

Chapter 11

Discourse Functions of Independent Pronouns in Setswana*

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1. Introduction

The literature on independent pronouns (henceforth IPs) in Bantu languages is divided on analyses of their discourse functions. Some maintain that IPs are used for contrastive stress or emphasis (Byarushengo & Tenenbaum 1976), while others maintain that IPs are used to introduce new referents into the discourse (Bresnan & Mchombo 1987). Using Bresnan & Mchombo's (1987) typology of Topic and Focus, Demuth & Johnson (forthcoming), in recent work on Setswana, show that a systematic examination of certain grammatical constraints provides a reliable metric for evaluating the discourse functions of certain arguments. This paper expands on that work and argues that, contrary to Chichewa, where IPs exhibit Focus discourse function, IPs in Setswana, like the related dialect of Setswana, fulfill the Topic function. However, unlike Setswana, which has both pre-posed and post-posed Topic positions (Demuth & Johnson - forthcoming), Setswana has only pre-posed Topic position.

Section 2 explores the discourse functions of Topic and Focus through a presentation of Setswana word order constraints and question formation. Section 3 then examines the constraints on the occurrence of IPs in both simple transitive clauses and in long-distance dependency constructions, showing that they can only fill pre-verbal Topic position. In Section 4 we raise some issues for further research.

The paper concludes in Section 5 with a formulation of the theoretical differences between Setswana and Setawana.

2. Topic and Focus in Setswana

Using the typology of agreement markers presented in Bresnan & Mchombo 1987, Demuth & Johnson (forthcoming) discuss the status of subject and object agreement markers in Setawana and show that the lexical NP filling the grammatical function of object must be adjacent to and following the main verb. As the facts for Setswana are identical, this paper will not try to support this claim, but will concentrate on examining those constructions, including IPs, which exhibit Topic and Focus discourse functions.

The use of 'Topic' and 'Focus' in this paper refer to the 'discourse functions', as opposed to the 'grammatical functions' (subject, object), of certain grammatical constructions. Bresnan & Mchombo (1987) suggest that certain grammatical constructions fill certain discourse functions in language. They hypothesize that question words, cleft constructions and independent pronouns fill Focus function, while the relative marker (RM) of relative clauses fill Topic function. The use of Topic function is not to be confused with that of topicalization, such as that commonly found in the Topic prominent languages described in Li (1976). The fact that Topic constructions in Setawana can occur in post-posed position as well as pre-posed position demonstrates that we are not talking merely of topicalization, or if so, that topicalization itself must be reanalysed to incorporate such phenomena. With these distinctions in mind we now consider the word order restrictions found in Setswana.

2.1 Word Order Restrictions

Setswana is a head-initial *pro*-drop language; the subject marker (SM) and object marker (OM) are part of the verb, and a well-formed sentence may be produced with no lexical NP in subject position. This is illustrated in (1).

- (1) *ó-e-bidítse*
 SM-OM-lashed 'He lashed it'

The examples in (2) show the word order permutations allowed in a simple transitive sentence. A lexical NP can occur in subject position, producing the grammatical sentence in (2a). Though Setswana allows a post-posed subject, as shown in (2b), Setswana speakers find it somewhat peculiar. Like Setawana, sentences (2c)-(2f) are completely unacceptable in Setswana.

- (2) a. *Thabo ó-bidítse ntsá*
 Thabo SM-lashed dog 'Thabo lashed the dog'
- b. *?ó-bidítse ntsá, Thabo*
- c. **ntsa o-biditse Thabo*
- d. **o-biditse Thabo ntsa*
- e. **Thabo ntsa o-biditse*
- f. **ntsa Thabo o-biditse*

The sentences in (2a)-(2f) show a limited flexibility in word orders permitted. (2b) is marginally acceptable in certain contrastive or emphatic contexts, requiring comma intonation between the lexical object *ntsa* 'dog' and postposed lexical subject *Thabo*. It therefore shows greater restriction than in Setawana, where the sentence is grammatical.

As in Setswana (Demuth & Johnson - forthcoming) and Chichewa (Bresnan & Mchombo 1987), the OM, when present, assumes the grammatical function of object, and the lexical object, if present, becomes post-posed, no longer functioning grammatically as the true object. (3) shows the grammaticality of different word order permutations of a simple transitive Setswana clause with an OM.

- (3) a. *Thabo ó-e-bídítse ntsá*
 Thabo SM-OM-lashed dog 'Thabo lashed the dog'
- b. *?ó-e-bídítse ntsá, Thabo*
- c. *?ntsá ó-e-bídítse, Thabo*
- d. *?ó-e-bídítse Thabo, ntsá*
- e. *Thabo, ntsá ó-e-bídítse*
- f. *ntsá, Thabo ó-e-bídítse*

The sentences in (3) provide further explanation for the marginal grammaticality of (2b). (3b), (3c) and (3d) all have a post-posed lexical subject and/or object, and all three are only marginally acceptable, requiring comma intonation and a contrastive or emphatic context. In contrast, both lexical subjects and objects can be *pre-posed*, as evidenced by the grammaticality of (3e) and (3f).

The pattern of grammaticality with respect to word order variation and object marking in Setswana is summarized in (4).

(4) Order	Without OM	With OM
SVO	yes	yes
VOS	?	?
OVS	*	?
VSO	*	?
SOV	*	yes
OSV	*	yes

Thus, word order in Setswana differs from that of Chichewa and Setswana in that VOS word order is only marginally acceptable, and all word orders with post-posed subjects (i.e. subject moved from pre-verbal SVO position to position after the verb - VOS, OVS, VSO) are disallowed even when the OM is present. We therefore hypothesize that Setswana does not allow post-posed subjects. We now consider this phenomena in light of the typology of Topic and Focus, beginning with a discussion of question formation.

2.2 Constraints on Question Formation

Setswana allows questioning of objects, as shown in (5a). However, it does not allow questioning of subjects, either in subject position (5b), or when post-posed (5c).

- (5) a. *Thabo ó-bóne máng?*
Thabo SM-saw who 'Who did Thabo see?'
- b. **Mang o-bone Thabo?*¹
who SM-saw Thabo 'Who saw Thabo?'
- c. **o-bone Thabo mang?*
SM-saw Thabo who 'Who saw Thabo?'

If Bresnan & Mchombo's hypothesis is correct that question words fill Focus function, we can then explain the status of the examples in (5). In (5a), a question word is allowed in object position. Thus, we

conclude that grammatical objects can be Focus elements. However, question words are not allowed in subject position, as shown by the ungrammaticality of (5b) and (5c). Thus, we conclude that grammatical subject is incompatible with elements that exhibit Focus discourse function, and that it must therefore be compatible with discourse Topic function. This subject/object asymmetry is also seen in closely related Sesotho, where subjects can not be questioned and can be shown to strongly select for discourse Topic (Demuth 1989). Thus, (5b) and (5c) are ungrammatical because the grammatical subject fills the Topic discourse function, thereby disallowing question words which inherently carry Focus discourse function.

These relations hold not only in simple transitive clauses, but in complement clauses as well, as shown in (6) with the matrix verb believe/agree.

- (6) a. *A John ó-dúmélá gore Bill ó-súnné máng?*
 Q John SM-agree that Bill SM-kissed who
 'Who does John believe Bill kissed?'
- b. **John o-dumela gore Bill o-mo-sunne mang?*
 John SM-agree that Bill SM-OM-kissed who
 'Who does John believe Bill kissed?'
- c. **John o-dumela gore mang o-sunne Mary?*
 John SM-agree that who SM-kissed Mary
 'Who does John believe kissed Mary?'
- d. *John ó-dúmélá gore ké máng yó ó-súnné-ng Mary?*
 John SM-agree that it's who RM SM-kissed-rel Mary
 'Who does John believe kissed Mary?'

The same grammaticality patterns are observed for the matrix verb wonder/think in (7).

- (7) a. *John ó-nág-ána gore Bill ó-súnné máng?*
 John SM-think that Bill SM-kissed who
 'John wonders who Bill kissed?'
- b. **John o-nagana gore Bill o-mo-sunne máng?*
 John SM-think that Bill SM-OM-kissed who
 'John wonders who Bill kissed?'
- c. **John o-nagana gore máng o-sunne Mary?*
 John SM-think that who SM-kissed Mary
 'John wonders who kissed Mary?'
- d. *John ó-nágána gore ké máng yó ó-súnné-ng Mary?*
 John SM-think that it's who RM SM-kissed-rel Mary
 'John wonders who kissed Mary?'

Both *dumela* 'believe/agree' and *nagana* 'wonder/think' show the same grammaticality patterns vis a vis the grammaticality of embedded questions. The (a) sentences have the question word functioning as grammatical object, which is compatible with Focus discourse function. Sentences (b) are ungrammatical due to the fact that object grammatical function cannot be simultaneously filled by both the OM and a question word. In sentences (c), the question words are incompatible with the inherent Topic function of grammatical subject. The alternative to questioning subjects in situ is provided in sentences (d), where the Focus function of the question word is compatible with the inherent Focus function of cleft constructions. We turn now to a discussion of IPs.

3. The Status of Independent Pronouns

Bresnan & Mchombo (1987) analyze IPs as linking to the Focus discourse function, where they introduce new or contrastive referents into the discourse. Yet in Setswana we find that IPs cannot occur in Focus positions.

3.1 Simple Transitive Sentences

In (8) we see that IPs cannot occur either as grammatical object (8a), or post-posed with an OM (8b).

- (8) a. **ke-bone ene*
SM-saw IP 'I saw him'
- b. **ke-m-mone ene*
SM-OM-saw IP 'As for him, I saw him'

The grammatical alternatives occur with only the OM and no IP (8c), or with a preposed IP (8d).

- (8) c. *ke-m-móne*
SM-OM-saw 'I saw him'
- d. *Ené ke-m-móne*
IP SM-OM-saw 'As for him, I saw him'

(8a) is ungrammatical because the IP cannot occur in Focus position, while (8b) is ungrammatical because, although the OM now fills the Focus function, the IP cannot be postposed. In contrast, (8c) is grammatical with no IP, and the preposed IP is allowed in Topic position in (8d). The examples in (8) therefore provide evidence for the fact that the IP cannot fill the Focus function of object position in (8a), nor can it be anaphorically linked to the Focus in postposed

position in (8b). It can, however, be preposed, as shown by the grammaticality of (8d).

3.2 Embedded Sentences

The same pattern of grammaticality holds in embedded constructions, as seen in (9). Thus, when the object of the embedded clause is potentially coreferent with the subject of the matrix clause, the IP is ungrammatical in Focus position (9a) or linked to Focus (9b) with either disjoint or conjoint readings. The grammatical alternative makes use of the OM only, with no IP, and exhibits conjoint reference. This is shown in (9c).

- (9) a. **Ntsa e jele borotho, rre a bo a-betsa yone*
 dog SM-ate bread, father then SM-lashed IP
 'The dog ate the bread, then father lashed it (not the dog)'
 'The dog ate the bread, and then father lashed it (the dog)'
- b. **Ntsa e jele borotho, rre a bo a-e-betsa yone*
 dog SM-ate bread, father then SM-OM-lashed IP
 'The dog ate the bread, then father lashed it (not the dog)'
 'The dog ate the bread, and then father lashed it (the dog)'
- (9) c. *Ntsá é-jélé borotho, rré a bo á-e-bétsa*
 dog SM-ate bread, father then SM-OM-lashed
 'The dog ate the bread, and then father lashed it (the dog)'

Similarly, when the object of the embedded clause is potentially coreferent with the *object* of the matrix clause, the IP is disallowed with either a contrastive or conjunctive reading, as shown by the ungrammaticality of (10a). The presence of an OM in the matrix clause in (10b) renders the sentence only slightly less ungrammatical, and would require conjunctive reference. Once again, the preferred sentence, shown in (10c), has an OM instead of an IP, and allows only a conjunctive reading.

- (10) a. **Thabo o-bone ntsa, rre a bo a-betsa yone*
 Thabo SM-saw **dog**, father then SM-lashed IP
 'Thabo saw the dog, then father lashed it (not the dog)'
 'Thabo saw the dog, and then father lashed it (the dog)'
- b. *?*Thabo o-e-bone ntsa, rre a bo a-betsa yone*
 Thabo SM-OM-saw **dog**, father then SM-lashed IP
 'Thabo saw the dog, and then father lashed it (the dog)'
- c. *Thabo ó-bóné ntsá, rré a bo a-é-bétsa*
 Thabo SM-saw **dog**, father then SM-OM-lashed
 'Thabo saw the dog, and then father lashed it (the dog)'

(9) and (10) show that it is not the grammatical function of the main clause referent to which the embedded IP links that determines the ungrammaticality of the (a) and (b) sentences. Rather, the IP in (9a) and (10a) is disallowed because it cannot fill the Focus function (i.e. as a lexical object), and in (9b) and (10b) it is not allowed to link to the Focus position (the OM). What happens when the IP is preposed, as in (11a)?

- (11) a. **Ntsa e-jele borotho, mme yone rre o-e-biditse*
dog SM-ate bread, and IP father SM-OM-lashed
 'The dog ate the bread, and then father lashed it'

Based on the grammaticality of the simple sentence in (8d), we might predict that (11a) would be grammatical. However, this is not the case. Apparently the IP cannot be preposed when the *subject* of the matrix clause is coreferential with the *object* of the complement clause. Alternatively, consider (11b).

- (11) b. *Ntsá é-jélé bogóbe, mmé yoné é-ilé toropó-ng*
dog SM-ate bread, and IP SM-went town-LOC
 'The dog ate the bread, and then it (i.e. the dog) went to town'

We can explain the grammaticality differences between (11a) and (11b) in the following two ways: In terms of grammatical functions, *ntsa* 'dog' of the matrix clause and *yone* 'IP' of the embedded clause both fill subject grammatical functions in (11b). In contrast, the subject *ntsa* 'dog' of the matrix clause is coreferent with *yone* 'IP' which links to the *object* of the embedded clause in (11a). If one of the discourse functions of IPs is to maintain discourse Topic continuity, this would be possible in (11b), but violated in (11a). It would therefore appear, in more structural terms, that there is a cross-clausal constraint on IPs which restricts them to being coreferent with matrix clause subjects only. We will evaluate this possibility in light of additional evidence provided in the remainder of this paper.

Further support for these hypotheses comes from considering the behavior of IPs when relative clauses serve as the antecedent. Bresnan & Mchombo (1987) analyze the relative marker (RM) as filling Topic function. Note that (12a) is grammatical because the relative clause functions as a pre-posed NP rather than as a matrix clause. In this case the IP, which is coreferent with the object of the lower clause, can also be coreferent with the RM of the relative clause. This provides further support for our observation that the IP functions to maintain Topic continuity, even across clauses. However, even with preposed relative clauses, the IP is still barred from being postposed, with or without an OM, as seen in (12b) and (12c) respectively.

- (12) a. *Ntsá é é jéle- níg bogóbe, yoné rré ó-e-bíáftse*
 dog dem RM ate-rel bread IP father SM-OM-lashed
 'As for the dog that ate the bread, father lashed it'

- b. **Ntsa e e jele-ng borotho, rre o-biditse yone*
 dog dem RM ate-rel bread father SM-lashed IP
 'As for the dog that ate the bread, father lashed it'
- c. **Ntsa e e jele-ng borotho, rre o-e-biditse yone*
 dog dem RM ate-rel bread father SM-OM-lashed IP
 'As for the dog that ate the bread, father lashed it'

The generalization seems to be that the IP in Setswana is capable of filling the Topic function, but only in pre-posed position, and only when the higher anaphoric referent (in this case the RM) also exhibits Topic discourse function. This is found to be true even if the relativized NP functions as the object of the relative clause, as shown in (12d).

- (12) d. *Ntsá é monna á-e-file-ng, yoné rré ó-e-bídtse*
 dog RM man SM-OM-gave-rel IP father SM-OM-lashed
 'As for the dog that the man fed, father lashed it'

The grammaticality of (12d) is apparently due to the fact that the IP link to the RM, thus maintaining Topic continuity. We can revise our originally proposed cross-clausal constraint on IPs to read: There is a cross-clausal constraint which restricts IPs to being coreferent with matrix clause Topics only.

Interestingly, we find that similar restrictions hold when we introduce the coreferent object NP. In (8b) we saw that the IP is not allowed in postposed position. Grammaticality does not improve when the lexical object NP is also present (13a). In (8d) we also saw that the IP of a main clause can be preposed if it is coreferent with the OM. When the object NP is added in postposed position, we find the resulting sentence (13b) is also ungrammatical. Thus, while (13b) is

allowed in Setawana, where there is apparently a 'Topic linking' device which links the IP with post-posed NP, this does not exist in Setswana. However, the IP and object NP can both occur, freely ordered, in pre-posed Topic position, as shown in (13c) and (13d).²

- (13) a. **ene ke-m-mone Thabo*
 IP SM-OM-saw Thabo 'As for him, I saw him, Thabo'
- b. **ke-m-mone ene (Thabo)*
 SM-OM-saw IP (Thabo)
- c. *Thabo ené ke-m-móne*
 Thabo IP I-OM-saw
- d. *ené Thabo ke-m--móne*
 IP Thabo I-OM-saw

The IP and NP are also restricted to pre-posed Topic position when the referent functions as grammatical *subject*. Thus, while (14a) and (14b) are ungrammatical due to a post-posed IP or NP respectively, while (13c) and (13d) are completely grammatical when both lexical subject NP and IP are preposed (paralleling 13c and 13d).

- (14) a. **ene o-m-pone Thabo*
 IP SM-OM-saw Thabo 'As for him, he saw me, Thabo'
- b. **o-m-pone ene (Thabo)*
 SM-OM-saw IP Thabo
- c. *Thabo ené ó-m-póne*
 Thabo IP SM-OM-saw
- d. *ené Thabo ó-m-póne*
 IP Thabo SM-OM-saw

Examples (13) and (14) provide further support for the original prediction that Topic discourse function is restricted to pre-posed position. The Setswana data therefore contrast sharply with that of closely related Setawana, where Topic is also allowed in post-posed position.

4. Further Research Questions

Strong evidence has been presented here arguing that Topic position in Setswana is restricted to pre-posed position. There are, however, a few matters which merit a brief consideration. We saw in (13b) and (14b) that neither IPs alone, nor NPs alone, nor IPs and NPs together could be post-posed. However, (15) shows that NPs *can* be post-posed *if* they co-occur with a demonstrative pronoun (dem) (Cole 1955).

- (15) *ke-é-bóné ntsá éo*
 SM-OM-saw dog dem 'I saw it, that dog'

It is not exactly clear what the discourse function of demonstratives is, how they differ from IPs, nor how they interact with Topic and Focus. It would seem for (15), however, that their discourse function requires further investigation. The status of demonstrative pronouns might be thought, in some ways, to resemble that of possessive pronouns (poss) in that they select for a definite NP. However, as shown in (16), the NP is not as acceptable with the possessive pronoun as it is with the demonstrative pronoun in (15).

- (16) *?ke-é-bóné ntsá yáaka*
 SM-OM-saw dog poss 'I saw it, my dog'

It is not clear that the demonstrative and possessive pronouns in (15) and (16) function as post-posed Topics. The fact that in Setswana object NPs are allowed in post-posed position with demonstrative pronouns, only marginally with possessive pronouns, and not at all with independent pronouns, indicates that further research must be carried out to determine the discourse function differences between these three pronouns, and the implications this holds for the grammar of Setswana.

5. Conclusions

This paper has used the notions of Topic and Focus to explore the interaction of IPs with various grammatical constructions. While we would probably agree that, by their very nature, cleft constructions universally have a discourse function of Focus rather than Topic, we have shown that the analysis of IPs is not so easily defined. While in some languages IPs may exhibit a Focus discourse function (Chichewa), this paper demonstrates that in Setswana they carry Topic discourse function, both within clauses as well as across clauses. Furthermore, we have shown that there is an additional cross-clausal constraint which restricts the occurrence of embedded IPs to cases where the referent has the same grammatical function in both clauses, thereby permitting the IP to maintain Topic continuity. Yet there are subtle dialectal differences regarding the placement of IPs: while Setawana has both pre- and post-posed Topic positions, Setswana apparently has only a pre-posed Topic position. In addition, at least for some speakers of Setawana, a coreferent Topic NP and IP can be split, one occurring in pre-posed position and one post-posed. This involves a principle of 'co-linking', or an Extended Consistency Condition, which allows there

to be an anaphoric linking between the two Topic positions. Such an Extended Consistency Condition is ruled out in Setswana, where there is only a preposed Topic position.

Notes

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1 As a direct question, (5c) is completely ungrammatical, but it is marginally acceptable as an echo question. This could be because question words in Echo Question constructions are not behaving as Focus elements, but rather have a partially anaphoric behavior, linking to the element in the preceding discourse that requires clarification.

2 The grammaticality of the sentences in (12) is not affected by the addition of an intervening temporal adverb.

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