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► 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

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

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COLLOQUE CLI, 24 Nov, 2022

ká copula is used in predicational sentences:

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

Bé 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)

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 jẹge nyimin sugu 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 woman Cop-Neg here
‘There is no woman in here.’
(5) Mùso té 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*, *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* nàmàsa *yé*
this COP banana COP
‘This is a banana’ (Pustet 2003:23)

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

Nín *yé* / tɛ nàmàsa *yé* / *tɛ

this Cop **NEG-Cop** banana *yé*
‘This is not a banana’

2.2-Inversion

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.

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 hakimima *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*_{Cop} N2 *yé*_{FOC_{new}}

- (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)