

ZULU PRONOUNS AND THE STRUCTURE OF DISCOURSE

Euphrasia Kunene
Department of Linguistics
University of California, Los Angeles

1. Introduction¹

Zulu, a Southern Bantu language of the Nguni group spoken mainly in Zululand, has a variety of pronominal forms² that can be used in place of or together with a coreferent noun. The coexistence of a noun and its coreferent pronoun(s) in a sentence is not a syntactically redundant phenomenon in Zulu. Rather, the choice of a particular pattern of coexistence is determined by the discourse context, i.e., what the speaker assumes that the hearer knows. The constructions that will be used to illustrate noun-pronoun(s) coexistence involve subjects, direct and indirect objects and reflexives.

2. Subject Pronouns

Consider the following sentences:

(1) umfana u-funa³ ukudla.

boy he-want food

'The boy wants food.'

(2) u-funa ukudla.

he-want food

'He wants food.'

¹I am indebted to Talmy Givón for comments on an earlier draft of this manuscript.

²These can be morphologically classified into bound (dependent) and unbound (independent) morphemes. The exhaustive list of the proforms is found in the appendix.

The bound morphemes (anaphoric pronouns) are attached to the verb while the unbound ones are not. I will use Pro for unbound pronouns; SVA for subject-verb-agreement pronouns and OVA for object-verb-agreement

³Various researchers have suggested that the bound prefixes arise from pronouns (cf. Givón [1975a], Keenan [1975], Moravcsik [1970]). SVA's are obligatory/automatic, while OVA's are optional.

- (3) uSipho yena u-funa ukudla.
 Sipho he he-want food
 '_____ but Sipho (himself) wants food.'
- (4) Yena u-funa ukudla.
 he he-want food
 '_____ but he (himself) wants food.'
- (5) Yena uSipho u-funa ukudla.
 he Sipho he-want food
 '_____ but he, Sipho (himself), wants food.'

In sentence (1) the subject 'boy' is overtly expressed. Therefore, this sentence can be used in a situation where the hearer cannot predict what the subject will be. This may be characterized by the relatively neutral question such as:

- (6) a. What's happening?
 b. What's the matter?

When the subject of the sentence has been introduced in previous discourse, on second occurrence it may be deleted and the SVA will function as an anaphoric pronoun, as in sentence (2) above. Sentence (2) may be elicited by questions such as:

- (7) a. What's the matter with the boy?
 b. What does the boy want?⁴

In these questions the subject is known to both speaker and hearer.

The subject noun can also be followed by an unbound pronoun in addition to SVA, as in sentence (3) above. Sentence (3) has a contrastive reading to the previous statement. For example:

⁴In most cases a question such as (7a) can be answered by the NP object alone, but the verb may also be repeated. On the other hand, (7b) always requires a verb and an object NP in response.

- (8) Abafana ba-funa ubisi,⁵ uSipho yena u-funa ukudla.
 boys they want milk, Sipho he he-want food
 'The boys want milk, but Sipho (himself) wants food.'

This pattern is thus used to contrast the subject with other members of a group to which it belongs. The unbound pronoun signals this contrastive device. To illustrate this, consider:

- (9) Abafana ba-funa ubisi, uSipho u-funa ukudla.
 boys they-want milk, Sipho he-want food
 'The boys want milk, and Sipho wants food.'

In sentence (9) the unbound pronoun is left out. The sentence is interpreted as non-contrastive and Sipho is not seen as a member of the group of boys. The English translation will use in (9) and instead of but. This may be further shown by the overt use of the conjunctions 'and' and 'but':

- (10) Abafana ba-funa ubisi, { no } Sipho u-funa ubisi.
 { *kodwa u }
 boys they-want milk, { and } Sipho he-want milk
 { *but }
- 'The boys want milk {and } Sipho wants milk too.'
 { *but }

Sentence (9) when used with kodwa 'but' becomes ungrammatical both in English and Zulu because it is non-contrastive as seen in (10).⁶ If on the other hand we use kodwa and na with sentence (8), then the sentence with na will be ungrammatical:

⁵In this sentence the first part of the sentence represents the discourse context, while the second part brings contrast. It is the second part that we are interested in.

⁶The English sentence in (10) using 'but' is acceptable, provided its context establishes an appropriate contrast, as in e.g., "There's not enough milk to go around, so someone will have to go without it. Now, all the boys want milk--but Sipho wants milk too--so what shall we do?".

- (11) Abafana ba-funa ubisi, {kodwa} uSipho yena ufuna ukudla.
 boys they-want milk, {but} Sipho he he-want food
 {*no} {*and}
- 'The boys want milk, {but} Sipho (himself) wants food.'
 {*and}

Sentences (8) and (11) are thus contrastive while sentences (9) and (10) are non-contrastive, and merely conjoined.

In cases where the speaker can assume that the subject of the contrastive sentence is known to the hearer, that subject may be deleted as in (4) above. Sentences like (4) will be used shortly after the introduction of the subject, and they will always be understood as being contrastive to an earlier statement in the discourse. Again the unbound pronoun serves as a contrastive marker. While the SVA by itself, as in (2), gives merely an anaphoric reading, not a contrastive one.

In certain non-emphatic cases the subject noun can follow its coreferent unbound pronoun, as in sentence (5) above, and then the reading obtained is contrastive. This construction will be used in cases where more boys other than Sipho were mentioned earlier in the discourse. The speaker repeats the noun parenthetically after its coreferential pronoun as an afterthought, in order to avoid confusion on the part of the hearer.⁷

3. Object Pronouns

Object nouns may coexist with coreferent pronouns in the same sentence. Thus, consider the following patterns:

- (12) U-shaya imbongolo.
 he-hit donkey
 'He hits a donkey.'
- (13) U-shaya yona.
 he-hit it. (it=donkey)
 'He hits it.' (contrastive with respect to object)

⁷For a discussion of afterthought-topic, see Givón [1975a].

- (14) U-ya-⁸yi-shaya.
 he-ASP-it-hit
 'He hits it.'
- (15) U-shaya vona imbongolo.
 he-hit it donkey
 'He hits it, the donkey.' (contrastive with respect to the object)
- (16) U-ya-yi-shava imbongolo.
 he-ASP-it-hit donkey
 '_____ but he hits it, the donkey.'
- (17) U-va-yi-shaya yona.
 he-ASP-it-hit it (it=donkey)
 '_____ but he hits it. (contrastive with respect to the object)
- (18) U-ya-yi-shaya vona imbongolo.
 he-ASP-it-hit it donkey
 '_____ but he hit it, the donkey.' (contrastive with respect to the object)

In sentence (12) the object is introduced to the hearer for the first time. This sentence can be elicited by the more neutral question:

- (19) What is the farmer doing?

The object noun can be replaced by an unbound pronoun after appearing first in the discourse, as in (13). The reading obtained from (13) is that of contrast or identifying a single item that has been mentioned earlier in the discourse against the rest of the items belonging to a class. For example, a farmer may have a pack of donkeys, one of which has been mentioned earlier in the discourse. Later, the speaker and the hearer learn that the farmer is hitting a donkey. The following question might be used by one of them:

- (20) Which donkey is the farmer hitting?

The response to this question might be sentence (13), if the donkey referred to by the pronoun has been mentioned before. If the donkey was

⁸The morpheme /-va-/ will be discussed later. Zulu grammarians call it a long form of the indicative mood. (cf. Doke [1947]).

not mentioned earlier in the discourse the response might take a mere descriptive form, i.e., "he is hitting the brown donkey", etc.

Object nouns, like subject nouns, need not be repeated, once mentioned earlier in the discourse. In this case the object noun can also be represented by an OVA as in (14). The reading obtained in (14) is that of focus on the activity or action (verb), whereas in (13) the focus is on the object. Sentence (14) is thus non-contrastive with respect to the object noun, and can be a response to the question:

(21) a. What is the farmer doing to the donkey?

or to the negative assertion:

b. The farmer doesn't hit the donkey.

Sentence (13) cannot be elicited either by (21a) or (21b), and sentence (14) cannot be elicited by the question (20). The speaker thus has different assumptions about what the hearer knows when using (13) and (14).

The verb plus unbound pronoun sequence may also be followed by the coreferent noun itself, as in (15). The reading obtained is contrastive and similar to that of (13), with the exception that the noun is added as an afterthought, to avoid ambiguity as to the reference of the pronoun.⁹ This is used when more than one noun from the same class have been mentioned earlier in the discourse. Sentence (15) can be elicited by question (20).

The OVA may also be followed by its coreferent noun, as in (16). The reading obtained involves an afterthought, plus "contrary to negation of the verb."¹⁰ Take the example of the farmer above. Suppose the farmer in general doesn't hit animals, but does hit certain ones such as donkeys, and this fact is known by the speaker. If on the other hand most people—including the hearer—assume that the farmer does not hit any animals, i.e., including donkeys, then the speaker will

⁹See Givón [1975a].

¹⁰This expression, as well as the expression "contrary to expectations", was suggested by Givón [personal communication].

use sentence (16) to contradict the idea held by the hearer, i.e., that the donkey being an animal is not being hit by the farmer. This contrasts the donkey--which is an animal but which nevertheless is being hit by the farmer--from the rest of the animals that the farmer doesn't hit. Sentence (16) can be elicited as a response to the statement:

(22) The farmer does not hit animals.

Again the assumptions held by the speaker about the hearer differ in (15) and (16). Sentence (15) cannot be elicited by (22), nor can (16) be elicited by (20).

The OVA can also be followed by the independent pronoun as in (17). Both OVA and the Pro are understood as referring to the same object noun. Sentence (17) is used contrastively, to express "contrary to expectations" couched in a previous statement. Take again the example of the farmer, who in general doesn't hit donkeys. If the speaker knows that the farmer does hit one donkey that has been mentioned earlier in the discourse, then she will use (17). The unbound pronoun *yona* singles out the one individual donkey from other donkeys that are not hit by the farmer. Sentence (17) may appear in the context of the statement:

(23) The farmer doesn't hit donkeys (in general).

Sentence (18), like (17), is contrastive, expressing "contrary to expectations", except that the noun is expressed overtly as an after-thought to avoid ambiguity of reference. The reading obtained is similar to that of (17).

For both subject and objects the unbound pronoun is used in contrastive situations, when the coreferent noun is known to the hearer. The SVA by itself is used non-contrastively. The OVA by itself is also used non-contrastively, at least so far as the object is concerned. Though it may be, naturally, used when the verb is in contrast/focus, as in (14) and (21b) above.

4. A Note on the Verb-Focus Morpheme /-ya-/¹¹

This morpheme appears in the present tense when there is no complement following the verb. That is, when the new information contained in the predicate phrase excludes the complement. For example, it may be used when no object is mentioned, as in:

- (24) U-ya-shaya.
 he-ASP-hit
 'He hits (something).'

Sentence (24) may be elicited by a question such as:

- (25) What is he doing?

Without the verb-focus morpheme this sentence is ungrammatical:

- (26) *U-shaya.
 he-hit

Further, this morpheme must be obligatorily used when the object is definite or an anaphoric pronoun, i.e., when it is known to the hearer, as in (14), (16), (17), (18) above. This can be seen from the ungrammaticality of (27a,b) below when contrasted with the grammatical (14) and (16), respectively:¹²

¹¹For a more extensive discussion of the verb-focus aspect in some Bantu languages, see Givón [1975b].

¹²Sentences in (27) are acceptable/grammatical in the following discourse context:

Sipho: Wena Thoko ungayishaya imbongolo.
 'You Thoko can hit the donkey.'

Thoko: ngi-yi-thanda?
 I-it-like
 '_____ while liking it?'

Sipho: u-yi-thanda
 you-it-like
 '_____ while liking it.'

Sipho knows that Thoko loves donkeys but that under certain circumstances or pressure he suspects that Thoko can overrule this characteristic and hit donkeys.

The use of /-ya-/ needs further investigation because it seems that there are at least two /-ya-/s, one marking the present tense (progressive) and the other might have to do with focus on the action.

- (27) a. *U-yi-shaya.
 he-it-hit
- b. *U-yi-shaya imbongolo.
 he-it-hit donkey

5. Reflexives

The reflexive marker /-zi-/ occupies the OVA slot, and likewise requires the obligatory presence of the /-zi-/ morpheme in intransitive constructions, but differs from the OVA in that it may or may not need the /-zi-/ in transitive constructions, or if an adjunct follows, as in (d) and (e) below:

- (28) a. Umfana u-ya-zi-shaya.
 boy he-ASP-REFL-hit
 'The boy hits himself.'
- b. Umfana yena u-ya-zi-shaya.
 boy he he-ASP-REFL-hit
 '_____ but the boy hits himself.'
- c. Yena u-ya-zi-shaya.
 he he-ASP-REFL-hit
 '_____ but hé hits himself.'
- d. U-ya-zi-shaya yena (umfana).
 he-ASP-REFL-hit him boy
 '_____ but he hits himself, (the boy)
- e. U-zi-shaya yena (umfana)
 he-REFL-hit him boy
 '_____ he hits himself, (the boy).'
- f. U-ya-zi-shaya.
 he-ASP-REFL-hit
 'He hits himself.'

In (28a) the subject is introduced and in (b) and (c) the subject is being contrasted with what went on previously. In (d) the reading obtained is also contrastive with focus on the action. Sentence (e) may be used to contradict a statement like: "X is hit by Y"; or it may be

an answer to a question: "Who hits him?". In both (d) and (e) the subject NP must have been mentioned earlier in the discourse since it is expressed by a pronoun. Both sentences express contrast, but in (d) the contrast focuses on the action, while in (e) it focuses on the identity of the object, i.e., its being the child himself rather than someone else. Sentence (28f) has a reading similar to that of (28a), except that the subject has been mentioned in the preceding discourse and is therefore re-introduced as a pronoun.

6. Direct and Indirect Object

In verbs that take two objects, the facts observed above, i.e., i. that the unbound pronoun expresses both contrast (i.e., 'focus') and coreference (i.e., 'topic'), and ii. that the OVA may appear in contexts where the sentence serves to contradict a corresponding negative, seem to hold for both objects. Thus, consider the following sentences:

- (29) a. umfana u-nika indoda isinkwa
 boy he-give man bread
 'The boy gives bread to the man.'
- b. umfana u-si-hika indoda isinkwa
 boy he-it-give man bread
 'The boy gives the bread to the man.'
- c. umfana u-nika yona isinkwa
 boy he-give him bread
 'The boy gives bread to him.'

Sentence (29a) may be an introductory sentence in this discourse, or an answer to a question such as: "What does the boy do?". Sentence (29b) may be used to contradict a statement such as: "The boy is not giving bread to the man", or alternatively as an answer to the question: "What does the boy do with the bread?". Sentence (29c) may be used in the context of contrasting the indirect object 'him' with others to whom no bread was given, or about whom it was erroneously claimed that the boy gave them bread. The fact that in (29b) the OVA appears but the verb-focus morpheme /-ya-/ does not, is readily explained from observing

that while the noun 'bread' is not new information here, the noun 'man' is, so that the condition for using /-ya/--that only the verb is new information--does not apply.¹³

7. Summary

I have shown that Zulu may use more than one coreferential pronoun in the same construction, sometimes two pronouns together with their coreferent noun. The distribution of all possible combinations is used to map various discourse contexts, i.e., various types of assumptions which the speaker may make about what the hearer knows.

The facts of Zulu pronominalization seem to rule out certain proposals made in the past concerning the formal way of handling the grammar of pronominalization. For example, Givón [1970] suggested that within one sentence only two coreferential elements may coexist: ". . . the force of the magical number two as upper bounds on the number of coreferential nominal elements in a (non-topicalized) construction seems compelling to me . . .". Givón further suggested that the "magical number two" principle militated for a transformational model of pronominalization, via copying-plus deletion, and against both the interpretative approach [Jackendoff 1969] and an alternative transformational approach of movement-plus-deletion. The facts of Zulu cast strong doubt on the validity of any strict transformational approach to pronominalization, since two pronouns may coexist with their coreferent noun, and further the various combinations of pronouns with the noun are used for distinct communicative purposes, to map different discourse situations. Pronominalization is just showing itself to be not a trivial syntactic process in Zulu, but rather a complex array of pragmatic devices used to elucidate subtle distinctions concerning the discourse context in which sentences are uttered.

¹³See Givón [1975b].

REFERENCES

- Doke, C. M. 1947. Zulu Grammar Book. Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand Press.
- Givón, T. 1970. "The magical number two, Bantu pronouns and the theory of pronominalization." Studies in African Linguistics, 1: 279-300.
- Givón, T. 1975a. "Topic, pronoun and grammatical agreement." in C. Li (ed.), Subject and Topic. (to appear).
- Givón, T. 1975b. "Focus and the scope of assertion: some Bantu evidence." Studies in African Linguistics, 6:185-205.
- Jackendoff, R. 1969. Some Rules of Semantic Interpretation for English.
- Keenan, E. 1975. "Towards a universal definition of 'subject of'." in C. Li (ed.), Subject and Topic. (to appear).
- Moravcsik, E. 1970. "Determination." in Working Papers on Language Universals, No. 1. Stanford University.
- Postal, P. M. 1966. "On so-called pronouns in English." in E. Reibel and S. Schane (eds.), Modern Studies in English: Readings in Transformational Grammar. Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice-Hall.

APPENDIX I

Pronominal forms for the various noun classes in Zulu

	<u>DEPENDENT</u>		<u>INDEPENDENT</u>
	<u>SVA</u>	<u>OVA</u>	
1st person sg.	ngi-	-ngi-	mi - na
pl.	si-	-si-	thi- na
2nd person sg.	u-	-ku-	we - na
pl.	ni-	-ni-	ni - na
Class 1/2 sg.	u-	-m-	ye - na
pl.	ba-	-ba-	bo - na
Class 3/4 sg.	u-	-wu-	wo - na
pl.	i-	-yi-	yo - na
Class 5/6 sg.	li-	-li-	lo - na
pl.	a-	-wa-	wo - na
Class 7/8 sg.	si-	-si-	so - na
pl.	zi-	-zi-	zo - na
Class 9/10 sg.	i-	-yi-	yo - na
pl.	zi-	-zi-	zo - na
Class 11 sg.	lu-	-lu-	lo - na
pl.	zi-	-zi-	zo - na
Class 14	bu-	-bu-	bo - na
Class 15	ku-	-ku-	ko - na

