

SOME ASPECTS OF THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE POSSESSIVE NOUN PHRASE IN BANTU

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Abstract

Possessive noun phrases are minimally made up of at least two Noun phrases (NPs) that are possessively related to each other. In this article we argue that the syntactic order in which these noun phrases appear is not as random as it may look on the surface. Semantic constraints, in a large measure, determine the syntactic order of NPs constituting possessive phrases. Some such constraints include the Person-Animacy Hierarchy (PAH), generic and part-whole relationships of nouns among others that will be explored in the article. It shall also be argued that the said semantic constraints are not syntactic rules as such but are strong cross-linguistic tendencies to which the linear ordering of the possessive phrase more often than not conforms and especially within the performance as opposed to the competence domain of language ability.

INTRODUCTION

This article is an attempt to explain the syntactico-semantics of one of the most frequent linguistic structures in Bantu (and dare I say in other languages of the world as well).¹ The Bantu family of languages is fairly wide, so much so that we do not claim to represent all of it in this article. Such an attempt would be as undesirable as it is impracticable. We will draw illustrations from such Bantu languages as Shona, Ndebele, Zulu, Chichewa, Haya, Kinyarwanda, Kikuyu and Sotho, among others and the

¹ I wish to register my sincere appreciation of the useful comments that I got when I presented a version of this article in the Department of Linguistics' Staff Seminar Series in October 1998. I also got equally important feed back from Mr Mkanganwi and Dr Carolyn Harford. Apart from that, I would like to register my many thanks as well as acknowledge the valuable support that I got from Professor Sam Mchombo of University of California, Berkley (USA) from whom I got materials that gave me the breakthrough in the Theory of Possessive Phrases in Bantu that I was developing. Many thanks also go the University of Zimbabwe for allowing me the Contact Visit that made it possible for me to meet and gain inspiration from some world luminaries of linguistics such as Sam Mchombo, Larry Hyman, Joan Bresnan, Charlse Fillmore, George Lakoff and John Mugane. Last but not least, I wish to make it clear that although I have incorporated Mr Mkanganwi and Dr Harford's suggestions in this article, the conceptual and organisational mistakes remain mine alone.

results yielding therefrom, shall, by extrapolation, be presumed to stand in the stead of others.

The syntax of the Possessive Noun Phrase (henceforth PNP) has been made reference to in Shona by Fortune (1957; 1985) and Harford (1985) among others. It should be noted that the latter looks at this aspect in relation to two other Bantu languages, which are Gikuyu and Kiruundi. Much more work has been done in other Bantu languages in respect of the PNP; by Mugane (1997) in Gikuyu; Hyman (1977) in Haya; Guma (1971) for Southern Sotho; and Taljaard and Bosch (1988) for Zulu, among others. In much of this work, most of the researchers have not concerned themselves with the semantic aspect underlying the syntactic structures of this construction. Taljaard and Bosch (1988) and Fortune (1985) follow the Dokean descriptivist method of analysing the possessive construction in Zulu and Shona respectively. Harford (1985, 32) points out in passing that the possessive phrase has a 'variety of semantic relationships which it may denote, including possession, characteristic, part of, kinship, etc'. It is not however, within the scope of her thesis to explore the syntactico-semantic nature of this relationship, an aspect which we propose to undertake in this article. Nonetheless, the passing observations she makes with regards to the shades of semantic relationships which possessive constructions refer to are illuminating for our purposes here.

This article makes the following claim as its point of departure, namely that the linear structure of the PNP is largely sensitive to a cluster of semantic constraints which, in turn, govern its syntax. Some such semantic constraints, following Hawkinson and Hyman (1974), Hayman (1977), Lyons (1967) and Anschutz (1997) include: the person-animacy status of possessively related nouns, the type of NPs involved, i.e. whether or not they are common, among others. We need to point out from the beginning that it is virtually futile to try and give all the semantic underpinnings that determine the nature of the PNP, let alone the countless varieties of such constructions. At least the tenets of generative grammar render an exercise such as that pointless. Moreover, Sager (1990, 29) warns against such an exercise in futility when he makes the following observation:

The size of conceptual fields and the complexity of the relationships to be declared within it, is matter for practical assessment of the purpose for which the conceptual analysis is undertaken . . . *it is not concerned with absolute conceptual systems* . . . (the emphasis is mine).

The said semantic constraints influence the syntax of these languages through what we may refer to as a hierarchy of significance. Given that minimally the PNP is configurationally constituted by at least two NPs

that are in a logical semantic relationship, the claim here is that one of the NPs of the PNP is hierarchically more significant relative to the other. This semantic hierarchical order is perceptually built on the understanding that the NP that is perceived of as the possessor (or **psr**) is hierarchically higher, more significant or more important in comparison to the NP that is perceived of as the possession (or **psn**). It is however, instructive at this juncture to illustrate the syntactic organisation of the construction under consideration. Consider the following examples from Ndebele/Zulu, Haya and Swahili respectively:

1. a. izimpondo ze-mbuzi
horns of-goat
'the goat's horns'²
- b. omukono gw' omwaana
arm of child
'The child's arm' [Hyman, 1995, 868]
- c. risasi ya Juma
bullet of Juma
'Juma's bullet' [Keach and Rochemont, 1992-1994, 91]

In all the above illustrations, we have in each case two NPs that are separated by a possessive marker or affix, as it is traditionally referred to in the literature (and especially by Fortune). We shall refer to the uninflected NPs in (1) a., b., and c., *izimpondo*, *omukono* and *risasi* as the bare nominals or the heads. These same NPs shall also be referred to as the possessions (**psn**) or the possessees, following Guma (1971, 119) even in cases in which this is not semantically so. The said NPs are here also viewed as being hierarchically less significant in comparison to their possessively inflected cousins in (1), respectively *imbuzi*, *omwaana* and *Juma*. Note that these NPs have different names. Mugane (1997, 92) refers to them as 'Non-argument associative phrases.' The possessively inflected NPs in (1) a. and b. which are *imbuzi* and *omwaana* respectively, are the possessors (**psr**). Mugane (1997) refers to these as, 'Argument associative phrases.' They are, on account of that, viewed as being hierarchically more significant relative to the bare nominals or the heads.

The syntactic structure of the PNP fits into the following input template which is a rather slight modification of Hyman's (1977) which he formulates as X of Y.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all examples which do not acknowledge source are the author's.

2. X of Y of Q-n [where *of* can be substituted for: *from*, *made of*, *-s*, *etc*, while Q-n stands for an infinite number of Possessive NPs that can hypothetically follow one after another]

The above input template also fits in with Anschutz's (1997, 2) description of the PNP's linear order when he notes that:

The term "Possessive NP" refers to any NP, NP construction included in the study [i.e. his study] (NP's NP; NP from NP, etc.

In distributional terms, we should situate the PNP in the same locations as those of the bare NP. Consider (3) below:

3. X of Y of Q-n —VP— R of S of Q-n ⇒

In this formulation, we posit that syntactically, the PNP can be made up of a concatenation of possessively related NPs which, theoretically, range from at least two *ad infinitum*, both, before and after the verb phrase (VP). The number of the hypothesised concatenation of NPs is represented by the notation ~n, while ⇒ stands for other phrases that may be part of the sentence, but which, for our purposes here are outside the scope of this discussion.

PART-WHOLE PNPS

Part-whole PNPs as defined by Lyons (1977, 312) show a relationship:

which holds between the separate or separable components of a thing and the whole thing of which they are components.

Here both Sager (1990, 32) and Lyons (1977) give the following as the conceptual formulation of the part-whole PNP:³

4. X is a constituent of A
 or X, Y, and Z are constituent parts of A
 or A consists of X
 or A consists of X, Y and Z

The above semantic conceptualisation of the part-whole relationship maps onto the syntax of the PNP in Bantu by according hierarchically higher status to the 'argument associative phrase' which we have also referred to as the **psr**. The illustrations given below support this view.

³ Note that the values, X, A, Z etc. are substituted in (6) further down.

5. a. michira ya mbewa
tails of mice
'The mice's tails' **Chichewa** [Bresnan and Mchombo, 1987, 774]
- b. amaisho g omwaana
eyes of child
'The eyes of the child' **Haya** [Hyman, 1995, 873]
- c. izindlebe ze-nja
ears of dog
'The dog's ears' **Zulu** [Taljaard and Bosch, 1988, 87]
- d. denga re-mba
roof of-house
'The roof of the house' **Shona** [Author's example]
- e. mororo oa-tau
roar of-lion
'The roar of the lion' **S. Sotho** [Guma, 1971, 120]

Before we go into the explanation aspect of the discussion, we need to first look once more at the formulation in (4) with a view to substituting the values provided with concrete examples. Below is the substitution of values X, Y, Z and A by NPs from one of the PNPs in (5). We propose to do this exercise using PNP (5) d. as shown in (6) below.

6. **denga** [roof] is a constituent of **imba** [house]
or **denga**, **chidziro** [wall] and **musiwo** [door] are constituent parts of **imba**
or **imba** consists of **denga**
or **imba** consists of **denga**, **chidziro** and **musiwo**

Note that although constituent NPs, **chidziro** and **musiwo**, are not included in the original PNP, they are nevertheless in a part-whole relationship with the main NP, **imba**. All the other Bantu PNPs in (5) can be cast in a substitutive format of values along the same lines as has been done in (6) above.

The above examples in (5) which are taken from five different Bantu languages in which the constituent parts of the whole are invariably syntacticised as the **psn** while the wholes are syntacticised as the **psr**, cannot, in all fairness, be attributed to some accidental organisational occurrence. It is true to say that the whole is perceived of as being semantically superior relative to its constituent parts. This explains the prevalent grammaticalisation of the associated NPs where the bare **psn** NP is located on the right hand side of the **psr** NP. Cast in a hierarchical

ordering that we argue in support of in this article, NPs, **mbewa** and **tau** in (5) a. and e. respectively, are therefore hierarchically higher as the possessors *vis-a-vis* the bare NPs, **michira** and **mororo**, that are the possessions.

GENERIC POSSESSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

One equally important constraint that determines the syntactic organisation of the **psn** and **psr** within the PNP, is the nature of the relationship that binds the two or more elements involved. One such constraint is the generic relationship. Sager (1990) defines this kind of a relationship in the following manner when he writes:

the generic relationship establishes a hierarchical order; it identifies concepts as belonging to the same category in which there is a *broader* (generic) concept which is said to be superordinate to the narrower (specific), subordinated concept/concepts (p. 30).

The said generic relationship as given by Sager (1990) can be formalised in more or less the same way as was done for the part-whole relationships as indicated in the input template below (note that the substitution of values R, T, P etc. is done in (9) further down).

7. R is a type of T
 or R, P and Q are types of T
 or T has the specific concept of R, P and Q
 or T has the sub-type R

Consider the examples from Shona that are provided in (8) below.

8. a. chibagwe che-mbeu
 maize of-seed
 ‘seed-maize’
- b. nzungu dze-mbeu
 groundnuts of-seed
 ‘groundnut seed’
- c. mapfunde e-mbeu
 sorghum of-seed
 ‘sorghum-seed’
- d. benzi ro-munhu
 fool of-person
 ‘a foolish person’
- e. simbe yo-munhu
 lazy of-person
 ‘a lazy person’

- f. mhutse yo-munhu
 destroyer of-person
 ‘a destroyer of people’

As has been the case in (6) above, we will first do a practical insertion of NPs into value slots, R, P, Q etc., that are the input template of the generic PNP. Use is made of PNPs a., b., and c. which are taken from (8) above. In (9), we substitute ‘abstract’ values of (7) with NPs.

9. **chibagwe** [maize] is a type of **mbeu** [seed (or crop)]
 or **chibagwe**, **nzungu** [groundnuts] and **mapfunde** [sorghum] are
 types of **mbeu**
 or **mbeu** has the specific concept of **chibagwe**, **nzungu**, **mapfunde**
 or **mbeu** has the sub-type **chibagwe**

The examples that are given above in (8) instantiate cases where the generic forms, ‘seed’ and ‘person’ are semantically perceived of as being more significant than their sub-types. The nature of this semantic relatedness grammatically transmutes to yield the present syntactic ordering of the PNP, where the generic form is grammatically the bare nominal (semantically the **psn**) while on the other hand the sub-type is grammatically the possessively inflected NP (which semantically is the **psr**).

Here we do not have a typical case of possession in the strict sense of the word. Semantically what is represented by the generic relationship above leans more towards ‘type of’ than ‘possessed’ or ‘owned by’ kind of PNPs. The argument that is being pursued in this article is that it is precisely the nature of the generic relationship that constraints the linear or syntactic organisation of the PNP. Here the generic forms are represented as being semantically superordinate to their sub-types that are then viewed as hierarchically subordinate to them.

Note however, that from (7) d. down to f., the hierarchically subordinate NPs refer to people who may be morally undesirable (at least as judged by the moral standards of the Shona people although we cannot conceive of a society in which people with such character traits are condoned). One may only venture to suggest that this scenario, where NPs indicative of negative character traits assume the subordinate position *vis-a-vis* the superordinate generic human NP, prevails, chiefly because such people are generally loathed by others. Owing to this, they are therefore not allowed to ‘possess’ or to take precedence of significance over the generic human NP which remains semantically superordinate to them.

PERSON-ANIMACY HIERARCHY

Hyman and Morolong (1977), Hyman (1977) and Anschutz (1997) indicate that the Person-Animacy (PAH) dichotomy has pervasive influence in syntactic organisation cross-linguistically. For instance, given any two arguments in Bantu that are associated with the same predicate and where one of them is human and the other is animate, in most such cases, the syntax almost invariably accords the human argument more access to direct object status *vis-a-vis* the other. The basic assumption is that direct object status is more significant than say the indirect or secondary object status.

Consider the following example from Swati:

10. Tsine sakh-ela indvodza sibaya
 we build-Ben man cattle byre
 'We are building a cattle byre for the man' **Swati** [Kunene, 1987, 6]

In (10), the human or person element is largely responsible for the adjacency of the NP **indvodza** to the predicate and the subsequent peripheralisation of the inanimate argument **sibaya**. It must also be borne in mind that at the lexical semantic level, that is, prior to the morpholexical insertion of the applicative morpheme **-el-**, **sibaya** was one of the original two arguments present. This would somewhat intuitively lead us to assume that **sibaya** must retain its position adjacent to the predicate and then the newcomer, beneficiary argument **indvodza** be logically pushed to the periphery as the grammatical indirect object. If we were to follow 'natural justice' as we see it fit, and reverse the above order, an ungrammatical or at the very least, an unintended sentence would be the one given below:

11. *? Tsine sakh-ela sibaya indvodza
 we build-Ben byre man

There are different versions of the PAH found in the literature, such as the Quirk's Gender Scale (in Anschutz, 1997), Hawkinson's Animacy Hierarchy, Hyman and Morolong and Hyman. We shall for the purposes of this presentation, use Hyman's (1995) version which is as follows:

12. 1st pers. > 2nd pers. > 3rd humans > 3rd pers. Animal > 3rd pers.
 Inanimate.

It must however, be noted that the hierarchy that is provided here must not be taken as the laying down of rules as such. This hierarchy, probably like any other, is supposed to indicate fairly strong tendencies by which Bantu languages syntacticise semantic phenomena associated with the PNP.

Consider the examples taken from various Bantu languages that are provided below:

13. a. masimo a- murena
fields of-chief
'The chief's fields'
- b. khomo tsa-ba-lona
?cattle of-yours
'Your cattle' **S. Sotho** [Guma, 1971]
- c. izimvu zikamalume
sheep of/uncle
'Uncle's sheep' **Zulu** [Taljaard and Bosch, 1988, 87]
- d. nyumba ya mfumu
house of chief
'The chief's house' **Chichewa** [Bresnan and Mchombo, 1987, 773]
- e. pa-mudzi w-athu
at-house of-our
'At our house'
- f. kitabu cha Zeinabu
book of Zeinabu
'Zeinabu's book' **Kiswahili** [Carstens, 1991, 84]
- g. urugo rwo [kwaa] daata
compound of at father
'Compound of father' **Kiruundi** [Harford, 1985, 35]
- i. shuro ya- baba
hare of-father
'Father's hare' **Shona**
- j. inkunzi ye-nkosi
bull of-chief
'The chief's bull' **Ndebele**
- k. enkoni y' omwaana
stick of child
'The child's stick' **Haya** [Hyman, 1995, 868]
- l. nyungu ya cucu
pot of grandmother
'Grandmother's pot' **Gikuyu** [Mugane, 1997]

- m. *libizo la-mushumani yo*
 name of-boy this
 'the name of this boy' **Lozi** [Fortune, nd, 31]

The examples given above are drawn from ten different Bantu languages that cover a wide geographical expanse of Sub-Saharan Africa. What is striking regarding the data provided above is the systematic structural patterning of PNPs in conformity with predictions of the PAH as given in (12) above. We argue as we have done earlier, that this systemic patterning cannot be left to some fortuitous explanation. From our view, the only plausible explanation for this common architecture traceable in different languages is that the miscellaneous PNPs are all constrained by the provisions of the PAH as outlined in (12) above.

In the data given above, we notice that the subordinate NPs (also the **psn**) are lower in the PAH scale as compared to the hierarchically superordinate or significant NPs (also the **psr**) which are higher on the same scale. Note that the following bare NPs drawn from (13) are all inanimate and lower than their human counterparts on the PAH scale: a. **masimo**, d. **nyumba**, e. **pamudzi**, f. **kitabu**, g. **urogo**, l. **nyungu** and m. **libizo**. While the latter examples cited show the position of inanimate NPs in comparison to human NPs, the following also bear testimony to the contention that even animate NPs which are lower than human on the PAH scale are still syntacticised as hierarchically subordinate to the latter. In the following examples from (13) b. **khomo**, c. **izimvu**, i. **shuro** and j. **inkunzi**, we note that although the latter are animate, they are nonetheless semantically lower than human, hence their less significant status relative to human NPs.

Two examples which illustrate the supremacy of the persons over other variables as indicated on the PAH scale are from Southern Sotho and KiSwahili. The PNPs, **khomo tsaba-lona** and **pamudzi w-athu** from Southern Sotho and KiSwahili respectively show the persons as **-lona** and **-athu**. In the case of Southern Sotho, the NP **khomo** which is animate is the **psn** of the second person pronoun **-lona**. In KiSwahili, the locative **pamudzi** is inanimate and it is subordinated to the first person plural **-athu**. The persons are the more significant elements of the PNPs because they assume **psr** roles. The syntactic organisation of these PNPs assumes this order according to the predictions posited by the provisions of the PAH.

This state of affairs as described in the preceding paragraph above, as indicated earlier, is a cross-linguistic phenomena. Hawkins (1981) as cited by Anschutz (1997, 3) makes the following incisive observation in respect of the nature of the syntax obtaining from this semantic organisation of NPs when he comments:

The division between human and non-human nouns is realised as a rather interesting semantic category whereby *human nouns* have linear precedence over non-human nouns [. . .] If one of the nouns is human and the other is not, the surface form corresponding to the structure in which the human noun comes first will be more acceptable than the surface form corresponding to the structure in which the human noun comes second (*the emphasis is Anschutz's*).

Note however, that when applying this to Bantu, we must reverse the above statement and say, '*non-human nouns have linear precedence over human nouns*'. This is necessitated by the reverse order in which Bantu and English consistently syntacticise the same possessive phrases.

The **prs** are invariably either humans or the persons. Hyman (1995, 875) whose version of PAH has been used here explains this in terms of what may be referred to as the human-centric or anthropocentric nature of language when he notes:

Call it a natural person hierarchy or a hierarchy of egocentricity, efficiency, or empathy, but the fact remains, namely that persons higher [in the hierarchy] will be more susceptible to possessor promotion.

This explains why human language in general accords superordinate (or **psr**) status to humans and the pronouns/persons while relegating on the other hand, non-humans to the subordinate (or **psn**) status. It would however, be interesting to explore how Bantu languages syntacticise semantic cases in which both the **psr** and the **psn** are human, an exercise that we explore in the next section of this article.

Human Possessive Noun Phrases

PNPs involving humans are interesting when looked at from the viewpoint of the PAH that we have so far been dealing with. It has already been seen from the viewpoint of the said hierarchy that humans take first position on that scale. This, it was observed, tends to influence the syntactic organisation of the PNP by showing a greater or less tendency of granting **psr** status to human NPs thereby relegating other NPs to the subordinate **psn** status. This, as has already been demonstrated, enters into the syntax of the PNP by granting '*non-human nouns linear precedence over human nouns*'.

It will be argued here that human PNPs, that is, where the head and the possessive modifier are both human, are constrained by an intrinsic hierarchical organisation. This claim already excludes the persons (i.e., the 1st person singular/plural, 2nd person singular/plural, etc.). It has already been shown in (13) above, using examples from both Southern Sotho and Swahili, that the persons take precedence over human nouns

in general. The claim that is being advanced here pertains to humans of equal nominal status such as the following from Southern Sotho (Guma, 1971, 120-122), **batho** (people), **mosali** (wife), **mora** (son), **ngaka** (healer), **monna** (man) etc. Consider the following PNPs involving human nouns only.

14. a. abaana b'oomushaija
children of man
'the man's children' **Haya** [Byarushengo, *et. al.*, 1977, 38]
- b. abantwana bo-malume
children of-uncle
'uncle's children' **Zulu** [Taljaard and Bosch, 1988, 87]
- c. muranda wa-mambo
servant of-king
'the king's servant'
- d. vadzidzi va-Jesu
disciples of-Jesus
'Jesus' disciples' **Shona**
- e. adui za askari
enemies of soldiers
'the soldiers' enemies' **Swahili** [Harford, 1979, 1]
- f. cucu wa Murang'a
grandmother of Murang'a
'Murang'a's grandmother' **Gikuyu** [Mugane, 1997, 96]
- g. ntat'a-Masilo
father of Masilo
'Masilo's father'
- h. ngaka ea-Mosotho
doctor of-Mosotho
'a Mosotho doctor/healer' **S. Sotho** [Guma, 1971, 121-122]
- i. umsekeli ka-mphathintambo
vice of-leader
'vice chairperson/president etc.' **Ndebele** [Matshakayile
Ndlovu (personal
communication)]
- j. uumw aana w'umugore
child of-woman
'the woman's child' **Kinyarwanda** [Kimenyi, 1978, 99]

- k. njau y - a ng'ombe
 calf of cow
 'calf of cow'

Kikuyu [Perez, 1986, 37]

The examples in (14) are drawn from a number of different Bantu languages. All of these examples with only the exception of (14) k., deal with human possessive relationships. The last possessive phrase involves animals and it will be used subsequently in support of some of the claims that we will advance in the discussion.

The first observation that we are drawing attention to in this section relates to a hierarchy of human nouns that run along lines of social status and/or institutional seniority either within the family institution, church or even the political organisation of a people. The point being made here is that people who enjoy high social standing such as those we have in (14) c. **mambo** (chief/king), d. **Jesu**, e. **askari** (soldiers) and i. **umphathintambo** (leader), are syntactically arranged within the PNP as the **psr**. The reverse is generally true of people with relative lower social status. The bare NPs occurring with those given in (14) c., d., e., and i. suffice as illustrations of this phenomenon. In grammatical terms, this latter group is syntacticised as **psn** within the mechanics of the PNP. It goes without saying though that this type of a PNP does not indicate true possession as such; rather it indicates what Harford (1986, 32) characterises as 'kinship'. Anschutz (1997, 9) describes this PNP as indicative of an instance whereby, 'the possessor and the possession are related through some social or genetic bond'. As can be argued, not all of the examples given above fall into this pattern.

The claim that has been made in the preceding paragraph in respect of seniority can be demonstrated with reference to 'kinship' relationships. It is evident from the data that children are, in terms of 'possessive language', perceived of as being possessions. This kind of perception seems to be cutting across all the Bantu languages, judging with the examples that are at hand. The following nouns in (14) a. **abaana** (children), b. **abantwana** (children) and j. **uumw aana** (child) are juniors *vis-a-vis* the other human nouns that they are pitted against. The senior persons semantically enjoy superordinate status hence they are the grammatically possessively inflected NPs. The reverse holds true for junior members of society. This extra-linguistic conceptual organisation of Bantu world view seems to touch on NPs other than humans only. Illustration (14) k. is a case in point. Here we witness a case whereby the calf (**njau**) is the semantic possession while on the hand the cow (**ng'ombe**), is the possessor. In human relations, this is akin to **mwana** (sibling) and **mai** (mother) respectively.

This kind of a possessive relationship can be explained either in terms of what has been said above or alternatively in terms of what

Anschutz (1997, 9) refers to as Origin. The said writer explains Origin in the following way when he writes:

The possessor created the possession; or the possession originated out of the possessors, usually a place or institution.

As is clear, not all aspects of Anschutz's argument can be used to explain the semantics of the senior/junior possessive phrase dichotomy. The clause, '... originated out of the possessors ...' is most applicable in the above scenario (i.e. 14 k.) Children, it can be argued, and hopefully without much controversy, biologically originate out of their parents through the twin processes of conception and birth. Fitting this into Anschutz's logic, parents are therefore the possessors while the children are the possessions. When this kind of a relationship is cast in terms of the PNP, it has already been seen that parents are grammaticalised as the superordinate possessively inflected NPs while the children are the subordinate bare nominals.

This may not be that much surprising when one considers the fact that in most Bantu cultures the young are expected to show respect to the elders. In the said societies, age, seniority, wisdom and authority are all rolled up in one package which the young are expected to take cognisance of.

The last semantic constraint governing the syntax of the PNP, as it is being articulated here, concerns itself with weighting what we may refer to as the 'semantic precedence status' of common nouns *vis-a-vis* proper nouns. Where Hawkins says, 'non-human nouns have linear precedence over human nouns', we would say, *proper nouns have semantic precedence over common nouns*. It is instructive to give brief working definitions of the terms of contention, that is common and proper nouns. Crystal (1991, 64) defines a common noun in the following manner:

In traditional grammar, 'common nouns' were *semantically* defined sub-class nouns (referring to 'general concepts' ... [the emphasis on semantics is Crystal's].

The same author defines a proper noun as follows:

The alternative term, **proper name**, reflects its traditional *semantic* definition: the name of an individual person, place, etc (p. 282) [the emphasis is Crystal's].

Given these definitions, it becomes much easier to argue in support of the semantic constraints that yield linear grammatical organisation of NPs in the PNP such as we have in (14) d., f., g. and h. In all these instances of human PNPs, it is true that proper nouns are taking semantic precedence over their common noun cousins. Thus in (14) f. and g. for instance, proper nouns, respectively, **Murang'a** and **Masilo** are taking semantic precedence over common nouns, **cucu** and **ntate**. Note that this

phenomenon is holding true for languages as geographically far and wide apart as Southern Sotho in South Africa and Gikuyu in Kenya. Here proper names are accorded the possessor status while their common noun counterparts are perceived of as the possessions.

In view of this observation and its pervasive occurrence in Bantu languages, we propose to slightly re-modify the PAH as it is given in (12) in order for us to accommodate this phenomenon. Consider the revised formulation of the PAH in (15) below.

15. 1st prs. >2nd prs. >3rd prop. Humans >3rd comm. Humans >3rd prs.
Animals >3rd prs. Inanimate

This kind of order would help solve a number of cases where one finds the junior/senior order being upset by cases in which we have a senior but ‘common’ person subordinated to a junior person with a proper name. Phrases (10) f., g. and h. clearly exemplify what we are arguing in support of here. Many more examples could be cited to bear witness to this claim. However, these should suffice for the moment.

We also wish to point out that the hierarchy that we suggest above is conceptually and formally the same as the **animacy hierarchy** given by Croft (1990, 112) which is as follows:

first, second-person pronoun<third-person pronoun<proper names<human common noun<non-human animate common noun<inanimate common noun

It is also worth noting that Croft reaches this conclusion using, *inter alia*, Takelma and Quiche, languages that are vastly different from Bantu or at least not known to be excessively similar.

On the Reversability of the PNP's Linear Order

In this section, we want to dispel possible counter-claims to the theory of the PNP that has been developed in this article. The claims that have been made above regarding the efficacy of semantic constraints should in the most be viewed in the following light which is used by Anschutz (1997, 3) to qualify predictions of the animacy hierarchies when he observes:

It is no difficult task to come up with counter-examples to the animacy hierarchies, and by using phrases such as ‘chiefly used with’ or ‘more acceptable’ their creators make it clear that the hierarchies are to be understood as tendencies rather than rules.

It is quite evident in this article that we have used more than only the animacy hierarchies in making claims about the architecture of the PNP in Bantu. We have used part-whole as well as generic relationships,

among others. And although Anschutz specifically absolves the predictions of the animacy hierarchies in particular, what he says is equally applicable to the other constraints that have been advanced in the article.

We would like to briefly discuss some of the salient issues that are contained in Anschutz's observation above because they raise fundamental questions regarding the notion of language and grammaticality or correctness. If we are to repeat the phrases used, such as, 'chiefly used with' and 'more acceptable', it becomes clear that grammaticality does not always neatly bifurcate into a parochial, 'this is grammatically correct' and 'this is grammatically incorrect' sort of dichotomy. The question of 'more acceptable' brings in the notion of a scale or continuum of acceptability with hypothetical lower and upper reaches which, not surprisingly, competent native speakers of a language could argue over without coming to a conclusive resolution. This ushers into the argument the incongruity between the competence and the performance modules of language ability. While stoutly resisting the temptation to delve into debates surrounding the efficacy of engaging in linguistic studies from the view of either module, we should nonetheless point out that this article has largely looked at the PNP from the performance module *vis-a-vis* the competence one.

The point we are making here is that it is hypothetically possible to reverse almost all the PNPs that have been provided as illustrations in this article without necessarily creating ungrammatical possessives. What should be pointed out is that, first, such an exercise would be one devoted to establishing largely one thing, chiefly, to see whether or not ungrammaticality results. We therefore argue that although ungrammaticality may not necessarily result, one would be hard pressed to find a natural or non-contrived context into which the reversed PNP fits. While this is true for almost all of the PNPs that are in this article, we will nevertheless sample a few for discussion purposes. Consider the reversed PNPs below:

16. a. izindlebe ze-nja
 ears of-dog
 ? inja ye-zindlebe
 dog of-ears
 'the dog of the ears' **Zulu**

b. denga re-mba
 roof of-house
 ? imba ye-denga
 house of-roof
 'house of the roof' **Shona**

- c. mororo oa-tau
 roar of-lion
 ?tau ea-mororo
 lion of-roar
 'the lion of roar'
- d. masimo a-murena
 fields of - chief
 ?murena oa-masimo
 chief of - fields
 'chief of the fields' **S. Sotho**
- e. nyumba ya mfumu
 house of- chief
 ?mfumu wa nyumba
 chief of - house
 'chief of house' **Chichewa**

The above PNPs are striking more by their semantic awkwardness than their ungrammaticality as such. Note that all these reversed PNPs have already been analysed in respect of the different semantic constraints they imposed on the linear order of the possessive phrase. It is evident that the reversed possessives convey unintended meanings, at least in respect of the initial and therefore intended meanings. In other words, even if the reversed PNPs convey meaning, they do not contain the same information as is found in the original possessives. This can be demonstrated in the formulation of the PNP provided below.

17. a. X of Y
 b. Y of X

If we agree, as we have already done in (2), that the input template of the PNP can be cast in terms of either (14) a. or b., we must also accept that the two formulations, if perceived of as being in the reverse order of each other, are logically and formally different. They contain the same NPs but they are semantically not identical. In order to illustrate this difference, we will take one of the PNPs and reverse the linear order of the NPs involved. If we retain the same meaning after doing that, we will be left with no choice other than to revise our claims regarding meaning and NP status. We propose to use (14) a. in order to achieve that and we will reconstitute it as (18) below.

18. a. **izindlebe ze-nja** zibuhlungu khakhulu namuhla
 ears of-dog are painful much today
 'The ears of the dog are very much painful today'

- b. * **inja ye-zindlebe** ibuhlungu khakhulu namuhla
 dog of-ears is painful much today
 'The dog of ears is very much painful today' **Zulu**

The grammatical disparities between the two examples in (18) clearly suggest that:

1. NPs that constitute a PNP are cast in a strict logical order, the intrinsic dynamics of which we have already demonstrated, and

2. That reversal of this logical order, though it may not necessarily lead to ungrammaticality, is not of identical semantic and/or information status as that of the original PNP. This is what precisely renders (18) b. outrightly ungrammatical. The first sentence, i.e. (18) a. is grammatical because it satisfies the semantics of the part-whole possessive relationship. On the other hand, (18) b. is ungrammatical because it violates the semantics of the same relationship. Although the notion of grammaticality cannot be dispensed with, nevertheless the resultant constructions are a testimony of the preferences of speakers of Bantu. Here, if two or more nouns are competing for high (or possessive) status, where one element is the whole and the other (or others) is only a part of that same whole, the part, more often than not, loses the competition to the whole. The part becomes the possession while, on the other hand, the whole becomes the possessor, as has been consistently shown in a number of instances above.

Reversed PNPs in (16) d. and e. illustrate the prominence of humanness *vis-a-vis* non-humanness or inanimacy on the PAH as is outlined in (12) above. In the two PNPs it is highly inconceivable to have inanimate NPs, **masimo** (fields) and **nyumba** (house) possessing or owning humans, **murena** and **mfumu** (both chiefs). The contexts in which this reverse order might obtain is quite a task to imagine. The reasons for this are clear, first, the means to convey this extra-linguistic relatedness of NPs is conceptualised through a human semiotic system or signification, i.e. language. Secondly, this is a case where the owner of the means of signification has to rate himself in relation to elements other than him. Since the scales of lordship and domination are either way heavily in his favour, it would be looking for the unusual to expect his primary means of communication to run contrary to how he perceives his place in relation to elements of nature other than himself. This anthropocentric nature of language is what leads to what Hyman earlier described as '... a hierarchy of egocentricity, efficiency or empathy ...' This 'unbalanced' relatedness between humans and inanimate nouns finds its way into language in general, and in this particular instance, into the organisation of the PNP by according humans **psr** status while inanimate NPs are accorded lower **psn** status.

In addition to what has been said above, one could also explain this state of affairs in terms of what Ferris and Hartmann (1983, 129) refer to as ‘semantic expectation’. They describe it in the following manner:

Semantic expectation — speakers have a bias towards constructing for themselves what seems to be a plausible sentence out of the lexical items which they hear.

In view of this observation we would therefore say that the scenario in (16) is improbable or outright ungrammatical because it violates the semantic expectations of speakers.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this article has shown that NPs constituting the PNP do not, unlike what meets the eye, align to each other in a random fashion. NPs that are possessively related are intrinsically ordered in a hierarchical progression of significance. The basis upon which the hierarchy is constructed has been demonstrated. A number of Bantu languages such as, Shona, Ndebele, Kiruundi, Gikuyu, Swahili, Southern Sotho and Lozi among others have been cited in support of this argument. It has been demonstrated that the bare or head nominals are the hierarchically less significant elements of the PNP, contrasting with the possessive qualifier NPs which are the superordinate elements of the two nouns. This, all pervasive, semantic hierarchical relatedness of NPs within the mechanics of the PNP has been the centrepiece of the foregoing discussion.

We have, throughout this article, argued that the syntactic structure of the PNP, are negotiated through the semantic status of the individual NPs that constitute it. To this end, it has been shown that provisions of the PAH, the nature of NP relatedness and the sub-categorisation of nouns into proper and common, among others, play some pivotal role in determining first, the significant status of nouns and secondly, the resultant syntactic alignment of the concerned nouns within the internal dynamics of the PNP. Considerations stemming from the nominal status induced by NP sub-categorisation have persuaded us of the need to recast the PAH as we now have it in (15).

Although the above semantic constraints condition to a large extent the resultant architectural structures of the PNP, as already said earlier, it must again be emphasised that these must not be perceived as syntactic rules that must not be broken. They must be treated rather as strong tendencies largely centred in the domain of linguistic performance as opposed may be to the module of linguistic competence. This explains why a ‘non-favoured’ or ‘non-preferred’ PNP is not necessarily ungrammatical. Examples (17) and (18) have been employed particularly to explain this important aspect of the article.

Although this has not been within the scope of the discussion, it is clear to us that the semantic influence of different constraints is not of equal strength, that is, some are more potent in terms of their influence than others. For instance, the influence of the part-whole semantic considerations are more binding and therefore more difficult to override than say those of the senior/junior dichotomy. The latter can, for instance, be easily overridden by the nominal sub-categorisation element of proper versus common noun. To illustrate this point, if say a less powerful member of a social institution, e.g. a commoner, is pitted against a more powerful individual, such as a king, the possessive scales tip in favour of the latter. However, if the same less powerful individual is identified with a proper name and the other with a common name, the former takes possessive precedence over the latter. This is what has been shown in (14) f., g. and h. which contrast dramatically in this regard with a., b., j. and k. in the same.

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