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The Ibibio Locative Copular Constructions

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Abstract

The Ibibio language, a member of the Lower Cross group of languages is predominantly spoken in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Ibibio has two types of copular construction. One is locative while the other is predicative. Using a purely descriptive approach/method, this paper provides a descriptive account of the copular locative constructions in Ibibio. This study is based on a database collected from adult speakers of Ibibio by the author using an elicitation list. The database includes both actual and potential words/sentences, which standard Ibibio speakers found to be in consistent with their language rules.

The paper has observed that Ibibio copular locatives make use of locative copular verbs which have semantic content, but are however, with indeterminate locative precision except when they co- occur with an appropriate locative complement. It has further observed that in Ibibio, the location of a subject entity can be marked with locative elements in two ways. In the first instance, a locative copular verb which can be *dórò*, 'be on' *síne* 'be in' *bà* 'be at' obligatorily co-occurs with a deitic locative complement or a locative prepositional phrase (PP) complement headed by a multipurpose preposition (P), *ké*. The P is semantically, interpreted as either on, in, at or under depending on the particular locative copular verb that it co-occurs with. In the second instance, in addition to the locative copular verb and the locative PP complement headed by the P *ké*, there is also within the PP complement (headed by the P *ké*), a locative relational noun modifier which, modifies the head noun, a complement to the locative P *ké*. Based on Ameka and

Levinson's (2007) cross-linguistic classification of positional and locative verbs, the paper concludes that Ibibio belongs to the multi-verb type of languages with inherently locative copular verbs which are used to express the spatial locative orientation of subject entities.

Key words: locative, copular verb, relational noun, noun modifier, prepositional phrase, deitic

1. Introduction

Every language has its own forms of expression used in representing situations. Locative constructions are inclusive of such numerous forms of expressions. A locative construction is a sub-type of a copulative construction (the other one being the predicative construction) consisting (normally) of a noun phrase (NP) (subject) co-occurring with a verb phrase (predicate) whose head is a copula, a semantically empty formative (Trask, 1993). The copula in most languages serves to link a subject NP to its predicate which is either identified with the subject or characterizes the subject.

Locatives specifically, are employed to locate situations in space and in time in everyday interactions and the descriptions of such situations located in space rely heavily on the spatial relationships of the entities concerned. Often, we observe that the entities in a locative construction are in a particular arrangement and as such, we employ a reference point to be able to describe to a large extent, the spatial arrangement of the entities. The locative verbs in such constructions make predictions about spatial location of their associated subjects (Ameka & Levinson, 2007). The hallmark of such constructions in some languages, in addition to many other classificatory locative verbs (e.g. stand, sit, lie, live/reside, kneel, keep, hang, etc.) includes a general copular verb, an inherently locative copular verb and or a locative P. English, for instance in addition to having the classificatory locative verbs, tends to use a general morphologically simple copula *be* (*is*) complemented by a PP in certain utterances for the expression of location unlike in many languages where there can be sets of alternative locative verbs or alternative locative verbal affixes. Instances of locative constructions in English are as follow.

- i. The egg *is* **in** the basket.
- ii. The book *is* **on** the table.

From examples (i – ii), it is quite obvious that a typical locative construction in English is copulative, being conspicuously expressed with the *be (is)* copular verb. It is also very obvious that a locative P can heavily support and license location in English (Hale & Keyser, 1993, Mchombo & Hirschbühler, 2006).

This article focuses on the locative copular constructions in Ibibio and provides a descriptive analysis of such constructions in terms of the locative copular verbs which feature in them and how they interact with other locative constituents in the expression of location in Ibibio. Ibibio is spoken by about four million people (Essien, 1990) in fourteen (Uyo, Itu, Uruan, Etinan, Nsit Ibom, Nsit Atai, Nsit Ubium, Ibesikpo Asutan, Ikono, Ini, Ikot Abasi, Mkpat Enin, Ibiono Ibom, Onna and Eket ((Urua, 2007)) of the thirty-one Local government Areas of Akwa Ibom State, Ngeria. More recent classifications have placed Ibibio in the Lower Cross group of the (New) Benue-Congo language family (Williamson, 1989).

This article is organized as follows. In section 2, I present and discuss data on Ibibio copular locatives while Section 3 is the summary and conclusion.

2. Locative Copular Constructions in Ibibio

The locative copular construction in Ibibio is typically an unmarked response to a ‘where-question’ and inclusive of the deitic type of locative construction, location in Ibibio can be marked with overt locative elements in two ways. For first type of locative-element marking, a locative copular verb (which expresses the location of some entity at the subject position) and an obligatory deitic locative complement or PP complement combine (co-occur) to relate the subject of the locative construction to its search locative domain. In the second type of locative-element marking, there is also a locative copular verb and a locative PP complement. Unlike in the other one the later PP consists of a locative

relational noun modifier which modifies the head noun, a complement to the locative P *ké*. All these three elements combine to relate a subject NP to its locative domain. Whereas the locative P is always *ké*, a semantically multipurpose P which can be interpreted as ‘in, ‘at’, ‘on, ‘beside, under, etc (Essien, 1990,Urua, 2000), the copular verb and the relational modifier noun in each case varies morphologically, reflecting the kind of location being expressed. As we shall see later, examples of the first type of locative copular constructions are *deictic, inside, at* and *on* locative constructions while the second type includes *under/below/at the bottom of, between/among, behind, in front of, right of, left of* locative construction. The spatial location of an entity encoded by the locative copular verb is as well encoded by the P *ké* in each locative construction thus ensuring that both locative constituents do not differ in terms of their locative/destination meaning. Also in the cases where the relational modifier nouns occur, they together with the P *ké* encode the appropriate spatial location.

As in other pro-drop languages, grammatical agreement holds between a lexical subject and the verb. Unlike languages like English, Ibibio is one of the languages whose locative copular verb manifests to a large extent different morphological forms which again, largely depends on the specific location being expressed. In the following sub-sections, I provide and discuss data on the Ibibio locative copular constructions.

2.1 Deitic *here/there* locative constructions

- 1) ébót ókò á-bà mí/ kó
 goat that 3sg.cl-LOC.COP.(at) here/there
 ‘That goat is here/there.’

In the deitic locative construction of Ibibio (1), location is expressed through the locative copula *bà* ‘be’. The locative copula selects a deitic expression *mi* or *kó* as a deitic locative complement. Whereas *mi* refers to an entity close to the speaker (proximal), *kó* is used to refer to an entity that is not close to the speaker (distal).

2.2 *In (side) Locative constructions*

2a) íyák á-síné ké ,ón
fish 3sg.cl- LOC.COP.(in) LOC.P water
'The fish is in the water.'

2b) ébót á-síné ké úfòk
goat 3sg.cl-LOC.COP.(in) LOC.P house
'The goat is in the house.'

From examples (2a-b), it is observed that the locative copula *síné* selects a locative PP headed by the P *ké* 'in' which in turn selects an NP complement ,ón.

2.3 *At Locative Constructions*

3) òkón á-bà ké úfòk
Okon 3sg.cl-LOC.COP.(at) LOC.P house
'Okon is at the house.'

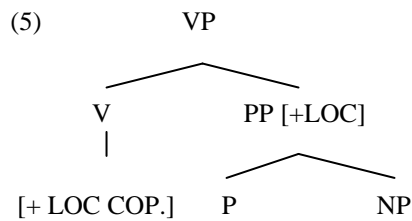
For the expression of the *at locative construction* (3), the locative copular verb *bà* normally co-occurs with a locative PP headed by *ké* 'at'.

It is however important to note that the locative copular *bà* is a much more general locative copular verb which does not provide a specific and exact locative relation between the located entity and its location. Thus, *bà* provides a neutral locative relation between an entity and its location.

2.4 On Locative Constructions

- 4) íyák á-dórò ké ókpókpóró
 fish 3sg.cl-LOC.COP.(on) LOC.P table
 ‘The fish is on the table.’

For the expression of the *on locative* construction (4), the locative copular verb *dórò* co-occurs with a locative PP headed by *ké* ‘on’. In each of the locative constructions in (2-4), the locative predicate (VP) is of the structure given in (5).



2.5 Under/Below/At the bottom of Locative Constructions

- 6a) íkpáng á-bà(síné) ké ìdàk ókpókpóró
 spoon 3sg.cl-LOC.COP. LOC.P under table
 ‘The spoon is under the table.’
- 6b) òkòn á-bà(síné) ké ìdàk étò
 Okon 3sg.cl-LOC.COP. LOC.P under tree
 ‘Okon is under the tree.’

For the expression of *under/below/at the bottom of* locative constructions, the locative copula *bà/síné*, a locative P, *ké* and a locative relational noun modifier *ìdàk* are obligatorily required. The locative relational noun modifier, *ìdàk*, modifies the head noun, a complement to the locative preposition *ké*. The three locative elements *bà/síné*, *ké* and *ìdàk* combine to express the spatial location of the subject which, in this case, is *under*, *below* or *at the bottom of* some entity.

2.6 Between/Among Locative Construction

7a) íkwà - t ùsàn yè ìkpáng
 knife 3sg.cl-LOC.COP. LOC.P between plate and spoon
 ‘The knife is between the plate and the spoon.’

7b) èkpàt á-bà(sínè) ké ótú
 bag 3sg.cl-LOC.COP. LOC.P middle many books
 ‘The bag is among the books.’

Also, for the expression of the *between/among locative construction* (7a-b), the locative copular verb *bà* or *sínè* occurs with the locative P, *ké* and *ùfóót* ‘between’ or *ótú* ‘among’ a relational modifier of the head noun which complements the locative P, *ke*. Again, the tripartite combination of *bà/sínè*, *ké* and *ùfóót/ótú* expresses the spatial location of the subject which is either *between* or *among*.

2.7 Behind Locative Constructions

8a) ébót á-bà ké èdèm ókpókóró
 goat 3sg.cl-LOC.COP. LOC.P back table
 ‘The goat is behind the table.’

8b) òkón á-bà ké èdèm ókpókóró
 Okon 3sg.cl-LOC.COP. LOC.P back table
 ‘Okon is behind the table.’

The locative copula *bà* together with the locative P *ké* and *èdèm*, a relational locative noun modifier (to the head noun complement of the locative P) all combine to express the location of an entity *behind* some other entity.

2.8 *In front of* Locative constructions

9a) ébót á-bà ké ísò ókpókóró
 goat 3sg.cl-LOC.COP. LOC.P face table
 ‘The goat is in front of the table.’

9b) òkón á-bà ké ísò ènò
 Okon 3sg.cl-LOC.COP. LOC.P face Eno
 ‘Okon is in front of Eno.’

The *in front of* locative construction (9a-b) is expressed with a combination of *bà* locative copula, the locative P, *ké* and *ísò*, a locative relational noun modifier to the head noun complement of the locative P.

2.9 *Right of* Locative Constructions

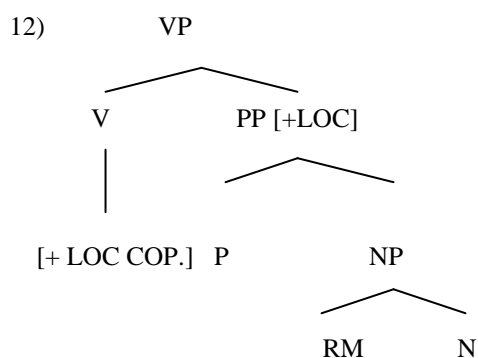
10) éwá á-bà ké ùbọ́ ` úfọ́k
 dog 3sg.cl-LOC.COP. LOC.P hand right house
 ‘The dog is at the right (hand) of the house.’

The *right of* locative construction (10) is expressed with a combination of *bà* locative copular verb with the locative P *ké* and ` , a locative relational modifier.

2.10 *Left of* Locative Constructions

11) éwá á-bà ké ùbọ́k ùfién úfọ́k
 dog 3sg.cl-LOC.COP. LOC.P hand left house
 ‘The dog is at the left (hand) of the house.’

The *left of* locative construction (11) is expressed with a combination *bà* locative verb and with the locative preposition *ké* and *ùfién*, a locative relational noun modifier. The VP structure of the locative structures in (6-11) is given in (12) while the table which follows provides at glance the different locative elements in Ibibio locative copular constructions.



here/ there	inside	at	on	under/ below/ at bottom of	between/ among	behind	in front of	right of	left of
bà + mí/kó	sine + ké	bà+ ké	dórò + ké	bà(síné) + ké idàk	bà(síné) + ké ùfọ́t	bà + ké èdèm	bà + ké ísó	bà + ké ùbók	bà + ké ùbók ùfién

Table 1. The locative markers in Ibibio copulative constructions

From table 1, the copulative locative constructions in Ibibio can be summarized thus: The deictic *here/there* location is marked by the locative copula *bà* ‘be’ complemented by the deictic locative complement *mí/kó* ‘here/there’. Likewise, the other forms of location are marked first by a locative copular verb, a locative preposition and in some cases a locative relational noun modifier and a locative NP. Thus, the *inside of* locative construction and

the *at* locative construction are marked by the combinations of síné+ [pp ké + NP]_{LOC} and bà+ [pp ké+ NP]_{LOC} respectively. The *on* location is marked by dórò+ [pp ké +NP]_{LOC} while the *under/below/at the bottom of* and *between/among* locations are marked by bà+(síné) [pp ké idàk + NP]_{LOC} and bà (síné)+ [pp ké ùfóót + NP]_{LOC} respectively. For the *behind, in front of* and *right of* locations, they are marked by bà+[pp ké èdèm + NP]_{LOC}, bà+ [pp ké ísó + NP]_{LOC}, and bà+ [pp ké ùbó + NP]_{LOC} respectively while bà+ [pp ké ùbók ùfién + NP]_{LOC} marks the *left of* location.

From the table, it is also obvious that the complements to the Ibibio locative copular verbs are predominantly prepositional phrases (Cf. Bresnan, 1990) and indeed, it is P, ké that heads Ibibio locative PP complement. This is an indication that location is grammaticalized Ibibio as has been suggested in the literature for a number of languages (Stowell, 1981, Baker, 1988). Given the non-optionality of the deitic locative adverbial complements in (1) and the locative PP complements (2-12) as shown in (13) below, they syntactically function as arguments of their respective locative copular verbs rather than as adjuncts.

- 13 a) * ébót ókò á-bà
goat that 3sg.cl-COP.(at)
- b) * iyák á-síné
fish 3sg.cl- LOC.COP.(in)
- c) * iyák á-dòró
fish 3sg.cl-LOC.COP.(on)

However, as should be expected of argument complements, both the deitic locative and PP complements can be focused on via topicalization as the following examples (14a- b) show.

- 14a) mí ké ébót ókò á-bà
here, TOP goat that 3sg.cl-COP.(at)
'That goat is here.'
- b) ké ,ón ké iyák á-síné
LOC.P water TOP fish 3sg.cl- LOC.COP.(in)
'The fish is in the water.'

2.11 Theoretical Analysis of Locative Constructions in Ibibio

As noted by Talmy (1983) and Langacker (1986), there is usually an asymmetrical relations holding between entities located in space with respect to each other in terms of size, containment, support, orientation, order, direction, distance, motion, or a combination of these (Svorou, 1994). In the description of spatial asymmetrical relations, an entity is identified as Figure (F) with respect to a referent object, Ground (G) (Talmy, 1983) and generally, there is the tendency to identify larger, immobile, culturally, significant objects as G.

In the description of a spatial arrangement of entities, a speaker normally takes a perspective. The perspectives defined to date (Svorou, 1994) are narrator, addressee and neutral perspectives. In the narrator perspective the speaker uses his/her viewpoint/standpoint to describe the spatial arrangement of entities. In the addressee's perspective, the description of spatial arrangement is provided on the basis of the addressee's viewpoint. For the neutral perspective, neither the narrator nor the addressee's viewpoint is used. It is important however, as pointed out by Schober (1993) that in the description of spatial arrangements in some languages, there are cases the addressee's perspective is highly likely to be used by interlocutors.

To describe the spatial arrangements of entities in space, asymmetrical relations also need a frame of reference (coordinate system) and the lexical items which provide information about the relation between an entity and its location (Jackendoff, 1996) are always used in

the context of such frames of reference. There are three widely accepted frames of reference. These are intrinsic, relative and absolute frames of reference (Levinson, 1996). Intrinsic frame of reference is a coordinate system of binary spatial relation between an entity and its location which is almost always object-centered since there is no reference to the environment and the viewpoint of the interlocutors. The relative frame of reference on the other hand, is a coordinate system of ternary relation between an entity, its location and the viewpoint of the interlocutors which is almost always viewer-centered. Absolute frame of reference however, is a binary relation between an entity and its location that is environment centered, being based on fixed geo-cardinal directions (north/south) or landmarks (uphill/downhill). These frames of reference are summarized in the table below:

Reference Frame	Source/Origin	Relation Type
Intrinsic	Object-Centered	Binary
Relative	Viewpoint-Centered	Ternary
Absolute	Environment	Binary

Table 2: Frames of Reference

With respect to the Ibibio locatives, we shall the examine entity-location relationships between objects and therefore, assign as appropriate the perspective taken in the description as well as the frame of reference employed. For the purposes of clarity, we shall examine the contrastive locative relations on a horizontal basis; (front and back, right and left) after which, we shall look at the other types.

2.12 *Front-Behind (Back) Locative Relations*

Consider examples (15-17).

15. ébót á-bà ké ísó ókpókóró
 goat 3sg.cl-LOC.COP LOC.P face table
 ‘The goat is in front of the table.’

In (15) *ébót* ‘goat’ is located with reference to the location of *ókpókóró* ‘table’. The perspective taken in the description is not neutral since frontness is not assignable to the table; there is no front of the table in Ibibio. Therefore, the speaker takes his own perspective. *Ébót* ‘goat’ is located between the speaker and *ókpókóró* ‘table’. The relationship is thus, ternary while the frame of reference is relative.

16. *ókpókóró* *á-bà* *ké* *ísó* *òkón*
 table 3sg.cl-LOC.COP LOC. P face Okon
 ‘The table is in front of the Okon’

In (16) the table is located with reference to the location of *Okon*. The perspective taken in (16) is neutral and there is no reference to the speaker’s perspective or the addressee’s perspective. Here, frontness is assigned according to the intrinsic features of *Okon* (face, direction of eye gaze, looking direction, etc). The relationship is obviously binary with an intrinsic frame of reference.

17. *ébót* *á-bà* *ké* *èdèm* *ókpókóró*
 goat 3sg.cl-LOC.COP. LOC.P back table
 ‘The goat is behind the table.’

In (17), *ébót* ‘goat’ is located with reference to the location of *ókpókóró* ‘table’. Since there is no backness assigned to *ókpókóró* ‘table’ in Ibibio, the speaker’s perspective is taken. Again, the location of *ébót* ‘goat’ is described as if *ókpókóró* ‘table’ is between *it* and the speaker. The relationship of the description is ternary with a relative frame of reference.

2.13 Right-Left Relations

Consider the examples in (18-19).

18. *éwá* *á-bà* *ké* *úbọ* *fọk*
 dog 3sg.cl-LOC.COP. LOC.P hand right house
 ‘The dog is at the right (hand) of the house.’

In (18) the speaker assigns frontness to *úfòk* 'house' using the intrinsic features (e.g. entrance path or main gate) of *úfòk*. Thus, the *éwá- úfòk* locative relationship is defined according to the frontness of the house and the location of the speaker does not matter here. The relationship is binary while an intrinsic frame of reference is employed.

19. *éwá á-bà ké úbók ùfiéng úfòk*
 dog 3sg.cl-LOC.COP. LOC.P hand left house
 'The dog is at the left (hand) of the house.'

The description of (19) is similar to that of (18). The speaker's perspective is employed and left-side location of *éwá* 'dog' is defined with respect to the frontness of *úfòk* 'house'. Again, the location of the speaker does not matter since it does not make any change in the construction given the intrinsic feature (frontness) of the house which is the reference point. The relationship is binary while the frame of reference is employed.

2.14 In-At-On-Under Relations

Consider examples (20-23).

20. *íyák á-síné ké ̀̀ón*
 fish 3sg.cl- LOC.COP.(in) LOC.P water
 'The fish is in the water.'
21. *òkón á-bà ké úfòk*
 Okon 3sg.cl-LOC.COP(at) LOC.P house
 'Okon is at the house.'
22. *íyák á-dòrò ké ókpókóró*
 fish 3sg.cl-LOC.COP(on) LOC.P table
 'The fish is on the table.'

23. *ikpáng* *á-bà(siné)* *ké* *idàk* *ókpókóró*
 spoon 3sg.cl-LOC.COP LOC.P under table
 ‘The spoon is under the table.’

In (20-23) *iyák*, *òkón*, *iyák* and *ikpáng* are described by referring to the location of *ón* ‘water’ *úfòk* ‘house’ , *ókpókóró* ‘table’ and *ókpókóró* ‘table’ respectively. In each case, there is no reference to the speaker/addressee’s perspective. Thus, the relationship in each case is binary while the reference frame is intrinsic.

From the theoretical analysis so far, it is obvious that if the entity used as a reference point has no intrinsic features, the speaker always relies on his own perspective. Ibibio allows both intrinsic and relative frames of reference but not absolute frame of reference. Making a choice of either intrinsic or relative frame of reference is entirely a function of the entities’ intrinsic features. The use of addressee’s perspective is not a preferable option for Ibibio speakers. They use either the speaker’s perspective or a neutral one. So far, I have no evidence for the use of addressee’s perspective.

3. Summary and Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to provide a descriptive account of locative copular constructions in Ibibio and have noted how they are expressed with inherently different locative copular verbs. Such verbs which can be *dòrò*, ‘be on’ *siné* ‘be in’ *bà* ‘be at’ are used to express the spatial location of a subject entity. The location of such a subject entity can be marked with locative elements in two ways. In the first case, an inherently locative copular verb co-occurs with a locative prepositional phrase headed by a multipurpose preposition, *ké*. In the second type, in addition to the inherent locative copular verb with the locative prepositional phrase headed by *ké*, there is also within the prepositional phrase a locative relational noun modifier which modifies the head noun, a complement to the locative preposition *ké*. The complements to the Ibibio locative copular verbs are predominantly prepositional phrases headed by the preposition *ké*; an indication that

location is grammaticalized in Ibibio. The various frames of reference, their origin/source and relation types which Ibibio locatives encode have been discussed. Specifically, Ibibio has two reference frames (intrinsic and relative) which seems to be related to the inherent properties of the entities located in a situation.

Finally, I must state that describing the Ibibio predicative construction; a sub-type of copulative construction will make an interesting research. Such a description will among other things reveal the areas of similarity and dissimilarity between the sub-types.

Abbreviations

COP. Copula

cl. Clitic

LOC- Locative

PRED - Predicative

P Preposition

3sg - Third person singular

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