

Copulas in Yaghnobi

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Abstract. The paper is devoted to present tense copulas in the Yaghnobi language (Eastern Iranian) of the 1920s–1960s. The study is based on a corpus of oral texts with a total volume of 47000 words. Yaghnobi has three different forms of the copula in the third person singular of the Present: the full forms *xast*, *ast* and the suffix *-x*. I show that they all have distinct grammatical and semantic uses and should be considered different copulas. The main meanings of the copula *-x* are associated with identification and attribution, while the copula *ast* is most frequently used in existential sentences and the possessive construction. The latter also has an unusual temporal function. Unlike *-x* and *ast*, the copula *xast* has no central meaning, commonly conveying identificational, equational, existential and locative meanings. I further argue that all copulas can be omitted in most of their semantic functions (identification, attributive, possessive, locative, existential, equational, temporal).

An interesting finding of this study is the existence of double copula sentences: sentences with a single subject where two copulas are used simultaneously. The analysis of such sentences shows that each copula conveys its own meaning (e.g. the first copula is identificational and the second existential). According to the available literature such constructions have not previously been described for Yaghnobi or other modern Iranian languages.

Key words: copula, semantics, Yaghnobi

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Глагольные связки ягнобского языка

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Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются глагольные связки третьего лица единственного числа настоящего времени в ягнобском языке 20-х — 60-х гг. XX века. Исследование основано на корпусе устных текстов объемом 47000 слов. Обосновывается выделение трех связок, две из которых являются полными формами (*ast* и *xast*), а одна — суффиксом (-*x*). В статье подробно рассматриваются особенности их грамматических и семантических употреблений. Показывается, что употребление глагольных связок в ягнобском языке в большинстве случаев не является обязательным. В статье также освещаются обнаруженные в ягнобском уникальные для иранских языков случаи контактного употребления двух разных связок в одном предложении при одном и том же субъекте.

Ключевые слова: глагол-связка, грамматическая семантика, ягнобский язык

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1. Introduction

Yaghnobi is an Eastern Iranian language spoken in Tajikistan, in the upper valley of the Yaghnob river, Zarafshan area. The exact current number of ethnic Yaghnobi, and the number of those who are still native speakers, are unknown. According to SIL data¹, in 2003–2005

¹ URL: <https://yaghnobi.wordpress.com/2007/04/23/is-yaghnobi-an-endangered-language/> (accessed on 05.11.2024).

there were about 13500 mother-tongue Yaghnobi speakers. However, Khromov [1972: 6] estimates the number of Yaghnobi speakers at approximately 1500 people in the valley of the Yaghnob river and 900 people outside it. In Ethnologue, Yaghnobi is considered an endangered language [Ethnologue 2024].

In this paper, I will study copulas in the Yaghnobi language of the 1920s–1960s. My study is based on a linguistic corpus of oral Yaghnobi texts collected in the first half of the 20th century. The major part of this corpus consists of texts collected by Andreyev and Peshchereva [1957] in the 1920s (35800 words). It also includes “A Yaghnobi tale” recorded by Klimchitskiy in 1932 [1940] (707 words), four short texts recorded by Sokolova [1953: 72–75] (282 words), texts collected by Khromov in the 1960s and published in his Yaghnobi grammar [1972] (3500 words) and texts from Bogolyubov’s doctoral dissertation [Bogolyubov 1956] (6418 words). The total volume of the Yaghnobi corpus is about 47000 words. The corpus was developed in FieldWorks Language Explorer software² and contains a word-by-word morphosyntactic analysis and translation into Russian and English. The corpus allows for a convenient search facility and the collection of statistical data.

Examples from the texts of [Andreyev, Peshchereva 1957] are marked by Arabic numerals. To mark examples from Khromov’s texts [1972] I use Roman numerals. The oral texts of Klimchitskiy [1940], Sokolova [1953] and Bogolyubov [1956] are marked by the author’s surname and the number of the text. The numbers assigned to the sentences in the cited examples correspond to their numbering in the initial source, the punctuation as in the original. In the following section, I give general information on copulas in Yaghnobi. I consider the Present and Past paradigms and show that in the third person singular Present, Yaghnobi has three copulas, namely *xast*, *ast* and *-x*. In the rest of the paper, I will examine the features of these three copulas. Section 2 gives frequency statistics for the copulas *xast*, *ast* and *-x* and also presents their negative forms. Section 3 mentions previous studies of the copulas in Yaghnobi. The grammatical functions of the present copulas *xast*, *ast* and *-x* are described in section 4. The present copulas are used in the following periphrastic verbal forms: Present Progressive,

² URL: <https://software.sil.org/fieldworks/> (accessed on 05.11.2024).

Perfect, Past Perfect, Inchoative, Inchoative 2, Reportative and the potential construction. The three copulas are distributed differently over these periphrastic forms. Section 5 is devoted to the semantics of the copula *xast*. Sections 6 and 7 consider the semantics of the copulas *ast* and *-x* respectively. Section 8 summarizes the semantic functions of the copulas *xast*, *ast* and *-x*. I determine the main functions of each copula and compare their semantic features. I show that *xast*, *ast* and *-x* all function differently in Yaghnobi and should be considered separate copulas, contrary to Benkato [2020], who takes *-x* to be simply a variant of *xast*. In section 9, I argue that the present copulas can be omitted in Yaghnobi in most of their semantic functions and even in some grammatical functions. Both affirmative (subsection 9.1) and negative (subsection 9.2) contexts are considered. Explicit use of the present copula is 4 times as frequent as its omission. However, the difference between sentences with an explicit and an omitted present copula is not clear. Section 10 examines sentences showing the simultaneous use of two copulas with a single subject. Each copula in such “double copula sentences” conveys its own semantic or grammatical meaning. In most double copula sentences the first copula is used in identificational or attributive function while the second expresses existential meaning. According to the available literature there has been no special study of double copula sentences in Iranian languages. The discovery of the Yaghnobi data thus represents a valuable contribution to the typology of Iranian languages. Section 11 focuses on the conclusions.

2. General information

Like the majority of (if not all) other modern Iranian languages, Yaghnobi has a copula. Generally speaking, it is used to predicate a noun or an adjective. See the examples below: in (1) the copula is used with a noun while in (2) it is employed with an adjective.

- (1) *Alī im.*
 Ali COP.PRS.1SG
 [He said:] ‘I am Ali.’ (Bogolyubov 14.IV, 6.4)

- (2) *tu pir išt, man yōš im.*
 you old COP.PRS.2SG I young COP.PRS.1SG
 [Isuf said:] ‘you are old, I am young.’ (Bogolyubov 14.I, 76)

The Yaghnobi copula has a full person-number paradigm in the Present and Past tenses, see Table 1 and Table 2 below from [Khromov 1972: 33–34].

Table 1. Present tense of the copula

	SG	PL
1	<i>īm</i>	<i>om</i>
2	<i>išt</i>	<i>ot, os</i> ³
3	<i>-x, ast, xast</i> ⁴	<i>or</i>

Table 2. Past tense of the copula

	SG	PL
1	<i>oyim</i>	<i>iyom</i>
2	<i>oy, oyi</i> ⁵	<i>iyot</i>
3	<i>oy, xoy</i>	<i>iyor</i>

In the third person singular there are three different forms in the Present (*-x, ast, xast*) and two in the Past (*oy, xoy*). In the Present, the third person singular copulas also differ morphologically: *ast* and *xast* are separate words, while *-x* cannot be used independently and always attaches to the end of another word. Therefore *-x* functions as a suffix or an enclitic. Benkato [2020] calls it an enclitic. The preliminary study of the morphological features of *-x* shows that it is closer to a suffix than to an enclitic: it functions as a predicative marker and attaches to a constituent which is predicated (compare it to person enclitics in Pamir languages which can be separated from the verb). In this paper *-x* will be treated as a suffix. However, a more detailed investigation of

³ The forms *ot* and *os* are dialectal variants.

⁴ Khromov also includes the forms *asti* and *xasti* [1972: 33]; however, these are simply variants of *ast* and *xast* respectively. All the variants attested in the texts will be mentioned later in the relevant sections.

⁵ The forms *oy* and *oyi* are variants of the second singular past copula.

its morphological status is required. In what follows I will refer to the forms *-x*, *ast*, *xast* as (different) present copulas.

The negative forms of the copula are formed by the particle *na*. However, irregularities can be found in the third person singular. The present copula *ast* has a regular negative form *naast*, but the forms *nest* or *nist* are more common. The full list of negative forms of the third person singular present copulas is the following: *nax*, *nest/nist*, *naast*, *naastě*, *naxasti*. In the third person singular Past, only the negative form *naoy* is possible (**naxoy*, **na xoy*).

In the corpus, taking into account both affirmative and negative contexts, the most common third person singular present copula is *-x*, with 503 occurrences. The copula *ast* appears in the corpus 395 times while *xast* is used only 64 times.

In this paper, I will describe the use of the present copulas *xast*, *ast* and *-x* only. The past copulas are not the subject of this paper and merit a separate discussion. The only section where the past copulas are (partly) considered is section 10.

3. Previous studies

The only existing published grammar of Yaghnobi [Khromov 1972] treats all three third person singular forms as variants of the same copula. It does not discuss the possibility of semantic differences either between the present copulas *-x*, *ast*, *xast* or between the past copulas *oy* and *xoy*. The Yaghnobi copulas are mentioned by Agnes Korn [2011]; however, she concentrates mainly on their origin and does not describe their functions.

The only study dedicated to the Yaghnobi copulas is an article by Adam Benkato [2020]. Benkato argues that Yaghnobi has an existential verb *ast* and a copula *xast*, and briefly describes their functions [Benkato 2020: 180–181]. He considers the form *-x* to be enclitic, and notes that it functions in the same way as the copula *xast*: “As far as I can tell from my limited fieldwork, *xast* and *=x* may be exchanged without affecting the grammaticality of the sentence” [Benkato 2020: 182]. I will discuss this assumption in section 8 after I consider the grammatical (section 4) and semantic (sections 5–7) functions of

xast, *ast* and *-x*. Benkato's study is mainly based on Khromov's grammar [1972], an unpublished MA thesis by Brian Bird [Bird 2007], and his own notes and recordings made during a fieldwork trip to Tajikistan in 2016. In his references he does not mention any of the materials which are included in my Yaghnobi oral corpus of the 1920s–1960s, with the exception of Khromov's grammar [1972].

In general, therefore, the third person singular copulas of Yaghnobi of the 1920s–1960s remain largely understudied.

4. Grammatical functions of the copulas

The Yaghnobi present copulas are used in some periphrastic verbal forms, namely the Present Progressive, Perfect, Past Perfect, Inchoative, Inchoative 2, Reportative and the potential construction.

Since this paper is not concerned with the TAM system of Yaghnobi, I will only briefly describe the structure of these forms and give one example for each of them. The semantics and functions of the periphrastic forms require a separate study.

The Present Progressive consists of an infinitive (either the full infinitive, i.e. the verbal stem marked by the suffix *-ak*, or the short infinitive, i.e. the bare verbal stem) and the present copula in the third person singular, while the agent (or the sole participant) appears in Oblique case, for example:

- (3) *A-wen — i odam-ě rup-ak ast.*
 PST-see.3SG INDEF man-OBL reap-INF COP.PRS.3SG
 'He saw: one man is reaping.' (16, 5.3)

The Perfect is formed by the past participle and the present copula (4).

- (4) *Zivanto-t tann vu-t or.*
 sheaf-PL wet be-PART.PST COP.PRS.3PL
 'The leaves have gotten wet.' (V, 2.2)

The Past Perfect consists of the past participle of the main verb and the perfect form of the verb *vu* 'to be' (5). The semantics of the Perfect and Past Perfect is described in detail in [Vydrin, Mazurova 2023].

- (5) *Dū čuja=s nīpis-ta vū-t or.*
 two baby=ENCL.3SG sleep-PART.PST be-PART.PST COP.PRS.3PL
 'Her two babies had been sleeping.' (18, 2.3)

The Inchoative is formed from the short infinitive of the main verb (the bare stem of the verb) marked by the Oblique case and the person-number form of the verb *vu* 'to be' in any tense or mood. Rarely, the copula can be used instead of the verb *vu*: the corpus has 105 examples of the Inchoative, but the copula is used only in the single example given below (6). There are no examples of the Inchoative with the third person singular present copula.

- (6) *sirvi čin-i =k oyim*
 herb collect.INF2-OBL =when COP.PST.1SG
 [I didn't find the mountain goat but] 'when I was collecting the herb sirvich' [I saw that the goat had come...] (XVI, 1.2)

The Inchoative 2 is formed from the full infinitive of the main verb marked by the Oblique case and the person-number form of the verb *vu* 'to be' in any tense or mood. The corpus provides one example where the copula is used instead of the verb *vu* 'to be':

- (7) *Dodo=m tir-ak-ě ast, čo=s*
 dad=ENCL.1SG leave-INF-OBL COP.PRS.3SG what=ENCL.3SG
tīfar-īšt?
 give-PRS.2SG
 [The girl said to her husband:] 'My dad is leaving, what will you give to him?' (21, 28.2)

The Reportative consists of the future participle (the verbal stem marked by the suffix *-na*) of the main verb and the verb *vu* 'to be' in the Perfect. As mentioned above, the Perfect itself uses the present copula. For example:

- (8) *neki či olow-i urk čukayr-na vu-ta x.*
 but from fire-OBL wolf afraid-PART.FUT be-PART.PST COP.PRS.3SG
 [The wolves went down to the edge of the threshing floor but] 'it turns out the wolf was afraid of fire.' (V, 7.1)

The potential construction (POT) consists of the particle *udda*, the copula and the full infinitive of the main verb. In this construction the copula is usually used with negation (cf. [Khromov 1972: 49–50]); however, the corpus contains two examples without negation. One of these is given below:

- (9) *ax yak man vōr-i var-ak udda xast*
 that one man load-OBL carry-INF POT COP.PRS.3SG
 ‘he can carry a load of one *man*⁶’ [but none of you can lift this load.]
 (Bogolyubov 22, 2.2)

Detailed study of the corpus data shows that the present third person singular copulas all function differently in periphrastic verbal forms. See Table 3.

Table 3. Grammatical functions of the present third person singular copulas

Periphrastic form	<i>xast</i>	<i>ast</i>	<i>-x</i>
Perfect	+	+	+
Past Perfect	–	+	+
Present Progressive	rare	+	rare
Inchoative 2	–	+	–
Reportative	–	–	+
Potential construction	+	–	+

All three copulas are used only in the Perfect. Here the corpus shows no difference between *xast*, *ast* and *-x*. In the Present Progressive, the common variant is the copula *ast*, and the copulas *xast* and *-x* are represented by only one example each in the corpus. The copula *xast* has the fewest grammatical uses (only the Perfect and the potential construction, and very rarely the Present Progressive). The copulas *ast* and *-x* can be used in the Past Perfect: the corpus data indicate no differences between them in this case.

⁶ The *man* is a measure of weight equivalent to about 147 kg.

Only *ast* can be used in the Inchoative 2. However, the corpus includes only one example of the Inchoative 2 with the copula. Only *-x* can be used in the Reportative. The potential construction uses only *xast* and *-x*.

In the next three sections I will discuss the semantics of the copulas *xast*, *ast* and *-x*.

5. The copula *xast*

The oral texts contain the following additional variants of the copula *xast*: *xastě*, *xaste* and *xasti*. The corpus data do not show any semantic/grammatical or any other differences between the variants. The copula *xast* can be used to indicate relations of identity (10) and attribution (11) in the third person singular Present.

- (10) *yor-tiš iš maxša xast.*
 see-PRS.3SG this calf COP.PRS.3SG
 'He looks (at it), this is a calf.' (IV, 3.3)

- (11) *jōgah=imōx saxt xast.*
 place=ENCL.1PL hard COP.PRS.3SG
 'Our place is hard (for living in).' (Bogolyubov 8.II, 13.1)

While examples with *xast* conveying the identity meaning are numerous in the corpus, examples involving attribution are missing from most of the texts of the corpus. Only the texts collected by Bogolyubov [1956] contain examples with *xast* expressing attribution.

Xast can express the semantic relation of existence (12).

- (12) *I yoč xast*
 one thing COP.PRS.3SG
 [A Yaghnobi riddle:] 'There is one thing': [it is neither on the ground nor in the sky, it stays in the middle. (cow's udder)] (46, 11.)

It can also be used to express existence in a metaphysical sense (e.g. *God exists*), for example:

- (13) *čof=ik dñiño xast*
 several=when world COP.PRS.3SG
 [The young man said: Oh, grandpa, I tied the bears up and told them:] ‘For as long as this world exists’ [don’t do any harm to this old man]. (42, 49.4)

The copula *xast* can be used in equational⁷ sentences (14) and convey locative meaning (‘existence of something somewhere’), see (15).

- (14) *sol-i tavallud=im hazor=u nuh-sad=u*
 year-EZF birth=ENCL.1SG thousand=and nine-hundred=and
bist=u du xasti.
 twenty=and two COP.PRS.3SG
 ‘The year of my birth is 1922.’ (XIV, 2.1)
- (15) *pōščō dōr-e xast.*
 Padishah gallows-OBL COP.PRS.3SG
 [In the morning the sun is rising, and people come and see that] ‘the Padishah is (hanging) on the gallows.’ (Klimchitskiy 2.39)

Benkato [2020: 181] comments that in modern Yaghnobi *xast* is used in the locative meaning when the subject is definite (as in the example (15) above, where *pōščō* ‘Padishah’ is a definite noun).

⁷ In equational sentences “the predicate <...> is referential and identifies the individual denoted by the predicate with the individual denoted by the subject. <...> In true equational clauses, the subject and predicate can be reversed” [Dryer 2007: 233]. For example, *Pavel is my father* = *My father is Pavel*. A closely related but distinct type of sentence is constituted by clauses with true nominal predicates [Dryer 2007: 233]. These are clauses with nonreferential nominal predicates which cannot easily be reversed. For example, *Julia is a linguist* — ??*A linguist is Julia*. Following the terminology used in another paper in this issue of the journal [Alekseev 2025], I will call clauses with true nominal predicates “proper inclusion sentences” (the subject is included in a class of entities, cf. the example above, which denotes that Julia belongs to the class of linguists). The Yaghnobi corpus does not provide any examples of the copula *xast* functioning in proper inclusion sentences. However, it is quite likely that it could be used in such sentences; the absence of such examples in the corpus is explained by the low overall frequency of *xast* in the corpus.

In the corpus, most of the examples with *xast* conveying locative relations do indeed have definite subjects. However, there are some exceptions, for example:

- (16) *bōzōr-i nahaw ranka čīz-i xup xasti...*
 market-OBL that.OBL manner thing-EZF good COP.PRS.3SG
 ‘There are such good things in the market...’ (Bogolyubov 11, 18.1)
- (17) *i yoka-y a-šau, a-γor —*
 INDEF place-OBL PST-go.3SG/SER PST-look.3SG/SER
i kall-ak čūpon xast.
 INDEF bald-DIMIN shepherd COP.PRS.3SG
 ‘He went to one place and saw — there is a bald shepherd.’ (16, 12.1)

In (16) and (17) *čīz* ‘thing’ and *čūpon* ‘shepherd’ are indefinite. In (17) the noun phrase is also marked by the indefinite article *i*.

The copula *xast* can be used in the possessive construction, which consists of the possessor in Oblique case, the possessed in Direct case (unmarked)⁸ and the copula or the verb *vu* ‘to be’, which agrees in person and number with the possessed. The construction will be considered in more detail in the next section. The use of the copula *xast* is not common in this construction; however, the corpus does contain some examples, e.g.:

- (18) *Ax čank čo-y čank xast?*
 that dust what-OBL dust COP.PRS.3SG
 ‘That dust — whose dust is it?’ (18, 21.2)

Thus, the copula *xast* in general conveys the meanings of identification, existence, equation and location. In the latter case *xast* is used mainly with definite subjects. It can also be used in the possessive construction. In some texts in the corpus the copula *xast* can express attributive meaning.

⁸ When used with a numeral the possessed will be marked as Oblique (as in (19)). Oblique marking is almost obligatory with nouns having a numeral; for more details about the Oblique case in Yaghnobi see [Vydrin 2023a].

6. The copula *ast*

The corpus contains the following variants of the copula *ast*: *as*, *ay*, *asti*, *astě*, and *aste*. The most frequent use of *ast* in the corpus is in the possessive construction (19).

- (19) *tufor žūta-y=im asti, ī=š askari xasti.*
 four son-OBL=ENCL.1SG COP.PRS.3SG one=ENCL.3SG service COP.PRS.3SG
 ‘I have four sons, one of them is in the army.’ (XXV, 1.1)

The possessive construction can express attribution. For example, the meaning ‘someone is hungry’ in Yaghnobi is expressed by the possessive construction (lit. ‘someone has hunger’):

- (20) *Mox dēvayz ast...*
 we⁹ hunger COP.PRS.3SG
 ‘We are hungry...’ (1, 126.2)

From the English point of view one can say that the Yaghnobi possessive construction can convey some modal meanings (participant-internal necessity and desire of the speaker). Cf. the two examples below:

- (21) *Gazak=īm ast.*
 urine=ENCL.1SG COP.PRS.3SG
 ‘I want to pee.’ (Lit. ‘I have urine.’) (32, 37.1)
- (22) *Man xūvn=īm ast...*
 I sleep=ENCL.1SG COP.PRS.3SG
 ‘I want to sleep...’ (lit. ‘I have sleep.’) (33, 21.3)

The possessive construction with the copula *ast* can express a situation taking place at the present moment (cf. the Present Progressive in English). Cf. example (23) below, which depicts two situations: ‘the beardless man is listening’ and ‘a shepherd is whistling’. The

⁹ This personal pronoun does not distinguish case morphologically: *mox* ‘we’ can function as both a direct and an oblique form.

former is expressed by the Present while the latter is conveyed by the possessive construction (lit. ‘a shepherd has a whistle’).

- (23) *Kusa yuš dor-čě — i čūpon-ě hūštok ast.*
 beardless ear hold-PRS.3SG INDEF shepherd-OBL whistle COP.PRS.3SG
 ‘The beardless man is listening — a shepherd is whistling.’ (30, 36.2)

The possessive construction can also be used to express a scheduled situation in the future. For example:

- (24) *Vīyora inč-ě=š nīkoh ast*
 evening wife-OBL=ENCL.3SG wedding COP.PRS.3SG
katta ako-pě=š.
 big elder.brother-with=ENCL.3SG
 ‘In the evening his wife will marry his elder brother.’ (Lit. ‘his wife has a wedding’) (44, 28.3)

- (25) *Fīroṇta poščo-ě tuy ast.*
 tomorrow Padishah-OBL feast COP.PRS.3SG
 [They said:] ‘Tomorrow the Padishah will hold a feast.’ (Lit. ‘the Padishah has a feast’) (29, 21.2)

In general, the Yaghnobi possessive construction is very productive and can function to convey some types of ‘possession’ that are unusual from the European point of view. Further functions of the possessive construction in Yaghnobi require a separate study.

In the possessive construction, the possessed (the goat’s meat in (26)) and even the copula (27) can be omitted.

- (26) *surōq a-kun a-wōv-or kal-e ast.*
 search PST-do.3SG PST-say-3PL bald-OBL COP.PRS.3SG
 ‘He searched [and] they said [that] the bald man has [the goat’s meat].’ (Klimchitskiy 2.3)

- (27) *Čo-y čank?*
 what-OBL dust
 [She will ask:] ‘Whose dust is it?’ (18, 21.3)

The copula *ast* can perform the existential function. Cf. the two examples below:

- (28) Čě *qal'a-ě* *xěpar ast?*
 about fortress-OBL news COP.PRS.3SG
 [The young man asked his brother:] 'Is there news about the fortress?' (3, 164.1)
- (29) *A-γor,* *a-wen* — *i* *payst ast.*
 PST-look.3SG PST-see.3SG/SER INDEF smoke COP.PRS.3SG
 'He looked and saw — there is smoke.' (2, 33.1)

In the majority of the existential examples with the copula *ast* the subjects are indefinite, sometimes marked by the indefinite article (as in (29) above). In contrast, according to the corpus data the copula *xast* used in this function does not impose any restrictions on the definiteness of the subject: it can be used with both indefinite (see examples in the previous section) and definite subjects (see example (30) below, where the subject is a proper name).

- (30) *Isuf xast* *yō na?*
 Yusuf COP.PRS.3SG OR NEG
 [One minister goes (to the jail) and asks:] 'Is Yusuf there or not?' (Bogolyubov 14.I, 52.1)

The copula *ast* can also perform the locative function, for example:

- (31) *Kat-ě* *kůnč-ě* *i* *vir=iš* *aně ast.*
 house-OBL corner-OBL INDEF husband=ENCL.3SG also COP.PRS.3SG
 'Her husband is also in the corner of the house.' (2, 29.2)

According to the pretext, the subject *vir* 'husband' is unknown to the speaker (although it is marked by the possessive enclitic) and is therefore marked by the indefinite article *i*. In contrast to the copula *xast*, the copula *ast* in the locative function is usually used with an indefinite subject. The indefinite subject in this case is not obligatorily marked by the indefinite article *i*, cf. the following example:

- (32) *Nah-autitē a-tuxo-ī=k kē dū kirm-ē astē*
 EMPH-those.OBL PST-kill-2SG=when then two worm-OBL COP.PRS.3SG
darun-t=ēšint.
 inside-PL=ENCL.3PL
 ‘When you kill those [two doves] there are two worms inside them.’
 (27, 89.2)

There are rare examples with a definite subject and the copula *ast* in the corpus. See the example below, where the subject ‘she’ refers to the mother mentioned in the previous sentence:

- (33) *falōna-y pōščōh-i dast-i ast.*
 certain-OBL Padishah-OBL hand-OBL COP.PRS.3SG
 [The Padishah’s son said: “Where is the mother of your sons?”
 The old man said:] ‘She is in the hands of a certain Padishah.’
 (Bogolyubov 15.II, 31.2)

The copula *ast* can be used with time-related nouns (e.g. *today*, *autumn*, *year*, *time*). I will call this function of the copula the temporal function. See the examples below.

- (34) *tirma-y mahal ast*
 autumn-OBL time COP.PRS.3SG
 [Ismail said:] ‘It is autumn,’ [so they will probably eat us]. (V, 9.1)

The situation expressed by the copula *ast* in temporal function can refer to the present (as in the example above), future (‘winter will begin’ in (35)) or past (resultative or perfective ‘several years have passed’ in (36)).

- (35) *yak mōh ani zimistōn ast...*
 one month another winter COP.PRS.3SG
 ‘Another month and the winter will begin...’ (Bogolyubov 11, 9.1)
- (36) *čandin sol ast be-darak vu-ta-x*
 several year COP.PRS.3SG without-news be-PART.PST-COP.PRS.3SG.PRF
 ‘several years have passed, and still no news (lit. ‘it has been without news’)’ (27, 155.2)

The copula *ast* rarely expresses identification (37). There are only 5 reliable examples of identity in the corpus, making up about 1% of the total use of the copula *ast*.

- (37) *čil gaz balandi=š ast.*
 forty gaz height=ENCL.3SG COP.PRS.3SG
 [There is an iron fence around the house of Hasan Gulriz,] ‘its height is forty gaz’¹⁰. (6, 10.2)

There are no good examples with *ast* conveying the attributive function (e.g. *Julia is beautiful*). The corpus contains a few examples where *ast* is used with an adjective (38). However, such examples are not clearly attributive: the adjective does not describe the subject but rather the weather, and the sentence does not have a referential subject.

- (38) *Mana nahauranka xynyk ast*
 well such cold COP.PRS.3SG
 ‘It is so cold’ [that they make a fire and then sit by it.] (VI, 3.2)

In general, the main function of the copula *ast* is as part of the possessive construction. It is also used with indefinite subjects in locative and existential sentences. This copula conveys temporal meanings: used with temporal expressions it expresses situations in the present or future, or resultative situations (which began in the past and were finished by the present moment).

The identification and attributive functions are rarely conveyed by *ast*. No examples are found of the copula *ast* in an equational sentence.

7. The copula -x

The copula -x commonly conveys identification (39). It is also frequently used in the attributive function (40). It can be used in the equational function (41) and in proper inclusion sentences (42).

¹⁰ A unit of length in Central Asia. Nowadays values of the *gaz* in Tajikistan range from 710 to 1020 mm. [Nazarova 2021: 160–161].

- (39) “*ax čō-x?*” *kē pōščō a-wōv ane:*
 that what-COP.PRS.3SG then Padishah PST-say.3SG CIT
 “*ax dōr-x*”.
 that gallows-COP.PRS.3SG
 [The bald man looked up and said to the Padishah:] ‘“What is that?”
 Then the Padishah said: “These are gallows.”’ (Klimchitskiy 2.30–2.31)
- (40) *idōka xunuk-x*.
 here cold-COP.PRS.3SG
 ‘This place is cold.’ (Lit. ‘Here it is cold.’) (Bogolyubov 8.I, 6.1)
- (41) *Nahēš man vir-x*
 this my husband-COP.PRS.3SG
 ‘This man is my husband.’ (9, 40.3)
- (42) *čupōn-x...*
 shepherd-COP.PRS.3SG
 [She says to her husband: “He eats without salt”. He answers:] ‘He is a shepherd...’ (Bogolyubov 14.III, 19.2)

The copula *-x* can perform the locative function. See example (43) below, where both the question about the location and its answer are expressed with the help of the copula *-x*.

- (43) “*Šimury ku-x?*” *A-vov:*
 Simurgh where-COP.PRS.3SG PST-say.3SG
 “*Falon xauz-ē lap-ē-x...*”
 certain pond-OBL shore-OBL-COP.PRS.3SG
 [He asked:] ‘“Where is the Simurgh?” She answered: “It is on the shore of a certain pond...”’ (10, 41.1–41.2)

Note that according to the corpus data only the copula *-x* can be used with the interrogative *ku* ‘where’. The corpus has no examples with the copula *-x* and the relative pronoun *ku* ‘where’. In this case only the copula *xast* is used, as in example (44) below. No examples in my corpus contain the copula *ast* used with the assertive *ku* ‘where’.

- (44) *na-yirif-tišť Samarqand-i vagzal=š*
 NEG-know-PRS.3SG Samarkand-OBL station=ENCL.3SG
kū xast, kū na-xasti.
 where COP.PRS.3SG where NEG-COP.PRS.3SG
 ‘[They were surprised. If someone is traveling and he is there for the first time,] he doesn’t know where the station in Samarkand is and where it isn’t.’ (XV, 7.1)

The copula *-x* in the locative function is attested only with definite subjects.

The corpus does not have reliable examples of the copula *-x* used in the existential function. It can perform this function only in the context of negation (*there is no*), cf. the examples (45) and (46) below. Note that the other present copulas *xast* and *ast* can appear in both affirmative and negative existential sentences.

- (45) *vorza na-x*
 cup NEG-COP.PRS.3SG
 [The bald man’s wife woke up, looked around —] ‘there is no cup’
 (41, 9.1)
- (46) *Saňg xay kūn-čě, yor-čě — asp na-x,*
 stone descent do-PRS.3SG see-PRS.3SG horse NEG-COP.PRS.3SG
baxil tēm na-x, asp-ě=š no-ta
 stingy also NEG-COP.PRS.3SG horse-OBL=ENCL.3SG take-PART.PST
tor-ta-x.
 leave-PART.PST-COP.PRS.3SG.PRF
 ‘He lowers the stone and sees — there is no horse, and there is no stingy man either, he has taken the horse and left.’ (37, 4.2)

Note that the example above can be analyzed as locative (‘there is no horse (here)’, ‘there is no cup (here)’). Since the copula *-x* is not used in reliable existential sentences it comes as no surprise that it is not attested in metaphysical existence sentences (e.g. *God exists*).

The copula *-x* is very rarely used in the possessive construction. The corpus shows only a few examples, cf. (47).

- (47) *Naš inč ka-yīk-x?*
 this woman who-ADJ-COP.PRS.3SG
A-vov: “Tau žuta-y na-x —
 PST-say.3SG you.2SG.OBL son-OBL NEG-COP.PRS.3SG
naax mardak-ī-x”.
 that man-OBL-COP.PRS.3SG
 [Padishah asked:] ‘ “Whose is this woman?” He said: “She doesn’t belong to your son, she belongs to that man.”’ (Lit. ‘she is not your son’s, she is that man’s’) (17, 29.1)

As has been shown in this section, the main uses of the copula *-x* are associated with identification and attribution. It can also function in equational sentences. In locative sentences, *-x* is used only with definite subjects. The existential function is performed by *-x* only in negative sentences. The copula *-x* is very rarely used in the possessive construction.

In the next section I will compare the functions of the three Yaghnobi copulas under consideration.

8. Differences between the copulas *xast*, *ast* and *-x*

Let us now consider Table 4, which summarizes the functions of the three copulas.

The three copulas differ in the scope of their usage. The main functions of the most frequent copula *-x* are identification and attribution. In addition, it can convey equation, proper inclusion and location of a definite subject. Existence and possession are rarely expressed by the copula *-x*. The other functions under consideration cannot be performed by *-x*.

The main function of the copula *ast* is possessive; however, it is also frequently used in existential sentences. It is the main copula used in locative sentences with an indefinite subject. *Ast* is the only copula used in the temporal function. It is rarely used in identificational and attributive functions and rarely occurs in locative sentences with a definite subject. Only in equational, proper inclusion and metaphysical existence sentences is the copula *ast* never used.

Table 4. Functions of copulas *xast*, *ast* and *-x*

Function	<i>xast</i>	<i>ast</i>	<i>-x</i>
Grammatical	Perfect, Present Progressive (rare)	Perfect, Present Progressive, Past Perfect, Inchoative 2	Perfect, Present Progressive (rare), Past Perfect, Reportative
Identification	+	very rare	main meaning
Attributive	only in Bogolyubov's texts	very rare	main meaning
Equational	+	—	+
Proper inclusion	—	—	+
Existential	+	+ (indefinite subject)	rare, with negation
Existential (metaphysical existence)	+	—	—
Locative (definite subject)	+	very rare	+
Locative (indefinite subject)	rare	+	—
Possessive construction	rare	main meaning	rare
Temporal	—	+	—

The less frequent copula *xast* has a large number of functions. Its main function is hard to define, unlike for the copulas *ast* and *-x*. It mainly conveys the following meanings: identification, equation, existence and location of a definite subject.

Rarely it can be used in attributive and possessive sentences and in locative sentences with an indefinite subject. It cannot be used with temporal nouns. My corpus also includes no examples with the copula *xast* used in proper inclusion sentences. However, the latter is close to equational meaning, and most probably *xast* is not attested in proper inclusion sentences simply due to its low frequency in the corpus.

According to the corpus data, all three copulas also differ grammatically and are used in different periphrastic verbal forms. The distinct grammatical and semantic functions of the present copulas prove that Yaghnobi in fact has three different copulas in the third person singular Present (*xast*, *ast* and *-x*). The assumption of full identity between *xast* and *-x* proposed by Benkato [2020] is not correct, at least in the case of the Yaghnobi language of the 1920s–1960s.

In the next section, I will consider cases where the present copulas are omitted.

9. Omission of the copulas

9.1. Assertive sentences

The corpus data show that the present copulas are not always obligatory. To study the specifics of copula omission I analyzed a part of the corpus (about 6000 words). It contains 102 occurrences of the copulas *xast*, *ast*, and *-x* and 26 cases where the copula is omitted: that is, omission of the copula is four times less frequent than its use.

Yaghnobi can drop the present copula in identification (48) and attributive (49) functions.

- (48) *Wir=iš ast, nom=š **Abdulxōliq.***
 husband=ENCL.3SG COP.PRS.3SG name=ENCL.3SG Abdulkholiq
 ‘She has a husband, his name is Abdulkholiq.’ (Bogolyubov 4.III, 5.3)

- (49) *Man **ser**, har met-ě wxar-omīšt.*
 I full every day-OBL eat-PRS.1SG
 [The fox said:] ‘I am full, I eat every day.’ (39, 26.6)

The locative meaning also can be conveyed without the present copula, in both interrogative (50) and assertive sentences (51) with a definite subject:

- (50) *Man oča **ku?***
 I mother where
 [This one said:] ‘Where is my mother?’ (10, 4.3)

- (51) *Anzōb yar-i tak-i=š.*
 Anzob mountain-OBL bottom-OBL=ENCL.3SG
 ‘Anzob¹¹ is located at the foot of the mountain.’ (Bogolyubov 6.II, 1.1).

Locative sentences with an indefinite subject can also appear without a copula:

- (52) *A-γor, hīč šahr na — i kappa.*
 PST-look.3SG nothing town NEG INDEF hovel
 [He went to the steppe.] ‘He looked around: no town (there), there is (only) a hovel.’ (42, 16.2)

As was mentioned in section 6 above, in the possessive construction the copula can be omitted. Below I repeat the interrogative example from above (53) and give an assertive example (54), cf:

- (53) *Čo-y čank?*
 what-OBL dust
 [She will ask:] ‘Whose dust is it?’ (18, 21.3)
- (54) *mana šart-i=m var,*
 well condition-OBL=ENCL.1SG bring.IMP.2SG
yayk=im taw.
 daughter=ENCL.1SG you.SG.OBL
 ‘Fulfill my condition and my daughter is yours.’ (15, 17.1)

The copula can be omitted in existential sentences. The corpus only contains examples with an indefinite subject, such as (55).

- (55) *γōr-tišt: ī kat, čīl ōdam-i ast=š.*
 look-PRS.3SG INDEF house forty man-OBL COP.PRS.3SG=ENCL.3SG
 [That day he is leaving, and in the evening he cannot find a place to stay.] ‘He looks: there is a house, there are forty men in it.’ (Bogolyubov 14.IV, 35.2)

¹¹ A village in the Yaghnobi river valley.

The present copula can also be omitted in equational sentences, cf.:

- (56) *rōt-i nīm=š nišēb, nīm=š sar-i.*
 road-OBL half=ENCL.3SG descent half=ENCL.3SG top-OBL
 ‘Half of the journey is downhill, half of it is uphill.’ (Bogolyubov 7, 6.1)

Time-related nouns usually function without a copula in Yaghnobi, for example in (24), which is repeated again here, *vīyora* is not marked by the copula *ast*:

- (57) *Vīyora inč-ě=š nīkoh ast*
 evening wife-OBL=ENCL.3SG wedding COP.PRS.3SG
katta ako-pě=š.
 big elder.brother-with=ENCL.3SG
 ‘In the evening his wife will marry his elder brother.’ (Lit. ‘his wife has a wedding’) (44, 28.3)

The corpus data show that all the copular functions considered above (except proper inclusion) can be expressed without a copula in Yaghnobi. The size of the subcorpus does not allow us to check whether the copula can be omitted in proper inclusion sentences.

In the grammatical use (section 4) the present copulas can be omitted only in the forms including the past participle (Perfect and Past Perfect). According to the corpus data the present copulas are never omitted in other periphrastic forms (Reportative, Present Progressive, Inchoative 2 and the potential construction).

9.2. Sentences with negation

The study of copula omission in the context of negation was carried out on the basis of the whole Yaghnobi corpus. There are only 13 such cases in the corpus. The statistics suggest that the omission of the copula with negation is much less frequent than its omission without negation.

According to my data, in negative contexts the present copulas are omitted in identificational (58), attributive (59), locative (with an

indefinite subject, example (52) cited here again as (60)), existential (61) and temporal (62) functions.

- (58) *Man poščo-ě inč oīm — nah-pět na,*
 I Padishah-OBL wife COP.PST.1SG EMPH-SO NEG
mūry-ě zarrin?
 bird-EZF golden
 [She says to the Golden Bird:] ‘I was the Padishah’s wife, is it not so, Golden Bird?’ (5, 69.1)
- (59) *Aně man-pě=t darkor na.*¹²
 another I-POST=ENCL.2SG necessary NEG
 [He said:] ‘I don’t need you anymore.’ (26, 14.4)
- (60) *A-γor, hič šahr na — i kappa.*
 PST-see.3SG nothing town NEG INDEF hovel
 [He went to the steppe.] ‘He looked around: no town (there), there is (only) a hovel.’ (42, 16.2)
- (61) *hičči na, γayk=ēm...*
 nothing NEG daughter=ENCL.1SG
 [Ash-Bibi said: “What is this, grandma, what did you put in your sleeve?” The old woman said:] ‘There is nothing there, my daughter’
 [I just burned my hand and put it into my sleeve.] (5, 44.2)
- (62) *dah rūz-i ne — sol-i nav ast.*
 ten day-OBL NEG year-EZF new COP.PRS.3SG
 [The elders used to say:] ‘In less than ten days there is a New Year.’
 (VII, 1.1)

The corpus does not have equational, possessive and locative (with a definite subject) examples with negation and lacking the overt copula. Locative examples with definite subjects and negation are expected to be very rare in naturally occurring discourse due to their pragmatic

¹² The modal construction with the word *darkor* usually uses the third person singular copula while the agent is marked by Oblique case. Cf. *darkor=im na-x* (necessary=ENCL.1SG NEG-COP.PRS.3SG) ‘I don’t need’ [Livshits, Pisarchik 1957: 244].

infelicitousness (cf. *This house is not in the forest* — an oral text is unlikely to contain such vague examples). It is not clear whether the equational and possessive functions cannot be expressed by an omitted copula with negation, or if the corpus just happens not to contain such examples.

In general, the possibility of dropping the copula raises questions about the true function of the present copulas in Yaghnobi. It is not clear what the main difference is between the sentences with and without a present copula. Can any semantic, stylistic or other difference be identified? This topic requires further study.

In the next section, I will consider cases of the simultaneous use of two different copulas in a single sentence.

10. Double copula

My corpus contains 40 examples of the simultaneous use of two copulas in a sentence with a single subject (both present and past copulas were counted). I will call such cases double copula sentences. These double copula sentences have never been mentioned in the previous work on Yaghnobi or other Iranian languages according to the available literature. Consider the following example:

- (63) *Sar-ě tor-ě=š i xol ast —*
 head-OBL crown-OBL=ENCL.3SG INDEF mole COP.PRS.3SG
nahipě katta-x ast.
 so.much big-COP.PRS.3SG COP.PRS.3SG
 [He said:] ‘There is a mole on the crown of his head — it is so big.’
 (42, 30.4)

In the first part of the sentence the copula *ast* is used to express the existence of the mole on the crown of his head. In the second part of the sentence both the copula *-x* and *ast* are used. The copula *-x* expresses the attributive function ('it is so big') while the copula *ast* repeats the existence of the mole. The literal translation of the second part of this example is as follows: 'it is so big, it exists'. The two copulas used with the same subject convey different functions (attribution and existence).

The observant reader may notice that example (63) could be interpreted as containing a misprint for an intended *katta xast* (big COP.PRS.3SG), which would feature just a single copula *xast* instead of the two copulas *-x* and *ast*. On the basis of the corpus data only, we cannot be absolutely certain that such cases are not misprints. However, I shall present arguments to support my contention that double copulas exist in the Yaghnobi language of the 1920s–1960s. First of all, double copula sentences are attested in two different sources: Andreyev and Peshchereva’s text collection [1957] and Bogolyubov’s text collection [1956], which are the most extensive sources of Yaghnobi oral literature. The number of double copula sentences is not so small as to make it plausible that they are all misprints. Secondly, there are cases where the analysis of the double copula sentence as a misprint does not fit the semantics of the copula. For example, (63) with the single copula *xast* would give an attributive sentence ‘it is big’; however, as was shown above in section 5, the attributive meaning can be conveyed by the copula *xast* only in Bogolyubov’s texts [1956], whereas example (63) is from Andreyev and Peshchereva [1957].

Finally, the analysis of the double copula sentences as misprints cannot account for the full range of double copula uses, particularly cases of the use of two copulas in different numbers, persons or tenses. I will consider such examples below.

Let us consider the following example:

- (64) *čo-x astě fīx-fīx kün-čē?*
 what-COP.PRS.3SG COP.PRS.3SG rustle do-PRS.3SG
 [All of them listened and said: “Let’s go, look and see”] ‘what it is
 (that’s) rustling’ (37, 21.6)

The copula *-x* is used with the pronoun *čo* ‘what’ and conveys identification. The question ‘what is this?’ can be expressed only by the copula *-x* in Yaghnobi. The corpus does not have any examples of the copula *xast* used with the pronoun *čo* ‘what’, which implicitly proves that *čo-x astě* is not a misprint (for *čo xastě*). Neither can example (64) be analyzed as *čo astě*. If the copula *ast* were used with the pronoun *čo* ‘what’ the meaning would necessarily be locative or existential, i.e.

‘what is there’ as in example (65) below, not identificational as in (64), i.e. ‘what it is’.

- (65) *Wes-t, xauz-ě rit pěyn-t,*
 go.down-IMP.2PL pond-OBL front.side open-IMP.2PL
wen-t — xauz-ě čo ast?
 go.down-IMP.2PL pond-OBL what COP.PRS.3SG
 ‘Go down, open discharge of water, go down — [look] what is in
 the pond?’ (20, 27.3)

Thus the double copula analysis of example (64) seems to be the only reasonable one available; the copula *-x* conveys identification and the copula *ast* expresses existential or locative meaning (‘it is there’). The literal translation of example (64) is ‘what it is, it is there, it is rustling’.

The corpus also contains examples where the present copula *-x* is used together with the past copula *oy*. Consider the following example:

- (66) *Man jűwol-ě tang-ot=š*
 I bag-OBL tanga-PL=ENCL.3SG
no-ta=šint-or, xokistar=šint
 take-PART.PST=ENCL.3PL-COP.PRS.3PL.PRF ash=ENCL.3PL
xaš-ta-x, pűn-ĩ tanga-x oy.
 pour-PART.PST-COP.PRS.3SG.PRF full-OBL tanga-COP.PRS.3SG COP.PST.3SG
 ‘They took the *tangas*¹³ from my bag and put ashes [there], [the
 bag] was full of *tangas*.’ (30, 13.1)

The example depicts an incident of theft. The speaker finds out that the thieves have taken money from his bag and replaced it with ashes. Note that the speaker uses the Perfect to describe this. Then he adds that the bag was full of money and uses the present copula *-x* and the past copula *oy*. The copula *-x* functions here in attributive meaning (‘the bag is full’) while the past copula *oy* expresses the existential meaning in the past (‘it was there’). The simultaneous use of the copulas can be translated into English as ‘the bag is full of money, it was there’.

¹³ The *tanga* is a unit of currency.

Skeptics would analyze the above example (66) as a misprint, as the past tense copula *oy* has a variant *xoy*, see Table 2 in section 2. However, if we consider the next example (67) with negation we will see that the present copula *-x* can indeed be used simultaneously with the past copula *oy*.

- (67) *Na', ax barra-yě bīrīyon na-x oy!*
 no that lamb-EZF grilled NEG-COP.PRS.3SG COP.PST.3SG
 [He said:] 'No, it wasn't grilled lamb!' (27, 139.1)

The analysis of (67) as a single copula with the negation particle, i.e. *na xoy* (NEG COP.PST.3SG), cannot be correct. As was stated in section 2, the past tense copula of the third person singular has only one negative form, namely *naoy*; the form *na xoy* is ungrammatical and does not occur in the corpus.

The functions of the copulas in (67) are the same as in the previous examples. The present copula *-x* is used in the identification meaning ('this is not grilled lamb') and the past copula adds existential meaning ('the situation took place', 'it was'). The scope of the negation is associated with the present copula.

This non-agreement in tense can also result from the use of the present copula *-x* in grammatical function (thus giving a Perfect) alongside the present copula *xast* in its semantic use. For example:

- (68) *Xoja-ī Xīzr vŭ-ta-x xast:*
 Khoja-EZF Khyzr be-PART.PST-COP.PRS.3SG.PRF COP.PRS.3SG
ni-yīriv-im.
 NEG.PST-recognize-1PL
 [The Padishah said:] 'It turns out it was Khoja Khyzr: we didn't recognize him.' (17, 33.1)

The Perfect conveys inferential meaning while the present copula *xast* expresses identification ('this is Khoja Khyzr'). The Perfect consists of the past participle and the copula *-x* or the copula *xast* [Khromov 1972: 36]. The simultaneous use of both copulas in contexts involving the Perfect is not mentioned in the grammar.

There are examples in the corpus where the past copula *oy* in the existential meaning is used together with the present copula *-x* in the grammatical meaning. Consider the example below (69).

- (69) *Kusa-ě* *oča=š* *saxt betop xoy*,
 beardless-OBL mother=ENCL.3SG hard ill COP.PST.3SG
mir-na *vu-ta-x* *oy*.
 die-PART.FUT be-PART.PST-COP.PRS.3SG.REP COP.PST.3SG
 ‘The beardless man’s mother was very ill, she was about to die.’
 (30, 22.3)

The Reportative has only one form in Yaghnobi, consisting of the future participle of the main verb and the Perfect of the verb *vu* ‘to be’ (i.e. the past participle *vuta* plus the present copula). A form with the future participle of the main verb, the past participle of the verb *vu* ‘to be’ and the past copula is not mentioned in the Yaghnobi grammar [Khromov 1972] and seems to be ungrammatical. It appears that the copula *-x* in (69) is used in its grammatical function (as a part of Reportative ‘she was about to die’) while the past copula *oy* is used separately to convey the identificational or attributive meaning (‘she was [such a woman]’).

In its grammatical use the present copula *-x* can appear twice in one sentence. For example:

- (70) *Tuxas-ta-x* *vu-ta-x*, *dar woqian razg!*
 kill-PART.PST-COP.PRS.3SG be-PART.PST-COP.PRS.3SG in really true
 [They came to the Padishah and said:] ‘He is killed, this is true indeed!’ (28, 21.3)

The form *tuxas-ta-x* is Perfect while the form *tuxas-ta vu-ta-x* is Past Perfect (see section 4). In both forms the copula can be used. However, in the example it is used twice, and the Yaghnobi grammar does not mention the existence of such a form with two copulas. The function of the two copulas here is not clear.

It is noteworthy that the corpus provides an example of non-agreement in number: the present copula of the third person singular *-x* can be used together with the present copula of the third person plural *or*. Consider the following example:

- (71) *Ištīt čo₁ kara₂-x or?*
 these who_{1,2}-COP.PRS.3SG COP.PRS.3PL
 [He said:] ‘Who/What are they?’ (3, 42.1)

The corpus contains only one such example. It is not clear whether it results from misspeaking on the part of the native speaker (who said *čo karax* in the singular and then wanted to correct himself and added the plural copula *or*), or constitutes a grammatical Yaghnobi sentence where the copula *-x* conveys identification and the copula *or* existence (lit. ‘who/what is it? they do exist’).

The functions of double copulas in some examples in the corpus are obscure:

- (72) “*Napis-ta-x-īm*,” — *a-wov*.
 sleep-PART.PST-COP.PRS.3SG-COP.PRS.1SG.PRF PST-say.3SG
 ‘“I am sleeping,” — she said.’ (32, 30.1)

Stative verbs like *napis-* ‘sleep, lie’, *nīd-* ‘sit’, *jax-* ‘stand’ and *uš-* ‘stand, be located’ use the Perfect to convey present state (e.g. ‘he is sleeping/sitting/standing’) [Vydrin, Mazurova 2023: 161]. An intransitive verb in the Perfect usually agrees with its subject in person and number (transitive verbs use other strategies, see [Vydrin 2023b]). Normally, example (72) above would be expected to take the form *napista īm* with the present copula of the first person singular only (*īm*). The function of the present copula of the third person singular (*-x*) here is not clear. One can assume that the past participle with the copula *-x* was lexicalized here (‘sleeping’, ‘sleepers’); however, there are no data speaking either for or against this assumption in the corpus.

In general, in all double copula sentences the first copula used is the present copula *-x*. There are no examples without the copula *-x* and no examples where *-x* is used after other copulas. The obligatory use of *-x* in the double copula sentence and its use even in sentences referring to the past argues that this copula is the most grammaticalized of the three. Note that *-x* is also the most frequent copula in the texts (see section 2 for the frequency data).

As a second copula either *ast* or *xast* can be used. Alternatively, the function of the second copula can be performed by the past copula of the third person singular (*oy*).

In double copula sentences both copulas preserve their functions. The second copula usually conveys existential, locative, attributive or identificational meaning, while the first copula (-x) can function grammatically (as a part of a periphrastic verbal form, see section 4) or semantically. In the latter case -x expresses identification or attribution.

The origin of the double copula construction in Yaghnobi requires a separate study. According to the available literature there are no special studies of such constructions in Iranian languages. The neighboring Tajik language, which has a great influence on Yaghnobi, does not have double copula sentences. Double copula sentences are not attested in Ossetic (another Eastern Iranian language), cf. the paper on Ossetic copulas in the present issue of the journal [Alekseev 2025]. In fact, at the current stage of my study it is not certain whether such sentences are present in any other modern or extinct Iranian language. However, the absence of such constructions in written grammars does not guarantee their complete absence in the language itself. The double copula sentences of Yaghnobi are not mentioned in existing grammatical descriptions either, and were discovered only after the analysis of a considerable number of texts.

Another topic which will not be discussed in this paper is the syntactic features of double copula sentences. Do the two copulas function as two predicates and form two clauses, or are both copulas used in a single clause? The syntactic analysis of these sentences must await a separate study.

It is not known whether double copula sentences still exist in modern Yaghnobi. Such uses of the copulas are not mentioned in the literature (e.g. [Bird 2007, Benkato 2020]). The study of this topic requires linguistic fieldwork with Yaghnobi native speakers.

11. Conclusion

In this paper I have studied the use of the present third person singular copulas *xast*, *ast* and *-x*, considering in detail their grammatical and semantic functions. My study suggests the following conclusions:

1. Yaghnobi has three different copulas in the third person singular of the Present (*xast*, *ast* and *-x*), not two (*ast* and *xast/-x*) as was suggested by Benkato [2020] for modern Yaghnobi.

2. All three present copulas have distinct semantic and grammatical functions.

3. The use of a copula in the Present is not obligatory. Most of the semantic functions conveyed by the present copulas can be expressed in Yaghnobi without a copula. The use of a copula is four times more frequent in the texts than its omission.

4. Double copula sentences are attested in Yaghnobi, where the copula *-x* is obligatorily used as the first copula conveying grammatical or semantic meaning (identification or attribution) and the second copula expresses other semantic meanings (most frequently existential); both copulas have the same subject. Double copula sentences have not been mentioned before in the available literature on Iranian languages.

Abbreviations

ADJ — adjectivizer, CIT — citative, COP — copula, DIMIN — diminutive, EMPH — emphatic, ENCL — enclitic, EZF — ezafe, IMP — imperative, INDEF — indefinite, INF — full infinitive, INF2 — short infinitive, NEG — negation, OBL — Oblique, PART.FUT — future participle, PART.PST — past participle, PL — plural, POST — postposition, POT — potential construction, PRF — Perfect, PRS — Present, PST — Past, REP — Reportative, SER — serial verbal form, SG — singular.

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