

# THE SETSWANA INDEPENDENT PRONOUN, AN INTEGRAL CONSTITUENT OR A RESUMPTIVE APPENDAGE TO LEXICAL NP TOPIC?

by

**Setumile Morapedi**

English Department, University of Botswana, Private Bag 00 703, Gaborone,  
Botswana

Email: morapedi@mopipi.ub.bw: Cell: 00267 72 644 874

## **Abstract**

*This paper examines the pronoun occurring in verb complex in Setswana declarative sentences, showing their referential agreement with externally occurring topic noun phrases. It has been found out that this pronoun has the same distribution as a lexical object noun phrase, and thus giving the impression that it is the grammatical subject of the sentence. Similarly, when the pronoun occurs in preverbal position, there is a tendency for it to be viewed as a canonical subject pronoun. The paper argues that the pronoun in this position is an independent resumptive pronoun which agrees with its referent which is a lexical topic NP.*

**Key words:** neuter constructions, verbal extensions, argument structure alternations, morpho-syntax, morphological processes, intransitive, linked parallel structures, association of semantic roles

## **1.0 Introduction**

The paper discusses the empirical distribution of independent pronouns in Setswana. It is shown that although the pronouns sometimes seem to have the same distribution as lexical subject and object noun phrases in the clause internal positions, they are actually independent resumptive pronouns in agreement with their respective referents which are lexical NP topics occurring clause-externally. Givón (1976) has made observations about this kind of occurrence that the subjects and objects tend to be topical in Bantu Languages. His view is that, the subject and object markers evolved from resumptive subject and object pronouns that were used with topicalised subjects and objects, and that over time they were cliticized to their verbs. Pronouns are noun-like elements. They replace nouns to perform the nominal functions. In that case, they carry all the features (e.g. person, number) from the noun they replace. The bond between a pro-form and its antecedent may either be of co-reference or substitution. Substitute pronouns such as *ene*,

*wena, lona, nna, rona,* and *bone* refer to a situation where the pro-form stands alone repeating the occurrence of the antecedent. They are usually used for emphasis or contrast. Bresnan and Mchombo (1987) and Bresnan (2001: 153) observed that such independent pronouns are used only to introduce new topics for contrast. The extent to which emphasis is made is usually achieved by having the pronouns occurring in apposition to nouns that function as subject or object and through change of word order, Cole (1955: 127). Their use corresponds very often to that of a stressed pronoun or noun in English. Such forms must be carefully distinguished from subject and object markers, such as *o* or *ba*, which have been incorrectly treated as pronouns in the earlier studies of Setswana Grammar. Pronouns are independent words, whereas subject and object markers are formatives or rather morphemes as they cannot stand alone. Subject and object markers must be attached to stems in order to form complete expressions.

Co-reference means the bond of cross-reference between two items or expressions which refer to the same thing, (Quirk 1985: 263). There are contexts where the subject and object marker occur in the presence of either a subject or object, where the subject or the object is either in the right or left dislocation. This is so because Setswana is a pro-drop language. A right dislocated phrase is a nominal phrase in clause-final position. It is indexed with a pronominal element inside the clause. It has an after-thought reading. It is phrased separately phonologically (Riedel 2009: 68). This means the dislocation is achieved through tonal evidence, where there is a pause immediately after it has been uttered. The information that I am providing is based on my own judgement as a native speaker of Setswana.

### **1.1 In the literature**

In the literature, the phenomenon of left and right dislocation is relatively common among Bantu languages, Bresnan and Mchombo (1987); Van der Spuy (1993); (Zeller 2012). Mutaka (1995) and Barker (2003) have observed this in Kinande where the object marker is linked to the left dislocation of the nominal phrase. Bergvall (1985; 1987) and Mugane (1997) noted the complementary distribution of the object marker and the overt nominal argument. Sabina (1986) and Morimoto (2000) have argued for this kind comparable analysis for Kirundi, so has Rubanza (1988) for Kiyaka. We can, therefore, make a prediction that the presence of an object marker in Bantu languages has the effect of rendering the nominal argument more of *topic* than a grammatical object. The object marker literally takes object NP out of the canonical object position of the sentence. This means that the discourse notions, such as *topic* usually occur on the outside of the internal clause structure, and the noun phrase that agrees with the object marker determines

the relevant agreement features. In this paper, it is shown that Setswana as a pro-drop language, has the left and right dislocation where there is a co-referential relation between the independent pronouns with their antecedent. Naturally, the observation that the nominal argument can be omitted in the presence of the SM (subject marker) and OM (object marker) has raised questions about the nature of the relation between them and the nominal argument in grammatical structure. In many Bantu studies, a lot of evidence has been given to show that the SM and OM should be analysed as pronominal arguments that get incorporated in the verbal morphology. The nominal arguments are *topic* elements allowed to occur by discourse factors (cf. Bresnan and Mchombo 1986, 1987; Demuth and Johnson (1989); Omar (1990); Rubanza (1988) and Mchombo (2004: 20).

## 1.2 Setswana as Bantu language

Setswana is a Bantu language spoken in Botswana and other neighbouring countries, such as South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Zambia. In Botswana, it is widely spoken by native speakers, as well as native speakers of other languages such as Ikalanga, Otjiherero, Shiyeyi, Thimbukushu, Sesubia, Shekgalagari and Sesarwa (Batibo, Mathangwane and Tsonope (2003: 45). It belongs to the Bantu branch of the Niger-Congo language family. It is a member of the South Eastern branch, falling within the Sotho language sub-group together with two closely related languages, Southern Sotho and Northern Sotho (SIL 2005). Setswana, like many Bantu languages, has a tonal system. The language has two significant tonal values, high (H) and low (L). These tone levels can be combined within a syllable thus forming contour tones, (Cole 1955: 54) and Department of African Languages and Literature (2000: 32). In Setswana, tone is semantically significant as it helps to distinguish between different words with different meanings that may be segmentally the same as in the verb, *bóna* ‘see’ and the pronoun, *bóna* ‘them’.

## 2. Noun Phrase Classes

Setswana, like other Bantu languages, has a nominal system according to which nouns are marked for class on prefixes which combine with the noun stem to form the noun. Each noun class contains either singular or plural nouns. For instance, if something is noun class 1, then it is necessarily singular (and 3<sup>rd</sup> person), if it is noun class 2, then it is plural of class 1. The pairing goes on like that up to class 10. Classes 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 include exceptions to pairing in the sense that they have no distinction between singular and plural. Plurals of classes 11 and 12 are found in class 10 because they share the same prefixes with this class. Class prefix 15 *go-*, which combines with stems to make infinitive verbs, and the locative class prefixes 16 (*fa-*), 17 (*go-*

) and 18 (mo-), do not have plural counterparts (Cole 1955: 230). In the noun class system, nouns usually agree with their respective subject and object markers, pronouns and demonstratives.

In the Setswana noun class system, every noun belongs to a specific grammatical class. Nouns are traditionally classified according to Meinhof's (1899) numbering system of nominal classification structure for Proto-Bantu, (Guthrie 1967), (Welmers 1973), (Carstens 1993), (Newmann 1999: 29). Meeussen (1967) reconstructed the noun class system of Proto-Bantu. Out of the twenty-three noun classes constructed, Setswana like most Bantu languages has eighteen (Guthrie 1967). Noun classes play a very important role in the agreement patterning found between the noun phrase and prefixes attached to the verb, as well as those that do not form the integral part of the sentence, as in pronominal and *topic*, (Morapedi 2006: 49).

The general conception about clause structure in Bantu is that the languages have the order SVO (subject, verb, object) (Watters 1989). For instance, in a simple sentence with a transitive verb, the grammatical subject precedes the verb while the object follows the verb, as in (1).

- (1) Ba-nna            **ba**-j-a            bo-gobe.            [unmarked]  
       2-man            2SM-eat-M        14-porridge  
       'The men are eating porridge.'

## 2.1 Subject

Syntactically, the subject in Setswana immediately precedes the verb in the unmarked sentence structure and is followed by the SM, which is a bound morpheme prefixed to the verb. The nominal subject needs to appear before the verb. The subject marker SM which appears in the verbal morphology, immediately after the subject shares the grammatical features of the subject. For instance, the subject agrees with the SM in terms of person, class, and number. That is why the SM is usually described as an agreement marker. It is obligatory for all finite clauses to have a subject marker. For instance, in example (2) below, the class 2 noun *banna* 'men' triggers obligatory class 2 agreement concretely realized in terms of plural number, person (3<sup>rd</sup>) in the form of the prefix *ba-* on the verb *ja* 'eat'.

- (2) Ba-nna            **ba**-j-a            bo-gobe.            [unmarked]  
       2-man            2SM-eat-M        14-porridge  
       'The men are eating porridge.'

The subject marker *ba-* in example (2) agrees with the class of the noun *banna* 'men', as shown in the morpheme-by-morpheme translation.

However, because Setswana is a '*pro-drop*' language, the subject may be omitted in a context in which its referent can be recovered, as in (3). The SM

*ba-* remains a grammatical agreement marker here in the sense that it shows agreement between the understood human subject (indicated by null pronominal argument *pro*) and the verb.

- (3) [pro] Ba-j-a                      bo-gobe.                      [no lexical subject]  
       2SM - eat-M                      14-porridge  
       ‘They are eating porridge’

The subject may also appear in the right periphery of the sentence as a topicalised afterthought, as in (4).

- (4) [pro]Ba-j-a                      bo-gobe,                      ba-nna. [‘post-posed’ subject’]  
       2SM-eat-M                      14-porridge                      2-man  
       ‘They are eating porridge, the men.’

In example (4), agreement holds between the subject marker and the null pronominal (*pro*). The clause-external noun phrase *banna* ‘men’ is linked by co-reference to *pro* in the clause and hence has agreement features in common with the subject marker. Examples (3) and (4) illustrate that according to the analysis adopted here, which treats Setswana as a *pro*-drop language, the SM functions as an agreement marker on the verb regardless of whether there is a lexicalised clause-internal subject or not. In *pro*-drop constructions, the SM carries the grammatical features that enable the hearer to retrieve the intended referent. When there is no lexicalised clause-internal subject, the null subject (*pro*) carries the thematic role associated with the subject position.

## 2.2 Object

In Setswana, a simple sentence with a transitive verb has the object nominal occurring after the verb, and is adjacent to the verb, as in (5a) below. The object cannot be left out of a transitive sentence without destroying its grammaticality, as in (5b), unless it is pronominally represented by an object marker (OM). (See examples in (6) below). Therefore, unlike the SM, which is obligatory in all finite clauses, whether the subject is there or not, the OM is not always required, as shown by its obligatory absence in (5c) below. This represents the unmarked case in which the NP *bogobe* ‘porridge’ is interpreted as a straightforward, clause-internal object.

- (5a) Mo-nna                      o-j-a                      bo-gobe                      [unmarked]  
       1-man                      1SM-eat-M                      14-porridge  
       ‘The man is eating porridge.’
- (5b) \*Mo-nna                      o-j-a                      [no object]  
       1-man 1SM-eat-M

- (5c) Mo-nna o-\*bo-j-a bo-gobe. [no OM required]  
 1-man 1SM-14OM-eat-M 14-porridge

When an OM occurs in a sentence, it is a bound morpheme immediately preceding the verb stem, and is preceded by the tense marker (if one occurs), which in turn is preceded by the subject marker. The object marker may be incorporated into any transitive verb and carries the same class, person and number features as the object, as in the examples in (6a) and (6b).

In some cases, the OM may co-occur in the sentence with a core-referential clause-external noun phrase in the left/right periphery as indicated by the high tone mark it receives, as in (6a) and (6b), respectively. The underlining shows co-referentiality between the *topic* and resumptive pronoun.

- (6a) Bó-góbé, mo-nna o-a-bo-j-a.  
 14-porridge 1-man 1SM-PRES-14OM-eat-M  
 ‘Porridge, the man is eating it.’ [pre-verbal object + OM]
- (6b) Mo-nna o-a-bo-j-a, bó-góbé.  
 1-man 1SM-PRES-14OM-eat-M 14-porridge  
 ‘The man is eating it, porridge.’ [post-verbal object + OM]
- (6c) Mó-íná, o-a-bo-j-a. [OM]  
 1-man 1SM-PRES-14OM-eat-M  
 ‘The man, he is eating it.’
- (6d) \*Mo-nna o-a- \*bo-gobe j-a,  
 1-man 1SM-PRES 14-porridge eat-M [no object NP in OM position]

## 2.3 Setswana Pronouns

There are three types of pronouns in Setswana, the absolute, the demonstrative and the qualificative. The absolute and the demonstrative constitute pronouns proper and are primitive in the sense that they have not been derived from any other part of speech. In contrast, the qualificative includes all words of qualificative type when acting as subject or object in a sentence, and thus performing a substantival function, (Cole 1955: 127).

### 2.3.1 Absolute Pronouns

The absolute pronoun is the type that may stand alone as subject or object in a sentence. It has different forms for the grammatical positions, as in the first person singular, *nna* ‘me’, the second person singular, *wena* ‘you’, and the

third person singular, *ene* ‘him/her’, and the third person plural, *bone* ‘them’, as in (7a), (7b), and (7c) below. It is primarily emphatic in significance and is often used to show contrast.

- (7a) Nna ke a j-a.  
I-am-PRES-eat-M  
‘I, am eating.’
- (7b) Wena o a ja.  
You-are-PRES-eat-M  
‘You, are eating.’
- (7c) Ene o a ja.  
He-is-PRES-eat-M  
‘He is eating.’
- (7d) Bone ba a ja.  
They-are-PRES-eat-M  
‘They are eating.’

### 2.3.2 Demonstrative Pronouns

The demonstrative pronoun in Setswana is also arranged according to grammatical positions, as in the first person demonstrative, *yo*, ‘this one’, indicating somebody near the speaker, the second person demonstrative, *yoo/seo*, ‘that one’ indicating somebody/something near the hearer, and the third person demonstrative, *baotseo* ‘those ones’, pointing at some people/some things that are far away from both the speaker and the hearer. Consider the examples in (8a) (8b) and (8c) below

- (8a) Mo-sadi yo  
1-woman 1-this  
‘This woman’
- (8b) Mo-sadi yoo  
1-woman 1-that  
‘That woman’
- (8c) Ba-sadi ba-le  
1-woman 1-those  
‘Those women’

The third type of pronoun in Setswana is the qualificative which usually follows the substantive with which they show concordial agreement. There are five different types of qualificative pronoun, such as, the adjective pronoun, *yo moleele*, ‘the tall one’; the enumerative pronoun, *bangwe* ‘some people’; the quantitative pronoun, *botlhe* ‘all’; the possessive pronoun, *wame* ‘mine’; and the relative pronoun, *sesebogale* ‘the sharp one’. Consider the examples in (9a) through to (9d) below.

- |      |  |                           |                          |
|------|--|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| (9a) | Mo-sadi<br>1-woman<br>‘The tall woman’ | yo-moleele<br>1DEM-tall   | [adjective]              |
| (9b) | Ba-sadi<br>2-woman<br>‘Some women’     | ba-ngwe<br>2DEM-some      | [enumerative]            |
| (9c) | Ba-sadi<br>2-woman<br>‘All the women’  | bo-tlhe<br>2DEM-all       | [quantitative]           |
| 9d)  | Ba-na<br>2-child<br>‘My children’      | ba-me<br>2DEM-my          | [possessive]             |
| (9e) | Se-lepe<br>7-axe<br>‘The sharp axe.’   | se-sebogale<br>7DEM-sharp | [relative qualificative] |

### 3. Independent pronoun

The independent pronouns (IDP) in Setswana seem to have the same distribution pattern as a lexical NP. When an IDP occurs clause-internally in the seemingly subject position, like a subject, it needs to occur with the subject marker (SM), as in (10a), in the same way that a lexical subject does (cf. examples (9) above).

- |       |  |                                 |                                |
|-------|--|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| (10a) | <b>E-ne</b> o-bits-a<br>1-IDP 1SM-call-M | ba-na <sup>1</sup> .<br>2-child | [IDP as subject/topic pronoun] |
|       | ‘She is calling the children.’           |                                 |                                |

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<sup>1</sup> Language-internal evidence as well as comparison with other Bantu languages prove that the stem for child should rather be /-ana/ as in the Setswana singular form Ngwana, which obviously derives historically from mu-ana → ngu-ana (by **m** Velarization before the back vowel [u] → ngw-ana (by vowel **u** gliding before another vowel)



(10a) **É-né**, [*Pro*]o-bits-a ba-na. [IDP as topic outside clause]  
 1-IDP 1SM-call-M 2-child  
 ‘Her, she is calling the children.’

(10c) **Mósádi,e-ne** o-bits-a ba-na. [IDP as resumptive pronoun]  
 1-woman 1-IDP 1SM-call-M 2-child  
 ‘The woman, she (herself) is calling the children.’

In example (10a), the IDP occurring in clause-internal subject position is discourse prominent, since Setswana is a *pro*-drop language. In other words, the presence of the subject pronoun is only required if the speaker wants to draw the hearer’s attention to the referent in some way. In example (10b), the IDP occurs as clause-external topic, with a *pro*- subject within the clause (cf. examples (6) and (7)). Example (10c), has a lexical NP topic with resumptive IDP subject *ene* (cf. (9a) and (9b)). The SM in the examples is (10) is still required in the clause as an agreement marker. Observe that the SM carries agreement features matching those of the seemingly clause internal IDP, resumptive IDP and its referent, the topicalised lexical NP *mosadi* ‘woman’, in (10a), (10b) and (10c), respectively.

Similarly, the object IDP occurs in the post-verbal position, where it is usually interpreted as a canonical object pronoun, as in (11a), and can also function as a resumptive pronoun connected to the *topic* NP (11b). When the object is represented by the OM within the sentence, the object IDP is topicalised and thus occurs clause externally, as indicated by the pause preceding the IDP in (11c). When the OM co-occurs with both the object IDP and the lexical object, they are both are topicalised, as indicated by the pause (indicated by a comma) preceding the object and the IDP in example (11d). The anaphoric relation between the independent pronoun and the antecedent is non-local to the clause structure because their primary function is in discourse. That is, the object marker like the object noun phrase it agrees with is non-local (external) and therefore is in anaphoric agreement.

(11a) Mo-nna o-rob-il-e **só-nè** [IDP as object]  
 1-man 1SM-break-PERF-M 7-IDP  
 ‘The man has broken it.’

(11a) Mo-nna o-rob-il-e **só-né** sé-lépé.  
 1-man 1SM-break-PERF-M 7-IDP 7-axe.  
 ‘The man has broken it, the axe.’ [object IDP with topicalised lexical object]

(11b) Mo-nna o-**sé**-rob-il-e, **só-né**.

1-man            1SM-7OM-break-PERF-M    7-IDP  
 ‘The man has broken it, itself.’ [topicalised object IDP with OM]

- (11c) Mo-nna            o-sé-rob-il-e,                            só-né sé-lépé.  
 1-man            1SM-7OM-break-PERF-M    7-IDP 7-axe.  
 ‘The man has broken it, the axe itself.’ [Top. obj. IDP & lexical obj. with OM]

In both (11c) and (11d), the OM is performing the resumptive function in the sense that it is connected to the external IDP and lexical object. Examples (11c) and (11d) would be ill-formed without the *topic/afterthought* pause. Therefore, this analysis correctly predicts that the IDP alternates with the OM in that both cannot simultaneously occur clause-internally and neither can occur with a clause-internal object.

Prosodic features (for example, a pause, which is indicated by the comma in these examples) distinguish constructions like (12a) with a clause-internal object marker from constructions like (12b) in which the nominal expression *bogobe* ‘porridge’ is in the clause-external right periphery. Thus, the nominal itself could be displaced to postverbal position, as in (12).

- (12a) Mo-nna            o-j-a            bo-gobe            [unmarked]  
 1-man            1SM-eat-M    14-porridge  
 ‘The man is eating porridge.’

- (12b) Monna            o-a-bo-j-a            bo-gobe.  
 1man            1a-OM-eat-M 14-porridge  
 ‘The man eats it, porridge.’

- (12c) Bó-góbé,            mo-nna            o-a-bo-j-a.  
 14-porridge    1-man            1SM-PRES-14OM-eat-M  
 ‘Porridge, the man is eating it.’            [pre-verbal object + OM]

- (12d) Mo-nna            o-a-bo-j-a,                            bó-góbé.  
 1-man            1SM-PRES-14OM-eat-M    14-porridge  
 ‘The man is eating it, porridge.’            [post-verbal object + OM]

- (12e) Mó-íná,            o-a-bo-j-a.                            [OM]  
 1-man            1SM-PRES-14OM-eat-M  
 ‘The man, he is eating it.’

- (12f) \*Mo-nna    o-a- \*bo-gobe            j-a,

1-man 1SM-PRES 14-porridge eat-M [no object NP in OM position]

In (12c) and (12d), the nominal object occurring outside the clause, performs the *topic*/afterthought function, respectively. The OM is in co-referential with the *topics* and therefore functions as a clause internal resumptive pronoun. The omission of the comma or *topic* pause in example (12c) results in ungrammaticality. In other words, the OM cannot co-occur with a clause-internal object, which demonstrates that it is an incorporated pronominal. In (12d) the object noun phrase *bogobe* ‘porridge’ has been omitted and is represented in the clause by the resumptive pronoun (OM). Further, although the object marker is recognised as an argument, its position cannot be occupied by a lexical NP because this position is restricted to incorporated pronominals. This is shown by the ungrammaticality of (12f) where the noun *bogobe* ‘porridge’ appears immediately before the verb *ja* ‘eat’ in OM position.

In sum, the OM as a pronominal morpheme serves as the complement of the verb when the object is omitted or displaced to a clause-external position (Bresnan and Mchombo 1987: 757).

(13a) Masego o j-a bone, bo-gobe.  
 1a-Masego 1SM-eat-M 14-it 14-porridge  
 ‘Masego eats it, porridge’

(13b) ’O-a-apay-a bo-gobe, Masego  
 1SM-PRES-M 14-porridge 1a-Masego  
 ‘She is cooking porridge, Masego’

Although the subject nominal can be displaced to appear post-verbally, it cannot disrupt the verb-object sequence. Thus the sequence in (13) is ungrammatical, as in (14).

(14) \* O-a-boja, Masego, bo-gobe,  
 1aSM-PRES, 1a Masego 14-porridge

The basic word-order is altered when the object marker (OM) is included in the verbal morphology. The OM duplicates the grammatical features of the nominal functioning as the object. When it occurs, the OM is attached immediately preceding the verb stem, as shown in (14). Therefore, with the inclusion of the OM, the nominal argument can be freely ordered with respect to each other and with respect to the verbal unit, as in (15)

(15a) Dineo o-bona di-pudi  
 1aDineo 1SM-see-M 10-goat  
 ‘Dineo sees goats’

(15b) Dineo            o-a-di-bon-a                            di-podi.  
 1a-Dineo        1SM-PRES-OM-see-M            10-goat  
 ‘Dineo sees them, the goats’

(15c) Dineo            o-a-di-bon-a            tsone            di-pudi.  
 1aLorato        1aSM-10OM-see-M    10-them        10-goat  
 ‘Dineo sees them, the goats.’

They can also be dropped without inducing ungrammaticality, as in example 16).

(16) Dineo        o-a-di-bon-a.                            [ Topic object dropped]  
 1aNeo        1SM-PRES-10OM-see-M  
 ‘Neo sees them.’

#### 4. Conclusion

The paper has explored the occurrence of independent pronouns lexical NP in the seemingly clause internal positions as well as outside the clause as dislocated elements. It has been shown that they have topical significance in either of the positions, where there is a referential relation between independent pronoun and the lexical NP. It has also been demonstrated that when the lexical NP occurs non-locally (clause externally), there is connection between it and the subject or object marker in the basic clause, where there is a pause with tonal features. An explanation has also been forwarded that when the independent pronoun occurs in either the seemingly subject or object position, it should not be incorrectly interpreted as the subject or object, like the pronouns (he and she) in English. They should be considered to be pronominals in co-referential relation with either overt or covert lexical *topic* NPs (that are either visible or invisible). It has been emphasised that a distinction be made between the subject and object markers and the independent pronouns. The recommendation came about because both the subject markers and the independent pronouns are often incorrectly analysed as subjects simply because they visibly occur before the verbs or after the verb.

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