

# Establishing the verbal status of locative copula *deiy* in Cameroon Pidgin English

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## Background

### Cameroon

- A republic in West Africa.
- Population of 22,000,000.
- Official languages French and English.
- Over 200 language spoken (Lewis et al 2013).



### Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE)

- Developed through colonialism, the slave trade and contact with other West African and Caribbean pidgins (Holm 1989).
- Spoken by 50% of the population and used widely as a lingua franca.
- Stigmatised and considered uneducated (Tanda 2015).
- Previous work on CPE primarily sociolinguistic and sociohistoric.

### Verbal and non-verbal copulas

- Copula: a predicate nucleus that adds no semantic content (Pustet 2003).  
'She **is** the doctor who **was** at the surgery'
- Many languages use different copulas for different functions.
- Copulas are only considered verbs if they behave like one (Stassen 1997).

### Copulas in CPE

- CPE has three copulas: verbal *bi*, identificational *na*, and locative *deiy*.
- Preverbal markers express tense, mood, modality, and aspect (TMA).
- Words preceded by TMA markers can be considered verbs.

- *bi* is a verb as it can be preceded by all TMA markers, e.g. infinitival *foe*:

a     noe     sopus     foe     bi     foe     Kumba  
1s   NEG   supposed   INF   COP   PREP   Kumba  
'I'm not supposed to be in Kumba'

- As it cannot be preceded by TMA markers *na* is not a verb.

- Deciding if *deiy* is a verb is more complicated:

- In addition to being a copula, *deiy* is a locative adverb meaning 'there'.

- Many other CPE words, including several TMA markers, are also multifunctional (do several jobs as different parts of speech).

- Allowing several possible interpretations of TMA + *deiy* combinations:  
e.g. infinitival *foe* is also the main preposition in CPE:

foe     deiy                     foe     deiy  
INF   COP                     PREP   ADV  
'to be'                             'in/on/up there'

### Data

- In total 1,060 possible TMA marker + *deiy* collocations were identified.
- The data is from a corpus of 240,000 words of spoken, transcribed CPE.
- The corpus texts were collected in five locations in Cameroon.
- Data is from a British Academy/ Leverhulme funded pilot corpus created by linguists at University of Sussex, University of Sheffield and University of Yaoundé in Cameroon (grant ref: SG140663).

## TMA markers

Multifunctional TMA markers in CPE:

- anterior tense marker/copula *bi*
- infinitive marker /preposition *foe*
- irrealis mood marker/verb *goe*

Single function TMA markers in CPE:

- imperfective aspect marker *di*
- perfective aspect marker *don*
- negative perfective marker *nova*
- modality markers *mos* and *fit*.

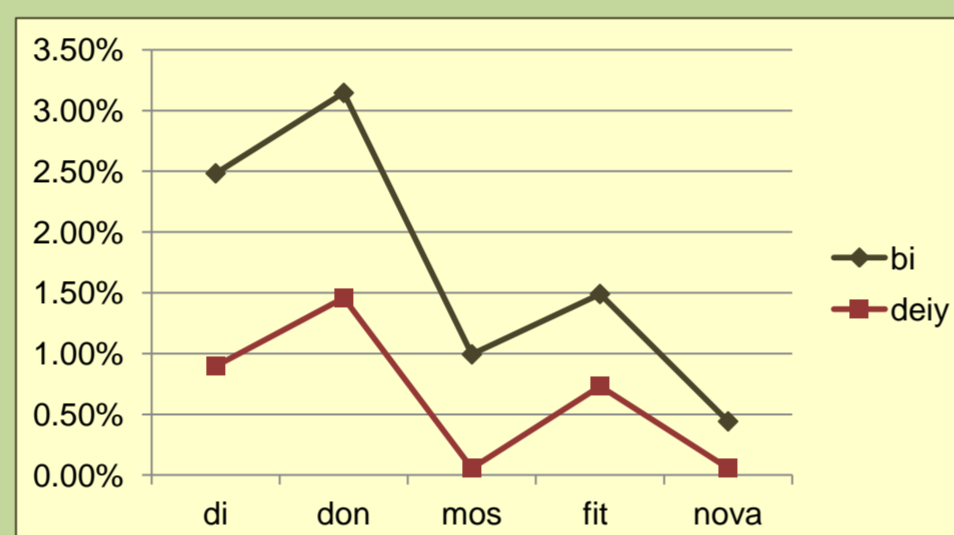


Figure 1. Relative frequency of single function TMA markers preceding copula *bi* and *deiy* in the corpus texts.

Figure 1 shows that instances of single function TMA + *deiy* follow the same frequency pattern as TMA + copula *bi* suggesting that these may not be cases of speaker error.

## An experiment...

If we assume:

1. Copula *deiy* is a verb and may be preceded by TMA
2. All ambiguous cases of *deiy* are copula rather than adverbial

Then we compare the relative frequencies of TMA + copulas *bi* and *deiy* we can observe the pattern seen in figure 5 on the right.

This assumption also yields the chart in figure 6 which is far closer to the pattern of copulas with locative adverb *yieh* seen in figure 2 than that observed in figure 3.

## Analysis

### Yieh

Figures 2 and 3 show how locative adverbs *yieh* 'here' and *deiy* 'there' collocate with the three CPE copulas:

- *deiy yieh* occurs 90% of the time
- *deiy deiy* occurs 36% of the time
- *bi deiy* occurs 63% of the time

This suggests that the analysis of *bi deiy* as COP.ADV may not always be correct.

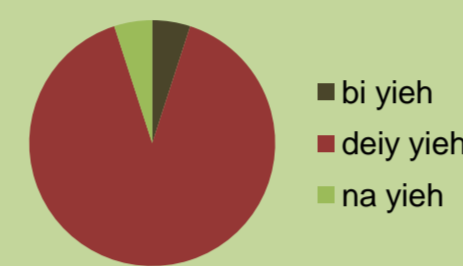


Figure 2. collocation of adverb *yieh* with the three copulas

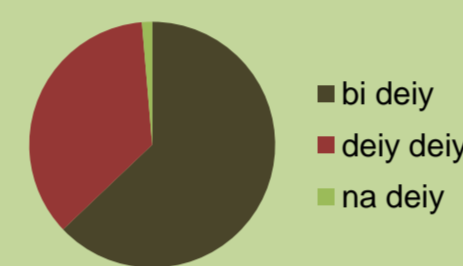


Figure 3. collocation of adverb *deiy* with the three copulas

## Hypothesis

Corpus evidence suggests that *deiy* can be classified as a verb as it can be preceded by markers expressing tense, aspect, mood and modality (TMA) which can only precede verbs in CPE

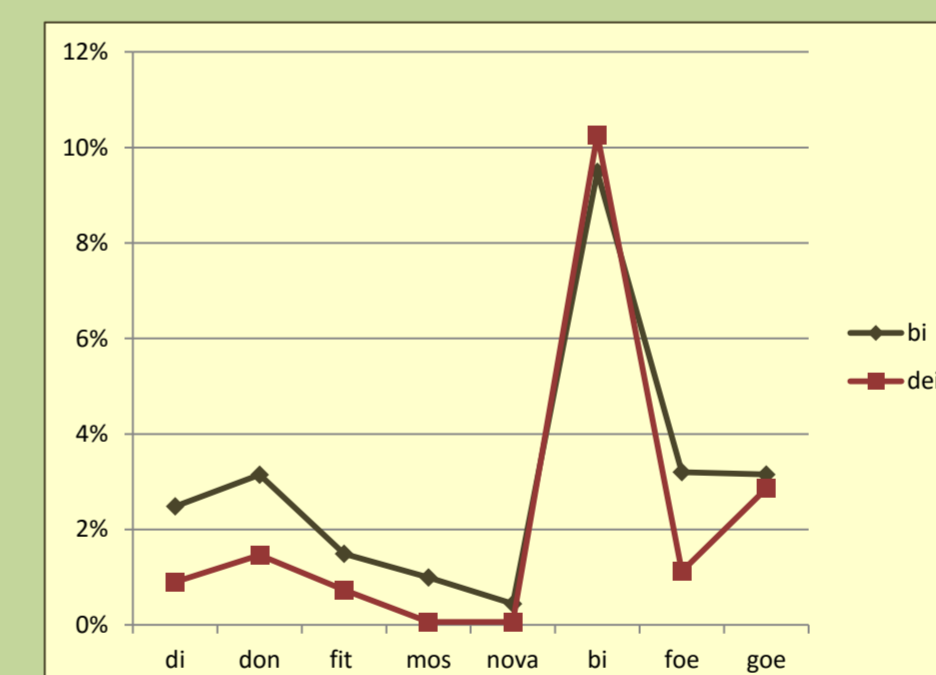


Figure 5. Relative frequency of TMA markers preceding *bi* and *deiy* in the corpus texts if ambiguous cases of *deiy* are assumed to be copula

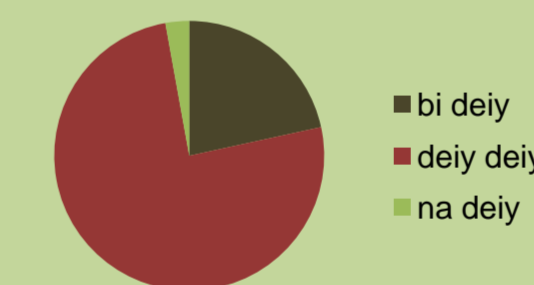


Figure 6. collocation of adverb *deiy* with the three copulas if ambiguous cases of *deiy* are assumed to be copula

## The possibility of reduplication

- *deiy deiy* occurs frequently in the corpus and can usually be analysed as COP + ADV.
- Reduplication (repetition causing semantic or grammatical change) is possible for CPE adverbs (Sala 2012).  
e.g. *goe deiy deiy* might be analysed as VERB + ADV + ADV

## Evidence against reduplication

- The only verbs which precede *deiy deiy* are *bi* and *goe*.
- Figure 4. shows that the relative frequency of TMA markers + *deiy deiy* follows a similar pattern to TMA + copula *bi*.

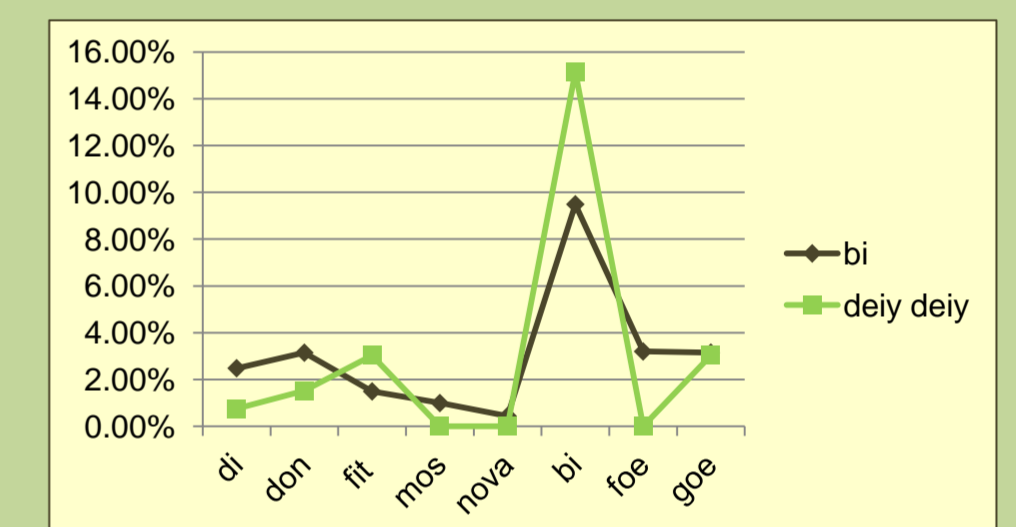


Figure 4. Relative frequency of TMA markers preceding copula *bi* and *deiy deiy* in the corpus texts.

## Comparing environments

Table 1 compares locative adverbs *yieh* and *deiy* with copula *deiy* and the instances in which *deiy* is preceded by TMA markers and shows that the TMA + *deiy* combinations occur in environments in which locative adverbs in CPE do not.

ENVIRONMENT	copula <i>deiy</i>	TMA + <i>deiy</i>	<i>yieh</i>	adverbial <i>deiy</i>
Directly preceding an adjective	✓	✓	X	X
Clause finally as part of an existential construction	✓	✓	X	X
Followed directly by a second, adverbial form, of the same word	✓	✓	X	X

Table 1. A comparison of the environments in which copula *deiy*, adverbs *deiy* and *yieh*, and the instances of TMA + *deiy* in question can occur

## Acknowledgements

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## Interim conclusions and further work

The evidence so far suggests that the locative copula *deiy* in CPE can be considered a verb as it appears to be able to follow markers of TMA and in ambiguous cases behaves more like a verbal copula than like a locative adverb.

Work still to complete:

- Further analysis of the corpus data, examining the available speaker metadata to see whether particular types of speaker tend to use *deiy* as a verbal copula.
- I am currently attempting to gather data from native speakers via questionnaire in order to compare this to the analysis of the corpus data but have yet to manage to achieve this.
- If acquiring feedback from native speakers is successful then further work will also include analysis of questionnaire data and comparison with the findings from the corpus data.