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# The Grammar of Copulas Across Languages

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# The Grammar of Copulas Across Languages

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MARÍA J. ARCHE, ANTONIO FÁBREGAS,  
AND RAFAEL MARÍN

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## *General preface*

The theoretical focus of this series is on the interfaces between subcomponents of the human grammatical system and the closely related area of the interfaces between the different subdisciplines of linguistics. The notion of ‘interface’ has become central in grammatical theory (for instance, in Chomsky’s Minimalist Program) and in linguistic practice: work on the interfaces between syntax and semantics, syntax and morphology, phonology and phonetics, etc. has led to a deeper understanding of particular linguistic phenomena and of the architecture of the linguistic component of the mind/brain.

The series covers interfaces between core components of grammar, including syntax/morphology, syntax/semantics, syntax/phonology, syntax/pragmatics, morphology/phonology, phonology/phonetics, phonetics/speech processing, semantics/pragmatics, and intonation/discourse structure, as well as issues in the way that the systems of grammar involving these interface areas are acquired and deployed in use (including language acquisition, language dysfunction, and language processing). It demonstrates, we hope, that proper understandings of particular linguistic phenomena, languages, language groups, or inter-language variations all require reference to interfaces.

The series is open to work by linguists of all theoretical persuasions and schools of thought. A main requirement is that authors should write so as to be understood by colleagues in related subfields of linguistics and by scholars in cognate disciplines.

Copular constructions have been mysterious since Panini and Aristotle, and the mysteries have only grown as our knowledge of the range of cross-linguistic variation in copular clauses has developed. This volume both surveys where our understanding of these constructions is, and further substantially extends the range of cross-linguistic data. This brings new challenges, but also new possibilities of deeper understanding. Overall, the chapters move towards an understanding of copular elements as being manifestations of a range of functional categories in the clausal domain, as opposed to being necessarily realizations of predication. Beyond this, the chapters extend the range of relevant phenomena by looking at how copulas enter into syntactic dependencies with other clausal elements, including subjects and focalized constituents, highlighting the way that copular elements are integrated into a wide range of clausal structures.

David Adger  
Hagit Borer





## *List of abbreviations*

1/2/3 etc.	1st/2nd/3rd person <i>or</i> noun class number
ACC	accusative
ADJ	adjective
APPL	applicative
ASC	amalgam specificational copular
AspP	aspectual phrase
AUG	augment
AUX	auxiliary
COMP	complementizer
CONJ	conjunction
CONN	connective
COP	copula
CopP	copular phrase
CP	complementizer phrase
CSC	canonical specificational copular
DEF	definite
DEM	demonstrative
DET	determiner
DM	Distributed Morphology
DP	determiner phrase
DUR	durative
DV	default vowel
ECM	exceptional case marking
EPP	extended projection principle
EVD	evidentiality
EZ	ezafe
FCCS	focus construction in Caribbean Spanish
F/FEM	feminine
FOC	focus
FV	final vowel
GEN	genitive
HC	host clause
IC	interrupting clause
IL	individual level

IMPF/IPFV	imperfect(ive)
INAN	inanimate
INC	inceptive
IND	indicative
INDEF	indefinite
INE	inessive
INST	instrumental
INT	intensive
IP	inflectional phrase
IV	initial vowel
LOC	locative
M/MASC	masculine
NEG	negative
NMR	number matching requirement
N/NEU	neuter
NOM	nominative
NON-VIR	non-virile
NP	noun phrase
OBJ	object
OM	object marker
PC	pronominal copula
PERS	persistive
PFV	perfective
PL	plural
PLA	plural addressee
PLUR	pluractional
POSS	possessive
PPP	past passive participle
PredP	predicate phrase
PREP	preposition
PRES	present
PRO	pronoun
PROX	proximal marker
PRS	present
QN	question marker
REF	referential
REFL	reflexive
REL	relative

REP	repetitive
SBJ	subject
SBJV	subjunctive
SC	small clause
SG	singular
SL	stage level
SM	subject marker
SOT	sequence of tenses
TAM	tense/aspect/mood
THM	thematic (lexical) prefix
TOP	topic
TopP	topic phrase
TP	tense phrase
TT	topic time
VIR	virile
vP	light verb phrase
VP	verb phrase



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# Main questions in the study of copulas

## *Categories, structures, and operations*

MARÍA J. ARCHE, ANTONIO FÁBREGAS,  
AND RAFAEL MARÍN

### 1.1 Introduction: why copulas?

This volume is dedicated to copulas, and more specifically, to how their syntactic and semantic properties can inform fundamental issues in linguistics. As we will show in this chapter, copulas and copular clauses are one of the areas of grammar with the greatest degree of variation attested. They vary both in forms, as they surface under different categories (verbs, prepositions, pronouns) and head different functional elements (T, Pred, C); and in behavior, since they participate in a diversity of agreement patterns (e.g., dual patterns such as in Polish) and non-canonical constructions (e.g., amalgams). For this reason, copulas and copular clauses are a privileged ground to explore essential theoretical issues concerning categorization, formal mechanisms of the grammar of agreement and late insertion, as well as clause structure. In sum, they are an unparalleled window into the study of the innermost mechanisms and properties of human language.

The chapters presented here are reviewed versions of a selection of talks offered at a workshop held at the University of Greenwich in June 2015. The chapters all demonstrate that the analysis of copulas is far from clear within individual languages and even less so when a given analysis is applied to more than one language. Since the cross-linguistic diversity in copulas is vast, the theoretical accounts need to embrace acute subtlety to capture all the nuances. Our main goal in this first chapter is to contextualize the contributions gathered in this volume by identifying both the main empirical facts that a theory on copulas should account for and the theoretical issues that such analyses have immediate consequences for. We will make reference to the empirical issues, the accounts existing to date, and the views that the authors

in the volume propose. The general issues at the core of the analyses of copulas are the following:

- a) The nature of grammatical categories; specifically, what kinds of heads are made compulsory by universal grammar and what the need for support elements is. As we will show, copulas have been understood as semantically empty inflectional supports, light verbs or raising verbs. In any of these approaches, the existence of copulas highlights the question of what connection there should be between meaning and lexical categorization. Copulas are used in contexts where their function appears to go beyond simple support for a subject-predicate structure. Their use in defining information structure and passive voice across a variety of languages is relevant in order to understand their nature. How can copulas be defined so all these other uses are accounted for, while not predicting that they should be used anywhere where verbal inflection could in principle be useful? Are there truly semantically empty verbs? What is the nature of support elements in general?
- b) The working of agreement. Copular sentences can involve two nominative NPs sharing one single verb, which is a unique situation leading to unexpected agreement patterns. This makes copular constructions an unparalleled ground to study the functioning of agreement, agreement probes in contexts where there is more than one candidate goal, and to explore whether there is a matching requirement between two NPs that are related through predication.
- c) The contribution of light elements to defining the type of clause. Some languages seem to have only one copula, while others have more than one element that can be used in nonverbal predicate contexts. Why are there languages that have more than one copula? How does this interact with the different types of copular sentences described in the literature? How many different types of copular sentences are there, and how are the empirical distinctions codified?

This chapter is organized as follows. In §1.2, we present a detailed survey of the main facts that a global theory of copulas should account for. This section discusses four aspects of the grammar of copulas: the behavior of (prototypical) copulas and the difficulties in delimiting the concept itself (§1.2.1), the taxonomy of copular sentences (§1.2.2), the existence of two or more copulas in a given language (§1.2.3), and other roles that copulas are associated with across languages. Later, in §1.3, we focus on two fundamental theoretical problems at the core of these facts: the morphosyntactic role of copulas (§1.3.1) and how the classification of copular sentences is to be analyzed (§1.3.2). Finally, in §1.4 we discuss the current points of agreement and disagreement in the study of copulas, as represented in the chapters of this volume.

## 1.2 Main facts about copulas

The purpose of this section is to describe the empirical facts that theories of copulas should account for. Given the significant disagreements found in the literature about the proper characterization of the empirical aspects of copulas, we will also refer to the different perspectives on the issues discussed.

### 1.2.1 The behavior of copulas

As is the case with many concepts borrowed from traditional linguistics,<sup>1</sup> copulas turn out to be an extremely challenging notion to define, and most works that involve an analysis of *be* and its cross-linguistic equivalents simply take the notion for granted. (1) gives a prototypical example of a *bona fide* copula:

- (1) John is sick.

This English example displays the properties that are prototypically associated with copulas: (i) copulas carry verbal inflection, (ii) copulas appear in contexts where the predicate is nonverbal, (iii) copulas are elements used to link the predicate and the subject—as the term itself suggests—from Latin *copula* ‘link’, and (iv) copulas are semantically light, possibly empty.

Thus, by virtue of (i), copulas should be inflected in whatever morphological properties verbs display in a language (e.g., tense, aspect, number and person, gender...). By virtue of (ii), (1) would correspond to predicating the adjective *sick* of the referring expression *John*:  $\lambda x[\text{sick}'(x)](j)$ . In relation to (iii), copulas cannot define a predicate on their own (*\*John is*). Finally, in relation to (iv), copulas are necessary to allow the adjective to define the predicate (*\*John sick*). However, as we will show in this chapter, all these prototypical properties are debatable, and are in fact the subject of enormous cross-linguistic variation and disagreement in how they are analyzed.

In typological studies (such as Stassen 1997 and Pustet 2003), the question of what is the set of properties that characterize copulas becomes central. Different proposals have been made and most of them agree that the definitions traditionally given on the basis of Romance languages and English are both too restrictive and too broad. Consider the definition below, from Pustet (2003: 5):

- (2) A copula is a linguistic element which co-occurs with certain lexemes in certain languages when they function as predicate nucleus. A copula does not add any semantic content to the predicate phrase it is contained in.

First of all, observe that the definition does not specify that the copula is a verb, or that it combines with nonverbal predicates. With respect to the first property, in fact, it has been noted that in many languages copular elements are historically related to pronouns (Hengeveld 1992: 237; Stassen 1997: 90; Heine and Kuteva 2002: 109)<sup>2</sup> or

<sup>1</sup> Latin and Medieval grammars since Priscian's *Institutiones* used the term *verbum substantivum* ‘substantive verb’ to refer to Latin *esse* ‘be’. The term ‘copula’ was coined later, by Abelard, and was used in the *Grammaire de Port-Royal*. It became widespread after Meillet (1906–08), who emphasized that a copular verb did not have most of the properties of verbs in a given language.

<sup>2</sup> We leave aside the nature of so-called pronominal copulas, illustrated in (i) for Maltese (Central Semitic Creole), 3rd person pronouns that in some languages are compulsory to build some types of copular sentences. See Doron (1986), Borg (1987), Pereltsvaig (2007), Dalmi (2010). Bondaruk, this volume, briefly touches on the issue.

(i) Malta hi gzira.  
Malta PC island  
‘Malta is the island.’

deictic elements in general. In !Xuun (Lionnet 2009), a K'xa language spoken in Namibia and Angola, the deictic proximal marker *e* (3a) has developed a use as a non-locative copula (3b):

- (3) a. me n|ee ti e.  
           1SG head IMPF PROX  
           'This is my head.'
- b. m ba !uu ti e Jor-El.  
           1SG father name impf COP Jor-El  
           'My father's name is Jor-El.'

Stassen (1997: 95–6) also notes that pronouns and discourse markers are frequently reanalyzed as “abstract linking morphemes in predicate nominal sentences” in African languages like Shona, Temne or Zulu, among others. Similarly, the Lakota copular verb *héc<sup>h</sup>a* derives from the pronouns *hé* ‘this’ and *c<sup>h</sup>a* ‘such’ (Pustet 2003: 56).

Note, next, that in Pustet’s definition there is no claim that copulas do not combine with verbs. This contrasts with other available definitions, where the combination with nonverbal predicates is taken to be central, as in (4), from Hengeveld (1992: 32):

- (4) A copula enables a nonverbal predicate to act as a main predicate in those languages and under those circumstances in which this nonverbal predicate could not fulfil this function on its own.

Based on her sample of 131 languages, Pustet defends the implicational hierarchy in (5): if a language uses copulas for verbal predicates (e.g., participles), it will also use copulas for adjectives and nouns, but not viceversa.

- (5) NOUNS > ADJECTIVES > VERBS

The scale is underpinned by the notions of valence, transience, and dynamicity found in Givón (1979) and Croft (1991): “within minimal pairs [in a given language], the lexical item that is compatible with the copula is always less transitive, less [temporally] transient and less dynamic than its counterpart that does not admit copula use” (Pustet 2003: 24). However, copulas do co-occur with verbs. The example in (6) shows a case from Bambara (Pustet 2003: 65) where the copula combines with a verbal predicate:

- (6) ne bε taa  
           1SG COP leave  
           ‘I am leaving.’

In light of these cases, it might be questioned whether English or Spanish passive constructions are instances of the same pattern (*copula* + *verb*), rather than one where the copula is treated as an auxiliary verb.

- (7) Rorschach fue atacado por un perro.  
       Rorschach was attacked by a dog

Pustet's definition in (2) makes the claim that copular verbs do not contribute any semantic information to the predicate, in contrast to auxiliaries, which could contribute modal or aspectual information. However, this claim is also problematic. Cross-linguistic surveys have proposed a class of semi-copulas (also called pseudo-copulas), namely those verbal forms which, like copulas, cannot form a predicate independently, but add an identifiable meaning to it. An often-cited example of semi-copula is the English verb *become*, which contributes a change of state meaning to the predicate.

(8) Tony Stark became \*(a millionaire).

Even among prototypical copulas, it is not always clear that there is no meaning contribution. In Spanish, as it is well known, two verbs have been considered copular: *ser* and *estar*, the first associated to individual level (IL) properties and the second associated to stage level (SL) properties (see Milsark 1974, Carlson 1977 for the distinction). IL-adjectives must, then, combine with *ser*, while SL-adjectives combine with *estar* (9).

- (9) a. Anacleto es español.  
       Anacleto is<sup>ser</sup> Spanish  
       b. Anacleto está desnudo.  
       Anacleto is<sup>estar</sup> naked

The adjectives that allow for both copulas show a systematic meaning difference: with *estar*, they pattern with SL predicates referring to stages of the individual, and with *ser*, they pattern with IL predicates predicating the property of the individual as such (see, among many others, Leborans 1995, 1999; Arche 2006; Camacho 2012; Gallego and Uriagereka 2016).

- (10) a. Roberto Alcázar es guapo.  
       Roberto Alcázar is<sup>ser</sup> handsome  
       b. Roberto Alcázar está guapo.  
       Roberto Alcázar is<sup>estar</sup> handsome

Unless we are willing to duplicate the entries for the adjective *guapo* 'handsome' and all the others that combine with both copulas, cases such as (10) strongly suggest that the verb *estar* (or the structure associated to it) introduces aspectual information that defines the predicate as SL (for instance, as Arche 2012, Brucart 2012, and Camacho 2012 argue).

Spanish *estar* also constitutes a potential counterexample to another prototypical copula property: the inability to define a predicate independently. The example in (11) shows that in a locative meaning, *estar* can be used without any other (overt) constituent. Unless we do not consider this verb a copula in locative uses, this property is at odds with the traditional definition.

- (11) Estoy.  
       I am<sup>estar</sup>  
       'I am here.'

The use and function of *estar* is in too many ways parallel to that of Spanish *ser*—including the ability to be used in passive sentences—which suggests that *estar* should belong to the same class as *ser*.

The facts just surveyed suggest that a much less restrictive definition of copula would be more appropriate. The proposal in (12) illustrates the spirit of what is needed:

- (12) A copular element is an element needed to define a predication structure.

Such an element is typically a verb, but not always; it typically combines with nonverbal categories, and it typically carries minimal meaning, which is connected with its inability to define a predicate alone. However, none of these properties are necessary to define a copula, as we have seen.

The definition in (12) is admittedly descriptive: it defines an object through its surface role and says nothing about its theoretical status, why it is needed or even about the grammatical category that it instantiates. We believe that this is a positive result that is sustained by the chapters in this volume. They lead to the conclusion that *copula* is not a distinct grammatical category, but rather the label that has been given to a number of distinct objects in different languages. In the remainder of this chapter, we examine the main current theoretical proposals about the nature of copulas and the structures they participate in. We will show that none of them are free of problems, but, more crucially, that all of them have clear facts supporting their claims empirically. One important point to bear in mind when approaching this tension is, precisely, that what we call ‘copula’ in one language is quite likely different from what we call ‘copula’ in another; copulas seem to be involved in different syntactic constructions cross-linguistically.

### 1.2.2 *Types of copular sentences*

It is far from clear whether there is only one kind of copular construction or whether copulas can participate in different kinds of structures where a subject is related to a nonverbal predicate. Different answers have been provided, partially depending on whether the distinction between different kinds of copular sentences is argued to be purely semantic or to have an impact on syntax.

The classical division of copular sentences comes from Higgins (1979), who proposes a four-way split, depending on whether—in different combinations—the nonverbal categories combined by the copula are referential or not: predicational (13a), specificational (13b), equative (‘identity statement’, 13c), and identificational (13d).

- (13) a. The winner is a man with a red beard.  
b. The winner is Charlie Brown.  
c. Britt Reid is the Green Hornet.  
d. That woman is Susan.

In (13a), the subject NP is referential and the post-copular NP is predicative, ascribing some properties to the subject. In contrast, in (13b) the subject is not referential in the sense that it is not used to identify a referent in the context, and the post-copular NP identifies such referent. In (13c), an identity statement, both NPs are equally referential. Finally, according to Higgins, in (13d) the subject is

referential, but does not provide the identity of the referent; the post-copular NP provides the identity.

A lot of descriptive and theoretical work has been conducted on this issue; see, among many others, Halliday (1967), Akmajian (1979), Keizer (1992), den Dikken (2006b), Lahousse (2009), Heycock (2012), for different interpretations and discussion.

Higgins's (1979) taxonomy has been questioned from two sides. On the one hand, some authors have argued that the division is insufficient. It either needs other (semantic) classes of copular sentences to be added (e.g., a definitional class *A zombie is a fictional undead being*, Declerck 1988) or it is irrelevant in accounting for syntactic phenomena (see Bejar et al. this volume for a critique along these lines). On the other hand, other authors have argued that Higgins's (1979) classification is over-specific and should be simplified. Mikkelsen (2005) proposed that identificational sentences like (13d) should be reduced to either identity statements or specificational clauses. Mikkelsen argues that the typology of copular sentences reduces to whether the two NPs denote an individual (type <e>) or a predicate (type <e,t>).

- (14) a. <e> is <e,t> (predicational)
- b. <e,t> is <e> (specificational)
- c. <e> is <e> (equational)

Identificational like (13d) are instances of (14c), that is, equational/identity statements; in contrast, those whose subject is simply a demonstrative (15) reduce to the specificational type.

- (15) That is Susan.

In cases such as (15)—Mikkelsen claims—the first nominal has a predicational semantics. She provides the following reasoning: *that*, as a demonstrative, cannot refer to humans, so it does not make sense to claim that in (15) *that* refers to an entity, since that entity would presumably be Susan, a human individual. Thus, (15) is an instance of a specificational sentence.

Other approaches have reduced Higgins's typology even more, positing only two classes: predicational and specificational (or inverse), depending on whether the more referential NP is the first or the second in the clause. Predicational and specificational clauses, as we will see in the following pages, are taken by many scholars to be the two basic categories of copular sentences to which all the other noted subtypes should be reduced to. Loccioni, in this volume, presents a study of the two copulas in Logoori, a Bantu language, and argues that their distribution captures the basic distinction between predicational and specificational, giving further support to the claim that these are the two types that must be distinguished in the grammar of natural languages. An exhaustive divide between predicational and specificational clauses immediately accounts for sentences like *John is my friend* and *My friend is John*, but the equative/identity statement type still needs to be accounted for. Moro (1988) in fact argued that copular sentences are never truly equative. His reasoning is the following, starting from a bona fide equative sentence like (16):

- (16) The morning star is the evening star.



If we try to make a possessive pronoun in the second NP refer to the first NP, we obtain ungrammaticality:

- (17) \*[The morning star]<sub>i</sub> is [its<sub>i</sub> source of light]

This is surprising if neither of the two NPs is a predicate and both are referential arguments. In a true identity statement where both NPs are referential arguments—Moro argues—this coreference is possible:

- (18) [The morning star]<sub>i</sub> is equal to [its<sub>i</sub> source of light]

So, why is (17) uninterpretable? Binding theory shows that a pronoun contained in a predicative nominal cannot be bound by the clausal subject: *\*John<sub>i</sub> is his<sub>i</sub> cook*. This is the same ungrammaticality that we find in (17); hence, (17) is, in actuality, a predication sentence, and by parity also (16). This position is contended by Heycock and Kroch (1999), who, on the basis of semantic facts, argue that equative sentences do in fact exist, because neither of the two NPs can be taken as really predicative (e.g., *My opinion about Alan Moore is your opinion about Frank Miller*). In contrast, Adger and Ramchand (2003) argue that there is always an asymmetry in referentiality between the two NPs involved in the construction. See Williams (1983) and Pereltsvaig (2001) for similar observations about the asymmetry. Their position is opposed to Carnie (1995: 241–8), who argues that the asymmetries identified in equative sentences follow from a distinction in theta-marking, something that necessarily implies that the equative copula cannot be interpreted as the logical identity operation.

Other approaches also arguing for just two types of clauses are present in Blom and Daalder (1977), Heggie (1988), Verheugd (1990), Moro (1997, 2000), and den Dikken (1995, 2006a). Interestingly, these theories tend to concentrate on the syntactic properties of the structure, rather than on the semantics of the NPs involved. As we will see in §1.3.2, in fact, it has been argued that there is only one type of copular sentence, namely, the predication one, whereas the specificational one is syntactically derived from it. Before we examine this issue, let us consider the question of whether the typology of copular sentences leads us to conclude that there is more than one verb *be*.

### 1.2.3 *Languages with multiple copulas*

If we take the definition proposed in (12) of a copula being an element that relates a subject to a nonverbal predicate (with the complications noted before), it can be concluded that some languages have more than one copular element. Gibson et al. (this volume) offer quite a comprehensive overview of the different morphological makeup of copulas in a sample of Bantu languages. They note that even typologically very close languages differ in the number of copulas they have and the regulations underpinning their distribution. The variation of the copulas in correlation with the constructions they appear in is crucial in advancing our knowledge about the nature and behavior of copulas. Typological studies can inform syntactic and semantic theoretical proposals in, at least, the following respects:

- a) The taxonomy of copular constructions. Some copulas have been argued to appear only in particular types of copular sentences. This can be taken as evidence that the simple distinction between predicational and inverse copular sentences needs to be enriched on principled grounds.
- b) The nature of the copulas. The factors governing the distribution of multiple copulas can be informative with respect to the kind of head(s) that the copulas spell out in each language and the distinct kinds of elements that can be subsumed under the traditional label of ‘copula’.

Let us briefly address the first aspect: what multiple copulas can tell us about the typology of copular sentences. If there are distinct, lexically differentiated copulas, whose distributions pattern with distinct types of copular sentences, the idea that at least those types of copular sentences must be grammatically distinguished becomes plausible. In this sense, consider the discussion below.

Some authors have proposed additional types of copular sentences based on the existence of additional copulas. For example, Bolinger (1972) proposed a locative type in addition to the predicational and equative copular sentences. This has been sustained by evidence from, for example, Kinyarwanda (Jerro 2015), where of the two copular elements, *ni* and *-ri*, one (*ni*) has a variety of uses and *-ri* is restricted to locational predications:

- (19) a. Karemera a-ri m’u Rwanda.  
           Karemera 1SG-COP in Rwanda  
           ‘Karemera is in Rwanda.’
- b. \*Mukamana a-ri umwarimu.  
           Mukamana 1SG-COP teacher  
           Intended: ‘Mukamana is a teacher.’
- c. \*Mukamana a-ri munini.  
           Mukamana 1SG-COP big  
           Intended: ‘Mukamana is big.’

Also, according to Wauters (2013), in Sereer (Niger-Congo) there are four copular elements. The copula *-oo* is used in equative sentences (20a); *jeg* is used in existential constructions (20b); *ref* marks NP copulas and is specialized in individual-level predicates (20c); *xe* can combine with stage-level predicates, among them locatives (20d)—which are also compatible with *ref*.

- (20) a. Mark, Musaa Juf=oo.  
           Mark Musaa Juf-COP  
           ‘Mark is Musaa Juf.’
- b. a=jeg-a wiin faafaf.  
           3=COP-DV people doctor  
           ‘There are male doctors.’
- c. osiriñ um a= ref-a osiriñ maak.  
           imam 3SG.POSS 3=COP-DV imam big  
           ‘His imam was an important imam.’

- d. obox    ole    a=xé    tafil    andok    um.  
       dog    DEF    3=COP    outside    room    3SG.POSS  
       ‘The dog is outside his room.’

Even though the existence of this variety of copulas and their ties to distinct copular sentences favors the idea that grammar differentiates more than a two-way distinction in the sentence taxonomy, the data do not necessarily enforce that conclusion. Alternative explanations can be offered. For instance, the copula for locative predicates might involve some kind of P incorporation to a copular element, yielding a different spellout, as Benveniste (1966) argued for French *avoir* and Gallego and Uriagereka (2016) have argued for Spanish *estar*. Copulas might in some cases be misanalyzed functional projections dominating adjectives, nouns, or prepositions, which necessarily project when they are used as predicates. In other words, (19) and (20) are compatible with a proposal whereby locative copular sentences have a structure distinct from ascriptional NP/AP sentences, but do not force that conclusion.

In sum, the evidence coming from the association between different copulas and different types of clauses deserves further investigation, so that the empirical evidence supporting different theoretical views can be clearly discerned.

Consider now the second issue: the distribution of multiple copulas. Here, we largely follow the typological description in Pustet (2003). We understand that the different kinds of factors governing the distribution of the copulas adds plausibility to the claim that the copula in different languages might spell out different heads.

One of the factors involved in the multiplicity of copulas has just been discussed: the type of copular sentence at hand. In line with the above, consider another language, Lakota, which distinguishes identificational sentences (*This is Mary*) from predicational ones (*He is a soldier*) by two distinct lexical copulas. We understand that this might be due to two factors: either there are distinct types of small clause codifying this distinction (which would be amenable with a syntactic proposal whereby the copula is low in the structure) or the distinct properties of each type with regard to information structure triggers a different copula choice. Since the identificational type generally involves focalization of the second NP, the copula could be conceived as an element sensitive to the global information structure of the clause, occupying a high position in the syntactic structure.

A second common factor in the choice of copulas is the grammatical category of the post-copular constituent. As Pustet (2003) notes, Bambara (Niger-Congo) distinguishes copular sentences with nominal predicates from those containing adjectival predicates:

- (21) a. nín        ye        námása    ye.  
           this        COP    banana    COP  
           ‘This is a banana.’  
       b. So        ka        sùrun.  
           house    COP    big  
           ‘The house is big.’

In such cases, it would seem that the copular elements must be introduced low in the structure, in a position where they can be sensitive to the lexical category of the predicate of the small clause. In some cases, the sensitivity is to the concept expressed by the predicate: Pustet reports that in Imonda (spoken in Papua New Guinea) the choice of the copula is sensitive to whether the referent of the NP is intrinsically tall or erect, which is reminiscent of a division of nouns based on shape that is typical of some classifier systems (such as the one in Diné Bizaad/Navajo); moreover, in Imonda one of the copulas is preferred when combined with predicates that refer to females. Both properties suggest that in this language copulas could be related to nominal classifiers.

Spanish is, without doubt, the best researched case of multiple copulas (Luján 1982, Porroche Ballesteros 1988, Arche 2006, among many others). Part of the distribution of the two copulas is sensitive to the grammatical category of the predicate: if it is a nominal element, *ser* is compulsory; if it is a gerund, *estar* is compulsory. However, with adjectives, prepositional phrases, and (to some extent) locations, both copulas are attested. In the case of adjectives, as in (22), the standard account is that *ser* combines with individual level predicates (Carlson 1977), which generally (but not necessarily) are associated with an implication of temporal persistence (22a); *estar* associates with stage-level predicates (22b). However, *estar* also involves other effects, such as an evidential use according to Roby (2009), illustrated in (22c), whereby the property is stated to be characteristic, but relative to the direct perception of the speaker. For reasons of space, we will not review here the different accounts of how the sensitivity to this distinction is implemented; see Arche (2006) and Roy (2013) for overviews.

- (22) a. Juan es gordo.  
       Juan is<sup>ser</sup> fat 'Juan is (characteristically) fat, is a fat person'
- b. Juan está gordo.  
       Juan is<sup>estar</sup> fat 'Juan is (at this point) fat'
- c. Esta paella está deliciosa.  
       this paella is<sup>estar</sup> delicious

Other languages reported by Pustet (2003) to have similar distinctions are Barasaano, Ndyuka, Limbu, and Maltese; a comparable sensitivity to the aspectual information of the AP is known to apply also to languages like Portuguese and Catalan, although the distribution is not identical to Spanish.

Finally, copulas can also be sensitive to the nature of the subject: Dumi (Sino-Tibetan language from Nepal; van Driem 1993) differentiates between sentences with animate and inanimate subjects with different copulas. This kind of sensitivity is compatible with an analysis where the copula is introduced high, at the level of TP; however, it does not force this conclusion, as the sensitivity could also be obtained if the copula is introduced immediately above the predicate, on the assumption that the subject in copular sentences is also base-generated below TP.

#### 1.2.4 Copulas beyond copular sentences

Finally, copulas are known to be used in other constructions that do not obviously involve a subject and a nonverbal predicate. The existence of such cases can be dealt with in two ways: either the other structures where copulas appear are analyzed as (less obvious) instances of a subject/nonverbal predicate structure, or the use of copulas in such cases is taken at face value, leading to a redefinition of what a copula is. Both venues have been explored. Here we will concentrate on just two cases: the use of copulas to mark information structure, specifically associated to focalization structures, and the use of copulas to express passive voice.

*1.2.4.1 Copulas and information structure: clefting* Copulas are generally involved in the articulation of a particular kind of information structure of the clause, namely, the one that assigns exhaustive focus to one constituent in the clause: the so-called clefted and pseudo-clefted sentences. The examples in (23) illustrate the type:

- (23) a. It was John who brought beer.  
b. John was who brought beer.  
c. Who brought beer was John.

According to some authors, the existence of such a structure suggests that copulas can be analyzed as discourse markers. The structure has some standard copular properties: there is a nominal expression (the free relative) which acts as a predication constituent describing the properties of a referential nominal expression; the inverse order is allowed, as in copular clauses, and the element relating the two is at least completely syncretic with a copular verb. However, some properties of (pseudo-)clefted sentences are not found in run-of-the-mill copular sentences. First, while inverted copular sentences tend to assign focus to the post-copular expression (Blom and Daalder 1977, Roy and Shlonsky this volume), pseudo-clefted sentences assign focus to the expression that assigns value to the free relative, independently of its position: both (23b) and (23c) above treat *John* as focus. The contrast below shows that while this is not the case for predication copular sentences such as that in (24a), it is the case in the clefted (24b).

- (24) a. Jean est mon ami.  
Jean is my friend  
b. Mon ami, c'est Jean.  
my friend it-is Jean

Second, in contrast with inverted copular sentences, focus must be exhaustive. While in (23) it is understood that the only person who brought beer was John, in an inverted clause such as (25), it does not follow that Jean is the only friend of the speaker.

- (25) Jean, c'est mon ami.  
Jean it-is my friend

Some authors (Lambrecht 1994; Lehmann 2008) argue that the exhaustive focus exhibited by (pseudo-)clefted sentences is an indecomposable part of their meaning,

without attributing any of it to the nature of the copula. In contrast, other authors have tried to divide such structures into independent components. In this regard, three main proposals can be found. In the first proposal, the pseudo-clefted structure is an instance of a copular sentence where one of the members has undergone partial ellipsis (Peters and Bach 1968). The second proposal involves movement (Chomsky 1970, Moreau 1971), and the third analysis proposes base-generation of both constituents (Higgins 1979, Akmajian 1979). We refer the reader to den Dikken (2006b) for a detailed discussion of these competing analyses.<sup>3</sup> What is crucial for our purposes is that the second and the third perspectives are essentially forced to say that, in a pseudo-cleft, the copula is not just supporting a subject-predicate structure, but also assigning exhaustive focus to one of the members. In the first analysis it is at least in principle conceivable that becoming the exhaustive focus is a condition for a referential DP to escape ellipsis (Merchant 2000), but nothing in principle forces this in the other two analyses.

In fact, there are attested structures where the copula is the only surface marker of exhaustive focus. This has been suggested by Zellou (2010) for Tigrinya, for example, where copulas are shown to be information structure markers. In this volume, O'Neill and Sáez study the issue in English and Spanish respectively. As Sáez (this volume) discusses, in Caribbean Spanish we find structures such as (26) below.

- (26) Juan compró fue un libro.  
 Juan bought was a book  
 'A book is what Juan bought.'

Whether these structures are subjacently pseudo-clefts where the *wh*-element is not expressed (Toribio 1992, Sedano 1994) (as represented in (27a)) or monoclausal structures where the copula is a focus marker (Bosque 1999b) (27b) has been a long-debated question within Spanish linguistics.

- (27) a. [~~what~~ Juan bought] was a book.  
 b. Juan bought [FocP was [a book]]

The analysis in (27a) has several problems noted in Bosque (1999b) and summarized by Sáez in this volume. The one in (27b) has its own set of problems, such as the fact that the complement of FocP cannot be extracted (\**What bought Juan was?*). Sáez argues for a proposal where (26) is an instance of an amalgam structure, specifically a subclass of Horn amalgams, whereby the copula heads a topic phrase (TopP).

<sup>3</sup> Note that in the ellipsis account the structure would have to be taken to be distinct from a run-of-the-mill copular, since, without ellipsis, cases such as (i) would never be a well-formed copular sentence.

(i) [Who brought the beer] was [John ~~brought the beer~~]

Cases where the ellipsis requires ungrammatical source sentences have also been noted in the literature (Blom and Daalder 1977, Akmajian 1979). The movement approach has been considered problematic for similar reasons (but has been resurrected as movement at LF by Bošković 1997).

O'Neill, this volume, studies similar structures, such as those in (28) for English. Since the analysis of pseudo-clefts without a *wh*-word is obviously not available, she also argues for an analysis involving an amalgam (following den Dikken et al. 2000), where the copula is introduced as a support element in Fin(iteness)P, in the boundary between the TP and the CP.

- (28) He needs a break is what he needs.

The use of copulas as heads of information structure raises a number of questions for the nature of copulas in grammars that allow structures comparable to (26) and (28). To begin with, it would provide arguments in favor of a view of copulas as pure support elements that are either merged high or are insensitive to the position where they are introduced, provided that it is a position where phi features and verbal morphology might be required. Second, it brings up the issue of whether copulas are designated to support predication or, more generally, are used to divide the clausal structure in two branches, perhaps along the lines of a figure-ground configuration that can be used both for predication (subject-predicate) and information structure (focus-presupposition).

*1.2.4.2 Passives* The use of copulas as elements involved in the expression of passive voice is also widespread across languages. Abraham (2006) shows that next to reflexive morphemes, structures involving a copular verb and a non-finite form of the verb (typically a participle) are used very frequently cross-linguistically to express passive voice: German *sein* 'be', used for stative passives, Dutch *zijn* or Spanish *ser* 'be' are just a few examples of this situation. Let us illustrate it here with Spanish, as this will allow us to hint at some of the theoretical questions related to the fact:

- (29) Juan fue atacado por un perro.  
Juan was<sup>ser</sup> attacked by a dog  
'Juan was attacked by a dog.'

In a sense, it is unsurprising that copulas are used in passives. As in a copular sentence, it can be argued that the existence of a participle denoting a predicate requires a support element to carry subject agreement and temporal-aspectual marking. Participles are, after all, non-finite forms of the verb, and, in Spanish, inflect as adjectives, that is, for gender and number but not for person. However, there is also a surprising side to this situation, highlighted in Crespi (2015), among other authors. Consider (30).

- (30) a. El libro fue escrito.  
The book was<sup>ser</sup> written.  
'The book was written.' (event)  
b. El libro está escrito.  
The book was<sup>estar</sup> written  
'The book is (already) written.' (result state)