This paper explores identificational predication in Wan (Southeastern Mande, Côte d’Ivoire). Like many other Mande languages, Wan does not have a two-place identificational predicate that could be used with two noun phrases (cf. *John is a teacher*). Instead, the corresponding meaning can be encoded in a construction involving a copula and a postpositional phrase (1).

(1)  yàá  pɔ̄  ziè  yā  
     3SG+COP  thing  bad  PPS
     ‘It is a bad thing.’

The postposition yā displays a polysemy pattern typical of postpositions involved in identificational constructions in other Mande languages. It introduces instruments (2a), accompanying objects and actions (2b-c), material (2d), and result of a transformation (cf. especially 2d vs. 2e). The same postposition is involved in property predication (2f), introduces a variety of non-finite complements (2g), and appears with certain arguments that can be described in terms of comparison (2h).

(2)  a.  Instrument  
     è  bɔ̀lè  dō  tɛ̄  klāŋ̄  yā  
     3SG  bird  one  killed  bow  with  
     ‘He killed a bird with a bow.’

     b.  Accompanying object  
     lē   dō  zō  yí  yā  à  lɛ̀ŋ  
     woman  one  came  water  with  3SG  to  
     ‘A woman brought him water.’

     c.  Accompanying action  
     nā̰á̰  gà  lé  bā  lé  pɔ̄  ló  yā  
     1SG+COP  go  PROG  field  at  thing  eat  with  
     ‘I am going to the field and eating.’

     d.  Material  
     è  yá-ŋ   pɔ̄  dō  wō  yrē  yā  
     3SG  sit-NMLZ  thing  one  made  wood  PPS  
     ‘He made a seat of wood.’

     e.  Result of transformation  
     è  yrē  dō  bō  yāŋ   pɔ̄  yā  
     3SG  wood  one  carved  sit-NMLZ  thing  PPS  
     ‘He carved a piece of wood into a seat.’

     f.  Property predication  
     yàá  é  ziè-zìè  yā  
     3SG  REFL  bad-bad  PPS  
     ‘He is evil.’
g. Non-finite complement

\[
\begin{array}{lll}
g. & \text{Non-finite complement} & \\
1\text{SG} & \text{kūnā} & 1\text{SG} \\
pō & \text{started} & \text{PPS} \\
λ & \text{thing} & \text{PPS} \\
yā & \text{eat} & \text{PPS} \\
\end{array}
\]

‘I started to eat.’

h. Comparison

\[
\begin{array}{lll}
h. & \text{Comparison} & \\
3\text{SG} & \text{mlāā} & \text{come.out:STAT.RSLT} \\
& \text{é} & \text{REFL} \\
& \text{dèè} & \text{PPS} \\
yā & \text{father} & \text{PPS} \\
\end{array}
\]

‘He resembles his father.’

The broad range of uses suggests that the postposition yā can hardly be regarded as a semantically meaningful component of identificational predication. Rather, its use in (1) appears to be determined by the syntactic properties of the corresponding copula, which must be followed by a postpositional phrase or an adverb. Accordingly, noun phrases that have adverbial equivalents do not combine with a postposition; for example, inherently locational nouns, which can be used either as nouns or as adverbs (Kwātá in the examples below), cannot be introduced by the postposition yā (3a vs. 3b).

(3) a. Kwātá á 1\text{SG} \text{gà-ŋ} \text{kōŋ} yā
   K. \text{COP} \text{go-NMLZ} \text{village} \text{PPS}
   ‘Kwata is the village I’m going to.’

   b. 1\text{SG} \text{gà-ŋ} \text{kōŋ} é á Kwātá (*yā)
   \text{go-NMLZ} \text{village} \text{DEF} \text{COP} \text{K.} \text{PPS}
   ‘The village I’m going to is Kwata.’

This restriction shows that the primary function of the postposition yā in the identificational construction is syntactic: it introduces noun phrases in a syntactic position restricted to adverbs and postpositional phrases. Hence, the characteristic pattern of polysemy displayed by that postposition does not necessarily imply a semantic and/or diachronic relation between the identificational construction and all other constructions illustrated in (2a-g); rather, it has to do with the function of yā as a general-purpose, “default” postposition that encodes a variety of (possibly unrelated) meanings for which no specialized postposition exist.

Further exploration of the encoding of identification in discourse reveals that the use of a copula with the postposition yā is but one type of identificational construction in Wan. Considerably more frequent in ordinary discourse is a construction with the one-place predicate má̰ ‘it/he/she is’, in which the object being identified must be discourse-given.

(4) pō ziè má
   \text{thing} \text{bad} \text{it.is}
   ‘It’s a bad thing.’

The predicate má̰, together with the construction involving the postposition yā, effectively compensate for the absence of a European-style specialized two-place identificational predicate of the type BE(x, y).