Toward a Typology of Copular Sentences

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This paper argues that copular constructions [CCs] in Polish and Swedish vary systematically with respect to interpretation, Case, and type of copular element (verbal/pronominal).

Background: In Polish, verbal CCs obligatorily take Instrumental (Inst) Case on the postcopular NP (NP2), whereas pronominal CCs require Nominative (Nom) Case on NP2 (Citko, 2008). This has been argued to track the predication/equation contrast. Relatedly, Sigurðsson (2006) argues that in Swedish, equative CCs allow only Nom (1a), whereas *assumed identity* CCs allow both Nom and Accusative (Acc) Case (1b).

(1a)   Han *är* inte han/*honom.   (1b)   Jag låtsas   inte vara dig/du.
      He is not he.nom/*acc.   I   pretend not be   you.acc/nom.
      'He isn't him.'   'I don't pretend to be you.'

Proposal: Following Citko (2008) and Adger & Ramchand (2003), we argue that in both Swedish and Polish, the semantic contrast underlying the morpho-syntactic alternation in (1), is that between predication with respect to an eventuality versus non-eventive predication. That is, Polish pronominal CCs with Nom Case are infelicitous with clearly eventive predicates, but improve when coerced into non-eventive readings. Similarly in Swedish, eventive contexts require Acc Case (2a), and non-eventive ones Nom (2b). The apparent alternation stems from surface ambiguous contexts, such as that in (1b).

(2a)   På semestern var jag dig/??du.   (2b)   I mitt förra liv var   jag du/??dig.
      On vacation   was I   you.acc/??nom   In my last   life was I   you.nom/??acc
      'On my holiday was I you.'   'In my last life, I was you.'

To derive the syntactic facts, we propose two heads: $Pred_e^o$ which takes an eventive complement (NP, AP, PP, VP), and assigns an Initiator θ-role to NP1, and thus Predicative Case (Spelled Out as Inst or Acc); and $Pred^o$ which takes a property denoting NP-complement, does not assign such a θ-role to NP1, and thus cannot assign Case. Since NPs have a [uCase] feature, NP2 in (2b) receives Nom from T^o inside a lower clause—by hypothesis, a silent Free Relative clause (cf. Heycock & Kroch (1999), Adger & Ramchand (2003), Pancheva (2009)), as a 'last resort'.

Predictions: This analysis predicts that Acc/Inst NP2s should behave syntactically like direct objects, whereas Nom NP2s should pattern like overt Relative Clause subjects. This is borne out: For instance, Inst/Acc, but not Nom NP2s are available for extraction (3).

(3) $[Dig/*du]_i$ vill   jag inte vara t_i.
      you.acc/*nom want I   not   be.inf t.
      'You, I do not want to be.' (Sigurðsson 2013)

Finally, we expect that the Nom NP2 (underlyingly a silent Free Relative clause) should be ambiguous between a 'universal' and a 'singular definite' interpretation (Jacobson, 1995). This, we argue, is what underlies the semantic contrast between 'true' Equatives (*John is Superman.*) and 'inherent property' predication (*John is the nicest person I know.*). We provide a detailed discussion of the semantic derivation and discuss further syntactic data to support this analysis.

Conclusion: We predict that the following syntactic and semantic properties will pattern together cross-linguistically: i. event semantics, verbal copula, Inst/Acc Case; ii. non-eventive (inherent property/equative) semantics, pronominal copula, Nom Case.

Selected References: Citko, B. (2008). Small clauses reconsidered: Not so small and not all alike. *Lingua 118* (3), 261–295.Sigurðsson, H. A. 2006. The NOM/ACC alternation in Germanic. In *Comparative studies in Germanic syntax*, ed. J. M. Hartmann and L. Molnárfi, pp. 13-50. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. Sigurðsson, H. A. 2013. Case in Swedish: A preliminary overview. Paper presented at FWAV,. SCL 25, Haáskóli Íslands (University of Iceland).