

# Predicative pronouns in Movima: an emergent copula?

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In the literature on nonverbal predicates (e.g. Hengeveld 1992, Overall et al. 2018, Payne 1997), pronouns are usually not included, even though they are occasionally analyzed as predicates in descriptions of individual languages (see Schachter and Otnes 1972: 64 on Tagalog). Therefore, it is an interesting question how languages that lack a copula create equational clauses with a nonlexical subject, like “She is a teacher”. Some languages mark the nominal as the predicate by attaching a person index to it. But when a language without a copula uses independent pronouns (i.e. “She teacher”), what is the predicate here? Is it the noun, the pronoun, or is there a zero copula? This paper shows that an appropriate analysis may be guided not only by grammatical, but also by information-structural considerations.

Like most verb-initial languages (Clemens and Polinsky in press), Movima (isolate, Bolivia) lacks a copula. Equational clauses are most productively formed by combining a noun with a preceding free pronoun, as in (1).

- (1)     *u'ko*    *alra=∅*  
          PRO.M friend=1SG  
          ‘He is my friend.’

The pronoun is a referential expression functioning as the argument of the clause. However, in embedding or negation, the pronoun is treated as the predicate (2): it is nominalized, which, in verbal clauses, is the process applied to the verb. If the pronoun is identified as a predicate in embedding, it must therefore also be analyzed as the predicate of the corresponding main clause.

- (2)     *ka=s*            *u'ko-niwa*    *pa:pa='ne*  
          is\_not=DET   PRO.M-NMZ   father\_of=3F  
          ‘He is not her father.’

However, the information structure of these “pronominal” sentences does not correspond to the expected distribution of information-structural categories: the predicate (i.e. the pronoun) represents the topic, while the noun bears the comment function. This is confirmed by the use of this construction in discourse, where the pronoun refers anaphorically to a previously introduced referent. Furthermore, the pronoun is prosodically nonprominent. The subject-

predicate partition of the Movima pronominal sentence, therefore, seems to go against its information structure: it is the topic expression (i.e. the pronoun) that functions as the predicate, and not the comment (i.e. the noun).

A way to solve this paradox could be to analyze the pronoun as having a copula function: A copula assigns the predicate function to the noun, which also conveys the comment. The diachronic relationship between pronouns and copulas has been attested for several other, unrelated languages (see Hengeveld 1992: 249f.; Katz 1996; Korn 2011; Li and Thompson 1977; Stassen 1997: 90ff.). If such a development is taking place in Movima, however, it is still in its initial phase, since the copula is unable link two full noun phrases in one prosodic unit.

These findings, which are supported by data from spontaneous spoken discourse, are a contribution to the discussion on nonverbal predication and on the functional and diachronic affinity between pronouns and copulas.

## References

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