

## ***Fi* in Gulf Pidgin Arabic**

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### **1. Introduction**

Gulf Pidgin Arabic (GPA) is a simplified communication system established by the non-Arabic immigrants to Gulf countries in the Middle East. In the past decades, millions of people with no Arabic skills have come from countries such as Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and the Philippines for job opportunities. They needed to try to speak Arabic in order to communicate with their employers and this communication system has evolved into a pidgin. GPA is based on Gulf Arabic (GA), the variety of Arabic spoken in the Gulf states: Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and nearby areas (Lewis, Simons, Fennig 2013). Smart 1990, Næss 2008, and Bakir 2010 further discuss the sociolinguistic situation of GPA.

The syntax of GPA has been little studied in the linguistic literature, except in the preceding references. One aspect of the morphosyntax that has been commented on is the morpheme *fi*. *Fi* in GPA derives from the Arabic morpheme *fii(h)* found in existential sentences. The goal of this paper is to propose a unified analysis of *fi* in GPA. A typical use of *fi* is given in (1), compared to a similar sentence in GA, (2).<sup>1</sup>

- |     |                                  |           |         |             |     |
|-----|----------------------------------|-----------|---------|-------------|-----|
| (1) | fi                               | aqlam     | baqala  |             | GPA |
|     | fi                               | pen.M.PL  | grocery |             |     |
|     | ‘There are pens in the grocery.’ |           |         |             |     |
|     |                                  |           |         |             |     |
| (2) | fii(h)                           | aqlam     | fi      | albaqala    | GA  |
|     | fii(h)                           | pen. M.PL | in      | the.grocery |     |
|     | ‘There are pens in the grocery.’ |           |         |             |     |

We propose that *fi* is a copula verb in GPA and has a function similar to *be* in English, building on proposals in Smart 1990, Næss 2008, and Bakir 2010. It is a marker of predication, which links the subject and a non-verbal predicate. We argue against other proposed uses of *fi* however from these same sources. We show that it is not an expletive subject (Smart 1990, Næss 2008), a verb of possession ‘have’ (Smart 1990, Bakir 2010), or a tense-aspect-mood (TAM) marker (Næss 2008, Bakir 2010). Direct evidence comes from GPA data, while indirect evidence comes from the structure of substrate languages Hindi and Gulf Arabic.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses the related form *fii(h)* in GA, a substrate language for GPA, as it seems clear that GPA borrowed *fi* from GA. Section 3 documents proposed uses for *fi* in GPA based on previous descriptions (Smart 1990, Næss 2008, and Bakir 2010). Section 4 lays out our unified structural analysis of GPA *fi* as a verb that introduces a non-verbal predication and argues against suggestions that it is an expletive subject,

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<sup>1</sup> Glossing abbreviations follow the Leipzig glossing conventions. We adapted some examples from the original works and transcription/glossing follow the original sources; however, we extracted more authentic examples of GPA from recorded conversations with immigrants who work in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The examples of GA are elicited from native GA speakers.

possessive verb ‘have’, or a TAM marker. We also address apparent cases of *fi* co-occurring with other verbs which seem to cast doubt on our proposal. Section 5 concludes.

## 2. *Fii(h)* in Gulf Arabic

It is necessary to discuss the status of *fii* in GA before addressing its status in GPA, as it seems evident that GPA *fii* was borrowed from GA in some form (Smart 1990, Næss 2008, Bakir 2010). First, *fi* has a use as a locative preposition:

- (3) a. huwa killah **fi** l-maktab GA  
 he always **in** the-office M.SG  
 ‘He is always at the office.’ (Holes 1990:56)
- b. shifna safiina shkuburha **fi** l-miina GA  
 saw.1PL ship F.SG what.size.its **in** the-port  
 ‘We saw a really big ship in the port.’ (Holes 1990:61)

*Fii* has a second, diachronically related, use in existential sentences, (4). We gloss *fii* here as ‘COP’ and propose that it is a copula verb following Qafisheh 1977:200, Holes 1990:72, and Næss 2008:79.

- (4) a. **fii** gahwa waayid GA  
 COP coffee.FEM much  
 ‘There is a lot of coffee.’ (Qafisheh 1977:201, (15))
- b. **fii** tamaat fi li-greenhooz l-9ood GA  
 COP tomatoes.FEM.PL in the-greenhouse the-big  
 ‘There are tomatoes in the big greenhouse.’ (Qafisheh 1977:201, (16))
- c. **fii** siyaraat fi al-jamiah GA  
 COP car.FEM.PL at the-university  
 ‘There are cars at the university.’
- d. **fi** shirta daxil GA  
 COP police.FEM.SG inside  
 ‘There are police inside.’

Evidence for the verbal status of *fii* in GA comes from two areas: negation and its use with the auxiliary *kaan*. Negation in GA takes one of three relevant forms (Holes 1990:71-73, Næss 2008:69-71). It is *ma* with perfective or imperfective verbal predicates, (5); *mu*, *mū*, or *mub* with non-verbal predicates, (6); and *la* with imperatives, (7).

- (5) a. **ma/\*mu** t-išrab ḥalīb GA  
 NEG 2SG.M.IPFV-drink milk  
 ‘You don’t drink milk.’ (after Næss 2008:69, (1b))

- b. **ma/\*mu** kisart il-jaam GA  
 NEG break.PFV.1SG the-window.pane  
 ‘I didn’t break the window pane.’ (after Holes 1990:71, (341))
- (6) a. huwa **mub/\*ma** zēn GA  
 3SG NEG good  
 ‘He is no good.’ (after Næss 2008:70, (4a))
- b. huwa **mū/\*mu** d-drēwil GA  
 3SG NEG the-driver  
 ‘He is not the driver.’ (after Næss 2008:70, (4b))
- (7) **la** ta-ḥḍur-ī il-muḥādra GA  
 NEG 2SG-attend-F.IMP the-lecture  
 ‘Don’t attend the lecture.’ (Næss 2008:70, (3))

Existential *fii* is negated with the verbal negative marker *ma* and not *mu* or *la* (Qafisheh 1977:240, Holes 1990:72):

- (8) a. **ma/\*mu/\*la** fii gahwa waayid GA  
 NEG COP coffee.F.SG much  
 ‘There isn’t much coffee.’ (after Qafisheh 1977:201, (18))
- b. **ma/\*mu/\*la** fii ṭamaat fi li-greenhooz l-9ood GA  
 NEG COP tomatoes.F.PL in the-greenhouse the-big  
 ‘There aren’t tomatoes in the big greenhouse.’ (after Qafisheh 1977:201, (16))
- (9) a. **ma/\*mu/\*la** fii siyarat bara GA  
 NEG COP cars.F.PL outside  
 ‘There are not cars outside.’
- b. **ma/\*mu/\*la** fii shirta daxil GA  
 NEG COP police.F.SG inside  
 ‘There is not a police officer inside.’

The second piece of evidence that *fii* is a verb comes from its behavior with the past tense auxiliary *kaan* ‘AUX.PAST’. *Kaan* is followed by an inflected main verb and indicates past-in-the-past when followed by a perfective verb or future-in-the-past when followed by an imperfective verb (Holes 1990:187). *Fii* may follow *kaan* (Qafisheh 1977:202), supporting its verbal status. Observe that *kaan* too is negated with the verbal negation marker *ma*:

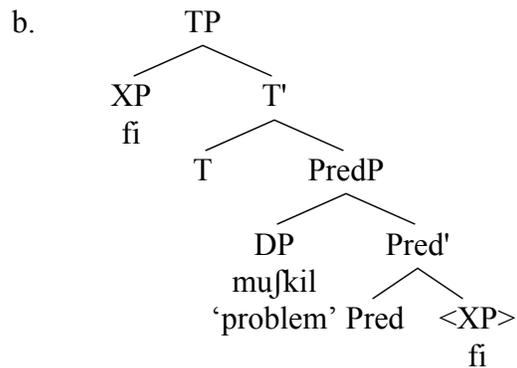
- (10) a. kaan fii qalim GA  
 AUX.PAST COP pen  
 ‘There was a pen.’
- b. ma kaan fii ṭamaat fi li-greenhooz l-9ood GA  
 NEG AUX.PAST COP tomato in the-greenhouse the-big  
 ‘There weren’t any tomatoes in the big greenhouse.’ (Qafisheh 1977:201, (20))





existential clause. The predicate *fi* then raises to the subject position of the clause.<sup>3</sup> To illustrate, in the expletive construction in (19), the subject of predication is *muʃkil* ‘problem’ and the predicate is *fi* under Næss’s suggestion. This subject-predicate relationship is mediated via a Predicate Phrase (PredP) (see Bowers 1993, Chomsky 1995, Kratzer 1996) in which the subject of predication is in the specifier of PredP and the predicate is the complement of the Pred head. *Fi* then undergoes predicate inversion (movement) to the surface syntactic subject position of the clause, the specifier of TP.

- (19) a. *fi muʃkil* GPA  
*fi problem*  
 ‘There is a problem.’



Although this analysis differs in certain details from Bakir’s claim, it is alike in placing *fi* in the syntactic subject position of the clause. We will argue against this below.

Næss 2008:88-91 suggests that *fi* also has uses as a tense-aspect-mood (TAM) marker. It is claimed to mark continuous aspect in (20), factuality in (21), and hypotheticality in (22).

- (20) a. *allem yāni fi šūf, wāhed fi šil kūb gul hāda kūb* GPA  
 learn that.is TAM see one TAM take cup say DEM cup  
 ‘I learned from watching, someone would take a cup and say this is a cup.’  
 (Næss 2008:89, (12a))

- b. *ḥamsa sana fi tālīm dāhil jāma* GPA  
 five year TAM study in university  
 ‘I studied at the university for five years.’ (Næss 2008:89, (12b))

- c. *binti fi āti māl walad* GPA  
 daughter TAM give to son  
 ‘My daughter is feeding my son.’ (Næss 2008:89, (13a))

<sup>3</sup> Here and below, we distinguish between SUBJECT OF PREDICATION, which can be understood as the external argument of the clause’s predicate and SYNTACTIC SUBJECT of the clause, which is the element residing in the syntactic subject position.



Finally, there is a use of *fi* as a copula verb or marker of predication (Smart 1990:100-102, Næss 2008:81-83, Bakir 2010:216-217). We take a copula to be a verbal form that syntactically connects a subject with a predicate (see Al-Horais, 2005:102, Aoun et al. 2010:ch. 2). The examples below show *fi* linking a subject with non-verbal predicates: an adjectival predicate, (25a,b,c), adverbial predicate, (25d), and a nominal predicate, (25e).

- (25) a. huwa fi bakistāni ana fi hindi GPA  
 3SG COP Pakistani 1SG COP Indian  
 ‘He is Pakistani, I am Indian.’ (Næss 2008:81-82, (3a))
- b. ana fi zeyn māl hindi GPA  
 1SG COP good PREP India  
 ‘I’m well [when I’m] in India.’ (Næss 2008:82, (3c))
- c. ?inta fii majnuun GPA  
 2SG.M COP crazy  
 ‘Are you crazy?’ (Bakir 2010:216, (20a))
- d. ?anaa fii hnii GPA  
 1SG COP here  
 ‘I am here.’ (Bakir 2010:216, (20e))
- e. haadaa fii wakit maal filim GPA  
 this COP time of film  
 ‘Is this a time for a movie?’ (Bakir 2010:216, (20f))

What is most interesting is that *fi* also appears with verbal predicates, (26), which would seem to suggest a use beyond that of a copula, as copulas typically do not appear with verbs.

- (26) a. ?anaa fii guul GPA  
 1SG fii say  
 ‘I say.’ (Bakir 2010:217, (20a))
- b. ?inta fii yaskit GPA  
 2SG.M fii be.silent  
 ‘You keep quiet.’ (Bakir 2010:217, (20b))
- c. ?inti fii šuuf GPA  
 2SG.F fii see  
 ‘Do you see?’ (Bakir 2010:217, (20c))
- d. ?inta fii saafir GPA  
 2SG.M fii travel  
 ‘Are you traveling?’ (Bakir 2010:217, (20d))
- e. ?anaa fii ruuh warša GPA  
 1SG fii go workshop  
 ‘I go to the workshop.’ (Bakir 2010:217, (20e))

- f. kaffiil fii sawwi jinjaal GPA  
 sponsor fii make quarrel  
 ‘The sponsor quarrels (with me).’ (Bakir 2010:217, (20f))
- g. haay faatora maa-fii ʔaktib GPA  
 this receipt not-fii write  
 ‘I can’t write this receipt.’ (after Bakir 2010:217, (20g))
- h. binti fi āti māl walad GPA  
 daughter TAM give PREP son  
 ‘My daughter gives [it] to my son.’ (Næss 2008:66, (26b))
- i. māl malābis ana fi šugl GPA  
 PREP clothes 1SG TAM work  
 ‘I work with clothes.’ (Næss 2008:67, (26d))

All authors note that with the marker of predication use, *fi* is optional with both non-verbal and verbal predicates:<sup>4</sup>

- (27) a. ana hindi mafi hāda sekl GPA  
 1SG Indian NEG DEM manner  
 ‘I am Indian, [so] it’s not like that.’ (Næss 2008:82, (4b))
- b. ʔintii waajid girgir GPA  
 2SG.F much talk  
 ‘You are very talkative.’ (Bakir 2010:218, (23a))
- c. ʔanaa tabaan GPA  
 1SG tired  
 ‘I am tired.’ (Bakir 2010:218, (23b))
- d. ʔintii šuuf filim GPA  
 2SG.F see film  
 ‘Are you watching movies?’ (Bakir 2010:219, (23c))
- e. ʔanaa sawwi tanziiif GPA  
 1SG make cleaning  
 ‘I am cleaning.’ (Bakir 2010:219, (23e))

To summarize, the following uses have been claimed for *fi*:

- (28) a. preposition (Bakir 2010)  
 b. expletive subject or expletive predicate (Næss 2008:79, Bakir 2010)  
 c. TAM marker (Næss 2008:88-91, Bakir 2010:217)  
 d. possessive main verb ‘have’ (Smart 1990:102, Bakir 2010:217)  
 e. predication copula (Smart 1990, Næss 2008:80, Bakir 2010:215)

<sup>4</sup> For some speakers, our investigations suggest that *fi* is obligatory in the non-verbal predicate contexts.

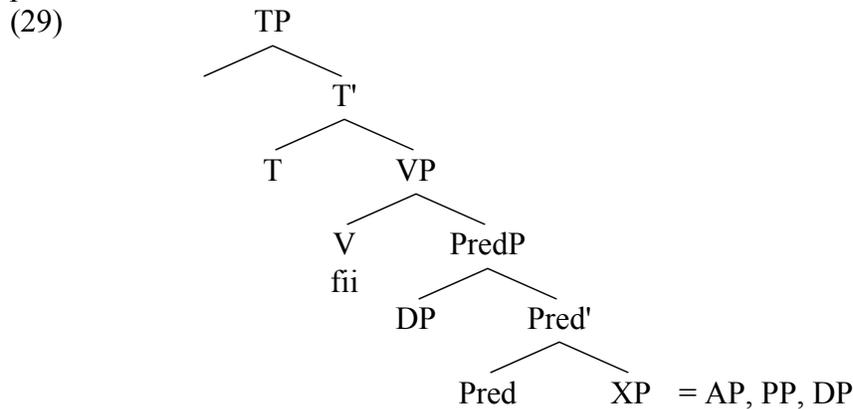
We propose in the next section that, beyond the prepositional use, the only other use of *fi* is as a predicational copula verb. The putative uses in (28b,c,d) and the appearance of *fi* with verbs can be accounted for as instances of this use.

#### 4. The analysis

This section presents our structural analysis of *fi*. In section 4.1 we propose that it is a verb. We show how this analysis accounts for the predicational copula and existential uses of *fi*. The subsequent subsections reanalyze non-copula uses of *fi* in (28) as copular uses within our analysis. Section 4.2 argues against Bakir and Næss’s claim that *fi* is an expletive subject. In section 4.3, we reconsider uses of *fi* translated with possessive ‘have’ and show how they are assimilated into our analysis. Section 4.4 considers examples where *fi* seems to be followed by a verb, which are seemingly problematic for our analysis. We claim that such elements are not actually verbs. Finally, in section 4.5 we claim that none of the putative TAM uses actually necessitates such an analysis. We propose that these additional aspectual and modal interpretations derive from context not *fi*.

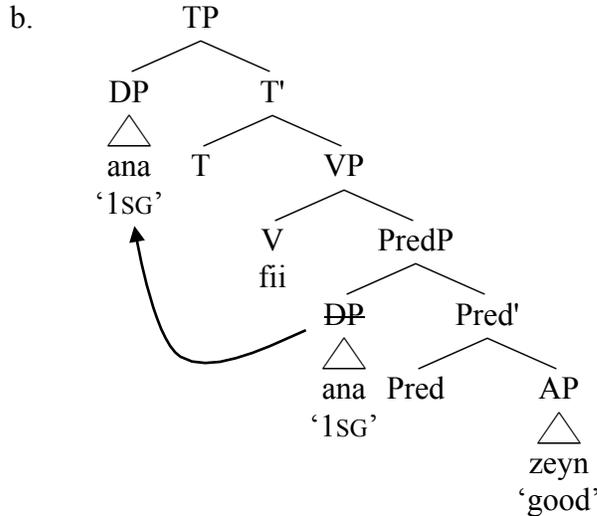
##### 4.1. The copula *fi*

We propose that there is a unified use of *fi* as a predication-introducing copula verb, functioning similarly to English *be*. *Fi* is a verb that takes a non-verbal predicate as its complement. We adopt the structure for copula clauses from Baker 2003 and Mikkelsen 2005 in (29). The copula is a verb that takes a Pred(ication) Phrase as its complement. The complement to Pred° is the non-verbal AP, PP, or DP predicate of the clause while the specifier of PredP is the subject of predication.



For example, the structure and derivation of (30a) is (30b). The subject *ana* ‘1SG’ originates in the specifier of PredP and moves to the canonical subject position, the specifier of TP.

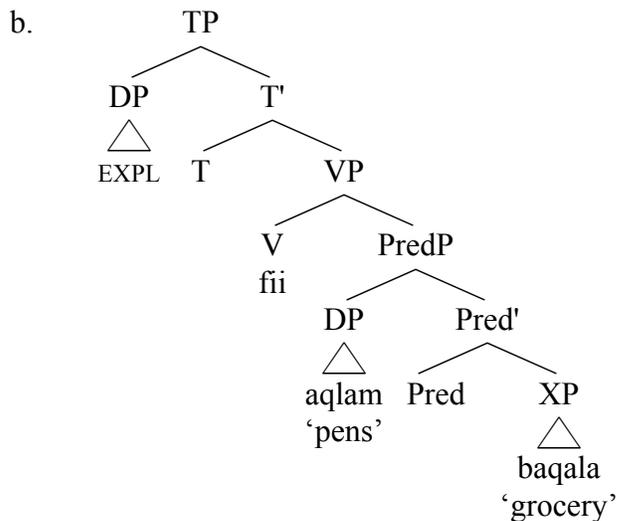
- (30) a. *ana fi zeyn (māl hindi)* GPA  
 1SG COP good PREP India  
 ‘I’m well [when I’m] in India.’ (Næss 2008:82, (3c))



As *fii* is not obligatory in such cases, see (27), we assume without argument that the verbal head occupied by *fii* can also contain a null verb that also selects PredP.

Existential constructions use the same structure except that the subject of the clause is a null expletive and the pivot of the existential (the subject of predication) remains inside PredP. It does not move to spec,TP:

- (31) a. *fii aqlam baqala* GPA  
*fii pen.PL grocery*  
 'There are pens in the grocery.'

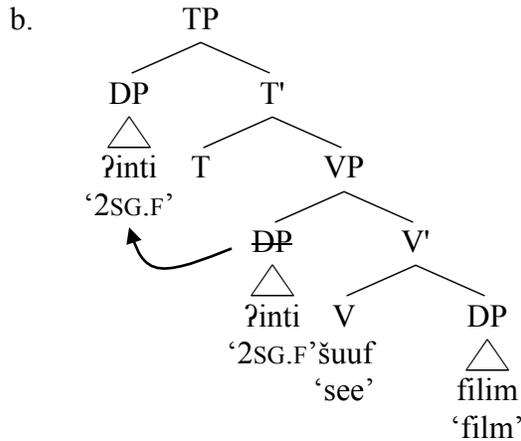


As in English, it is expected that the expletive will impose a definiteness restriction on the PredP-internal pivot.

Baker 2003 argues that VPs are different in that only they are true predicates and are able to license a specifier to which they assign a theta role. Their external argument originates in spec,VP (Kuroda 1988, Koopman and Sportiche 1991, Chomsky 1995). Thus, PredP is

unnecessary in verbal clauses. The structure of a verbal clause in GPA would be as in (32b) for the example in (32a).

- (32) a. ?inti      šuuf    film?  
 2SG.F    see    film  
 ‘Have you seen the film?’  
GPA  
 (Bakir 2010:207, (3c))



For GPA, this predicts that *fi* will not appear with verbs. This is not obviously true given examples like (26). We return to such examples below and propose that such sentences are not verbal, despite appearances.

Our analysis of *fi* as a verb is supported by negation in GPA. As discussed above, negation in GA takes one of three forms: *ma* with perfective or imperfective verbal predicates, *mu*, *mū*, or *mub* with non-verbal predicates and *la* with imperatives. Næss 2008:71 indicates that this system has been simplified in GPA. In GPA, *ma* is used in front of verbs, (33), and a new negative particle *mafi* is used for non-verbal predicates and imperatives, (34) and (35).<sup>5</sup>

- (33) a. ana    **ma**    tibba    istogol  
 1SG    NEG    want    work  
 ‘I wanted to quit.’  
GPA  
 (Næss 2008:71, (7a))

- b. ana    **maa**    yadri  
 1SG    NEG    know  
 ‘I don’t know.’  
GPA  
 (Bakir 2010:219, (24a))

- c. ...    ?ašaan    **maa**    sawwi    maama    jinjaal  
       so.that    NEG    make    Madam    quarrel  
 ‘... so that Madam doesn’t quarrel (with you).’  
GPA  
 (Bakir 2010:220, (24d))

- (34) a. bas    hāda    ...    riyyāl    **mafi**    zēn  
       but    DEM    man    NEG    good  
 ‘But the husband is not nice.’  
GPA  
 (Næss 2008:75, (17b))

<sup>5</sup> Næss 2008:71 and Bakir 2010:219 state that *mafi* is sometimes used in front of verbs in their data. This does not affect our point as crucially the reverse does not hold: *ma* is not used with non-verbal predicates.

- b. ... 'umān alhīn **mafi** ġalī GPA  
 Oman now NEG expensive  
 '... Oman nowadays isn't expensive.' (Næss 2008:75, (18b))
- c. **mafi** kull yōm GPA  
 NEG every day  
 'not every day' (Næss 2008:75, (19a))
- d. same-same avocado **mapi** avocado, tāni. GPA  
 same-INT avocado NEG avocado other  
 'It's like avocado, but it's not avocado, it's something else.'  
 (Næss 2008:75, (20a))
- e. hāda namūna aleyn hāda **mafi** mustamil, ... GPA  
 this type now DEM NEG used<sup>6</sup>  
 'Nowadays these aren't used....' (Næss 2008:76, (21a))
- (35) ... la mama **mafi** rūh šuġl ... GPA  
 no mother NEG go.IMP work  
 '... No mama, don't go to work, ...' (Næss 2008:74, (14))

These authors observe that *ma*, and not *mafī*, is used in front of *fī*, (36). This is identical to the situation in GA, (8) and (9). Given that we claim that *fī* is a verb, this pattern of negation with *fī* is expected.

- (36) a. maa-fī muškil GPA  
 NEG-COP problem  
 'There is no problem.' (Bakir 2010:215, (19d))
- b. ana ma fī bēt GPA  
 1SG NEG COP house  
 'I don't have a house.' (Næss 2008:73, (13))

#### 4.2. *fī* is not an expletive subject

Our analysis claims that *fī* is a verb and that the subject of clauses with *fī* is either a null expletive or the subject of predication. In contrast, Næss 2008 and Bakir 2010 suggest that *fī* itself is the subject of existential clauses, roughly equivalent to English *there* as in 'There is a problem'. The behavior of negation argues against this analysis. If *fī* were an expletive in existentials like (37a), one would expect negation to follow the subject and take the form *mafī*, which is not found, (37b).

- (37) a. fī aqlam baqala GPA  
 fī pens grocery  
 'There are pens in the grocery.'

<sup>6</sup> Næss 2008:76 indicates that *mustamil* 'used' is etymologically related to a participle in GA and suggests that it has been reanalyzed as an adjective in GPA. We concur with this suggestion.

- b. \*fi    mafi    aqlam    baqala  
       fi    NEG    pens    grocery

Further support for our analysis comes from a comparison to existential constructions in Hindi, one of the substrate languages of GPA (Smart 1990, Næss 2008). Existential constructions in Hindi use a morpheme *honā* ‘be’, which is a verb given its inflection and position—Hindi is head-final. Such sentences lack an overt expletive (Freeze 1992). Except for word order, then, GPA and Hindi look alike.

- (38) a. ek    dikkət    hē    Hindi  
       one    problem    AUX.3SG.PRES  
       ‘There is a problem.’
- b. kamree-mēē    aadmii    hai    Hindi  
       room-in    man    COP.3SG.MASC.PRES  
       ‘There is a man in the room.’ (Freeze 1992:555, (3b))

To summarize, we propose that *fi* in GPA is a verb. It selects a predication phrase that introduces non-verbal predication. In the remaining subsections we show how this analysis can be extended to the other uses of *fi* proposed in the literature.

### 4.3. Possessive *fi*

Smart, Næss, and Bakir all observe possessive uses for *fi*, repeated below in (39), with further examples in (40). We claim that a separate analysis is not required to accommodate this use.

- (39) a. haadi    maa-fii    slop    GPA  
       this    NEG-COP    slope  
       ‘This does not have a slope.’ (after Bakir 2010:218, (22c))
- b. ?anaa    fii    šugul,    ?anaa    maa-fii    muškil    GPA  
       1SG    COP    work    1SG    NEG-COP    problem  
       ‘If I have work I don’t have a problem.’ (after Bakir 2010:218, (22g))
- c. ?anaa    fii    koof    maamaa    GPA  
       1SG    COP    fear(N)    madam  
       ‘I am afraid of Madam.’ (Bakir 2010:216, (20c))
- d. ana    ma    fi    bēt    GPA  
       1SG    NEG    COP    house  
       ‘I don’t have a house.’ (Næss 2008:73, (13))
- (40) a. howa    fi    folos    GPA  
       3SG.M    COP    money  
       ‘He has money.’

- b. ʔinta fi kafil kowes GPA  
 2SG COP boss good  
 ‘You have a good boss.’

In GA there is no verb ‘have’. Possession is indicated by a preposition, with the prepositional phrase in subject position:<sup>7</sup>

- (41) a. 9ind-i arba9 yihaal GA  
 with-1SG four children  
 lit. “With me are four children”  
 ‘I have four children.’ (Holes 1990:95, (482))

- b. 9ind-na Hurriyya GA  
 with-1PL freedom  
 lit. “With us is freedom”  
 ‘We have freedom.’ (Holes 1990:95, (483))

A similar pattern is also found in the substrate language Hindi, which uses the copula *honā* ‘be’ plus a preposition *paas*, glossed ‘proximity’ for alienable possession:

- (42) a. larke-ke paas kuttaa hai Hindi  
 boy.OBL-GEN near dog COP.3SG.PRES  
 ‘The boy has a dog.’ (after Freeze 1992:576, (47b))

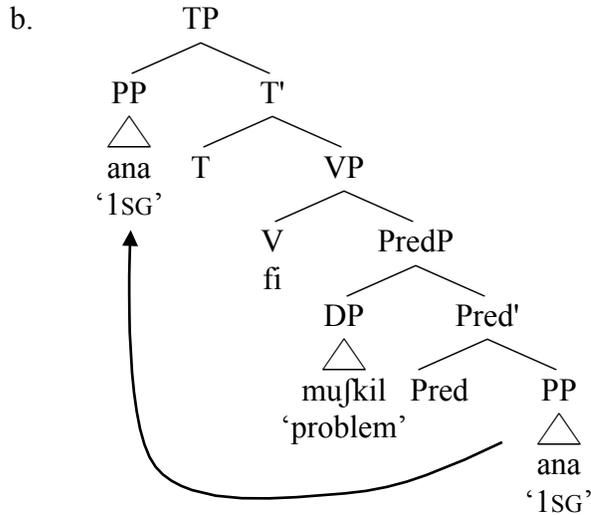
- b. us-ke paas paisa hai Hindi  
 3SG.OBL-GEN near money COP.3SG.PRES  
 ‘He has money.’

Freeze 1992 argues extensively for a derivational relationship between existential sentences and possessive structures. Such a relationship would immediately account for the possessive use of *fi* in GPA with no further mechanisms. In the derivation of an existential clause, the subject position is occupied by an expletive, (31b), and both the subject of predication and the non-verbal predicate remain in-situ. In the possessive structure the non-verbal predicate is the possessor, which counts as a location and which is typically expressed as a prepositional phrase in other languages (Freeze 1992). In possessive structures, this PP predicate moves to the syntactic subject position, spec,TP. An example in GPA is given in (43). ‘I have a problem’ is more literally, “At me is a problem” with the possessor functioning as a locative subject. In a language like GPA that largely lacks prepositions, the locative subject is expressed as a nominal, perhaps with a null preposition, as shown.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The prepositional analysis of *9ind* (Holes 1990:95) might not be correct but we leave that for later exploration.

<sup>8</sup> Two theoretical issues arise with respect to (43): Why the PP moves to spec,TP and how it can do so, crossing the DP, in apparent violation of locality. We assume that the movement is driven by the EPP and is allowed because the PP and the DP are equidistant in some sense from T. The issues are beyond the scope of the paper but are explored in Harves 2002, Bailyn 2004, Mikkelsen 2005, and Landau 2010, among others.

- (43) a. ana fi muʃkil GPA  
 1SG COP problem  
 lit. ‘At me is a problem.’  
 ‘I have a problem.’



The similarity to both Arabic and Hindi is evident. In Arabic the word order is as in (41), where the possessor is a PP and appears initially as the subject, just as in GPA. GPA however lacks the preposition and Arabic lacks the predicational copula. In Hindi, (42), there is once again a clause-initial locative PP subject, however the predication relationship between it and the possessed element is mediated by a copula, just as in GPA with *fi*. Freeze 1992 discusses other languages that unify existential structures and possessive structures. The fact that this reappears in GPA is thus unsurprising and is compatible with our unified analysis of *fi* as a predicational copula.

#### 4.4. *fi* with verbs data

Given our analysis of *fi* as a predicational copula found with non-verbal predicates, we do not expect *fi* to co-occur with verbs. Various data in Næss 2008 and Bakir 2010 repeated below seems to contradict this expectation. The boldfaced elements following *fi* look like verbs.

- (44) a. ʔanaa fii **guul** GPA  
 1SG fii **say**  
 ‘I say.’ (Bakir 2010:217, (20a))
- b. ʔinta fii **yaskit** GPA  
 2SG.M fii **be.silent**  
 ‘You keep quiet.’ (Bakir 2010:217, (20b))
- c. ʔinti fii **ʃuuf** GPA  
 2SG.F fii **see**  
 ‘Do you see?’ (Bakir 2010:217, (20c))

- d. *ʔinta fii saafir* GPA  
 2SG.M fii **travel**  
 ‘Are you traveling?’ (Bakir 2010:217, (20d))
- e. *ʔanaa fii ruuh warša* GPA  
 1SG fii **go** workshop  
 ‘I go to the workshop.’ (Bakir 2010:217, (20e))
- f. *kafiil fii sawwi jinjaal* GPA  
 sponsor fii **make** quarrel  
 ‘The sponsor quarrels (with me).’ (Bakir 2010:217, (20f))
- g. *haay faatora maa-fii ʔaktib* GPA  
 this receipt not-fii **write**  
 ‘I can’t write this receipt.’ (after Bakir 2010:217, (20g))
- h. *binti fi āti māl walad* GPA  
 daughter TAM **give** PREP son  
 ‘My daughter gives [it] to my son.’ (Næss 2008:66, (26b))
- i. *māl malābis ana fi šugl* GPA  
 PREP clothes 1SG TAM **work**  
 ‘I work with clothes.’ (Næss 2008:67, (26d))

We claim that such data are not actually problematic for our proposal. Although the elements following *fi* appear to be verbs, and may be verbs in GA, they are not viewed as verbs by GPA speakers. Consequently, the possibility of *fi* is expected and is compatible with our analysis. The apparent exceptional elements following *fi* divide into three groups: nouns, stative adjectives, and imperatives. We treat them in turn. We use negation as an independent test to determine the category of the word in GPA. Remember that verbs are negated in GPA with *ma*. If a lexical item cannot be negated with *ma* then this suggests that it is not a verb. Such cases will thus not be genuine instances of *fi* co-occurring with a verb.

In some cases, the element following *fi* is translated into English as a verb but the morphosyntax of the word indicates that it is a noun. Examples include (44d,i) above, and repeated below as (45a,b), which contain *saafir* ‘travel’ and *šugl* ‘work’ as well as two additional examples in (45c,d) with *talāk* ‘divorce’ and *kalām* ‘speech’.

- (45) a. *ʔinta fii saafir* GPA  
 2SG.M COP **travel**  
 ‘Are you traveling?’ (Bakir 2010:217, (20d))
- b. *māl malābis ana fi šugl* GPA  
 PREP clothes 1SG COP **work**  
 ‘I work with clothes.’ (Næss 2008:67, (26d))
- c. *alhīn fi talāk* GPA  
 now COP **divorce**  
 ‘Now I am divorced.’ (Næss 2008:90, (15))

- d. ana fi **kalām** mišān huwa, huwa fi **kalām** mišān ana GPA  
 1SG COP **speech** PREP 3SG 3SG COP **speech** PREP 1SG  
 ‘I am talking to him, he is talking to me.’ (Næss 2008:89, (13b))

In the case of (45b,c) at least, a possessive paraphrase is appropriate: “I have work with clothes” and “I have divorce”. It is thus only the supplied English translation that is misleading. That these words are not verbs in GPA is indicated by the fact that the above examples cannot be negated with *ma* but instead use the non-verbal negator *mafī*:

- (46) a. ?inta mafii/\*ma saafir GPA  
 2SG.M NEG travel.N  
 ‘You are not traveling.’
- b. alhīn mafii/\*ma talāk GPA  
 now NEG divorce.N  
 ‘Now I am not divorced.’
- c. ana mafii/\*ma kalām mišān huwa GPA  
 1SG NEG speech.N PREP 3SG  
 ‘I am not talking to him.’

A handful of examples involve a verb that has plausibly been reanalyzed by GPA speakers as an adjective, since they are stative.<sup>9</sup> Two of Bakir’s examples are below.

- (47) a. ?inta fii **yaskit** GPA  
 2SG.M fii **be.silent**  
 ‘You keep quiet.’ (Bakir 2010:217, (20b))
- b. ana fii **maluum** GPA  
 1SG BE **known**  
 ‘I know.’ (Bakir 2010:216, (20d))

The example in (23b) confirms that *maluum* in (47b) is negated with *mafī*. This is confirmed by our own data:

- (48) a. ?inta mafii/\*ma yaskit GPA  
 2SG.M NEG be.silent  
 ‘You don’t keep quiet.’
- b. ana mafii/\*ma maluum GPA  
 1SG NEG known.Adj  
 ‘I don’t know.’

Finally, the remaining examples above involve *fī* followed by elements that are imperative verbs in GA: (44a,c,e,f,g). For reasons that we do not understand, GPA speakers seem to be taking imperative verbs as non-verbal. While we do not have an explanation for this, nor do we

<sup>9</sup> See Bakir 2010:216, footnote 10 for a similar suggestion.

know how exactly the verbs are being analyzed, the pattern seems clear. Note that it is not the case that the imperative verb form is the form of a verb generally borrowed into GPA. Bakir 2010:205-211 discusses verb forms in GPA and indicates that “the common verb form that is used in GPA is the Gulf Arabic 3rd person masculine imperfect form (Bakir 2010:206)”. In support of this conclusion, Bakir (2010:207) observes that when the imperative and imperfective verb stems are distinct, GPA uses the imperfective.<sup>10 11</sup>

#### 4.5. TAM *fi*

Næss 2008 and Bakir 2010 presented data, repeated below, which they took to show that *fi* can convey aspectual and modality semantics. This section reconsiders such examples.

- (49) a. *allem yāni fi šūf, wāhed fi šīl kūb gul hāda kūb* GPA  
 learn that.is TAM see one TAM take cup say DEM cup  
 ‘I learned from watching, someone would take a coup and say this is a cup.’  
 (Næss 2008:89, (12a))
- b. *ḥamsa sana fi tālīm dāhil jāma* GPA  
 five year TAM study in university  
 ‘I studied at the university for five years.’ (Næss 2008:89, (12b))
- c. *binti fi āti māl walad* GPA  
 daughter TAM give to son  
 ‘My daughter is feeding my son.’ (Næss 2008:89, (13a))
- d. *alhiin ḡanaa fii guum* GPA  
 now 1SG fii stand  
 ‘Now I am standing.’ (Bakir 2010:212, (13))
- (50) *alhīn fi talāk* GPA  
 now TAM divorce  
 ‘I’m divorced now.’ (Næss 2008:89, (15))

<sup>10</sup> Bakir 2010:210 does acknowledge that the choice of verb form for any given GPA speaker is influenced to some extent by what forms that speaker is exposed to.

<sup>11</sup> One example remains for which we have no account:

- (i) *binti fi āti māl walad* GPA  
 daughter COP giveto son  
 ‘My daughter is feeding my son.’ (Næss 2008:89, (13a))

*Āti* in GA is the first singular present form of the verb ‘give’. It is possible that this form is also seen as an imperative by GPA speakers, even though it is not morphologically imperative in GA. It is used imperatively:

- (i) *āti ana folos* GPA  
 give 1SG money  
 ‘Give me money!’

(51) aleyn fi sakkar mahal, bādēn yesīr dubay ... GPA  
 now TAM close shop then go Dubai  
 ma fi fayda fulūs ma fi  
 NEG EXPL use money NEG EXPL  
 ‘If I close the shop and go to Dubai, there’s no use in that, then I don’t get paid.’  
 Context: A2 explains why he has not been to Dubai (Næss 2008:90, (16a))

(52) a. fii baddil kafiil GPA  
 fii change sponsor  
 ‘Can I change the sponsor?’ (Bakir 2010:218, (22b))

b. laakin minni minni ʔinti fii ruuh, maamaa maafii maluum  
 but here here 2SG.F fii go mother not known  
 ‘But if you may go here and there, your mother wouldn’t know.’  
 (Bakir 2010:218, (22f)) GPA

Evidence that *fi* is not contributing TAM semantics here comes from the fact that the meaning of these sentences does not change if *fi* is deleted. For example, consider the synonymous pair in (53), based on (49d) above.

(53) alhiin ʔanaa (fii) guum GPA  
 now 1SG COP stand  
 ‘Now I am standing.’

The TAM meanings are simply a consequence of the context of utterance, not the morpheme *fi* itself. As one can see, numerous previous examples have no additional modal or aspectual interpretation.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has reconsidered the syntactic function and analysis of the morpheme *fi* in Gulf Pidgin Arabic, which derives from the existential verb *fii(h)* in Gulf Arabic. Previous discussion of this morpheme (Smart 1990, Næss 2008, Bakir 2010) has proposed that it has several uses: as a preposition, an existential expletive, a verb of possession ‘have’, a TAM marker, and a predicational copula. We argued that GPA *fi* is only ever a preposition or a predicational copula verb and that the other suggested uses of *fi* can and should be reduced to the predicational copula use. *Fi* is a verbal head that selects for a non-verbal predication. In relying on Freeze 1992, our analysis supports Freeze’s unification of existential, possessive, and locative clauses.

Our analysis of *fi* as a predicational copula provides evidence against Ferguson’s (1971) claim that pidgins and other simplified communication languages uniformly lack copulas. Other potential copulas in pidgin languages included *nà ím* in Nigerian pidgin and *ém* in Tok Pisin (Faraclas 1990:97) as well as *bilong* in Chinese Pidgin English (Frankin 1981).

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