

Copulas as Last Resort Roots

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In this paper we discuss the copula system in Saramaccan from a synchronic and a diachronic point of view. We show that this system is atypical from a cross-creole perspective (cf. Michaelis et al 2013), and counts as an early reconstitution (Arends 1989, van den Berg 2007). Furthermore, we discuss the micro-parametric variation between the Surinamese creoles (Goury & Migge 2003).

Received opinion (e.g. Michaelis et al. 2013) has it that Saramaccan has two copulas, a specificational and a predicational one (in the sense of Den Dikken 2006). The specificational copula is nominal (*dā*), while the predicational one is verbal (*dē*). Arguments for their different categorial status are: (i) the distribution of TMA-markers and negation; (ii) the distribution of subject pronouns; (iii) reversibility of the NPs. However, we argue that the specificational/predicational divide is mistaken, because the verbal copula *dē* can also occur in specificational contexts. Furthermore, the two copulas are not mutually exclusive in their combinatory possibilities as both may occur with NP-complements, but only verbal *dē* may occur with PP and AP-complements. The analysis we propose, therefore, takes a different perspective, in which *dā* is a pronominal element in specificational copula-constructions, both having special semantic content (in terms of *identity* etc.) and a special syntax (in terms of selectional features (DP-restriction) and reversibility), whereas *dē* is a verbal element in specificational and predicational constructions without having special semantic content nor a special syntax, a pattern shared with the other Surinamese creoles.

In the remainder we focus on and solve the puzzle of Sebba (1986) about the variable behavior of the verbal copula in the Suriname creoles:

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|----|--------------------------|-------|-------|--------|--------------|
| (1) | a. | A | liba | (*de) | bradi. | (Sebba 1986) |
| | | DET | river | DE | wide | |
| | | ‘The river is wide.’ | | | | |
| | b. | A | liba | *(de) | so | bradi. |
| | | DET | river | DE | so | wide |
| | | ‘The river is so wide.’ | | | | |
| | c. | U | bradi | a | liba | *(de)? |
| | | how | wide | DET | river | DE |
| | | ‘How wide is the river?’ | | | | |

Following Veenstra & Lopez (2014), we argue that the Surinamese creoles have the following clause structure, in which little *v* is obligatorily incorporated into the I-Domain:

- (2) [IP v+T/M/A [vP <v> [Root R [...]]]]

Property items like *bradi* can freely occur in the Root position as long as they are categorically unspecified. Degree phrases, like *so* in (1b) and *u* in (1c), are generated in the extended projection of the little *a* projection and signal a non-verbal categorial specification, and accordingly the copula *de* has to surface in order to resolve the conflict between little *v* and *aP*. In the final analysis then, what has traditionally been analysed as a (verbal) copula is in fact a last resort Root to avoid a categorial conflict between two categorically specified lexical items.

References

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