



Introduction

- ▶ Khoekhoegowab (Central Khoesan, Namibia) shows a puzzling case marking pattern.
- ▶ The object marker *-a* marks all DPs except sentence-initial subjects; non-initial subjects are marked identically to objects.

(1) Dandagob ge taras -a ꞑkhanis -a go mā.
 D. DECL woman -OM book -OM PAST give
 “Dandago gave the woman a book.”

(2) ꞑkhanis -a =b ge Dandagob -a taras -a go mā.
 book -OM =3SM.SC DECL D. -OM woman -OM PAST give
 “As for the book, Dandago gave it to the woman.”

General Khoekhoe clause structure:

- Second-position clause type markers in matrix clauses (e.g. *ge* ‘declarative’, *kha* ‘interrogative’)
- Default word order is SOV, but any XP may be topicalized into initial position.
- We’ll refer to this initial position as the *prefield* and the position between the clause type marker and the verb as the *middlefield* (borrowing terms from Germanic syntax).

In (2), an object DP has been fronted.

- The fronted DP, *ꞑkhanis*, still appears with the object marker, *-a*.
- Notably, the subject now also appears with the object marker.

When a non-subject XP is topicalized into the prefield, the subject appears in the middlefield and a subject clitic is generated, as seen in (2).

- This subject clitic matches the φ -features of the displaced subject.

Generalization: The object marker appears on all argument DPs except for subjects in the prefield.

Previous analysis: Washburn (2001)

Washburn (2001) proposes that the object marker in Khoekhoe is Case assigned under Spec-Head agreement with T.

All DPs obligatorily move through Spec,T in order to receive Case.

This analysis relies on a stipulation:

- Subject DPs receive OM in Spec,T; it is deleted in Spec,C.
- Object DPs that move into Spec,C don’t undergo this case deletion.

(3) a. [_{VP} S → [_{TP} S + OM → [_{CP} S + OM
 b. [_{VP} O → [_{TP} O + OM → [_{CP} O + OM

In addition, there is an empirical argument against Washburn’s analysis:

Washburn’s only evidence for this movement is the objects positioning with respect to tense marking.

However, there are alternative word orders where objects appear after tense marking; the object marker still appears.

(4) Dandagob ge go ꞑkhanis -a khomai
 D. DECL PST book -OM read
 “Dandago read a book.”

Object Marking as Default Case

Background: Schütze (2001) proposes that DPs not associated with Case features in the syntax may be spelled out with a default case morpheme.

- The set of elements with the proposed default marking don’t form a natural class.
- DPs receive default case in positions the syntax couldn’t have assigned it to them.

Example: In English, accusative is default. (5) a. Who wants to try this game?

- b. Me / *I.
 Not us / *we.

Pronouns in fragment answers are accusative, even when they correspond to a syntactic subject.

Our proposal: The Khoekhoe object marker is a **default case** assigned to all argument DPs that don’t receive nominative.

- Sentence-initial subjects receive nominative via Spec-Head agreement with C.
- The remaining DPs are not associated with a case assigning head and receive OM.
- If some other XP is topicalized into the prefield, the subject doesn’t receive nominative and hence surfaces with default case.

Analysis Details

C bears unvalued φ -features and agrees with the subject.

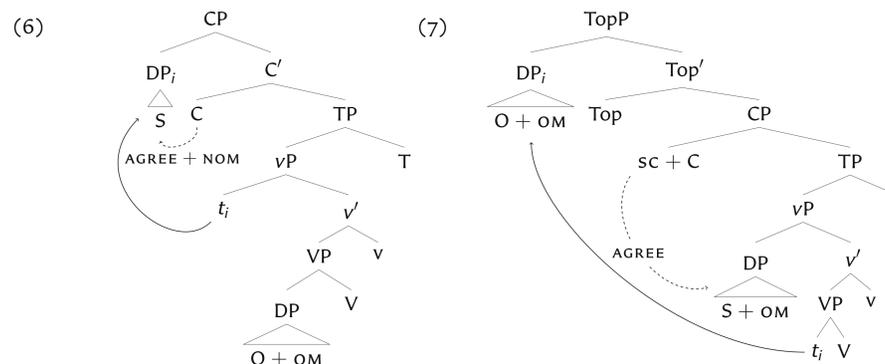
This agreement relation can be realized in two ways:

1. Raising the subject to Spec,C (and assigning nominative).
2. Generating a subject clitic.

The subject only receives case if it moves into Spec,C.

Non-subject fronted items are not in Spec,C, but instead in the specifier of a higher Topic head.

As such, they do not receive nominative from C.



Additional Data: Questions

In questions, all DPs (including sentence-initial subjects) surface with identical object marking:

(8) Dandagob -a kha taras -a ꞑkhanis -a go mā?
 D. -OM INTER woman -OM book -OM PST give
 “Did Dandago give the woman a book?”

Washburn’s model does not address this fact.

We propose C[+Q] is defective and is unable to assign nominative; all DPs get default.

Evidence for the Topic Position

Subject-initial sentences are ambiguous between a topicalized and a broad focused reading; other sentences are non-ambiguous.

(9) Dandagob ge ꞑkhanisa go khomai.
 D. DECL book PAST read
Either: “Dandago read the book.”
Or: “As for Dandago, he read the book.”

(10) ꞑkhanisa =b ge Dandagoba go khomai
 book =3SM.SC DECL D. PAST read
Only: “As for the book, D. read it.”
Not: “D. read the book.”

In at least some situations, both Spec,C and Spec,Topic can be filled.

These involve topicalization of the TP with focus on the subject.

(11) ꞑkhanisa go khomai Dandagob ge
 book PAST read D. DECL
 “As for reading the book, it was Dandago.”

Predictions and Problems

Our model correctly predicts that all DPs should receive object marking in the absence of a case-assigning head.

In addition, we correctly predict the form of **fragment answers**:

- When the C head is elided, we correctly predict that the fragment should appear with default marking, even when grammatically the subject.
- There is an alternative construction where C is pronounced; here we correctly predict that object marking is impossible.

(12) Tai-i ꞑkhanisa go ꞑama?
 who book PAST buy?
 “Who bought the book?”

(13) a. Dandagob *(-a).
 D. -OM
 “Dandago (bought the book).”

b. Dandagob (*-a) ge.
 D. DECL
 “It was Dandago.”

Coordination is more puzzling:

- In DP coordination, we find that both DPs are unmarked regardless of grammatical role, unlike in English.
- However, the entire ConjP receives an object marker if appropriate:

(14) Dandagob ge [ꞑkhanis tsi ꞑgam-i tsin] -a go ꞑama.
 D. DECL book and meat and -OM PST buy
 “Dandago bought the book and the meat.”

- This is puzzling, but perhaps this is not DP coordination but something lower.

SELECTED REFERENCES: • Haacke, Wilfred H.G. 2013. Namibian Khoekhoe Syntax. In *The Khoesan Languages*, ed. Rainer Vossen, 325–340. Routledge. • Schütze, Carson T. 2001. On the nature of default case. *Syntax* 4:205–238. • Washburn, Paul. 2001. A Minimalist approach to Khoekhoe declaratives. *Cornell Working Papers in Linguistics* 18:28–56.