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Identificational constructions in Wan

This paper explores identificational predication in Wan (Southeastern Mande, Côte d'Ivoire). Like many other Mande languages, Wan does not have a two-place identificational predicate that could be used with two noun phrases (cf. *John is a teacher*). Instead, the corresponding meaning can be encoded in a construction involving a copula and a postpositional phrase (1).

(1) yàá   pɔ̄   zià   yā
     3SG+COP   thing bad   PPS
     'It is a bad thing.'

The postposition *yā* displays a polysemy pattern typical of postpositions involved in identificational constructions in other Mande languages. It introduces instruments (2a), accompanying objects and actions (2b-c), material (2d), and result of a transformation (cf. especially 2d vs. 2e). The same postposition is involved in property predication (2f), introduces a variety of non-finite complements (2g), and appears with certain arguments that can be described in terms of comparison (2h).

(2) a. Instrument
         è   bɔ̀lè   dō   tɛ̄   klā̰ŋ̄   yā
         3SG   bird   one   killed bow   with
         'He killed a bird with a bow.'

     b. Accompanying object
         lē   dō   zō   yí   yā   à   lèŋ
         woman   one   came water   with 3SG   to
         'A woman brought him water.'

     c. Accompanying action
         nà̰á̰   gà   lé   bā   lé   pɔ̄   lɔ́   yā
         1SG+COP   go   PROG field at   thing   eat   with
         'I am going to the field and eating.'

     d. Material
         è   yá-ŋ   pɔ̄   dō   wō   yrɛ̄   yā
         3SG   sit-NMLZ   thing one   made wood   PPS
         'He made a seat of wood.'

     e. Result of transformation
         è   yrɛ̄   dō   ɓō   yáŋ   pɔ̄   yā
         3SG   wood   one   carved   sit-NMLZ   thing   PPS
         'He carved a piece of wood into a seat.'

     f. Property predication
         yàá   é   zià-zià   yā
         3SG   REFL   bad-bad   PPS
         'He is evil.'

g. Non-finite complement

ŋ̀	kúnā̰	pɔ̄	lɔ́	yā
1SG	started	thing	eat	PPS

'I started to eat.'

h. Comparison

à	mlá̰á̰	é	dèè	yā
3SG	come.out:STAT.RSLT	REFL	father	PPS

'He resembles his father.'

The broad range of uses suggests that the postposition *yā* can hardly be regarded as a semantically meaningful component of identificational predication. Rather, its use in (1) appears to be determined by the syntactic properties of the corresponding copula, which must be followed by a postpositional phrase or an adverb. Accordingly, noun phrases that have adverbial equivalents do not combine with a postposition; for example, inherently locational nouns, which can be used either as nouns or as adverbs (*Kwātá* in the examples below), cannot be introduced by the postposition *yā* (3a vs. 3b).

(3) a.

Kwātá	á	ŋ̀	gà-ŋ	kɔ̄ŋ	yā
K.	COP	1SG	go-NMLZ	village	PPS

'Kwata is the village I'm going to.'

b.

ŋ̀	gà-ŋ	kɔ̄ŋ	é	á	Kwātá	(*yā)
1SG	go-NMLZ	village	DEF	COP	K.	PPS

'The village I'm going to is Kwata.'

This restriction shows that the primary function of the postposition *yā* in the identificational construction is syntactic: it introduces noun phrases in a syntactic position restricted to adverbs and postpositional phrases. Hence, the characteristic pattern of polysemy displayed by that postposition does not necessarily imply a semantic and/or diachronic relation between the identificational construction and all other constructions illustrated in (2a-g); rather, it has to do with the function of *yā* as a general-purpose, "default" postposition that encodes a variety of (possibly unrelated) meanings for which no specialized postposition exist.

Further exploration of the encoding of identification in discourse reveals that the use of a copula with the postposition *yā* is but one type of identificational construction in Wan. Considerably more frequent in ordinary discourse is a construction with the one-place predicate *má̰* 'it/he/she is', in which the object being identified must be discourse-given.

(4)

pɔ̄	ziè	má̰
thing	bad	it.is

'It's a bad thing.'

The predicate *má̰*, together with the construction involving the postposition *yā*, effectively compensate for the absence of a European-style specialized two-place identificational predicate of the type BE(x, y).