

## Copula Clauses in Austronesian languages of West New Guinea

### Abstract

Copula clauses are certain types of clauses in which the syntactic device linking the subject and the predicate is not a verb. As in the English clause *John is a teacher*, the linking device *is* takes the function as what is called ‘copula.’ Copula clauses exist in almost all languages with a great variation in their grammars. They may range from lexical categories to complex morpho-syntactic devices. This paper describes copula clauses across Austronesian languages of West New Guinea (WNG), especially languages of the Cenderawasih Bay area. Syntactically, copula clauses refer to non-verbal clauses that the linking device that may be positioned in the middle or final position of a clause as in Ambai (Silzer 1983).

- (1) *ne-ku guru dino Yani*  
POSS-1SG teacher BE Yani  
‘My teacher is Yani.’
- (2) *Yani ne-ku guru dine*  
Yani POSS-1SG teacher BE  
‘Yani is my teacher.’

Morphologically, the linking device may be formed by a simple lexical category and a morphologically compositional word. A copula with a simple lexical category does not have any morphology as in (1) and (2). As for a morphologically compositional word, they apply an agreement pattern in which a copula agrees with the subject of the clause in terms of the person and number features as in the following examples:

- (3) *Ya pandita ti-ya* (Wooi, Sawaki 2016:71)  
1SG pastor COP-1SG  
‘I am a pastor.’
- (4) *Aya guru ri-s-aya* (Biak, Mofu 2008: 244)  
1SG teacher DET-COP-1SG  
‘I am a teacher.’

Yet, copula, in any forms, does not bring any semantic content to a clause. Instead, it is only a functional device that link various semantic constructions such as classification, equational, attributional, predlocative, existential, predpossessive, and appretentive constructions.

**Keywords:** copula, subject, predicate, compositional word, lexical category, agreement.

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