



**HAL**  
open science

## Some Aspects of Bambara yé....yé sentences

Siaka Sangare

► **To cite this version:**

Siaka Sangare. Some Aspects of Bambara yé....yé sentences. Colloque Ecole Doctorale Cognition Langage Interaction Paris 8, Nov 2022, Paris, France. hal-03982661

**HAL Id: hal-03982661**

**<https://univ-paris8.hal.science/hal-03982661>**

Submitted on 10 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.

# Some Aspects of Bambara *yé...yé* sentences

SANGARE SIAKA, Université Paris 8

COLLOQUE CLI, 24 Nov, 2022

**ká** copula is used in predicational sentences:

- (6) Búuru **ká** kálan  
bread Cop warm  
'The bread is warm.'

**Be** is used in locative and existential sentences

- (7) Umu bá bé só kóno  
Oumou mother COP house in  
'Oumou's mother is in the house' (**locative**)
- (8) Cèw bé yèn mùsow fàna  
man.pl COP there woman.pl also  
'There are men but also women.'

(**existential**)

**Dòn** is used in 'presentational' sentences

- (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)

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

## 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) Umu **ká** jàn  
Umu Cop tall  
'Umu is 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 :

ká / **mán**    be, **yé** / **té**    dòn / **té**

## INTRODUCTION

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 bé jege nyimin súgu kóno  
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  
'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. **bá** (river) c. **bàn** (refuse) e. **fúru** (marriage) g.**jóli** (wound) b. **bà** (goat) d. **bán** (die) f. **fùru** (stomach) h.**jòli** (blood)
- (4) Mùso **té** yàn    (5) Mùso **té** yàn  
woman Cop-Neg here    woman.Art Cop-Neg here  
'There is no woman in 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, bé, dòn and yé, Among the four copulative sentences, only yé allow for inversion.

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

## 2.yé...yé copular sentences

### 2.1-Two occurrences of yé (Where is the copula)

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

- (13) Nín **yé** námàsa **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:

Nín yé /te námàsa yé/\*té

this Cop **NEG-Cop** banana yé  
'This is not a banana'

### 2.2-Inversion

## 2.3 Against the equative analysis

### Interpretational problem

The meaning of *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. These sentences cannot mean **[[X]] = [[Y]]**

#### -Identification

- (14) Nín yé námáasa yé  
this COP banana YE  
'This is a banana' (Pustet 2003:23)

#### -Predication

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

#### -Specification

- (16) 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:

- (17) Né ní Umi yé kálanden>(\*w) yé

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 so *yé*-sentences are not equatives;

## 3. yé2 Analysis

- *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

N1 *yé*<sub>cop</sub> N2 *yé*<sub>FOCnew</sub>

- (18) Mariam yé n'térifari dè yé  
Mariam COP 1sg best-friend FOCCONTRA FOCNEW  
'Mariam is my best friend (only friendship and nothing else ; not my fiancée)

## CONCLUSION

*yé...yé* sentences are not equatives; instead they are asymmetric DP-Cop-Focus structures., in which DP2 is necessarily (new information) focus. All *yé*-sentences, whether canonical or inverse, may involve focalization.