COPULAR STRUCTURES AND ASYMMETRIC IDENTITY†

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Abstract. We propose an analysis of copular structures of the type "DP is DP" based on the existence of a silent predicate of asymmetric identity. Our proposal is based on a cognitively grounded notion of identity as identification of one object on the basis of the properties of another. We argue that our proposal is preferable over Russell's view that the copula is ambiguous between a predicative interpretation (as in "Socrates is wise") and an equative one (as in "Socrates is a man") but also improves upon Longobardi's and Moro's influential analyses, which entail that DP's are ambiguous between a referring type (<e > or < et>t>) and a predicational type (<et>). In the new analysis proposed here, copular structures receive a uniform predicational interpretations and DPs are uniformly interpreted as referential.

1. Moro and Russell on copular sentences, identity and predication

It has become customary since Higgins (1973) to distinguish between at least three main types of copular sentences of the form "DP is DP": *Predicational*, where the first DP acts as an argument and the second as a predicate; *specificational*, where the first DP acts predicatively and the second argumentally; and *equative*, where both DPs act as arguments of a symmetric predicate of identity. In response to Ruwet's (1982) observation that a symmetric analysis of equatives meets substantial syntactic challenges, Longobardi (see especially Longobardi 1983, 1985) advanced a number of arguments (to be reviewed below in detail) that equative copulars are, in fact, essentially specificational (that is, Pred-Cop-Argument structures). As a result, in Longobardi's framework nominal copular sentences share a common semantics across different types, whereby one of the two DPs act as the argument and the other as the predicate, *modulo* the difference between the predicational and the specificational type. Syntactically, there are two main types, canonical copulars, where the argument precedes the copula and the predicate

follows it, and inverted copulars, where the predicate precedes the copula and the argument follows it.

In a series of important publications (see Moro 1997, 2010 and the references cited therein), Moro accepts Longobardi's negative conclusions concerning the equative interpretation of copular constructions, and further proposes that all nominal copulars are the surface outcome of a single, essentially asymmetric, predicative structure. More precisely, inverted structures differ from canonical structures in that they constitute the syntactic result of raising the predicative DP to a pre-copular position.

In this contribution, we will provide a critical discussion of these ideas, starting with Ruwet's (and Longobardi's) original insight that, in all nominal copulars, one of the two DPs involved always acts as a predicate. As we will see, there are in fact reasons to adopt the opposite view, according to which both the DPs involved always have an argument status, not only in 'inverted' specificational copulars, but also in 'canonical' Argument-Cop-Pred copulars, constituting the predicational type. According to the view discussed above, introduced by Longobardi and successively adopted by Moro, in sentence (1) the DP 'la foto del muro' behaves as the subject whereas the DP 'la causa della rivolta' behaves as the predicate:

(1) La   foto   del   muro è   la   causa della rivolta

     The   picture of-the wall is   the   cause of-the riot

     'The picture of the wall is the cause of the riot'

Empirically, this position is supported by several classes of data, among which agreement, pronominal cliticization and subextraction, to which we will return in due time.

A most straightforward consequence of this theory is that Russell (see especially Russell 1919) was wrong in complaining about the ambiguity of the copula (henceforth, BE) between a predicational interpretation (the one found, for instance, in (2a)) and an equative interpretation (as found, according to him, in (2b)). These two interpretations of the copula are rendered in (2c)-(2d).

(2)   a.   Socrate   è   saggio

            Socrates   is   wise

            'Socrates is wise'

     b.   Socrate   è   un   uomo

            Socrates   is   a   man

            'Socrates is a man'

     c. $[[BE_{Pred}]]$: $\lambda P_{<e,t>}.\lambda x_{<e>}.P(x)$ "Socrate è saggio" (Socrates is wise)

     d. $[[BE_{Eq}]]$: $\lambda x_{<e>}.\lambda y_{<e>}.y=x$ "Socrate è un uomo" (Socrates is a man)

Longobardi's syntactic arguments suggest rather that both sentences in (2) are predicational. If this view is correct, however, it entails that a DP such as "a man" is ambiguous between the object-referring reading in (3) and the predicational reading in (2b):

(3)   Un   uomo è   entrato   nella   stanza

       A   man   is   entered   in-the   room

       'A man entered the room'

This means that the ambiguity of BE is dissolved at the price of introducing the kind of categorial ambiguity that Russell, especially in the context of his theory of types, intended to avoid. As a matter of fact, there are occurrences of the DP "a man" in which this DP is uncontroversially not predicational, as in (3) above (the logical type may be <e>, as in DRT, or < <e,t>,t>, as in quantificational approaches, but certainly not <e,t>). If (2b) is predicational ('un uomo' is <e,t>), categorial ambiguity is unavoidable for linguistic expressions belonging to the class exemplified by "a man".

For Russell, the two instances of "a man" in (3) and (2b) receive the same interpretation, in the sense that they are both object-referring. The cost is interpreting (2b) as an identity sentence (something along the lines of 'Socrates = a man'), while painfully admitting that the copula is ambiguous in natural language (identificational in (2b) and predicational in (2a)). According to the view proposed by Longobardi and further developed by Moro, though the two instances of "a man" in (3) and (2b)

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are necessarily ambiguous, the advantage is that the ambiguity of BE between an equative and a predicational reading is dissolved (all copular structures are predicational); more specifically, BE never expresses identity in natural language.

There are also important syntactic consequences. These have mainly to do with the observation that when the predicate is not a DP (but an AP or a PP) inversion is not possible, as exemplified in (5), whilst inversion is generally admitted when the predicate is a DP, as shown in (6):

(5)   *Saggio   è   Socrate /   *In   giardino   è   Socrate

       Wise   is   Socrates/   In   garden   is   Socrates

       'Wise is Socrates'/ 'In the garden is Socrates'

(6)   La   causa   della   rivolta   è   la   foto   del   muro

       The   cause   of-the   riot   is   the   picture   of-the   wall

       'The cause of the riot is the picture of the wall'

A potential problem is raised by the degraded status of inversion in (2b) above, shown in (7a). However, the low acceptability of (7a) seems due to pragmatic factors, since inversion is acceptable in cases such as (7b) below, where there is a context-induced bias towards the specification of the value of x in the propositional function $P(x)$ as the referent of "Socrate":

(7)   a.   ??Un   uomo   è   Socrate

             A   man   is   Socrates

             'A man is Socrates'

       b.   Un   invitato   al   party   di   Giacomo   è

             A   guest   at-the   party   of   Giacomo   is

             Socrate,   lo   riconosci?

             Socrates,   him   recognize.2ps

             'A guest at Giacomo's party is Socrates; do you recognize him?'

Since inversion, with the *caveats* above, is then generally allowed in "DP is DP", in the sense that the predicate DP is permitted to precede the subject DP, giving rise to *specificational* copulars, it follows that *syntactic* subjects may be predicates. This requires extensive revisions in the theory of syntax, especially for the nature of the trigger for movement: if predicative DPs move, on a par with argument DPs, the trigger for movement must be suitably defined for being applied to both classes of DPs. Another important consequence is that, given "DP is DP", which DP is the subject and which DP is the predicate should be determined semantically, and not syntactically. As we have just seen, the order between the two DPs is in fact irrelevant, since predicate-raising can give rise to configurations where the predicate precedes the subjects, with the very same truth-conditions as the configurations where the subject precedes the predicate.

Furthermore, the expectation that all copular structures should be amenable to a subject-predicate interpretation is far from trivial, particularly given Jespersen's (1924) – and many others' – preoccupation for cases such as (8) (see Moro 2010), where identifying the subject of predication was felt as puzzling, lending some support to the Russellian hypothesis that identity may be involved in cases of this sort:

(8) a. Miss Castelwood è   la   più   bella   ragazza

         Miss Castelwood is   the   most beautiful   girl

         alla   festa

         at-the   party

         'Miss Castelwood is the most beautiful girl at the party'

     b. La   più   bella   ragazza   alla   festa è   Miss

         The   most beautiful   girl   at-the party is   Miss

         Castelwood

         Castelwood

         'The most beautiful girl at the party is Miss Castelwood'

As repeatedly emphasized, sentences such as (8b) are *specificational* copulars (in the sense of Higgins 1973). Their status is widely discussed in the literature (see Heycock & Kroch 1999, Heycock 2012, Mikkelsen 2004, den Dikken 2006 a.o.), and arguments have been raised against

the view that the pre-copular DP is in fact an *inverted* predicate. The lack of consensus might be surprising, given the existence of seemingly uncontroversial syntactic tests that may be used to single out the predicate in specificational structures and other types of copular constructions. As we will see, however, one of the problems is that these tests are in fact quite less uncontroversial than generally assumed.

This clearly shows that arguing, on linguistic grounds, against Russell's equative analysis of copulars involved two distinct phases, as insightfully noticed by a reviewer: the first phase simply consisted in providing strong syntactic evidence against BE as an identity predicate, whereas the second phase, conceptually and empirically distinct, consisted in arguing that predicational and specificational copulars share the very same underlying structure – a move that not all scholars are ready to make.

We will proceed as follows. In section 2, we will review Longobardi's main conceptual and empirical arguments for the thesis that copular structures of the class "DP is DP" are not equative constructions, also in the light of Moro's model of predicate raising. In section 3, we will argue that the asymmetry between a subject and a predicate in copular structures may be warranted without paying the cost of granting the DP ambiguity between a predicative and an argument reading. We will examine the consequences of this hypothesis, arguing, more particularly, that the empirical arguments developed in favor of the predicational interpretation of one of the two DPs in a copular structure either dissolve or can be usefully reframed in support of the new analysis. In the final section, we will draw some general conclusions concerning the interpretive status of copular sentences, proposing that in a sense both Russell and Longobardi were right: copular structures do involve identity, but this identity is different from the symmetric relation used in logical languages. Contrary to Russell, the identity involved in copular structures is not the predicate we find in familiar version of an enriched predicate calculus. Contrary to Longobardi, and much more in line with Heycock (2012), an asymmetric analysis of copular structure does not involve interpreting one of the two DPs as a predicate: what moves is always an argument DP, and though inverse copular structures undoubtedly exist, predicate-raising simply dissolves as an optical illusion.

2. Copular structures as subject-predicate structures

Consider again sentence (1), reproduced below as (9a). Taken together, Longobardi's and Moro's insights take us to two conclusions: (i) one of the two DPs in (1) acts as a subject, whereas the other DP acts as a predicate; (ii) when the two DPs are shifted, as in the specificational sentence in (9b), the preverbal DP still acts as the predicate, while moving to the subject position (predicate-raising):

(9) a. La foto del muro è la causa della rivolta

The picture of-the wall is the cause of-the riot

'The picture of the wall is the cause of the riot'

  b. La causa della rivolta è la foto del muro

The cause of-the riot is the picture of-the wall

'The cause of the riot is the picture of the wall'

As we have seen above, the view that specificational sentences involve some sort of inversion with respect to the canonical order of the two DP-arguments is a common one (see the references cited in Heycock 2012). Moro's more particular claim is that the inverted DP is a predicate.

A first source of evidence in favor of this hypothesis is agreement in languages such as Italian (Longobardi 1983, 1985). In (9b), if the preverbal DP remains singular whereas the postverbal DP is made plural, it is the latter that induces agreement on the copula, manifesting itself as the subject, as shown in (10):

(10) La causa della rivolta sono le foto del muro

The cause of-the riot are(pl.) the pictures of-the wall

'The cause of the riot are the pictures of the wall'

The rightward agreement in (10), though not found in languages such as English and French, is quite widespread in Romance besides Italian, and in fact extends to some Germanic languages, including German, Dutch, and Icelandic (cf. section 4 below for a more detailed discussion).

A second argument in favor of predicate-raising is that the postverbal DP in (9a) can undergo pronominal cliticization by means of the default third person form "lo", without exhibiting gender and number agreement with the DP, as shown in (11a) (Longobardi 1983, 1985; see also 2008). This is exactly what happens when the replaced phrase is a predicate, as shown in (11b), whereas agreement is compulsory with argument DPs, as shown in (12a-b). These data are complemented by the observation that, in English, the possibility of referring back to the preverbal DP in a specificational sentence is bounded to the use of the singular neuter pronoun *it* rather than of the gendered pronoun, as shown in (12c-d) (see Büring 1998), a fact easily explained under a predicate-inversion analysis of specificational sentences, as convincingly argued in Mikkelsen (2004):

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(11) a.   La   foto   del   muro   lo   è /   *la   foto   del   muro

           The   picture of-the wall   it   is/   the   picture of-the wall

           la   è

           la   is

      b.   Maria è   saggia /   Maria lo   è /   *Maria   la

           Maria is   wise /   Maria it   is/   Maria   she

           è

           is

(12) a.   Ho   analizzato   le   cause della rivolta

           Have.1sg   analysed   the   causes of-the riot

           'I have analysed the causes of the riot'

      b.   Le   ho   analizzate /   *lo   ho

           Them(fem.)   have.1sg   analysed /   it   have.1sg

           analizzato/e

           analysed.sg.masc/pl.fem

      c.   Ahab is the best man for the job, isn't he/*it?

      d.   The best man for the job is Ahab, isn't *he/it?

This class of data is strikingly confirmed by the analysis of copular sentences containing instances of the first-person pronoun *io*. More particularly, consider the structure in (13):

(13)	Il	capo	di	stato	non	sono		io,	è
	The	chief	of	state	not	am(1sg)		I,	is

Napoleone

Napoleon

In (13), "io" is the nominative first-person pronominal form, and acts as the subject, triggering agreement on the copula ("am", not "is"). As expected, third-person *predicative* clitization is only possible for the postverbal DP "il capo dello stato", as shown in (14), and not for the nominative first-person pronoun, as shown in (15):

(14)	Io	il	capo	di	stato?	Non	lo	sono	proprio,
	I	the	chief	of	state?	Not	it	am	really,
	(lo)	è	Napoleone		*(lo* = the head of State)				
	(it)	is	Napoleon						

(15)	Il	capo	di	stato	sei	tu.	
	The	chief	of	state	are	you	
	*No,	il	capo	di	stato	non	lo	sono	(**lo* = me)
	No,	the	chief	of	state	not	it	am	

Finally, subextraction from the postverbal DP in copular structures presents us with an unexpected asymmetry: it seems that subextraction is possible only for a subset of the relevant cases; more particularly, it is excluded only when the postverbal DP acts as the subject of the copular structure. For instance, given a canonical structure such as (9a) above, interrogating or pronominalizing a subconstituent of the postverbal predicative DP "la causa della rivolta" is fully admissible, as shown in (16), whereas the result is significantly deviant when we apply the very same processes to a subconstituent of the postverbal *subject* DP in (17).

(16) a.

Di	quale	rivolta	la	foto	del	muro	è	la	causa?
Of	which	riot	the	picture	of-the	wall	is	the	cause

'Of which riot is the picture of the wall the cause?'

b.

(Della rivolta)	La	foto	del	muro	ne	è	stata
(of-the riot)	the	picture	of-the	wall	of-it	is	been

la causa
the cause

(17) a.

*Di	quale	muro	la	causa	della	rivolta	è	stata	la
Of	which	wall	the	cause	of-the	riot	is	been	the

foto?
Picture

b.

*(Del muro)	La	causa	della	rivolta	ne	è	stata	la
(of-the wall)	the	cause	of-the	riot	of-it	is	been	the

foto
picture

Moro ([1997](#)) accounts for these data on the basis of the syntactic hypothesis that the two DPs constitute a small clause selected by the copula: in a nutshell, extraction in (17) takes place from the subject of the small clause, which does not satisfy the usual licensing requirements for the unpronounced copy of movement.[1]

   We will not address here the full range of consequences that Moro draws from his insight, like the analysis of BE in existential constructions and the analysis of movement phenomena in terms of dynamical

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[1] It is worth emphasizing that clauses like (9b), where according to Moro the predicate DP has been raised to the subject position, constitute for him 'inverse copular sentences'. This class of sentences ('specificational' copular clauses) has been analyzed, in the literature, not only as inverted predicational, but also as equative constructions (as for instance in Heycock & Kroch [1999](#)).

antisymmetry (Moro 2004). The only point we wish to make is that all these analyses are based on the thesis that DPs can be predicational (type <e,t>) and that these predicational DPs, on a par with argument DPs (type <e > or < <e,t>,t>) can move to subject positions within a sentence.

In what follows, we will present some arguments that seem to pledge for a scenario which is different from those envisaged by the theories introduced above, a new scenario where identity and predication are not necessarily two incompatible analyses of copular structures. More particularly, the Russellian analysis entails that the two DPs are symmetric arguments of a binary identity predicate, expressed by BE (the copula). Moro's analysis contends that BE is a functional head selecting a small clause, one of whose DP-constituents is necessarily interpreted as a predicate. The issue we want to raise is whether it is possible to dismiss Russell's symmetric analysis, together with his claim that BE expresses identity, without paying the price of categorial ambiguity for DPs, which is what we get if one of the two DPs is necessarily interpreted as a predicate in copulars. The way this issue is usually presented is that you can't have your cake and eat it too: either BE is ambiguous (Russell) or DPs are categorially ambiguous (Longobardi, Moro). Of course, it is not only a question of philosophical taste, rather a question of which conclusions are warranted by the available empirical evidence.

3. A silent predicate of asymmetrical identity

Let us consider the two sentences in (18), traditionally classified as *equative/identificational* copular clauses:

(18) a.   Lui è   Ringo Starr

          He is   Ringo Starr

          'He is Ringo Starr'

  b.   Ringo Starr è   lui

          Ringo Starr is   him

          'Ringo Starr is him'

In Italian, "lo"-cliticization is possible both for the name in postverbal position (18a) and for the personal pronoun in postverbal position (18b). This is shown in (19):

(19) a.

Non	credo	che	lui	sia		Ringo Starr.
Not	believe.1ps	that	he	is-SUBJ		Ringo Starr
Sì	invece,		lui	lo	è	sicuramente!
Yes	on the contrary,		he	it	is	surely

(*lo* = Ringo Starr)

b.

Non	credo	che	Ringo Starr	sia		lui.
Not	believe.1ps	that	Ringo Starr	is-SUBJ		him.
Sì	invece,	sono	assolutamente		sicuro	che	lo
Yes	on the contrary, am	absolutely			sure	that	it

is-SUBJ

sia! (*lo*=lui)

These data raise two problems. First, under Moro's unified account we expect one of the two DPs in (18), that is, either the pronoun or the name, to be the subject of predication and the other to be the predicate. This prediction is evidently borne out in cases such as (20a), where the postverbal first-person pronoun, which triggers agreement on the copula, and thus plausibly acts as the subject of predication, cannot possibly undergo *lo*-cliticization, as shown in (20b), whereas the preverbal inverted predicate is clearly allowed to do so, as shown in (20c):

(20) a.

Ringo Starr	non	sono	io
Ringo Starr	not	am	I

b.

*Ringo Starr	non	lo	sono/è (*lo* = io)
Ringo Starr	not	it	am/is

c.

Ringo Starr?	Non	lo	sono	(certo)	io! (lo = Ringo Starr)
Ringo Starr	not	it	am	(surely)	I

So, in sentences that are uncontroversially asymmetric subject-predicate structures, as is the case in (20), "lo" can pronominalize only one of the two DPs (the predicate, but not the subject), and things are as they should be.

However, since cliticization undoubtedly triggers a predicational reading in (19), the sentences in (19) can be taken to show that both the name and the pronoun are allowed to act as the predicate. In other words, (18) is different, in the sense that we can easily apply *lo*-pronominalization to both DPs in (18). This observation suggests that (18a) and (18b) can be both analyzed as canonical structures, featuring a preverbal subject and a postverbal predicate.

On these grounds, either we dismiss *lo*-pronominalization as a reliable test for singling out predicates – a move that would be completely unwarranted – or we conclude that the sentences in (18) do not conform to Moro's canon for copular structures, according to which either the name or the pronoun should semantically qualify as the subject and therefore resist *lo*-cliticization.

If we do so, however, we find ourselves in nobody's land: the only plausible alternative, Russell's analysis of copular structures as equative constructions, is also incompatible with the data, since what the data arguably show is not that both DPs act as arguments of a binary identity relation, but that each of the two DPs may function as a predicate, provided this DP is realized in postverbal position. In other words, it seems we should conclude that (i) the analysis is necessarily non-equative (confirming the original insights by Ruwet and Longobardi) but that (ii) what acts as a predicate depends on the position where a DP is realized (postverbal DPs are predicational), *contra* Moro.

The conclusion is that Russell's analysis of BE as symmetric identity is untenable, even for sentences such as (18); at the same time, Moro's claim that the predicate status of a DP is independent of the (preverbal or postverbal) syntactic position it fills is incorrect in cases such as (18) (arguably, the subject is "lui" in (18a) and "Ringo Starr" in (18b)). In slightly different terms, the distinction between the subject and the predicate should be semantically grounded (though the predicate may appear in subject position in non-canonical inverted structures), whereas it seems here that what counts as predicate (or subject) depends in fact on the syntactic position (preverbal or postverbal) in which the relevant DP is realized.

Be it as it may, there is no doubt that predication must be a crucial ingredient of the analysis one provides for (18) However, the terms of the question are more complex than that, since we also have reasons to make not only predication, but also *identity* a crucial ingredient of (18). There are in fact, as is well-known, some serious reasons that pledge in favor of an equative analysis for the constructions under discussion. Consider first (18a), repeated below:

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(18)   a.   Lui   è   Ringo Starr

He   is   Ringo Starr

'He is Ringo Starr'

The natural context in which we might use (18a) is one in which we are introducing, say at a party, the guy we are indicating to one of our acquaintances. What we mean, doing so by uttering (18a), is that the properties we may assign to the guy while looking at him should be enriched by the set of properties conveyed by the name "Ringo Starr". This may simply be, in the default scenario, the naming convention "Ringo Starr" (we learn to make use of this naming convention whenever we want to refer to *that* guy), but may also be, of course, one of the *modes of presentation* that we normally associate to the name's referent (we may know, for instance, that Ringo Starr is one of the most famous rock stars of all time, one of the Beatles, and so on). This is in fact the reason why sentences such as (18a) are usually referred to, in the literature, as *identificational* copular clauses. What matters, given the present concerns, is that there is a clear sense in which we are predicating the properties (or modes of presentations) associated to the name "Ringo Starr" of the referent of the third-person pronoun realized in preverbal position. In fact, a better way to describe this procedure consists in saying that in uttering (18a), we are identifying the referent of "lui" as the very same referent for which the properties associated to "Ringo Starr" hold: we are claiming that the properties possibly associated to "Ringo Starr" should be used, so to speak, to *identify* the referent of "lui".

Interestingly, this interpretive procedure is simply inverted, while remaining essentially the same, in the case of (18b), repeated below:

(18)   b.   Ringo Starr   è   lui

Ringo Starr   is   him

'Ringo Starr is him'

In this case, we are saying that the referent of "Ringo Starr" should be *identified as* the male individual that we are singling out demonstratively, in the sense that whatever trait (physical appearance, behavior, etc.) emerges from the perceptual and cognitive inspection of *that* individual should be used to single out the referent we associate with the name "Ringo Starr".

Clearly enough, this is not simply predication, it is *identification*. It is not predication because we are not ascribing a property to an object, as when we say *Ringo Starr is cool* or *this flower is red*. When we do so, we are usually interested in relating a certain property to a certain object, not

necessarily in defining a procedure of identification for that object. On the contrary, when we utter (18b), we intuitively claim that the referent of "Ringo Starr" can be *identified by using all the properties* we can infer from the inspection of the referent of "lui".

Isn't this equivalent to interpreting the sentences in (18) as identity statements? After all, if only as an effect of Leibniz's law, when two objects are associated with the same set of properties, these objects should in fact be indistinguishable.

There are reasons not to draw this conclusion, however. First, we are using the properties associated with the referent of the postverbal DP to identify the referent of the preverbal DP, and *not* the other way around. In other words, we are not stating that x = y; rather, we are stating that x *is identified by means of* y, meaning that all properties of y that is worth considering in the context of utterance are properties of x (without stating, crucially, that all properties of x are properties of y). In other words, this sort of *partial* identity works *asymmetrically*. Second, the meaning of (18b) is independent of whether the referents of the preverbal and postverbal DPs are really the same object. In this sense, the partial identity at stake in (18) is distinct from the intended meaning of Frege's classical examples *The morning star is the evening star* and *Hesperus is Phosphorus*, which express, via two different epistemic routes encoded by two different modes of presentation, an ontological commitment to identity (x = y) (see Kripke 1980).

The relevant distinction is subtle but sensible. Consider for instance a wax museum scenario in which I am visiting the rock star section with a friend. I might show my friend one of Ringo's sculptures while uttering (18b). Intuitively, the meaning of (18b) would remain the same as before: what matters is Ringo Starr's traits, independently of whether these are drawn by directly inspecting Ringo's figure or by indirectly examining his wax sculpture in the wax museum. In the wax museum scenario, however, we are certainly not claiming that the referent of "Ringo Starr" is the same as the wax sculpture[2] we are pointing to.

This line of analysis is arguably confirmed by an inspection of the interpretive properties of copular sentences containing names. Consider for instance the two sentences in (21), uttered in the context of a movie on famous actresses of the past:

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[2] Notoriously, some of the consequences of the wax museum scenario for a theory of reference, and more particularly for binding theory in syntax, have been originally addressed in Jackendoff (1992), from which a rich literature originated on this and related issues (for a discussion, see Reuland 2011).

(21)   a.   Roseline will be Garbo

      b.   Katherine will be Loren

Clearly, the suggested interpretation is that Roseline will assume Garbo's traits, and that Katherine will assume Loren's traits: this pragmatically translates, in the context at stake, into the reading according to which Roseline will play Garbo and Katherine will play Loren. Another exemplification of this interpretive setting is the following adaptation of Cumming's "masked ball" scenario (Cumming 2008). Suppose Roseline and Katherine are announced as two guests at my party but that you are not acquainted with either of them. The only thing you know is that Roseline will wear a white dress, whereas Katherine will wear a black dress. In a sense, the only property you can associate with the two women is the color of the dress they will wear at the party. Now suppose that the two women, in order, say, to confound their suitors at the party, decide to swap their dresses: Roseline shows up in a black dress, and Katherine in a white dress. If I know about their intentions, I might warn you by uttering the sentence in (22):

(22)   Hey, pay attention! Roseline will be Katherine, and Katherine will be Roseline!

What I mean, evidently, is that you'd better identify Roseline as the lady in black dress (which was originally the identification trait for Katherine), and that you should identify Katherine as the lady in white dress (which was originally the identification trait for Roseline). Basically, in this setting I would use the two postverbal occurrences of a name as vehicles for expressing a certain identificational trait, which is then ascribed to the referents of the preverbal names, that is, used to *effectively identify* this referent.

   Even here, and even more clearly than in (18), there is certainly no commitment to ontological identity. In uttering (22) we do not intend to assert that object x (the referent of Roseline) should be equated to object y (the referent of Katherine). If this were the case, we would not need to use both identity statements in the conjunction in (22), since stating that "Roseline is Katherine" would suffice to establish the identity, as it suffices to state "Hesperus is Phosphorus" (or, equivalently, "Phosphorus is Hesperus") to establish that both names refer to planet Venus. Here, on the contrary, we intend to identify the referent of Roseline by associating it with the traits that were in fact (originally) associated with Katherine.

   This is basically what we mean when we use the notion of *asymmetric identity*. These data show, among other things, that there is much more

to the interpretive properties of sentences like "Roseline is Katherine" than what is implied by the label *equative copular clauses* traditionally used, in the literature, to refer to these constructions.

At this point, let's get to grips with the fundamental issue raised by sentences such as (18) and (22). As seen above, we have reasons to conclude that these sentences involve *both identity and predication*. In fact, identity and predication are strictly connected: object x is characterized as endowed with all properties associated to object y. Conceptually, it hardly makes sense to propose that this sort of asymmetric identity is expressed by BE, that is, by the copula. Moreover, this move would not help us to solve the syntactic problem from which we started in this section: if the copula expresses identity (or, equivalently, asymmetric identity) and the copula itself is the predicate, how can we account for the possibility of *lo*-cliticization in, say, *Lui è Ringo Starr* (giving *Lui lo è*)? After all, *lo* pronominalizes predicates, but "Ringo Starr" in "Lui è Ringo Starr" would simply act as the second argument of the (asymmetric) identity predicate.

The solution we intend to propose is that copular structures involve a *phonetically silent* predicate of *asymmetric identity*, something that we may paraphrase, for practical convenience, as "identified as", but whose interpretation, as already elucidated above, is perhaps better rendered in terms of "identified by means of". Given this proposal, a copular sentence such as "Roseline is Katherine" should be assigned the structure in (23), where the upper-case expression renders the empty predicate:

(23)   Roseline is IDENTIFIED AS Katherine

Similarly, "Lui è Ringo Starr" (He is Ringo Starr) in Italian should be analyzed as (24).

(24)   Lui è IDENTIFICATO COME Ringo Starr

        He is IDENTIFIED AS Ringo Starr

Interestingly, if we abstract away from the copula (BE or equivalent devices in other languages, as for instance the third-person pronoun in Hebrew), all other alleged identity predicates hardly express logical identity; they rather go proxy for it. This is the case for "è uguale a" (is equal to), "è identico a" (is identical to), and even for "è la stessa cosa di" (is the same thing as). To exemplify, "è uguale" and "è identico" are often used to express (strong) similarity or resemblance, which have nothing to do with logical identity. Still, one might think that there are interpretations of "è identico" in which the latter is used equivalently to "è la stessa cosa", as dictionaries often suggest, and that "è la stessa

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cosa" expresses logical identity. This is doubtful, however, in view of
sentences such as (25):

(25)   L'aspirina   è   la   stessa cosa dell'acido   acetilsalicilico

The-aspirin   is   the   same thing of-the-acid   acetylsalicylic

'Aspirin is the same thing as acetylsalicylic acid'

In uttering (25), most speakers are certainly aware that factories
preparing aspirine let acetilsalicilic acid undergo some specific chemical
treatments, or may add additional stuff to the acid, to the effect that what
is meant by (25) is quite plausibly not logical identity with ontological
commitment ($x = y$), but something along the lines of "aspirin has the
very same fundamental chemical structure as acetilsalicilic acid". It is as
if natural language is in search for many proxies to logical identity, while
avoiding full ontological commitment, in order to enhance, perhaps, a
wider range of cognitive solutions and to be able to play around with
different degrees of similarity/identity[3].

Notice in this respect that the variants of *overt* identity that we have
introduced above do not convey the same interpretation as the *silent*
identity predicate involved in copular sentences. Suppose we take a
famous example by Chomsky and imagine that London, after being fully
destroyed by the burnings caused by climate change, is rebuilt one
hundred miles from its present location (Chomsky 2000). We might
describe this situation by uttering (26) while referring to new London,
and without falling into contradiction, which should be the case if the
silent predicate of identity were interpreted as "is equal":

(26)   Questa   è   Londra,

This   is   London

anche se   non è   (più)   uguale   a   Londra

even   if   not is   (anymore)   equal   to   London

In the same vein, I might use (27), again without contradiction, in the
masked-ball context described above, in which Roseline and Katherine
are identified by the dress they wear, but they swapped their dresses:

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[3] This view complements in a way Reuland's proposal of a *syntax without identity* in his
detailed analysis of anaphora in language (Reuland 2011). In this view, syntax has precisely
one way of representing identity, namely by 'the y is a copy of x-relation', underlying both
Move and Agree.

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(27) | Hey, | fai | attenzione! | Roseline | è | Katherine, | | |
Hey,	pay	attention	Roseline	is	Katherine,		
ma	Roseline	e	Katherine	non	sono	la	stessa
but	Roselin	e	and	Katherine	not	are	the	same
persona							
person							

The data discussed so far suggest that silent identity in copular structures is not full identity. It is a special sort of identity, though, and it plays the same syntactic role played by the overtly expressed identity predicates, none of which – if we are right – expresses logical identity in the Russellian sense. Syntactically, there is striking evidence in favor of this view concerning pronominal binding and the boundaries of binding domains. Let's discuss some of these data in more detail.

At first sight, as brought to our attention by Andrea Moro (p.c.), binding effects pledge against the analysis of copular sentences as stating identity between two symmetrically referential arguments (in agreement with Longobardi's original evidence against the equative analysis of copulars). As emphasized by Moro (2017), if we build (28) as a statement of logical identity, it should be possible, for the pronoun, to be bound by the subject. However, binding is not allowed (the examples in (28) are Moro's examples (20) and (21)), either in English (28a) or in Italian (28b). Moro's hypothesis is thus that the post-copular DP is not an argument of the copula (type $<e>$ or $<<et>t>$) but a predicate (type $<et>$). As such, the DP cannot provide an independent binding domain; the minimal binding domain should instead be extended to the whole clause, deriving the fact that the pronoun must be free in that clause (Longobardi 1983, 1985; Giorgi and Longobardi 1991; Moro 1997):

(28) a.   *[the morning star]$_i$ is [its$_i$ source of energy]

      b.   *[la stella del mattino]$_i$ è [la sua$_i$ fonte di energia]

However, binding is allowed, in both languages, when a lexical identity predicate is present, as shown in (29), leading Moro to propose that (29) involves identity (the minimal binding domain is the postcopular DP) rather than predication:

(29)   a.   [the morning star]$_i$ is one and the same as [its$_i$ source of energy]

      b.   [la stella del mattino]$_i$ è la stessa cosa della [sua$_i$ fonte di energia]

In other words, if (28) involved identity, there would simply be no explanation for the binding contrast between (28) and (29): binding should be allowed both in (28) and (29).

Let's take this conclusion at face value: (28) is a predicational structure, not an equative structure. As a matter of fact, it makes some sense, semantically, that in (28) we are not after identifying the morning star by means of the properties of the independently established referent "the source of energy of the morning star". It is more plausible that we are ascribing to the morning star the only property of being its own source of energy. This is immediately confirmed by the observation that in the further examples in (30), where bare predication is also intuitively involved, binding is equally filtered out, on a par with (28):

(30)   a.   *Alessia$_i$ è la sua$_i$ sola fonte di sostentamento

         *Alexia$_i$ is her$_i$ only source of livelihood

      b.   *Alessia$_i$ è la causa della sua$_i$ rovina

         *Alexia$_i$ is the cause of her$_i$ downfall

The point we wish to make is that grammatical judgments are different in settings where a notion of identity is clearly at stake. Suppose for instance that in a piece of theatre two characters originally thought to be distinct (Alessia and her mother) reveal themselves one and the same character:

(31)   a.   Alessia$_i$ è sua$_i$ madre

      b.   Alexia$_i$ is her$_i$ mother

Here the possessive pronoun is naturally bound by the subject. This insight is immediately confirmed by the inspection of a slightly different setting. Suppose Alessia owns two apartments at the same floor of the very same building. If we want to express the notion that (as we recently discovered) Alessia is in fact Alessia's neighbor, binding is again a legitimate option, as shown by (31b):

(31) a. Alessia$_i$ è la sua$_i$ vicina

b. Alexia$_i$ is her$_i$ neighbor

These observations still hold in contexts where referent *x* (the precopular DP) is identified by being ascribed a proper subset of the properties associated with referent *y* (the postcopular DP), as is arguably the case in the examples in (32). In all these cases, the natural interpretation is not one in which we ascribe the single property expressed by the postcopular DP to the referent identified by the precopular DP, but one in which this referent is *partially identified* by the whole set of properties associated to the independent referent established by the postcopular DP. Crucially, in all these cases, where partial/asymmetric identification prevails on a bare predicational reading, binding is fully allowed, both in English and in Italian:

(32) a. [A star]$_i$ is (not) her$_i$ fans

[Una star]$_i$ (non) è il suo$_i$ pubblico

b. [A singer]$_i$ is (not) her$_i$ songs

[Un cantante]$_i$ (non) è le sue$_i$ canzoni

c. [A people]$_i$ is (not) its$_i$ history

[Un popolo]$_i$ (non) è la sua$_i$ storia

d. [That man]$_i$ is (by now) his$_i$ shadow

[Quell'uomo]$_i$ è (ormai) la sua$_i$ ombra

e. Alexia$_i$ is (practically) her$_i$ dog

Alessia$_i$ è (praticamente) il suo$_i$ cane

Contrary to what is *prima facie* suggested by the binding contrast between (28) and (29), these data, taken together, prompt the generalization according to which the subject of copular structures involving identity can bind a pronoun within these structures, independently of whether the identity predicate is realized overtly or covertly. In other words, the binding facts do not suggest any contrast between copular structures (whenever interpreted in terms of asymmetric identity) and structures involving an overt identity predicate. If this were the case, the analysis of copular structures as *identificational*

constructions would be empirically disqualified, under the default hypothesis that a covert identity predicate should behave as an overt one.

In fact, the empirical generalization is clear. When asymmetric identification is arguably at stake, copular structures allow pronominal binding. When bare predication is involved, binding is disallowed. It seems thus that there are two distinct binding domains involved in these structures: in the first (the identificational structures) the small clause corresponding to the two DPs is headed, by hypothesis, by a silent identity predicate, whose semantics will be suitably defined below; in the second (the predication structure) the small clause corresponding to the two DPs is headless, giving rise to a binding domain that extend beyond the postcopular DP, where the pronoun is not allowed to be bound by the subject.[4]

An important consequence of this analysis is that there are some residual cases where the postcopular DP is not interpreted as the *identifier* of the object introduced by the precopular DP (the referent to be *identified*), but simply as expressing a property to be ascribed to the subject (see however fn. 4). Encyclopedic knowledge and contextual factors certainly play a role in deciding which syntactic structure is used. In (32e), for instance, we are clearly not ascribing to Alessia the unique property of being her dog; rather, we are interested in establishing that the properties ascribed to the two creatures substantially (though not fully, of course) overlap. The same holds for (31): ascribing to Alessia the property of being Alessia's neighbor hardly makes sense in normal circumstances. What makes sense is singling out "Alessia's neighbor" as a referent, and then suggest that all the properties proper to this referent also apply to Alessia (interpretive shift to strict identity through pragmatic strengthening is arguably involved here; see fn. 4). In cases such as "Alexia is her dog" this strategy provides in fact a reasonable semantic source for the metaphorical interpretation of these sentences. In a nutshell, the relevant interpretive procedure develops as follows: first, ascribing to Alessia the property of being Alessia's dog hardly makes sense; as a consequence, a referent for Alexia's dog is singled out (giving rise, in our terms, to the *identificational* interpretation); the final step is transferring (many of) the properties of this referent to Alessia, generating the metaphorical reading.

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[4] We do not provide here a detailed discussion of the implications of these binding facts for a more general theory of pronominal and anaphoric binding We address these issues in Fiorin and Delfitto (2024). There we also aim at eliminating the residual cases of predicational interpretation of DPs in copular structures, exemplified by (28) and (30) in the text. In a nutshell, we propose that cases like (28) and (30) involve strict identity between the referents of the two DPs, under a process of pragmatic strengthening that triggers the shift from asymmetric to symmetric identity. If this line of analysis is correct, the complex binding facts discussed in the text would not depend on the contrast between a predicational and an argument reading of the postcopular DP, but on the interpretive awkwardness of binding in pragmatically-supported strict identity contexts (see Fiorin & Delfitto 2024).

This approach predicts that binding should be possible in contexts that foster, for the very same sentence, an identificational reading over a predicational one. This seems correct. Consider a context in which someone suggested that the source of energy of the morning star should be identified with another star in its vicinity. Suppose now that someone else reacts to this suggestion by uttering (28c). In (28c) binding is allowed, as a consequence of the fact that that we have created a context that pragmatically supports the identification of the referent of the postcopular DP with the morning star (i.e. the precopular DP; see Fiorin and Delfitto 2024):

(28)   c.   Not at all! [The morning star ITSELF]$_i$ is [its$_i$ source of energy]

The presence of a predicational residue with postcopular determined nouns, of the kind exemplified in (28) and (30), is in many respects not surprising. It is highly reminiscent of the interpretive contrast found between bare and determined nouns in postcopular position, at least for the languages where predicative bare nouns are allowed at all. A case in point is the contrast between (33a) and (33b) in Italian (Zamparelli 2000). The literature suggests that whereas (33a) simply consists in ascribing to John a single property, consisting in its capacity to perform professionally as a lawyer, (30b) is characterizing John as *inherently* endowed with the full set of properties normally associated with being a lawyer:

(33)   a.   Giovanni   è   avvocato

            John   is   lawyer

        b.   Giovanni   è   un   avvocato

            John   is   a   lawyer

While putting aside the semantic and ontological issues raised by a full-fledged analysis of these structures (see Delfitto & Fiorin 2017, section 8, and the references cited therein), we would simply like to emphasize that an analysis of (33b) along the lines proposed above, involving thus the presence of a silent predicate of asymmetric identity, would immediately account for the seemingly *essentialist* reading of (33b), by interpreting the sentence as the statement that John is to be identified by means of some of the properties typically associated to the members of the kind "lawyer". In fact, we might say that the interpretation of this sentence consists in the use of a kind (lawyers) to identify the individual John,

essentially by claiming that John is an (almost) typical member of the kind. Conversely, what is involved in (33a) is bare predication: a single property (being a lawyer) is ascribed to John, without mention of a kind or of the properties typically associated to the members of this kind. As is well-known, the 'essentialist' characterization of (33b) is confirmed by the non-contradictoriness of (34):

(34)   Giovanni è stato presidente per molti anni senza mai essere stato un presidente

         'John has been president for many years without ever beinga president'

One of the advantages of the proposed analysis – in terms of asymmetric identity – is that the 'essentialist' reading of the determined noun in predicative position, as surfacing in (34), can be derived without resorting to an *intensional* analysis of the postcopular DP, along the lines offered by Romero (2005) for specificational sentences (see also the discussion in Heycock 2012).

All in all, we submit that the data considered here clearly warrant the conclusion that copular structures are generally predicational, in the sense that they contain a silent predicate of asymmetric identity that permits distinguishing between a first argument introducing an object holding as the 'identifier' (whose properties are transmitted to the object introduced by the second argument) and a second argument interpreted as the object which is 'identified' by means of (some of) the properties ascribed to the first object.

This solves the puzzle discussed at the onset of the present section: in (18) above, what is pronominalized as a predicate (undergoing "lo"-cliticization) is not the postcopular DP (both "lui" and "Ringo Starr", raising a problem for Moro's approach) but the whole VP-like complex containing the silent identity predicate and the postcopular DP.

Interestingly, there is still a residue of pure predicational structures, essentially involving predication without asymmetric identity (whose syntactic realization and comparative distribution we have started to elucidate above), as exemplified by cases such as (28), (30) and (33a), featuring definite determiners or determinerless nouns in postcopular position.

Summarizing, binding domains are highly sensitive to the distinction between bare predication and asymmetric-identity predication, support-ing the asymmetric-identity hypothesis while sensibly enlarging its empirical scope.

On these empirical and conceptual grounds, we propose that the copula, in structures where it is followed by a DP, involves a silent identity predicate, whose semantics can be defined as in (35), based on the

observation that this predicate introduces an asymmetric relation (*x is identified by means of y*) rather than a symmetric one (x = y):[5]

(35) $\lfloor$id$\rfloor$ = x y [$\forall$s$\forall$P Ascribe(s,P,y) $\rightarrow$ Ascribe(s,P,x)]

This roughly reads as follows: The relation of identification $\lfloor$id$\rfloor$ is a relation between two entities x and y such that for all relevant cognitive agents s[6] and all properties P, if s ascribes P to y, then s ascribes P to x. In a sentence like *Rosaline is Katherine*, (35) applies first to the postverbal argument *Katherine*, producing (36), and successively to the preverbal argument *Rosaline*, producing (37) as the ultimate meaning of *Rosaline is Katherine*, a sound result, it seems:

(36)   λx [$\forall$s$\forall$P Ascribe(s,P,Katherine) $\rightarrow$ Ascribe(s,P,x)]

(37) $\forall$s$\forall$P [Ascribe(s,P,Katherine) $\rightarrow$ Ascribe(s,P,Rosaline)]

As already elucidated, we have now an explanation of the possibility of *lo*-pronominalization in (18) and (22). When *lo* pronominalizes a postverbal DP in these sentences, there is no reason to interpret this DP as a predicate; what gets pronominalized is the predicate '*identified as DP*', that is, the predicative complex containing the silent asymmetric predicate of identity and the second argument y. At the same time, the order of the arguments can be simply switched: in place of *Rosaline is Katherine* we may have *Katherine is Rosaline*, and in place of *Lui è Ringo Starr* we may have *Ringo Starr è lui*. Though the interpretation changes (since (35) encodes *asymmetric* identity), what counts as the subject of predication (that is, as the object that gets identified) is always the DP realized preverbally. As for the postverbal DP, it can be pronominalized with *lo*, not because it is itself a predicate, but because it is part of a VP containing a silent identity predicate. The copula, as in Moro, is nothing

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[5] Notice that the proposed interpretation of *id* lends itself to a form of pragmatic strengthening that renders it, in effect, a symmetric identity in the strongest logical sense. This result is achieved by application of a pragmatic strategy known in the literature as 'conditional perfection' (Geis and Zwicky 1971; see also Horn 2000), which maps a conditional logical form (A $\rightarrow$ B) into a bi-conditional one (A $\leftrightarrow$ B). This form of pragmatic strengthening is common to all conditional logical forms and has been a central case study in contemporary pragmatics. If correct, then, our proposal explains the presence of symmetric interpretations of copular sentences as the product of strengthening, when the pragmatic circumstances allow it, an otherwise essentially asymmetric logical form.

[6] We have included universal quantification over cognitive agents in the denotation in (35) on the basis of considerations proposed by Delfitto and Fiorin (2023), concerning the semantics of proper names. In a nutshell, these have to do with the pragmatic nature of the processes the cognitive agents involved in a linguistic exchange rely upon in order to identify the reference of singular terms.

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else than the realization of the functional head selecting the whole VP, the canonical locus of expression of the relevant tense and agreement features.

Given this framework for the analysis of copular sentences, much of Moro's proposals remain in place, crucially including the role of inversion structures. As we have seen, (20a), reproduced below, is undoubtedly a non-canonical copular structure, where the subject is realized postverbally. The same holds for (38), witness the plural agreement induced on the copula by the postverbal DP:

(20) a.   Ringo Starr   non   sono   io

          Ringo Starr   not   am   I

(38)   La   causa   della   rivolta   sono   le   due   foto   del   muro

       The   cause   of-the   riot   are   the   two   pictures   of-the   wall

As Moro has emphasized, a canonical structure and its inverse correlate have the same truth-conditions (*Io non sono Ringo Starr* is the same as *Ringo Starr non sono io*), though the choice is of course not entirely free, and is typically dictated by focus-related factors (i.e. by the syntactic conditions for the realization of contrastive focus), as may be seen in (39) below:

(39) a.   Ringo Starr   non   sono   IO,   sei   TU

          Ringo Starr   not   am   I   are   YOU

     b.   *IO   non   sono   Ringo Starr,   sei   TU

          I   not   am   Ringo Starr   are   YOU

As for (38), the difficulty of making "the cause of the riot" the subject of predication (i.e. the subject of the silent predicate of identity) may be related to the cognitively-grounded preference for qualifying two pictures (a concrete notion) as the cause of the riot (an abstract notion) with respect to the alternative of qualifying the cause of the riot as two pictures. Intuitively, this preference is linked to the presence of residual *bare predicational readings* for copular sentences.

Modulo these qualifications, we should acknowledge that for the great majority of copular sentences, there is no semantically determined compulsory subject of predication: both DPs may act as subject/ identified object. It simply depends on which side of the asymmetric

relation of identity becomes salient in the context of utterance. More concretely, it depends on which DP plays the role of identifier. For instance, are we interested in saying that Hesperus came to be identified as the same object as Phosphorus, or in saying that Phosphorus came to be identified as the same object as Hesperus? Are we interested in characterizing Ringo Starr as the guy in front of us ("Ringo Starr è lui"), or are we more interested in characterizing the guy in front of us as Ringo Starr ("Lui è Ringo Starr")? As a conclusion: what acts as the subject of predication (i.e. as the identified object) is not determined *a priori* by purely semantic considerations; it is dictated by a wide range of cognitive and pragmatic considerations.

From this, there is an important conclusion to draw. If in the sentence "Ringo Starr è lui", "Ringo Starr" is the identified object, it does not follow that switching the two DPs is necessarily equivalent to an inverse copular construction. This is certainly the case, as we have seen above, for the pair "Io sono Ringo Starr" (I am Ringo Starr) and "Ringo Starr sono io" (lit. Ringo Starr am I). It is not the case, however, for the sentences "Lui è Ringo Starr" and "Ringo Starr è lui": for each of the sentences in the latter pair, the preverbal DP acts as the subject of predication, and each of the two sentences, based on the predicate of asymmetric identity defined in (35), receives distinct truth-conditions, independently of the focus-related effects connected to inverse constructions. And, importantly, both sentences qualify as *canonical* copular structures, in Moro's sense.

This is confirmed, in fact, by the subextraction facts. Consider a sentence such as (40):

(40) Il direttore del dipartimento è l'assassino della

The director of-the department is the-murderer of-the

ragazza

girl

'The director of the department is the murderer of the girl'

Subextraction is possible from the postverbal DP, as confirmed by wh-movement and ne-cliticization in (41):

(41) a. Di quale ragazza il direttore del dipartimento

Of which girl the director of-the department

è l'assassino?

is the-murderer

b. Il direttore del dipartimento ne è l'assassino

The director of-the department of-it is the-murderer

If this is taken to entail that the preverbal DP in (40) is the only possible subject of predication, and that – consequently – the sentence in (42) is necessarily an inverse copular construction, where the postverbal DP still acts as the subject, we should expect subextraction from the subject to be impossible, as was the case in (17), reproduced here as (43). However, subextraction from the postverbal DP in (42) is perfectly legitimate, as shown in (44):

(42) L'assassino della ragazza è il direttore del

The-murderer of-the girl is the director of-the

dipartimento

department

(43) a. *Di quale muro la causa della rivolta è la foto?

Of which wall the cause of-the riot is the picture

b. *La causa della rivolta ne è la foto

The cause of-the riot of-it is the picture

(44)	a.	Di	quale	dipartimento	l'assassino	della	ragazza	è
		Of	which	department	the-murderer	of-the	girl	is
		il	direttore?					
		the	director					
	b.	L'assassino	della	ragazza		ne	è	il	direttore
		The-murderer	of-the	girl		of-it	is	the	director

It seems thus that if Moro's conclusion is granted (extraction from a postverbal DP is barred when this DP is a subject, as confirmed by the awkwardness of (43)), from this we should not jump to the conclusion that whenever we switch the two DPs in a copular construction, what we get is a pair constituted by the canonical and the inverse structure. In general, what we get is two canonical copulars each of which has distinct truth-conditions, since each of them has a different subject, acting as the identified object, to which a full set of identificational traits is ascribed, in accordance with the semantics of the predicate of asymmetric identity, as defined in (35).

4. A note on personal pronouns and rightward agreement

In the framework we have proposed in the preceding section, what counts as identifier or identified object in copular sentences containing a phonologically empty asymmetric identity predicate is not a consequence of the semantics of the DPs involved but stems from some context-dependent cognitive factors. This explains, among other things, why (42) is not the inverse of (40) but represents the shift of the identifier in (40) to the role of identified object in (42). As we have seen, this shift remains problematic in settings where one of the two DPs does not refer to an object but expresses a single property to be ascribed to the subject, as in (28) and (30) above. Similarly, the shift is impossible in rightward agreement configurations, where the postcopular pronoun (marked with nominative case) arguably still fills its original position as a subject in a small clause. A case in point is (20a), repeated below:

(20)	a.	Ringo Starr	non	sono	io
		Ringo Starr	not	am	I

What is clear is that in (20a) nominative is not assigned in the familiar spec-head configuration, given that the pronominal subject does not move. What is unclear is what triggers agreement on the copula. Moro

(2017) proposes that agreement is triggered by the presence of a phonologically empty predicate, indicated as *pro* below, which moves to the spec of the Agr-projection filled by the copula and indirectly agrees with the subject *in situ*, something along the lines of (45):

(45)   [DP … pro$_i$ copula [DP t$_i$]

This proposal works elegantly for Italian, given the potential connection with the independently established pro-drop parameter. It should be noticed, however, that rightward agreement is also found in Germanic languages, such as Dutch, Icelandic and German, where pro-drop is not allowed (Heycock 2012, den Dikken 2006). The issue is thus in need of a more in-depth analysis involving parameters of variation for configurations of nominative-assignment and for silent predicate realization, which exceeds the boundaries of the present contribution.

However, a second important generalization clearly emerges: whenever the postcopular DP is realized as a personal pronoun in a copular structure, nominative case is tied to the subject of the small clause, whereas accusative case is tied to the expression of the predicate. This entails that both in (46a) and (46b) the nominative pronoun corresponds to the subject of predication (with (46b) counting as an inverse sentence, in Moro's sense), whereas the accusative pronoun in (47a), if it were acceptable in Italian, would correspond to the predicate, on a par with the fully acceptable (47b) in English:

(46)   a.   Io   sono   Ringo   Starr

             I   am   Ringo   Starr

        b.   Ringo   Starr   sono   io

             Ringo   Starr   am   I

(47)   a.   ??Ringo   Starr   è   me

             Ringo   Starr   is   me

        b.   Ringo Starr is me

Judging from the dubious status of sentences such as (47a) in Italian, which are unacceptable to most native speakers we have consulted, it seems that the availability of rightward agreement, as in (46b), rules out,

in Italian, the possibility of realizing the corresponding construal in which the pronoun (realized with accusative case) is the predicate. The question is why this should be the case. This problem is compounded by the observation that there is no absolute prohibition, in Italian, for the realization of an accusative personal pronoun as a predicate, witness the perfect grammatical status of (48), where the subject of predication is a first- or second-personal pronoun:

(48) a.   Tu   sei   me

            You   are   me

      b.   Io   sono te

            I   am   you(acc)

We propose that this problem finds an elegant solution that results from the interaction between information structure and the semantics of first and second person pronouns. First, a nominative pronoun is realized in postcopular position in Italian, as in (46b), instead than in precopular position, as in (46a), in order to produce one of the required narrow focus configurations, as seen from the contrast in (49):

(49) a.   Ringo Starr sono IO,   non   TU

            Ringo Starr am   I,   not   you

      b.   ??Io sono Ringo Starr, non   TU

            I   am   Ringo Starr, not   you

This entails that in Italian the availability of rightward agreement in (49a) allows the realization of all focus construals (including narrow focus as in (49a)) for the pronoun, while ensuring that the nominative pronoun, as the subject of predication, always corresponds to the identified object rather than to the identifier. Now, notice that if we assume a semantics of the first and second person pronouns in terms of property self-ascription (Wechsler 2010, Delfitto and Fiorin 2022), this is, intuitively, the most natural option. Informally, sentences such as (46a-b) would express the property (to be self-ascribed by the speaker) of being identified by means of the identificational traits proper to Ringo Star. Conversely, sentences such as (47a-b) would express the property (to be self-ascribed by the speaker) of serving as the identifier of Ringo Star. In other words, (46) conveys the meaning that the speaker self-ascribes the property of being identified by means of someone else, whilst (47)

conveys the meaning that the speaker self-ascribes the property of being used to identify someone else.

We propose that the first procedure of property self-ascription is cognitively more straightforward, hence more salient. Italian, thanks to the availability of rightward agreement and nominative assignment in postcopular position, can simply stick to it for all possible focus readings of the pronominal argument. On the contrary, English cannot realize a *nominative subject* in postcopular position whenever this argument must be assigned narrow focus. In this case, accusative case must be used, that is, a construal in which this argument is no longer the subject but becomes the predicate of the small clause. We propose that information structure requirements prevail on the cognitively driven preference for realizing the first or second person as the subject of predication. This explains why (47b) is perfectly fine in English whereas (47a) is perceived as deviant in Italian.

The correctness of this line of analysis is confirmed by the grammaticality of (48) in Italian. In these sentences, rightward agreement and postcopular nominative case are not an option. The reason is that in order to realize the first-person pronoun as a postcopular nominative subject in (48a) and the second-person pronoun as a postcopular nominative subject in (48b), we need to realize the other personal pronoun as a predicate, that is, as endowed with accusative case. Now, it is a fact that the landing site of a predicate DP in inverse copular structure is incompatible with the realization of morphologically overt accusative case, as promptly seen in (50) below:

(50) a.   *Te   sono   io

           you(acc)   am   I

      b.   *Me   sei   tu

           me   are(2p)   you

There is thus evidence that Italian has no generalized ban on accusative pronouns in copular structures: when there are independent syntactic reasons (like the unavailability of the inversion structure in (50)) that make it impossible to realize a narrow-focus construal with nominative first- and second-person pronouns, accusative pronouns can be used in canonical copulars, as in (48), both in English and Italian. This entails that the deviance of sentences such as (47a) in Italian is not of a syntactic nature. It is related to the difficulty of self-ascribing the property of being an identifier rather than self-ascribing the property of being identified as something else. This conclusion significantly increases – we submit – the

explanatory power of our analysis of copular sentences as involving a silent predicate of asymmetric identity.[7]

5. Conclusions

In this paper, we have discussed some important aspects of the old chestnut-in the-fire concerning whether copular sentences of the sort "DP is DP" are predicational or equative. In the literature, either a choice is made between these two interpretations (in the sense that all copular constructions are interpreted in the same way, either predicationally or identificationally) or it is claimed that some of them are interpreted predicationally and some of them identificationally.

As we have seen, Longobardi proposed that these sentences are uniformly subject-predicate structures, based on a detailed investigation of the syntactic facts. Successively, Moro argued that both the predicational and the specificational type can be reduced to a single predicational syntactic format. *Pace* Russell, the copula is interpreted uniformly (no identity involved), at the price of categorial ambiguity (DPs can be both arguments and predicates) and of predicate-raising (syntactic positions that were considered argument positions may be filled by DP predicates, as is the case in inverse copular constructions).

We argued that this price is too high. There is a line of argumentation according to which all copular constructions are predicational (in the sense that there always is a subject of predication), while all DPs involved have argument status. From this perspective, Moro's analysis of the specificational type in terms of predicate-raising, though capturing an existing phenomenon, is less pervasive than assumed in Moro's analysis, since the logic of identification that we have proposed favors a canonical analysis of most copulars. In fact, the difference between a predicational and a specificational type would completely dissolve under the elimination of the residual cases of DP-predication discussed in the text

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[7] A reviewer raises the issue of Italian "io sono" vs. "sono io". He correctly points out that in this case the canonical and inverse constructions do not have the same truth-conditions. As for "sono io" (an inverse copular used with the meaning of English "it's me"), we simply propose that the status of Italian as a pro-drop language allows the presence of a silent predicate in subject position ("la persona che vedi / la persona che ti sta parlando sono io"). In the corresponding canonical sentence with a (contextually salient) postcopular predicate, the postcopular predicate cannot be a silent category but need be cliticized as *lo*. For instance, if one asks "chi è il tuo migliore amico?" 'who is your best friend?', the answer can be indifferently be "io lo sono", 'lo sono io' (both featuring lo-cliticization), "sono io" (featuring a pro-predicate in subject position), but cannot be "io sono" (featuring a silent predicate in a non-subject position). This is in full agreement with the requirement that non-subject anaphoric positions need an overt pronoun in Italian (if one asks "when did you see John last time?", the answer can be "L'ho visto ieri" 'I him-saw yesterday' but cannot be "Ho visto ieri" 'I saw yesterday'). For the case of "io sono" with an existential reading ('I exist'), this corresponds to an independent use of the verb BE, orthogonal to the use of copular constructions, and indeed only very marginally acceptable in Italian.

(something we hinted at in this text and that we intend to pursue in future work; see Fiorin and Delfitto 2024).

The approach to copulars developed in this contribution is essentially based on the existence of a silent predicate of asymmetric identity, whose semantic properties we have extensively discussed.

This approach delivers a uniform interpretation of copular structures, potentially unifying all Higgins' types, by acknowledging that all of them revolve around some notion of identity. However, the logic to be developed is a logic of asymmetric identification, not a logic of symmetric identity. The logical relation of identity advocated by Russell for the analysis of copular constructions has no role to play, except perhaps as the result of some procedure of pragmatic strengthening into strict identity (see Horn 2000).

To conclude, predication and identity are not necessarily the inhabitants of two parallel universes in the analysis of copular structures. If we are right, there is a way to get the best of both worlds.

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