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Inverted Copular Sentences in Bambara

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Bambara copular system

Bambara (a Niger-Congo language from the Mande family) exhibits a multi-copula system that comprises four copulas:

1. **ká** is used in predicational sentences:

   (1)   Búuru ká   kálan.
         bread COP warm
         'The bread is warm.'

2. **bɛ́** is used in locative and existential sentences:

   (2)   Umu   bá   bɛ́   só   kɔ́nɔ.
         Oumou mother COP house in
         'Oumou's mother is in the house.'

   (3)   Cɛw   bɛ́   yèn   mùsow   fána.
         man.pl COP there woman.pl also
         'There are men but also women.'

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Bambara copular system

1. **dòn** is used in presentational / identificational sentences

(4) M'bá   dòn.
     1sg.mother COP
     'It is my mother.' / 'Here is my mother.'

2. **yé** is used in equative sentences (Pustet 2003, Vydrin 2003)

(5) nìn yé   námása yé
     this COP banana COP
     'This is a banana.' (Pustet 2003:23)

(6) Jékabaarà fúrabulù yé   náani yé.
     Jekabaara leaf   COP four COP
     'Jekabaara has four pages' (lit. Jekabaara's pages are
     four)

Goals of the presentation

Address the syntax and semantics of *yé...yé* sentences:

- What is the nature of *yé...yé* copular sentences?
- What are the structural properties of these sentences and what does it tell us about the *yé* copula?
- What is the grammatical status of the two occurrences of *yé*?

Apparent symmetry of *yé..yé* copular sentences

Two occurrences of *yé*

Two occurrences of the 'copula' *yé* (Pustet 2003)

(7)   nìn yé   námása yé
        this COP banana COP
        'This is a banana.' (Pustet 2003:23)

Equative analysis

The apparent symmetry in *yé..yé* copular sentences has led to the common view that they are **equative sentences** (Vydrin 2003, 2020, Pustet 2003, a.o.).

We reject this analysis.

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Against the equative analysis

A typology of copular sentences: Higgins (1979)

i. PREDICATIONAL sentences:
   express a predication relation between a subject and a
   predicate

(8) John is happy/tall/american.
     This virus is annoying.

ii. IDENTIFICATIONAL sentences:
    express an identification; the subject is usually a deictic
    expression

(9) This is a banana.
     This is Mr Johnson.

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Against the equative analysis

Higgins' typology (1979)

iii. SPECIFICATIONAL sentences:
express a relationship between a 'superscriptional' subject phrase (which introduces a variable) and the predicate which provides a value for the variable.

(10)   What I like about him is his tie.
        What he said is 'no more virus'.

iv. IDENTITY sentences, also called "equatives"
express an identity relationship between two referential expressions

(11)   Clark Kent is Superman.
        Superman is Clark Kent.

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Against the equative analysis

Interpretational problem

The meaning of *yé...yé* sentences is not that of an identity
between two referential expressions.
Not a single example in the literature can rightly be qualified as
equative/identity:

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Against the equative analysis

Interpretational problem

some are identificational sentences:

(12)   nìn yé námása yé
         this yé banana yé
         'This is a banana.' (Pustet 2003:23)

others are predicational sentences:

(13)   Fanta Kulibali yé muso   h'akilima yé
         fanta kulibali YE woman intelligent YE
         'Fanta Kulibali is an intelligent woman' (Vydrin 2003)

(14)   Hawa yé   kalanden yé
         Hawa YE student   YE
         'Hawa is a student.'

Plural

the second term (N2) cannot be pluralized when the first term (N1) is plural: | N1 yé N2 yé |

(15)   Hawa yé   kalanden yé
           Hawa YE student   YE
           'Hawa is a student.'

(16)   Né ní   Hawa yé kàlànden(**.w**) yé
           1sg and Hawa YE student(.pl)   YE
           'I and Hawa are the students.'

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Against the equative analysis

Interim conclusion

→ *yé..yé* sentences are not equatives; they do not express an identity relation between two referential expressions

- N2 is not a referential DP
- N2 patterns with predicates rather than DPs
- (verbal and non verbal) predicates are never marked for plural in Bambara.

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Apparent symmetry in _yé..yé_ sentences

_yé1_ as a copula

Copulas in Bambara have a positive and a negative form:

(17)   ká > mán
        bɛ́/dòn/yé > tɛ́

Only the first _yé_ is subject to this change in a **negative context**:

(18)   Á   nyɛ́kisɛ **yé**   bílènman   **yé**.
        3sg eye   COP   red.Nom-state yé
        'His eye is red.'

(19)   Á   nyɛ́kisɛ **tɛ́**   bílènman   **yé**.
        3sg eye   COP.NEG   red.Nom-state yé
        'His eye is not red.'

→ Issue: what is the nature of _yé2_?

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Inversion

Inversion

yé...yé sentences allow for inversion; cf., Predicate Inversion, Moro (1997)

(20) né   yé   kalanden yé | N1 yé N2 yé |
      1sg COP   student yé
      'I am a student'

(21) kalanden yé   né yé | N2 yé N1 yé |
      student   COP 1sg yé
      'The student is me'

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Inversion

yé1 as a copula in inverted sentences

yé$_{COP}$ remains in a fixed position

(22) né **tɛ́**   kalanden yé.
      1sg COP-NEG student   yé
      'I am not a student.'

(23) kalanden **tɛ́**   né yé.
      student   COP-NEG 1sg yé
      'The student isn't me.'

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Inversion

Inversion

The possibility of inversion is a surprising fact given the (very) strict word-order properties of Bambara:

(24)   S-Part-O-V-(X)

(25)   Fanta bé   jɛ́gɛ nyímina súgu   kɔ́nɔ
         Fanta PROG fish eat   market in
         'Fanta is eating fish at the market.'

...but it is not so surprising considering the properties of copular sentences cross linguistically.

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Inverse copular sentences in syntax and semantics

Inversion

Copular inversion is a well-known phenomenon in the literature on copular sentences. This phenomenon has never been described in Bambara.

(26)   John is the best candidate.
        The best candidate is John.

Inversion

Moro (1997): canonical and inverse copular sentences are derived from the same underlying small clause (SC):

(27) John$_i$ is [$_{SC}$ t$_i$ the best candidate]
      = raising of the subject

(28) The best candidate$_i$ is [$_{SC}$ John t$_i$]
      = raising of the predicate (Predicate Inversion)

NB: inversion is *not* Predicate Inversion:

- Inversion, but never of a predicate
- cf. predicational sentences: *Blue is the table*
  similarly in Bambara: *Kálan ká búuru* lit. warm is bread (1)
- this cannot be a mere accident!

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Inverse copular sentences in syntax and semantics

Inversion

We accept three types of expressions:

- entities (type *e*)
- predicates (type *et*)
- individual concepts (type *se*) ; Romero (2005)

Across languages, 'inversable' expressions are individual concepts (English, French, Bambara, Malagasy, Wolof, ...; Roy (in prep.))

(29)   *A good example* is China.
        My best friend is John.
        The president of Guinea is Alpha Condé.
        The captain of the team is John.

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Inverse copular sentences in syntax and semantics

Analyzing inverted copular sentences

Inverted sentences are **specificational sentences** (Higgins 1979; Declerck 1988; Heycock 1994; Mikkelsen 2005, 2006)

- the pre-copular constituent provides a variable (individual concept)
  (e.g., *the best candidate*);
  → the *variable* constitutes shared background information;
  → the subject of a specificational sentence is a Topic

- the post-copular constituent provides a *value* for the variable
  (e.g., *John*)
  → the *value* constitutes new information
  → the post-copular expression is a Focus

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Inverse copular sentences in syntax and semantics

Specificational sentences

Specificational sentences are **Topic**-**Focus** structures.

- Question-Answer congruence (Halliday 1967; Heycock 1994)
  The constituent in the answer that corresponds to the
  wh-phrase in the question is the *Focus*

  (30)   Who is your best friend?
         A: John is my best friend. (canonical)
         A': My best friend is John. (inverse)

  (31)   Who is John?
         A: John is my best friend. (canonical)
         A': #My best friend is John. (inverse)

  Conclusion: In inverse copular sentences the second member
  is necessarily new information focus.

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Topic-Focus structures

Analysis

- Hypothesis:
  Bambara *yé..yé* sentences are **Topic**-**Focus** structures, both in the canonical and in the inverse orders.

  (32)   TOPIC yé$_{COP}$ FOCUS yé

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Topic-Focus structures

Questions

In English, the two questions (*Who is your best friend?* and *Who is John?*) correspond in actuality to four distinct possibilities:

(33)   I wonder who John is [who]
        I wonder who is John
        I wonder who your best friend is [who]
        I wonder who is your best friend

Four questions are available in Bambara.

Topic-Focus structures

Bambara questions

Bambara is a wh- in-situ language

(34)   **Jɔ́n** yé   jɛ̀gɛ̀ nyími?
       who PAST fish eat
       'Who ate the fish?'

(35)   Cynthia yé   **mùn** dùn kúnǔn?
       cynthia PAST what eat   yesterday
       'What did Cynthia eat yesterday?'

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Topic-Focus structures

Question-Answer test

Q= N1 yé jɔ́n yé? $\rightarrow$ canonical order

(36)   Moussa yé   jɔ́n   yé?
          Moussa COP who yé
          'Who is Moussa?'

(37)   Moussa yé   n'térifari   yé.
          Moussa COP 1sg.best-friend yé
          'Moussa is my best friend.'
          $\rightarrow$ and *not*: N'térifari yé Moussa yé.

(38)   Moussa yé   Lajine nyɛ́màa   yé.
          Moussa COP Guinea president yé
          'Moussa is the president of Guinea.'
          $\rightarrow$ and *not*: Lajine nyɛ́màa yé Moussa yé.

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Topic-Focus structures

Question-Answer test

Q= N2 yé jɔ́n yé? $\rightarrow$ inverse order

(39) I   térifari   yé   jɔ́n   yé?
      2sg   best-friend   COP   who   yé
      'Who is your best friend?' (context: I know that you have
      a best friend, choice from a set of individuals)

(40) N'térifari   yé   Moussa yé.
      1sg.best-friend COP   Moussa yé
      'My best friend is Moussa.'
      $\rightarrow$ and *not*: Moussa yé n'térifari yé.

(41) Lajine nyɛ́màa   yé   Moussa yé.
      Guinea president COP   Moussa yé
      'The president of Guinea is Moussa.'
      $\rightarrow$ and *not*: Moussa yé Lajine nyɛ́màa yé.

Conclusion

In $\boxed{\alpha \ \text{yé}_{COP} \ \beta \ \text{yé}}$ sentences

- α constitutes the shared background information;
- β constitutes the new information (focus).

    $\rightarrow$ the constituent that provides new information in the answer is in the same position as the wh-element in the question.

yé..yé sentences are $\boxed{\textbf{Topic yé}_{COP} \ \textbf{Focus yé}}$ structures

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Topic-Focus structures

More on Bambara questions

Bambara allows for 2 additional possible questions where *jɔ́n* appears in sentence initial position:

Q= Jɔ́n yé β yé?

$\rightarrow$ issue: since Bambara does not have wh-movement, in these cases the wh-expression *jɔ́n* realizes α, i.e. the topic, rather than β, the focus.

We will address the two cases separately.

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Topic-Focus structures

Case 1

(42) Jɔ́n yé i térifari yé ? | Q= Jɔ́n yé N2 yé? |
      who COP 2sg best-friend yé
      'Who is your best friend ?' (context: I don't know if you
      have a best friend or not, I want to know the existence of
      a best friend together with his/her identity)

- In this context the focus is not only on the identity of 'who'
  but also the existence or not of a best friend.
- N2 is part of the new information focus.
- importantly, the answer has to be in **canonical** order

(43) Moussa yé n'térifari yé.
      Moussa COP 1sg.best-friend yé
      'Moussa is my best friend.'
      → and *not*: N'térifari yé Moussa yé.

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Topic-Focus structures

Case 2

(44)   Jɔ́n yé   Moussa yé ? | Q= Jɔ́n yé N1 yé? |
        who COP Moussa yé
        'Who is Moussa?'

- interpretational constraints: *Moussa* is known by the speaker and the hearer; it is not part of the new information;

- the question conveys an additional depreciative meaning (insult); cf. 'Who does Moussa think he is?'

- again, the answer has to be in **canonical** order:

    (45)   Moussa yé   Lajine nyɛ́màa yé.
            Moussa COP Guinea president yé
            'Moussa is the president of Guinea.'
            → and *not*: Lajine nyɛ́màa yé Moussa yé.

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Topic-Focus structures

Case 2

- This result is not contradictory with our claim that β is new information focus considering the form of the answer (canonical order)

- We would need to explain how the wh-element can appear in sentence initial position given that Bambara does not have wh- movement. This issue concerns the formation of questions and remains open for future research.

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Conclusion

All *yé...yé* sentences, independently of whether they are in canonical or inverse order, are Topic-Focus structures.

Analysis; following up on Roy and Shlonsky (2019):

(46)   [$_{PredP}$ Moussa$_j$ n'térifari$_i$]

(47)   [Moussa$_j$ SUBJ [$_{AspP/TP}$ yé [$_{FocP}$ n'térifari$_i$ [$_{PredP}$ t$_j$ t$_i$]]]]
       → canonical order

(48)   [n'térifari$_i$ SUBJ [$_{AspP/TP}$ yé [$_{FocP}$ Moussa$_j$ [$_{PredP}$ t$_j$ t$_i$]]]]
       → inverse order

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Analyzing *yé2*

Analyzing *yé2*

What is the nature of the second occurrence of *yé*?

- we have already discarded the analysis if *yé2* as a copula
- common alternative view: *yé2* as a postposition (Vydrin 2003, 2020, Dumestre 2003)
- however, no empirical evidence beyond apparent homophony with postposition *yé* (but homophony within functional items is rampant in Bambara.)
- semantically, we note the absence of similarity between *yé2* and the postposition (beneficiary, comitative, instrumental, etc...).

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Analyzing *yé2*

Analyzing *yé2*

Instead, we propose to analyze *yé2*, which accompanies β, precisely as a marker of new information focus. Recall that Bambara is a head final language:

(49) $[_{\alpha_j}$ SUBJ $[_{AspP/TP}$ **yé**$_{COP}$ $[_{FocP}$ β_i $\boxed{\textbf{yé}_{FOC_{new}}}$ $[_{PredP}$ t$_j$ t$_i$]]]]

(50)   Moussa yé$_{COP}$ $\boxed{\text{n'térifari yé}}$.
         N'térifari yé$_{COP}$ $\boxed{\text{Moussa yé}}$.

Conclusions

1. *Yé...yé* sentences are not equatives; instead they are asymmetrical Topic-Focus structures.

2. *yé1* is a copula

3. *yé2* is a marker of new information focus

4. Bambara, like many other unrelated languages, has a strategy for forming inversed copular sentences; the same strategy is also used for forming non-predicational sentences in the canonical order.

Thank you!

Ábarika!

Merci!

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