AN ARGUMENT FOR THE CATEGORY ADJECTIVE

IN SOMALI

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1. Introduction

There have been differences in the literature on Somali grammar about whether there is justification for a syntactic category of adjective. Elements identified as such by Hunter (1880), Larajasse and Sampont (1897), da Palermo (1914), Barry (1937), Bell (1953) and Moreno (1955) have more recently been analysed as verbs by Abraham (1964) and Andrzejewski (1969). The present study reviews the justifications for the latter approach and argues that it is mistaken, leading as it does to an analysis which calls for the acceptance of a high degree of irregularity and which fails to relate phenomena which have as their common source a single, very simple rule of Somali grammar. In short, this is an argument for the category adjective in Somali.

2. Background: the Somali Verb Classes

The justification for treating as verbs those items previously described as adjectives rests on morphological data and thus a necessary preliminary to the present discussion is a brief description of verbal morphology. There are in Somali three morphologically distinct classes of verb: strong, weak, and the irregular verb yahay: "to be", which may be said to form a third class on its own. The strong verbs are just four in number: yidhi: "to say", yimi: "to come", yiil: "to stay, remain", and yiqin: "to know". Thus all but five verbs belong to the category of weak verbs. Some of the major characteristics of these forms are described below; the treatment is necessarily brief and the reader is referred to Andrzejewski (1968 and 1975) for a fuller discussion.

2.1 Tense marking

Weak verbs can be analysed as sequences of the following morphemes: root, person marker, and tense marker, as in (1) below:
(1) a. (way) keentaa "(she) brings" keen+t+aa  
b. (way) keentay "(she) brought" keen+t+ay  
where keen: root of "bring", t: person marker "she",  
aa: tense marker "present", ay: tense marker "past"

Strong verbs on the other hand mark changes in tense by changes in the vowel qualities in the root, as shown in (2) below:

(2) a. (way) taqaan "(she) knows" t+aqaan  
b. (way) tiqin "(she) knew" t+iqin  
where t: person marker "she", aqaan: root-present of "know",  
iqin: root-past of "know"

As (1) and (2) show, the two classes mark tenses differently: strong verbs by a root vowel change, weak verbs by suffixation of a specific morpheme.

2.2 Morpheme sequence

As can be seen from the above examples the verb classes also differ in the position that the person marker morpheme occupies in relation to other morphemes. Weak verbs are of the structure root + person marker + tense marker, while strong verbs have the sequence person marker + root. For a further example of this see (3) below:

(3) a. (waannu) keenay "(we) brought" keen+n+ay  
b. (waannu) nimi "(we) came" n+imi  
where n: person marker "we", keen: root of "bring",  
ay: tense marker "past", imi: root-past of "come"

In the above, (3a) and (3b) display the morpheme sequences of weak and strong verbs respectively.

Interestingly the verb yahay:"to be" has both types of morpheme sequence, and this choice of sequence, for this verb alone, is significant in differentiating tense. For example, the order of morphemes found in strong verbs marks the present tense of yahay while its past tense has these same
morphemes but arranged in the order characteristic of weak verbs. This is shown in (4) below:

(4) a. (way) tahay "(she) is" t+ahay
    b. (way) ahayd "(she) was" ahay+d(⁻*t)

where ahay: root of "be", t: person marker "she", which becomes d finally by a general phonological rule.

Note that yahay's use of morpheme sequence to distinguish tenses means that each of the three verb classes uses a different mechanism for marking tense differences.

2.3 Person marker morphemes

The verb classes are also distinguished by the form they have for the person marker "he". In strong verbs this is realized as y, in weak verbs by the lack of an overt marker (in other words by zero, written hereafter as φ), while in yahay: "to be" both forms show up but in different tenses. This is shown in (5) below:

(5) a. weak
    (way) keentaa "(she) brings" she: t
    (way) keenaa "(he) brings" he: φ

b. strong
    (way) taqaan "(she) knows" she: t
    (way) yaqaan "(he) knows" he: y

c. yahay
    (way) tahay "(she) is" she: t
    (way) yahay "(he) is" he: y
    (way) ahayd "(she) was" she: d(⁻*t)
    (way) ahaa "(he) was" he: φ

In fact it should prove possible to state the person marker behaviour shown in (5) as a predictable consequence of the differences in morpheme
sequence described in 2.2 (above). This is because wherever the sequence is person marker + root the marker for "he" is ɣ, while in the sequence root + person marker (+ tense marker) it is ɣ. So a rule stating that this marker is realized as ɣ initially and ɣ elsewhere would make the difference in the verb classes' person marker follow automatically from their different morpheme sequences.

These then are the three Somali verb classes: strong, weak, and yahay: "to be". The above, very brief, description of their structure forms the background to the following discussion of whether adjectives are a distinct category or are themselves also verbs.

3. **Adjectives or Verbs?**

3.1 **Adjectives or "past participles"?**

The basic justifications for treating as verbs what had been considered adjectives are morphological. Abraham (1964:289) divides the class into "real adjectives" and "past participles". His exposition is rather brief but this seems to have been done on the grounds of morphological complexity: "real adjectives" are simple, unanalyzable forms while "past participles" are elements which have clearly been derived from verbs by suffixation of various elements. This is of course not by itself an argument for verb status since elements may be derivationally related but syntactically distinct. Indeed, there are two obvious points to discourage an approach such as Abraham's. Firstly, the adjective forms, unlike past participles in English (which Abraham seems to have thought comparable), are not part of the corresponding verb's paradigms. For example, there is clearly a relationship between dil (V: "beat") and dillan (ADJ: "beaten") but dillan does not occur as a form of the verb dil whereas of course in English beaten occurs as part of the verb beat. Secondly, there is a parallel relationship between pairs of nouns and adjectives e.g. wannaag (N: "goodness") and wannaagsan (ADJ: "good") yet no attempt was made to use a similar morphological argument to claim that wannaagsan is a noun and clearly it would be unwarranted to do so on just this evidence of similarity. In short, a relationship of morphological derivation between two elements says nothing about their relative syntactic status.
Abraham provides no syntactic arguments to demonstrate that *dillaan*, for example, patterns like a verb and is thus, as he claims, a "past participle" and not a "real adjective".

3.2 Adjectives or "hybrid verbs"?

Andrzejewski's (1969) motivation for calling these elements verbs is also grounded in morphology but in this case in inflectional rather than derivational morphology. To understand his approach one might consider the following examples:

(6) a. *wuw wannaageyaa*  "he was good"
   FOCUS+he good

b. *way wannaageyeen*  "they were good"
   FOCUS+they good

(7) a. *nin wannaageen*  "a man who is good, a good man"
    man good

b. *nin wannaageeanaa*  "a man who was good, a good man"
    man good

In both (6) and (7) there is no obvious occurrence of *yahay*: "to be". However, there are elements suffixed to *wannaageen*: "good" which serve to distinguish tense and person. Since this marking of tense and person onto elements by affixes is characteristic of verbs in Somali, Andrzejewski analysed elements like *wannaageen* as verbs.

However, if these are verbs then one has to say that they show characteristics which do not correspond to any of the three verb classes described earlier. For example, while the fact that tense is marked by suffixation (cf. 7a and 7b above) associates them with weak verbs, the actual choice of morphemes is different. In fact they reverse the weak verb pattern: *-aa* represents present tense in weak verbs (see 1a above) but seems to signify past tense in (7) above. Similarly, the weak verb past tense morpheme *-ay* (as in 1b above) represents present tense in these elements (see
for example, 1.1a and 1.1b below). Because of this one might posit a fourth verb class, morphologically distinct from the three discussed earlier. This is essentially what Andrzejewski has done.

However, there are greater problems, for in the present tense these "verbs" have the very unusual arrangement shown in (8) below:

(8) a. wax waxaagsan yahay "he is good"
    FOCUS+he good is

b. wax waxaagsan tahay "she is good"
    FOCUS+she good is

This is unusual for a verb because it has the root followed by yahay:"to be". Verb + verb constructions do occur in Somali: for example, the future tense of all verbs involves an auxiliary use of doon:"to wish, want" as shown in (9) below:

(9) waan tegi doonaay "I will go"
    FOCUS+I go will

However (8) is unusual in having yahay for the second verb: yahay does not normally occur as an auxiliary. Sentence (10) below, for example, is an impossible construction:

(10) *waan tegi yahay

Apart from the elements under discussion the only elements which can occur as complements of yahay are NPs. In fact, in (8) waxaagsan is behaving in a way we might expect of NPs in Somali i.e. as the complement of yahay with the latter taking its normal inflections of tense and person.

How can one characterize the fact that in examples like (6) and (7) waxaagsan seems to pattern like a verb while in (8) it behaves like a noun? Andrzejewski's approach has been to state that these are in fact verbs, but that they are highly irregular - an irregularity echoed in his label for them of "hybrid verbs". The present argument suggests another approach: it will be
claimed that by treating these elements as adjectives one can describe the 
behaviour shown in (6-8) without recourse to the notion of irregularity. 
The claim will be that what is being overlooked by the "hybrid verb" approach 
is the effect of a simple reduction rule.

The principal evidence for this last claim comes from an examination of 
the occasions when these "verbs" occur, as in (8), with a full form of yahay. 
Sentences like (8) have variants which commonly occur in speech and which are 
associated with less formal styles of discourse. Sentences (8a) and (8b) 
above, and repeated below, have for example, the stylistic variants (11a) and 
(11b) below:

(8) a. wuu wanaagas yahay  "he is good"
    FOCUS+he good is
b. way wanaagas tahay  "she is good"
    FOCUS+she good is

(11) a. wuu wanaagasanyay  "he is good"
    b. way wanaagasanyay  "she is good"

Informally, in (11) the copula is reduced and suffixed onto the preceding 
wanaagas. More specifically, the root of yahay (i.e. -ah-) is deleted and 
what remain to become suffixed clitics are the tense and person markers. 
Any account of elements like wanaagas must include an optional rule to 
relate (8) and (11) in order to capture the generalization that they are 
stylistic variants. Let us for the moment call this rule Copula Reduction. 
This means that (11a) has as underlying structure a form like (8a) and since 
the reduction is optional, both sentences are grammatical.

What is important here is that this same rule can account for the verb-
like appearance of wanaagas in (6) and (7). In exactly the same way that 
(11a) is derived from (8a), sentence (6a) above (and repeated below for 
convenience) can be assigned an underlying structure like (12):

(6) a. wuu wanaagaasanaa  "he was good"
Here, ahaa is the normal past tense form of yahay and the rule needed to get from (12) to (6a) is the Copula Reduction rule described above. If we assume this rule to have applied to produce (6a) then all forms of wanaagean can be assigned a single underlying structure with wanaagean as complement of the verb yahay. When wanaagean appears with suffixed tense and person marker morphemes, -ah- has been deleted; when the rule has not applied, wanaagean appears as the invariable complement of yahay. In short, the differences between (6) and (7) on the one hand and (8) on the other are the result of whether a single rule has applied or not.

It must be noted, however, that (12) unlike (8) is not a grammatical surface structure. Hence this reduction rule must be said to operate obligatorily for sentences like this. In fact the rule deleting yahay's root is obligatory for all but main sentence present tense forms. If, as one can easily imagine, the rule operated obligatorily in all cases then suggesting underlying forms with yahay for these elements might be criticized as somewhat "abstract". Nevertheless, the justification would remain that this derivation allows explanation of apparently highly irregular forms. Given though that the full form of yahay does actually surface in certain sentences, and further that these are but stylistic variants of other sentences in which it does not, then the present analysis seems to be well motivated. To repeat, wanaagean and similar elements seem in some instances like verbs because a rule has applied to delete yahay's root and attach to them its surviving person and tense markers.

This still leaves unresolved the question of the syntactic status of these elements. I have claimed that they are not verbs; but are they NPs? The underlying structures suggested for them above exactly parallel those of sentences in which NPs are complements of yahay. To see this compare the underlying structures proposed for (7) below with (13):

(7) (repeated)
   a. nin wanaagean
      "a man who is good"
      from $\leftarrow$ nin wanaagean ah
(7) b. nin wannaasean
    "a man who was good"
    from ←nin wannaasean ahaa

(13) a. nin askari ah
    man soldier is
    "a man who is a soldier"

    b. nin askari ahaa
    man soldier was
    "a man who was a soldier"

In fact elements like wannaasean are distinguished from nouns like askari by
a whole range of morphological and syntactic facts and no-one has ever
attempted to include them in the same syntactic category. Examples of the
syntactic differences would include the fact that wannaasean-type elements
cannot occur as subjects or be wh-questioned; they are morphologically
distinct in not occurring with determiners or being inflected for case.
In fact (7) and (13) above are examples of a rare overlap between these two
categories i.e. that both may occur as complements of yahay. Even here they
are distinguished and it is the rule of Copula Reduction itself which
separates them. Reduction is only possible when the complement of yahay is
one of these wannaasean elements: NP complements block the reduction. This
can be seen from (14) below which parallels (13):

(14) a. *nin askari
    "a man who is a soldier"

    b. *nin askari ahaa
    "a man who was a soldier"

These are impossible because Copula Reduction has erroneously applied with
NPs.

Thus wannaasean-type elements form a syntactic class distinct from both
verbs and NPs. Given this, and also the semantic role they perform in the
examples already given, and in (15) and (16) below, it seems reasonable to
call this class adjectives.

(15) aqaikitii waa cas yahay
    house+the F+it red is
    "the house is red"
4. Conclusion

The "hybrid verb" approach was formulated to explain how the same elements in what are, in a significant sense, alternative variants of the same sentence can appear either inflected for tense (and thus verb-like) or as invariable complements of "be". The problem seems a serious one and was used as justification for postulating a defective class of verbs. However, as shown here, there operates upon these elements a reduction rule which must be accounted for in any approach and which provides a natural explanation for the apparent irregularity. This rule reveals that this class of elements, unlike verbs, always occur as complements of yahay: "to be". Further it distinguishes in its application between these elements, to which it applies, and NPs, to which it does not.

It seems clear that earlier recognition of these elements as adjectives, based largely on notional grounds, correctly reflects the syntactic facts. Note, however, that such recognition is only possible if one allows the use of an obligatory deletion rule, which Andrzejewski's (1969) framework does not.
NOTES

1. Following Andrzejewski (1975) the reference form given for these strong verbs is the 3rd person singular masculine of the past tense. For example, "come" is referred to as *yim*ī, literally "he came".

2. It is assumed here that when, as in (8), adjectives and *yahay* occur as full forms, they are separated by a word boundary i.e. ##NP##ADJ##yahay## and that part of the Copula Reduction rule attaches non-deleted elements of *yahay* onto the preceding adjective i.e. (where mm = remaining morphemes of *yahay* ) ##NP##ADJ##mm##. In fact there is some evidence that ADJ-*yahay* may not be separated by a word boundary even in (9). This evidence comes from the phonological rules affecting nasals. Word finally the segment /m/ cannot occur and is realized as /n/, neutralizing the phonological opposition holding elsewhere between these sounds. The addition of another syllable by any process of the grammar (e.g. plural formation) restores the phonological contrast, as can be seen by the following examples:

1. *nin:* "man" (∈ *nim*)
   *nim:* "men"
   *san:* "nose"
   *san:* "noses"

2. *xukum:* "rule!(sing.)" (∈ *xukum*)
   *keen:* "bring!(sing.)"
   *keena:* "bring!(pl.)"

This /m/ → n rule occurs even when the following word begins with a vowel e.g.

3. a. *nin xum ayaan la hadlay* "I spoke with an evil man"
   man evil FOC+I with spoke
   b. *nin xum ayaan la hadlay*

This suggests that the rule is crucially sensitive to word boundaries and must be something like PR1 below:

PR1: m → n / _ ##

In sequences of ADJ - *yahay* however, wherever the form of *yahay* begins with a vowel, final m in the adjective does not undergo PR1, as can be seen in the following:

4. *waan xum ahay* "I am evil"
   FOC+I evil am

This suggests that the boundaries in (4) above are

##waan##xum##ahay##

rather than
as is assumed in the present discussion. If this is so, then the rule cliticizing *yahay* onto a preceding adjective is independent of the rule, Copula Reduction, which deletes *yahay*'s root. This of course does not materially affect the present argument.

3. By wh-questioning (a convenient, if sloppy, label) is meant the constituent questioning which occurs with NPs. In Somali this is done by using one of a limited set of question words, *yaa:*"who?" for example, or by suffixed interrogative determiners, e.g. *ninkaa:*"which man?"
REFERENCES


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0. The Somali verb classes:
   a. Weak verbs e.g. qor "to write"
   b. Strong verbs: yidhi "to say", yimi "to come", yil "to stay, remain", & yiqiin "to know"
   c. The copula: yahay "to be"

(1) a. (way) keenta "(she) brings" keen+t+aa
   b. (way) keentay "(she) brought" keen+t+ay
   where keen: root of "bring", t: person marker "she",
   aa: tense marker "present", ay: tense marker "past"

(2) a. (way) taqaan "(she) knows" t+aqaan
   b. (way) tiqiin "(she) knew" t+iqiin
   where t: person marker "she", aqaan: root-present of "know",
   iqiin: root-past of "know"

(3) a. (waanuu) keejaay "(we) brought" keen+n+ay
   b. (waanuu) nimi "(we) came" n+imi
   where n: person marker "we", keen: root of "bring",
   ay: tense marker "past", imi: root-past of "come"

(4) a. (way) tahay "(she) is" t+ahay
   b. (way) ahayd "(she) was" ahay+d(t)
   where ahay: root of "be", t: person marker "she", which
   becomes d finally by a general phonological rule.

(5) a. weak
   (way) keenta "(she) brings" she: t
   (wuu) keenaa "(he) brings" he: ø

b. strong
   (way) taqaan "(she) knows" she: t
   (wuu) yaaqaan "(he) knows" he: y

c. yahay
   (way) tahay "(she) is" she: t
   (wuu) yahay "(he) is" he: y
   (way) ahayd "(she) was" she: d(t)
   (wuu) ahay "(he) was" he: ø
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b. way wannaageen tahay  
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(9) waan tegi doona  
    "I will go"
    FOCUS+I go will

(10) *waan tegi yahay

(11) a. wuu wannaageganyay  
    "he is good"

b. way wannaagegantay  
    "she is good"

(12) wuu wannaageen ahaa/

(7) (repeated)

a. nin wannaageen  
    "a man who is good"
    from <= nin wannaageen ah

b. nin wannaageeena  
    "a man who was good"
    from <= nin wannaageeena ahaa

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b. nin askari ahaa  
    "a man who was a soldier"
    man soldier was

(14) a. *nin askari  
    "a man who is a soldier"

b. *nin askariga  
    "a man who was a soldier"

(15) aqalkii wuu caa yahay  
    "the house is red"
    house+the F+it red is

(16) gaadh i caysub ayaan soo iibsaday  
    "I bought a new car"
    car new FOCUS+I bought
(17) A note on the rule of Copula Reduction

It is assumed here that when, as in (8), adjectives and yahay occur as full forms, they are separated by a word boundary i.e. **NP**ADJ**#yahay** and that part of the Copula Reduction rule attaches non-deleted elements of yahay onto the preceding adjective i.e. (where mm = remaining morphemes of yahay) **NP**ADJ**#mm**. In fact there is some evidence that ADJ-yahay may not be separated by a word boundary even in (8). This evidence comes from the phonological rules affecting nasals. Word finally the segment /m/ cannot occur and is realized as /n/, neutralizing the phonological opposition holding elsewhere between these sounds. The addition of another syllable by any process of the grammar (e.g. plural formation) restores the phonological contrast, as can be seen by the following examples:

1. nin: "man" (วล*nim)  
   niman: "men"  
   san: "nose"  
   sanan: "noses"

2. xukum: "rule!(sing.)" (วล*xukum)  
   xukuma: "rule!(pl.)"  
   keen: "bring!(sing.)"  
   keena: "bring!(pl.)"

This /m/~ n rule occurs even when the following word begins with a vowel e.g.

3. a. nin xum ayaan la hadlay  
   "I spoke with an evil man"  
   man evil FOC+I with spoke  
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This suggests that the rule is crucially sensitive to word boundaries and must be something like PR1 below:

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In sequences of ADJ - yahay however, wherever the form of yahay begins with a vowel, final m in the adjective does not undergo PR1, as can be seen in the following:

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**waan**xum**ahay**

rather than

**waan**xum**ahay**

as is assumed in the present discussion. If this is so, then the rule criticising yahay onto a preceding adjective is independent of the rule, Copula Reduction, which deletes yahay's root. This of course does not materially affect the present argument.
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