Colloquial Bengali has multiple copular elements that link subjects with predicates. This paper will focus on the two most important linking elements: the ‘true’ copula, which is null in the present (1a), and the verb achh-, which is often glossed to be (present) (1b). The ‘true’ copula construction is generally used with predicates expressing more permanent properties of subjects, such as Dipti is a doctor or Dipti is tall. The verb achh-, on the other hand, is used with predicates expressing temporary properties, including stative constructions (Dipti is sleeping/standing/etc.), and in There is/are-type constructions. I will first provide a theoretical description of the null copula/achh- verb distinction in Bengali; I shall then progress toward an analysis of these two elements, with special reference to the to the optionality of achh- in certain circumstances.

The distinction between the copula and substantive be-verb found in Bengali is also found in other languages, including Spanish, Irish (cf. Doherty 1996), Scottish Gaelic (cf. Ramchand 1996), Brythonic Celtic (cf. Hendrick 1994), and African-American English (cf. Green 2000). In each language, the distinction between temporary and permanent properties is central to the discussion of the copula/be-verb contrast. Doherty reinterprets this traditional division of property types in terms of Kratzer's (1988/1995) distinction between stage-level predicates (SLP) and individual-level predicates (ILP). This distinction plays a major role in the analyses of be-like elements in work on the languages mentioned above and is also critical to the copula/achh- distinction in Bengali.

At first sight, the following claim seems plausible for Bengali: (i) The ‘true’ copula appears with individual-level predicates, while achh- appears with stage-level predicates. Though accurate to a certain extent, closer investigation reveals that this proposal does not adequately account for all of the data. Evidence against this claim is found in the fact that both the null copula and achh- can be used with the same predicates (2a-b). Sentence (2a), with the null copula, has a generic reading; it characterizes Ram as a member of the set of people who are happy. In (2b), achh- is used to indicate that Ram is presently in the state of being happy. A second fact that points to the inadequacy of the claim in (i) is the optionality of achh- in certain stage-level environments. From Kratzer (1988/1995), we know that ILPs do not permit when-clauses (*When Mary knows French, she knows it well) or certain locative modifiers (*John knows French in the car). Sentence (3a) below has a locative modifier, and (3b) has a when-clause; by Kratzer’s test, it is clear that these predicates are stage-level. What is notable here is that achh- is optional in precisely the two environments where individual-level readings are ruled out. So, (2a-b & 3a-b) demonstrate that the correspondence in our initial claim (i) above works only in one direction: the presence of achh- indicates a stage-level reading but the absence of achh- does not automatically yield an individual-level reading.

Analysis: Following Chierchia (1995), I assume that ILPs are inherently generic. I suggest that the generic operator is present by default in Bengali unless somehow blocked; in other words, predicates are by default individual-level. The semantics of achh- introduce existential quantification over the spatio-temporal variable, thus blocking the generic operator/individual-level reading. In (2a), then, the generic operator is present by default, and it binds the spatio-temporal variable of ‘happy’. In (2b), the spatio-temporal variable of ‘happy’ is bound by achh-; the generic operator is blocked, because there is nothing for it to bind. The availability of the stage-level reading despite the absence of achh- in (3a-b) can now
be explained. The locative argument/when-clause binds the spatio-temporal variable of the predicate. Consequently, the generic operator cannot appear, accounting for why an individual-level reading is unavailable. To sum up, my analysis treats the generic operator/individual-level reading as a default that is always available unless specifically barred from appearing. The stage-level reading, on the other hand, needs to be marked explicitly with the verb achh-, a locative adverb, or a when-clause. This asymmetry may be related to the claim in the literature (cf. Lewis 1975, Heim 1982/1988) that the default adverb of quantification has universal force.

**Data & Selected References**

(1) a. tini amar baba Ø.
   he.H my father COP
   'He is my father.'

   b. amar baRiite Onek lok achhe.
   my house-in many people be-3O
   'There are many people (present) in my house.'

(2) a. ram Sukhi Ø.
   Ram happy COP
   'Ram is (a) happy (person).'  

   b. ram Sukhi achhe.
   Ram happy be-3O
   'Ram is (certainly) happy (at present).'  

(3) a. gOto budhbar o yOkhOn elo amra sObai Syumiye (achhi).
   last Wednesday he when came we all sleeping (be-1)
   ‘When he came home last Wednesday, all of us (were) sleeping.’

   b. okhameamar kOlom (achhe).
   there my pen (be-3O)
   ‘My pen (is) there.’


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1 Ø represents the null copula.
2 The Bengali verb is marked for person but not for number or gender. The second- and third-person endings additionally distinguish between honorific (H) and ordinary (O) forms.
