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Copula constructions in Mande – a preliminary overview

1. Introduction

Non-verbal predication or copula constructions are common in Mande as in other languages in the linguistic area. In Mande however, they show some peculiarities. In addition such structures differ also in the Mande family with regard to form, semantic functions and basic syntactic structure. The aim of this paper is to survey the occurring copula structures or non-verbal predications in the Mande languages in order to get some idea of the distribution of certain features within the language family as a whole and to disclose possible areal influence.

Non-verbal predication is an issue properly described for many Mande languages either as an interesting subject by itself in language description or in language typology. The issue of copula clauses is often raised in connection with simple sentence structures in grammatical descriptions following the structuralist approach. A comparative approach to non-verbal predication, both from a typological perspective and in historical comparative terms, has not been undertaken so far and a first step in this direction is intended here.

1.1 The sample languages and data

A typological study presupposes a balanced sampling of languages and depends heavily on language documentation, as a detailed description of specific properties is needed. The sample should take languages from different branches into account. For the purpose of this study, the following languages and corresponding descriptions and publications have been enquired:

Language	*Source*
Bambara	Dumestre 2003
Mandinka	Creissels 1983
Koranko	Kastenholz 1987
Looma,	Prost 1967
Tigemaxo	Blecke 1996
Soninke	Diagana 1994, Girier 1996
Bobo	Le Bris & Prost 1981
Gouro	Benoist 1970
Boko	Jones 1996
Bisa (Barka)	Prost 1950, field notes
Samo (Toma)	Platiel 1971, field notes

Table 1: The language sample.

The level of description of non-verbal predication varies among the presentations. It must be mentioned that especially the respective semantic functions of the different types of copula constructions depend in some cases on my interpretation of the given examples and are not provided by the authors themselves. Fortunately, some semantic distinctions are expressed explicitly or correspond to the ones in French (like "c'est" or "il y a") and can be thus derived from the literal translations.

1.2 Some issues of non-verbal predication in Mande

Copula constructions have been investigated from a general typological perspective recently as far as the semantic functions are concerned. A comprehensive typology of non-verbal

predication is for example presented in Hengeveld (1992). Other approaches concentrate on certain features or subsets of non-verbal predication, but do not offer a detailed typology like Declerck (1988) or Schachter (1985). The features and subcategories have been thus defined not only on a morphological motivated but also on a purely semantic basis by means of criteria, which are not necessarily reflected in a given language.

Some authors like Declerck (1988) propose for example distinctions like specificational and predicational copula constructions in English although both types do not differ morphologically. Nevertheless such a distinction may be reflected in other languages and is therefore included in the set of features under investigation.

Non-verbal predication refers to any kind of full sentence constructions in which predication is expressed without the use of lexical items pertaining to the class of full verbs in the respective language. Such phrases semantically express an aspect of the concept existence and correspond to Standard European "to be".[1] Nominal, copula, locative, existential and possessive constructions are thus considered to pertain to the same class of constructions. The basic structure of those constructions is formulated by Hengeveld (1992, p. 1) as (disregarding the order of constituents):

1)   Argument (copula) Predicate

Non-verbal predication can be classified generally with regard to:

a) The type of the copula
b) The type of the predicate
c) The type of the argument
d) The semantic and pragmatic function expressed
e) Structural types

a) Copula types

The following copula types can be distinguished: verbal, particle, inflectional, zero (Curnow 2000). Copulas are generally grammaticalized forms of lexical sources and the properties are related to the corresponding sources. In many cases, the copula is derived from a verb or auxiliary denoting local existence or likewise. But the source has not necessarily to be a verb. A postposition could possibly also be the source as argued by Kastenholz (2003). In most of the cases, copulas develop further into auxiliaries denoting TAM.

Some of the distinctions in Curnow (2003) are not adequate for Mande as they refer to morphological properties like *inflectional*, which are generally non-existent or of minor importance in Mande. The major issue here is the distinction of a verbal or non-verbal copula. As this distinction cannot be made on the basis of inflectional properties, a morphosyntactic criterion is involved. Verbs in Mande are generally such lexical items, which can occur in the syntactic V-slot in the S_AUX _O_V_X pattern and are tense-marked by a split predicative construction.[2] But this definition, copulas are non-verbal like auxiliaries as copulas occur in the AUX-slot as argued by Creissels (1983, p. 31). Therefore, they cannot occur with TAM morphemes in contrast to full verbs. In Bambara for example, copulas can only be marked with regard to tense and aspect by *tun,* the "inactual marker".[3] Therefore, they may be best characterized as non-verbal particles considering their possible origin as postpositions.

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[1] Expressions like *voila* (French), *haayi* (Soninke) *akwai* (Hausa) are not considered as copulas here. Semi- and pseudo-copulas like make are also ignored.
[2] This view is adapted from Kastenholz (1987, p. 121)
[3] See Dumestre (2003 p. 215) for example.

b) Predicate type

Hengeveld (1992) refers in his typology to different kinds of predicates. The classification is based on the type of element occurring in the Y_{Pred} position of a X_{Arg} COP Y_{Pred} structure. The predicate element can be an adjective, adverb, a noun phrase, or a postpositional phrase. In some languages the choice of a copula is motivated by the kind of Y_{Pred}. In the proposed typology a distinction is made between bare predicates, referential predicates and relational predicates. The notion of bare predicates refers to a category in inflectional languages and is not discussed here. Referential predicates are characterized as "terms" in the functional framework and involve referring nouns, pronouns or demonstratives. Relational predicates are those in which a postpositional phrase is involved, "to be at", "to be in", or which involve existence or location in general.

The distinction of referential and relational is to some extend reflected by different copulas in most of the languages in the sample. Referential predicates are used in identificational or equative contexts and expressed by the copula chain patterns 4a and 4b (see infra) or simply distinguished by the copula.

Bisa

2)   Zibergaren mun-**on**
      Worker 1. Sg. COP
      "I am a worker"

3)   a **ti** hin
       3.sg. COP water
      "he is in the water"

      (Prost 1950, p. 41)

Soninke

4)   Denba   ni soxaana   yi
      Demba   COP   farmer COP
      Demba is (a) farmer

      (Girier 1996, p. 97)

It seems that in most of the languages in the sample the predicate type is pertinent to the choice of the copula.

c) Argument type

Copula constructions may also be classified according to their arguments. The major distinction made in Hengeveld (1992) are the semantic features definite vs. indefinite. Unfortunately, this feature is not suitable to explain the different types of copula constructions in Mande (see Bambara in Hengeveld 1992, p. 215). Arguments in non-verbal predications are in most of the cases specific and specificity does not correspond directly to defniniteness. In languages with such kind of morphologically marked distinction, non-specific arguments occur only in such cases of general existence, but exclusively with predicate copulas.

Koranko

5)   Sàlamãnu   bé
      2.sg   hand   COP
      "There is catfish"
      (Kastenholz 1987, p. 100)

d) Semantic and pragmatic functions

Semantic features are not investigated here from a purely semantic view to explain different readings but with regard to the different copula structures and morphemes in the Mande languages. It will be argued that the proposed semantic features are not fully able to explain the distinctions reflected in the morphology of the Mande languages and some modification and revisions are necessary. Pragmatic features come into play in specificational copula constructions. Monovalent copulas or predicators (see Schachter 1985, p. 55) are predominantly distinguished from specificational and predicational copulas. They are regarded here as specificational and non-topic, in contrast to specificational topic. The choice of *don* and *yé ... yé* in Bambara is therefore interpreted as pragmatic and not as purely semantic.

Bambara

6) Tabali   don.
   table   COP
   "It is a table."

7) Bala   don.
   Bala   COP
   "It is Bala. "

8) Hèrè   bè.
   peace COP
   "There is peace."

   (Examples from Koopmann 1992, p. 574)

e) Structural types

The following patterns of copula constructions are attested in the sample. NP_{Pred} and NP_{Arg} are generalizations, indicating the semantic function linked to a slot. In an NP position all kinds of nominal elements and referring expressions like nouns, pronouns, demonstratives etc. can occur.[4] While the patterns 2-4a are common in all languages of the sample, 1, 4b, and 5 do only occur in some languages showing a specific distribution pattern.

1) NP_{Arg} COP
2) NP_{Arg} COP NP_{Pred}
3) NP_{Arg} COP PP_{Pred}
4a) NP_{Arg} COP NP_{Pred} COP/ "Chain pattern"
4b) NP_{Pred} COP NP_{Arg} COP / "Chain pattern"
5) NP_{Arg} NP_{Pred} COP

In some languages like Bambara a specific pattern is exclusively linked to a copula while in others like Samo both copulas can occur with nearly all kind of patterns.

Samo

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[4] Nominal is defined in syntactic terms here as any element that can appear as a head of a NP slot.

COP   nɛ: type 1,2,3,4

     ta: type 1,2,3,4, 5

Bambara

COP   don: 1, 3[5]

     yé: 4

     bé: 1,3

Monovalent NP_{Arg} COP constructions occur most likely with specificational copulas and the use of this pattern with a predicational copula is very limited. It seems that this pattern, which expresses identification is limited to a linguistic area. In Bambara, in which the focus marker is not obligatory like in Mandinka, the order of NP_{Arg} and NP_{Pred} presupposes different readings. The main question here concerns the status of the second element like *lá* (Koranko), *ni* (Tigemaxo). With regard to *yé* in Bambara, the second *yé* in identificational predications has been referred to as a postposition (Bird/Kendall (1986)) or a verb "to see" (Creissells (1997)). It is argued here that two copulas are involved in this construction and not one copula and a postposition. In languages with a predicational / specificational distinction postpositions occur predominantly with predicational and not with specificational copulas. On the other hand, specificational and not predicational copulas are used throughout in cleft sentences involving topicalisation. However, it seems that the emphasis is expressed by the second and not by the first copula *yé* in the chain as indicated by the following examples.[6]

9)   Né yé kàramɔgɔ yé

     1. Sg. COP teacher COP

     "I am the teacher."

10)   kàramɔgɔ yé né yé

     teacher COP 1. Sg.COP

     "it is me, the teacher, "

     (Bambara, Dumestre (2003 p. 34))

2 The typology applied and Mande specific features

As for the Mande languages a basic distinction of predicational vs. specificational is proposed. These distinction corresponds to the one proposed by Declerck (1988). Specificational non-verbal predications involve the specification of a linguistic variable by use of an overt or even covert referring element in order to identify the argument. In specificational constructions something is said "about something" or in syntactic/pragmatic terms: it is given some information on the argument, which is relevant to the context. The

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[5] The occurence of don with a postpositional phrase seems to be rare in Bambara. Nevertheless, some examples are given by Dumestre (2003, p. 34): né jìgi sɛmɛnen dòn í lá, "My hope rests on you".

[6] The interpretation of the synchronic underlying representation and function of what is classified as COP in such identificational chains may be questionable. An alternative would be the interpretation of the second element as a postposition as it is the canonical view for Bambara. It is claimed here in short, that although the source may certainly a postposition, these former postpositions have been grammaticalized and function synchronically as copulas.

major criterion is the obligatory occurrence of a deictic referring expression. In predicational constructions a referring expression is not obligatory.

Predicational
      Existential (there is (a))
      Locative (there is a … (here, at …))
      Possessive (there is a … at [under his control])

Specificational
      Identificational / topic marking (this/he/ the mentioned is a, he is a kind of)
      Deictic (this/he/ the mentioned, it is a / the) "C'est un/une ", "It is a …"

Apart from the general typological perspective some features are of interest also because of their distribution patterns. These features play a role for the interpretation of possible areal influence concerning copula constructions. In Boko for example, a separate verb expressing possession is found, a feature that does usually occur in Mande languages. The obligatory focus marking in copula sentences in Mandinka is as well a marked feature in the sample. Other properties are of interest with regard to language history.[7]

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[7] For a discussion of the imlications on the TAM auxiliaries see Tröbs (2003) and Kastenholz (2003).

	Predicational				Specificational	
	Existential	Attributive	Locative	Possessive	Identificational/topic	non-topic
Bambara	bé	(verb)	bé LOC / bé PP	bé ... fè	yé ... yé	dòn
Mandinka	bé	(verb)	be LOC / PP	bé ... búlú	lé mú	lé mú
Koranko	bé/yé	(verb)	bé/yé LOC / PP	yé ... la	lé ... lá	lè
Looma	ka/gha	(verb)	ka/gha LOC / PP	ka/gha	ka/gha. (ke ??)	ve/be
Tigemaxo	ga	n Adj	ga/xai LOC / PP	ga PP	ga ... ni	ni
Soninke	?	Adj ni	wa LOC / PP	?	ni ... yi	ni
Bobo	ti	ti (/verb)	ti LOC / PP	ti ...ta/ko	ne/tà	3.Pron: à /yé
Gouro	a	a	a LOC / PP	a ... lèè	le (... nyã)	le
Boko	ku	(verb)	ku LOC / PP	dɛ ... ừ	á ... nɛ̀, nɛ	nɛ
Bisa (Barka)	ti	ti	ti LOC / PP	ti ... hứ	... bi/n	nɛ
Samo (Toma)	ta	nɛ / ta	nɛ / ta	ta	á/n ... á	nɛ

Table 2: Semantic functions and copulas in the sample

	NP_{Arg} COP	NP_{Arg} COP NP_{Pred}	NP_{Arg} COP PP_{Pred}	NP_{Arg} COP NP_{Pred} COP	NP_{Arg} NP_{Pred} COP
Bambara	+ / don	+ / bé, LOC	+ / bé, don	+ /yé ... yé	--
Mandinka	+ / mú	+ / bé, LOC	+ / bé, mú	--	--
Koranko	+ / bé, lè	+ / bé, LOC	+ / bé, lè	+ /lé ... lá	--
Looma	+ / be/ve, ka/gha	+ / ka/gha	+ / ka/gha	--	+ / ka/gha
Tigemaxo	+ / ni	+ / n, ADJ	+ / ga, xai	+ / ga ... ni	--
Soninke	+ / ni	+ / wa, LOC	+ / wa, ni	+ / ni ... yi	+ / ni, ADJ
Bobo	+ / ti	+ / ti, POSS	+ / ti	--	--
Gouro	+ / le	+ / a, ADJ	+ / a, le	+ /le (... nyã)	+ / a
Boko	+ / nɛ	+ / kú, LOC nɛ, ID	+ / kú, dɛ	+ / á ... nè	(+) / (á) ... nè
Bisa (Barka)	+ / nɛ	+ / ti, ADJ, LOC	+ / ti	--	+ / nɛ, ID
Samo (Toma)	+ / nɛ, ta	+ / nɛ, ta	+ / nɛ, ta	+/ á/n ... á	+/ ta

Table 3: Predication structures in the sample

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	Copula in cleft /left dislocation	Argument inversion	focus marker	Obligatory focus marking	zero in possessive relational nouns (bobo)	have verb	locative copula	neutralization in negation
Bambara	-	+	de	-	-	-	-	+, te
Mandinka	-	--	le	+	-	-	-	+, té
Koranko	- / do	?	lé	-	-	-	-	- / bé-sa; lé-ma
Looma	+ / ka, gha	?	-	-	-	-	-	+, la ... le
Tigemaxo	- / ye	?	rɔ/nɔ	-	-	-	-	+, di
Soninke	?-/na	--	na	-	-	-	+	-/wa-nt; ni-fe
Bobo	-/ òn	--	-?	-	+	-	-	(+), COP ga
Gouro	+ / le	+	-?	-	-	-	-	(+), COP lo
Boko	+ / nɛ	+	mɛ	-	~+/(á) ... nè	+	+	(+), COP-o
Bisa (Barka)	+ / nɛ	--	é	-	-	-	-	(+), ba COP
Samo (Toma)	+ / nɛ	--	dɛ	-	-	-	-	(+) ba COP wa

Table 4: Mande-specific features in the sample

3. Discussion and preliminary results

The general distinction of predicational and specification non-verbal predication is reflected in many Mande languages in the sample but not in the family as a whole. It seems that the different copula constructions in Mande cannot be fully explained by the typology of Hengeveld (1992, p. 101/102). Pragmatic features have also to be taken into account. As a proposal, the features topic and non-topic are applied. The predicators like *nε* (Bisa, Samo, Boko) or *don* (Bambara) are classified as non-topic because they do not refer explicitly to an element of the discourse. In constructions with topic marking the referring element is explicitly expressed and some emphasis is implied. In the cases of topicalisation via cleft sentences, the copula element is the specificational one, if a general distinction of specificational and predicational exists in the language.

An additional type of non-verbal predication is found exclusively in Bobo. The pattern consists of a pronoun, a demonstrative or a referring particle/expression and a predicative NP or a numeral. No copula is expressed on the surface structure, neither in affirmative mood nor in negation. In the past tense, only the auxiliary occurs. The zero-copula does not occur with postpositions.

11)   à   tū

      it   mahogany
      "This is a mahagony tree"

12)   à   tū   ga

      it   mahogany   not
      "This is not a mahagony tree"

13)   à   mέ

      it   me
      "This is me"

14)   à   àwὲ   gá

      it   him   not
      "This is me"
      (Le Bris & Prost 1981, p. 51)

The distribution pattern and the occurrence of *ti*, occurring in Bobo, Bisa and Vai (Tröbs 2003) and the wider distribution of nε suggests that the principal dichotomy of predicational and specificational may have been some kind of proto feature. On the other hand, the copula ka found in the Northern branch may be connected to the ka in stative constructions in Manding.

The occurrence of a verb "have" and the locative copula "ku" in Boko seems to go back to language contact. The copula chains do possibly also coincide with an areal distribution as Mandinka, Looma and Bisa, which may lie outside the scope of the Bambara influence, do not share this feature.

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List of abbrevations

Arg	Argument, semantic function
AUX	Auxiliary slot, position
COP	Copula
NP	Noun phrase
NP_{Arg}, NP_{Pred} :	Semantic function expressed by the phrase
O	Object slot, position
Pred	Predicate, semantic function
S	Subject slot, position
Sg.	Singular
V	Verb slot, position
X	Unspecified type of phrase or slot.
Y	Unspecified type of phrase or slot.