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Distribution and Interpretation of Overt Noun Phrases in Gokana Clause Structure: A Government-Binding Analysis

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Abstract:
Noun phrases perform both thematic and grammatical functions. A principled analysis of their role within clause structure and discourse context is necessary for a proper understanding of language structure. This paper analyzed the distribution and interpretation of overt noun phrases in Gokana clause-structure within the framework of Government-Binding Theory. The paper found that Gokana overt Noun phrases are classifiable into anaphors, pronouns, and referential expressions. The paper showed that Gokana anaphors are of two types: reflexives and reciprocals. The reflexive noun phrase must have an antecedent in order to be interpretable which must agree with the reflexive in the nominal grammatical features of person and number. The paper found that the antecedent/reflexive pair is immune to gender agreement as the reflexive does not morphologize gender contrasts in the language. The paper claimed that a reflexive must be bound in its governing category, and cannot precede but must always follow its binder. Thus, an antecedent must constituent command (C-command) the reflexive NP and not the reverse. The paper argued that Gokana reciprocals are subject to the same distribution and interpretive constraints as reflexives except that the reciprocal noun phrase is inherently plural and requires only a plural antecedent for its interpretation. The paper claimed that Gokana pronouns do not show gender contrasts and are not locally bound in their distribution but they inherently specify certain properties of the referent and may not require an antecedent in its minimal clause but may need contextual information for a complete determination of the referent .We noted that there is no form of binding on NPs that are referential expressions and they do not have any form of pronominal or anaphoric grammatical relation in their distribution and interpretation within Gokana clause – structure.

Keywords: Gokana, anaphors, reflexives, reciprocals, pronouns, referential expressions, noun phrases, clause structure

1. Introduction

Gokana is spoken in Gokana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria by approximately 200,000 people. It is closely related to Baan, Eleme, Tee and Kana. These Languages form a genetic unity and Williamson and Blench (2000:33) classify them in Delta - Cross of Cross River within the Bantoid – Cross of the East Benue - Congo branch of Benue – Congo.

This paper seeks to provide an objective and principled description of the distribution and interpretation of overt Noun Phrases within the Gokana clause structure with insights from Government – Binding Theory.

2. Methodology

The researcher collected data from fluent native speakers of Gokana with the help of field assistants. The researcher also relied on his intuition as a native speaker of the language but where any given set of data contradicted his intuition , direct oral interview was use to elicit comparative data from other native speakers of the language. Secondary sources of data such as texts and library materials were also utilized. These data were analyzed within the framework of Government – Binding Theory.

2.1. Defining Noun Phrases

Andrews (1985) asserts that Noun Phrases perform a range of semantic, pragmatic and grammatical functions. He argued that the semantic functions of the Noun Phrase interpret how the referent of an NP participates in the propositions conveyed by the sentence by either utilizing internal referents within the sentence or referents in the universe of discourse. Huddleston (1988) also states that Noun Phrases can be assigned certain semantic roles that determine logical relations within the structure of the sentence.

A number of studies, Awobuluyi (1978), Watters (1979), Simons (1982) and Isaac (2010) agree that Noun Phrases can perform pragmatic functions. The Pragmatic functions involves the choice of what NP constituent the speaker chooses to emphasize as new information over and above other constituents within the clause structure. It is attested that several focus strategies are used to achieve pragmatic functions of the NP across languages.

Andrews(1985:64) claims that the grammatical functions of the NP determine the distribution of Noun Phrases within clause structure and sub – divided such functions into oblique, core and external functions.

The present study is concerned with the distribution and interpretation of overt Noun Phrases in sentence grammar. The types of overt Noun Phrases attested in the grammar of Gokana are categorized and analyzed in this paper.

3. Anaphors

Two types of anaphors are attested in the grammar of Gokana: reflexives and reciprocals. According to Crystal (1997:326) reflexives express the relationship in a construction where the subject and the object relate to the same entity. The syntactic devices used for the expression of reflexive meaning differ across languages. For instance, English utilizes reflexive pronouns to express this relationship while other languages use a variety of forms such as suffixes, case endings and word order in the expression of reflexive relationship within clause structure.

On the other hand, a number of scholars such as Crystal(1997), Haegeman (1996), Radford (1988), Riemsdjke and Williams(1986) agree that reciprocals constitute a class which express the meaning of mutual relationship within clause structure. We examine the distribution and interpretation of these sub–classes of anaphors in what follows:

3.1. Reflexives

The following reflexive Noun Phrases are attested in the grammar of Gokana:

1a)	nâbá	'myself'
b)	Obá	'yourself'
c)	abá	'himself/herself'

2a)	bęębá	'ourselves'
b)	boobá	'yourselves'
c)	babá	'themselves'

The difference between (1a – c) and (2a – c) is in terms of number distinction. All the reflexive NPs in (1a – c) are singular while those in (2a – c) are plural. Both (1a – c) and (2a –c) are categorized according to differences in grammatical person such as 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person contrasts. The issue of gender distinction is neutralized in the 3rd person as it is not morphologies in the grammar of Gokana. This explains why (1c) has the gloss 'himself/herself'

Reflexive NPs in Gokana exhibit the following features in their distribution and interpretation. Let us consider the following data:

3a)	Ledum	fé	abá	
	PN		Kill	himself
	'Ledum killed himself'			
b) *	Ledum	fé	obá	
	PN		kill	yourself
c) *	Ledum	fé	babá	
	PN		kill	themselves
d)	Gbara	a	fé	abá
	man		the	kill himself
	'the man killed himself'			
e)	Pabia		a	fé abá
	woman the		kill	herself
	'the woman killed herself'			

In (3a), the reflexive picks up its reference from the subject NP <u>Ledum</u>. This shows that the reflexive NP <u>abá</u> and the subject NP <u>Ledum</u> have the same referent. Thus the reflexive takes the subject NP as its antecedent. The reflexive NP and the subject NP must agree with respect to the nominal grammatical features of person and number. Observe that (3b) and (3c) are ungrammatical as a result of lack of agreement in the nominal features of person and number respectively. But (3d) and (3e) are grammatical because there is no grammaticalized gender distinction in Gokana.

The requirement that the Gokana reflexive NP and its antecedent agree in terms of their nominal grammatical features follows from the fact that the reflexive depends on the antecedent for its interpretation as the reflexive and the antecedent share their referent. The agreement in the nominal features constrains the grammar from generating a contradiction in the specification of the relevant properties for the selection of the referent. Thus, the reflexive is bound by its antecedent. The antecedent is the binder of the reflexive. The antecedents Ledum, Gbara a'the man' andPabia a 'the woman' bind the reflexives abá 'himself' and abá 'herself' in (3a), (3d) and (3e) respectively. Also observe that the reflexive NPs and their antecedents in this data are locally bound since they are clause – mates.

Within the minimal clause which serves as the binding domain, the antecedent NP must precede the reflexive NP. The Construction in (4) is in violation of this requirement:

4) *   abá   fé   Ledum
      himself kill   PN

The antecedent NP must constituent – command (henceforth c – command) the reflexive NP and not the reverse. According to Haegeman (1996:212), a node A, C – commands a node B, if and only if:

- A does not dominate B;
- B does not dominate A;
- The first branching node dominating A also dominates B.

Thus, a reflexive NP cannot have independent reference but must depend for its reference on the binder. The data in (4) is ungrammatical because in the distribution of the NPs, the antecedent NP depends on the reflexiveNP in violation of the binding principle which states that:

    A binds B, if and only if:

- A, C – commands B;
- A and B are coindexed

(Haegeman 1996)

    In the data in (5), the antecedent NP and the reflexive NP are coindexed in agreement with the binding principle.

5)   bái   mon   babái
      they   see   themselves
      'they saw themselves'

    The co - indexation provides the interpretation that there is a shared referent in the distribution of the antecedent and reflexive NPs within the minimal clause. Gokana reflexive NP is therefore A – bound in its governing category as the antecedent of the reflexive NP must be locally bound within the minimal clause.

A significant finding in the analysis of Gokana reflexives is the fact that gender as a nominal grammatical feature plays no role in the interpretation and distribution of reflexive NPs within the Gokana clause structure. The only attested reflexive nominal grammatical features are person and number.

3.2. Reciprocals

    The only reciprocal noun phrase attested in Gokana is ene 'each other'. Zua (1987:65) claims that it always appears as a last constituent in a minimal clause and it has a very restricted distribution.

Examples:

6a)   bá   nveèbá nè   ene
        they   help   give   REC
        'They helped each other'
b)   Ledum nè   Koo   dé   gyáá   ene
      PN   and   PN   eat   food   REC
      'Ledum and Koo ate each other's food'

    In Gokana the reciprocal NP ene is referentially dependent and it is subject to the same distribution and interpretative constraints as reflexives. The syntactic features of the Gokana reciprocal NP can be listed as follows:

- The reciprocal must have an antecedent.
- The reciprocal must occur in the same clause with its antecedent.
- The reciprocal must share the same nominal grammatical features of person and number with its antecedent.

By contrast, whereas the reflexive can have a singular antecedent in the nominal feature of number, the reciprocal NP is inherently plural and requires a plural antecedent for its interpretation as shown in (6a – b). A violation of this constraint is responsible for the ungrammaticality of (7a – b):

7a) *   Gbara a   nveèbá nè   ene
       man   the   help   give   REC
  b) *   Ledum de   gyáá   ene
       PN   eat   food   REC

    Interestingly, both reciprocals and reflexives do not select their referent from the universe of discourse but are constrained by syntactic principles to select their referent from the domain of sentence grammar. This justifies the classification of both phenomena as anaphoric noun phrases in Gokana syntax.

3.3. Pronouns

    Personal pronouns are attested as a type of noun phrase in Gokana. The nominal grammatical features of case, person and number apply to them. But they are immune to gender distinction as the Gokana personal pronouns do not contrast for gender marking as illustrated in the data in (8a – c):

8a) à   beé   dé   gyáá
     he   PST   eat   food
     ' he ate the food '
b)   à   beè   dé   gyáá
     she   PST   eat   food
     ' she ate the food '
c)   à   beè   dé   gyáá
     it   PST   eat   food
     ' it ate the food '

The personal pronouns in Gokana also subsume a set of independent forms which usually occur as answers to questions as shown in the constructions in (9a – c):

9a) méé   ní   e   a   beè   fé   gbógó   á   é   ?
     who   FOC   RCM   he   PST   kill   dog   the   EM
     ' who killed the dog ? '
b)   nda   (nì   e   m   beè   fé   gbógó   á   e)
     I   FOC   RCM   I   PST   kill   dog   the   EM
     ' I killed the dog '
c) * m   (nì   e   m   beè   fé   gbógó   á   e)
     I   FOC   RCM   I   PST   kill   dog   the   EM
     ' I killed the dog '

Observe that the construction in (9c) is ungrammatical because the dependent form of the pronoun m 'I' is used as response to the question in (9a). By contrast (9b) is grammatical because the appropriate independent form of the pronoun nda 'I' is used in response to the question.

Personal pronouns in Gokana are presented in Table 1 to show grammatical contrasts in the nominal features of case, person and number of the pronouns.

			Subject		Object		Possessive	
			Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
DEPENDENT FORM		1st person	m 'I'	è 'we'	m 'me'	i 'us'	nà 'my'	bẹẹ 'our'
		2nd person	ò 'you'	ò…i 'you'	ni 'you'	ii 'you' pl	o 'your'	boo 'your'
		3rd person	à he,she,it	ba 'they'	ẹ him,her,it	va 'them'	à 'his/her'	bà 'their'
INDEPENDENT FORM		1st person	Nda ' I '	beere 'we'	nda 'me'	beere 'us'	Nda 'my'	Mbèré 'our'
		2nd person	oro 'you'	booro 'you'	oro 'you'	booro 'you'	Nlo 'your'	Mbòóro 'your'
		3rd person	ẹrẹ 'he,she'	Baara 'they'	ẹrẹ 'him/her	baara 'them'	Ndẹ 'his/her	Mbàára 'their'

Table 1: Gokana Personal Pronouns

Let us consider the following data:

10a) Ledum beè   fé   ẹ
     PN   PST   kill   him
     ' Ledum killed him '
b)   Ledum beè   fé   abá
     PN   PST   kill   himself
     ' Ledum killed himself '

It is obvious that the interpretation of the pronoun in (10a) differs from that of the reflexive in (10b). The pronoun ẹ 'him' in (10a) must refer to an entity different from the subject NP Ledum, while the reflexive abá 'himself' in (10b) must take the subject NP Ledum as its referent. It cannot refer to any entity outside the sentence. Whereas the reflexive is bound in its governing category, the pronoun is free. Thus, pronouns are free within their governing category but may be bound outside their governing category as the data in (11) illustrates:

11) Jesus_i nyima koò   bá   gébee   fẹ   ẹ_i
     Jesus   know   that they   will   kill   him
     'Jesus knows that they will kill him'

Observe that the pronoun ẹ 'him' in (11) does not refer to bà 'they' which is the subject of its governing category, the subordinate clause (IP), but it rather takes its reference from Jesus which is the subject of the higher clause. This explains why the subject NP of the matrix clause is co-indexed with the object NP ẹ 'him' of the subordinate clause. This coindexation shows that the subject of the matrix clause is the referent of the object NP ẹ 'him' in the lower clause.

The left - dislocated construction in (12) also shows that even in a non – complex clause, the referent of a pronoun in Gokana cannot occur within the structure of the minimal IP or in an A – position within the minimal IP. Examine this data:

12)   Jesus$_i$ ba   gébeè   fẹ   ẹ$_i$
        Jesus   they   will   kill   him
        'Jesus, they will kill him'

Observe that the pronoun ẹ 'him' is coindexed with Jesus instead of ba 'they', the subject in SPEC I- bar position of the minimal IP. Jesus occurs in SPEC C – bar position which is an A – bar position. And therefore, cannot A – bind the pronoun.

Pronouns in Gokana therefore undergo A – bar binding since their binder cannot be found in an A – position of same minimal clause. It appears that a pronoun can find its referent from a higher clause or from the discourse domain but certainly not from the universe of discourse which seems more of a pragmatic than syntactic constraint as its referent is beyond the domain of the grammar of the minimal IP.

The distribution and interpretation of Gokana personal pronouns therefore clearly contrast with those of the anaphors: whereas an anaphor is bound in its governing category, a pronoun is free in its governing category but may be bound elsewhere.

Unlike anaphors that need an antecedent for their interpretation, pronouns do not require an antecedent. But pronouns inherently specify certain properties of the referent and may need contextual information for a complete determination of the referent. This explains why (10a) repeated here as (13) is interpretable and grammatical without an antecedent in the vicinity of its governing IP:

13)   Ledum   beè   fẹ   ẹ
        PN   PST   kill   him
        'ledum killed him'

3.4. Referential Expressions

Referential expressions (hence forth R – expressions) in Gokana refer to noun phrases that are inherently referential, such as labels for entities in the universe of discourse. R – expressions have independent reference and do not require an antecedent. They are also not bound within sentence grammar or the discourse domain. They freely select their referent from the universe of discourse.

Consider the data in (14)

14)   Ledum   beè   mòn   a   vígà
        PN   PST   see   his   brother
        'Ledum saw his brother'
b)   Ledum   beè   dá   koò   a   vígà   beè   zari   faà
        PN   PST   hear   that   his   brother PST   buy   motor
        'Ledum heard that his brother bought a car'

Observe that the R – expressions Ledum and a vígà 'his brother' in (14a) have independent reference. They do not share an anaphoric or co – referential relation. Both NPs are free and do not tolerate any form of binding. Their referent can freely be determined from the universe of discourse which is absolutely free from the constraint of sentence grammar. Similarly, all the underlined R – expressions in the complex sentence in (14b) also make independent reference in their distribution. There is no form of binding and they do not share any pronominal or anaphoric relation in their interpretation.

Thus, this analysis agrees with Haegeman (1996) that R – expressions do not tolerate any A – binding: they must be free. In contrast to pronouns which must be free locally, but may be bound outside their GC, R – expressions must be free everywhere.

4. Feature Matrices for Overt – NPs

Chomsky(1982) proposes that the typology of NPs should be reconsidered in terms of syntactic primitives. Following this, Gokana overt NPs are analyzed in line with the feature matrices as follows:

- Reflexives and Reciprocals [+Anaphor, - Pronominal]
- Personal Pronouns [-Anaphors, + Pronominal]
- R – expressions [-Anaphors, - Pronominal]

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have analyzed the distribution and interpretation of overt noun phrases in Gokana within the framework of Government - Binding Theory. We found that three types of overt noun phrases: anaphors, pronouns and referential expressions are attested in the grammar of Gokana. The paper showed that Gokana anaphors are sub divided into reflexive and reciprocals. We found that a reflexive must agree with its antecedent in the nominal grammatical categories of person and number but the antecedent/reflexive pair is immune to agreement in the nominal grammatical feature of gender as it is evident in the grammar that the reflexive does not morphologize gender contrasts in the language.

The paper claims that in terms of distribution, a reflexive noun phrase must be bound in its governing category. The paper also found that in terms of linear sequence a reflexive cannot precede but must always follow its binder which explains why case distinction is not considered in the linear distribution of a reflexive noun phrase within the minimal sentence. Thus, an antecedent must C – command the reflexive NP and not the reverse.

The paper found that Gokana reciprocals are subject to the same distribution and interpretive constraints as reflexives except that the reciprocal noun phrase is inherently plural and requires a plural antecedent for its interpretation.

The paper identified two sets of personal pronouns in the language: the dependent and independent pronouns. Whereas the dependent pronouns occur in constructions; the independent pronouns are only used in context as answers to questions.The paper found that pronouns are also immune to gender distinctions in Gokana just like anaphors. But in their distribution, pronouns are not locally bound; they are free in their governing category but are bound within the discourse context.

We claimed that the Gokana pronouns inherently specify certain properties of the referent and may not necessarily require an antecedent in its clause but may need contextual information for a complete determination of the referent. We noted that there is no form of binding on NPs that are Referential Expressions and they do not have any form of pronominal or anaphoric grammatical relation in their distribution and interpretation.

The paper recommended that the typology of NPs should be in terms of syntactic primitives and categorized Gokana overt NPs as: reflexives and reciprocals[+ Anaphors, - Pronominal], personal pronouns [- Anaphor, + Pronominal] and R – expressions [- Anaphor, - Pronominal].

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