

The Haitian Creole copula and types of predication: A lexical account

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Introduction

- Stem alternation, suppletive or not, is most often related to the presence of inherent and/or contextual inflectional features specifying the lexeme: e.g. French *oeil* vs. *yeux*, English *go* vs. *went*, Portuguese *perco* ‘I lose’ vs. *perdemos* ‘we lose’.
- It may depend on what the word appears next to: e.g. French *mon ombrelle* ‘my sunshade’, not **ma ombrelle* – cf. *une ombrelle* ‘a sunshade’ and *ma maison* ‘my house’ (Zwicky 1985, 1990).

- I examine another instance of shape-dependence: the suppletive stems that realize the copula in Haitian Creole, a French-based creole spoken by about ten million people in Haiti.
- These stems do not depend for their selection on inherent and/or contextual inflectional features or on the shape of some adjacent element, but on the syntax and semantics of the predicate headed by a given form of the copula.
- The ser/estar alternation in Portuguese and Spanish may provide an analogue — although ser and estar are likelier to be distinct lexemes.

- In addition to general descriptions (e.g. Valdman 1978, 1981; DeGraff 2007; Fattier 2013), numerous studies have been devoted to the Haitian Creole copula system, e.g. Damoiseau (1985), DeGraff (1992), Déprez & Vinet (1997), Kihm (1993), Déprez (2003).
- Most approaches are couched in the framework of transformational syntax (P & P or Minimalism). (The first and the last reference but one are exceptions.)
- Here, I intend to look at the issue from a lexical and morphological angle.

- First I review the Haitian Creole facts.
- Then I propose a formal account according to which the copular lexeme's lexical entry mentions several stems, each of which identifies a particular lexical entry of type word, whose valence and semantics are subsets of the valence and semantics of the lexeme.
- Collocations of these words with TMA markers are realized via realization rules written in an Information-based Morphology (IbM) format (Crysmann & Bonami 2015).

The Haitian Creole copula: facts

Part of the Haitian Creole copula's paradigm can be retrieved from the following examples (Déprez 2003:135, 136, 139; Fattier 2013:201):

(1) *Jan se yon pwofesè.*

John COP INDF teacher

John is a teacher.

(2) *Jan chapantyé.*

John carpenter

John is a carpenter.

(3) *Jan malad.*

John sick

John is sick.

(4) *Jan nan lekol la.*

John in school DEF

John is at school.

(5) *Elifèt te anba tab la.*

E. PST under table DEF

Elifèt was under the table.

(6) *Se frè mwen Jan ye.*

COP brother 1SG John COP

It is my brother that John is.

Three forms come out from these examples:

1. **se** in (1) and (6), from French *c'est* /sɛ/ 'it is'
2. a null form in (2)-(5)
3. **ye** in (6), from French *est* /ɛ/ 'is' or *i(l) est* /jɛ/ 'he is'.

- I assume we are dealing with verbal forms, whose special properties are in part a legacy from their origin.
- That there are overt forms gives us ground to assume a null form as a cell in the paradigm (see Sag et al. 2003 on the copula in AAVE).

- The difference between (1) and (2) seems to lie in the syntactic category of the complement, an NP in (1), a NOM in (2) (Sag & Wasow 1999:84).
- Note that *chapantyè* in (2) can be modified by an attributive adjective: e.g. *Jan bon chapantyè* ‘John is a good carpenter’.

- The real difference, however, resides in the individual-level character of the property predicated by means of *se*, in the present case being a professor (Carlson 1977; Diesing 1988; Chierchia 1995; Kratzer 1995).
- *Se*'s complements need not be indefinite NPs involving the indefinite determiner *yon* 'a' as in (1).
- Whenever the complement denotes some obviously permanent quality of the subject, determination can be dispensed with.

See the following extract from a poem by Bonel Auguste (Chalmers et al. 2015:20), where being man's limit is presented as a defining property of man's dream:

(7) *rèv lòm se limit lòm.*

dream man COP limit man

man's dream is man's limit. (*le rêve de l'homme est la limite de l'homme*)

Despite the absence of definite articles, *limit lòm* is a definite NP by virtue of being a genitive construction whose complement *lòm* is itself definite as it refers to the maximal set of human beings (see Lyons 1999:181-184 on 'class generics'; Huddleston & Pullum 2002:407; Kihm 2003).

- Bare nouns (NOMs) are acceptable under the same conditions: e.g. *Mari se fanm* ‘Mary is a woman’ (Glaude 2012), alternating with the synonymous (?) *Mari se yon fanm*.
- In French as well, in a somewhat literary register, *Marie est femme* is a (semantically slightly distinct) alternative to *Marie est une femme*.

- Given this, (2) appears to be ambiguous, in the sense that being a carpenter may be viewed as an individual-level quality of John or as a stage-level description of what John is at the time the sentence is uttered.
- Nouns denoting professions or trades typically trigger that kind of ambiguity, allowing for referentially equivalent predicates with and without *se*. (For similar facts in French, see Kupferman 1979; Boone 1983.)

- The individual- vs. stage-level contrast can also be made manifest with adjectival predicates.
- On the basis of a corpus study Damoiseau (1996) demonstrates that for more than half of the items (including *malad*) adjectival predicates without an overt copula as in (3) imply a stage-level interpretation, while the same with *se* as in *Jan se malad* are understood as predicating an individual-level property of the subject (also see Pompilius 1976).

Clefting of stage-level predications (no overt copula) is done by way of ‘doubling’ as with verbs. See (7) (Déprez 2003:146):

(7) *Se damou Jan damou.*

COP in.love John in.love

John IS in love.

Compare *Se manje Jan manje* {COP eat J. eat} ‘John did eat’.

Cleft individual-level predications (involving **se**) are like (6). See (8) (Damoiseau 1996:157):

(8) *Se grangou li ye.*

COP unscrupulous 3SG COP

Unscrupulous s/he really is.

Grangou also has the stage-level meaning ‘hungry’, in which case clefting employs the same strategy as for *damou* ‘in love’ in (7).

- Example (4) shows the copula not to be realized when the complement is a locative PP.
- Not all PP complements behave alike.
- PP complements, locative or otherwise, predicating a potentially individual-level property require *se* as shown in (10) and (11) (Déprez 2003:141, 142):

(10) *Tout sa se pou ou.*

all this COP for 2SG

All this is for you.

(11) *M pa te di ou vi mwenn se nan navigasyon.*

1SG NEG PST tell 2SG life 1SG COP in navigation

I had not told you my life is in navigation.

Descriptive generalization: The copula is realized as *se* before a noun, adjective or prepositional phrase denoting a potentially individual-level property of the subject. It is not expressed (null stem) when the property is potentially stage-level.

- Couldn't *te* be the past form of the copula in (5)?
- More data show *te* to be a past tense marker (a 'particlexeme' in Zwicky's 1990 terminology) that may combine with other TMA markers, as in (12)-(13) (Fattier 2013:201, 199):

(12) *Li te gen twa zoranj.*

3SG PST have three orange

S/he had three oranges.

(13) *Li t(e) ap boukanen mayi.*

3SG PST PROG roast maize

S/he was roasting maize.

- There might exist two homophonous *te*, one a past marker, the other the copula's past form.
- Such an assumption would have history on its side, since *te* obviously comes from the French imperfect *était* 'was' and/or the past participle *été* 'been' and the TMA sequence in (13) can be traced back to the obsolete and/or dialectal French past progressive periphrase *était après* or (a) *été après*.

- Synchronically there is good reason not to regard *te* as the past copula.
- Transposing (6) into the past gives us *Se frè mwen Jan te ye* ‘It’s my brother that John was’, not **Se frè mwen Jan te*, as we would expect if *te* was the past copula.
- I assume that the past tense marker *te* in (5) ‘precedes’ the same null form of the copula as is evidenced in (2)-(4).

- *Ye* requires a gap to its immediate right.
- The gap, the foot of an LDD, may be part of a cleft construction as in (6) or of a WH-construction as in (14) from a poem by André Fouad (Chalmers & al. 2015:62):

(14) *di m kijan lavi te ye*
tell 1SG how life PST COP
tell me how life was.

- It wouldn't do simply to state that *ye* must be followed by nothing (meaning an utterance-final pause).
- There may occur something after it, provided it is not a complement, but dislocated material as in (15) (Tessonneau 1980:18) or an adjunct as in (16) (Déprez 2003:148):

(15) *sa l' ye nèg la ki marye avè fi a?*

what 3SG COP man DEF REL marry with girl DEF
 What is he, the man who married the girl?

(16) *Nonm nan te pi gran m te ye lè sa a.*

man DEF PST more big 1SG PST COP time DEM DEF
 The man was bigger than I was at that time.

- The fact that *se* in (6) lacks a subject has led some authors to cast doubt on its verbal character and to define it as an ‘introducer’ distinct from copular *se* (see discussion in Valdman 1978).
- Yet, null subjects do exist in Haitian Creole as shown by the following examples (Déprez 1992a: 198, 1992b:24):

(17) *Rete yon nèg nan kay la.*

remain one man in house DEF

There remains one man in the house.

(18) *Sanble Mari renmen Jan.*

seem Mary love John

It seems Mary loves John.

- Such unrealized subjects correspond to expletive subjects in languages like English or French where nullity is disallowed: compare *Il reste un homme dans la maison, Il semble que Marie aime Jean.*
- In 17th century French *sembler* and *rester* could be used without expletive *il* in sentences quite similar to (17) and (18) (Haase 1935:15-16).
- The null subject of **se** in (6) and in such sentences as **Se vre** {COP true} ‘It’s true’ (French *C’est vrai*) falls under this generalization.
- I conclude that **se** is a verbal copula across the board, and it belongs to the small set of verbs that allow expletive null subjects, a feature to be mentioned in its lexical entry.

- **Se** is not limited to 3rd person.
- See (19) from a poem by Solèy (Chalmers et al. 2015:22) where the subject is the clitic form *m* of *mwèn* ‘I, me’, occurring with all verbs (cf. *m pati* ‘I left’):

(19) *m se espas nan mitan de pyebwa.*

1SG COP space in middle two tree

I am the space between two trees.

- And see (16) showing that *ye* like *se* is compatible with all person-number values.

- An intriguing property of *se* is its position vis-à-vis TMA markers and negation.
- See the following examples (Glaude 2012:39; Valdman 1978:240; Cavé in Chalmers et al. 2015:46):

(20) *Jan se pa te papa w.*

John COP NEG PST father 2SG

John wasn't your father.

(21) *Sa se va yon gwo nouvèl.*

that COP FUT INDF great news

That will be great news.

(22) *Se tap yon tan pèdi.*

COP PST.PROG INDF time lose

It would be time lost.

- As shown by (20) the grammatical order is **se** < NEG < TMA, whereas it is NEG < TMA < V with all other verbs, including **ye** (cf. [14]).
- Examples (20)-(22) suggest that all simple or complex TMA markers are admissible with **se**.
- Yet not all native speakers accept **se va** and **se ap**.

- *Se*'s compatibility with all subject pronouns gets drastically reduced when it combines with TMA markers and/or the negation.
- The pronoun is then obligatorily 3SG, it is left-dislocated and the emphatic form *li-mèm* must be used. See the following contrast (Déprez 2003:151):

(23) **Li se te zanmi mwen.*

3SG COP PST friend 1SG

(24) *Li-mèm, se te zanmi mwen.*

3SG-self COP PST friend 1SG

S/he was my friend.

- Likewise, **Li se pa zanmi mwen* vs. *Li-mèm, se pa zanmi mwen* ‘S/he isn’t my friend’
- **Ou(-mèm) se (pa) te zanmi mwen* vs. *Ou (pa) te zanmi mwen* ‘You were (not) my friend’, using the null form of the copula.
- In (24) *se*’s subject is the null subject bearing 3SG as its only possible value.

- Déprez (2003:151) relates the ungrammaticality of **Ou(-mèm) se (pa) te...* to that of French **Toi, c'est/c'était (pas) mon ami(e)* next to *Elle/lui, c'est/c'était (pas) mon ami(e)*.
- It does not account for the well-formedness of *Ou se zanmi mwèn* 'You are my friend' or *Jan se zanmi mwèn* 'John is my friend' (where *Jan* is not left-dislocated).
- *Se* inflected for TMA and/or the negative polarity selects for the null subject only, so that *Jan* in (20) is actually left-dislocated as is *li-mèm* in (24) and as is *Jean* in the French equivalent *Jean, c'est/c'était (pas) mon ami*.
- With non-3rd person subjects and inflected *se*, the individual vs. stage-level contrast appears to be neutralized.

The null form is compatible with all TMA markers and negation, as shown by (5) as well as by (26) (Glaude 2012:49) and (27) (DeGraff 2007:114):

(26) *Jan ap doktè.*

John PROG doctor

John will be a doctor .

(27) *Duvalye pa prezidan Ayiti.*

Duvallier NEG president Haiti

Duvallier isn't the president of Haiti.

- (26) cannot mean 'John is being a doctor': interpreting the progressive as a future is a general possibility, and the only one with stative verbs (Fattier 2013).
- The positive counterpart of (27) is *Duvalye prezidan Ayiti* 'Duvallier is the president of Haiti', whereas the negative of the also acceptable *Duvalye se prezidan Ayiti* is *Duvalye, se pa prezidan Ayiti* (see above).

A formal account of the Haitian Creole copula

- I only try to account for the clearest facts as exemplified in (1)-(6).
- I assume the Haitian Creole copula to be one verbal lexeme realized as three stems, one null, selected according to predication type.
- This lexeme can be represented as the following lexical entry:

<i>copv-lexm</i>															
LID	[COP]														
SYN	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>HEAD</td> <td>[PRED +]</td> </tr> <tr> <td>VAL</td> <td> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>[1] SPR</td> <td>$\langle NP \mid null \rangle$</td> </tr> <tr> <td>[2] COMPS</td> <td>$\langle NP \mid NOM \mid PP \mid ADJP \mid ADV \mid gap \rangle$</td> </tr> </table> </td> </tr> <tr> <td>ARG-ST</td> <td>$\langle [1], [2] \rangle$</td> </tr> </table>	HEAD	[PRED +]	VAL	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>[1] SPR</td> <td>$\langle NP \mid null \rangle$</td> </tr> <tr> <td>[2] COMPS</td> <td>$\langle NP \mid NOM \mid PP \mid ADJP \mid ADV \mid gap \rangle$</td> </tr> </table>	[1] SPR	$\langle NP \mid null \rangle$	[2] COMPS	$\langle NP \mid NOM \mid PP \mid ADJP \mid ADV \mid gap \rangle$	ARG-ST	$\langle [1], [2] \rangle$				
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- Expressions headed by the copula are propositions about some situations and they are semantically restricted to predicating stage-level (*stlev*) or individual-level (*indlev*) properties of a given subject.
- Property type conditions the choice of the proper stem among the three stems that realize the copula, tagged A (the null stem), B (**se**), and C (**ye**).

The contexts calling for the null stem (A) are summed up in (28):

(28) *Jan (pa) (te) (bon) chapantyé / malad (anpil) / nan lekola / konsa.*

John (NEG) (PST) (good) carpenter / sick (very)/ in school
DEF / so

John is/was (not) a (good) carpenter / (very) sick / at school / so .

The copula's null stem is required if

1. the subject is an NP;
 2. the complement is a NOM, or an AP, or a PP, or an adverb;
 3. the denoted property is viewed as being of the stage-level sort.
- It may be negated and/or specified for some TMA value.

- Each stem realizes a word-form of the copular lexeme, with its own lexical entry.
- The A stem is assigned the following lexical entry, where the phonological form is represented as the empty list, and the valence and semantics are subsets of the lexeme's valence and semantics:

	<i>verb word</i>		
LID	[A COP]		
PHON	⟨ ⟩		
SYN	HEAD	[PRED +]	
	VAL	[1] SPR ⟨NP⟩ [2] COMPS ⟨NOM PP ADJP ADV⟩	
	ARG-ST	⟨[1], [2]⟩	
SEM	MODE	<i>prop</i>	
	INDEX	<i>s</i>	
	RESTR	RLN	<i>cop</i>
		SIT	<i>s</i>
SBJ		<i>i</i>	
PRED		<i>j pred stlev</i>	

- Suppose we now want to account for the predicate *te bon chapantyé* ‘was a good carpenter’ (French *était bon charpentier*).
- I assume Haitian Creole collocations such as *te chante* ‘sang, used to sing’ to be periphrases (Bonami 2015), i.e. multiword morphological units involving an ancillary and a main element, in which the former is a marker instead of a verb as in the English periphrase *has sung*.
- (See Van Eynde 1994 and Sag 2012 for the relevant notion of marker as a non-head element selecting a head and assigning it features.)

- The difference between *te chante* and the case at hand is that the main verb's stem has no phonology associated with it.
- Hence the following realization rule for the collocation of the past marker *te* with the null stem of the copula, using Information-based Morphology formalism (Crysmann & Bonami 2015):

<i>mword</i>							
PHON	⟨te⟩						
MPH	⟨ 1 [PH⟨te⟩PC1], 2 [PH⟨⟩PC 1]⟩						
MS	{ 3 [TMA <i>pst</i>]} A [LID COP]						
RR1	<table style="border-collapse: collapse; margin-left: 20px;"> <tr> <td style="border-right: 1px solid black; padding-right: 5px;">MUD</td> <td>3 [TMA <i>pst</i>]</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border-right: 1px solid black; padding-right: 5px;">MPH</td> <td>1 [⟨te⟩PC 1]</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border-right: 1px solid black; padding-right: 5px;">RS</td> <td>[]</td> </tr> </table>	MUD	3 [TMA <i>pst</i>]	MPH	1 [⟨te⟩PC 1]	RS	[]
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MPH	1 [⟨te⟩PC 1]						
RS	[]						
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MUD	A LID COP						
MPH	2 [PH ⟨⟩PC 1]						
RS	[]						

- The rule realizes a multiword (mword) comprising the marker *te* and the null copula tagged A pointing to the relevant word-form and stem.
- Tagging ensures that /te < >/ is inserted in the right syntactic-semantic contexts.

- The reverse selection (RS) feature is given no value.
- Its function is to ensure that, in periphrases such as *has sung*, the main verb's form (e.g. the past participle) stands in the context of the ancillary item that requires it (e.g. *have*) (Bonami 2015).
- In Haitian Creole the form of the main verb never depends on the marker in collocation with which it assumes a given TMA value.
- ***Te*** includes a COMPS feature [VFORM finite] in its lexical entry.

- In the morphophonological (MPH) tier, the phonological (PH) form ⟨te⟩ and the null stem are assigned the same position class (PC) 1.
- This is in order to avoid the awkward statement that *te* ‘precedes’ something that is actually not there.
- We may therefore consider *te* in *te bon chapantyé* a portmanteau word cumulating the marker and the null stem.
- The rule also accounts — mutatis mutandis — for the collocations *ap* ⟨ ⟩ and *pa* ⟨ ⟩ of (24) and (25).

The contexts calling for **se** (stem B) are summed up in the three examples below:

(29) *Mari se yon (bon) profesè / fanm / sè ou / malad.*

Mary COP INDF (good) teacher / woman / sister 2SG / sick

Mary is a (good) teacher / a woman / your sister / a sick person.

(30) *Se vre / konsa / yon lòt bagay.*

COP true / so / INDF other thing

It's true / so / another thing.

(31) *Vi mwenn se nan navigasyon.*

life 1SG COP in navigation

My life is in navigation.

Se is required when

1. the subject is an NP as in (29) and (31) or is null as in (30);
 2. the complement is an NP as in (29), or a NOM whose head denotes some individual-level quality such as being a woman, or an AP denoting an individual-level property as in (29)-(30), or a PP with the same type of denotation as in (31), or an adverb such as *konsa* in (30).
- I leave aside **se** in clefts (6).
 - The lexical entry for **se** is similar to that for the null stem but for the above changes.

- What about the position of TMA markers and the negator as illustrated in (20)-(22)?
- I posit special realization rules such that TMA markers and the negator follow rather than precede the main verb when it is *se*.
- The explanation for such a crazy behaviour is diachronic to some extent: cf. French *c'est pas* /sɛ_pa/ 'it isn't' — but *c'était pas* /sɛtɛ_pa/ 'it wasn't'.
- The COP < NEG < TMA ordering is a Haitian Creole innovation consequent to *te*'s emergence as a past marker (cf. *pa te V*).

Ye (stem C) is required when

1. the subject is an NP;
 2. the complement is a gap related to clefting as in (6) or questioning as in (14).
- *Ye* appears to be neutral as to whether the predicated property is stage or individual-level.
 - The lexical entry for *ye* is similar to those for *se* and the null stem, but for the above changes.

Conclusion: what remains to be done

- A lot!
- Why should *se* be limited to (necessarily 3rd person) null subjects when and only when it is inflected for TMA and/or negative polarity?
- Why is the stage vs. individual-level contrast neutralized when *se* is so inflected and the subject is non-3rd person?

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Thank you for your attention