀lèla*<sup>1</sup> *t̀fiqla mu ʿàlləm*<sup>1</sup> *mu ʿàlləm*<sup>1</sup> *d̀əkkána g̀òrtela*<sup>1</sup> ‘She went down and met the teacher. The teacher — the shop (he was in) was big.’ (A22:18)
- (25) *q̀imtela*<sup>1</sup> *ẁiðt̀elle ʿixàla*<sup>1</sup> *b̀èʿe*<sup>1</sup> *q̀èdamtela*<sup>1</sup> ‘She made him food, some eggs. It was early morning.’ (A23:4)

### 2.1.2. The Independent Copula

The independent copula is marked with regard to the nature of the predicate and subject and also with regard to the communicative salience of the proposition expressed by the clause.

There are restrictions with regard to the type of predicate and subject that occur in this construction. The predicate is identificatory or expresses a permanent property of the subject, which is typically an intrinsic defining property rather than an acquired property. It is not used when the predicate denotes a contingent situation. The subject of the construction is always high in topicality. There is no restriction, however, regarding the referential status of the subject, in that it may have a specific referent or denote a generic class. This is illustrated in the following examples, e.g.

- (1) *ʿána ʿiwən Rustámō br̀on-t-Z̀àlo*<sup>1</sup> ‘I am Rustam son of Zāl.’ (A29:63)
- (2) *ʿána ʿiwən Yúwəl Yuḥànnā*<sup>1</sup> ‘I am Yuwəl Yuḥanna.’ (A1:1)
- (3) *ʿáxni ʿiwəx m̀àlke*<sup>1</sup> ‘We are kings.’ (A18:8)
- (4) *ʿáwwa ʿile sulàqa*<sup>1</sup> ‘This is the (festival of) Ascension.’ (B6:7)
- (5) *b̀éθət Q̀ára T̀éždin q̀idle*<sup>1</sup> *Q̀ára T̀éždin ʿile x̀ətne d̀iye*<sup>1</sup> ‘The house of Qara Teždin has burnt down. Qara Teždin is his brother-in-law.’ (A26:55)
- (6) *ʿiθwalən š̀əwma*<sup>1</sup> *yáʿni ʿéða y-aθ́éwa m̀ən-š̀əwma*<sup>1</sup> *š̀əwma ʿile xamš̀i yomáθa*<sup>1</sup> ‘We had a fast, that is the festival came after a fast. The fast is fifty days.’ (B5:52)
- (7) *ʿáxxa ʿiθena d̀əwla*<sup>1</sup> *d̀əwla ʿile xa-sandùqa*<sup>1</sup> *r̀éše p̀hixele d̀ére x̀ətṭe g̀áwe*<sup>1</sup> ‘Here there is a drum. The drum is a box, with an open top, in which they put wheat.’ (B6:54)
- (8) *θ̀áyele q̀āša*<sup>1</sup> *ʿu-sára gǹunele*<sup>1</sup> *ʿó gǹuna ʿile niš̀ànqa*<sup>1</sup> ‘The priest comes and ties the band. The band is a symbol.’ (B5:44)
- (9) *ʿu-k̀ut-xa*<sup>1</sup> *ʿitle g̀ómət g̀ʿəne*<sup>1</sup> *ʿitle dúka m̀ruzágtā y-amr̀áxla d̀una*<sup>1</sup> ... *g̀óma ʿile gawàye*<sup>1</sup> *d̀una ʿile qam-t̀àra*<sup>1</sup> ‘Everybody has his own basement stable and a place prepared (for feeding), which we call a *duna* (feeding pen). ... The basement stable is inside and the feeding pen is outside.’ (B5:110)
- (10) *x̀àrθa*<sup>1</sup> *y-aθ́éleni ʿéða*<sup>1</sup> *ʿéðət be-yàlda*<sup>1</sup> *ʿéðət be-yàlda ʿile ẃéθət M̀š̀ixa*<sup>1</sup> ‘Then we have (another) festival, the festival of Christmas. The festival of Christmas is (in commemoration of) the birth of Christ.’ (B6:12)

The high topicality of the subject item in (4)–(10) arises from the fact that its referent has been referred to in the immediately preceding discourse, where it is an item of central concern. In the case of full nominal subjects, moreover, the nominal itself has typically been mentioned in the preceding clause, as can be seen in the examples. Constructions such as (1)–(3) with 1st person pronominal subjects, however, often occur at the beginning of speech. One factor contributing to the high topicality of the subject referent could be that the referent of the pronoun is present and observable by the hearer in the speech situation. Another factor is that such clauses are typically used at the beginning of a speech in

which the first person referent plays a prominent role in the subsequent clauses. We may call this forward pointing topicality. This is the case, for example, with the discourse following the clause adduced in (1) above, which is reproduced below:

- (11) *'ána 'iwən Rustámo brōn-t-Zàlo, ... hon-'áθya ṭlábəlla brátux, nablánna ṭla-bàbi.* 'I am Rustam son of Zāl ... I have come seeking the hand of your daughter, in order to take her to my father.' (A29:63)

A construction with an independent copula is marked with regard to communicative salience. It is used in clauses expressing assertive, factive propositions, which are high in communicative salience in that the speaker is committed to their factuality, but it is not used to express non-factive propositions such as interrogative clauses, in which the proposition is being questioned. If the clause is interrogative, the enclitic copula on the predicate is used. This is illustrated in (12), which contains assertive and interrogative clauses:

- (12) *'àxni<sup>1</sup> kàslən<sup>1</sup> šàbθa<sup>1</sup> 'ila šawwà-yome<sup>1</sup> 'u-yàrxax<sup>1</sup> 'ile ṭlaθi-yome.<sup>1</sup> 'áxtu šabθéxu 'əštà-yomela?<sup>1</sup> yarxéxu 'əsri-w- 'əçčà-yomele?<sup>1</sup>* 'A week for us is seven days and a month is thirty days. Is your week six weeks? Is your month twenty-nine days?' (A17:13)

The communicative salience of the construction gives the clause a degree of independence from the preceding discourse. This is often exploited to express some kind of reorientation in the discourse. When the subject is a 3rd person pronoun or a nominal that has been mentioned in the preceding discourse, the construction is generally used to express some kind of elaborative background on what precedes. It can be seen as a device to mark a boundary or discontinuity in the flow of the discourse. This is a common discourse usage of constructions with communicative salience. Alternatively communicative salience of the construction is sometimes exploited to give prominence to a statement deemed to be of particular importance. This applies especially to clauses with a 1st or 2nd person pronominal subject (1–3). These often occur at the beginning of a section of discourse.

When the subject of the independent copula is pronominal, in some cases it is expressed only by the inflection of the copula and is not realized by an independent pronoun, e.g.

- (13) *'e-màsta<sup>1</sup> 'i-deríla gu-gùða.<sup>1</sup> gúða mòdile?<sup>1</sup> 'ile gáldət xa-hèywən.<sup>1</sup>* 'They put the yoghurt in a churn. What is a churn? It is an animal skin.' (B6:38)
- (14) *xéla díya mòdile<sup>1</sup> t-mazvərra?<sup>1</sup> 'ila mīya.<sup>1</sup>* 'What is its power, which turns it? It is water.' (B6:53)
- (15) *ba 'úθət ninwàye<sup>1</sup> ... léle 'éða diyàna.<sup>1</sup> 'ile 'éða qàwmi.<sup>1</sup>* 'The Rogation of the Ninevites is not a religious festival. It is a national festival.' (B6:17)

### 2.1.3. Enclitic Copula Attached to the Subject

When the subject of the clause is high in topicality, the copula in some instances does not stand independently with its own stress but rather is cliticized to the subject, e.g.

- (1) *'áyyela çìta.* 'This is butter.' (B6:41)
- (2) *'u-'áyyela kùlla.* 'This is all (the story).' (A4:24)
- (3) *'áw-ile síra bìya.* 'It is tied to it.' (B6:55)
- (4) *xúwwele qṭila!* 'The snake is killed!' (A24:42)

These constructions share with the independent copula construction the feature of having subjects with topical prominence. In the examples cited above, the referent of the subject has been referred to in the immediately preceding discourse where it is of central concern. The clauses are, however, unmarked with regard to the nature of the predicate, in that they may express either a contingent or a permanent property of the subject. They are also unmarked with regard to the communicative salience and assertiveness of the proposition of the clause as a whole. This is shown by the fact that the construction is used in interrogative clauses containing interrogative words that are in the subject position, e.g.

(5) *'énile gu-bêθa?*<sup>1</sup> 'Who is in the house?'

(6) *'énile zaqàra?*<sup>1</sup> 'Who is a weaver?'

Such constructions, therefore, are close in function to clauses with the copula cliticized to the predicate, which are likewise unmarked with regard to the nature of the predicate and the communicative salience of the clause. They differ only in the marked status of the subject referent, in that this must be an item that is topically prominent. The placement of the copula on the interrogative subject as in (5) and (6) can be interpreted as a reflection of the topical prominence of the interrogative word. It is not topically prominent by virtue of being informational given, but rather since it is what the question primarily requests information about.<sup>7</sup> Moreover it has a feature analogous to what has been described above as forward pointing topicality. This is because the referent of the interrogative constituent is typically expected to be identified in the subsequent discourse.

The notion of forward pointing topicality also explains the attachment of the copula in (7) to the adverbial *hádax*, which is linked as a correlative to the following prepositional phrase:

(7) *'ítli ðá brātət-màma<sup>1</sup> hádax-ila štrànta<sup>1</sup> max-d-àwwa yóma.<sup>1</sup>* 'I have a cousin. She is as beautiful as this sun (lit. She is thus beautiful, like this sun).' (A7:17)

## 2.2. The Deictic Copula

The Barwar dialect also has what may be called a 'deictic copula'. This is formed by combining the presentative element *ho-* with the enclitic present copula. The most commonly used forms are the following:

3rd pers.	ms.	<i>hóle</i>	(< <i>ho</i> + <i>ile</i> )
	fs.	<i>hóla</i>	(< <i>ho</i> + <i>ila</i> )
	pl.	<i>hóle</i>	(< <i>ho</i> + <i>ile</i> )
2 <sup>nd</sup> pers.	ms.	<i>hówat</i>	(< <i>ho</i> + <i>wat</i> )
	fs.	<i>hówat/hówat</i>	(< <i>ho</i> + <i>wat</i> )
	pl.	<i>hówitu</i>	(< <i>ho</i> + <i>witu</i> )
1st pers.	ms.	<i>hówən</i>	(< <i>ho</i> + <i>wən</i> )
	fs.	<i>hówən/hówan</i>	(< <i>ho</i> + <i>wən</i> )
	pl.	<i>hówəx</i>	(< <i>ho</i> + <i>wəx</i> )

As is the case with the independent copula, the deictic copula exhibits certain restrictions with regard to the nature of the predicate and subject and also with regard to the communicative salience of the

7. For the topicality of interrogative words see Steedman (2000, 659).

proposition expressed by the clause. It is generally used when the predicate expresses a contingent situation that is not necessarily a permanent property of the subject. It may be used without any other clause constituents to draw attention to the location of a referent in the current speech situation, e.g.

- (1) *máre kèla tóto?*<sup>1</sup> *máre hòla.*<sup>1</sup> ‘He said “Where is grandma?” He said “There she is (as we speak).”’ (A7:24)

In many cases it is combined with a locative adverbial in the predicate, e.g.

- (2) *yonátha hóla reše-reše-diye.*<sup>1</sup> ‘Doves are over him.’ (A25:58)  
 (3) *hóla skínta mənne.*<sup>1</sup> ‘A knife is with him (= he has a knife).’ (A30:21)  
 (4) *’u-hóla wajjúwe díya làxxa.*<sup>1</sup> ‘and her personal effects are here.’ (A21:9)  
 (5) *baxtáθan hóla yaqúre tər wəθna.*<sup>1</sup> ‘Our wives are both pregnant.’ (A25:2)  
 (6) *xátna hóle zína l-gàre.*<sup>1</sup> ‘The groom is standing on the roof.’ (B8:34)

Examples (2)–(6) all express contingent situations that hold at the moment of speaking, but are not presented as permanent. The subjects are of various different types of informational value including newly introduced referents (2)–(3), referents that are anchored by a pronominal suffix to a previously mentioned referent (4) or to the participants of the speech situation (5) and a referent that is explicitly given in the preceding discourse (6).

The construction with the deictic copula is occasionally used where the predicate is intended to express a permanent property of the subject. In such cases the subject is generally a referent that has been newly introduced into the discourse, e.g.

- (7) *xa-bráta hóla tàma.*<sup>1</sup> ‘A girl is there.’ (A25:68)  
 (8) *’Ēn-Nūne hóla npíltu gu-’áθrət Bārwar.*<sup>1</sup> ‘En Nune lies in the land of Barwar.’ (B4:1)  
 (9) *qimēle, šammət máθa díye wéwa Barwore.*<sup>1</sup> *’ámte díye hóla gu-Sàrzar’ u-xále díye hóle gu-Daštane.*<sup>1</sup>  
 ‘The name of his village was Barwore. His aunt is in Sarzar and his uncle is in the Daštane.’ (A23:1)  
 (10) *’iθan xà’a hóle gu-Kàrkuk.*<sup>1</sup> ‘There is a person, he is in Kirkuk.’ (A16:1)  
 (11) *kúlla pəlxána, pəlxánət béθa hóle b-qǝ̀̀ali.*<sup>1</sup> ‘All the work, the work of the house is my duty (literally: is on my neck).’ (A21:27)

The deictic copula may be used to express a permanent property in a clause that has a topical, informationally given, subject. In such cases the speaker draws special attention to the proposition expressed by the clause rather than to the referent of the subject, e.g.

- (12) *’aw-’éne díye npíltela isəqθe’ amər hà! hóla gwirta!*<sup>1</sup> ‘His eye fell on his ring and he said “Ah, she is married!”’ (A26:31)

In (12) the deictic copula gives particular prominence to the proposition that ‘she is married’ due to the fact that the speaker is surprised by the discovery of this unexpected situation.

In principle the subject of a deictic copula has a specific referent and does not denote a generic class. Examples are sometimes encountered that appear to go against this principle, such as (6) above where the subject *xátna* (‘the groom’) is referring generically to the groom in any wedding. In such cases the speaker

is no doubt presenting the subject as if it were a specific case of the class concerned for the sake of vividness.

Constructions with the deictic copula are marked with regard to communicative salience, as is the case with the independent basic copula. It is used in clauses expressing assertive, factive propositions, which are high in communicative salience in that the speaker is committed to their factuality, but it is not used to express non-factive propositions such as interrogative clauses, in which the proposition is being questioned. If the clause is interrogative, the enclitic copula on the predicate is used.

(13) *baxtáθan hóla yaqùre.*<sup>1</sup> ‘Our wives are pregnant.’

(14) *baxtáθan yaqùrela?*<sup>1</sup> ‘Are our wives pregnant?’

If a question does not relate to the factuality of a proposition, the deictic copula may be used, e.g.

(15) *qa-mó brónux hóle gu-bèθa?* ‘Why is your son in the house?’

The deictic copula is also used in an assertion that is embedded in a question, e.g.

(16) *lá-màrexu `áyya quşárta hóla b-`ùrxa?*<sup>1</sup> ‘Did you not say that this cooking pot is on the way (to giving birth)?’ (A5:5)

In general the deictic copula is a device for drawing the particular attention of the hearer to something in the immediate speech situation. This may be a property of the subject expressed in the predicate that is observable in the immediate situation, but not necessarily a permanent property, or a permanent property that is unexpected. Alternatively it may be a referent that is newly introduced into the discourse and, therefore, worthy of particular attention. In some cases, both of these conditioning factors may be operative. The ultimate decision as to whether a basic copula or a deictic copula is used, however, depends on the degree of prominence that the speaker wishes to give to the subject referent or the predication in a particular discourse context. Consider, for example, (17):

(17) *xa-şaqòlele<sup>1</sup> mkùlçele<sup>1</sup> `u-xa-xèna<sup>1</sup> ða-`àtma<sup>1</sup> hóla sàxi.<sup>1</sup> märe `áyya `àtma<sup>1</sup> nablátla `alla-diya.<sup>1</sup>* ‘One is a shank, it is stripped (of its meat). Another, a thigh, is in good condition. He said (to the servant) “Take this thigh to her.”’ (A30:30)

Here both the ‘shank’ and the ‘thigh’ are newly introduced referents and the predications concerning them both denote contingent situations that exist at the time of speaking. The narrator, however, wishes to give greater prominence in the discourse to the ‘thigh’ since this is the concern of the following speech.

The deictic copula may be used to draw attention to the situation as a whole expressed by a clause when this marks the onset of a section of discourse and provides the background for what follows. Consider the wider context of (5) cited above:

(18) *málka märe fla-d-o-xóne fāqira,<sup>1</sup> märe xòni<sup>1</sup> baxtáθan hóla yaqùre tərwəθna.<sup>1</sup> `ən-báxtux muθéla bràta<sup>1</sup> `u-báxti muθéla bròna,<sup>1</sup> brátux qa-bròni.<sup>1</sup> `ən-báxti muθéla bràta<sup>1</sup> `u-báxtux muθéla bròna,<sup>1</sup> `a-bráti qa-brónux.<sup>1</sup>* ‘The king said to the poor brother, he said “My brother, our wives are both pregnant. If your wife gives birth to a girl and my wife gives birth to boy, your daughter (will be married) to my son. If my wife gives birth to a daughter and your wife gives birth to a son, my daughter (will be married) to your son.”’ (A25:2-3)

The predicate of the independent basic copula, on the other hand, expresses that a certain property is a permanent feature of the subject but does not specify whether this property is observable in the

immediate speech situation. Similarly the independent basic copula does not draw attention to the subject of the clause, since it is already activated in the consciousness of the hearer due to its high degree of topicality.

As has been remarked in §1.0., it is likely that the basic copula originated as a presentative construction, similar in function to the deictic copula that is in use today. This explains the use of the L-suffixes in the 3rd person, which originally expressed the object of the presentative. At some stage this old presentative would have lost its presentative function and been cliticized to the predicate, in conformity with the syntactic position of verbal inflection. This would have been accompanied by the emergence of a new presentative device in the form of the deictic copula. The construction with the basic independent copula placed before the predicate, e.g. *brónux 'ile xàwri* 'Your son is my friend' is likely to reflect a transitional stage of this development which has survived in the modern dialect. As remarked, this construction does not have an attention-drawing function to the same degree as the deictic copula, but it nevertheless has greater communicative salience than the construction with the enclitic copula.

The deictic copula may be used with past tense reference in the context of clauses with past verb forms, e.g.

- (19) *xa-pàra, wiðále gáne max-qəšta. Fárxo 'u-Səttíye hóla kəs-gəðəde.* 'One lamb made itself like a bow. Farxo and Səttíye were together.' (A25:28-29)
- (20) *qímele 'ap-Fárxo šqílalle zòrna, mxáya zòrna, bejíye hóla xa-gòta 'árwa xa-gòta.* 'Farxo also took up the pipe and played pipe music, the young lambs were one side and the sheep the other.' (A25:31)
- (21) *hóla 'iθáθa gu-ləša, lyáša kùbbe, 'u-'əθyele' bába dīya 'u-wázir.* 'Her hands were in dough, while kneading the meat-balls, and her father and the vizier came.' (A21:26)
- (22) *múšlyəlla dīwən. dīwən t-xále dīye hóla dwiqta.* 'He brought them down to the meeting room. The meeting room of his uncle was full.' (A23:14)

The deictic copula may be combined with the expressions *heš* 'still', *hal-dīya* 'until now', and *har* 'already, still', which imply that the situation has an end-point or starting-point and is not permanent, e.g.

- (23) *'áy heš-hóla gu-gòma.* 'She is still in the basement stable.' (A18:22)
- (24) *julləkθa hóla hár qrúšta rəša.* 'As for the bowl (of yoghurt) — here, its crust is still on it.' (A30:24)
- (25) *'áp-'o-ʔlaθa qəm-permile. 'u-dəbbóre hár-hóla qam-tārət bōya.* 'They slaughtered also the third one. The hornets were still before the door of the hole.' (A20:9)
- (26) *hal-dīya hóla gu-móxən 'áyya 'áxni.* 'Until now this is in our memory.' (B16:12)

Occasionally the deictic copula is placed after the predicate, e.g.

- (27) *'árye dīye kəs-báxte dīye hóla.* 'His lions are with his wife.' (A18:19)
- (28) *'éne pθixtela, bas-ʔliya hóle.* 'His eye is open, but he is asleep.' (A31:6)

The deictic copula is sometimes used to present a nominal, denoting its existence without ascribing any property to it in a predicate, e.g.

- (29) *hóla 'isəqθa dīya.* 'Here is her ring.' (A25:69)
- (30) *hóla zeðəye.* 'Here are the breads.' (A30:24)
- (31) *hó 'la mīya.* 'Here is some water.' (A28:18)

### 2.3. The Copula in Subordinate Clauses

The distinction between the various copula constructions described above are neutralized in subordinate clauses that are introduced by the conditional particle *'ən* and the general subordinating particle *ṭ-* (< *d-*). The latter has various functions, such as a relativizer and complementizer, and is often combined with other particles. If a copula clause occurs in such clauses, the enclitic copula is always used, rather than the independent or deictic copula, and this is attached to the particle at the head of the clause, e.g.

- (1) *'ən-ile miθa, gāræg mēθən.*<sup>1</sup> 'If he is dead, I must die.' (A8:61)
- (2) *'ən-ít xonēni, háyyu tu- 'áxxa kəslēni.*<sup>1</sup> 'If you are our brother, come and sit here with us.' (A39:7)
- (3) *'ən-ile xwarzāyi, ṭ-áθe t-γǎðéla 'ánna mōdila 'u-mōdi lēla xo-d-áwwa jùlla.*<sup>1</sup> 'If he is my nephew, he will come and know what these are or are not under this cloth.' (A25:49)
- (4) *si-prúmle 'áwwa yála zōra ṭ-ile gu-dudiya.*<sup>1</sup> 'Go and slaughter this baby boy who is in the cradle.' (A15:8)
- (5) *xilalle 'o- 'ixála ṭ-ile kəsle.*<sup>1</sup> 'He ate the food that was in front of him.' (A23:5)
- (6) *xáðrəx xázexi xa-nāša ṭ-ile palāxa.*<sup>1</sup> 'Let's look for a man who is a hard worker.' (A21:3)
- (7) *'ánna yǎði ṭ-ile duglāna.*<sup>1</sup> 'They know that he is a liar.' (A48:3)
- (8) *let-xzáya bíye díye ṭ-ile miθa?*<sup>1</sup> 'Don't you see that he is dead?' (A17:2)

The placement of the copula on the subordinate particle in relative clauses can be related to the fronting of the copula to mark topically prominent items. The referent represented by the *ṭ-* particle, which is that of the antecedent noun in the adjacent main clause, is clearly the main topical concern of the relative clause. Although such copula movement to mark topical prominence is an optional strategy in main clauses, it has been formalized as a fixed rule in subordinate relative clauses. It would appear that this was further generalized to other types of subordinate clause opening with the particle *ṭ-*. The movement of the copula onto the conditional particle *'ən* is likely to have arisen from the fact that the particle was originally followed by *ṭ-*, as is still the case of some NENA dialects.

### 2.4. Copula on focused elements

The distinction between the various types of copula is neutralized also when the speaker wishes to place a particular focus on one argument of the clause. In such circumstances only the enclitic copula is used, even where in equivalent clauses without such argument focus the deictic or independent copula occur. The enclitic copula is attached to the focused element, whether this be the subject or a component of the predicate of the clause. The focused element bears the nuclear stress and is typically moved to the front of the clause if is not already situated there. This type of construction is used when the speaker wishes to put a contrastive focus on one argument. In what follows the focus is represented in the translation with italics:

- (1) A: *bróni hóle gu-bèθa.*<sup>1</sup> B: *là, bābux-ile gu-béθa, lá brònux.*<sup>1</sup> 'A: "My son is in the house". B: "No, *your father* is in the house, not your son."'
- (2) A: *bróni hóle dmíxa gu-bèθa.*<sup>1</sup> B: *là, gu-kèrmele dmíxa, lá gu-bèθa.*<sup>1</sup> 'A: "My son is asleep in the house". B: "No, he is asleep *in the orchard*, not in the house."'
- (3) A: *'áwwa 'ile xàtna.*<sup>1</sup> B: *là, qriwēle 'áwwa, lá xàtna.*<sup>1</sup> 'A: "This is the groom". B: "No, this is the *best-man*, not the groom."'

- (4) A: 'áwwa 'ile mtúrša mən-kèpa. B: là, mən-qèsele mtúrša, lá mən-kèpa. 'A: "This is made of stone". B: "No, this is made of wood, not of stone."

Examples from the text corpus:

- (5) 'áwwa lèle kálba. 'àtit kálba. 'He is not a dog. you are a dog' (A11:2)  
 (6) 'áni xšíwela dàbbela táma. 'They thought the bear (not the bees) was there.' (A10:7)

The contrastive focus may be an informationally given referent, as in the following:

- (7) A: 'ádyo xzéli xónat Dawəð 'u-brōn-màme. brōn-màme 'ile zaqàra. B: là, xònele zaqàra, lá brōn-màme. 'A: "Today I saw the brother of David and his cousin. His cousin is a weaver". B: "No, his brother is a weaver, not his cousin."

This neutralization applies only to strong focus, as is the case with contrastive focus. It is not necessarily used with a simple new information focus, as is seen in constructions such as the following:

- (8) A: 'énile gu-bèθa. B: brònuh hóle gu-béθa. 'A: "Who is in the house?" B: "Your son is in the house".  
 (9) A: 'énile? B: 'áw 'ile xòni. 'A: "Who is he?" B: "He is my brother".

#### REFERENCES

- Duval 1896 R. Duval, "Notice sur les dialectes néo-araméens", *Mémoires de la société de linguistique de Paris* 9 (1896), 125-135.  
 Duval 1969 R. Duval, *Traité de Grammaire Syriacque*, Reprint, Amsterdam 1969.  
 Hobermann 1988 R.D. Hobermann, 'The history of the Modern Aramaic pronouns and pronominal suffixes', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104 (1988), 221-231.  
 Khan 2001 G. Khan, "Quelques aspects de l'expression d'"être" en néo-araméen", in A. Donabéian (Ed.), *Langues de Diaspora. Langues en Contact (Faits de Langues Revue de Linguistique XVIII)*, Paris 2001, 139-148.  
 Khan 2008a G. Khan, *The Jewish Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Urmī*, Piscataway 2008.  
 Khan 2008b G. Khan, G., *The Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Barwar*. 3 vols. Vol. 1 *Grammar*. Vol. 2 *Lexicon*. Vol. 3 *Texts*. Leiden 2008.  
 Macuch 1989 R. Macuch, *Neumandäische Chrestomathie mit Grammatischer Skizze, Kommentierter Übersetzung und Glossar*, Wiesbaden 1989.  
 Macuch 1993 R. Macuch, *Neumandäische Texte im Dialekt von Ahwāz*, Wiesbaden 1993.  
 Nöldeke 1904 T. Nöldeke, *Compendious Syriac Grammar*, Translated by J.A. Crichton, London 1904.  
 Ritter 1990 H. Ritter, *Ṭūrōyō: Die Volkssprache der Syrischen Christen des Ṭūr 'Abdīn. C: Grammatik*, Stuttgart 1990.  
 Socin 1882 A. Socin, *Die neu-aramäischen Dialekte von Urmia bis Mosul. Texte aund Übersetzungen*, Tübingen, 1882.

- Steedman 2000 M. Steedman, "Information structure and the syntax-phonology interface", *Linguistics Inquiry* 31 (2000), 649–89.
- Tsereteli 1977 K.G. Tsereteli, "Zur Frage der Klassifikation der neuaramäischen Dialekte", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 127 (1977), 244-253.
- Tsereteli 1978 K.G. Tsereteli, *The Modern Assyrian Language*, Moscow 1978.