

# Copular Constructions in Mbat: grammatical and classificatory considerations



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# Jarawan languages

- ▷ Approximately 17-25 varieties, mostly in Nigeria but also Cameroon
- ▷ Also called Jarawan Bantu, though their relationship to Bantu proper vs. Southern Bantoid is unclear
- ▷ Classifications based on lexicon suggest a relationship to A40 Mbam-Bubi languages (according to Grollemund), or A60 (according to Blench)
- ▷ Morphologically, they bear resemblance to Southern Bantoid
  - No noun classes other than fossilized nasal prefixes
  - Primarily isolating
  - Primarily aspectual
  - Presence of unproductive extensions, e.g., reversive, contactive, and applicative (?)

# Largely undescribed group

Outside of work on classification:

Gerhardt (1988) – description of Perfective and Habitual suffixes in verbs in “Jaar”, and short discussion of Perfective and Intensive in Kantana (iso:mma)

Green (2020) – conditions on stem-controlled vowel harmony vs. blocking in Mbat verbs (iso:bau)

Green (2021) – stem shape allomorphy triggered by addition of Perfective and Habitual suffixes in Mbat

In progress work:

van de Velde & Idiatov have fieldnotes on Mbula (iso:mbu)

SIL Nigeria survey (Rueck, et al. 2009) – 350 word wordlists

Mbat (iso:bau) – 2 speakers, same village

Galamkya (iso:bau) - 2 speakers, different villages

Jaku (iso:jku) - 2 speakers, different villages [nearing extinction]

Duguri (iso:dbm) - 2 speakers, different villages

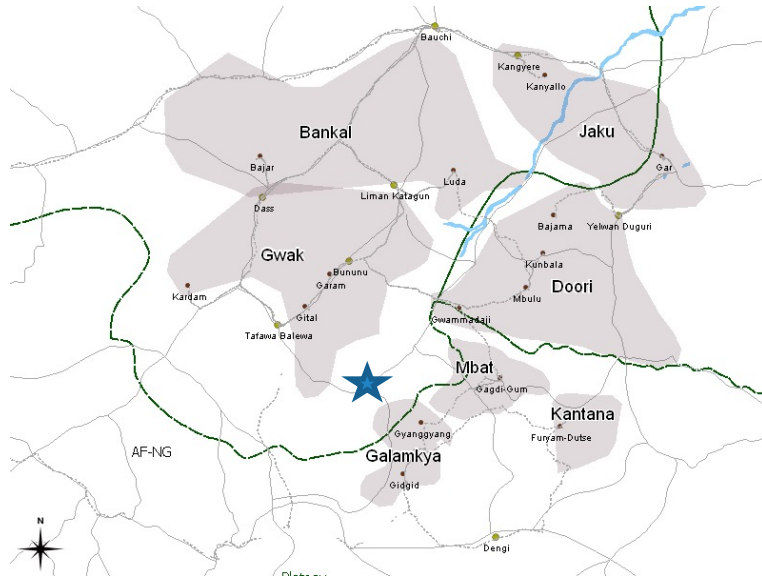
Bankal/Bankala (iso:jjr) - 2 speakers, different villages

Gwak (iso:jgk) - 2 speakers, different villages

Kantana (iso:mma) – 1 speaker

Blench has fieldnotes on various varieties

# Mbat



- ▷ [iso:bau]
- ▷ ~40k speakers
- ▷ Native consultant is from Tadnum village, Bauchi State

(Rueck et al. 2009)

# Jarawan languages: Syntax

- ▷ Unmarked word order: SVO
- ▷ Number agreement, within DPs only
- ▷ Primarily head-initial
  - Sentence/clause initial Q marker
  - Clause initial relativizer
  - PP headed by a locative marker
  - Periphrastic negation
  - Exception: DP (N + DET) – boundary marking?
- ▷ Wh-in-situ

# Copular Constructions: Overview

▷ Existential copula: *gha*

(1) *mʊs gha*  
cat **exist**  
'There is a cat.'

▷ Equative/linking type:

(2) *dʊghʊl l-a na John*  
name POSS-1SG ? John  
'My name is John.'

(3) *ngʊn my-a m-ə gʊlʊn*  
tree SG-DEF SG-REL tall  
'The tree is tall.'

▷ Function of *na*?

# Identification of *na*: Hypotheses

- ▷ *na* is a copula:
  - /nV/ copulas in some Bantu languages (Gibson et al. 2019)
    - Swahili *ni*
    - Digo *ni*
    - Kagulu *no*
- ▷ *na* is not a copula, but an element that denotes some additional meaning:
  - N-cleft focus in Southern Bantoid
    - Pronominal f-marker and n-cleft in Basaá (Leffel et al. 2014)
    - Focus marker *á* and cleft in Bafut (Tamanji 2009)

# Predicate Nominals

▷ *na* only appears in some predicate nominal constructions:

(4) *mʊs dəba*

cat animal

‘(A) cat is (an) animal.’

(5) *yi bwa m-ə kam-gʊr*

3.SG person SG-REL teach-thing

‘He/she is a teacher.’

(6) John **na** *bwa m-ə kam-gʊr (my-a)*

John ? person SG-REL teach-thing (SG-DEF)

‘John is the teacher.’



# Nominal vs. Pronominal Subjects

- ▷ *na* does not seem to be conditioned by subject type:

(7a) John *bwa* *m-ə* *kam-gur*  
John person SG-REL teach-thing  
'John is a teacher.'

(7b) John ***na*** *bwa* *m-ə* *kam-gur*  
John ? person SG-REL teach-thing  
'John is the teacher.'  
or 'It is John who is the teacher.'

(8a) *yi* *bwa* *m-ə* *kam-gur*  
3.SG person SG-REL teach-thing  
'He/she is a teacher.'

(8b) *yi-n* *bwa* *m-ə* *kam-gur*  
3.SG-? person SG-REL teach-thing  
'He/she is the teacher.'  
or 'It is he/she who is the teacher.'

- ▷ Complementary distribution: Is *-n* a cliticized variant of *na*?

# Indefinite vs. Definite

- ▷ However, the same example set contrasts indefinite vs. definite, and a degree of focus:

(7a) John bwa m-ə kam-gur  
John person SG-REL teach-thing  
'John is a teacher.'

(7b) John **na** bwa m-ə kam-gur  
John ? person SG-REL teach-thing  
'John is the teacher.'  
or 'It is John who is the teacher.'

(8a) yi bwa m-ə kam-gur  
3.SG person SG-REL teach-thing  
'He/she is a teacher.'

(8b) yi-**n** bwa m-ə kam-gur  
3.SG-? person SG-REL teach-thing  
'He/she is the teacher.'  
or 'It is he/she who is the teacher.'

# Predicate Adjectives

- ▷ *na* also does not appear in these sentences:

(9) ndak my-a m-ə ŋgayi  
cow SG-DEF SG-REL big  
'The cow is big.'

(10) bi-but by-a b-ə gulən  
PL-person PL-DEF PL-REL tall  
'The men are tall.'

- ▷ but it appears in the sentence below:

(11) ndak my-a **na** m-ə ŋgayi  
cow SG-DEF ? SG-REL big  
'It is the cow that is big.'

# Obligatory *na* in demonstratives

- ▷ Demonstrative constructions require *na*:

(12) ndak    na    ku/mi  
      cow    ?    that/this  
      ‘That/this is a cow.’

(13) \*ndak    ku/mi  
      cow    that/this  
      ‘Intended: That/this is a cow.’

- ▷ Frame of reference: inherently entail a certain degree of definiteness

# Semantic Contrast?

- ▷ Clause types distinguished by Higgins (1973) and Mikkelsen (2005):
  - Predicational, Referential, Equative, Specificational
  
- ▷ *na* does not appear in:
  - Indefinite constructions with adjectival complements (i.e., predicational)
  - Equative constructions (e.g., I am a teacher)
  
- ▷ *na* appears in:
  - Specificational constructions (e.g., the teacher is me)
  - Demonstrative/referential constructions (e.g., that is a cow)
  
- ▷ *na* bears a semantic notion/function than a syntactic one.

# Revised hypotheses:

- ▷ *na* is a copula that only appears in specificational, referential, and demonstrative constructions
- ▷ *na* is a semantic unit/element that distinguishes specificational, demonstrative, and referential constructions from the rest of the linking type constructions
  - i.e., *na* is a focus marker.

# Copula vs. focus marker

- ▷ (Very broad) Definition of copula:
  - An element that is (often) present in syntax but semantically vacuous (Daniels 1973, Pustet 2003)
- ▷ However, *na* is NOT semantically vacuous.
- ▷ Additional evidence:
  - (14a) *bwa m-ə kam-gur my-a yi*  
person SG-REL teach-thing SG.DEF 3.SG  
'The teacher is him/her.'
  
  - (14b) *yi-n bwa m-ə kam-gur (my-a)*  
3.SG-FOC person SG-REL teach-thing SG-DEF  
'The teacher is him/her.'
- ▷ Specificational reading also achievable through a mere inclusion of *na*:

# Identification of *na*

- ▷ Therefore, *na* would appear to be a focus marker!
- ▷ Morphological insertion vs. head of FocP (i.e. cleft constructions)?



# Detection of copula

- ▷ Mbat does not seem to have an overt linking copula, by looking at the PF or surface structure
- ▷ Zero copula languages are not uncommon: Russian, Turkic languages, Japanese (arguably), and many other languages.
- ▷ However, in many of these languages, copula appears in:
  - Non-present Tense/Aspect
  - Negation
  - Interrogatives
  - Imperatives

# Tense/Aspect: Perfective

- ▷ Content verbs: a perfective suffix /-Vm/, or persistive *ki*

(15a) *sin-im mi*  
see-PRF 3.SG  
'I saw him.'

(15b) *ki sin-i*  
PERS see-3.SG  
'I used to see him'

- ▷ Copular constructions: inclusion of *bak* (also means 'used to') that can float

(16a) *bak* *mi bwa m-ə kam-gur*  
used.to 1.SG person SG-REL teach-thing  
'I was a teacher.'

(16b) *mi bak bwa m-ə kam-gur*  
1.SG used.to person SG-REL teach-thing  
'I was a teacher.'

# Tense/Aspect: Future

- ▷ Future tense construction is identical to that of content verbs:
  - Future marker + V-HAB

(17) ya baal my-a sa jəp kun  
3.PL two SG-DET FUT speak mouth  
'The two of them will speak.'

(18) mi sa gus-un bwa m-ə kam-gur  
1.SG FUT become-HAB person SG-REL teach-thing  
'I will be a teacher.'

- ▷ A lexical verb appears in place of a copula.

# Negation: Imperfective

- ▷ General negation strategy:
  - Periphrastic: (AUX)...NEG
  - Sentence-final negator *ra*
- ▷ Predicate nominals: inclusion of an auxiliary *bə*,

(19) John bə dʊghʊl l-a ra  
John AUX name POSS-1SG NEG  
'John is not my name.'

- ▷ Predicate adjectives: appearance of the existential copula *gha*

(20) ndak my-a ŋgayi gha ra  
cow SG-DEF big exist NEG  
'The cow is not big.'

# Negation: Perfective

- ▷ Predicate nominals and predicate adjectives both require *bak*:

(21) *bak*    *mi*    *bwa*    *m-ə*    *kam-gur*    *ra*  
used.to 1.SG person SG-REL teach-thing NEG  
'I was not a teacher.'

(22) *bak*    *ndak* *my-a*    *ngayi* *gha*    *ra*  
used.to cow SG.DEF big exist NEG  
'The cow was not big.'

- ▷ Existential copula *gha* still required for predicate adjectives

# Negation: Future

- ▷ Replacement with/insertion of a lexical verb is constantly observed
- ▷ Dropping of the habitual suffix – related to the properties of negation

(23) me      gʊs      bwa      m-ə      kam-gʊr      ra  
1.SG.NEG   become   person   SG-REL   teach-thing   NEG  
'I will not be a teacher.'

- ▷ Replacement with a synonymous lexical verb also observed with adjectives:

(24) ndak my-a    sa    gʊl    ra  
cow   SG-DEF   FUT   grow   NEG  
'The cow will not be big (lit. The cow will not grow).'

- ▷ Strict syntactic requirement of future constructions

# Imperatives

▷ Lexical verbs also fill in the required V-head.

(25) gʊs      bwa    m-ə    kam-gʊr  
become person SG-REL teach-thing  
'Be/become a teacher!'

(26) gʊs      yid-an  
become pretty-HAB  
'Be pretty!'

(27) nuq      a      bal    mula    my-a  
sit/stay LOC inside room SG-DEF  
'Be in the room'

# Interrogatives: General sketch

▷ Inclusion of a question marker *ka* at the sentence-initial position

▷ Wh-in-situ

(28a) Milka yid-an littafi m-i  
Milka like-HAB book SG-this  
'Milka likes this book.'

(28b) **ka** Milka yid-an littafi m-i  
**Q** Milka like-HAB book SG-this  
'Does Milka like this book?'

(28c) **ka** Milka yat mēni  
**Q** Milka like which.one  
'Which one does Milka like?'



# Interrogatives: Copular constructions

(29a) Milka gha twakwat bi-ngun by-a  
Milka exist behind PL-tree PL-DEF  
'Milka is behind the trees.'

(29b) ka Milka kya  
Q Milka where  
'Where is Milka?'

(29c) ka yana (gha) twakwat bi-ngun by-a  
Q who (exist) behind PL-tree PL-DEF  
'Who is behind the trees?'

(29d) ka yana kya  
Q who where  
'Who is where?'

- ▷ Existential *gha* no longer required
- ▷ No other copulative elements observed
- ▷ In line with the general interrogative constructions

# na(-cleft) revisited

▷ Straightforward cleft constructions with content verbs:

(30a) Milka yid-an littafi m-i  
Milka like-HAB book SG-this  
'Milka likes this book.'

(31) maam my-a na kum ki my-a  
woman SG-DEF FOC found louse SG-DEF  
'It is the woman that found the louse.'

(30b) Milka na yid-an littafi m-i  
Milka FOC like-HAB book SG-this  
'It is Milka who likes this book.'

(30c) **Ka** mani na Milka yat  
**Q** which.one FOC Milka like  
'What is it that Milka likes?'

# *na*(-cleft) revisited: Copular constructions

- ▷ In the case of copular constructions:

(32) John na bwa m-ə kam-gur  
John FOC person SG-REL teach-thing  
'It is John who is a/the teacher.'

- ▷ However, predicate nominals cannot undergo clefting:

(33) \*bwa m-ə kam-gur na John  
person SG-REL teach-thing FOC John  
'Intended: A teacher is what John is.'

- ▷ Unclear if there is a structural asymmetry that allows cleft
- ▷ Lexical constraints? Structural constraints?

# No overt copula

- ▷ For the constructions that absolutely require verbal elements (e.g. Future tense), synonymous verbs are inserted
- ▷ Structural analysis?
  - Syntactic asymmetry is not detected:
    - Focus marking or clefting of objects/predicate nominals is unacceptable
- ▷ Predicate nominals and adjectives can behave as predicates themselves, with no additional predicative elements?
- ▷ Possibility of a null copula? If so, is it even discoverable?

# Future plans

- ▷ *na*: morphological insertion vs. cleft construction
  - Could potentially explain why some orders are not permitted
  - Relationship with Southern Bantoid
- ▷ Cross-linguistic theories of copula
  - Theory of Distinctness (Baker & Vinokurova 2009)
    - (Overt) copula is necessary in the linearization of nominal predication in distinguishing DP1 and DP2
      - Null copula analyses are unnecessary
  - The Raising of Predicates (Moro 1997)
    - Copula is an element that determines clause structure
      - Would Mbat have a null copula?

# Summary

- ▷ Overt existential copula behaves like content verbs
- ▷ Linking type copula is not found in the surface structure:
  - No overt copulas in Mbat
  - Different syntactic behaviors in linking type structures
- ▷ Na is a focus marker
  - more obvious in constructions with content verbs
  - More similar to Southern Bantoid than Bantu A
- ▷ Additional work to explicate focus constructions involving *na*
- ▷ Additional work to address broader theoretic implication

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