Non-verbal predication and copular sentences in Mayan languages

Grant Armstrong

University of Wisconsin-Madison
Department of Spanish & Portuguese/
Language Sciences Program

February 1, 2024

visit glottothèque at: https://spw.uni-goettingen.de/projects/maya/

Goals

- Describe the basic components of non-verbal predication sentences (NVPs) in Mayan languages and issues they raise about finiteness and clause structure

- Situate NVPs within the typology of copular sentences, focusing on predicational vs. specificational sentences in Mayan languages

Non-verbal predication and copular elements

- In NVPs the main predicate is a non-verbal category (e.g. noun or adjective phrase). Typologically, languages differ as to whether the non-verbal predicate is linked to the subject via a copular element or not (Stassen 2013)

(1)   a. You **are** a teacher   English

        b. Mō   kóro **mú**   nda   Vai (Welmers 1976: 116, cited in Stassen 2013)
           man old   FOC/COP 1SG
           'I am an old man'

        c. Maystraj-ety   Ch'ol (Coon 2013: 66)
           teacher-B2SG
           'You are a teacher'

Basic components of NVPs

- Subject NPs follow the predicate in canonical order

- Set B pronouns appear in either post or pre-predicate position and index the person features of the subject

(2)   a. Yucatec Maya (field notes)   [Predicate]-SetB [Subject]
          Taam-Ø   le   ch'e'en=o'
          deep-B3SG DEF well=CL
          'The well is deep'

        b. Tz'utujil (Dayley 1985: 62)   SetB-[Predicate] [Subject]
          At   winaq
          B2SG person
          'You are a person'

Lack of temporal morphology and TAM

- NVPs do not have TAM markers or accompanying status suffixes (Bohnemeyer 2002; Verhoeven 2007; Mateo Toledo 2011; Pye 2011; Vapnarsky 2013; Coon 2014; Armstrong 2017)

(3) a. *Max-yob' hach   Q'anjob'al (Mateo Toledo 2011: 161)
         CP-bad   B2SG
         Intended: 'You were bad'

      b. *Úuch xooknáal-nak-en   Yucatec (Armstrong 2017: 170)
         REM   student-SS-B1SG
         Intended: 'I was a student long ago'

- This is the fundamental characteristic that distinguishes NVPs from sentences with verbal predicates

Temporal modifiers, negation and fronting

- NVPs permit a range of TAM-related modifiers (e.g. *now, before, perhaps*), clausal negation and fronting of the subject (Craig 1977; Mateo Toledo 2011; Pye 2011; Aissen 2017a; Armstrong 2017)

(4)   a. Winik-at=ix   Tseltal (Polian 2013: 445)
            man-B2SG=now
            'You are now a man'

        b. Le   oon=o'   ma' tak'an-Ø=i'   Yucatec (Armstrong 2017: 186)
           DEF avocado=CL NEG ripe-B3SG=CL
           'The avocado, it's not ripe'

        c. Máax u   suku'un-Ø   Pil   Yucatec (Armstrong 2017: 194)
           who   A3SG big.brother-B3SG Felipe
           'Who is Felipe's big brother?'

Embedding

- NVPs can be subordinate clauses only in contexts where a fully finite verbal subordinate clause is possible (Craig 1977; Bohnemeyer 2002; Mateo Toledo 2011; Pye 2011; Aissen 2017a)

(5) Q'anjob'al (Mateo Toledo 2011: 172)

a. Chi-Ø   w-oche-j | tol   ch-ach   way-i |
   ICP-B3SG A1SG-want-SS COMP ICP-b2sg sleep-SS
   'I want you to sleep (lit. I want that you sleep)'

b. *Max-Ø h-aq'le-j | tol   max-ach way-i |
   CP-B3SG A2SG-try-SS COMP CP-B2SG sleep-SS
   Intended: 'You tried to sleep'

c. Max-Ø h-aq'le-j | ha-way-i |
   CP-B3SG A2SG-try-SS A2SG-sleep-SS
   'You tried to sleep'

(6) Q'anjob'al (Mateo Toledo 2011: 172)

a. Chi-Ø   w-oche-j | tol watx'il anima hex |
   ICP-B3SG A1SG-want-SS COMP good people B2PL
   'I want you all to be good people'

b. *Max-Ø w-aq'le-j | (tol) miman hin |
   CP-B3SG A1SG-try-SS COMP big   B1SG
   Intended: 'I tried to be a big person'

Major areas of research and further reading

- Agreement and position of set B pronouns in NVPs (Craig 1977; Armstrong 2010, 2017; Pye 2011; Coon 2013; Coon, Mateo & Preminger 2014)

- Predicative vs. non-predicative nominal expressions (Armstrong 2010; in prep; Pye 2011; Vapnarsky 2013)

- Existential, locative, possessive and stage vs. individual level predicates (Freeze 1976, 1992; Craig 1977; Polian 2004; Coon 2006; Verhoeven 2007; Vapnarsky 2013; Armstrong 2017)

- Non-verbal categories, finiteness and argument structure (Mateo Toledo 2011; Pye 2011; Coon 2014; Aissen 2017b)

- AM markers as NVPs (Bricker 1981; Bohnemeyer 2002; Verhoeven 2007; Pye 2011; Coon 2013)

NVPs and the typology of copular sentences

- NVPs form part of a **typology of copular sentences** in which two nominal expressions are related to one another in different ways (Higgins 1979; Mikkelsen 2005, 2011; Den Dikken 2006, 2017)

(7) **Predicational**: Pred position ascribes property to Subj position

[$_{Subj}$ Jürgen Klopp] is [$_{Pred}$ a football manager]

Says "what" Jürgen Klopp is

(8) **Specificational**: Pred position (focus) specifies unknown referential value of Subj position (ground)

[$_{Ground}$ The manager of Liverpool FC] is [$_{Focus}$ Jürgen Klopp]

Says "who" the manager of Liverpool FC is

Specificational sentences

- Specificational sentences have a canonical [Focus] – [Ground] order in Mayan languages

[Focus] - [Ground]
(pred position)   (subj position)

(9)   a. Teen le   ts'akyaj=o'   Yucatec (field notes)
          1SG   DEF doctor=CL
          'The doctor is me'

       b. Joñoñ jiñi aj-choñ-we'el   Ch'ol (Coon & Martinovic, to appear)
          1SG   DET AGT-sell-meat
          'The butcher is me'

Specificational sentences

- When topicalized, the ground appears before the focus

[Ground] - [Focus]
(top position)   (pred position)

(10)   a. Yucatec (field notes)
   Le jach kolnáal-o'ob=o'   to'on
   DEF true corn.farmer-PL=CL 1PL
   'The true corn farmers are us'

   b. Tseltal (Polian 2013: 452)
   te sak   waj-mats'=e   ja'=me te   j-chinam-tik=e
   DET white tortilla-dough=DET FOC=CL DET A1-brain-PL.INCL=DET
   'As for white pozol, it is our brain'

1st and 2nd person focus

- When the focus is a 1st or 2nd person pronoun, some languages do not permit the presence of a set B pronoun in the ground while others do

(11)   a. Joñoñ jiñi aj-choñ-we'el(**-oñ**)   Ch'ol (Coon & Martinović to appear)
           1SG   DET AGT-sell-meat(-B1SG)
           Intended: 'The butcher is me'

        b. Jo'on te jumen-**on**=e   Tseltal (Polian 2013: 453)
           1SG   DET vulture-B1SG=DET
           'The vulture is me'

Definite NPs as foci in specificational sentences

- In [ground]-[focus] order when the focus is a definite NP, a copular element related to either a focus particle or 3rd person pronoun surfaces in many Mayan languages

  (12) a. Yucatec (field notes): *leti' = 3sg pronoun*

  Le ko'olel=o' **leti'** le máaestra=o'

  DEF woman=CL 3SG/COP DEF teacher=CL

  'That woman is the teacher'

  b. Tseltal (Polian 2013: 452): *ja' = focus particle*

  te sak waj-mats'=e **ja'**=me te j-chinam-tik=e

  DET white tortilla-dough=DET FOC/COP=CL DET A1-brain-PL.INCL=DET

  'As for white pozol, it is our brain'

  c. K'iche' (Velleman 2014: 32): *aree = focus particle (are' = 3sg pronoun)*

  Le nab'ee cofradia **aree** le Santa Cruz

  DET first congregation COP DET Santa Cruz

  'The first congregation was the Santa Cruz congregation'

Major areas of research and further reading

- Typologies of copular sentences (Polian 2013, chapter 21; Velleman 2014; Coon & Martinović to appear; Armstrong in prep)

- Cleft constructions and focus (Polian 2013, chapter 21; Vapnarsky 2013; Velleman 2014; Verhoeven & Skopeteas 2015; Gutiérrez Bravo 2017; Aissen 2017b)

This lecture is part of the series *Glottothèque: Mayan languages.* Berlin, Göttingen, Mexico City: online resource.

visit glottothèque at:
https://spw.uni-goettingen.de/projects/maya/

Abbreviations used

1 = 1st person
2 = 2nd person
3 = 3rd person
A = set A bound pronoun
B = set B bound pronoun
AGT = agentive noun
CL = clitic
CLF = nominal classifier
COMP = complementizar
COP = copula
CP = completive
DEF = definite
DET = determiner
FOC = focus particle
INCL = inclusive
NEG = negation
PL = plural
REM = remote past
SG = singular
SS = status suffix

References

- Aissen, Judith. 2017a. Complement clauses. In J. Aissen, N. England & R. Zavala (eds.) *The Mayan Languages*, 260-292. London: Routledge.
- Aissen, Judith. 2017b. Information structure in Mayan. In J. Aissen, N. England & R. Zavala (eds.) *The Mayan Languages*, 293-324. London: Routledge.
- Armstrong, Grant. 2010. On copular constructions in Yucatec Maya. In *Proceedings of the 4th Conference on Indigenous Languages of Latin America, University of Texas-Austin* (CILLA IV). http://www.ailla.utexas.org/site/cilla4_toc.html
- Armstrong, Grant. 2017. The syntax of non-verbal predication in Yucatec Maya. *Cuadernos de Lingüística de El Colegio de México* 4(2): 137-212
- Armstrong, Grant. In prep. Copular sentences in Yucatec Maya: Predication, specification, identification and equation. University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Bohnemeyer, Jürgen. 2002. *The grammar of time reference in Yukatek Maya*. Munich: Lincom.
- Bricker, Victoria. 1981. The source of the ergative split in Yucatec Maya. *Journal of Mayan Linguistics* 2: 83-127.
- Coon, Jessica. 2006. Existentials and negation in Chol (Mayan). *CamLing* 2006: 100-107.
- Coon, Jessica. 2013. *Aspects of split ergativity*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Coon, Jessica. 2014. Predication, tenselessness, and what it takes to be a verb. In H-L. Huang, E. Poole & A. Rysling (eds.) *Proceedings of the 43rd Meeting of the Northeast Linguistics Society (NELS 43)*, 77-90. CreateSpace.
- Coon, Jessica. 2016. Mayan morphosyntax. *Language & Linguistics Compass* 10/10: 515-550
- Coon, Jessica, Pedro Mateo Pedro and Omer Preminger. 2014. The role of case in A-bar extraction asymmetries: evidence from Mayan. *Linguistic Variation* 14: 179-242.
- Coon, Jessica and Martina Martinović. To appear. Predication, specification and equation in Ch'ol. *Proceedings of NELS 53*.
- Craig, Colette. 1977. *The structure of Jacaltec*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Dayley, Jon P. 1985. *Tzutujil Grammar*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Den Dikken, Marcel. 2006. *Relators and Linkers. The Syntax of Predication, Predicate Inversion, and Copulas*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Den Dikken, Marcel. 2017. Pseudoclefts and other specificational copular sentences. In M. Everaert and H. C. van Riemsdijk (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Syntax*. Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. doi:10.1002/9781118358733.wbsyncom001.

References

- Freeze, Ray. 1976. Possession in K'ekchi' (Maya). *International Journal of American Linguistics* 42: 113–25.
- Freeze, Ray. 1992. Existentials and other locatives. *Language* 68: 553–95.
- Gutiérrez Bravo, Rodrigo. 2017. Clefts and focus in Yucatec Maya. *Cuadernos de Lingüística de El Colegio de México* 4(1): 5-47.
- Higgins, Francis Roger. 1979. *The Pseudo-Cleft Construction in English*. New York: Garland.
- Mateo Toledo, B'alam. 2011. The finiteness of nonverbal predicates in Q'anjob'al (Maya)." In H. Avelino (ed.) *New perspectives in Mayan linguistics*, 160–182. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Mikkelsen, Line. 2005. *Copular Clauses: Specification, predication and equation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Mikkelsen, Line. 2011. Copular clauses. In C. Maienborn, K. von Heusinger, and P. Portner (Eds.), *Semantics: An International Handbook of Natural Language Meaning*, 1805–1829. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Polian, Gilles. 2004. El predicado existencial y locativo en tseltal. Clasificación de las construcciones con AY. In I. Barreras Aguilar & M. Castro Llamas (eds.) *Memorias del VII Encuentro de Lingüística del Noroeste v. 1,* 255-274. Hermosillo: Universidad de Sonora.
- Polian, Gilles. 2013. *Gramática del tseltal de Oxchuc*. México DF: CIESAS (Publicaciones de la Casa Chata).
- Pye, Clifton. 2011. Mayan stative predication. In K. Shklovsky, P. Mateo Pedro & J. Coon (eds.) *Proceedings of FAMLi*, 191-207. Cambridge, MA: MIT Working Papers in Linguistics, volume 63C
- Stassen, Leon. 2013. Zero Copula for Predicate Nominals. In Dryer, Matthew S. & Haspelmath, Martin (eds.) WALS Online (v2020.3) [Data set]. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7385533
- Vapnarsky, Valentina. 2013. Is Yucatec Maya an omnipredicative language? Predication, the copula and focus constructions. *Language Typology and Universals (Sprachtypologie und Universalienforschung)* 66: 40-86.
- Velleman, Leah. 2014. Focus and movement in a variety of K'ichee'. PhD. Dissertation, University of Texas, Austin.
- Verhoeven, Elisabeth. 2007. *Experiential constructions in Yucatec Maya: a typologically based analysis of a functional domain in a Mayan language*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Verhoeven, Elisabeth & Skopeteas, Stavros. 2015. Licensing focus constructions in Yucatec Maya. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 81: 1-40.