

A Linguistic Analysis of Copulas in Bangla with Respect to English

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Abstract

This paper investigates the linguistic concept of copulas in Bangla, examining their syntactic and semantic properties in comparison to English. Copulas, which link a subject with a non-verbal predicate, differ significantly across languages. English primarily uses the verb *to be* as a copula, while Bangla features five distinct types: *ach-* (to be present/exist), *thak-* (to remain/stay/live permanently), *hO-* (to become/happen), a null copula, and Positive Polarity Copulas (*holo* and *hocche*). Each Bangla copula exhibits unique syntactic and semantic functions, with overlapping usages in some contexts. For instance, *ach-* and *thak-* both express existential meanings, but *thak-* conveys permanence or habituality, whereas *ach-* indicates temporary presence. The study also delves into null copulas, which can covertly represent *hO-* or *ach-*, and examines their behavior in different grammatical structures. Positive Polarity Copulas, although morphologically tied to past and progressive forms, semantically operate in the simple present tense. The analysis underscores the structural distinctions between Bangla and English copular constructions, particularly the implications of Bangla's subject-object-verb (SOV) order versus English's subject-verb-object (SVO) order. This paper highlights areas for further research, including the information structure of copular clauses in Bangla and their unified syntactic representation. By addressing these linguistic intricacies, the study contributes to a broader understanding of cross-linguistic variations in copular constructions.

Keyword: Copulas, Bangla syntax, linguistic typology, positive polarity Copulas, existential predicates, cross-linguistic comparison

1. Introduction:

The linguistic situation of a particular language is not necessarily a universal condition. Though the term 'copula' in linguistics always remains an enigmatic area which has attracted so many theoreticians from the ancient times to this century, there was no consensus reached regarding its syntactic and semantic properties. Naturally, the notion of copula differs in different languages, and hence, it is very difficult to posit an all-satisfying definition of the term. It becomes very much evident if we compare the number and function of copulas in English and Bangla¹. The term 'copula' refers to the verb 'to be' (in specific context) in English and its different corresponding forms in Bangla which has mainly five copulas. Radford (1997, p. 501) gives the following definition of copula:

(A copula is) used to link a subject with a verbless predicate.

Now, the syntactic nature of a non-verbal (verbless) predicate will be evident if we examine the morpho-syntactic features of a lexical verb. Radford (1997, p. 534)

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¹ The language to be discussed here is *calitbhaSa*, the standard colloquial variety of Bangla. Ferguson (1972) called it Standard Colloquial Bengali (SCB). This standard is the widely accepted norm of educated speaking and writing in both West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh.

A category of word which has the morphological property that it can carry a range of inflections including past tense +d, third person singular present tense +s, perfective +n and progressive +ing (cf. show/shows/showed/shown/show-ing), and the syntactic property that it can head the complement of infinitival to.

The non-verbal predicates, therefore, are those that do not inflect. In Bangla, like English, non-verbal predicates are nominal as well as adjectival categories. It may also include prepositional phrases. In a broad sense, a copular clause in Bangla (a SOV language) may denote any structure with the following general schema, where the copula is Generally absent in present predicative copular sentence:

- 1) XP YP (COP) (where YP is not a VP)

This schema is different from that of English which is a SVO language:

- 2) XP COP YP (where YP is not a VP)

The following copular clauses are examples from English:

- 3) Priya is a good girl. (XP = DP, YP = DP)
 4) Priya is nice. (XP = DP, YP = AP)
 5) Priya is in the school. (XP = DP, YP = PP)
 6) The morning is the Evening Star. (XP = DP, YP = DP)

In English the copula *be* is not optional in a matrix copular clause. The sentences below are examples of Bangla² copular clauses conforming to the structural pattern of 1:

- 7) am-ar bondhu-ra khub bhalo Shikari
 I-GEN friend-PLURAL very good hunter
 'My friends are very good hunters'.
 8) am-ar bondhu-ra khub bhalo
 I-GEN friend-PLURAL very good
 'My friends are very good'.
 9) am-ar bondhu-ra bagan-e (ache)
 I-GEN friend-PLURAL garden- POSTPOSITION (in) COP-PRES-3P-AGR
 'My friends are in the garden'. (XP = DP, YP = PP)
 10) sOmoreSh bosu-i/ (ho-l-en) kalkut
 Samaresh Basu-EMPHATIC MARKER/ PPC³-PAST- 3P-AGR(HON) Kalkut
 'Samaresh Basu is Kalkut'. (XP = DP, YP = DP)
 11) sObha-r sObhapoti ho-l-en anisur rOhoman
 meeting-GEN president PPC Anisur Rahaman
 'The president of the meeting is Anisur Rahaman'. (XP = DP, YP = DP)

1.1 Now, we will discuss different types of Bangla copulas. There are five⁴ types of copulas in Bangla:

- i) **ach-** – 'to be present', 'to exist'
 ii) **thak-** – 'to remain, to stay, to live permanently'
 iii) **ho-** – 'to become, to happen, to come into being'
 iv) **Ø-** the null copula
 v) **holo** and **hocche** (Positive Polarity Copula) – 'to be'

² For the transcriptions of Bangla sentences into English, I have followed mainly Punya Sloka Ray (1966), except the sibilants. For dental /s/, I have transcribed as 's', for palatal /s/, 'Sh', and for retroflex /s/, 'S'.

³ Ferguson (1972) has called *hOoya*, *holo*, and *hocche* as pro-copula. Prof. Probal Dasgupta (1983) calls the last two elements together as Positive Polarity Copula (PPC). We shall adopt the latter term.

⁴ I did not mention 'rOoya', (meaning 'to stay, to be situated') as a copula in the above list in 1.1 because its use is not very frequent, rather it becomes almost archaic.

Except the null copula and the positive polarity copula (henceforth PPC), all the other three copulas listed here have their own lexical, auxiliary and other grammatical functions. But our main concern will be their functions as copulas.

1.2 Description of *ach-* Copula:

1.2.1 *Ach-* is a defective verb in Bangla with no future forms. It takes the help of the future forms of the copula *thak-* to express future. Its forms in different tenses and with different persons are given below:

PERSON	RESPECT GRADING in Pronouns	PRESENT		PAST	
		Affirmative	Negative	Affirmative	Negative
1 st		ach-i	Nei	ch-il-am	ch-il-am-na
2 nd	Inferior	ach-is	Nei	ch-il-i	ch-il-i-na
2 nd	Ordinary	ach-o	Nei	ch-il-e	ch-il-e-na
2 nd	Honorific	ach-en	Nei	ch-il-en	ch-il-en-na
3 rd	Ordinary	ach-e	Nei	ch-il-o	ch-il-o-na
3 rd	Honorific	ach-en	Nei	ch-il-en	ch-il-en-na

1.2.2 Ray Freeze in his article *Existential and Other Locatives* (1992) makes a unified analysis of existential sentences to reveal their relations in Universal Grammar. He divides the existential sentences into two groups – a) Predicate Locative and b) pure Existential. His unified analysis is based on ‘a single underlying structure in which the thematic arguments are LOCATION and THEME’. The theme argument in predicate locatives is a definite NP and it is raised to the subject position of the clause to occur subject initially. On the other hand, if the theme argument is indefinite, the locative phrase is raised to the Spec (IP) and becomes the subject. He calls the latter type as pure Existential. The syntactic structures of these sentences are nothing but different orderings of the same constituents. In a language like Bangla with SOV order the structures are:

Basic Order	Predicate Locative	Existential
SOV	Theme - Locative – Cop	Locative - Theme – Cop

The same examples which Freeze (1992) has cited in his article are given below:

- 12) mai hindustan-me tha (Theme - Locative - Cop)
 I. India-in. COP-1SG-MASC-PAST
 ‘I was in India’.
- 13) kamre-me admi hai (Locative - Theme - Cop)
 room-in. man COP-3SG-MASC-PRES
 ‘There is a man in the room’.

Let us see how this formulae work in Bangla existential, which is akin to Hindi in its syntactic order and other grammatical features. It should be mentioned that Hindi has only one copula – *hai*, not like Bangla which has five different varieties, as already stated.

1.2.3 *Ach-* is a purely existential copula that carries the meaning that someone or something ‘exists’ or ‘is present’ (somewhere or in some state). It may be used with a definite NP or an indefinite NP subject. When it is used with a definite NP subject, its status is that of Freeze’s predicative locative with the structure – ‘Theme - Locative – Cop’. But the copula is optional here, (as also evidenced in Russian (Freeze)).

- 14) boi-Ta Tebil-er upor-e (ach-e)
 book-CLASSIFIER table-GEN POSTPOSITION (on) COP-PRES-3P-AGR
 ‘The book is on the table.’
- 15) boi-Ta Tebil-e (ach-e)
 book-CLASSIFIER table- POSTPOSITION (on/in) COP-PRES-3P-AGR
 ‘The book is on/in the table.’

Another pair of examples is given below:

- 16) tini bagan-e ach-e-n
 he/she-hon garden-POSTPOSITION (in). COP-PRES-3P-AGR
 ‘He/she is in the garden’.

The same information in Bangla can be conveyed without *ach-*, though with a delicate nuance of meaning:

- 17) tini bagan-e
 he/she-hon garden-POSTPOSITION (in)
 ‘He/she is in the garden’.

In fact, the native speakers use both the expressions interchangeably and it is very difficult to differentiate between them. Sentence 17 is used most likely with a more immediate context. Sentence 16 with its use of copula denotes a longer duration and it may implicate, in a given context, that someone may have been in the habit of going to the garden and now he is there for a short period of time, and his purpose is gardening, but sentence 17 does not implicate so, as it may also mean that he is there for other purposes. Another set of examples may be relevant here:

- 18) Omit (Ekhon) Emerika-y
 Amit now Amerika-POSTPOSITION (in)
 ‘Amit is (now) in Amerika’.
- 19) Omit (Ekhon) Emerika-y ach-e⁵
 Amit now Amerika-POSTPOSITION (in) COP-PRES-3P-AGR
 ‘Amit is (living) now in Amerika’.
- 20) Omit (Ekhon) Emerika-y thak-e
 Amit now Amerika-POSTPOSITION (in) COP-PRES-3P-AGR
 ‘Amit lives permanently now in Amerika’.

Sentence 18 denotes a temporary existence – Amit may be on a tour or has gone there for some purpose and will come back after a short period of time. 19 means that Amit’s duration of stay in America is for a longer period of time in comparison to that of 18 but not as longer as that of 20 which says that Amit is now settled in America and lives there permanently. The next set of sentences is also interesting:

- 21) sudip (Ekhon) skul-e
 Sudip now school-POSTPOSITION (in)
 ‘Sudip is now in school’.
- 22) sudip (Ekhon) skul-e ach-e
 Sudip now school-POSTPOSITION (in) COP-PRES-3P-AGR
 ‘Sudip is now in (a) school’.
- 23) Sudip (Ekhon) skul-e thak-e
 Sudip now school-POSTPOSITION (in) COP-PRES-3P-AGR
 ‘Sudip lives in (a) school’.

The meaning of all these sentences is almost the same but 22 may implicate, in addition to its usual meaning, that Sudip is serving a school now, but 21 shows that Sudip has, at present, gone to a particular school and will come back soon. But these meanings, like that of above set of sentences, are always contextual and they need a pragmatic analysis. On the other hand, 23 expresses undoubtedly the fact that Sudip lives in the school premises.

⁵ The similar meaning can be expressed through the following example:

- Omit (Ekhon) Emerika-y roye-ch-e
 Amit now Amerika-POSTPOSITION (in) COP-PRES-3P-AGR
 ‘Amit lives now in Amerika’.

1.2.4 When we talk about some permanent immovable substance we cannot use the time adverbial denoting a temporary state:

- 24) himalOy (*Ekhon) bharot-er uttor-e
the Himalayas Now India-GEN north-POSTPOSITION (on)
'The Himalayas are (*now) on the north of India'.
- 25) gach-Ta. (*Ekhon) skul-er paShe
tree-CLASSIFIER now school-GEN beside
'The tree is (*now) (standing) beside the school'.

Again, we find in 24 and 25 that if the subject is an immovable thing the copula *ach-* is generally omitted⁶. This can further be exemplified in the following interrogative sentence:

- 26) baRi-Ta kothay *ach-e?
house- CLASSIFIER where COP-PRES-3P-AGR
'Where is the house situated?'

1.2.5 On the other hand, when *ach-* is used with an indefinite NP as its subject, we cannot omit *ach-*. It is obligatory here. It occurs usually in clause-final position and means something like "There be ...". In these sentences the normal word order is Locative-Copula-Subject. They are instances of Freeze's existential sentences (Locative - Theme - Cop):

- 27) sekhane ek-Ti pen *(ach-e)
there one-CLASSIFIER pen COP-PRES-3P-AGR
'There is a pen'.
- 28) chad-e ki keu *(ach-e)?
roof- POSTPOSITION (on) QUESTION MARKER someone COP-PRES-3P-AGR
'Is there anyone on the roof?'
- 29) Tebil-er upor-e ek-Ti dasTar *(ach-e)
table-GEN POSTPOSITION (on) one-CLASSIFIER duster COP-PRES-3P-AGR
'There is a duster on the table'.

Thus, the syntactic order agrees with the notion of Freeze, but in the predicative locatives the word order is flexible depending on the position of the FOCUS:

- 30) bharot-er uttor-e himalOy
India-GEN north-POSTPOSITION (on) the Himalayas
'The Himalayas are on the north of India'.
- 31) skul-er paShe gach-Ta (ach-e)
school-GEN beside tree-CLASSIFIER COP-PRES-3P-AGR
'The tree is (standing) beside the school'.
- 32) Tebil-er upor-e boi-Ta *(ach-e)
table-GEN POSTPOSITION (on) book-CLASSIFIER COP-PRES-3P-AGR
'The book is on the table.'

In all these examples the primary focus is on the locatives. There is a possibility to use an expression like the following that contradicts Freeze in its word order as an existential sentence:

- 33) ek-Ti boi Tebil-er upor-e (ach-e)
one-CLASSIFIER book table-GEN POSTPOSITION (on) COP-PRES-3P-AGR
'There is a book on the table'.

The sense implied here is that the speaker has perhaps found one book on the table among the rest.

1.2.6 Thus, in both the cases, *ach-* with a definite or an indefinite NP as its subject – there is no NP or AP complement. These types of sentences are said to have an existential meaning. The most convenient and sure test of its existential use is to convert the sentence into negative in present tense, which is invariably marked by the negative particle *nei*.

⁶ If we use a copula at all here, it is *roOya* and not *ach-* and it occurs between Locative and the subject. This type of poetic use can be found in the geography book in school. The following description is an instance:

bharot-er uttor-e roye-ch-e himalOy
India-GEN north-POSTPOSITION (in) COP-PRES-3P-AGR the Himalayas
'The Himalayas are in the north of India'.

- 34) Omit Emerika-y nei
Amit Amerika-POSTPOSITION (in) NEG
'Amit is not in Amerika'.
- 35) boi-Ta Tebil-e nei
book-CLASSIFIER table-POSTPOSITION (on) NEG
'The book is not on the table.'
- 36) sekhane ek-Ti-o pen nei
there one-CLASSIFIER-EMPHASIS pen NEG
'There is not a single pen'.
- 37) chad-e ki keu nei?
roof- POSTPOSITION (on) QUESTION MARKER someone NEG
'Is not there anyone on the roof?'

1.2.7 We find that *ach-* never occurs in an NP-NP-COP structure, but it is not unusual in an NP- AP-COP structure. Freeze has not discussed this variety in his article. But the occurrence of this kind of adjectival complement is limited in Bangla.

- 38) Opu bhalo ach-e
Apu good COP-PRES-3P-AGR
'Apu is well (in good health)'.
- 39) Oditi Thik ach-e
Aditi all right COP-PRES-3P-AGR
'Aditi is all right (in good health)'.

And the following sentences pose an interesting study:

- 40) Opu bhalo
Apu good
'Apu is good (in character or behaviour)'.
- 41) Oditi Thik
Aditi all right
'Aditi is right (correct or perfect)'.

In 40 and 41 the omission of *ach-* makes a gross change in meaning different from its presence in 38 and 39. The first group denotes a stage-level quality, and the second group denotes an individual-level quality. Though it is a puzzle, and its secret lies, most likely, in its syntax and corresponding semantic interpretation. 38 and 39 have the structure NP-AP-COP_{ach-} but 40 and 41 may have a different underlying structure, though apparently, they show, as if, *ach-* is omitted. Here the copula is covert, and it occurs because of the omission of any form of a different copula *hO-*. The first group of sentences is existential in nature and the second group is predicative. The following tests can attest the above assumption.

a) *Ach-* of 38 and 39 can be replaced by the copula *thak-* in a conditional clause, but the null copula of 40 and 41 can be replaced only by the copula *hO-*, not *ach-*:

- 42) jodi Opu bhalo thak-e, tObe am-ra kolkata ja-b-o
if Apu well COP-PRES-3P-AGR then we Kolkata go-FUTURE-1P-AGR
'We shall go to Kolkata, if Apu gets well'.
- 43) jodi Opu bhalo hO-y, tObe am-ra take purosrito kor-b-o
if Apu good COP-3P-PRES-AGR then we him rewarded do-FUTURE-1P-AGR
'We shall reward Apu, if he behaves well'.

b) Again, when these two types of copular sentences are negated, they take different negative marker:

- 44) Opu bhalo nei
Apu well NEG-PRESENT
'Apu is not well.'
- 45) Opu bhalo nO-y
Apu good NEG-PRESENT-3P-AGR
'Apu is not good in his character or behaviour'.
- 46) Oditi Thik nei
Aditi all right NEG-PRESENT
'Aditi is not well'.
- 47) Oditi Thik nO-y
Aditi all right NEG-PRESENT-3P-AGR
'Aditi is not right or perfect'.

Interestingly, the negative copula marker *nei* is constant in all persons when it negates a sentence with the presence of *ach-*, but the negative copula *nO-* may change its form according to the person of the subject:

- 48) ami bhalo nei
I well NEG-PRESENT
'I am not well.'
- 49) tumi bhalo nei
you well NEG-PRESENT
'You are not well'.
- 50) ami bhalo no-i
I good NEG-PRESENT-1P-AGR
'I am not good in character'.
- 51) tumi bhalo nO-o
you good NEG-PRESENT-2P-AGR
'You are not good in character'.

Therefore, we can reach a conclusion that the copula *ach-* cannot take a pure AP as its complement.

1.3. Description of *thak-* Copula:

1.3.1 *thak-* always expresses either a permanent existence / a characteristic of individual-level quality, or a habit / a practice. In the first case *thak-* is used with a locative adverb, but in the latter case it may not take the adverb in some cases. It is interesting to note that *thak-* in its future form loses its characteristic to qualify a permanent existence or a habit. As *thak-* supplants the future forms of *ach-*, the features of *ach-* and *thak-* merge. For this reason, the future form of sentences 18, 19 and 20 is same:

- 52) Omit Emerika-y thak-b-e
Amit Amerika-POSTPOSITION (in) COP-FUTURE-3P-AGR
'Amit will live/stay in Amerika'.

In future tense it needs a time adverbial to denote the sense of living/remaining permanently or a future habit.

In present tense it is not obligatory:

- 53) mach jOl-e thak-e
fish water-POSTPOSITION (in) COP-PRES-3P-AGR
'Fish lives in water'.
- 54) tini dhEnomOgno thak-en
he/she-HON absorbed in meditation COP-PRES-3P-AGR
'He/She remains absorbed in meditation'.

57) Tebil-er upor-e sObsOmOy boi-Ta thak-e
 table-GEN POSTPOSITION (on) always book-CLASSIFIER COP-PRES-3P-AGR
 ‘There one can always find a book on the table.’

PERSON	RESPECT GRADING in Pronouns	PRESENT		PAST		FUTURE	
		Affirmative	Negative	Affirmative	Negative	Affirmative	Negative
1 st		thak-i	thak-i na	thak-l-am	thak-l-am na	thak-b-o	thak-b-o-na
2 nd	Inferior	thak-is	thak-is na	thak-l-i	thak-l-i na	thak-b-i	thak-b-i-na
2 nd	Ordinary	thak-o	thak-o na	thak-l-e	thak-l-e na	thak-b-e	thak-b-e-na
2 nd	Honorific	thak-en	thak-en na	thak-l-en	thak-l-en na	thak-b-en	thak-b-en-na
3 rd	Ordinary	thak-e	thak-e na	thak-l-o	thak-l-o na	thak-b-e	thak-b-e-na
3 rd	Honorific	thak-en	thak-en na	thak-l-en	thak-l-en na	thak-b-en	thak-b-en-na

58) jodi Opu bhalo * thak-b-e, tObe am-ra Kolkata ja-b-o
if Apu well COP-FUTURE-3P-AGR then we Kolkata go-FUTURE-1P-AGR
'We shall go to Kolkata, if Apu gets well'.

59) jodi Opu bhalo. * hO-b-e, tObe am-ra take purosrito kor-b-o
if Apu good COP-FUTURE-3P-AGR then we him rewarded do-FUTURE-1P-AGR
'We will reward Apu, if he behaves well'.

(60) poSa kukur-Ti ghOr-er moddh-e thak-e
pet dog-CLASSIFIER home-GEN inside-POSTPOSITION (in) COP-PRES-3P-AGR
'The pet dog lives inside home'.

- 61) poSa kukur-Ti ghOr-er moddh-e ach-e
pet dog-CLASSIFIER home-GEN inside-POSTPOSITION COP-PRES-3P-AGR
'The pet dog is inside home (for the time being)'.

Again, *ach-* denotes the present state of existence at a time, but *thak-* can express many states at a time:

- 62) *riku bagan-e ach-e kintu Ekhon se ekhan-e ach-e
Riku garden-POSTPOSITION (in) COP-PRES-3P-AGR but now he here COP-PRES-3P-AGR
'*Riku is in the garden but now he is here (for sometime)'.

- 63) riku dilli-te thak-e kintu Ekhon se ekhane thak-e
Riku Delhi-POSTPOSITION (in) COP-PRES-3P-AGR but now he here COP-PRES-3P-AGR
'Riku lives in Delhi but now he is here (for sometime)'.

It is more appropriately expressed with the use of both the copulas:

- 63.a) riku dilli-te thak-e kintu Ekhon se ekhane ach-e
Riku Delhi-POSTPOSITION (in) COP-PRES-3P-AGR but now he here COP-PRES-3P-AGR
'Riku lives in Delhi but now he is here (for sometime)'.

- b)** When it is negated, *thak-* takes a simple default negative marker *nei* after it, but the negative marker for *ach-* is always *nei*.

- 64) sudip skul-e nei
Sudip school-POSTPOSITION (in) NEG-PRESENT
'Sudip is not in (the) school'.

- 65) sudip skul-e thak-e na
Sudip school-POSTPOSITION (in) COP-PRES-3P-AGR NEG-MARKER
'Sudip does not live in school'.

- c)** As already discussed in 42, *ach-* cannot occur in a conditional clause and takes the help of *thak-*.

- 66) sudip ja-te skul-e thak-e/*ach-e sei ceSTa ho-cch-e
Sudip so that school-in COP-PRES-3P-AGR that attempt hO-PRES-PROGRESSIVE-AGR
'The attempt is going on, so that Sudip lives/stays in school'.

- d)** In imperative sentences *ach-* cannot be used, but *thak-* is almost a default choice:

- 67) jao eboN kolkata-y thak-o / *ach-o
go and Kolkata-POSTPOSITION (in) stay/ exist PRES-2P-IMPERATIVE-AGR
'Go and stay/live in Kolkata'.

- e)** To express a sense of past habit, as done by the English phrase 'used to', *thak-* is a default option, but it is not possible with *ach-*. Its past form 'ch-il-am' is used to mean a past indefinite.

- 68) ami dilli-te thak-t-am / *ach-t-am
I Delhi-POSTPOSITION (in) stay-used to-1P-PAST-AGR
'I used to stay/live in Delhi'.

- 69) ami dilli-te ch-il-am
I Delhi- POSTPOSITION (in) be-1P-PAST-AGR
'I was in Delhi'.

- f)** *thak-* is a true subjunctive in Bangla, *ach-* has no function to play here:

- 70) am-ar bacca bhalo thak-uk
my (1P-POSSESSIVE) baby well/healthy live/remain-SUBJUNC MARKER
'May my baby live well/healthy'.

- g)** But, interestingly, *thak-* cannot occur with immovable things but *ach-* can do so:

- 71) skul-Ti baRi-r pechon dik-e ach-e / *thak-e
 school-CLASSIFIER house-GEN back side-POSTPOSITION (at) COP-PRES-3P-AGR
 ‘The school is situated at the backside of the house’.

h) Finally, *ach-* has no future form but *thak-* has its own future form, and it is already shown in the tables 1.2.1 and 1.3.2 respectively.

1.4 Description of *hO-* Copula:

1.4.1 The copula *hO-* is a very common and basic verb in Bangla with a high frequency of occurrence. It has full sets of forms in all the tenses:

PERSON	RESPECT GRADING in Pronouns	PRESENT		PAST		FUTURE	
		Affirmative	Negative	Affirmative	Negative	Affirmative	Negative
1 st		ho-i	no-i	ho-l-am	ho-l-am na	hO-b-o	hO-b-o-na
2 nd	Inferior	ho-s	no-s	ho-l-i	ho-l-i na	ho-b-i	ho-b-i-na
2 nd	Ordinary	hO-o	nO-o	ho-l-e	ho-l-e na	hO-b-e	hO-b-e-na
2 nd	Honorific	hOn	nOn	ho-l-en	ho-l-en na	hO-b-en	hO-b-en-na
3 rd	Ordinary	hOy	nOy	ho-l-o	ho-l-o na	hO-b-e	hO-b-e-na
3 rd	Honorific	hOn	nOn	ho-l-en	ho-l-en na	hO-b-en	hO-b-en-na

1.4.2 *hO-* mainly expresses the notion of ‘being’ or ‘becoming’. Examples are given below:

a) In Imperative Sentence:

- 72) GENi hO-o
 wise COP-AGR
 ‘Be wise’.

b) In Optative Sentence:

- 73) tom-ar jibOn-e Shanti ho-k
 you-GEN life-POSTPOSITION (in) peace cop- SUBJUNC MARKER
 ‘Let there be peace in your life’.

c) NP-AP Structure:

- 74) horipOdo bORoi khuShi ho-l-o
 Haripada very happy COP-3P-PAST-AGR
 ‘Haripada became very happy’.

d) NP-NP Structure:

- 75) torun Doktor ho-l-o
 Tarun doctor COP-3P-PAST-AGR
 ‘Tarun became a doctor’.

In the last two examples (74 and 75), if we drop the copula, we get different meanings. With the use of copula, the sentences express a change of state or a sense of becoming. On the other hand, without the occurrence of copula, they express an already existing state:

- 76) horipOdo bORoi khuShi
 Haripada very happy
 ‘Haripada is very happy’.

- 77) torun (ekjon) Doktor
Tarun one doctor
'Tarun is a doctor'.

e) We have already discussed how this copula is used in a conditional clause. It is also used in the sense of non-finite 'being':

- 78) ShikkhOk ho-e ami khuShi
teacher COP-NON-FINITE I happy
'I am happy being a teacher'.

f) In some few cases it behaves like a null copula in its meaning of being:

- 79) rahul Indira-r nati (hOy)
Rahul Indira-GEN grandchild COP-3P-PRS-AGR
'Rahul is Indira's grandchild'.

This type of use is limited as the native speakers feel at ease with its omission. The only difference is that it occurs at the clause-final position.⁷ According to Dasgupta (1983) the *hO-* of 79 is a 'Kinship Verb' which always occurs at the sentence-final position. It is different from the 'Become/Happen Verb' *hO-*, which we have discussed in 72-78. He further classifies the *hO-* copula of the following sentence as 'Characterization Verb':

- 80) khabar-Ta mukhorocok hO-b-e eboN sOsta hO-b-e
food-CLASSIFIER tasty COP-3P-FUTURE-AGR and cheap COP-3P-FUTURE-AGR
'The food will be tasty and cheap'.

Thus, this is another area to explore further to find out the differences between these different types of *hO-* copulas. For our present study we will put more emphasis on null copula as it is much more frequent and natural than *hO-* in present tense in Bangla.

1.5 Description of the null copulas:

1.5.1 There are two types of null copulas in Bangla:

- a) Existential Null Copula
- b) Predicative Null Copula

1.5.2 Existential null copulas are the covert positions for the overt existential copula *ach-* as exemplified in the sentences like 17, 18, and 21 etc. where *ach-* can be omitted, and the relation between them is straightforward.

1.5.3 The predicative null copula occurs in the sentences without an overt copula are the result of the omission of *hO-* and *ach-* in NP-NP/AP and NP-PP constructions respectively. The primary reason is that the native speaker of Bangla consciously or unconsciously posits a form of *hO-* / *ach-* when he/she is to supply the missing element in the place of covert occurrence of this copula. Its negative forms in all the tenses and its other forms in past and future indicate its clause-final position. Anyhow, it is generally a present tense marker, but in some conditional clauses, it may also denote pastness. It takes different forms in different tenses as are given below:

⁷This copula is different from the PPC which always occurs in a medial position.

PERSON	RESPECT GRADING	PRESENT		PAST		FUTURE	
		Affirmative	Negative	Affirmative	Negative	Affirmative	Negative
1 st		Ø	no-i	ch-il-am	ch-il-am-na	hO-b-o	hO-b-o-na
2 nd	Inferior	Ø	no-s	ch-il-i	ch-il-i-na	ho-b-i	ho-b-i-na
2 nd	Ordinary	Ø	nO-o	ch-il-e	ch-il-e-na	hO-b-e	hO-b-e-na
2 nd	Honorific	Ø	nO-n	ch-il-en	ch-il-en-na	hO-b-en	hO-b-en-na
3 rd	Ordinary	Ø	nO-y	ch-il-o	ch-il-o-na	hO-b-e	hO-b-e-na
3 rd	Honorific	Ø	nO-n	ch-il-en	ch-il-en-na	hO-b-en	hO-b-en-na

1.5.4 The differences between these two types of null copulas (existential and predicative) are stated below:

a) *ach-* cannot substitute the predicative null copula (in NP-NP/AP structure) in any position (sentence medially or finally) without changing its basic meaning.⁸ But the existential sentences like 16 and 17 show that it can replace a null copula in NP-PP structure.

81) OtiSh Ek-jon ShikkhOk
Atish one-CLASSIFIER teacher
'Atish is a teacher.'

82) * OtiSh ach-e Ek-jon ShikkhOk
Atish is one-CLASSIFIER teacher
'Atish is a teacher.'

82.a) * OtiSh Ek-jon ShikkhOk ach-e
Atish one-CLASSIFIER teacher COP-3P-PRESENT-AGR
'Atish is a teacher.'

b) The copula *hO-* supplies tense and other grammatical features to the predicative null copula when the latter is negated or used in a conditional clause. On the other hand, the copula *ach-* supplies so to the existential null copulas, but not in the conditional clauses which are supplied by the *thak-* copula.

c) The predicative null copula is negated by the different forms of the negative copula *nO-*, which responds differently in different persons, and the existential null copula is negated by *nei*, which has no other forms in present tense, as we have already shown in the examples 44 - 51.

d) The existential null copula invariably occurs usually in the clause-final position. The examples are already given, but the position of the predicative null copula in the sentence. It needs further study to ascertain whether it follows the basic verb-final pattern in Bangla.

e) Though their past forms are the same, their forms in future tense are replaced by different copulas. The forms are already given in the tables above.

⁸ The null copula can be replaced by the PPCs, but the position of the null copula is contradictory to it, which is logically clause final, whereas the PPCs are always clause-medial, though it needs to be analyzed

OtiSh holo/hocche Ek-jon ShikkhOk
Atish PPC one-CLASSIFIER teacher
'Atish is a teacher.'

1.5.5 The predicative null copula occurs in the following structures:**a) Definite NP - Indefinite NP complement:**

- 83) bhOdromohila-Ti Shilpi
woman-CLASSIFIER artist
'The woman is an artist'.
- 84) uttomkumar e chobi-r nayak
Uttamkumar this film-GEN hero
'Uttamkumar is the hero of this film'.
- 85) Orup khub bhalo chatro
Arup very intelligent student
'Arup is an intelligent student'.

b) Definite NP - Definite NP complement:

- 86) aj somber
today Monday
'Today is Monday'.
- 87) uttomkumar uttomkumar
Uttamkumar Uttamkumar
'Uttamkumar is Uttamkumar'.
- 88) am-ar bhai-er nam bideSh
I-GEN brother-GEN name Bidesh
'My brother's name is Bidesh'.

c) Indefinite NP - Indefinite NP complement:⁹

- 89) ek-Ti gach ek-Ti pran
one-CLASSIFIER tree one-CLASSIFIER life
'One tree is one life'.
- 90) kukur khub onugOto prani
dog very faithful animal
'A dog is a very faithful animal'.

d) NP - AP complement:

- 91) gach-Ti lOmba
tree-CLASSIFIER tall
'The tree is tall'.
- 92) manuS mOronShil
man mortal
'Man is mortal'.
- 93) akaSh-er rON nilabho
sky-GEN colour bluish
'The colour of the sky is bluish'.

It is important to note that the position of the null copula is apparently ambiguous as it can be replaced by a PPC clause-medially, but its past and future counterparts along with its negative forms occur always in the sentence final position.

e) Cleft Construction:

⁹ Mainly, this is used in a generic sense.

- 94) tumi je boka sObai ta jan-e
you-ORDINARY that fool all that know-PRES-3P-AGR
'That you are a fool is known to all'.
- 95) tumi ja kor-e-ch-o ta nindonio
you-ORDINARY what do-PRES-PERF-2P-AGR that condemnable
'What you have do ne is condemnable'.

In a truncated cleft construction¹⁰

- 96) oi-Ta am-ar kaka-r choto chele
this-CLASSIFIER I-GEN uncle-GEN youngest son
'This is my dog'. (It is a truncated cleft)

f) Definite NP - Genitive complement:

- 97) pen-Ti am-ar
pen-CLASSIFIER I-GEN
'The pen is mine'.
- 98) ain-Ti sOrkar-er
law-CLASSIFIER government-GEN
'This is government's law'.

1.5.6 If a sentence with a null copula within its structure becomes a part of a conditional clause, the default conjunctive¹¹ is *hole* and *na hole* is used in a negative context.

- 99) se bhalo Shilpi na hole ogrim de-b-o na
he-ORDINARY good artist NEG-MARKER CONJUNC advance give-FUTURE-1P-AGR NEG
'I shall not give him/her any advance if he/she is not a good artist'.
- 100) meye-Ti sundor hole Omit ta-ke biye kor-b-e
girl-CLASSIFIER beautiful CONJUNC Amit her-ACCUSATIVE marriage do-FUTURE-3P-AGR
'Amit will marry the girl if she is beautiful'.

If *jodi* is used as a conditional conjunctive, *hole* is not used. The structure *jodi.....tahole/tobe* is used instead.

- 101) jodi kukur-Ta choTo hOy tobe / tahole kin-b-o
if dog-CLASSIFIER small COP then buy-FUTURE-1P-AGR
'I will buy the dog, if it is small'.

In a subjunctive clause the null copula is replaced by the present form of the copula *hOoa*.

- 102) ei lok-Ti jini tom-ar kaka hOn khub cotur
this dog-CLASSIFIER who-HON you-GEN uncle COP-HON very clever
'This man who is your uncle is very clever'.

It should be noted here that *thak-* copula is substituted for *ach-* in a subjunctive context. We have already cited an example in 42.

1.6 Description of Pro-copula:

1.6.1 These PPCs are – *holo*, the simple past form of *hOoa* and *hocche*, the present progressive form of *hOoa*. They have their own lexical or auxiliary uses:

- 103) nil-er sath-e baccu-r jhOgRa holo
Nil-GEN with Bacchu-GEN quarrel COP-3P-PAST-AGR
'Bacchu made a quarrel with Nil'.

¹⁰ See Mikkelsen (2005), p. 49 and pp. 118-130

¹¹ There is a traditional conditional conjunctive *noile*, but it is not used in copular sentence.

- 104) briSti ho-cch-e
rain COP-3P-PRESENT-PROGRESSIVE-AGR
'It is raining'.

1.6.2 But, surprisingly, when *holo* and *hocche* function as PPC, they do not exercise their respective tense-aspect markings. PPCs are always simple present in their semantic evaluation. Their important characteristic features are stated below:

a) A PPC can almost always replace the predicative null copula, and not the other existential one:

- 105) sani holo/hocche gabhaskar-er ar ek nam
Sunny PPC Gavaskar-GEN other one name
'Sunny is Gavaskar's other name'.

- 106) *sudip skul-e holo/hocche
Sudip school-POSTPOSITION PPC
'Sudip is in school'.

b) It takes a definite NP as subject and an NP/AP/PP/clause as complement:

- 107) kuntOl holo/hocche tar ShikkhOk
Kuntal PPC his teacher
'Kuntal is his teacher'.

- 108) manuS-Ti holo/hocche bhiSon lOmba
man-CLASSIFIER PPC very tall
'The man is very tall'.

- 109) jOl-er tank-Ta holo/hocche tin tOl-ar chad-e
water-GEN tank-CLASSIFIER PPC three story-GEN roof-POSTPOSITION (on)
'The water-tank is on the roof of three-story (building)'.

- 110) mathabEthar karon holo/hocche Daktarbabu aj khub Osustho
headache-GEN reason PPC doctor-CLASSIFIER (HON) today very ill
'The reason of headache is that the doctor is very ill today'.

c) It can also take a nonfinite clause as subject and an NP/AP as complement, though it is optional:

- 111) phaMka maTh-e gol deoa (holo/hocche) khub sOhoj
empty ground-POSTPOSITION (on) goal give-VERBAL NOUN PPC very easy
'It is very easy to score a goal in an empty field (without any opposition)'.

- 112) phaMka maTh-e gol deoa (holo/hocche) khub sOhoj bEpar
empty ground-POSTPOSITION(on) goal give-VERBAL NOUN PPC very easy matter
'It is a very easy matter to score a goal in an empty field (without an opposition)'.

- 113) phaMka maTh-e gol deoa (holo) khub koThin nO-y
empty ground-POSTPOSITION(on) goal give-VERBAL NOUN PPC very hard NEG-3P-AGR
'It is not very hard to score a goal in an empty field (without any opposition)'.

d) But a PPC does not occur when the subject is an indefinite NP or a finite clause:

- 114) *ek-Ti ShikkhOk holo/hocche kuntOl
one-CLASSIFIER teacher PPC Kuntal
'Kuntal is a teacher'.

- 115) *am-ar ek-Ta Tibhi ach-e holo/hocche sOkol-er hiNsa-r karon
I-GEN one-CLASSIFIER TV have PPC all-GEN envy-GEN reason
'The reason of everyone's envy is the fact that I have a TV'.

- e) It always occurs clause-medially and this is the most enigmatic area to be investigated further as it goes counter to the default syntactic pattern of copular structure in particular and Bangla clauses in General. Whether it conforms to Moro's (1997) notion of raising predicate would be an interesting case study. A study of information structure of the arguments flanking the PPC may explain this peculiarity of its occurrence.

- 116) *kuntOl tar ShikkhOk holo/hocche
Kuntal his teacher PPC
'Kuntal is his teacher'.
- 117) *manuS-Ti bhiSon lOmba holo/hocche
man-CLASSIFIER very tall PPC
'The man is very tall'.
- 118) *mathabEthar karon daktarbabu aj khub Osustho holo/hocche
headache-GEN reason doctor-CLASSIFIER (HON) today very ill PPC
'The reason of headache is that the doctor is very ill today'.

- f) A PPC does not allow a negative proposition:

- 119) *kuntOl holo/hocche na tar ShikkhOk
Kuntal PPC NEG his teacher
'Kuntal is not his teacher'.
- 120) *manuS-Ti holo/hocche na bhiSon lOmba
man-CLASSIFIER PPC NEG very tall
'The man is not very tall'.
- 121) *jOl-er Tank-Ta holo/hocche na tin tOla-r chad-e
water-GEN tank-CLASSIFIER PPC NEG three story-GEN roof-POSTPOSITION (on)
'The water-tank is not on the roof of three-story (building)'.
- 122) *mathabEthar karon holo/hocche na Daktarbabu aj khub Osustho
headache-GEN reason PPC NEG doctor-CLASSIFIER (HON) today very ill
'The reason of headache is not that the doctor is very ill today'.

- g) A PPC cannot tolerate any modification immediately preceding it:

- 123) *kuntOl bodhOy holo/hocche tar ShikkhOk
Kuntal probably PPC his teacher
'Kuntal is probably his teacher'.
- 124) *manuS-Ti bodhOy holo/hocche bhiSon lOmba
man-CLASSIFIER probably PPC very tall
'The man is probably very tall'.
- 125) asol-e kuntOl holo/hocche tar ShikkhOk
in fact Kuntal PPC his teacher
'In fact, Kuntal is his teacher'.
- 126) manuS-Ti asol-e bhiSon lOmba
man-CLASSIFIER in fact very tall
'The man is, in fact, very tall'.

- h) A PPC does not allow an interrogative form with enclitic *ki* pattern:

- 127) kuntOl ki tar ShikkhOk?
Kuntal QUESTION MARKER his teacher
'Is Kuntal his teacher'?

- 128) *kuntOl ki holo/hocche tar ShikkhOk?
Kuntal QUESTION MARKER PPC his teacher
'Is Kuntal his teacher'?
- 129) *manuS-Ti ki holo/hocche bhiSon lOmba?
man-CLASSIFIER QUESTION MARKER PPC very tall
'Is the man very tall'?

i) A PPC also does not allow an ordinary constituent questioning:

- 130) ke tar ShikkhOk?
QUESTION MARKER his teacher
'Who is his teacher'?
- 131) *ke holo/hocche tar ShikkhOk?
QUESTION MARKER PPC his teacher
'Who is his teacher'?

j) A PPC also refuses to accept an enclitic *je* immediately before it when it occurs in a conditional clause, but this enclitic *je* can occur at the left of the clause:

- 132) *kuntOl je holo/hocche tar ShikkhOk, se-Ta sObai jan-e
KuntOl that PPC his teacher that-CLASSIFIER all know-PRES-3P-AGR
'It is known to all that Kuntal is his teacher'.
- 133) se-Ta sObai jan-e je kuntOl holo/hocche tar ShikkhOk
that-CLASSIFIER all know-PRES-3P-AGR that KuntOl PPC his teacher
'It is known to all that Kuntal is his teacher'.

k) It is not possible to conjoin a clause with PPC and another clause with a PPC where the subject is same for both the clauses:

- 134) *kuntOl holo/hocche tar ShikkhOk ebON holo/hocche bhiSon lOmba
Kuntal PPC his teacher and PPC very tall
'Kuntal is his teacher and his very tall'.

l) As we have already shown in j) above, a clause with PPC cannot accept a subordinate status when a subordinate proposition like *bole* is used:

- 135) *kuntOl holo/hocche tar ShikkhOk bole sObai ta-ke hiNsa kOr-e
Kuntal PPC his teacher because all him envy do-PRES-3P-AGR
'Everybody is envious of him as Kuntal is his teacher'.

1.7 Conclusion:

Thus, in this paper, different copulas have been identified and classified in Bangla. The specific syntactic and semantic functions of these copulas have been discussed while examining the behavioural pattern of English copula. The discussion hints at further areas of investigation in the copular constructions in Bangla, with particular emphasis on unified syntactic structure of copular clauses in this language and also on the information structure of the linked arguments and their syntactic and semantic variations. This paper finds its significance in the fields of linguistics, comparative grammar, and South Asian language studies. It provides a comprehensive exploration of copular constructions in Bangla and compares them with those in English, contributing to several areas of academic and practical importance. By analyzing the syntactic and semantic behavior of Bangla copulas, the paper adds to the global understanding of this linguistic phenomenon. Specifically, the study identifies five types of Bangla copulas (*ach-*, *thak-*, *hO-*, null copulas, and Positive Polarity Copulas), examining their specific uses and grammatical behaviors. By examining phenomena such as null copulas, Positive Polarity Copulas, and their interaction with predicates, it advances theoretical models of copular structures. For example, the study highlights the flexibility of Bangla copulas in expressing existential, predicative, and equative meanings, challenging universal assumptions about copula behaviour. The analysis of Positive Polarity Copulas (*holo* and *hocche*) also opens new avenues for understanding tense-

aspect systems in copular constructions. The paper highlights significant structural differences between Bangla, an SOV (subject-object-verb) language, and English, an SVO (subject-verb-object) language. This comparison reveals how language structure influences the function and placement of copulas. For instance, Bangla allows for null copulas in specific contexts, whereas English requires the explicit use of "to be" verbs. Such findings deepen the understanding of how grammatical rules operate differently across linguistic systems, enriching the field of typological linguistics. Moreover, Bangla is a major South Asian language with over 230 million speakers worldwide, yet its grammatical features remain underexplored compared to European languages. This paper fills an important gap by providing a detailed examination of Bangla copular constructions, offering insights that are critical for understanding the syntax and semantics of the language. Additionally, it places Bangla within a broader linguistic framework by comparing it to Hindi and other related languages, providing a platform for further research on Indo- Aryan languages.

This research has practical implications for language teaching, translation studies, and computational linguistics too. Educators can use these insights to teach Bangla grammar more effectively to learners. In translation, understanding how Bangla and English copulas differ can improve accuracy. Moreover, computational linguistics can benefit from the syntactic analysis presented in the paper for developing natural language processing tools for Bangla. Hence this paper makes a significant contribution to the fields of linguistics and language studies. It enhances the theoretical understanding of copulas, bridges the gap in South Asian linguistic research, and offers practical applications in language teaching and technology development.

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