

Bambara Inverse Copular sentences

Siaka Sangare, Isabelle Roy

▶ **To cite this version:**

Siaka Sangare, Isabelle Roy. Bambara Inverse Copular sentences. Workshop on copular sentences :Predication, Specification, Equation, Isabelle Roy, Laboratoire de Linguistique de Nantes / CNRS, Jun 2022, Paris, France. hal-04002886

HAL Id: hal-04002886

https://univ-paris8.hal.science/hal-04002886

Submitted on 23 Feb 2023

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives| 4.0 International License

Bambara Inverse Copular sentences

Siaka Sangare, SFL Univ.Paris 8
Isabelle Roy, LLING Nantes Université

june 14-15,2022
Workshop on copular sentences:
Predication, Specification, Equation

1 Introduction: Bambara[1]

Bambara or *bámanakan* is a Niger-Congo language from the Mande family spoken mainly in Mali with its closer variants in Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Burkina Faso and Guinea Conakry. The Mande family also includes the group of Mandingue languages, an inter-intelligible homogenous linguistic continuum including Malinké, Dioula, Maninka and Kagoro. This paper focuses on Bambara.

1.1. Word-order

Bambara is a head final language; with a strict S-Part-O-V-(X) word order. Verbal particles are obligatory; they appear between S and O. V is final, but can be followed by oblique complements and adjuncts.

(1) Fanta bɛ́ jɛ̀gɛ nyímin súgu kɔ́nɔ
Fanta Prog fish eat market in
'Fanta is eating fish at the market.'

The syntax of intransitive predicates differs slightly, especially in the past. The same S-V-(X) order is exhibited, but the verbal particle is replaced in this case by an affixal TAM marker (the suffix *-na/-ra/-la* depending on verbal morphology and regional) dialectal variations):

(2) Sitan ní Hawa nàna
Sitan Conj Hawa come-Acc

[1] **Abbreviations** :**ACC**: accomplished,**ASP**:aspect , CONJ: conjunction,**COP**:copula, **FOC**:focus, **NEG**: negative, **POSS**: possessive, **Pl**:plural, **PM**: predicative marker, **QUAL**:quality, **SG**:singular, **SUBJ**:subjunctive, **PAST**:passé

‘Sitan and Hawa came’

1.2. A tonal language

Bambara is a tonal language that distinguishes high, low and increasing tones. Tones have a lexical function (3),

(3) a. b**á** (river) c. b**à**n (refuse) e. f**ú**ru (mariage) g.j**ó**li (wound)
b. b**à** (goat) d. b**á**n (die) f. f**ù**ru (stomach) h.j**ò**li (blood)

as well as a grammatical function in the expression of definiteness (9)-(10) (Dumestre (2003) and Vydrin (2019:32-36)): definiteness is marked by a low tone [̀] added at the end of the nominal phrase (leading to possible modifications of the original lexical tones):

(4) Mùsò tɛ́ yàn
woman Cop-Neg here
‘There is no woman in here.’

(5) Mùsó ̀ tɛ́ yàn
woman.Art Cop-Neg here
‘The woman is not here.’

This position is not yet a univocal agreement to the Bambara speaking community and remains a field of investigation.

1.3. Copular system

Bambara exhibits a multi-copular system that comprises four copulas (Pustet 2003, Dumestre 2003): *ká*, *bɛ́*, *dòn* and *yé*. Among the four copulative sentences, only *yé*-sentences allow for inversion.

Past descriptions (Vydrin 2003, 2020, Pustet 2003, Dumestre 2003, Sauvant 1913)

- ***ká*** copula is used in predicational sentences:
(6) Búuru ká kálan
bread Cop warm
‘The bread is warm.’

- ***bɛ́*** is used in locative and existential sentences
(7) Oumou bá bɛ́ só kɔ́no

Oumou mother COP house in
'Oumou's mother is in the house' (locative)

(8) Cɛ̀w bɛ́ yèn mùsow fàna
man.pl COP there woman.pl also
'There are men but also women.' (existential)

- ***dòn*** is used in 'presentational' sentences (in the terminology used by Sauvant 1913 and Dumestre 2003); they are similar to Higgins' identificational sentences. In these sentences, however, and contrary to English, there is no deictic subject: the copula appears in final position and is directly preceded by the element that is being identified:

(9) M' fà dòn
1sg mother COP
'It is my mother.' / 'Here is my mother.'

- ***yé*** copula is used in 'equative' sentences (Pustet 2003, Vydrin 2003, 2020, Dumestre 2003).

(10) Nìn yé námáasa yé
this COP banana COP
'This is a banana' (Pustet 2003:23)

(11) Jɛ̀kabaarà fúrabulù yé náani yé
Jɛkabaara.ART leaf.ART EQU four PP
'Jɛkabaara (a monthly newspaper) has four pages'
(litt. 'Jɛkabaara pages are four') (Vydrine, 2020:5)

This paper focuses on *yé…yé*-sentences. Against the commonly accepted analysis, we will argue that *yé…yé*-sentences are *not* equatives and propose an analysis of canonical and inverse *yé*-sentences.

1.4 Copula and Verbal particle homophony

In Mande grammatical tradition (Dumestre 2003), verbal particles are termed 'predicative markers' (PM); they express tense, aspect and mood.

(12) Ana **ká** **dòn** so
Ana SUBJ enter house
'May Ana come home'

(13) Fanta **bɛ́** jɛ̀gɛ **nyímin** súgu kɔ́nɔ
Fanta Prog fish eat market in
'Fanta is eating fish in the market.'

(14) Tìle **yé** jɛ́gɛ **jà**
sun PAST fish dry
'The sun has dried the fish.'

Verbal particles are homophonous with the copulas (NB: There is no equivalent verbal particle for *dòn.*)

For some authors (e.g., Pustet 2003), there is no distinction between the verbal / non-verbal systems: copulas and verbal particles are the same grammatical items used with verbs and non-verbal predicates alike.

• In actuality, verbal particles and copulas are *not* the same grammatical items (cf., Sangare 2021):

- Their respective semantic contributions are not identical:

(15) Sara **ká** dòn só kɔ́nɔ
Sara SUBJ enter house in
'May Sara come into the house now'

(16) Umu **ká** jàn
Umu COP long
'Umu is tall' and *not*: 'May Umu be tall'

- TAM markers have positive and negative forms (like copulas do as well). Negatives forms of TAM markers are not (always) identical to the negative form of the corresponding copula :

Table 1:

Copulas	positive form		negative form
	ká	/	**mán**
	bɛ́	/	tɛ́
	yé	/	**tɛ́**
	dòn	/	tɛ̀
verbal particles	positive form		negative form
	ká	/	**kàná**
	bɛ́	/	tɛ́

yé / **má**

(17) Umu **kàná** jɛ̀gɛ nyími
Umu NEG fish eat
'May Umu not eat the fish'

(18) Umu **mán** ján
Umu NEG tall
'Umu is not tall'

• We conclude that copulas are *not* identical to verbal particles and are restricted to non-verbal predication..

• It is possible that copulas are themselves verbal. They are intransitive verbs, and exhibit the normal syntax of intransitives.

cf. (14) Umu ká jàn **S-V-XP(AP)**
Umu COP long
'Umu is tall'

cf. (7) Oumou bá bɛ́ só kɔ́no **S-V-XP(PP)**
Oumou mother COP house in
'Oumou's mother is in the house'

cf. (9) M' fà dòn **S-V**
1sg mother COP
'It is my father.' / 'Here is my father.'

• Copulas can combine with tense markers:

(19) Rosine tún yé dén nyùman yé
Rosine PAST COP child good yé
Rosine was a good child

The complete study of the interaction between the four copulas and the TAM system is still under investigation.

2. *yé…yé* copular sentences

2.1-Two occurrences of *yé*

Pustet (2003:23) treats both occurrences of *yé* as a copula.

(20) Nìn yé nàmàsa yé
this **COP** banana COP
'This is a banana' (Pustet 2003:23)

However, only the first *yé,* namely *yé1*, is the actual copula in the sentence: only *yé1* changes to the negative form in a negative context:

(21) Nìn *yé* / tɛ́ nàmàsa yé/*tɛ́
this Cop **NEG-Cop** banana *yé*
'This is not a banana'

We will come back to the analysis of the second *yé*, namely *yé2*, in section 3.3

2.2-Inversion

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

- Moro (1997): Predicate Inversion analysis: canonical and inverse copular sentences are derived by movement from the same underlying small clause (SC):

(23) John$_i$ is [$_{SC}$ t$_i$ the culprit] = raising of the subject
(24) The culprit$_i$ is [$_{SC}$ John t$_i$] = raising of the predicate

Bambara: *yé*-sentences allow for inversion:

(25) Né yé kàlàndèn yé
1sg COP student yé
'I am a student'

(26) Kàlàndèn yé né yé
student COP 1Sg yé
'The student is me'

- *yé*-sentences are the only copular sentences that allow for inversion. In particular, true predicational sentences using the copula *ká* do not permit the raising of the predicate:

(27) a. Jíri ká sùrun b. *Sùrun ká jíri

tree Cop short short Cop tree
'the tree is small'

This is not different from what we see in languages like English or French: **Blue is the table / *Bleue c'est la table*. 'Inversable' expressions are not predicates; we analyze them as individual concepts (Romero 2005, Heycock 2012, Roy 2022)

- In inverse sentences, *yé1* remains the copula; this can be shown wiht the negatives forms:

(28) Né **tɛ́** kàlàndèn yé *Né yé kalanden te
1sg NEG-COP student yé
'I am a student'

(29) Kàlàndèn **tɛ́** né yé *Kalanden yé ne te
student NEG-COP 1Sg yé
'The student is me'

2.3 Against the equative analysis

The apparent symmetry in *yé*-sentences (two *yé* forms and the possibility of inversion) has led many researchers to assume that *yé*-sentences are equatives, ie. they express identity statements. (Vydrin 2003, 2020, Pustet 2003, Dumestre 2003 and others)

Arguments against this position:

➢ **Interpretational problem**

The meaning of *yé*-sentences is <u>*not*</u> that of an identity between two referential expressions. Not a single example in the literature can rightly be qualified as equative / identity. These sentences cannot mean **[[X]] = [[Y]]**

-Identification

(30) Nìn yé námáasa yé
this COP banana YE
'This is a banana' (Pustet 2003:23)

-Predication

(31)Fanta kulibali yé muso hakilima yé
fanta kulibali Cop woman intelligent YE
'Fanta Kulibali is an intelligent woman' (Vydrin 2003)

-Specification

(32) Kalanden yé Hawa yé
Hawa Cop student YE
'Hawa is a student'

➢ **Plural**

In *yé*-sentences the second nominal expression (i.e. post copular expression) is not pluralized even when the subject plural:

(33) Né ní Umi yé kálanden yé
1SG Conj Umi COP student yé
'I and Umy are students.'

(34) Né ní Umi yé kálanden.(***w)** yé
1SG Conj Umi COP student.(*Pl) yé
'I and Umy are the students.'

We note that impossibility to realize plural is a property of predicates in general in Bambara (including verbs), suggesting again, that the post-copular expression is not a referential expression.

NB: The plural marker .***w*** always appears on the rightmost element in the DP:

(35) kálanden.**w**
student.pl
'The students'

(36) kálanden nyùma sàba.**w**
student good three Pl
'The three good student

➢ *yé*-sentences are not equatives; the post-copular expression is not referential.

2.4 Nominal predicates

Regarding the inventory of Bambara copulas, *ká* was said to be compatible with adjectives only and *yé* with nouns only (as early as Sauvant 1913). On the surface, however, Bambara seems to allow for certain adjectives in *yé*-sentences, and specifically adjectives derived in *-man*.

There are two classes of adjectives in Bambara: homorganic and heterorganic, or descriptively simplex and morphologically complex.

- **Homorganic** or simplex adjectives (e.g., nùgu (smooth), fɛ́gɛn (light), súma (slow), bìlen (red)) are only compatible with *ká* copula.

(37) Jí ká kálan *ji yé kalan yé
water COP hot
'The water is hot'

- **Heterorganic** or complex adjectives are adjectives obtained by suffixation of a simplex adjective, for instance with the suffix -*man*.[2] These (apparent) adjectives are compatible with copula *yé* only, and not *ká*:
-

(38) Jíri yé sùrùman yé *jiri ká sùrùman
tree COP short Foc
'The tree is short'

There are reasons to believe that -*man* adjectives are in fact predicates inside a reduced relative clause. One argument comes from the copula; another argument comes from their contrastive interpretation (Acedo-Matellan & Roy *in progress*):

- -*man* adjectives cannot take copula *ká*

(39) Jíri **ká** súrun ≠ * Jíri ká sùrùnman
Tree COP short
'The tree is short'

-man adjectives in *yé*-sentences necessarily have a contrastive interpretation, where the subject is contrasted with a set of entities:

---

[2] There exist also adjectivizing suffixes that attach to nouns -*ma* and verbs, -*ta*:

(40) Malado dén yé sárama yé
Malado child COP beauty-Adj yé
'Malado's child is beautiful'

(41) Ana ká búuru yé fèereta yé, dúnta tɛ̀
Ana Poss bread COP saleable yé, edible Cop.Neg
'Ana's bread is for sale, not for food'

(42) Jíri yé sùrùman yé
tree COP short yé
'The tree is short' = [the tree is the one that is short among a set of objets]
cf. *the black dog* (intersective reading)
the dog that is black (necessarily contrastive,
i.e. that dog among a set of other dogs)
vs. *the dog that is barking/sleeping* (not necessarily contrastive)
(Acedo-Matellan & Roy in progress)

➢ Bambara *-man* adjectives are predicates inside a reduced relative clauses;
[N that is *sùrun*]

➢ to sum up; *yé* sentences are nominal copular sentences.

3-Topic-Focus structure

3.1 Introduction

Bambara yé-sentences (nominal copular sentences) allow for inversion. Inverse sentences are specificational sentences wherein the specificational subject is the topic and the complement the focus.

3.2 Question-test in Bambara

The unmarked way to ask the questions *Who is John ?* and *Who is your best friend?* is with the wh-expression after the copula and before *yé2*.

- ***"Who is John?"***

Q= N1 yé jɔ́n yé ?

[A] (43) Musa yé **jɔ́n** yé?
Musa COP who yé
'Who is Musa?'

-We answer by :

(44) Musa yé **n' térifari** yé
Musa COP 1sg.best-friend yé
'Musa is my best friend.'

→***not***

(45) N'térifari yé Musa yé
1sg.best-friend COP Musa yé
'My best friend is Musa'

- ***"Who is your best friend?"***

Q= N2 yé jɔ́n yé?

[B] (46) Í térifari yé Jɔ́n yé ?
2sg best-friend COP who yé
'Who is your best friend?'
context: It is known you have a best friend, so you may choose among a set of individuals

-We answer by :

(47) N'térifari yé **Musa** yé →***not*** (48) Musa yé n' térifari yé
1sg.best-friend COP Musa yé Musa COP 1sg.best-friend yé
'My best friend is Musa' 'Musa is my best friend.'
[>different from English]

Bambara also allows for other question orders, where the wh- *jon* appears in sentence initial position. These questions, however, have a marked interpretation.

[**C]** (49) Jɔ́n yé Musa yé?
Who COP Musa yé
'Who is Musa?'
Interpretational constraints: The question conveys an depreciative meaning (insult) cf. 'Who is this Musa?' / 'Who does he think he is?'
'C'est qui ce Moussa?' (our qui il se prend?, qu'est-ce qu'il pense qu'il est?)

-The answer will be:
(50) Musa yé **Lajine nyɛ́màa** yé → ***not*** Lajine nyɛ́màa yé Musa yé
Musa COP Guinea president yé
'Musa is the president of Guinea'

So the new information focus necessarily is on the second DP, in this context as well.

[D] (51) Jɔ́n yé í térifari 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 as well (N2 is new information focus)

-The answer will be (45)

(52) N'térifari yé **Musa** yé →***not*** (*53*)Musa yé n'terifari yé
1sg.friend.best COP Musa yé Musa COP 1Sg friend.best yé
'My best friend is Musa' 'Musa is my best friend'

➢ **Conclusions**: Bambara *yé*-sentences have a fixed information structure both in the canonical and the inverse orders:

- Focus is always on DP2
  DP1Cop DP2$_{FOCUS}$ yé

➢ All nomical copular sentences in Bambara have the properties of inverse copular sentences in languages like English; and can potentially be analyzed by movement and focalization, along the lines of Shlonsky & Rizzi (2018) and Roy & Shlonsky (2019).

3.3-Analysis of *yé2*

- *yé2* is usually analyzed as the postposition *yé* (Vydrin 2003, 2020, Dumestre 2003)
- However, no one has provided empirical evidence beyond apparent homophony; but homophony within functional items is rampant in Bambara.

• Semantically, we note the absence of similarity with postposition *yé* (beneficiary, comitative, instrumental, etc...).

• Instead, we propose that *yé2* is a marker of new information focus.

(54) N1 yé$_{cop}$ N2 yé$_{FOCnew}$

• Bambara has a marker of contrastive focus: *dè* which can co-occur with *yé*

(55) Mariam yé n'térifari dè yé

Mariam COP 1sg best-friend FOC_{CONTRA} FOC_{NEW}
'Mariam is my best friend (only friendship and nothing else ; not my fiancee for instance)

Ingredients of the analysis:

(56) [Musa$_i$ subj [$_{AspP/TP}$ yé [$_{FocP}$ n't´erifari$_j$ yé [$_{PredP}$ t$_j$ t$_i$]]]]

- flat SC rather hierarchical SC?
- syntax of copulas: *yé* inserted in T/Asp projection directly?
- focalization of DP2
- movement of DP1 to Subj position

4 Conclusions

yé…yé sentences are not equatives; instead they are asymmetric DP-Cop-Focus structures., in which DP2 is necesarily (new information) focus.

All *yé*-sentences, whether canonical or inverse, involve focalization.

References

Declerck, Renaat, 1988. *Studies on copular sentences, clefts and pseudo clefts.* Leuven: Leuven University Press/Foris

Dumestre, Gerard. 2003. *Grammaire fondamentale du bambara*. Paris: Kathala.

Dumestre, Gerard. 2011. *Dictionnaire bambara-français*, Paris: Karthala

Heycock, Caroline, 1994. *"The internal structure of small clause: New evidence from inversion*." In Proceedings of the 25th North East Linguistic Society.

Heycock Caroline and Anthony Kroch. 1997. *"Inversion and Equation in Copular Sentences*." ZAS Papers in Linguistics vol. 10, 71-87.
Higgins, F. Roger. 1979. *The Pseudo-Cleft Construction in English*. New York : Garland.

Moro, Andrea. 1997. *The Raising of Predicates : Predicative Noun Phrases and the Theory of Clause Structure*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

Mikkelsen, Line, 2005. *Copular clauses: specification, predication and equation.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Pustet, Regina. 2003. *Copulas: Universals in the Categorization of the Lexicon*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Romero, Maribel, 2005. "*Concealed questions and specificational subjects*". Linguistics and Philosophy 28:687–737.

Roy, Isabelle (in prep.). "*Predication, Specification, Equation*." U. de Nantes.

Roy Isabelle and Ur Shlonsky. 2019. "*Aspects of the syntax of ce in French copular sentences*." in *The Grammar of Copulas Across Languages*, ed. M. Arche, R. Mar`ın and A. F´abregas. Oxford : Oxford University Press. 153-169.

Sauvant, Le P.. 1913. *Grammaire bambara*. Société des Missionnaires d'Afrique.

Vydrin, Valentin. 2003. "*Non-Verbal Predication and Copulas in Three Mande Languages*."

Vydrin, Valentin. 2019. "*Cours de Grammaire Bambara*." INALCO Presses