

# THE STRUCTURE OF SIMPLE SENTENCE IN MESQAN: A SOUTH ETHIO-SEMITIC LANGUAGE SPOKEN IN ETHIOPIA

OusmanShafi

Wollo University, Ethiopia

## **ABSTRACT**

*Mesqan is a Gurage language belonging to the South Ethio-Semitic division of the Ethio-Semitic language group which is mainly used in day-to-day communication by a population of about 179,737 people in the Gurage Zone, Ethiopia, whose linguistic features were not well described. Foreign and Ethiopian scholars undertook several studies on Gurage languages including Mesqan. However, most of the works on Mesqan focus only on data for its genetic classification in relation to other Gurage languages. So, in order to document the grammar of Mesqan, whose speakers are nowadays mainly bilingual, a descriptive work is a very urgent need. The central aim of this paper is to provide a comprehensive description and features of simple sentence structures of the Mesqan Language. The paper is descriptive in nature, since the study is mainly concerned with describing what is actually being in the language, and mainly relies on primary linguistic data. The linguistic data, i.e. the elicited grammatical data concerning the structure of simple sentence, was collected from native speakers of the language during 12 months of fieldwork conducted between 2011 and 2012 in four Mesqan villages and in Butajira, the administrative center of the Mesqan Woreda. The most frequent word order in simple sentence is subject-object-verb (SOV). The position of adverbs is not fixed, but they always precede the verb. The sentence-initial position is the topic position and mostly nouns. Topicalization may trigger a change in the order of constituents when the topic is not the subject of the sentence, as in questions with interrogative pronouns.*

## **KEYWORDS**

*Topicalization, Topic, Constituents, Interrogative, Pronouns, Word order, Precede, Initial*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Mesqan refer to their group and home area as *mäsk'an*. The term could be related to the local *Mäsk'älä ?Ijäsus* Church that was built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century AD (DİNBARU ET AL. 1987 E.C.:32; MEYER 2007:845). Mesqan seems to have no major dialects (Getu 2012:15), although *Urib* is mentioned as an assumed Mesqan variety in early descriptions (cf. Hudson 2013:13). Genetically, Mesqan is part of Outer South Ethio-Semitic, in which Hetzron (1972:6, 119) classifies it as independent sub-branch of Western Gurage, whereas Leslau (1969:152) groups it together with Dobbī and Muher (Northern Gurage). As Western and Northern Gurage share many grammatical features, Hetzron (1972:1, 8–10; 1977:20–24) unites them into the areal-typological unit Gunnän Gurage (for lexical similarities, cf. Hudson 2013:284–290).

Mesqan is spoken by about 200,000 people who mainly reside in the Gurage Zone, particularly in the Mesqan Woreda and the nearby Butajira town, which is also their administrative center (cf.

Getu 2012:13–14). Islam is the dominating religion, which also shapes the live style and culture of the Mesqan.

Mesqan is easily understood by speakers of other GunnänGurage varieties(Fekede 2015:194–198). Most Mesqan are bilingual in Amharic, the official language in the Gurage Zone(Getu 2012:74). Despite few literary pieces in Ajämi or Fidäl(Wagner 1983:363; Hetzron 1972:156 fn. 4), Mesqan is not used for writing. Early comparative works including data on Mesqan focus on the lexicon and inflectional paradigms (e.g. Cohen 1931:216–230; Ullendorff 1955; Leslau 1969; 1982). Leslau(2004) describes the verb morphology of Mesqan by comparing it to other Gurage languages. A Mesqan–English vocabulary is found in Leslau (1979:751–831). Scattered information on all parts of Mesqan grammar including interlinearized text samples is found in Hetzron (1977:184–195), a preliminary grammar sketch is given in Meyer (2007). Several theses prepared at Addis Ababa University deal with specific topics of Mesqan grammar, like its phonology (Abduljebar 1988), verb (Getu 1989; Yitbarek 1992; Meseret 2012), or noun (Endale 1986E.C.).

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study is qualitative and empirical in nature, and mainly relies on primary linguistic data. Since the researcher is not a speaker of Mesqan, native speakers of the language were consulted. The data were gathered from seven native speakers of Mesqan during 12 months of fieldwork conducted between 2010 and 2012 in Butajira, MisraqImbor, MirabImbor, MisraqMesqan and MirabMesqan.<sup>1</sup> During my fieldwork, I had five male and two female language consultants whose first native language was Mesqan and who had a good knowledge of Amharic. They all were born within the speech community of Mesqan where they also obtained their primary and secondary school education. Besides their native language and Amharic, they speak English. During my fieldwork, I spent most of my time in Butajira which is the administrative center of the MesqanWoreda, but I also undertook several shorter trips to MisraqImbor, MirabImbor, MisraqMesqan and MirabMesqan. I started my fieldwork by eliciting words and sentences. Next, I recorded free speech texts thendatas were transcribed, edited and translated. The presentation of the data is not based on a single linguistic model or theory, but is intentionally eclectic descriptive. I used a structural approach for identifying phonemes and morphemes. Morpho-syntactic phenomena were described on the basis of major findings in linguistics typology. Based on The Leipzig Glossing Rules, most of the data are presented in an interlinear morpheme-by-morpheme version with four lines. The first line represents the actual utterance. The second line contains underlying or hypothetical morphemes or morpheme combinations which are glossed in the third line; the fourth line is an English translation usually in a literary style

## **3. SIMPLE SENTENCES**

The most frequent word order in simple sentence is subject-object-verb (SOV). The position of adverbs is not fixed, but they always precede the verb. The sentence-initial position is the topic position. Topicalizationmay trigger a change in the order of constituents when the topic is not the subject of the sentence, as in questions with interrogative pronouns.

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<sup>1</sup>The Mesqan people consider the area containing MisraqImbor, MirabImbor, MisraqMesqan and MirabMesqan as their original place.

#### 4. VERBAL CLAUSES

Verbal clauses unlike verbal phrases do not confirm only auxiliary and inflectional informations like agreement, tense, aspect and mode usually related with verbs. However, they represent the main conceptual relation, situation, or action uttered by the clause. Verbal clauses in Mesqan have a verb in the perfective or imperfective aspect, or in the jussive or imperative mood as main verb. This verb obligatorily agrees with the subject of the clause by subject agreement markers. A simple verbal clause can consist only of a single verb. The most frequent order of constituents in a verbal clause is: *adverb* - subject - *argument/adjunct* - *verb*:

- (1) *tīramaaliāt'esīyā.*  
 tīrama ali ät'e sīy-ä  
 yesterday Ali sheep buy.PFV-3SG.M  
 'Ali bought a sheep yesterday.'

Adverbs can also occur in clause-medial position, as in the following example:

- (2) *alitīramaät'esīyā.*  
 ali tīrama ät'e sīy-ä  
 Ali yesterday sheep buy.PFV-3SG.M  
 'Ali bought a sheep yesterday.'

As the clause-initial position is commonly taken by the topic, sentences (1) and (2) only differ in their information structure. In (1), the adverb *tīrama* 'yesterday' is the topic, but in (2) it is the subject *Ali*. It is also possible for an object or adjunct to occupy the clause-initial topic position, as, for instance, the direct object in (3):

- (3) *g<sup>w</sup>äčäyalik<sup>w</sup>ätt'äränn.*  
 [g<sup>w</sup>äčä-y]<sub>object</sub> [ali]<sub>subject</sub> k'ätt'är-ä-<sup>w</sup>-nn  
 hyena-DEF Ali kill.PFV-3SG.M.SBJ-3SG.M.OBJ  
 '(As to) the hyena, Ali killed it.'

In order to topicalize an object or adjunct, its referent must signify known or salient information among speaker and addressee, i.e. it must be a definite noun phrase. As shown in (3), the direct object *g<sup>w</sup>äčä* 'hyena' fulfills this criterion because it is marked by the definite marker *-y*.

There is an additional constraint for topicalization (and also for the order of constituents in a verbal clause in general) which concerns the relation between subject and topicalized object or adjunct: The subject and the topicalized constituent either must be of equally marked for definiteness (i.e. they cannot be indefinite), or the subject should be less definite than the topicalized constituent. A clause structure in which a less definite NP clause-initially is followed by a more definite NP is ungrammatical. For instance, the reverse order of the definite direct object (*säβi* 'the person') and the indefinite subject (*ambäsa* 'lion') in (4) below would yield an unacceptable sentence, even if they followed the SOV order of constituents. That means the basic word order SOV is of little value for the identification of subject and object when the involved entities are of unequal definiteness status.

- (4) *ambäsa säβik'ätt'ärä.*  
 [ambäsa]<sub>subject</sub> [säb-i]<sub>object</sub> k'ätt'är-ä  
 lion säb-DEF kill.PFV-3SG.M

‘A lion killed the person.’

When both, subject and direct object, are indefinite nouns, their order is invariable SOV, i.e. the syntactic roles of these nouns are interpreted according to this default order, as in the following example:

- (5) *ambäsasäβk’ätt’ärä.*  
 [anbäsa]<sub>subject</sub> [säb]<sub>object</sub> k’ätt’är-ä  
 lion säb kill.PFV-3SG.M  
 ‘A lion killed a person.’

When the direct object *säβ* ‘person’ in (5) should become the topic, it moves to the clause-initial position and is obligatorily marked for definiteness, which, consequently, yields its cross-reference by an object agreement marker on the verb:

- (6) *säβiambäsak’wätt’äränn.*  
 [säb-i]<sub>object</sub> [anbäsa]<sub>subject</sub> k’ätt’är-ä- {<sup>w</sup>-nn}  
 person-DEF lion kill.PFV-3SG.M.SBJ-3SG.M.OBJ  
 ‘(As to) the person, a lion killed him.’

Clauses, like (7), in which all arguments (and adjuncts) are represented by overt NPs are not frequent. The order of the constituents in such clauses is not fixed. It seems that the noun phrase which contains new information is placed near to the verb, while noun phrases which represent given information tend to occur more the beginning of the clause, as in the following example:

- (7) *tīramaaliyäsaraät’easiyā.*  
 tīrama [ali]<sub>subject</sub> [yā-sara]<sub>indirect object</sub> [ät’e]<sub>direct object</sub> a-sy-ä  
 yesterday Ali DAT-Sara sheep CAUS.D-buy.PFV-3SG.M  
 ‘Ali sold a sheep to Sara yesterday.’

Instead of (7), clauses with only one overt argument or adjunct are much more common, as in the following examples:

- (8) *tīramaät’easiyā.*  
 tīrama ät’e a-sy-ä  
 yesterday sheep CAUS.D-buy.PFV-3SG.M  
 ‘He sold a sheep yesterday.’
- (9) *tīramaät’esiyā.*  
 tīrama ät’e siy-ä  
 yesterday sheep buy.PFV-3SG.M  
 ‘He bought a sheep yesterday.’

The subject in (8) and (9) are only referred to by the 3SG.M subject agreement marker on the verb; there are no overt subject NP. This indicates that the referents of the subject NP are easily retrievable for the interlocutors from the previous discourse. In contrast, the subject NP *Ali* represents new discourse information in (1), or is emphasized as a topic in (2).

## 5. NOMINAL CLAUSES

Copular or auxiliary verbs occur in the position of a main-clause verb in nominal sentences, and in expressions of verbal possession and obligation. They include the present tense copula *-n*, the past tense auxiliary *bannä*, and the existential copula *nännä* ‘he/it exists’. The use of these morphemes is restricted to particular tenses in main clauses, i.e. in contrast to verbal clauses, nominal clauses in Mesqan express the tense distinction present vs. past.

## 6. AFFIRMATIVE NOMINAL CLAUSES

The present tense copula is frequently used in the formation of equative clauses, which show that the subject NP is identical to the NP functioning as complement to the copula (see Payne 1997:114). In (10), for instance, it is ascertained that the referent of the subject *Ali* is identical to the referent of the copula complement *gäβäre* ‘farmer’:

- (10) *aligäβärewu.*  
 ali gäβäre-u  
 Ali farmer-COP.3SG.M  
 ‘Ali is a farmer.’

The copula complement can also express a property that is associated with the subject, as in the following examples:

- (11) *sarasinarsäβiya.*  
 sara sinar säb-ya  
 Sara strong person-COP.3SG.F  
 ‘Sara is a strong person.’
- (12) *yähiti aβeta balik’u.*  
 yä-hiti ab-eta balik’-u  
 GEN-3SG.F father-POSS.3SG.F old\_man-COP.3SG.M  
 ‘Her father is an old man.’
- (13) *gärädimälkammaya.*  
 gäräd-i mälkamma-ya  
 girl-DEF beautiful-COP.3SG.F  
 ‘The girl is beautiful.’

In subordination, the copula is replaced by the verb *xänä* ‘He/It be(came).’ in the imperfective aspect.

- (14) *alibäβetäwtawussitt’ tixän leβa gäbba.*  
 ali bä-bet-äwta wussitt’ t-y-xän-ø  
 Ali LOC-house- inside SUB-3-be(come).IPFV-SG.M  
 POSS.3SG.M  
 leba gäbba  
 thief enter.PFV.3SG.M  
 ‘When Ali was in his home, a thief entered.’

The existential copula *nännä* ‘he/it exists’ affirms the existence of an entity. This copula is commonly used in locative constructions:

- (15) *sarabäβetnännäčč.*  
 sara      bä-bet              nänn-äčč  
 Sara      LOC-house      exist.PRS-3SG.F  
 ‘Sara is in a house’

Obligation, as in (16), and possession, as in (17), is periphrastic construction based on the existential copula:

- (16) *aβännawäčännännäβ<sup>w</sup>ä.*  
 ab-ännä                      wä-čänn                      nänn-ä-b<sup>w</sup>-ä  
 father-POSS.1SG      VN-come.JUS      exist.PRS-3SG.M.SBJ-MAL-3SG.M.OBJ  
 ‘My father must come.’
- (17) *birrnänne.*  
 birr      nänn-ä-e  
 money      exist.PRS-3SG.M.SBJ-1SG.OBJ  
 ‘I have money.’

In possessive constructions, the object agreement markers are attached to the existential copula to refer to the possessor, while the subject agreement marker refers to the possessed entity. In obligation, the existential copula is always marked by the default 3SG.M subject marker while the individual who is obliged to do something is referred to by a combination of applicative marker - *b* plus object agreement marker.

In subordination, the existential copula *nännä* ‘he/it exists’ is replaced by the element *-annä*, which only occurs in subordinated clauses:

- (18) *birrbanne ifikkä.*  
 birr      bä-annä-e    ä-ib-ø-kkä  
 money      COND-exist.SUB.PRS.3SG.M-1SG.OBJ      1-give.IPFV-SG.SBJ-2SG.M.OBJ  
 ‘When I have money, I will give (it) to you.’
- (19) *sarabäβetbannäččfäyyawu.*  
 sara      bä-bet              bä-annä-äčč    fäyya-u  
 Sara      LOC-house      COND-exist.SUB.PRS.3SG.M-3SG.F      good.COP.3SG.M  
 ‘If Sara was in a house, it was good’

In past tense nominal clauses, the auxiliary *bannäis* used instead of the copula *-n*, as in the following examples:

- (20) *innafäyyatämariwoččbannänä.*  
 inna      fäyya      tämari-očč      bannä-nä  
 1PL      good      student-PL      AUX.PST-1PL  
 ‘We were good student.’
- (21) *äk<sup>w</sup>äbäβetbannähu.*  
 äk<sup>w</sup>ä      bä-bet              bannä-h<sup>w</sup>  
 today      LOC-house      AUX.PST-1SG  
 ‘I was at home today.’

Verb in the imperfective followed by the relative verb *yänäbbärä* functioning as past tense auxiliary in subordination expresses an ongoing action in the past, as in the following example:

- (22) *g<sup>w</sup>äčätik'ät'iryänäbbäräyhiyarčänñä.*  
 g<sup>w</sup>äčä t-y-k'ät'r-ø yä-näbbär-ä-y  
 hyena SUB-3-kill.IPFV-SG.M REL-live.PFV~AUX.PST-3SG.M-DEF  
 hiyar čänñ-ä  
 Hiyar come.PFV-3SG.M  
 'Hiyar who was killing a hyena came.'

## 7. NEGATIVE NOMINAL CLAUSES

Present tense equative nominal clauses are negated by the verb *xänä* 'He/It be(came).' in the negated perfective aspect:

- (23) *saragobäztämarianxänäčč.*  
 sara gobäz tämari an-xän-äčč  
 Sara clever student NEG-be(come).PFV-3SG.F  
 'Sara is not a clever student.'
- (24) *ambäsasinarawreanxänä.*  
 anbäsa sinar awre an-xän-ä  
 lion strong wild\_animal NEG-be(come).PFV-3SG.M  
 'A lion is not a strong wild animal.'

Present tense attributive clauses are negated in the same way:

- (25) *gärädimälkammaanxänäčč.*  
 gäräd-i mälkamma an-xän-äčč  
 girl-DEF beautiful NEG-be(come).PFV-3SG.F  
 'The girl is not beautiful.'

In subordination, the negated verb *xänä* 'He/It be(came).' in the imperfective aspect is used instead of the copula:

- (26) *alibäbetäwtawussitt' texän leβa gäbba.*  
 ali bä-bet-äwta wussitt' t-a-y-xän-ø  
 Ali LOC-house- inside SUB-NEG-3-be(come).IPFV-SG.M  
 POSS.3SG.M  
 leβa gäbba  
 thief enter.PFV.3SG.M  
 'When Ali was not in his home, a thief entered.'

In negated existential clauses, the negative existential copula *ennä* 'he/it does not exist' is used:

- (27) *alibätimhürt bet wussitt' ennä.*  
 ali bä-timhürt\_bet wussitt' ennä  
 Ali LOC-school inside not\_exist.PRS.3SG.M  
 'Ali is not in the school.'

Negative obligation and possession constructions are based on the negative existential copula *ennä* 'he/it does not exist':

- (28) *aβänñawäčänennäβ<sup>w</sup>ä.*  
 ab-änñä wä-čän ennä-b<sup>w</sup>-ä

father-POSS.1SG VN-come.JUS not\_exist.PRS.3SG.M.SBJ-MAL-3SG.M.OBJ  
 ‘My father has not to come.’

- (29) *birrenne.*  
 birr ennä-e  
 money not exist.PRS.3SG.M.SBJ-1SG.OBJ  
 ‘I have no money.’

In the past tense, the negative nominal clause is expressed by the negated verb *näbbärä* ‘He lived.’ instead of the auxiliary *bannä*, as in the following example:

- (30) *innafäyyatämariwoččännäβärnä.*  
 inna fäyya tämari-očč an-näbär-nä  
 1PL good student-PL NEG-live.PFV-1PL  
 ‘We were not good student.’

The negative possession in the past is as follows:

- (31) *emnamišstannäβäre.*  
 emna mišt an-näbär-ä-e  
 last\_year woman NEG-live.PFV-3SG.M.SBJ-1SG.OBJ  
 ‘I did not have a wife last year.’

## 8. CLEFT SENTENCES

According to Hetzron (1977:125), a cleft construction is a type of focus construction where everything else in the sentence except verb is presupposed and the clefted element fills a gap in the hearer’s knowledge. This also applies to Mesqan.

In a cleft construction in Mesqan, the focused constituent immediately precedes the present tense copula, while the remaining constituents are summarized in a relative clause. Every syntactic constituent except verb can be focused in cleft sentences:

Verbal sentence:

- (32) *aliyäsarabirr aβänna.*  
 ali yä-sara birr ab-ä-nna  
 Ali DAT-Sara money give.PFV-3SG.M.SBJ-3SG.F.OBJ  
 ‘Ali gave money to Sara.’

Cleft sentence with focus on the subject:

- (33) *yäsarabirryaβännay – aliwu.*  
 yä-sara birr yä-ab-ä-nna-y  
 DAT-Sara money REL-give.PFV-3SG.M.SBJ-3SG.F.OBJ-DEF  
 ali-u  
 Ali-COP.3SG.M  
 ‘It’s Ali who gave money to Sara.’

Cleft sentence with focus on the recipient, i.e. indirect object:

- (34) *alibirryaβännay – yäsaraya.*  
 ali birr yä-ab-ä-nna-y  
 Ali money REL-give.PFV-3SG.M.SBJ-3SG.F.OBJ-DEF  
 yä-sara-ya

DAT-Sara-COP.3SG.F  
 ‘It’s Sara that Ali give money for.’

Cleft sentence with focus on the direct object:

- (35) *aliyäsarayafännay – birra.*  
 ali yä-sara yä-ab-ä-nna-y  
 Ali DAT-Sara REL-give.PFV-3SG.M.SBJ-3SG.F.OBJ-DEF  
 birra-u  
 money-COP.3SG.M  
 ‘It’s the money that Ali gave to Sara.’

## 9. COMPARATIVE SENTENCES

A comparative sentence is a construction in which two entities are compared according to some quality. To express that the compared entities have the same degree of a quality, a copula construction is used, in which the standard noun phrase is marked by the genitive marker *yä-* and the similitive marker *xäma* ‘like’:

- (36) *aliyäsaraxämasinaru.*  
 ali yä-sara xäma sinar-u  
 Ali GEN-Sara SIM strong-COP.3SG.M  
 ‘Ali is as strong as Sara.’

A difference in quality between two entities is also often expressed by a nominal clause. In this case, the compare remains unmarked but the standard is marked by the ablative marker *tä-*. The compared quality occurs as complement to the copula:

- (37) *tiramatačäññäysäβäk<sup>w</sup>ayäčäññäysäβ bižžäwu.*  
 tirama tä-ø-čäññä-y säb äk<sup>w</sup>a  
 yesterday ABL-[REL]-come.PFV.3SG.M-DEF person today  
 yä-čäññä-y säb bižžä-u  
 REL-come.PFV-3SG.M-DEF person many-COP.3SG.M  
 ‘The people who came yesterday are more than the people who came today.’

In order to emphasis whether the compare has more or less of a certain quality than the standard, the relative verbs *yäβäzza* ‘(he/it) which was plenty’ or *yännäsä* ‘(he/it) which was less’ can be used as modifiers to the nominal denoting the compared quality:

- (38) *yäsara aβ tali aβ yäβäzza gällifu.*  
 yä-sara ab tä-ali ab yä-bäzza  
 GEN-Sara father ABL-Ali father REL-be\_plenty.PVF.3SG.M  
 gällif-u  
 tall-COP.3SG.M  
 ‘Sara’s father is taller than Ali’s father.’
- (39) *yäsara aβ tali aβ yännäsäčč’iru.*  
 yä-sara ab tä-ali ab yä-annäsä

GEN-Sara father ABL-Ali father REL-be\_less.PVF.3SG.M  
 äčč'ır-u  
 short-COP.3SG.M  
 'Sara's father is shorter than Ali's father.'

Instead of a copula clause, also verbal clauses can be used for comparison. In this case, the compared quality remains salient while the difference from the standard is denoted by the imperfective form of the verbs *annäsä* 'It was less.' or *bäzza* 'It was plenty.' as in the following examples:

(40) *yäsara aβ tali aβ yans.*  
 yä-sara ab tä-ali ab y-ans-ø  
 GEN-Sara father ABL-Ali father 3-be\_less.IPFV-SG.M  
 'Sara's father is shorter than Ali's father.'

(41) *yäsara aβ tali aβ yiβäza.*  
 yä-sara ab tä-ali ab y-bäza-ø  
 GEN-Sara father ABL-Ali father 3-be\_plenty.IPFV-SG.M  
 'Sara's father is taller than Ali's father.'

To express the superlative, the phrase *binnim* 'among all (lit. in all)' is used in place of the standard, as in the following example:

(42) *alibinnimyäβäzzadurešawu.*  
 ali bä-innim yä-bäzza dureša-u  
 Ali LOC-all REL-be\_plenty.PVF.3SG.M rich-COP.3SG.M  
 'Ali is the richest among all.'

## 10. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter summarizes the findings from the previous section on the introduction and Simple Sentence Structure of Mesqan – a language which has not been well studied previously. Thus, the major aim of this study was to present a comprehensive Simple Sentence Structuredescription of this language. To this effect the study is divided into five main sections:

section one is introduction which contains the people and their language, and research methodology, section two is the structure of Simple Sentence, section two is about verbal clauses, section three is about nominal clauses, section four is about cleft sentences and section five is about comparative sentences.

The most frequent word order in simple sentence is subject-object-verb (SOV). The position of adverbs is not fixed, but they always precede the verb. The sentence-initial position is the topic position. Topicalization may trigger a change in the order of constituents when the topic is not the subject of the sentence, as in questions with interrogative pronouns.

Verbal clauses unlike verbal phrases do not confirm only auxiliary and inflectional informations like agreement, tense, aspect and mode usually related with verbs. However, they represent the main conceptual relation, situation, or action uttered by the clause. Verbal clauses in Mesqan

have a verb in the perfective or imperfective aspect, or in the jussive or imperative mood as main verb. This verb obligatorily agrees with the subject of the clause by subject agreement markers. A simple verbal clause can consist only of a single verb. The most frequent order of constituents in a verbal clause is: *adverb - subject - argument/adjunct – verb*.

Copular or auxiliary verbs occur in the position of a main-clause verb in nominal sentences, and in expressions of verbal possession and obligation.

In a cleft construction in Mesqan, the focused constituent immediately precedes the present tense copula, while the remaining constituents are summarized in a relative clause. Every syntactic constituent except verb can be focused in cleft sentences:

A comparative sentence is a construction in which two entities are compared according to some quality. To express that the compared entities have the same degree of a quality, a copula construction is used, in which the standard noun phrase is marked by the genitive marker *yä-* and the simulative marker *xäma* 'like':

### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

1	First person	O	Object
2	Second person	GEN	Genitive
3	Third person	IPFV	Imperfective
SG	Singular	PFV	Perfective
MAL	Malifactive	JUS	Jussive
PST	Past	LOC	Locative
AUX	Auxiliary	M	Masculine
REL	Relative	F	Female
SUB	Subject	VN	Verbal noun
NEG	Negative	PRS	Present
REL	Relative	OBJ	Object
SIM	Simulative	PFV	Perfective
ABL	Ablative	PL	Plural
COND	Conditional	POSS	Possessive
SBJ	Subject	PROX	Proximal
COP	Copula	PRS	Present
DEF	Definite	SBJ	Subject
CAUS	Causative	SG	Singular
DAT	Dative	SUB	Subordinating Prefix

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