

Indefinite Subjects in Durban Zulu*

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It has long been observed that subjects cross-linguistically have topic properties: they are typically definite, referential and/or generic (Givón 1976). Bantu languages are said to illustrate this generalization: preverbal position for NPs is equated with both subject and topic status and postverbal position with focus (and non-subject). However, there is a growing body of work showing that preverbal subjects are not necessarily syntactically or semantically equivalent to topics. For example, Zerbian's (2006) careful study of preverbal position in Northern Sotho shows that preverbal subjects meet few of the semantic tests for aboutness topics. The study of restrictions on preverbal subjects in Durban Zulu presented in this paper builds on Zerbian (2006) and Halpert (2012). In particular, we investigate the interpretational properties of preverbal indefinite subjects. These subjects show us that preverbal subjects carry a presupposition of existence. We explore an analysis connecting the "strong reading" of preverbal subjects with how high the verb moves in Zulu (following Tsai's 2001 work on Mandarin).

1 Introduction

Work since, at least, Givón (1976) has noted that subjects cross-linguistically have topic-like properties: they are typically definite, referential and/or generic. Bantu languages with SVO word order are said to illustrate this generalization: preverbal position for NPs is equated with topic status and postverbal position with focus (Bresnan & Kanerva 1989; Morimoto 2000: 57; Henderson 2006:

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109). Subjects are thus canonically in preverbal position because they are canonical topics.

Support for the proposal that preverbal subjects have topic status comes from a range of evidence: for example, many Bantu languages do not allow subjects to be focused in situ. The incompatibility between preverbal subject position and focus is said to follow from the inherent topicality of preverbal subjects (Morimoto 2000). However, there is a growing body of work showing that preverbal subjects are not necessarily syntactically, semantically, or prosodically equivalent to topics. Work like Cheng & Downing (2009), Morimoto (2000), van der Wal (2009) and Zerbian (2006) argues that, even in Bantu languages where subjects cannot be focused in situ, one can distinguish a syntactic preverbal Subject position (clause internal) from a clause external Topic position. Furthermore, Zerbian's (2006) careful study of preverbal position in Northern Sotho shows that preverbal subjects fail many of the semantic tests for aboutness topics. Zerbian concludes that preverbal subjects in Northern Sotho are best characterized as being [-Focus], rather than [+Topic].

This paper investigates restrictions on preverbal subjects in Durban Zulu, building on Zerbian (2006). We show that in Durban Zulu, as in Northern Sotho, weak/nonspecific indefinites (i.e., narrow scope indefinites) – e.g. *no one*, *someone* – cannot occur as preverbal subjects. One cannot account for this restriction by proposing that subjects must be [-Focus], because other types of [-Focus] indefinite subjects can occur preverbally. As Zerbian (2006: 189) concedes, this kind of data provides the best support for the proposal that subjects are Topic-like. We then investigate the interpretational properties of preverbal indefinite subjects. These subjects show us that preverbal subjects carry a presupposition of existence. We explore an analysis connecting the “strong reading” of preverbal subjects with how high the verb moves in Zulu (following Tsai's 2001 work on Mandarin).

The paper is structured as follows. In section 2, we review the kinds of Zulu data that illustrate topic-like properties of preverbal subjects. In section 3, we show that, in spite of this, preverbal subjects cannot be equated with Topic or aboutness topic in Zulu. In section 4 we present our analysis of the properties of indefinite preverbal subjects, and we conclude in section 5.

2 Topic properties of subjects in Zulu¹

Word order in many Bantu languages is canonically: S V IO DO (see, e.g., Bearth 2003; Heine 1976). It is a typological generalization that in SVO languages, topics occur sentence-initially (preverbally), while focused elements occur postverbally (Güldemann 2007; Morimoto 2000). Under this view, preverbal subjects are in a canonical topic position, and there is a body of work on Bantu languages demonstrating the topic-like properties of subjects. In this section, we review the properties that are exemplified in Zulu.²

2.1 Morphosyntactic topic properties of subjects

In Zulu, as in many Bantu languages, the subject concord prefix on the verb is obligatory, whether the co-referential nominal is present or not (Doke 1961; Halpert 2012). This is illustrated in (1a-c). As shown in (1d), where the subject is dislocated, the subject does not need to be in a local position with the verb to trigger subject agreement. (Halpert does not indicate prosody in her Zulu data; the brackets in (1) indicate optionality):

(1) Optional overt subject/obligatory subject prefix (Halpert 2012: 34)

- a. (uZinhle) u-xova u-jeqe
1.Zinhle 1SUBJ-make 1-steamed.bread
'Zinhle is making steamed bread.'
*uZinhle xova u-jeqe (ungrammatical with the above intended meaning)
- b. (omakhelwane) ba-xova u-jeqe
2.neighbor 2SUBJ-make 1-steamed.bread
'The neighbors are making steamed bread.'

¹ The accent marks on vowels in the data indicate tone; long vowels are indicated by doubling the vowel. In the morpheme glosses, numbers indicate noun class agreement, following the standard Bantu system adopted in work like Mchombo (2004). The following abbreviations are used: OBJ = object marker; SUBJ = subject marker; TAM=tense-aspect marker; FUT = future; NEG = negative; INF = infinitive; COP = copula; REL = relative; LOC = locative; DJ = disjoint verbal affix.

² See Morimoto 2000, van der Wal 2009 and Zerbian 2006 for detailed discussion of tests defining the topic properties of subjects in selected Bantu languages.

- c. (iqhawe) li-xova u-jeqe
 5.hero 5SUBJ-make 1-steamed.bread
 ‘The hero is making steamed bread.’
- d. li-xova u-jeqe kahle]_{VP} iqhawe
 5SUBJ-make 1-steamed.bread well 5.hero
 ‘The hero makes steamed bread well.’

As Bresnan & Mchombo (1987: 755) argue, this range of facts implies that all preverbal subjects are functionally ambiguous. A preverbal subject could either be a true subject and the subject prefix reflects grammatical agreement, or it could be a Topic and the subject prefix functions like a resumptive pronoun.³ As work like Frascarelli (2007) argues, this same ambiguity is found in other *pro*-drop languages. Although we will see in the next section that there are syntactic tests distinguishing subject and topic positions, they do not resolve the ambiguity in the function of an immediately preverbal subject.

A positional property aboutness topics share with subjects (when in their canonical position) is that they must be preverbal, as Cheng & Downing (2009) and Halpert (2012) show. Right-dislocations do not have the status of discourse topics. The data in (2) from Cheng & Downing (2009: 224-225) illustrates this asymmetry in a discourse context. Right-dislocating the subject in (2b) is unacceptable in the context provided because it is then not interpreted as the (newly-introduced) discourse topic. (*ízo:lo* ‘yesterday’ is in IAV position as it is the new information in the response, answering the indirect question):

(2) Context:

Speaker A: I wonder when they bought the bicycles. (Several people bought bicycles.)

- a. í-bhaiyisékííl’ ú-Síph’ ú-yí-théngel’ ízoolo
 5-bicycle 1-Sipho 1SUBJ-5OBJ-buy yesterday
 ‘Sipho bought the bicycle yesterday.’
- b. # í-bhaiyisékííl’ ú-yí-théngel’ ízoolo ú-Siipho.

The following example makes the same point. The sentence in (3a) gives an acceptable follow-on to the context-providing sentence. The alternative follow-on in (3b) shows that it is unacceptable for the subject to be right-dislocated

³ Halpert (2012) argues that Zulu subject marker is an agreement marker rather than a pronominal element.

when it is also the topic. In contrast, as we see in (3c), right-dislocation of the subject is possible when it is not the discourse topic but rather an after-thought:

- (3) Ú-Siiphó í mí-fiino ú-yí-phékél' ízi-ngáane
 1-Sipho 4-vegetable 1SUBJ-4OBJ-cook.for 10-child
 hháyi ízí-vakáashi
 not 8-visitor
 'Sipho is cooking vegetables for the children, not for the visitors.'
- a. ízí-vakásh' a-zí-yí-dl-i ímí-fiino
 8-visitor NEG-8SUBJ-4OBJ-eat-NEG 4-vegetable
 'The visitors don't eat vegetables.'
- ízi-vakáshi* 'visitor' dislocated:
- b. #imi-fino a-zi-yi-dl-i izi-vakashi
 4-vegetable NEG-8SUBJ-4OBJ-eat-NEG 8-visitor
- cf. non-discourse topic subject:
- c. í-théng' imí-fiin' é-mákéth' ín-kósíkaazi
 9SUBJ-buy 4-vegetable LOC-market 9-woman
 'The woman bought vegetables at the market.'
- [Context: answers, *What did the woman buy at the market?*]

Work like Vallduví (1990) has demonstrated that cross-linguistically left-dislocated elements typically function as discourse topics (or 'links', in his terminology), while right-dislocated elements are normally discourse 'tails': i.e., non-focus, non-link parts of the sentence. Zulu fits this cross-linguistic pattern. Zerbian (2006: 92-95) shows that the same asymmetry in the function of left vs. right dislocations holds for Northern Sotho and suggests it might be more widespread in Bantu languages. In fact, she notes that right dislocations are very rare in her corpus and proposes that this is because they function as afterthoughts, not as discourse topics.

2.2 Preverbal subject position is incompatible with focus

If preverbal subjects are Topics, then they should not be able to be focused in their canonical position. We do find evidence for this incompatibility in Zulu and other Bantu languages. For example, *wh*-questions on subjects and their

answers – elements with inherent focus – must be clefted in Zulu, as Sabel & Zeller (2006) and Cheng & Downing (2012) show:⁴

(4) Cheng & Downing (2012: 252)

Q u-báán’ ó-thólé ín-dándatho e-bí-kú-láhlékééle
 COP1-who REL.1SUBJ-find 9-ring REL.9SUBJ-TAM-2sgOBJ-lost
 ‘Who is it that found the ring that you lost?’

A um-fúndíisi ó-thólê: índándatho e-bí-ngi-láhlékééle
 COP1-teacher REL1SUBJ-find 9-ring REL.9SUBJ-TAM-1sgOBJ-lost
 ‘It is the teacher who found the ring that I lost.’

#A úm-fúndíisi ú-thólê: ín-dándatho e-bí-ngi-láhlékééle
 1-teacher 1SUBJ-find 9-ring REL.9SUBJ-TAM-1sgOBJ-lost
 ‘The teacher found the ring that I lost.’ (*ungrammatical as answer to Q*)

Subjects can also be focused if they are postverbal (*vP* internal), as Halpert (2012), Buell and de Dreu (2013) and Zeller (2013) demonstrate.⁵ The following example shows that the focus operator *kuphela* ‘only’ cannot appear with a preverbal subject but is licit with a postverbal one. Note in (5b) that the *vP* internal postverbal subject does not trigger subject agreement on the verb; instead, the verb has expletive class 17 agreement:

(5) (Halpert 2012: 39)

ngi-mem-e wonke umuntu, kodwa...
 I-invite-TAM 1.every 1.person but
 ‘I invited everyone, but...’

a. *uJohn kuphela u-fik-ile
 1.John only 1SUBJ-come-TAM

b. ku-fik-e uJohn kuphela
 17SUBJ-come-TAM 1.John only
 ‘only John came.’

⁴ Cheng & Downing (2012), Morimoto (2000), van der Wal (2009), and Zerbian (2006) provide detailed discussion of other Bantu languages where *wh*-questions on subjects and their answers must be clefted. See Cheng & Downing (2013) for a syntactic analysis of the structure of Zulu clefts.

Note that the copula in these clefted sentences has no segmental realization. It is the depressor Low tone on the initial syllable of the clefted nominal that realizes the copula.

⁵ See work like Bresnan & Kanerva (1989), Zerbian (2006) and van der Wal (2009) for discussion of the focus properties of postverbal subjects in other Bantu languages.

In short, two strategies – clefts or *v*P internal position – allow subjects to be placed in narrow focus in Zulu. Preverbal subject position is incompatible with narrow focus. Indeed, as Cheng & Downing (2012) and Zeller (2013) observe, it is not possible to focus elements outside *v*P in Zulu.

2.3 Preverbal subjects have topical semantic properties

As Morimoto (2000) and Zerbian (2006) argue, if preverbal subjects are aboutness Topics, then certain operators (*no one, someone, about #*) connected with weak indefinites – a property incompatible with an aboutness topic – should not be able to occur in preverbal position. Zerbian (2006) demonstrates that in Northern Sotho *no one* and *about #* must occur postverbally (following a copular construction in these examples) when they function as subjects:

(6) Northern Sotho (Zerbian 2006: 182-183)

- a. Ga go mang a tseba-go gore mo-lato ké eng
NEG 17SUBJ who 1SUBJ know-REL that 3-problemCOP what
'Nobody knows what the problem is.'
- b. Ké ba-ithuti ba e-ka-abago ba ba-raro ba
COP 2-student 2DEM about 2.QUAL 2-three 2DEM
ba be-go ba dir-ile mo-šomo wa gae
2SUBJ TAM-REL 2SUBJ do-TAM 3-work 3.of home
'About three students had done their homework.'
(answering the question: 'How did your class go yesterday?')

Our recent pilot elicitations testing these operators in Zulu yields similar data: the equivalents of *someone* and *no one* occur postverbally (following an existential predicate *-khona*) when they function as subjects:⁶

⁶ The *-khona* construction is discussed in detail in section 4, below. See Buell & de Dreu (2013) and Zeller (2013) for discussion of other uses of this construction.

(7) a. Context: The office kitchen is a mess.

(k)ú-khoona ó-shíyée ízinkómishi zéékoofi
 17SUBJ-there REL.1SUBJ-leave 10.cup 10.of.coffee
 zí-nga-washííwe fúúthi
 10SUBJ-NEG-wash.PASSIVE.TAM again
 ‘Someone left unwashed coffee cups again.’
 [Lit. ‘There is one who left...’]

b. Context: Laura came to the office, and asks:

Q. lú-khoona ú-cingo lwaámi ólú-ngen-íile
 11SUBJ-there 11-call 11.mine REL.11SUBJ-come.in-TAM
 ‘Did I get any phone calls?’
 [Lit. ‘Is there a call of mine that came in?’]

A. kú-khoona ó-shay-íile kódwá ang-ázi úkúthí
 17SUBJ-there REL.1SUBJ-call-TAM but NEG.I.SUBJ-know that
 békú-(ng)ubáani
 COP.TAM-who
 ‘Someone called, but I don’t know who it was.’

c. Context: A woman and her children arrived at the station.

(k)úngekhó muuntu ó-bá-land-íile
 17.NEG.there 1.person REL.1SUBJ-2OBJ-meet-TAM
 ‘No one met them.’

The restriction that weak indefinite subjects must be postverbal (vP internal) follows if preverbal subjects are Topics.

3 Problems with equating Topics and Subjects

Even though preverbal subjects and topics have many properties in common in Zulu, they also can be distinguished, as we show in this section. The data presented here comes from a recent pilot study on Durban Zulu, building on Zerbian’s (2006) work on Northern Sotho as well as Halpert’s (2012) work on Zulu subject properties.⁷

⁷ See Morimoto (2000) for discussion of Bantu languages where preverbal topics and subjects cannot be easily distinguished.

3.1 Syntactic distinction between topic and subject

One important distinction between subject and topic is that they demonstrably occupy two different syntactic positions in many Bantu languages. (See e.g., Bresnan & Mchombo 1987, Morimoto 2000, van der Wal 2009.) This is also true for Zulu, as work like Cheng & Downing (2009) and Halpert (2012) demonstrates. One argument for this distinction from Halpert (2012), following van der Wal (2009) for Makhuwa-Enahara, is that universal quantifiers are permitted as a preverbal subject (8a), but not with a left dislocated (topicalized) subject. As Halpert (2012) argues, in (8b), the subject must be considered to be left-dislocated, as it precedes a left-dislocated object. In (8c), we see that it is not the SOV word order in (8b) that makes the sentence ungrammatical; such a word order is fine if the subject is not a universal quantifier:

- (8) a. wonke umuntu u-ya-**wa**-thanda amaswidi
1every 1.person 1SUBJ-DJ-6OBJ-like 6.candy
'Everyone likes candy.'

BUT

- b. *wonke umuntu amaswidi u-ya-**wa**-thanda
1every 1.person 6.candy 1SUBJ-DJ-6OBJ-like (Halpert 2012: 39)

- c. Context: Who did the woman buy the greens from?

ín-kósíkaazi ímí-fín' í-yí-thengée kú-m-liimi
9-woman 4-vegetable 9SUBJ-4OBJ-buy LOC-1-farmer
'The woman bought the greens from a farmer.'

(Cheng & Downing 2009)

As Cheng & Downing (2009, 2012, to appear) have shown, prosody confirms the distinction between these two positions in Zulu.⁸ A prosodic break follows a clause-external preverbal Topic, whereas no break follows a clause-internal subject. This is illustrated by the example below, where right parentheses indicate prosodic phrase boundaries, cued by long penult vowels:

⁸ See Downing & Mtenje (2011) for similar prosodic arguments for the subject/topic distinction in Chichewa.

- (9) Left dislocated object (underlined), followed by preverbal clause internal subject (Cheng & Downing 2009: 234)

[_{CP} ámá-pheeph'] [_{CP} [_{IP} úm-mél' [_{VP} ú-wá-sayín-íle)]]]
6-paper 1-lawyer 1SUBJ-6OBJ-sign-TAM
'The lawyer signed the papers.'

Indeed, it is often assumed that preverbal Topics cross-linguistically must be followed by a prosodic break, while subjects need not be. (See e.g., Rizzi 1997, Frascarelli 2000.)⁹

3.2 Preverbal subject position is compatible with all-new focus

According to Sasse's (1987) definition,thetic sentences do not show topic-comment structure. Rather, the subject (like the rest of the sentence) is new information. Zerbian (2006) shows that the subject can occur preverbally inthetic sentences in Northern Sotho, even though, by definition, it cannot be a topic of the sentence:

- (10) No. Sothothetic sentence (Zerbian 2006: 184)
Letšatši le hlaba ka 6 a.m.
5.sun 5SUBJ rise at 6 a.m.
'The sun rises at 6 a.m.'

Halpert (2012) and our recent data demonstrate the same holds for Zulu.

- (11) Zuluthetic sentences

a. Halpert (2012: 40)

Context: What's happening?
uZinhle u-xova u-jeqe
1.Zinhle 1SUBJ-make 1-steamed.bread
'Zinhle is making steamed bread.'

⁹ This assumption finds many counterexamples in Bantu languages, however. In Northern Sotho and Haya, preverbal topics and preverbal subjects both phrase with the verb. In contrast, in Luganda, preverbal topics and preverbal subjects both phrase separately from the verb (Pak 2008). See Zerbian (2007), Downing (2011) for recent surveys of dislocation prosody in Bantu languages.

b. Cheng & Downing (elicitation notes)

Context: What are you waiting here for?

í-tékiisi li-y-éeza lí-zo-ngi-lánda khona máánje.

5-taxi 5SUBJ-DJ-come 5SUBJ-FUT-me-pick.up here soon

‘A taxi is coming to pick me up soon.’

Since the subject, like the entire sentence, has all-new focus, we would not expect it to occur in its canonical position if a preverbal subject is equivalent to an aboutness topic.

3.3 Preverbal subjects lack topical semantic properties

Zerbian (2006) shows that indefinite subjects commonly occur in preverbal position in Northern Sotho, even though topics are considered inherently definite.¹⁰

(12) Indefinite subjects in No. Sotho (Zerbian 2006: 185-186)

a. Context: When reporting that my car was stolen.

ma-hodu a utsw-itše koloi ya ka
6-thief 6SUBJ steal-TAM 9.car 9.of mine
‘Thieves stole my car.’

b. Context: possible response to a cry from outside

ngwana o a hwa mo ntle
1.child 1SUBJ-DJ-die LOC outside
‘A child is dying outside!’

Halpert (2012) and our recent data demonstrate that the same holds for Zulu. We already saw one example in (11b), above. Below are more:

¹⁰ See Reinhart (1981) and Endriss and Hinterwimmer (2010) for discussions of indefinite noun phrases as topics. As Reinhart (1981) notes, such indefinites are specific. Endriss and Hinterwimmer (2010) show that indefinite aboutness topics have wide scope reading (see their paper for further discussion concerning a reading involving an adverbial quantifier in the sentence). These are not the readings we are interested in here. Instead, we are interested in non-specific, weak, and narrow scope indefinites.

(13) Indefinite subjects in Zulu

a. Halpert (2012: 40)

namhlanje aba-ntu aba-thathu ba-zo-li-wina i-loto
today 2-person 2-three 2SUBJ-FUT-5OBJ-win 5-lottery
'Today three people will win the lottery.'

b. Cheng & Downing (elicitation notes)

[Context: 'What happened to the orange?']

úm-fána ú-lí-dl-iile
1-boy 1SUBJ-5OBJ-eat-TAM
'A boy ate it.'

To sum up these sections, we have extended Zerbian's tests for aboutness topic properties of subjects to Zulu and shown that, as in Northern Sotho, preverbal subjects do not consistently have topic properties. While they do have some properties in common, subjects are prosodically, syntactically and semantically distinct from topics. Zerbian's (2006) conclusion about the distribution of preverbal subjects in Northern Sotho is that they are best characterized as [-Focus] rather than [+Topic]. As she acknowledges, though, the postverbal requirement on weak indefinites (*someone; no one*) presented in section 2.3, above, is problematic for this generalization. Equating preverbal subject with topic makes the right prediction for these operators, as they are semantically incompatible with an aboutness topic. Halpert's (2012) claim that indefinites are compatible with preverbal subject position in Zulu also cannot account for why weak indefinites cannot occur preverbally. In the next section we develop an analysis that appeals to the notion of presupposition of existence to account for constraints on the occurrence of different types of indefinite preverbal subjects in Zulu.

4 Towards an analysis

In Zulu, nouns with an augment can be interpreted either as a definite or an indefinite. There is no formal marking of a definiteness distinction. Below we choose to concentrate on the indefinite interpretation of nouns/noun phrases, because it can steer us away from the notion of givenness-topic properties. As we have argued above, they are not satisfactory when it comes to explaining preverbal subject properties.

4.1 Background re presuppositional indefinites

Indefinites have been the center of debate for a long time. We only concentrate on the issues related to indefinite subjects. Diesing (1992) discusses two readings of indefinites. Consider (14a,b):

- (14) a. There are some ghosts in my house.
b. Some ghosts are in the pantry; the others are in the attic.

Diesing states that (14a) is a non-presuppositional reading of the indefinite. The sentence simply asserts the existence of ghosts. On the other hand, in (14b), we find a presuppositional reading of the indefinite. In this reading, the sentence presupposes the existence of ghosts and asserts that some of them are in the pantry, while the others are in the attic. Though Reinhart (2006) considers Diesing's arguments inconclusive (see also Kratzer 1998), von Stechow (1998) shows that presuppositional indefinites do exist. Von Stechow uses various environments to test the presence of presuppositional indefinites. In particular, he uses yes-no questions as well as conditionals to show that indefinite subjects of individual-level predicates induce an existence presupposition.¹¹ Consider the sentences in (15).

- (15) a. If some ghosts were Dutch, Holland would be a strange place.
b. If some Dutchmen were ghosts, Holland would be a strange place.

It is clear that (15a) carries an existence presupposition concerning ghosts, and if one does not believe in the existence of ghosts, (15a) is problematic. (15b), on the other hand, is not a problem since it does not carry an existence presupposition concerning ghosts; rather, it carries an existence presupposition concerning Dutchmen.

4.2 Sentences with and without *(ku)khona*

In our attempts to elicit preverbal indefinite subjects, often sentences with *(ku)khona* followed by the indefinite subject are offered. (The *-khona*

¹¹ Individual-level predicates denote more or less permanent states, for example, *intelligent*, *wise*, *tall*. They contrast with stage-level predicates which are temporary states, such as *sad*, *tired* and *bored*. (See Carlson 1977.)

construction can be considered to be comparable to existential sentences with *there* in English.) Below we discuss these sentences and compare them with preverbal indefinite subjects, without (*ku*)*khona*.

4.2.1 (*ku*)*khona*

Buell & de Dreu (2013), following Doke (1961), note that the adverbial *-khona* ‘there’ can be used as a predicate meaning ‘be present’. The sentences in (16a,b) show the positive and negative forms of *khona*.

- (16) a. uSipho u-khona
1.Sipho 1SUBJ-be.present
‘Sipho is here/there/present/in.’
b. uSipho a-ke-kho
1.Sipho NEG-1SUBJ-be.present
‘Sipho isn’t here/there/present/in.’

Further, they show that *khona* with class 17 (expletive) subject-marking is used to form sentences comparable to existential sentences, as shown in (17a,b).

(17) Examples from Buell & de Dreu (2013) of existential use of *khona*

- a. ku-khona imali eningi lapha
17SUBJ-be.present 9.money 9.much here
‘There is a lot of money here.’
b. A-ku-kho mali eningi lapha
NEG-17SUBJ-be.present 9.money 9.much here
‘There isn’t a lot of money here.’

Aside from *khona*, *-na* ‘with’ can also be used in expletive/existential sentences, as in (18) (example adapted from Buell & de Dreu 2013):

- (18) ku-na-marandi a-yikhulu
17SUBJ-with-6.rand REL.6SUBJ-hundred
‘There are a hundred rand.’

Buell & de Dreu (2013) suggest that the subject in expletive/existential sentences is a *pro* which triggers class 17 agreement.

4.2.2 *The data*

Consider now the data that bear upon the question of presupposition of existence. First, both when the logical subject appears after *(ku)khona/ku-na* and when it is preverbal, it can be interpreted as carrying the presupposition of existence. This is shown in the example below:

(19) [Context: What's the news?]

- a. Kú-n' ábá-zingeéli ábá-búlál-ê í-bhubéesi ízoolo
 17SUBJ-with 2-hunter REL.2SUBJ-kill-TAM 5-lion yesterday

OR

- b. ábá-zingeéli bá-búlál-ê í-bhubéesi ízoolo
 2-hunter 2SUBJ-kill-TAM 5-lion yesterday
 'Hunters killed a lion yesterday.'

This contrasts with environments where there is no presupposition of existence. In such cases, the indefinite has to follow *(ku)khona* or *ku-na*. We use the conditional test discussed in von Stechow (1998), which has a preceding context to further ensure the non-presupposition of existence:

(20) Preceding sentence: I'm not sure whether there is any mistake in this book manuscript, but...

- Ngéké si-khíphe lencwáadi, úmá kú-n' amá-phútha
 never we-publish this.book if 17SUBJ-with 6-error
 á-bálúlékiile
 REL.6SUBJ-be.major.TAM

'We'll never publish the book, if there are major mistakes in it.'

In (20), the context ensures that there is no presupposition of existence with respect to mistakes. In this case, the noun *amaphutha* 'mistakes' must appear after *kuna*. On the other hand, if we assume that there are mistakes, the indefinite noun phrase can either follow *(ku)khona/kuna*, or it can be in preverbal position:

(21) a. úúma kú-khóna áamá-phútha á-bálúlékiile,
 if 17SUBJ-there 6-error REL.6SUBJ-be.major.TAM

OR b. úúma áamá-nye áamá-phutha á-bálúlékiile,
 if 6-some 6-error 6SUBJ-be.major.TAM

ngéké sí-khíphe lencwáadi
 never we-publish this.book

‘If (some) mistakes are major, we will never publish this book.’

In (21b), *amanye amaphuta* ‘some mistakes’ appears preverbally. The sentence carries a presupposition of existence with respect to mistakes.

Note that it is not a matter of specificity that determines whether the subject can be preverbal. For instance, assume a context where someone comes into the room, and sees that everyone is very quiet. The person then asks: ‘Why are you so quiet?’ The answer can be either (22a) or (22b), when it is not clear exactly which baby is sleeping.

(22) a. úm-ntwaana ú-lééle.
 1-baby 1SUBJ-sleep.TAM

OR b. kú-khóna úm-ntwana ó-lééle
 17SUBJ-there 1-baby REL.1SUBJ-sleep.TAM

‘A baby is sleeping.’

Crucially, in this case, there is definitely a presupposition of existence concerning the baby. Note that here, it also cannot be said that the sentence is about babies (i.e., the preverbal subject is not the topic).

It should be noted that in the case of *no one*, the logical subject must follow the negative form of *-khona*, as in (23a,b):

(23) a. Akúkhó muuntu ó-fíkiile
 there.is.no 1.person REL.1SUBJ-come.TAM

‘No one came.’

b. Akúkhó muuntu ó-bambê: ú-Siipho
 there.is.no 1.person REL.1SUBJ-catch.TAM 1-Sipho

‘No one caught Sipho.’

We follow Karttunen and Peters (1979) in treating the negation in (23a,b) as involving “denial” or “metalinguistic” negation, which always yields a sentence devoid of any presupposition.

4.3 Quantificational force of indefinites and its position

Leaving aside the question of whether the preverbal noun phrase can be interpreted as definite (which will necessarily carry the presupposition of existence), we turn now to the issue of the quantificational force of the indefinites. We follow Diesing (1992) and Tsai (2001) in assuming that indefinites can take up either a weak interpretation (i.e., it behaves like a variable) or a strong interpretation (i.e., it behaves like an existential quantifier). Take the indefinite noun phrase *some ghosts* in the examples in (14), repeated here as (24):

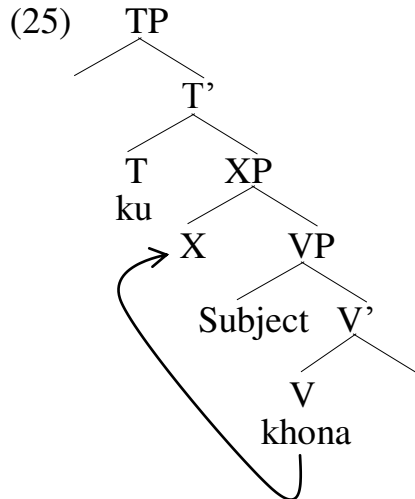
- (24) a. There are some ghosts in my house.
b. Some ghosts are in the pantry; the others are in the attic.

As Diesing points out, the two indefinite *some ghosts* do not have the same status in these two sentences. *Some ghosts* in (24b), the one which carries a presupposition of existence, is a “strong” indefinite. That is, it behaves like an existential quantifier (i.e., it undergoes Q(uantifier) R(aising)). On the other hand, *some ghosts* in (24a) is a weak indefinite, which does not carry an existence presupposition. It behaves like a variable. Since it is a variable, and not an existential quantifier, it cannot undergo QR; instead, it needs a binder. In the absence of any overt binder, existential closure can come to the rescue (see Heim 1982 among others) providing it with existential force.

Turning back to the data in Zulu, as we have seen in (21a,b), when there is a presupposition of existence, the indefinite noun phrase can either follow *kukhona* or it can be in the preverbal position. If we were to align the presuppositional reading with the strong reading (following Diesing 1992), it means that the indefinite noun phrase in Zulu can behave like a typical quantifier (e.g., in undergoing Quantifier Raising).

The question that arises is why the preverbal position cannot host a weak reading of indefinites. This can in fact follow from the variable property of the indefinite. As we have noted above, when an indefinite is not presuppositional, it is a variable, which needs a quantificational binder. Though such cases can rely on existential closure to provide an existential operator to bind the variable, the indefinite needs to appear in a position where the existential force associated with existential closure can bind it.

Consider now the structure of a *kukhona* sentence as in (25) (following Buell & de Dreu 2013), where *khona* is treated as a verb (see also Zeller (2013)).



Given (25), a question arises concerning the c-command domain of existential closure. To answer this question, we need to review a number of basic assumptions. First, following Julien (2002) among others, we assume that Zulu verbs do not move all the way to T, but rather to a (mood) projection between TP and VP, and we mark this project as X.¹² Second, we follow Tsai (2001), who argues that existential closure is associated with the predicate (i.e., the verb), and that the movement of the verb extends the domain of existential closure. In other words, in a typical sentence with verb movement in Zulu, anything within the VP would be bound by existential closure, because the verb has moved up to X.

Consider now (25). The movement of *khona* extends the domain of existential closure to the VP. The existential force associated with the existential closure therefore binds the post-*ku-khona* subject variable, yielding a weak reading of an indefinite. On the other hand, if the subject appears preverbally, in the Spec of TP, it is above the c-command domain of existential closure. Therefore, it cannot be bound by existential closure. If the subject is an indefinite, it can undergo QR, yielding a strong reading. But this strong reading is associated with the presupposition of existence.

¹² The X hosts the final vowel, and that is why in Buell & de Dreu (2013), the projection is called the FSP.

5 Conclusions

We have shown in this paper that preverbal subjects are not equivalent to Topics in Zulu. Further, characterizing preverbal subjects as being [-Focus], Zerbian's (2006) proposal for Northern Sotho, also fails to cover the range of data we have. In our exploration of preverbal indefinites, we argue that the notion that matters is presupposition of existence. This differs from the standard notion of 'givenness', which requires contextually mentioned elements in the discourse.

In the case of indefinites, we see that they can be either quantificational or variable-like, and thus they can have strong and weak readings respectively. The strong reading is associated with the presupposition of existence. In Zulu, weak indefinites cannot appear preverbally, because they are not in a position which is within the domain of existential closure. We appeal to Tsai's (2001) analysis and show that the limited verb movement in Zulu leads to necessarily a "strong" subject: either a strong indefinite or a definite subject, both of which will yield a presupposition of existence concerning the element in the subject position.

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