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BILIN 'TO BE' AND 'TO HAVE'

By F. R. PALMER

Linguists are usually very chary about referring to 'the verb "to be"' in any language and statements of the kind 'this language has no verb "to be"' are taboo. There are, however, three interesting classes of verb forms in Bilin for which the most informative labels are: the copula 'to be', the locative verb 'to be', and 'to have'. It is these I propose to discuss in this paper. The classes are formal classes in that forms of the verbs are in complementary distribution or in free variation. The three classes themselves are conveniently handled together in this one paper because they have shared membership.

1. RECAPITULATION

I have set out details of the morphology of the Bilin verb elsewhere.¹ The essential characteristics are as follows:

1.1. *Aspect*. There are many paradigms with number, gender and person distinctions (though number and gender can be treated as a single grammatical category). The 3rd person masculine singular is the form used as the label for any particular paradigm. I referred to these paradigms as 'tenses', but it must be noted that many of them are non-finite and would be translated by a conjunction + a verbal form in other languages (not only in English, but also in the neighbouring languages, Tigrinya and Tigre).

e.g.	gebneḍin	because he refused
	gebáka	when he refused

These paradigms, or tenses, belong moreover to two formally distinct classes which I called 'aspect A' and 'aspect B'. As a mnemonic device the term 'past' (A) and 'present' (B) might have served since many of the A paradigms refer to past time and most of the B paradigms to present time. Indeed there are some pairs of paradigms that differ formally only in the features that are associated with aspect and semantically only in time reference.

e.g.	A jabéx^w	who bought
	B jabəx^w	who buys

Not all the paradigms, however, are similarly paired, and one objection to the terms 'past' and 'present' is that the paradigms with future time reference all belong to aspect A ('past'). But for the verbs which we are considering the relation between these aspects and past/present time is important. The designation 'A' and 'B' will be used but where relevant "(past)" and "(present)" will be added.

¹ 'The verb in Bilin', *BSOAS*, 19, II, 131-159.

1.2. *Vowel quality.* A morphophonological characteristic of the verb in Bilin is the vowel quality of the endings which in some cases involves vowel harmony. In this respect there are two main classes of verb, one of which is 'z' prosodic and the other 'y' prosodic in aspect A. In aspect B the classes do not differ in respect of vowel quality; most of the paradigms are 'a' prosodic. This feature of vowel quality is of particular importance when we are dealing with the paired paradigms where the aspect A paradigm refers to past time, and the aspect B paradigm to present time. The vowel correspondences are as follows:

z (A)	y (A)	a (B)
ə or zero	i	ɐ
ɐ	e	ɐ
o	e	ɐ

An example of the y prosodic A form and the corresponding a prosodic B form, with a difference in time reference, has already been given. Example of a z prosodic aspect A form and an a prosodic aspect B form with similar differences of time relations are:

A	geblá	he did not refuse
B	gebelá	he does not refuse

Not all the paradigms are paired in this way. Some A paradigms have no corresponding B paradigms and vice versa. Nor can all distinctions of aspect be made solely in terms of vowel quality, since as the table above shows [ɐ] occurs in the same place in both the z and the a system. The distinction of aspect is made here by the feature of prominence (which is considered in the next section). A final point is that there are some paradigms in aspect B with the vowels a, u, e. These have no corresponding paradigms in aspect A and can be shown to be aspect B only in terms of prominence.

1.3. *Prominence.* The other characteristic of the verb in Bilin is what I have called 'prominence', though the term 'stress' might perhaps have been appropriate because there is never more than one prominent or stressed syllable in a single word (and no such syllable in some words); the phonetic characteristic of the prominent syllable is a high pitch.

As with the features of vowel quality, the characteristics of prominence is to be stated for an entire aspect of any one class of verbs. There are four possibilities:¹

- (i) the last full syllable of the stem is prominent;
- (ii) the syllable containing the first vowel of the ending is prominent;
- (iii) the syllable containing the last consonant of the stem is prominent (this will imply forms with different placement of prominence with the same

¹ This is differently worded for the statement in 'Verb in Bilin' (p. 138), but is the same in substance.

paradigm, depending on whether the ending begins with a vowel or a consonant) ;

- (iv) the position of the prominent syllable (including the absence of a prominent syllable) is stateable only for individual paradigms and, in some paradigms, only for individual forms.

Examples are :

(i)	gáŋɛx^w	(he) who runs
	gáŋɛrɛri	(she) who runs
(ii)	ʃəŋɛx^w	(he) who calls
	ʃəŋɛrɛri	(she) who calls
(iii)	kabɛx^w	(he) who helps
	kábrɛri	(she) who helps
(iv)	geɓɛx^w	(he) who refuses
	gebrɛri	(she) who refuses

Prominence and vowel quality are not wholly independent of each other. Most of the verbs with *z* prosodic aspect A have a different prominence pattern for each of their two aspects. For these, indeed, prominence alone distinguishes some of the forms of paired paradigms. All the verbs, however, which are *y* prosodic in aspect A have the same prominence patterns in both aspects.

In terms of both vowel quality and prominence nine distinct classes of verb in Bilin were noted, designated by the Roman numerals I to IX.

2. OUTLINE OF THE PROBLEM

In this section we are concerned only with an outline of the relevant verbs.

2.1. *Copula and locative verb.* A distinction is to be made between the copula and the locative verb. The copula is used with an adjective or a noun as its complement (though there are some exceptional forms to be noted with nouns) ; the locative verb is used with adverbs of place or with nouns in the locative case.

2.2. *'Past' and 'present'.* A striking characteristic of some of the verbs used is that there is a complete reversal of the usual aspect/time relations. That is to say, aspect B forms ('present') are used for past time and aspect A forms ('past') are used for present time. Aspect A forms of **ʔákna** are used as forms of copula and aspect A forms of **wánna** as forms of the locative verb, but with present, not past, time reference, while aspect B forms of **sɛŋna** are used as forms of both the copula and the locative verb but with past, not present, time reference. Similarly aspect A forms of **ʃákna** are used as forms of 'to have' but with present time reference. **ʔákna**, **wánna**, **ʃákna** all have some morphological peculiarities which are dealt with in the relevant sections.

3. THE COPULA

Two verbs, *ʔákna* and *séɲna*, make up most of the forms of the copula.

3.1. *Morphology.* *ʔákna* belongs to class II and *séɲna* to class VIII. Class II is *z* prosodic and class VIII *y* prosodic in aspect A; the prominence patterns of class II is (iv) in aspect A (prominence depending on the form itself) and (iii) in aspect B (prominence on the syllable in which the last consonant of the stem occurs). The prominence pattern of class VIII is (iii) in both aspects. *ʔákna*, moreover, belongs to a subclass of II along with *ʃákna* (which is dealt with under 'to have') and *nákna* 'to give' as the only other members, whose characteristic is that in aspect A the stem is *ʔex-*, *ʃex-* and *nex-*, but *ʔak-*, *ʃak-* and *nak-* in aspect B. Some of the morphological characteristics of the two verbs may be shown by the following 'reported speech' forms which translate '(said) that ...':

<i>ʔákna</i>		
A	3 m., 1 m/f.	<i>ʔexet</i>
	3 f., 2 m/f.	<i>ʔexret</i>
B	3 m., 1 m/f.	<i>ʔakét</i>
	3 f., 2 m/f.	<i>ʔákret</i>
<i>séɲna</i>		
A	3 m., 1 m/f.	<i>seɲét</i>
	3 f., 2 m/f.	<i>séɲret</i>
B	3 m., 1 m/f.	<i>seɲét</i>
	3 f., 2 m/f.	<i>séɲret</i>

Not all the forms given in this table, however, are forms of the copula, which normally include only the aspect A forms of *ʔákna* (for present time reference) and the aspect B forms of *séɲna* (for past time reference):

A	<i>ʔexet/ʔexret</i>	that he/she is
B	<i>seɲét/séɲret</i>	that he/she was

3.2. *Paired paradigms.* The reported speech forms just noted illustrate the reversal of the usual time-aspect relations in those paradigms that are paired (one in each aspect). A similar pattern is found with the 'relatives' (positive and negative):

A	<i>ʔexex^w</i>	who is
B	<i>seɲéx^w</i>	who was
A	<i>ʔexgéx^w</i>	who is not
B	<i>seɲégéx^w</i>	who was not

We may contrast (in the same formal order, but with the time relation reversed) the forms of *támna* 'to taste':

A	<i>tamex^w</i>	who tasted
B	<i>taméx^w</i>	who tastes

A	tamgéx^w	who did not taste
B	tamégex^w	who does not taste

Similarly **?exosena** was noted (aspect A and with present time reference) :

kəserá ?exosena, fərnən
When it is morning, let us go

Its 'pair' would be **səpésena** (B, but with past time reference). This was not in fact attested as a form of the copula but it was found as a form of the locative verb.

3.3. *Non-paired paradigms.* This complete reversal of aspect-time relations is, of course, possible only with the paradigms that are in pairs, one in each aspect with past/present time contrast. For all other paradigms, forms of **?ákna** were found, and where a distinction of time is made, the aspect/time relations were those of the normal pattern in Bilin—A for past and B for present. In many cases, however, alternative forms of **səpəna** were also noted. Examples are :

A	?exgid	(səpégid)	he would not be/have been ¹
A	?exnədik		if he were/had been
B	?akén		if he is
B	?akék	(səpék)	being
B	?akáka	(səpáka)	when he is/was
B	?akú	(səpú)	while he is/was

3.4. *Future time paradigms.* For the paradigms that have future time reference forms of **?ákna** only were found, e.g.

?exrá	he will be
?exréd	he would be
?exró	... to be

These, it will be seen, fit the regular pattern of the Bilin verb since they are aspect A forms used for future time reference. There can be no reversal of aspect-time relations, since there are no corresponding B forms.

3.5. *The form gən.* For positive present time reference the form used for all numbers, genders and persons is the uninflected **gən**. The positive and negative statement forms are illustrated by :

	bətex^w gən	he is rich
A	bətex^w ?exlá	he is not rich
B	bətex^w səpék^w	he was rich
B	bətex^w səpéla	he was not rich

¹ Or 'If he ...' (the same forms are used in the protasis and apodosis of the conditional in Bilin). 'Verb in Bilin' does not note this nor that many of the other forms are not indicative of time, which would be shown by the main verb; **?akú** may thus be translated 'while he is' or 'while he was'; 'Verb in Bilin' gives a translation in the past tense only.

Another form that is quite outside the regular pattern is **həmbəx^w** 'who is', an alternative to **?əxəx^w**. This is an aspect B (not A) form of the verb **həmbəna** whose forms are more commonly used as forms of the locative verb.

3.6. *Irregular forms.* Finally, there are some forms that diverge from the general pattern of the copula in that they are aspect A forms of **səŋna** and aspect B forms of **?əkna**, even though they are members of paired paradigms. These, then, are irregular in terms of the pattern of the copula though they would be regular if judged in terms of the general pattern of the Bilin verb.

First of all the following aspect A forms of **səŋna** were noted as well as the regular aspect B forms which are placed in brackets :

səŋét	(səŋét)	(said) that he was
səŋiget	(səŋéget)	(said) that he was not

Secondly, as aspect B form of **?əkna** was noted in :

ni yəwəndá ?əkék^w
or ni yəwəndá ?ə?ék^w
He is my relation

It would appear that with nouns as complements the form **?əkék^w** is preferred to **gən** (**?ə?ék^w** is an alternative and completely irregular form). The corresponding negative **?əkéla** was also noted, but the 'regular' form **?əxlá** (aspect A) was preferred.

4. THE LOCATIVE VERB

For the locative verb the verbs most used are **wańna** and **səŋna**. **səŋna** was, it will be recalled, also used for the copula.

4.1. *Morphology.* Aspect B forms of **səŋna** are again used for past time reference and aspect A forms of **wańna** for present time reference. Both verbs belong to the same class, class VIII, *y* prosodic and with the prominence depending on the place of the last consonant of the stem ; some of the forms of **wańna** have a stem **want-** (see below).

4.2. *Paired paradigms.* As with the copula we may exemplify the aspect-time relations by the relative forms :

A	wanéx	who is
B	səŋéx^w	who was
A	waníge^w	who is not
B	səŋége^w	who was not

We may contrast the forms of **kábna** 'to help' :

A	kabéx^w	who helped
B	kabéx^w	who helps

A	kabígex^w	who did not help
B	kabégex^w	who does not help

Another pair of paradigms is that of :

A	wanésena	just as he is/was
B	señésena	after he was
cf. A	kabésena	after he helped
B	kabésena	just as he helps/helped

4.3. *Non-paired paradigms.* For the non-paired paradigms, forms of both verbs again occur (see § 3.3.), e.g.

A	wanégid (señégid)	he would not be/have been
A	wanínédik (señínédik)	if he were/had been
B	wanáka (señáka)	when he is/was
B	wanú (señú)	while he is/was

A further, rather striking point is that **señén** (B) was used as if the paradigm **tamnédik** (A) 'if he (had) tasted' and **tamén** (B) 'if he tastes' were paired paradigms. **señén** (B) was used with the function of **tamnédik** (A), being translated not 'if he is' but 'if he were/had been' (and identical in meaning then with **wanínédik** and **señínédik**), e.g.

ni net señén, nin ?exgíd

If he were here, this would not have happened

Clearly, however, there is some inconsistency of usage. A rather striking example is that given below where a form of **?ákna** is used in a similar way to **señén** above (though **?ákna** is usually used as a form of the copula only, where it is the counterpart of **wánna** not **séñna**) :

ni kexin ?akégen, kədmətəl wanégid

If he were not there, he would not be at work

4.4. *Future time paradigms.* For the future time paradigms only forms of **wánna** are used, usually with the stem form **want-**, e.g.

wantira	he will be
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wanira was also attested.

There is also the form :

wantéla	he will not be
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This is important because the comparable forms of other verbs have *either* present or future time reference, e.g.

kabéla	he will/does not help
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For present time negative reference, however, there is a quite different form of the locative verb (see next section). **wantéla** therefore refers only to the future, and in this respect appears to be a unique form in Bilin.

4.5. *Present time statements.* As with the copula there are again some special forms for statements of present time. The positive form used is the aspect B form of *hambana*, a class I verb, *z* prosodic in aspect A and with prominence pattern (iv) (prominence determined by the form itself). For the negative the forms used are those of the following paradigm (aspect A with aspect/time reversal) which are regular forms of an otherwise unattested verb with stem *ʔəl-* (though the difference in the syllabification of the first and fourth forms is not attested with any other verb) :

3 m.	ʔəllá
3 f.	ʔələllá
2 m/f.	ʔələllá
1 m/f.	ʔələli
3 pl.	ʔələnní
2 pl.	ʔələdənní
1 pl.	ʔələnní

For past time, aspect B forms of *səŋna* are used (as for the copula).

For the imperative, forms of *ʔákna* were attested, e.g.

ʔəxən	let him be
ʔəxgin	let him not be

Also noted from the same verb (as well as *səŋék*) was :

ʔakék	being
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4.6. *Irregular forms.* The aspect A forms of *səŋna* that were noted in § 3.6 were also found as forms of the locative verb, as well as the 'regular' forms :

səŋét	(səŋét)	(said) that he was
səŋiget	(səŋéget)	(said) that he was not

Similarly :

səŋésəna	(səŋésəna)	after he was
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There is also some evidence to suggest that the aspect A relative paradigm of *səŋna*, i.e. *səŋéx^w*, is used in a 'pluperfect' sense, thus giving the possibility of three distinctions of time :

A	wanéx ^w	who is
B	səŋéx ^w	who was
A	səŋéx ^w	who had been

4.7. *The verb ʔərgána.* An alternative to all the forms we have been considering are the forms of *ʔərgána*, which is a class III verb (*z* prosodic in aspect A and with prominence (iii)—the prominent syllable being the one containing the first vowel of the ending). This verb has the meaning of 'to spend the day' and is used only where there is limitation of time implied by this. There is therefore a contrast between :

ni ʔasmara sɛŋɛkʷ he was in Asmara
 ni ʔasmara ʔərgəxʷ he was in Asmara for a day

Often, however, either of these two would be possible.

ʔərgəna is a regular verb in Bilin with the normal aspect-time relations of all the other verbs, aspect A referring to past time and aspect B to present time.

5. 'TO HAVE'

Forms of 'to have' come from three verbs in Bilin. First, aspect A ('past') forms of *ʃákna* are used for present time reference. Secondly, aspect A ('past') form of *ʔərgəna* with the object possessed as the subject of the verb and the possessor indicated by the indirect object suffix are used for past time reference (literally 'there was to him' etc.). Thirdly, there is also a 'regular' verb *kəmna*.

5.1. *Morphology.* *ʃákna* belongs to a subclass of class II with only three members (§ 3.1). In addition, however, it has two idiosyncratic forms. In place of the expected *ʃexəxʷ*, the form is *ʃakʷ*, 'he has', and in place of *ʃexexʷ* the form is *ʃaxʷ*, 'who has'. *ʃexəxʷ* and *ʃexexʷ* do occur in Bilin, but only as past time forms of the verb in the sense of 'to take', with the meanings 'he took' and 'who took'. In the sense of 'to have' the rest of the paradigm follows the usual pattern of Bilin and is therefore indistinguishable from the past time forms of the verb in its sense 'to take'.

5.2. *The verbs ʃákna and ʔərgəna.* These verbs are commonly used only in the statement and relative paradigms:

ʔərgəxʷəllu	he had
ʃakʷ	he has
ʔərgəxʷəllu	who had
ʃaxʷ	who has

(and similarly the negatives).

With *ʃákna* only, it will be noted, is there the reversal of aspect/time relations noted with the copula and locative verbs.

5.3. *The verb kəmna.* Bilin has a 'regular' verb with the meaning 'to have' *kəmna*. It is another class VIII verb and it is used for all those paradigms for which forms of *ʃákna* and *ʔərgəna* are not used. Examples are:

kəmin	let him have
kəmira	he will have
kəməka	when he has

6. CONCLUSION

We conclude with a tabulated summary of the forms used for the copula, the locative verb and 'to have'.

6.1. *Summary.* The forms considered are set out alongside corresponding forms of *gebna* :

TABLE

	<i>gebna</i>		<i>copula</i>	<i>locative verb 'to have'</i>	
A	<i>gebæx^w</i>	he refused	† <i>seŋék^w</i>	† <i>seŋék^w</i>	ʔərgáx ^w əllu
B	<i>gebæk^w</i>	he refuses	<i>gən</i> ʔakék ^w	<i>həmbæk^w</i>	† <i>ʃak^w</i>
A	<i>geblá</i>	he did not refuse	† <i>seŋéla</i>	† <i>seŋéla</i>	ʔərgáləllu
B	<i>gebelá</i>	he does not refuse	† <i>ʔexlá</i>	† <i>ʔəllá</i>	† <i>ʃexlá</i>
A	<i>gebæx^w 1</i>	who refused	† <i>seŋéx^w</i>	† <i>seŋéx^w</i>	ʔərgéx ^w əllu
A	<i>gebǵéx^w 1</i>	who did not refuse	† <i>seŋégéx^w</i>	† <i>seŋégéx^w</i>	ʔərgǵéx ^w əllu
B	<i>gebæx^w 1</i>	who refuses	<i>həmbæx^w</i> † <i>ʔexæx^w</i>	† <i>wanéx^w</i>	† <i>ʃax^w</i>
B	<i>gebǵéx^w 1</i>	who does not refuse	† <i>ʔexǵéx^w</i>	† <i>wanǵéx^w</i>	† <i>ʃexǵéx^w</i>
A	<i>gebrá 2</i>	he will refuse	ʔexrá	<i>wantíra</i>	<i>kəmirá</i>
(B)	<i>gebelá</i>	he will not refuse		<i>wantéla</i>	
A/B	<i>gebən</i>	let him refuse	ʔexən	ʔexən	<i>kəmin</i>
A	<i>gebnədik 3</i>	if he refused	ʔexnədik	<i>wanínədik</i> <i>seŋínədik</i>	<i>kəminədik</i>
A	<i>gebgid 4</i>	he would not have refused	ʔexǵid <i>seŋégid</i>	† <i>seŋén</i> <i>wanégid</i> <i>seŋégid</i>	<i>kəmégid</i>
A	<i>gebet 5</i>	(says) that he refused	† <i>seŋét</i> <i>seŋét</i>	† <i>seŋét</i> <i>seŋét</i>	<i>kəmét</i> ʔərgétəllu
B	<i>gebet 5</i>	(says) that he refuses	† <i>ʔexét</i>	† <i>wanét</i>	<i>kəmét</i>
A	<i>gebesəna</i> } <i>gebosəna</i> } 6	after he refused	† <i>seŋésəna(?)</i>	† <i>seŋésəna</i>	<i>kəməsəna</i>
B	<i>gebesəna 6</i>	just as he refuses/refused	† <i>ʔexosəna</i>	† <i>wanésəna</i>	<i>kəməsəna</i>
B	<i>gebén 5</i>	if he refuses	ʔakén	<i>wanén</i>	<i>kəmén</i>
B	<i>gebék</i>	refusing	ʔakék <i>seŋék</i>	ʔakék <i>seŋék</i>	<i>kəmék</i>
B	<i>gebáka</i>	when he refuses/refused	ʔakáka <i>seŋáka</i>	<i>wanáka</i> <i>seŋáka</i>	<i>kəmáka</i>
B	<i>gebú</i>	while he refuses/refused	ʔakú <i>seŋú</i>	<i>wanú</i> <i>seŋú</i>	<i>kəmú</i>

† Reversal of Aspect.

6.2. *Related forms.* Many of the verbs we have been considering are used with other meanings. Indeed in those paradigms in which they are not required for 'to be' or for 'to have' they are used only with these meanings. These are, with examples :

¹ Two different paradigms share these forms 'who refused' and 'which he refused', etc. 'Verb in Bilin', 148-152.

² Similarly *gebrásik*, *gebrád*, *gebró*, *gebrór*, *gebróta*.

³ Similarly *gebnédi*, *gebnedin*.

⁴ Similarly *gebgí*, *gebgín*, *gebgíndu*.

⁵ Also negative form with infix -g- — 'Verb in Bilin', 146-8, 152-3.

⁶ Similarly but with no reversal of aspect-time relations *gebo* (A), *gebesənək* (B) (with negative *gebegésənək*).

ʔákna	to happen
nin ʔakéxʷ gən	this is possible (this is what happens)
həmbəna	to remain
ni ʔəntəgi həmbəxʷ	he failed to come (he remained without coming)
wánna	to be present
wanéx ʔəllá	no-one is here
waníxəxʷ ʔəllá	no-one is absent.

səŋna, however, does not seem to have any clearly distinct alternative meaning, and the forms of both wánna and səŋna which are not used for 'to be' do not occur at all. There are no forms

*səŋixʷ, *səŋila, *wanixʷ, *wanila, *wanékʷ

6.3. *Historical and comparative points.* It is possible to speculate on the historical reasons for the reversal of aspect-time relations with these verbs. With the verb 'to have' there is perhaps no problem at all. *ʔákna* has the meaning 'to take' and 'I took' (past) = 'I have' (present). Similarly with *ʔákna* it can be suggested that 'It happened' (past) = 'It is' (present), but there is no obvious explanation for the use of the aspect B form of *səŋna* to refer to past time.

My completely bilingual informant was at all times prepared to identify the Bilin verbs with verbs of Tigrinya and indeed there may well be some validity in this identification. It was striking how many grammatical forms of Bilin did, in fact, have exact parallels in Tigrinya, even though they were formally very distinct—often what was morphological in Bilin had purely syntactical counterparts in Tigrinya. His identifications were :

<i>Bilin</i>	<i>Tigrinya</i>
ʔákna	kone
səŋna	nebere
wánna	hellewe
həmbəna	terefe
ʔərgəna	wəʕale