

**The copula cycle in Kriyol**  
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This paper aims to investigate the emergence of the copular item *i* in the Portuguese-based Creole of Guinea-Bissau, or simply Kriyol. It is well known that copulas may develop from personal or demonstrative pronouns (e.g. Stassen 1997). The copular item *i* in Kriyol developed from the third person subject pronoun *i* and is now part of the copula paradigm, which consists of both verbal (*sedu* ‘to be’, (*y*)*era* ‘was/were’, and the locative copula *sta* ‘to stay’) and non-verbal items (*i* and  $\emptyset$ , the zero copula).

The choice of the copula in Kriyol depends upon both complement type and the Tense-Aspect of the sentence. As a general tendency, the item *i* is used with complements with a trait [+Nominal] (i.e. nouns and nonverbal adjectives) in the present (1) and past tense (2a).

Copular clauses in the past tense may also select the copula (*y*)*era*, inherently specified for past (2b). Yet, some speakers consider (2b) an influence from Portuguese. Whenever the sentence is in the future tense or an aspectual value such as habitual or continuous is associated to the predication, the copula *sedu* is selected and the corresponding marker is inserted at its left (3).

On the basis of the striking resemblance to topic-comment structures of the type STRONG PRONOUN/NOUN + RESUMPTIVE *i*, this paper proposes that copular clauses with *i* and complement [+Nominal] (1 and 2a) derive from topic-comment structures. In more detail, the copular item *i* is the result of copularization of resumptive pronoun *i* to topic-comment structures through copula cycle (Lohndal 2009). The cycle has three major steps: from pronoun (in the Specifier position) to copula (in the Head position) to grammatical marker (affix). Based on the fact that *i* may be absent in copular clauses such as (1) without any change in meaning, we assume that *i* in Kriyol did not reach the status of full copula. What made *i* eligible as a copular item is its special status in Kriyol grammar: apart from being 3SG weak subject, *i* is a kind of “neutral pronoun [...] which is able to refer back to anything in the world” (Kihm 1994:160f.), regardless of Number- and Person-agreement to its antecedent. The non-verbal status of the copular item *i* is clearly shown by the fact that only items that may function as topics are allowed as subjects of copular clauses with *i*, i.e. strong pronouns (2a and 4) or lexical nouns (1). As a difference, verbal copulas such as *sedu* (3) or (*y*)*era* (2b) always select syntactic subjects, i.e. weak pronouns or lexical nouns; the presence of the strong pronoun before the weak (mandatory) subject, is optional (2b). Moreover, the negative clitic *ka*, which is a preverbal item, always occurs at the right of *i* in copular clauses (4). Finally, *i* cannot combine with aspect markers. Such particles in Kriyol only select items with a verbal trait, i.e. verbs or verbal adjectives. As a consequence, whenever an aspect marker is present, it selects the verbal copula *sedu* (3).

The line of analysis outlined in this paper is different from Kihm’s (2007) proposal as to the emergence of the copular item *i*: he assumes that the 3SG pronoun *i* has been reanalyzed as a predicate marker in Ancient Kriyol. At a later stage, *i* has become a copula and its presence is mandatory. Further evidence in favor of the analysis proposed here is based on similar cases of grammaticalization, e.g. Sranan (Arends 1989, McWhorter 1997), Mandarin Chinese and Hebrew (Li and Thompson 1977). As an instance, the copula *hu* in Hebrew may still function as 3SG pronoun. The same is true for *i* in Kriyol. We extend this proposal to Casamancese, the variety of Kriyol spoken in Casamance (Senegal), with the difference that in Casamancese, it seems that *i* is mandatory in copular clauses with complement [+N] (Biagui 2012, Biagui & Quint 2013; see 5, adapted from Biagui 2012). It is plausible to assume that *i* in Casamancese reached the status of (non-verbal) full copula.

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- (1) *Kil omis la (i) piskadur(is).*  
DEM man-PL there i fisher(-PL)  
'Those men are fishermen.'
- (2) a. *El i bon pursor ba.*  
3SG.strong i good teacher PST  
b. *(El) i yera bon pursor.*  
3SG.strong 3SG.weak be.PST good teacher  
'S/He was a good teacher.'
- (3) *I ta /na sedu difisil.*  
3SG.weak HAB/CONT be difficult  
'It is/will be difficult.'
- (4) *Ami i ka pursor.*  
1SG.strong i NEG teacher  
'I am not a teacher.'
- (5) *Pidru i bon soldadi.*  
Peter i good soldier  
'Peter is a good soldier.'

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