Review

Ibibio predicative copular constructions

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The Ibibio language is a member of the lower cross group of languages within the (New) Benue-Congo sub-family of the Niger-Congo family. It is predominantly spoken in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Ibibio has two types of copular construction; a locative copular construction and a predicative copular one. This paper provides a descriptive account of the predicative sub type of copular construction in Ibibio and has identified two types; one with an overt copular verb *dó,'be'* which licenses a copular subject noun phrase in the subject position with a predicative adjective/noun phrase copular complement and the other without any overt copula but consists of just a copular subject noun phrase juxtaposed with a predicative verbal adjective complement. The paper observes that the predicative copular verb *dó* can remain covert in a predicative copular construction if its complement is a verbal adjective and must however, be overt if its complement is a predicative adjective/noun phrase. Semantically, both types of Ibibio predicative copular construction are 'marked' copular constructions since each is not an option freely available for the other in the grammar of Ibibio. It is also observed that the predicates of the two types of predicative copular construction project structural relations whose semantics implicates stativity. This study is based on a database including both actual and potential words, which standard Ibibio speakers agree are in consistent with their language rules.

Key words: Predicative, copula, complement, verbal adjective, covert.

INTRODUCTION

It is a well known fact that different languages have different possible syntactic structures to encode essentially the same or similar meanings. In many cases, the different constructions across languages which are used to encode the same meaning or very similar meanings may also have many structural similarities. For instance, the most basic intransitive clause in two different languages will tend to contain a noun phrase and a verb. However, the most divergent constructions between languages are perhaps those which encode notions such as identity and classification, the predicative copular constructions. Copular constructions have attracted the attention of many scholars and thus, have been the focus of many studies such as Meillet (1906), Benveniste (1950), Verhaar (1967: 72),Schachter (1985, 1984), Declerck (1988), Hengeveld (1992), Rosén (1996)

Stassen (1997) , Déprez and Vinet (1997), Syea (1997), Butt et al. (1999), Adger and Ramchard (2003), Avgustinova and Uszkoreit (2003), Anyanwu (2004) Dalrymple et al. (2004), Müller 2006), Nordlinger and Sadler (2006), Anyanwu (2010) among many others. These studies have indeed observed that whereas some languages have only one type of predicative copular construction, others may have two or more different predicative copular constructions. The choice of particular copular constructions by a language depends upon discourse and grammatical factors such as tense and aspect, polarity, the status of the clause as main or subordinate, the person of the copula subject, and the semantic relations expressed (e.g. identification/ classifi-cation, existence, location, possession, etc.).

With respect to the typology of predicative copular constructions, it has been extensively reported in the literature that some languages obligatorily have an overt copula verb, which heads the VP of a predicative copular construction while in some other languages, the predicative copular construction may consist of constituents that are just juxtaposed without any overt copula. Between these two extreme possibilities, there

are other variations in the strategies used as well as applicable constraints in the expression of copular constructions (Curnow, 2000; Pustet, 2003). In fact, within the same language, there may also be optional variations. In Russian, Arabic (Avgustinova and Uszkoreit 2003) and 'Teꞔeꞔ' (an Ogoni language, Nigeria) (Anyanwu, 2004) for instance, the copula is not overt in the present tense but must be overt in the future/past tense, while in Modern Irish (Carnie, 1997) and Scottish Gaelic (Adger and Ramchand, 2003) the copula must be overt in a predicative copular construction irrespective of its tense. However, in Chinese (Tang, 2001) the copula can be optional in a predicative copular construction.

Despite the typological differences, Adger and Ramchand (2003) have assumed that the different forms of copula construction have essentially one underlying structure. They however, attribute the divergence in structure to the semantic specification of the predicate of the copular construction. Thus, according to them, interplay of syntax and semantics in a predicative construction leads to the use of divergent strategies in the formation of copular clauses. Obviously, semantic considerations are significantly involved in the choice of the strategies employed in expressing the copular constructions in many languages and this is a fact which Pustet (2003) emphasizes by saying that "semantics conditions linguistic form". This same observation has been made by Adger and Ramchand (2003: 325) when they posit that 'there is an extremely tight relationship between the syntax and semantics of predication' adding 'that semantic predication always feeds off a syntactic structure containing a predicational head'.

This paper provides a descriptive account of predicative copular constructions in Ibibio. Ibibio is spoken in fourteen (Uyo, Itu, Uruan, Etinan, Nsit Ibom, Nsit Atai, Nsit Ubium, Ibesikpo Asutan, Ikono, Ini, Ikot Abasi, Mkpat Enin, Ibiono Ibom, Onna and Eket (Urua, 2007)) of the thirty-one local government areas of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The data on which this study is based were collected from adult speakers of Ibibio by the author using an elicitation list. The database consists of acceptable expressions collected from standard Ibibio speakers within Uyo metropolis.

IBIBIO PREDICATIVE COPULAR CONSTRUCTIONS

Ibibio grammaticalizes two major types of predicative copular construction; locative and predicative copular constructions with copular verbs which are either inherently locative for locative copulative constructions or predicative for predicative copular constructions. Unlike in the semantically situation-descriptive Locative Copular Constructions (1a-e) (Anyanwu, 2010) where there can be different inherent locative copular verbs, a copular predicative construction in Ibibio may show overt evidence for a predicative copular verb *do* 'be' (2 to 4) while in some other grammatical contexts there is no overt copular verb (5a-c).

1a) *ébót ókò á-bà   mí*
    goat   that   3sg.cl-LOC.COP (at)   here
    'That goat is here.'

1b) *ébót   á-síné   ké   úfộk*
    goat   3sg.cl-LOC.COP (in)   LOC.P   house
    'The goat is in the house.'

1c) *òkón   á-bà   ké   úfộk*
    Okon   3sg.cl-LOC.COP (at)   LOC.P   house
    'Okon is at the house.'

1d) *íyák á-dórò   ké   ókpókóró*
    fish 3sg.cl-LOC.COP (on) LOC.P table
     The fish is on the table.'

(1e) *íkpán) á-bà   ké   ìdàk   ókpókóró*
    spoon   3sg.cl-LOC.COP LOC.P under   table
    'The spoon is under the table.'

A predicative construction in Ibibio on the other hand basically differs from a locative one since it obviously lacks an inherently locative verb or a locative preposition. It consists of an NP at the subject position and a VP predicate whose head may have an overt copula verb *dó* complemented by an adjective phrase/noun phrase or a VP whose head does not an overt copula but a verbal adjectival complement. In this paper, we shall examine the predicative copular constructions in Ibibio with a view to highlighting their syntax and semantics.

Predicative copular constructions in Ibibio

In Ibibio, as already stated, two types of predicative copular constructions exist: one with the overt copula *dó* and the other with any covert copula. In both types, the complement of the overt and covert copular verb refers or characterizes the subject of the construction. These two types of constructions are further examined as follows.

Overt copular predicative construction

In the overt copular predicative construction, the overt copula is always *dó* whether in the present tense (2a-d), future (2e-f) or past tense (2g-h) and the predicative copular construction where it occurs can be used to express certain range of functional semantic notions. These include ascriptive/specifying/defining (2a-b), possessive and *emphatic* locative functions. The complement of the overt copula *dó* can be made the *topic* of a predicative construction (cf. 2d).

Ascriptive/specifying/defining: For the expression of the ascriptive/specifying/defining semantic notion, the

copula *dó* is complemented by a predicative adjective or an NP, which ascribes, specifies, defines or characterizes its subject NP as shown in following examples (2a-h).

(2a) kóòp   á-dò   òbúbít
    Cup   3sg.cl-PRED.be   black
    'The cup is black.'

(2b) òkón   á-dò   ìmə́k(ówódèèn)
    Okon   3sg.cl-PRED.be   short (person)
    Okon is short man'

(2c) òkón   á-dò   ìnọ́
    Okon 3sg.cl-PRED.be   thief
    'Okon is a thief.'

(2d) ówódèèn   ke   òkón   á-dò
    man   TOP   Okon   3sg.cl-PRED.be
    Okon is a (real) man.'

(2e) kóòp   á-yáá-dó   òbúbít
    Cup   3sg.cl-Fut.-PRED.be   black
    The cup will be black.'

(2f) òkón   á-yáá-yíp   ìnọ́
    Okon   3sg.cl-Fut.-PRED.be   thief
    Okon will be a thief.'

(2g) òkón   á-kê-dò   ìnọ́
    Okon   3sg.cl-past-PRED.be   thief
    Okon was a thief.'

(2h) òkón   á-kê-dò   ìmə́k ówódèèn
    Okon   3sg.cl-past-PRED.be   short man
    Okon was a short man.'

Possessive function: For the expression of the possessive semantic notion, the copula *dó* is followed by a predicative possessive pronoun as the following examples (3a-c) show.
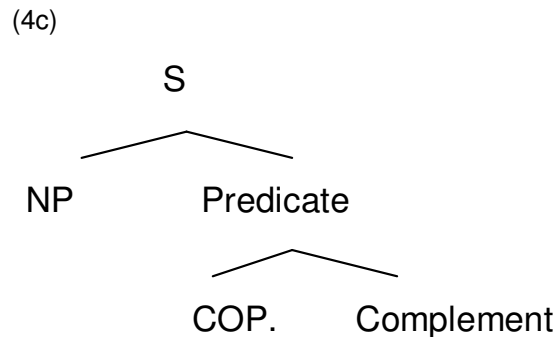
(3a) okpókóró á-dò   ákè   m̀mì
    table   3sg.cl-PRED.be   own   mine
    'The table is mine.'

(3b) okpókóró á-dò   ákè   ǹnyìn
    table   3sg.cl-PRED.be   own   mine
    'The table is theirs.'

(3c) ébót   á-dò   ákè   mọ̀
    goat   3sg.cl-PRED.be   own   his/her
    'The goat is his/hers.'

Emphatic locative function: For the expression of the emphatic locative semantic notion, the copula *dó* is followed by a deitic locative adverbial as in examples 4a and b.

(4a) òkón   á-dò   kó
    Okon   3sg.cl-be   there
    'Okon, he is there'

(4b) òkón   á-dò   mì
    Okon   3sg.cl-be   here
    'Okon, he is here'

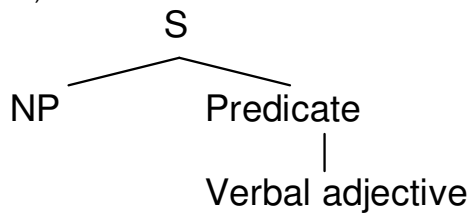The structure of the overt copular predicative construction is illustrated in (4c)

(4c)

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                    S
              /           \
          NP              Predicate
                         /          \
                      COP.        Complement
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Covert predicative copular constructions

For the expression of the covert copular predicative constructions, the subject of the sentence is in juxtaposition with a predicate which consists of a verbal adjective. Unlike in the overt type, the complement of the covert predicative construction cannot be made a topic (cf. 5d). Also, there is no restriction on the subject of the covert copular predicative construction; it may be a substantive NP or a pronoun which may be overt or not. This type of construction is always in the present tense. However, if one wishes to express tense (e.g. the past tense) straightforwardly *máá* is attached to the verbal adjectival predicate as in (6a-b).

(5a) òkón   á-nyọ́ọ̀n
    Okon   3sg.cl-verbal.ADJ (tall)
    Okon is tall.'

(5b) ànyé   á-yàìyá
    She/he   3sg.cl-verbal.ADJ (handsome)
    'She/he is beautiful/ handsome.'

(5c) á-môhó
    3sg.cl-verbal.ADJ (short)
    'She/he is short.'

(5d) * á-nyọ́ọ̀n   ke   étò
    3sg.cl-verbal.ADJ (tall) TOP tree
    'The tree is tall.'

The structure of covert predicative construction is illustrated in (5e).

5e)

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          S
        /   \
      NP     Predicate
               |
            Verbal adjective
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When the covert copular predicative constructions are put in the past or negated (6e-f), they still do not manifest any overt copula as subsequently shown. The fact that they can be put in the past with the past tense marker -*máá*- supports the position that the subject complements in (6a-d) are verbal adjectives.

(6a) *òkón   á-máá-nyọ́ọ̀n*
    Okon   3sg.cl-PAST-verbal.ADJ (tall)
    'Okon was tall.'

(6b) *òkón   á-máá-yàìyá*
    Okon   3sg.cl-PAST-verbal.ADJ (handsome)
    Okon was handsome.'

(6c) *òkón   á-máá-môhó*
    Okon   3sg.cl-PAST-verbal.ADJ (short)
    'Okon was short.'

(6d) *étò   á-máá-nyọ́ọ̀n*
    tree   3sg.cl-PAST-verbal.ADJ (tall)
    The tree was tall.'

(6e) *òkón*   **í-nyọ́ọ̀n-họ́**
    Okon 3sg.cl-verbal.ADJ (tall)-Neg.
    'Okon is not tall.'

(6f) *òkón*   **í-yàíyá-ké**
    Okon   3sg.cl-verbal.ADJ (handsome)-Neg.
    Okon is not handsome.'

Supporting evidence that the subject complements in (5 and 6) are predicative verbal adjectives is shown in (7) where their attributive counterparts (true adjectives) modify or are in attributive modification to an accompanying NP. Note the fact that there is also a difference in morphological shape between the verbal adjective complements and the true adjectives.

(7a) *òkón   á-dò   ànyán ówódèèn*
    Okon 3sg.cl-PRED.be tall   man
    'Okon is a tall man.'

(7b) *òkón   á-dò   ùyàìyáówódèèn*
    Okon   3sg.cl-PRED.be handsome   man
    'Okon is a handsome man.'

(7c) *òkón   á-dò   ìmə́k ówódèèn*
    Okon 3sg.cl-PRED.be   short   man

'Okon is a short man.'

Also note that these true adjectives do not change their morphological shape in both their attributive (8a-b) and predicative usage (8a-b)

(8a) *étò   á-dò   ànyán*
    tree   3sg.cl-PRED.be   tall
    'The tree is tall.'

(8b) *ókpókóró á-dò   ìmə́k*
    table   3sg.cl-PRED.be   short
    'The table is short.'

THE SEMANTICS OF IBIBIO PREDICATIVE COPULAR CONSTRUCTIONS

Ibibio predicative copular constructions (both the overt and the covert copular type) semantically, implicate stativity. Stativity, telicity, as well as the other aspectual classes (activities, accomplishments, achievements), pertain not to verbs but to the predicates which verbs head (cf., Dowty, 1979, 1991; Tenny, 1992, 1994). Thus, it would be reasonable to entertain the possibility that these notions, including stativity in particular, are never features of individual lexical items (e.g., verbs, nouns, adjectives, adpositions) but rather of whole predicate. In English for instance, Dowty (1979) provides some tests to decide whether an English *predicate* is stative. They are as follows:

1. Stative verbs do not occur in the progressive aspect:

"Mary knows the answer".

2. Stative verbs cannot be complements of "force":

"Mary forced John to know the answer".

3. Stative verbs do not occur as imperatives.

"Know the answer!"

4. Stative verbs cannot appear in the pseudo-cleft construction:

*What Mary did was know the answer.

The predicates of Ibibio predicative copular constructions are static; they have no duration, do not include any distinguished end point in their basic denotation and their subjects do not include any agents. With respect to the semantics of predicative constructions in Ibibio, we shall follow ideas put forward by Hale and Keyser (2002) to assume that the predicates of the overt and covert predicative copular constructions project structural relations whose semantics implicates stativity. Thus, Ibibio predicative copular constructions involve central

coincidence since in each case, the copular subject NP corresponds to an entity that possesses the attribute denoted by its copular predicative complement. The relationship between the subject and its predicate complement is not one of change. The entity denoted by the subject possesses the attribute and does not come to have or lack the attribute. Both the subject and its attribute as expressed in the predicate coincide to define a set whose members are at once a subject entity and its predicate. Thus, in a predication of the type represented (8b) which has the prototypical copula *dò*, the property denoted by the syntactic complement *ìmə́k* 'short' (a predicative adjective) is attributed to the entity denoted by the subject. The property *ìmə́k* 'short' coincides temporally and spatially with the subject entity, *ókpókóró* 'table'. This shows that stativity is also a feature of not only the verbal heads but also a property of the entire predicative copular construction which obviously results from the semantic composition of the meaningful elements (Anyanwu, 2004).

The stativity of Ibibio predicative constructions is also readily shown by some language internal mechanism and cross-linguistic test. First, without the *máá* the past tense marker, a predicative construction will have a non-past interpretation as shown in the examples 2 to 5. Giving the predicative construction a past tense reading, requires *máá*, a past tense marker (6a-d), effectively adding some kind of eventive interpretation. Secondly, the perfective high- low tone marker can combine with a lexical verb (e.g. *wèt* 'write') as in (9) to indicate perfectivity or completeness but with the Ibibio predicative copula *dò* (10) with its predicate complement, the same high-low tone marker still gets a stative reading/interpretation.

(9) *ènò á-wêt*
    Eno 3sg.cl-PRED.be Perf.. write
    'Eno has written'

(10) *étò á-dô   ànyán*
     tree   3sg.cl-PRED.be.   tall
     'The tree is getting tall.'

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Thus far, we have been examining predicative copular constructions in Ibibio and have observed that they can be expressed with an overt or covert copula. Whereas the overt copula takes a predicative adjective or an NP complement, the covert one must take a verbal adjective as a complement. With respect to the semantics of predicative copular constructions in Ibibio, we have followed ideas put forward by Hale and Keyser (2002) to assume that the overt or covert predicative construction projects a structural relation whose semantics implicates stativity (Anyanwu, 2004). We have also demonstrated

their stativity status through some language internal mechanism and a cross-linguistic test.

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