THE COPULA IN MODERN STANDARD ARABIC

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Ahmad Alotaibi, Al Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University and University of Essex

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Predicational and equative uses

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Like its counterparts in many languages, the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) copula appears with a number of different complements and has both predicational and equative uses.

Predicational uses may involve PP, AP, and NP complements, and also verbal complements.

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(1) kaana ʔaT-Tifl-u fii l-hadiiqat-i
be.PAST.3SG.M the-child.SG.M-NOM in the-garden-GEN
‘The child was in the garden.’

Predicational uses may involve PP, AP, and NP complements, and also verbal complements.

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(2) kaana xalid-un xaaʔif-an min l-ʕanaakibi
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(3) kaana Zayd-un muʔallif-a riwaayaatin
be.PAST.3SG.M Zaid-NOM author.SG.M-ACC novels
'Zaid was an author of novels'

(4) kaana Zayd-un yaktubu t-taqriir-a
be.PAST.3SG.M Zayd-NOM write.PRES.3SG.M the-report-ACC
‘Zaid was writing the report.’

Equative uses have a distinctive syntax with an optional pronoun between the two noun phrases.

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(5) kaana Hišaam-un Muhammad-an
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(8) *kaana ʔaT-Tifl-u Huwa fii l-hadiiqat-i
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(11) kaanat l-fataat-u Hiya/*Huwa l-munassiqat-a
be.PAST.3SGF the-girl-NOM she he the-coordinator-ACC
‘The girl was the coordinator.’

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‘The girl was the coordinator.’

(12) kaana HaʔulaaʔiHum/*Huwa ʔafDal-a fariiq-in
be.PAST.3SG.M those they he best-ACC team-GEN
‘Those were the best team.’

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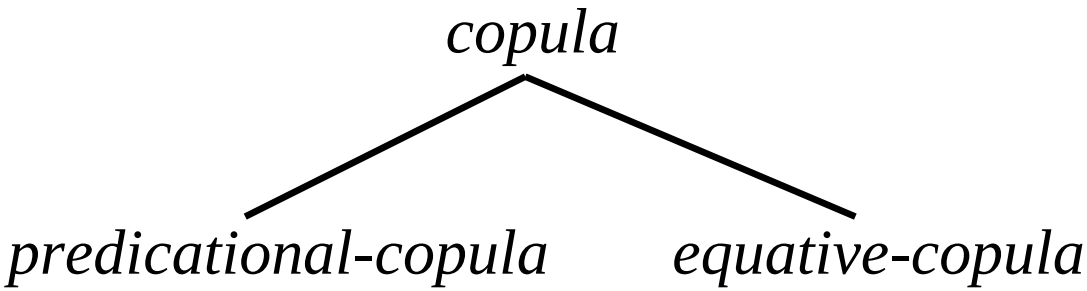

Verbal and non-verbal predicational uses

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There are also syntactic differences between predicational examples with a non-verbal complement and predicational examples with a verbal complement.

P, A, and N and their complements can be fronted.

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‘The child was in the garden.’

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This suggests that the predicational copula can have a PP, AP, or NP as its complement.

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(17) *yaktubu t-taqriir-a kaana Zayd-un
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'Zayd was writing the report.'

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This suggests that the predicational copula can appear in an argument composition structure with a verb and the complements of the verb as its complements.

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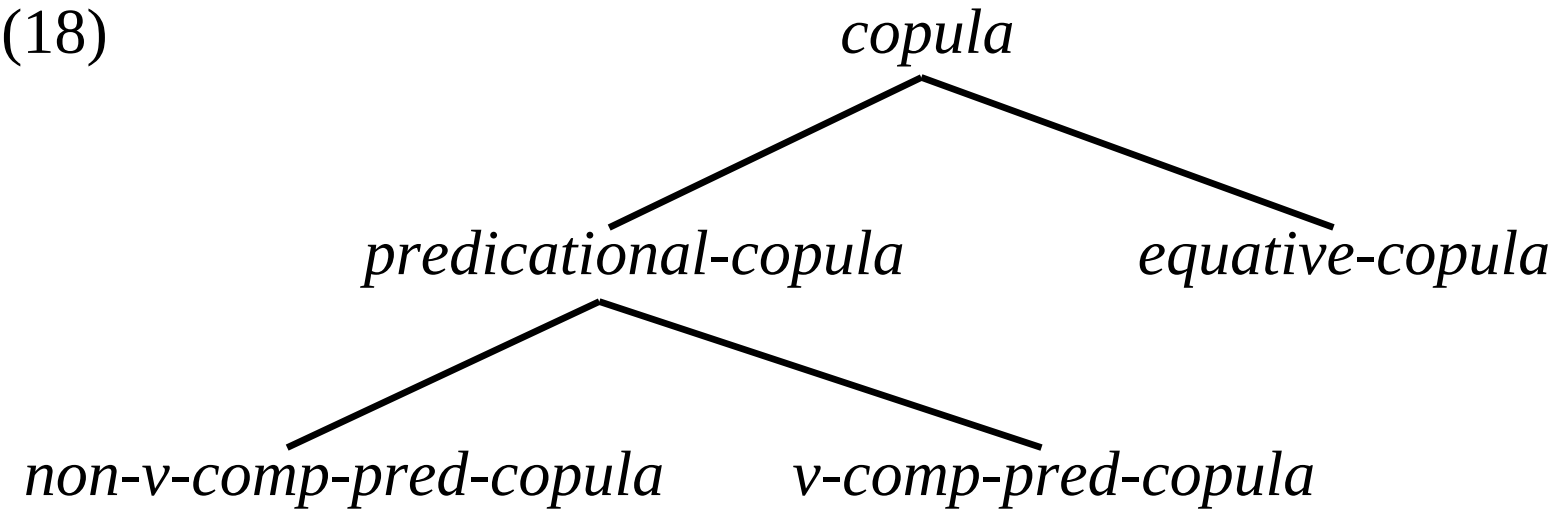

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(26) qad yakuunu Hišaam-un (Huwa) Muhammad-an
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Note that an adjectival or nominal predicate is nominative.

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Apart from this, these sentences look like copula sentences without a copula.

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(31) kaana Hunaaka Taalib-un fii l-hadiiqati
be.PAST.3SG.M there student.SG.M-NOM in the-garden
‘There was a student in the garden.’

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(32) Hunaaka Taalib-un fii l-hadiiqati
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The similarities between verbless sentences and sentences with an overt copula can be captured by assuming that the former contain a phonologically empty form of the copula with similar but not identical properties to overt forms.

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A second difference concerns verbal complements.

One might suppose that the verb in the following is the complement of a phonologically empty form of the copula.

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(33) r-rajulu yaktubu t-taqriira
the-man write the-report.SG.ACC
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One might suppose that the verb in the following is the complement of a phonologically empty form of the copula.

(33) r-rajulu yaktubu t-taqriira
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A verb that is the complement of an overt form of the copula cannot precede its subject and complement (in either order).

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(34) a. *kaana yaktubu Zayd-un t-taqriira
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b. *kaana yaktubu t-taqriira Zayd-un
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b. yaktubu t-taqriira Zayd-un
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To avoid two analyses for examples like (33), we assume that the phonologically empty form of the copula never takes a verbal complement.

An HPSG analysis

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Constraints on *copula* will ensure that the various forms of the copula have the right form, ensuring that the same forms appear with the various subtypes.

Basic constraints

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A constraint on *predicational-copula* will ensure that predicational copulas share a SUBJ value and a CONT value with their first complement (which is the only complement in the case of the non-verbal-complement-predicational-copula).

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(36) *predicational-copula* $\rightarrow$ $\left[\begin{array}{l}\text{CONT}\,[2] \\ \\ \text{ARG-ST}\ \langle [1], \left[\begin{array}{l}\text{SUBJ}\,\langle [1] \rangle \\ \text{CONT}\,[2]\end{array}\right] \rangle \oplus \text{L}\end{array}\right]$

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(37) *non-v-comp-pred-copula* $\rightarrow$ $\left[\text{ARG-ST} < [], \left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{phrase} \\ \text{HEAD} \neg \textit{verb} \end{array}\right] >\right]$

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(38) *v-comp-pred-copula* $\rightarrow \left[\text{ARG-ST} < [], \left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{word} \\ \text{HEAD} \textit{verb} \\ \text{COMPS}[1] \end{array}\right] > \oplus [1]\right]$

(39) *equative-copula* →

$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{CONT} \begin{bmatrix} \textit{identity-rel} \\ \text{ARG}\,[1] \\ \text{ARG}\,[2] \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{ARG-ST} < \begin{bmatrix} \text{DEF} + \\ \text{INDEX}\,[1] \begin{bmatrix} \text{NUM}\,[3] \\ \text{GEN}\,[4] \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}, (\begin{bmatrix} \text{PRO} + \\ \text{CASE}\ \textit{nom} \\ \text{INDEX} \begin{bmatrix} \text{PERS}\ \textit{3} \\ \text{NUM}\,[3] \\ \text{GEN}\,[4] \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}), \begin{bmatrix} \text{DEF} + \\ \text{INDEX}\,[2] \end{bmatrix} > \end{bmatrix}$$

Present tense of the copula

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We assume following e.g. Bonami, Borsley and Tallerman (2016) that constraints can be overridden by more specific constraints and that this is overridden by more specific constraints in the contexts in which the overt present tense form *yakunnu* appears.

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(41) $$\left[\begin{array}{l}\text{HEAD } \textit{verb} \\ \\ \text{COMPS} < \ldots \left[\begin{array}{l}\text{HEAD } \textit{noun} \vee \textit{adj} \\ \text{CASE } [1]\end{array}\right] \ldots >\end{array}\right] \rightarrow [1] = \textit{acc}$$

In the case of the phonologically empty form of the copula this will be overridden by the following constraint:

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(42) $\left[\begin{array}{l}\text{HEAD}\left[\begin{array}{l}\textit{copula}\\ \text{NULL} +\end{array}\right]\\ \text{COMPS} < \ldots \left[\begin{array}{l}\text{HEAD noun} \vee \text{adj}\\ \text{CASE [1]}\end{array}\right], \ldots >\end{array}\right] \rightarrow [1] = \textit{nom}$

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(41) will also be overridden by the constraint on the type *equative-copula*, which requires the optional pronoun to be [CASE *nom*].

The following constraint will ensure the phonologically empty form of the copula never takes a verbal complement:

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(43) *v-comp-pred-copula* $\rightarrow$ [NULL –]

Conclusions

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- The similarities and differences between verbless sentences and sentences with an overt copula can be captured by assuming that the former contain a phonologically empty form of the copula with similar but not identical properties to overt forms.

REFERENCE

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Bonami, O., R. D. Borsley, and M. O. Tallerman (2016), On pseudo-non-finite clauses in Welsh, *Proceedings of the Joint 2016 Conference on Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar and Lexical Functional Grammar*, 104-124.