THE COPULA CYCLE IN KRIYOL

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0. INTRODUCTION: This study focuses on the copular item i in Kriyol (Portuguese-based creole of Guinea-Bissau, West Africa) and its path of grammaticalization. Copulas such as locative and stage-level (sta ‘to be, to stay’), modal (parsi ‘to seem’) and aspectual (bida ‘to become’) will not be taken into account here.

1. EQUATIVE COPULAS IN KRIYOL AND THEIR ORIGIN
i. Verbal copula sedu ‘to be’ (from European Portuguese (EP) ser ‘to be’ with delatinism of /fr/ and insertion of epenthetic vowel /u/; see Khim 1994:272),
ii. Past verbal copula (y)era ‘was/were’ (from EP 3SG ipv. past copula era ‘was’),
iii. Past verbal copula foi (entering the paradigm; from EP 3SG pvf. past copula foi ‘has/has been’).
iv. Copular item i (3SG subject clitic pronoun; (neutral) reprise pronoun).

2. SELECTION OF THE COPULA
It depends upon two principles that seem to be shared among the languages of the world (Stassen 1997): (i) complement type and (ii) Tense/Aspect of the sentence.

(i) Type of the post-copular complement:
   a. Verbal adjectives that describe a basic quality such as kumpridu ‘to be tall’ and kontenti ‘to be happy’ (Khim 1994, 2000) usually occur without copula (1).
   1) E mininu kumpridu.
      DEM child be tall
      ‘This child is tall.’
   b. Non-verbal adjectives (2) and nominal predicates (3) usually occur with i.
   2) Badjuda i alema.
      girl i German
      ‘The girl is German.’
   3) Tina i musika ke mindjeris ta toka.
      tina i music REL woman-PL HAB play
      ‘Tina is a/the music that women play.’

(ii) Tense and Aspect in copular clauses:
The copular item i may only combine with the postverbal past marker ba, but it never combines with preverbal aspect markers na and ta. Yera and foi do not combine with na and to; they may occur alone or followed by ba. Notice that (4a) and (4b) yield the same reading. Sedu may combine with all T-A markers (5).
   a. Kasa ku kai (i) bedju ba dimas.
      house REL fall.down be(i)old PST very
      ‘The house that fell down was very old.’
   b. Kasa ku kai yera (ba) bedju dimas.
      house REL fall.down be PST (be)old very
      ‘The house that fell down was very old.’
   5) I (ka) na /ta sedu difisil.
      3SG NEG CONT/HAB be difficult
      ‘It is (not)/will (not) be difficult.’

3. INTRALINGUISTIC VARIATION
Kriyol shows a certain degree of intralinguistic variation, e.g. in the occurrence of i with verbal adjectives such as burmedju ‘be red’ (6). Moreover, i is sometimes not expressed (7).
   6) Kil ropo i (ka) burmedju.
      DEM cloth i NEG red
      ‘That cloth is (not) red.’
   7) Kil omis la (i) piskadur(is).
      DEM man-PL there i fisherman-PL
      ‘These men are fishermen.’

4. EVIDENCE FOR THE NON-VERBAL STATUS OF I
   • The subject of an i-copular clause is either a strong pronoun or a noun, whereas the subject of a verb is either a clitic pronoun or a noun.
   • The negation ka always follows copular i (6); otherwise, ka is preverbal (5).
   • I does not combine with verbal items such as T-A markers; it may only combine with ba (in this case, ba is an adverb; Truppi & Hagemeijer 2018).

5. FORMER HYPOTHESIS OF EMERGENCE
   • Khim (2007) assumes that the 3SG pronoun i has been reanalyzed as a predicate marker in Ancient Kriyol (AK), which was based on Lingua de Preto (‘Black Tongue’, a variety close to EP, spoken by African slaves in 16th c. Portugal, and then brought back to Africa; Khim 2007, Khim & Rougé 2013).
   LDP so_COP >> pidginized LDP Ø >> protocrole Ø = AK i Pred-marker > Kr. i COP

6. PRESENT PROPOSAL
   • On the basis of the striking resemblance to topic-comment structures (see section 7 below), I propose that copular clauses with i and complement [+Nominal] (2, 3, and 4a) derive from topic-comment structures through copula cycle.
   The item i was reanalyzed as a copula through Head Preference Principle (‘be a head, rather than a phrase’; van Gelderen 2004). The full cycle has three major steps (Lohndal 2009).
   Dem/Pronoun (Specifier) >> Copula (Head) >> Grammatical marker (affix) ---

7. TOPIC-COMMENT STRUCTURES IN KRIYOL
The following examples show the resemblance between topic-comment structures with reprise pronoun i (8) and copular clauses with copular i (4a, repeated in 9):
   8) Badjuda, i kumpridu pon.
      girl
      ‘The girl, she bought bread.’
   9) Kasa ku khi (i) bedju ba dimas.
      house REL fall.down be(i)old PST very
      ‘The house that fell down was very old.’
   Notice that i in (4a/9) is ambiguous: it could be either i (a reprise pronoun in a topic-comment structure (see 8)) or (ii) a copular item. As a consequence, (i) the adjective bedju is an item [+V]; or (ii) bedju is an item [+N].

8. STRUCTURAL CHANGE
For a demonstrative or a pronoun to develop into a copula, it has to occupy the Specifier position of the Predication Phrase (Lohndal 2009). This shift happens, in fact, within the same phrase (structures in (10) adapted from Lohndal 2009 and van Gelderen 2015). The structure in (10a) shows the stage where i is still a pronoun (in Spec of PrP, resembling topic-comment structures), whereas in (10b), it shifts to the Head position of PrP:
   10a. i sop, bedjuda [PrP irom i] [i iro, iap, alema]]
   10b. i sop, badjuda [PrP irom i] [i iro, iap, alema]]

Problem: i is arguably a subject clitic, i.e. it is in X’ and not in Spec (see e.g. Cardinell & Starke 1999). We may postulate an earlier stage of Kriyol (see section 5), where a non-clitic pronoun *el occurred in copular clauses (see Khim 2007 for the emergence of Kriyol 3SG pronoun(s): EP ele > AK eli > K (eli i)). This reanalysis of 3SG pronoun may have taken place in topic-comment structures, which gave rise to copular clauses of the type discussed here. (10a) => (10c) [i sop, badjuda [PrP irom i] [i iro, iap, alema]]

9. CONCLUSION
Most informants agree that i is mandatory in copular clauses. Yet, i is often dropped in spontaneous speech (4a, 7). Moreover, sentences such as (4a) show that i may still be interpreted as a pronoun. Based on these facts, I assume that i in Kriyol did not reach the status of full copula, i.e. it is not fully grammaticalized. It still “swings” between Spec and Head of PrP. This explains why it can be dropped and why it is still analyzable as a pronoun in certain contexts.

What is it? It attributes a property (described by the complement) to the subject, but it is not a copula. We may, thus, define i as a predicate marker (copula-like functional category).

10. KRIYOL VS. CASAMANCESE
   The creole language of Casamance (Senegal) is a later offshoot of Kriyol (17th c.). Casamance also displays the copular item i, which seems to be mandatory in equative sentences (Biagioli 2012):
   11) Pipido i boy sadoul.
      Pipido i good soldier
      ‘Pipido is a good soldier.’
      (adapted from Biagioli 2012:188)
   If so, the grammaticalization of i as a copula in Casamance has gone further than in Kriyol and it has reached the status of full copula.

11. FURTHER ISSUES FOR EXPLORATION are, among others: (i) to study Kriyol subject clitics (and the possibility for Kriyol to be a null-subject language), (ii) to analyze the behavior of the past marker ba in i-copular clauses, (iii) to look at the African substrate languages, e.g. Mandinka and Wolof (are there pronominal copulas?), and (iv) to investigate whether we need to postulate a null copula for explaining the alternation between the presence and absence of the copula.

References