
Copular clause typology and pronominal elements: Insights from Osanyin

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Non-predicational copular sentences across various languages have been shown to exhibit an extra (often pronominal) element. Cross-linguistically, this element has received diverse theoretical treatments: for French *ce*, it has been argued to occupy a ‘high’ subject position due to agreement failure (Roy & Shlonsky 2019), while for Russian *èto*, it is claimed to be the D head within the ‘big DP’ that occupies Spec,TP (Burukina, Borise & den Dikken 2024).

In this study, we contribute to this typological landscape by presenting novel data from Osanyin (Benue-Congo, a variant of Oko). Osanyin is shown to feature a pronominal element *a-* in both binominal equative and specificational copular clauses in addition to the copula, as illustrated in (1b&c).

- (1) a. Osebi wọ erunro.
Osebi COP farmer
‘Osebi is a farmer.’
b. Osebi a-wọ erunro.
Osebi A-COP farmer
‘Osebi is the farmer.’
c. Opa erinro owowo a-wọ Osigbodi.
age.group leader new A-COP Osigbodi
‘The new age group leader is Osigbodi.’

We propose that the post-copular DP originates as the subject of a small clause (PredP) and moves to a low focus position (Shlonsky & Rizzi 2018). Following Burukina et al. (2024), we analyze DP2 in the small clause as a ‘big DP’ with the pronominal element *a-* as its head. This complex DP2 subsequently moves to Spec,TP as an instance of predicate inversion (Moro 1997). This analysis accounts for the surface word order and interpretive properties of these clauses.

Consistent with equative and specificational sentences in other languages (Higgins 1979; Moro 1997; Heycock & Kroch 2002; a.o.), the Osanyin structures exhibit specific information structure properties; extraction is not permitted; and the post-copular DP is referential. Crucially, Osanyin, as an article-rich language, provides explicit morphological evidence for the referentiality of the post-copular nominal, offering crucial new evidence for this cross-linguistic construction.

References: • Burukina, I., Borise, L. & M. den Dikken (2024). A ‘big DP’ analysis of Russian copular constructions with *èto*. *Glossa* 9(1), 1–37. • Roy, I. & U. Shlonsky (2019). Aspects of the syntax of *ce* in French copular sentences. In *The Grammar of Copulas Across Languages* 153–169.