

Copular Constructions in Defaka

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Abstract

Defaka is a grossly endangered Ijoid language spoken in the Eastern fringe of the Niger Delta Region of Rivers State, Nigeria; precisely, the Opobo-Nkoroo Local Government Area. The linguistic status of Defaka was first discussed in detail by Jenewari (1983). A comparison of the Defaka language and the Ijo language cluster revealed its genetic relationship with Ijo. More recently, the language has been documented and a detailed grammar written on it. Evidence from recent research reveals that, the language might be extinct in a couple of decades because there are fewer than fifty fluent speakers and intergenerational transmission has long ceased. Howbeit, much of the grammar of the language is preserved. This paper discusses predicate nominals and related clauses in Defaka. These construction types express the notion of proper inclusion, equation, attribution, location and existence. Predicate nominal and predicate adjective constructions exhibit similar morphosyntax. They employ juxtaposition and focus. There are two clitic morphemes, =te and =m and a locative verb ímì which mark location and existence respectively. There are no overt copula verbs in Defaka, but the clitic auxiliary verb =ri, which marks the progressive aspect, occurs in predicate locative constructions, acting like a copula verb, introducing the locative phrase. The toneless focus marker = kə, which occurs in equative predicate nominal clauses is not a copula but a subject focus marker. The grammatical analysis in this paper is basically descriptive.

1.0 Introduction

The Defaka people are a small speech community sharing an island with a dominant population of the Nkọrọọ (traditionally known as Kirika by its indigenes), whose linguistic relatives are the Kalabari, Okrika and Iḅanj. The immediate neighbours of Nkọrọọ are the Opobo, Andoni, Ogoni and the Bonny people of Rivers State. A fragmented portion of the Defaka speaking community live on an island called Iwoama and some fishing settlements around Nkoroo. The Defaka are bilingual. They speak Defaka and Kirika. The stigmatization of Defaka by the Nkoroo has resulted in heavy language shift which has reduced the functional domain of Defaka, over the years from being used in a healthy traditional society, to use within the Defaka ward in Nkọrọọ. Defaka and Kirika are predominantly fishermen. But from the historical account of the founder of the present Defaka ward and the choice of location, (the Defaka have a larger expanse of land located more inter-land than the Kirika territory) it is obvious that in course of migration through the central Delta region, the Defaka had acquired a hunting culture, because they do more hunting than the Kirika. Primarily, the Defaka engage in similar economic pursuits as the Kirika. They trade in such sea products as crayfish, periwinkles, crabs, oysters and several kinds of fishes. They engage in basket weaving, net making, thatch making, petty trading and subsistent farming. Trading activities are carried out with their surrounding neighbours-the Andoni, Ogoni and Opobo. Their involvement in trading with these neighbours, facilitate the speaking of a number of these languages, Nigerian pidgin and Igbo, (the Opobo variety) ranking top most on the list.

The population of Defaka speakers as cited by Ethnologue is put at 2000 Lewis, (2009). Recent field research estimates the number of Defaka speakers within and outside Nkọrọọ to be between 50 to 100, and fluent speakers to be less than 50.

1.1 Sources of Data

This paper is part of a larger work on the grammar of Defaka. The data was got through elicitations based on the 1700 SIL Comparative African Word List, and partly based on the Lingua Descriptive Questionnaire. The field work for the entire study was carried out between September, 2007 and August, 2010. Defaka does not have an approved orthography, so data presented in this paper are transcribed using IPA symbols. The Leipzig glossing convention has also been adopted

1.2. Theoretical Framework

This paper is a description of copular constructions in Defaka. According to Halliday, (2014) analysis and description are at two end of the pole. Having analyzed the relevant data, we are able to make some generalizations on the characteristics of predicate nominal constructions in Defaka in or description. According to Payne (1997) these construction types are found in every language. The framework adopted for this analysis is structuralism. Structuralism views language as a communication system with discrete rather than continuous elements. It is the combination of these elements that form the structures, patterns or relations of language.....(Crystal 1992;32).

1.3. Preamble

Following Payne (1997), a predicate nominal construction is one in which the semantic content of the predication is embodied in a noun. Other related clause types are predicate adjectives, which have the main semantic content expressed by an adjective. Semantically these clause types are described as attributive clauses. Existential constructions predicate the existence

of some entity in a specified location, locative constructions predicate location while possessive clauses predicate possession.

One basic similarity between these construction types is their lack of a semantically rich lexical verb i.e. a verb that expresses the major semantic content of the predication. For instance, the **be** and **do** verbs in English would always require an accompanying noun or verb in the predicate. They make up the grammatical requirements in the predicate but are by themselves semantically empty. Other features of these clause types noted by (Payne, 1997:113) are that, predicate nominal morphosyntax often functions in domains variously termed ‘focus’ topicalisation’ etc. He also mentions that, the progressive aspect in English is a verbal clause type that derives from an earlier predicate locative pattern. These clause types in Defaka seem to exhibit similar features. We shall discuss them in some detail, in the sections that follow.

1.3.1. Copular Sentences with Predicate Nominals

Predicate nominal clauses typically express the notion of proper inclusion and equation (Payne 1997:114). Proper inclusion is when an entity is defined as being part of the class of items specified in the predicate. The subject of the predicate nominal clause is usually specific while the predicate nominal is not specific. In equative clauses, the subject of the clause is identical to the entity in the predicate nominal. In essence, predicate nominal constructions express a defining or identification relationship. The subject of the clause is usually a noun or a pronoun or sometimes an infinitive phrase as in (2d),

- 1a) tàbìdòmbé èmènè=tì
 PN male =person
 ‘Tabiombe is a man’

b) à èwèremíní èmènè-míní
 DEF children male people
 ‘The children are men’

c) à bái ?àù ti bái
 DEF man fight person man
 ‘The man is a soldier’

The sentences in (1 a-c) express the notion of proper inclusion. They simply specify or define the class to which the predicate nominals belong. No overt copular verb occurs in this kind of construction in Defaka. The semantic content of the predication is embodied in the noun.

An equative clause is one in which the subject of the clause is identical to the entity specified in the predicate nominal. Defaka distinguishes proper inclusion and equation. In the examples in (1a-c) above, we do not observe any linking element. The subject and the predicate nominal are juxtaposed. In the following sentences in (2 a-d) an equative notion is expressed. The entity in the predicate nominal is being equated with or identified with the subject of the clause.

2a) ò=kò tàbiòmbe
 3sgm =FOC PN
 ‘He is Tabiombe’

b) á=!kó jáà gbíí alá
 3sgf=SFOC thing sow woman
 ‘She is a seamstress’

c) ì=kò jáà dídèi-mà bái
 1sg =SFOC thing learn-FACT man
 ‘I am a learner’

- d) ìṣì ó!gúó=!kó átákí
 good life =SFOC money
 ‘A good life is money

It is not uncommon to find languages without copular verbs. A copula can be an affix, a particle, or verb, as we find typically in English with the verb ‘be’. Defaka is one of such languages without morphological overt copular verbs. The predicate nominal clauses in (1) have two noun phrases juxtaposed with no copula element intervening, while those in (2) have what appears like a copula, but is actually, the toneless subject focus marker, **kɔ**. As we mentioned earlier in the preamble, as noted by (Payne,1997:113), predicate nominal morphosyntax often functions in domains variously termed focus, topicalization, etc. **kɔ** is clearly a focus marker. There are two focus markers in Defaka, a toneless subject focus marker **kɔ** and a low toned object focus marker **ndò**, as shown in the sentences in (3 a-b)

- 3a) tàbiòmbé=kò à ómgbìṣà súkù=rè
 PN =SFOC DEF cloth wash =NEG
 Tabiombe did not wash the cloth’
- b) à ómgbìṣà ndò ò súkù=ré kè
 DEF cloth NSFOC 3sgm wash =NEG COMP
 ‘He did not wash the **cloth**’

The subject focus marker occurs in equative predicate nominal clauses in Defaka because the entity in the predicate nominal is being equated with the subject of the clause. The subject is therefore in focus.

1. 3.2. Copular Sentences with Predicate Adjectives

There are only two adjectives in Defaka. **ájá** ‘new’ and the diminutive, **ḅ̀r̀s̀!f̀í** ‘little’. Adjectival functions are performed by verb-based adjectives derived from stative verbs which denote properties or states relating to size, shape, color, age, evaluation etc.. These deverbal modifiers are stative verbs because they take verbal extensions when they perform predicative functions as the examples in (4) show, but drop their verbal extensions when they perform attributive functions as modifiers within the noun phrase as shown in the example in (2d)- **ìṅ̀ì ó!gú́** ‘good life’

The morphosyntax of predicate adjectives is similar to that of predicate nominals in Defaka. The strategy employed in the examples in (4) is juxtaposition just like the predicate nominals in example (1)

- 4a) d̀z̀ìè ótóm-mà
 husband sweet-FACT
 ‘To have a husband is sweet’/It is good to have a husband’
- b) èwèrè èté ìṅ̀ì-mà
 children own/have good-FACT
 ‘To have children is good/ It is good to have children’
- c) ókòò èté ìjókó-mà
 friend own/have good-FACT
 ‘To have a friend is good/Friendship is good’
- d) jáà ikéré ibò-mà ìṅ̀ì=rè
 thing think big-FACT good =NEG
 ‘To think too much is bad/ It is bad to think too much’

- b) à bái=!rí ibìjàà tòò=tè ibì lèè=m
 DEF man =PROG mat top =LOC sleep place = LOC[Exist]
 ‘The man is sleeping on the mat’
- c) èwèrèmíní à ándù òbìò=tè bóí-mà
 children DEF boat inside =LOC hide-FACT
 ‘Children are hiding inside the boat’

There is a correlation between location and existence in Defaka. Both construction types have a locative and a nominal whose location is specified by the locative. Another verb or locative word denoting existence, which occurs here, is **ími** ‘be present/exist’

- 7a) àmàjà=rì ími džíkà òbìò=tè
 PN =PROG [Exist] house inside =LOC
 ‘Amanya is in the house’

- b) à éséréálà=rì ími tàbìò džíkà òbìò=tè
 DEF woman =PROG[Exist] God house inside =LOC
 ‘The woman is in the church’

Whereas the clitic locatives =**m** and =**te** can co-occur in a sentence denoting location and existence, the locative word **ími** ‘be present’ and the existential clitic locative =**m** cannot co-occur in a sentence. The reason being that, both morphemes denote a sense of permanence or existence. A sentence such as example (8) is ungrammatical.

- 8) * àmàjà=rì ími džíkà=m
 PN =PROG [Exist] house=LOC [Exist]

‘Amanya is present in the house existing’

Both morphemes can however, be used independently in similar construction types. For instance

ími can be used to express purely existential notions without a sense of location as in (9a &b),

9a) tàbìò=rì ími
 PN =PROG [Exist]
 ‘There is God’

b) èbèrè=rì ími
 dog =PROG [Exist]
 ‘There is/are dog(s)’

=m on the other, always cliticizes with a following noun denoting permanence or existence as in example (10 a&b)

10a) à òrò!fí bóm=!rí òjìkà=m
 DEF little child =PROG house =LOC[exist]
 ‘The little child is in the house’

b) à óáí=!rí ìbì lèè =m
 DEF man =PROG sleep place =LOC [exist]
 ‘The man is sleeping’ (lit. in the place of sleep)

In sentences (10a&b), the existential locative, **=m** cliticizes with locational nouns denoting a sense of permanence or existence. For instance, the existential locative **=m** cannot cliticize with locational nouns like up, inside, front etc. which denote spatial location. A sentence such as (11) will be judged as ungrammatical

11) * à bòm=rì bóì-mà tóó=!m

DEF child =PROG hide-FACT up =LOC [exist]
 ‘The child is hiding up’ (somewhere)

The grammatical form of sentence (11) will feature the more general locative =te, as in (12)

12) à bòm=rì bòi-mà tóó=!té
 DEF child =PROG hide-FACT up =LOC
 ‘The child is hiding (somewhere)

1.3.4. Possessive Clauses.

A typical possessive clause in Defaka features the possessive word *ètè* ‘to own’ with no intervening copula.

13a) à ó!lò báí kàsi èté-mà
 DEF old man chair own-FACT
 ‘The old man has a chair’ [owns a chair]

b) bómá ómgbiṅà èté-mà
 PN dress own-FACT
 ‘Boma has a dress’ [owns a dress]

Conclusion

Copular constructions in Defaka are basically of two types. Predicate nominal and predicate adjective constructions exhibit similar characteristics. They employ juxtaposition and focus, while locative and existential constructions feature an intervening auxiliary verb which functions as a copula. Possessive clauses do not feature any copula. We therefore conclude that, there are no overt morphological copular verbs in Defaka.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS and CONVENTIONS

| | |
|-------|---|
| ! | = phonetic representation of downstep |
| * | = ungrammatical |
| - | = morpheme break |
| = | = clitic break |
| 1sg | = first person singular pronoun |
| 3sgf | = third person singular feminine pronoun |
| 3sgm | = third person singular masculine pronoun |
| FACT | = factitive |
| NEG | = negative |
| DEF | = definite |
| LOC | = locative |
| PN | =personal name |
| Exist | =Existential locative |
| PROG | =progressive |
| REL | = relative |
| COMPL | = complimentizer |
| SFOC | = subject focus marker |
| NSFOC | =subject focus marker |