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A grammar of Kumzari : a mixed Perso-Arabian language of Oman

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5 Existential

5.1 Existential by definition

Kumzari has a set of six pronominal enclitics that function to link subjects and predicates. Despite this sounding much like the definition of a copula (cf. Pustet 2003:5-7), the enclitics in Kumzari are in fact existentials, are unlike copulas in a number of respects, and have properties both resembling and differing from verbs.

Their ambiguity as a word class stems from their idiosyncratic history. Although in many languages copulas are verbs, in Kumzari the equivalent word class is the existential enclitics, which appear to have developed out of a copular verb such as the Old Persian **h*-existential by shedding the verb stem at a much earlier stage of the language, probably more than a millenium ago.⁷⁷ With only the pronominal endings left, the existential enclitics broadened their syntactic and semantic scope to accommodate all non-verbal predicates.

The existential enclitics can serve as predicates in a clause, but require a complement. Existentials are not compatible with another verb, and they occupy the same syntactic position as a verb: clause-final. However, in dropping their verb stem the existentials have properties that are synchronically unverblike: they are timeless, do not conjugate, and do not have any indication of tense, aspect, mood, voice, or mirativity; thus, they do not fill in a paradigm as verbs do (cf. Stassen 1997:76). They are enclitics, meaning they can combine with many kinds of predicate nuclei (cf. Sorani, Samvelian 2007:265). They are semantically empty. In addition, the existential enclitics differ formally from both the pronominal verbal affixes and the possessive pronouns (see section 3.2.2 possessive pronouns). Negation of existentials uses the negative enclitic, which falls after the existential (see chapter 10).

Although fulfilling most of the technical criteria of a copula, the Kumzari enclitic is called an existential for a number of reasons. Firstly, the existential is neither a prototypical verbal copula nor a prototypical nonverbal copula. Although it is similar to a verbal copula, it does not have the definitive TAMM inflection and verbal paradigm, and thus lacks “the morphological features which distinguish verbs in the language” (Stassen 1997:76). While some languages possess a nonverbal copula, these are all traced to either morphosyntactic marking of information structure or separate pronouns (Stassen 1997:76ff, cf. Pustet 2003:54). Secondly, copulas can in many languages have verbs as complements (Pustet 2003:62), but in Kumzari, existentials and verbs are mutually exclusive in the predicate. Thirdly, the verb *bur* ‘become’ in Kumzari is a more apt custodian of the term copula, for reasons laid out in chapter 9. Fourthly, the use of the term ‘existential’ for a similar morpheme has precedents in the related languages Sorani (Blau 2000:76, Thackston 2006:30) and Domari (Matras 1999:33), in Iranian Central Plateau dialects (Windfuhr 1991), in the contact language Aramaic (G.Khan 2008:838,842), and in the nearby varieties Khorasan Arabic (Windfuhr 2006) and Bandari (Pelevin 2002).

5.2 Morphological structure of the Existential

The six existential enclitics are given in Table 36 below.

⁷⁷ The Kumzari existential’s incompatibility with verbs suggests that the existential was formed, and the **h*-verb stem dropped, at some point before Middle Persian adopted the *istad* forms.

Table 36. Existential enclitics

person	singular	plural
1	=um	=im
2	=ī	=ē
3	=Ø	=in

The existentials are enclitics; that is, unlike the verbal suffixes which can only attach to verbs, the existentials cliticise to the end of any word class or phrase other than verbs. However, being clitics they are also unlike the separate pronouns in that they are “grammatical words but not independent phonological words” (Dixon & Aikhenvald 2002:35); they undergo morphophonemic alternation to form a phonological unit with the word they follow (cf. Matthews 2002:278). Existential enclitics are unstressed, and being vowel-initial, an epenthetic glottal stop appears when they attach to vowel-final stems (e.g. *ḡanī*=’**in** ‘they are rich’ but *apsit*=**in** ‘they are upset’)⁷⁸.

5.3 Syntactic distribution of the Existential

5.3.1 Semantic categories taking the Existential

Kumzari takes the existential enclitic on all three semantic types of predicates delineated by Pustet’s typological cross-linguistic examination (Pustet 2003): “existential predicates” (e.g. there are goats), “ascriptive predicates” (e.g. they are goats), and “identificational predicates” (e.g. he is Shaiky-the-Goat). Following are examples of the existential performing in all three predicate functions:

(304) K597 [existential predicate]

ka pi yē si-ta=**in** ā, ka pi yē bātar!
 if from 3s three-COUNT =EX:3p SUB if from 3s better
 ‘If **there were** three of them, it would have been even better!’

(305) S419 [ascriptive predicate]

ammū šan zank-an=**in** ya’nī.
 all 3p woman-PL =EX:3p that is to say
 ‘That is to say, all of them **were** women.’

(306) A110 [identificational predicate]

tō aḥmad =ī? mē aḥmad tka =**um**.
 2s aḥmad =EX:2s 1s aḥmad “does-it”=EX:1s
 ‘You **are** Ahmad?’ ‘I **am** Ahmad-Does-It.’

5.3.2 Syntactic categories taking the Existential

As an enclitic, the existential can attach to words of various syntactic categories:

nouns:

⁷⁸ This is very similar to the diachronic development of a copula from a verb in Turkish, of which at present only the pronominal endings and an intervocalic glide –y remain (Pustet 2003:56-57).

(307) P981

šmā martk-an=**ē**

2p man-PL =EX:2p

‘As for you, **you are** men’

(308) G22

kō’ī=**in**.

mountain.bedouin =EX:3p

‘**They are** mountain bedouins.’

adjectives:

(309) A311

dūr =**in** ya’nī pi gēr-ō.

far =EX:3p that.is.to.say from grave-the

‘That is to say, **they were** far from the grave.’

(310) S477

xālaš =**in**. ditk-o raft.

finished =EX:3p girl-the go:3sREAL

‘**They were** finished. The girl left.’

deverbs:

(311) B656

šara’a =**in** walēyit-ē.

docked =EX:3p country -a

‘**They were** docked in a country.’

(312) S756

sā laffa =**in**.

now swarming =EX:3p

‘Now **they were** swarming.’

and perfect participles:

(313) G155

sātē ġēla-an mē xōs =**in**.

now grain-PL 1s eat:PERF =EX:3p

‘Now my grain **is** eaten.’

(314) G12

mām, bap, iš na. mām yē murs-ē =**Ø**, bap yē murs-ē =**Ø**.

mother father any NEG mother 3s die:PERF-3s =EX:3s father 3s die:PERF-3s =EX:3s

‘Mother, father, there weren’t any. His mother **was** dead, his father **was** dead.’

as well as to inflected words:

(315) B1042

ba tēra-ō =**in**.

on path-the =EX:3p

‘**They are** on the path.’

(316) P982

kō’ī-an =**ē**.

mountain bedouin-PL =EX:2p

‘**You are** mountain bedouins.’

and to entire phrases:

(317) R381

si-ta zīn =**in**.

three-COUNT thief =EX:3p

‘**There were** three thieves.’

(318) B1256

mē wa brār-an mē aft kas =**im**.

1s and brother-PL 1s seven PERS =EX:1p

‘I and my brothers **are** seven people.’

(319) R117

tō wā šan =**ī** na.

2s with 3p =EX:2s NEG

‘You **are** not with them.’

Other than perfect participles, the existential enclitic does not co-occur with verbs in the predicate. The fact that non-participial verbs are mutually exclusive with the existential enclitic points to its verbal origin.

5.4 Semantics of the Existential

While the categories of verbal inflection are six TAMM forms, the existential has only a single form that is used for all contexts. Consisting of the former verbal endings, however, the existential enclitic retains the six person-number forms.

The existential enclitics do not express demarcation as to time (past, present, future):

(320)

pīru mē murḥum, ammū wā yē=**um** bē.

grandfather 1s late (died) always with 3s=EX:1s only

‘My late grandfather, **I was** always only with him.’

If time must be pragmatically expressed, a verb or explicit time reference is used:

(321) K577

mē dūšīn ḡarra=**um**.

1s yesterday mistaken=EX:1s

‘**Yesterday I was** mistaken.’

Aspect, mood, mirativity, and voice are also undifferentiated in the existential, so that if these must be communicated, a verb is used, often the verb *tō'a* ‘become’:

(322) P900

ḥamala biš šēx-ō!
careful become:2sIMPER sheikh-the
‘**Watch out** for the sheikh!’

5.5 Existential in Poetics

This poem, embedded in the tale *Abūyi salaḥnī*, *Ummī rakabnī*, uses the existential in cataphora. The third-person plural existential enclitic is repeated at the end of eight successive lines in the list portion of the poem, to elaborate on the abundance of things carried away by the newlyweds.

Table 37. Existentials in the poem Newlyweds carry things away

Poem: U515 (Newlyweds carry things away)	
nwāz mičē tāṭ-im ā, tambār-im. ba siyyārit = in , ba jāmal = in . ka xōrdin = in , ka šākar = in , ka brinḏ = in , wa ka mēčūrī = in , wa ka ḡāḏ = in , wa ka širx = in , wa ka... filḥāl, dām... ča qaymit, čintā malyūn, ambād-iš yē.	
“Tomorrow, whatever we want, let’s carry away.” They are in cars, They are on camels: There was also food, There was also sugar, There was also rice, And there was also fish, And there was also money, And there was also gold And also... in any case, I don't know what value, How many millions’ worth, They carried it off.	
rhetorical structure of the poem: carry on {large value} plural existential on {large value} plural existential also {valuable} plural existential also {valuable} plural existential also {valuable} plural existential	

	and also {valuable} plural existential
	and also {valuable} plural existential
	and also {valuable} plural existential
	and also...
{large value}	
{large value}	
carry	