

What does it take to be a copula?

1 Languages show a great diversity in the realisation of the copular predicate, including verbs, pronouns, particles and the zero copula (Stassen 1996, 2008). Languages that allow copular sentences with no overt copula can alternatively use another, lexical BE in them. The choice between the lexical and the zero copulas introduces changes in the semantic interpretation of copular sentences. These changes include (i) the so-called lifetime effect in the past tense and its absence in the present, as in Russian (Pereltsvaig 2007, Geist 2007, Partee & Borschev 2007); (ii) the habitual vs. *ad hoc* property readings, as in Maltese (Borg 1996, Stassen 1996); (iii) the locational vs. non-locational uses of copular sentences and (iv) the predicational vs. non-predicational interpretations, as in Jamaican Creole (Bailey 1965, Patrick 2005, Dürrleman-Tame 2008).

2 Cross-linguistically, primary predication relation (see Bowers 1993, 2001) is realized either overtly or covertly in copular sentences. The covert (i.e. zero) copula carries [+phi],[+tns],[+fin] and [+pred] features, which reflect its verbal character. This will be tested in the syntactic environments of (i) clause negation; (ii) adverbial scope ambiguities and (iii) FOC/NEG scope interaction in Russian, Polish and Hungarian. The present proposal derives the peculiar properties of copular sentences, traditionally attributed either to the copula or to the non-verbal predicate, by introducing an OP_{alt} operator. In contrast to the current analyses of alternative states that take the ALT or EXH operators to be choice functions (e.g. Beck 2007, Magri 2009), here OP_{alt} is treated as a modal operator taking scope over the whole proposition and ranging over accessible worlds (Kratzer 1991). The presence vs. absence of the OP_{alt} operator accounts for the facts in (i)-(iv) above.

3 It is assumed here that the zero copula projects under the V head but lacks phonological realization (see Partee & Borschev 2007); since no overt material moves to the deficient T(ense) head in present indicative copular sentences, there is no eventuality for OP_{alt} to scope over. Pronominal copulas lack the [+V] feature altogether and thus project no VP at all (see Doron 1983, 1986, Eid 1991, Shlonsky 2000, Doherty 1996). With both types of copula, the number of accessible worlds that the OP_{alt} operator can range over is restricted to the actual one, excluding any further alternatives.

DATA

(I) PAST VS. NON-PAST

(1a) Ivan byl xrabryj soldat vsju svoju žizn'. (lifetime effect)
Ivan COP.PAST brave soldier all his life
'Ivan was a brave soldier all his life.' (Ivan is dead now.)

(1b) Ivan 0 xrabryj soldat. (no lifetime effect)
Ivan COP.PRES brave soldier
'Ivan is a brave soldier.'
(Russian, modelled on Pereltsvaig 2007)

(II) HABITUAL VS. AD HOC PROPERTY

(3a) Albert 0 tabib.
Albert COP.PRES doctor.'
'Albert is a doctor.' (habitual property)

(3b) Pietru qieghed l-eżaminatur.
Peter stay.PRES3SG.M the-examiner
'Peter is the examiner.' (*ad hoc* property)
(Maltese, Stassen 1996)

(III) LOCATIVE VS. NON-LOCATIVE

- (4a) De bebi 0 sick.
the baby COP sick
'The baby is sick.'
- (4b) De bwai de(h) ina Landan.
the boy COP in London
'The boy is in London.'
(Jamaican Creole Bailey 1965, Patrick 2004)
- (5a) *Dr Jekyll nie (jest) Mr Hyde. (equative)
Dr Jekyll not COP Mr Hyde.
'Dr Jekyll is not Mr Hyde.'
- (5b) Dr Jekyll to nie (jest) Mr Hyde.
Dr Jekyll PRON not COP Mr Hyde
'Dr Jekyll is not Mr Hyde.'
(Polish, modelled on Ćitko 2008, Bondaruk 2013, 2014)
- (6a) Sejčas Ivan ne 0 v Londone.
now Ivan not COP in London
'Ivan is not in London now.'
- (6b) Sejčas Ivan 0 ne v Londone a v Moskve.
now Ivan COP not in London but in Moscow
'Ivan is not in London but in Moscow now.'
(Russian, Partee & Borschev 2007)
- (7a) Péter mindig A VADKENDER-TÓL 0 beteg.
Peter always the ragweed-from COP ill
'It is always the ragweed that makes Peter ill.'
- (7b) Péter MINDIG beteg 0 a vatkender-tól.
Peter always ill COP the ragweed-from
'Peter is always made ill by the ragweed.'
(Hungarian, É.Kiss 2002)