

# On binominal copular clauses in Yoruba

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I examine copular clauses in Yoruba (Benue-Congo) where nominals flank the copula on either side. These constructions exhibit two distinct copula elements: one verbal and the other identical to the focus marker in the language. Previous research suggests these copulas serve different discourse functions (Bisang & Sonaiya 2000). Based on (sub)extraction data, I argue that the verbal copula is restricted to predication sentences, while the focus copula—non-predicational in nature—appears both in canonical and inverse copular sentences, marking information structure associated to focalization. Crucially, non-predicational copular clauses involve movement to a low focus position in the vP/VP periphery (Belletti 2004).

I demonstrate that an analysis distinguishing subject positions (Cardinaletti 2004, Rizzi 2015, Shlonsky & Rizzi 2018) more accurately accounts for these structures. In the verbal copular sentences, the pre-copular DP undergoes movement to both lower and higher subject positions, fulfilling case/phi-features and edge features, respectively. In focus copular sentences, only the higher subject position is merged. Evidence for the absence of the lower subject position comes from the lack of nominative case marking on the pre-copular DP. Additionally, the subject of the focus copula cannot be a clitic, and only strong pronouns are permitted.