

## **Tswana locatives and their status in the inversion construction**

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### **Abstract**

Several articles published in the last decade have demonstrated that, in several Sotho-Tswana (S30) and Nguni (S40) languages, locative marking has ceased to be integrated into the noun class system, and preverbal locatives in inversion constructions do not show evidence of being grammatical subjects. Part of the literature on Tswana suggests however that in both respects, Tswana might be different. The present article argues that the locative system of Tswana is in fact not particularly conservative (and is even more innovative than that of the other S30-40 languages), and the preverbal locatives in the inversion construction of Tswana do not show properties that could support analyzing them differently from the preverbal locatives in the other S30-40 languages.

**Keywords:** tswana, inversion constructions, impersonal constructions, locative subjects, locative classes

## 1. Introduction

In Bantu languages, canonical predication is typically characterized by verb agreement with a noun phrase representing the sole argument of intransitive verbs and the most agent-like argument of transitive verbs. As illustrated by ex. (1), if this argument is not identified to a speech act participant, the agreement prefix of verbs encodes the noun class to which the noun phrase representing it belongs, which results in co-variation between the class prefix of the noun heading the noun phrase in question and the agreement prefix of the verb.<sup>1</sup>

- (1) a. **Mosadi o lapile.**  
**mù-sádí**      'ú-láp-ìl-è  
 CL1-woman   CL1-be\_tired-PRF-FIN  
 'The woman is tired.'
- b. **Lepodisi le lapile.**  
**lí-pòdísí**      'lí-láp-ìl-è  
 CL5-policeman   CL5-be\_tired-PRF-FIN  
 'The policeman is tired.'
- c. **Sefofu se lapile.**  
**sì-fòfù**      sí-láp-ìl-è  
 CL7-blind\_person   CL7-be\_tired-PRF-FIN  
 'The blind person is tired.'
- d. **Ngaka e lapile.**  
**Ø-ṅàkà**      í-láp-ìl-è  
 CL9-doctor   CL9-be\_tired-PRF-FIN  
 'The doctor is tired.'

Verb agreement is therefore crucial for the identification of a grammatical relation 'subject' in Bantu languages, and the observation of the verbal prefix expressing agreement with the subject is crucial for the analysis of constructions in which the argument encoded as the subject in canonical predication deviates from its usual behavior.

Central Bantu languages are characterized by the integration of locative marking into the noun class system, and inversion constructions in which a locative NP in preverbal position can be analyzed as the grammatical subject. The analysis of preverbal locatives as grammatical subjects in constructions such as the Chichewa inversion construction illustrated by ex. (2) crucially relies on the observation of the co-variation between the possible locative class prefixes (**ku-** in (2a), **m-** in (2b), **pa-** in (2c)) and the verbal prefixes occupying the slot dedicated to the expression of subject agreement.

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1. Throughout this article, the examples for which no particular indication is given are Tswana examples from the author's personal documentation.

## (2) Chichewa (Bresnan &amp; Kanerva 1989)

- a. **Ku-mu-dzi**      **ku-na-bwér-á**      **a-lendô-wo.**  
 CL17-CL3-village    CL17-PAST-come-FIN    CL2-VISITOR-CL2.DEM  
 ‘To the village came those visitors.’
- b. **M-mi-têngo**    **mw-a-khal-a**      **a-nyăni.**  
 CL18-CL4-tree    CL18-PRF-sit-FIN    CL2-baboon  
 ‘In the trees are sitting baboons.’
- c. **Pa-m-chenga**    **p-a-im-a**      **nkhandwe.**  
 CL16-CL3-sand    CL16-PRF-stand-FIN    CL9.fox  
 ‘On the sand is standing the fox.’

Several papers published in the last decade have contributed to a better understanding of the specificity of the locative systems of Sotho-Tswana and Nguni languages and of their inversion constructions, in comparison with the typologically unusual situation typically found in Central Bantu languages: Marten (2006), Zerbian (2006), Buell (2007), Buell (2009), Marten (2010).<sup>2</sup> The locative system of Swati is characterized by Marten (2010) as having undergone “a systematic change whereby locative marking has ceased to be part of the noun class system, and is now better analyzed as a prepositional system”. Zerbian (2006) demonstrates that preverbal locatives in the inversion construction of Northern Sotho show no evidence of being grammatical subjects, and consequently the construction is better analyzed as “an impersonal construction with a preposed locative constituent”. Buell (2007) comes to a similar conclusion for Zulu and suggests that it might perhaps be extended to Tswana too.

Part of the literature on Tswana suggests however that in both respects, Tswana might be kind of a black sheep of the family. According to Cole (1955), Tswana, contrary to the other Southern Bantu languages, has synchronically active class prefixes for the three locative classes 16, 17, and 18. This analysis has been adopted in most subsequent works on Tswana, and in publications dealing with other Southern Bantu languages, Tswana is regularly mentioned as a language whose rich nominal locative morphology contrasts with the impoverished nominal locative morphology found in the other Southern Bantu languages. As regards inversion constructions, Demuth & Mmusi (1997) argue that Tswana has a locative inversion construction in which preverbal locatives must be analyzed as grammatical subjects.

In this paper, I show that Tswana is in fact not different from the other Southern Bantu languages analyzed in the articles quoted above. As already argued in Creissels (1997), the locative system of Tswana is not particularly conservative (and is in fact even more innovative than that of the other Southern Bantu languages), and the preverbal locatives in the inversion construction of Tswana do not show any property that could support analyzing them as grammatical subjects. Writing the present article was motivated by the persistence of the legend about the ‘rich nominal locative morphology’ of Tswana and the fact that, in spite of the advances in the analysis of the locative systems and inversion constructions of Southern Bantu languages, Tswana is still referred to with a distorted view of its locative system and inversion construction.

2. For a general account of Bantu locatives, see Grégoire (1975).

## 2. The restructuring of the locative system of Tswana

### 2.1. The reduction of the locative class system

Synchronically, the class system of Tswana includes just one noun class corresponding at least to some extent to the reconstructed Bantu locative classes. The morphological material characterizing this class comes mainly from the Bantu class 17. In the glosses, it is referred to as class 15/17, because the same agreement morphology characterizes infinitives, whose prefix is **go** ( $\chi\grave{u}$ -).

Morphological elements analyzable as reflexes of the other locative classes of Bantu (16 or 18) are still identifiable in Tswana, but always in forms synchronically belonging to class 17, or as frozen vestiges of former prefixes in forms that belong to other classes or do not participate in the class agreement system at all. Such forms sometimes retain the semantic properties characteristic of Bantu classes 16 and 18, but they are never involved in specific agreement patterns. Consequently, in a description of Tswana, according to the current conventions in the description of Bantu languages, it is correct to use the label 'class 17' (or 'class 15/17') for one of the synchronically active noun classes; by contrast, characterizing some Tswana forms as belonging to 'class 16' or 'class 18' makes sense only from a historical perspective.

The question of characterizing the synchronic class 17 of Tswana as 'locative' or not is not discussed in the present paper, but in this respect, the situation of Tswana does not differ significantly from that described by Buell (2009) for Zulu.

There are only two Tswana nouns belonging to class 17, both meaning 'place': **golo** ( $\chi\grave{u}$ -l̩) and **felo** (f̩l̩). In spite of the fact that it obviously begins with a reflex of the class 16 prefix, **felo** (f̩l̩) has exactly the same agreement properties as **golo** ( $\chi\grave{u}$ -l̩), and in a strictly synchronic analysis, it is impossible to segment it into a class prefix and a stem. Note that Tswana speakers tend to regularize the situation by using **lefelo** (l̩-f̩l̩) (class 5, plural **mafelo** (m̩à-f̩l̩)) instead of **felo** (f̩l̩).

As will be shown in detail in Section 2.3, the formation of locative expressions in Tswana cannot be described as the formation of nouns with the same agreement properties as **golo** ( $\chi\grave{u}$ -l̩) 'place' from nouns belonging to other classes.

### 2.2. The reflexes of Bantu locative nouns

Synchronically, in Tswana, the direct reflexes of other Bantu locative class nouns are words found exclusively in contexts in which they can be analyzed as adverbs or prepositions. They have lost the ability to be used as subjects or objects, and to be modified by noun dependents such as demonstratives or adjectives.

The only construction in which a vestige of the former agreement properties of the Tswana reflexes of the Bantu locative nouns can still be observed is the construction they form with their complement in their use as prepositions. In this use, their complement is introduced by a genitive marker reminiscent of their nominal origin. A crucial observation however is that, whatever the class they originally belonged to, their complement is invariably introduced by the class 15/17 genitive marker **ga** ( $\chi\acute{a}$ -). For example, in **morago ga** (m̩r̩áχ̩̀ χ̩̀á-) 'behind', the reflex of a Bantu noun of class 18 functions as a preposition whose complement is marked by a prefix which, historically, is the reflex of the class 15/17 genitive marker.

Tswana has nouns cognate with the Bantu locative class nouns, but they are not their direct reflexes since they include non-locative prefixes that determine their agreement properties. In such nouns, the reflex of the etymological locative prefix subsists in frozen form as the first syllable of the stem to which the non-locative prefix attaches. Synchronically, such nouns have nothing to do with the locative system, and it can only be observed that their stem coincides with a synchronically unanalyzable word functioning as an adverb or preposition:

<u>adverb</u>	<u>preposition</u>	<u>noun</u>
<b>godimo</b> <b>χùdíímú</b> 'above'	<b>godimo ga</b> <b>χùdíímù χά-</b> 'on top of'	<b>legodimo</b> <b>lì-χùdíímú</b> 'top' (cl. 5)
<b>morago</b> <b>mùràχú</b> 'behind'	<b>morago ga</b> <b>mùràχù χά-</b> 'behind'	<b>bomorago</b> <b>bù-mùràχú</b> 'back' (cl. 14)

### 2.3. Locative expressions headed by ordinary nouns

In Tswana, a limited number of nouns that do not belong to class 17 share with **golo** (χù-lò) and **felo** (fílò) the ability to be used as locative adjuncts or complements of movement verbs without any special morphological marking. The general rule is that noun phrases fulfilling these functions are marked by a locative marker attached to their first word: either the locative suffix **-ng** (-ŋ) or the locative prefix **go** (χù-), as in examples (3) to (5).

- (3) **Mosetsana o tlaa ya nokeng.**  
**mù-sítsánà**    **ú-tláá-j-à**    **nùké-ŋ**  
 CL1-girl            CL1-FUT-go-FIN    (CL9)river-LOC  
 'The girl will go to the river.'
- (4) **Ke isitse ngwana ngakeng.**  
**kì-ìs-ìts-é**            **ŋw-àná**    **ŋákè-ŋ**  
 1SG-go.CAUS-PRF-FIN    CL1-child    (CL9)doctor-LOC  
 'I have sent the child to the doctor's.'
- (5) **Ke tswa go malome.**  
**kì-tsw-à**            **χù-màlómè**  
 1SG-come-FIN    LOC-(CL1)uncle.1SG  
 'I am coming from my uncle's.'

The locative markers **-ng** (-ŋ) and **go** (χù-) are in complementary distribution: **-ng** (-ŋ) is used if the first word of the noun phrase is a noun belonging to classes other than 1a/2a, or a non-human noun of class 1a, whereas **go** (χù-) is used in all other contexts. As illustrated by ex. (6) & (7), neither of these two locative markers has any effect on the agreement properties of the words they attach to: the concord on other elements within the noun phrase is not modified by the addition of the locative marker.

- (6) **motse osele** → **motseng osele**  
**mù-tsi**    **ú-sìlì**            **mù-tsi-ŋ**            **ú-sìlì**  
 CL3-village CL3-other            CL3-village-LOC CL3-other  
 ‘another village’                    ‘in another village’
- (7) **bontšhe basele** → **go bontšhe basele**  
**bó-ŋtʃʰé**    **bá-sìlì**            **χó-bó-ŋtʃʰé**            **bá-sìlì**  
 CL2a-ostrich CL2-other            LOC-CL2a-ostrich CL2-other  
 ‘other ostriches’                    ‘on other ostriches’

In addition to the fact that the locative marker **go** (**χó-**) does not trigger class 17 concord, its tone distinguishes it from the class 17 prefix **go** (**χò-**). Synchronically, Tswana has no tonal process that could account for this tonal distinction, if the two prefixes were posited as having the same underlying form.<sup>3</sup> Historically, given the extreme regularity of the tonal correspondences between Bantu reconstructions and Tswana, the high tone of the locative prefix (or proclitic) **go** (**χó-**) attached to the left edge of locative expressions excludes analyzing it as cognate with the noun class prefix **go** (**χò-**). Historically, **go** (**χó-**) must be related with Bantu class 17 in some way or other, but its tonal properties rule out a scenario by which this prefix or proclitic would originate in a reanalysis of the Bantu nominal prefix \***kù-**.<sup>4</sup>

To conclude this section, like in the other Southern Bantu languages, the Tswana reflexes of the Bantu locative class prefixes have lost the ability to be used as locative markers for nouns inherently belonging to other classes, and locative marking has no effect on the agreement properties of Tswana nouns.

#### 2.4. The Tswana reflexes of the demonstratives of locative classes

The Tswana reflexes of the Bantu demonstratives of classes 16, 17, and 18, are respectively **fa** (**fá**), **ko** ~ **kwa** (**kó** ~ **kwá**), and **mo** (**mó**).<sup>5</sup> Synchronically, they are used as determiners of the locative class nouns **golo** (**χò-lò**) and **felo** (**filò**), and as deictic locative adverbs. They have retained the semantic distinctions originally attached to the choice between the three Bantu locative classes, but are not differentiated in terms of agreement anymore.

3. On the tonal processes of Tswana, see Creissels (1998), Creissels et al. (1997).

4. The possibility of a similar distinction between **ku-** as a locative marker and **ku-** as the class 17 noun prefix does not seem to have been discussed in the literature on Nguni locative systems, which in all other respects are very similar to the system of Tswana. The reason may well be that, in Sotho-Tswana languages, in spite of the existence of complex systems of high tone spreading processes, situations in which a morpheme contributing a high tone to the tonal structure of a word does not surface as high-toned itself are relatively exceptional. This facilitates the recognition of the tonal identity of morphemes. By contrast, Nguni tonology is characterized by tone shift processes that may make the identification of the morphological source of the surface high tones extremely difficult.

5. I have no explanation to propose for the fact that the Tswana reflex of the class 17 demonstrative **ko** ~ **kwa** (**kó** ~ **kwá**) is anomalous with respect to the regular correspondences between Tswana forms and Proto-Bantu reconstructions. A form **go** (**χó**) that might be the regular reflex of the class 17 demonstrative is signaled in the literature, but it is not used by the speakers of the Sengwaketse or Sengwato dialects with whom I worked on Tswana.

In their use as locative adverbs, **fa**, **kó** and **mó** obviously cannot show evidence of differing in their agreement properties. Crucially, the loss of the distinction between the three agreement classes to which they originally belonged can be observed in their use as demonstrative determiners. The locative class nouns **golo** ( $\chi\dot{u}$ -lò) and **felo** (**flò**) ‘place’, originally belonging to classes 17 and 16 respectively, freely combine with demonstratives originally belonging to any of the three locative classes. **Golo fa** ( $\chi\dot{u}$ -lò **fá**) ‘this place’, **golo ko** ( $\chi\dot{u}$ -lò **kó**) ‘that place’ and **golo mo** ( $\chi\dot{u}$ -lò **mó**) ‘this place (inside)’ are equally acceptable. These combinations are still differentiated by shades of meaning, but syntactically, the distinction between the Bantu classes 16, 17 and 18 has been entirely lost.

The fact that the distinction between the Tswana reflexes of the Bantu demonstratives of locative classes is not correlated to the agreement system anymore is corroborated by the agreement properties of infinitives. Tswana infinitives are marked by the same prefix **go-** ( $\chi\dot{u}$ -) and generally have the same agreement properties as **golo** ( $\chi\dot{u}$ -lò) ‘place’, but the only demonstrative determiner with which they can combine is **mo** (**mó**), reflex of the Bantu demonstrative of class 18, as in **golema mo** ( $\chi\dot{u}$ -lì-mà **mó**) ‘this way of cultivating’.<sup>6</sup>

## 2.5. The alleged ‘locative class prefixes’ of Tswana

The only difference between the locative system of Tswana and that of the other Southern Bantu Languages involved in the ‘great locative shift’ described by Marten (2010) for Swati is the presence of elements that have been wrongly analyzed as locative class prefixes, suggesting that the locative system of Tswana might be more conservative than that of the other Southern Bantu languages.

The point is that, in Tswana, one of the three locative deictic adverbs **fa** (**fá**), **ko** ~ **kwa** (**kó** ~ **kwá**) or **mo** (**mó**) (glossed respectively there<sub>1</sub>, there<sub>2</sub> and there<sub>3</sub>) is usually found at the left margin of locative expressions. For example, ex. (4) & (5) above can be re-formulated as (8) & (9).

- (8) **Ke isitse ngwana ko ngakeng.**  
 kì-is-íts-é                      ηw-àná    'kó    ηákè-η  
 1SG-go.CAUS-PRF-FIN    CL1-child    there<sub>2</sub>    (CL9)doctor-LOC  
 ‘I have sent the child to the doctor’s.’
- (9) **Ke tswa ko go malome.**  
 kì-tsw-à                      kó    χó-màlómè  
 1SG-come-FIN    there<sub>2</sub>    LOC-(CL1)uncle.1SG  
 ‘I am coming from my uncle’s.’

Although by no means obligatory, the presence of one of the three locative deictic adverbs at the left margin of locative expressions is usual in Tswana, and this is one of the few features that sharply distinguish Tswana from its closest Sotho relatives: in elicitation, Tswana consultants tend to systematically use **fa** (**fá**), **ko** ~ **kwa**

6. Infinitives can combine with **fa** (**fá**) and **ko** ~ **kwa** (**kó** ~ **kwá**), but in such combinations, **fa** (**fá**) and **ko** ~ **kwa** (**kó** ~ **kwá**) can only be interpreted as locative adverbs, not as demonstrative determiners of the infinitive.

(**kó** ~ **kwá**) or **mo** (**mó**) before locatives (although they generally agree that they can be deleted), and in any Tswana text, the proportion of locative phrases beginning with **fa** (**fá**), **ko** ~ **kwa** (**kó** ~ **kwá**) or **mo** (**mó**) is quite obviously much higher than that of locative phrases devoid of them.

In part of the literature on Tswana, including Demuth & Mmusi (1997), **fa** (**fá**), **ko** ~ **kwa** (**kó** ~ **kwá**) or **mo** (**mó**) preceding locative phrases are not identified as locative deictic adverbs, but as noun class prefixes of classes 16, 17, and 18, respectively. This analysis is however erroneous, both from the diachronic and synchronic points of view.

Diachronically, **fa** (**fá**), **ko** ~ **kwa** (**kó** ~ **kwá**) and **mo** (**mó**) preceding locative phrases cannot be the reflexes of Bantu locative class prefixes, since the Tswana reflexes of the Bantu locative class prefixes are **fa-** (**fà-**), **go-** (**χù-**) and **mo-** (**mù-**). The tones are different in all three classes, the vowels are different in classes 17 and 18, and the initial consonant is different in class 17.

Synchronically, **fa** (**fá**), **ko** ~ **kwa** (**kó** ~ **kwá**) and **mo** (**mó**) preceding locative phrases are not prefixes. In addition to that, they are not involved in class agreement.

Morphologically, **fa** (**fá**), **ko** ~ **kwa** (**kó** ~ **kwá**) and **mo** (**mó**) preceding locative phrases are not bound forms, but words.<sup>7</sup> As discussed in detail by Creissels et al. (1997: 16-23) and Creissels (1998), in Tswana (and probably in the other languages of the Sotho-Tswana group), high tone spreading and downstep provide criteria for distinguishing boundaries between adjacent words from word-internal morpheme boundaries. According to these criteria, **fa** (**fá**), **ko** ~ **kwa** (**kó** ~ **kwá**) and **mo** (**mó**) preceding locative expressions are unambiguously words rather than prefixes of proclitics. At the junction between **fa** (**fá**), **ko** ~ **kwa** (**kó** ~ **kwá**) and **mo** (**mó**) and the following word, a downstep appears, and high tone spreading operates, exactly in the same way as at the junction between forms that unquestionably constitute distinct words. **Fa** (**fá**), **ko** ~ **kwa** (**kó** ~ **kwá**) and **mo** (**mó**) differ in both respects from the locative prefix or proclitic **go** (**χù-**) mentioned above and illustrated by ex. (5), (7), and (9), which is never separated from its host by a downstep, and has tone spreading properties typical of prefixes.

For example, if **ko** (**kó**) were a prefix, **ko ngakeng** ‘at the doctor’s’ would be phonetically \***[kónǎkèŋ]** rather than **[kónǎkèŋ]**, and **ko go bontšhe** ‘on the ostriches’ would be phonetically \***[kóχúbóŋtʃʰé]** rather than **[kó'χúbóŋtʃʰé]**.

Syntactically, **fa** (**fá**), **ko** ~ **kwa** (**kó** ~ **kwá**) and **mo** (**mó**) preceding locative phrases trigger no change in agreement, either in the internal structure of the locative phrase (for which the only relevant factor is the class to which the head noun belongs), or in the relation between the locative phrase and other elements of the construction in which it is inserted. They are as class-neutral as the locative affixes **-ng** (**-ŋ**) and **go** (**χù-**) described in Section 2.3.

7. An anonymous reviewer objects to this analysis that Tswana exhibits word-minimality effects. It is true that several morphological rules of Tswana can be explained as motivated by minimality constraints, but Tswana has no general ban on monosyllabic words, and the behavior of the monosyllabic locative adverbs shows no evidence of prosodic dependency. A possible explanation is that, historically, they are reflexes of morphologically complex words, and therefore may have been disyllabic at the time when the constraints responsible for the minimality effects observed in Tswana morphology were phonologically active.

Consequently, **fa** (**fá**), **ko** ~ **kwa** (**kó** ~ **kwá**) and **mo** (**mó**) preceding locative phrases are not the reflexes of the Bantu prefixes of locative classes, and they cannot be analyzed as resulting from the re-creation of a system of prefixes more or less similar to the Bantu system of locative class prefixes either. They can only be characterized as emerging locative prepositions, i.e., as locative adverbs engaged in a grammaticalization process by which they tend to acquire the status of prepositions, as argued in more detail in Creissels (1997). Analyzing them as locative class prefixes is simply erroneous, and the characterization of Tswana in the comparative tables in (Demuth & Mmusi 1997:16) and (Marten 2006:107) must be corrected. Morphologically, Tswana locatives, exactly like Sotho locatives, never show locative class prefixes. Syntactically, Tswana, exactly like Sotho, has entirely lost the ancient distinction between three locative classes, and has not re-created it either.

What distinguishes Tswana from its closest Sotho relatives is not the maintenance or re-creation of locative class prefixes, but rather a further modification of the locative system by which deictic locative adverbs that are not involved in the noun class system anymore are engaged in a further grammaticalization process by which they evolve towards the status of prepositions. This evolution does not contradict, but rather reinforces the tendency already observed in other Southern Bantu languages, whereby locative markers integrated into the system of noun class prefixes and class agreement are replaced by locative markers more similar to the locative adpositions or cases found in most of the world's languages.

### 3. Locatives in the presentational focus construction

#### 3.1. Introductory remarks

Presentational focus constructions (or sentence-focus constructions – see Lambrecht 2000) with S arguments in postverbal position are common among Bantu languages, but important variations can be observed both in their conditioning and formal characteristics.<sup>8</sup>

Tswana intransitive verbs have a presentational focus construction in which their S argument occurs in immediate postverbal position and loses the control of verbal agreement, which immediately distinguishes it from a right-dislocated subject fulfilling the discourse role of ‘antitopic’ (alias ‘afterthought’).<sup>9</sup> In ex. (10), the verb agrees with the subject in canonical preverbal position. In ex. (11),

8. Some of the variations observed in the presentational focus constructions of Bantu languages are comparable to those observed in similar constructions in Romance languages. See among others Creissels (2010) for a typologically oriented discussion of Romance presentational focus constructions, and van der Wal (2008) for a possible explanation of the variations in verbal agreement in the presentational focus constructions of Bantu and Romance languages.

9. In addition to intonation, the conjoint/disjoint morphology contributes to the recognition of the distinction between inverted subjects in the presentational focus construction and right-dislocated subjects in antitopic function, since conjoint verb forms are obligatory before inverted subjects but cannot be immediately followed by a right-dislocated noun phrase.

the same agreement relationship can be observed with the right-dislocated noun phrase. By contrast, in the presentational focus construction illustrated by ex. (12) & (13), the noun phrase in immediate postverbal position is assigned the same semantic role as the preverbal subject in ex. (10) but does not act as the controller of verbal agreement: irrespective of the class to which the noun phrase in immediate postverbal position belongs, the morphological slot devoted to the expression of subject agreement in the verb form is invariably filled by the marker of class 15/17, i.e. the marker that, in the canonical *subject-verb* construction, expresses agreement with one of the two nouns of class 17 or with an infinitive in subject role.

- (10) **Basadi ba opela mo kerekeng.**  
 bà-sádì 'bá-ǒpél-à mó kéréké-ŋ  
 CL2-woman CL2-sing-FIN there<sub>3</sub> (CL9)church-LOC  
 'The women are singing in the church.'
- (11) **Ba opela mo kerekeng, basadi.**  
 bá-ǒpél-à mó kéréké-ŋ bà-sádì  
 CL2-sing-FIN there<sub>3</sub> (CL9)church-LOC CL2-woman  
 'They are singing in the church, the women that is.'
- (12) **Mo kerekeng go opela basadi.**  
 mó kéréké-ŋ χó-ǒpél-á bà-sádì  
 there<sub>3</sub> (CL9)church-LOC CL15/17-sing-FIN CL2-woman  
 'In the church there are women singing.' (lit. 'there sing women')
- (13) **Go opela basadi.**  
 χó-ǒpél-á bà-sádì  
 CL15/17-sing-FIN CL2-woman  
 'There are women singing.' (lit. 'there sing women')

In this construction, the presence of a locative expression preceding the verb is possible but not obligatory, and when a locative expression is present in this position, its variations have no effect on the verb form, which invariably includes the marker of class 15/17 in the slot devoted to the expression of subject agreement in the canonical subject-verb construction. In this respect at least, Tswana clearly does not differ from the other Southern Bantu languages.

The function of the inversion construction with an invariable subject marker of class 15/17 can be described in terms of subject detopicalization. In particular, as illustrated by ex. (14), Tswana subjects cannot be questioned by means of interrogative words occupying the canonical preverbal position, and the use of the inversion construction provides a strategy for questioning arguments normally encoded as subjects of intransitive verbs.

- (14) **\*Mang o opela mo kerekeng?**  
 intended: 'Who is singing in the church?'

**Mo kerekeng go opela mang?**

**mó**      **kérèké-ŋ**      **χú-ǎpél-à**      **máŋ**  
 there<sub>3</sub> (CL9)church-LOC CL15/17-sing-FIN who  
 ‘Who is singing in the church?’ (lit. ‘there sings who?’)

As illustrated by ex. (15) and (16), Tswana also has a construction of intransitive verbs with an invariable subject marker of class 15/17 in which the participant encoded as the subject in the canonical subject-verb construction is not mentioned at all and is interpreted as unspecified. However, this construction cannot be described as resulting from the mere omission of the inverted subject in the inversion construction, since the verb must be in the passive form.

**(15) Go a opelwa.**

**χú-à-ǎpél-w-à**  
 CL15/17-DISJ-Sing-PASS-FIN  
 ‘There is being sung.’

**(16) Go opelwa mo kerekeng.**

**χú-ǎpél-w-à**      **mó**      **kérèké-ŋ**  
 CL15/17- sing-PASS-FIN      there<sub>3</sub>      (CL9)church-LOC  
 ‘There is being sung in the church.’

The inversion construction of Tswana with an invariable subject marker of class 15/17 is not limited to a semantic subclass of intransitive verbs. As already established by Demuth & Mmusi (1997), in Tswana, the presentational focus construction with an invariable subject marker of class 15/17 and the noun phrase representing the S argument in immediate postverbal position is possible without any particular restriction with all intransitive verbs. This contradicts previous claims according to which such constructions would be universally limited to ‘unaccusative’ intransitive verbs – see Bresnan & Kanerva (1989), but the existence of important cross-linguistic variations in the conditioning of otherwise similar presentational focus constructions constitutes a well-established fact now.<sup>10</sup>

Another important observation is that, contrary to the situation of languages that have presentational constructions in which S arguments in postverbal position must be licensed by a locative expression preceding the verb, no such constraint is observed in Tswana. Irrespective of the lexical meaning of the verb, sentences such as (13) are always acceptable without any particular conditions on the context in which they are uttered. Consequently, the use of the notion of ‘locative inversion’ in the description of the presentational focus construction of Tswana is not justified.

To conclude this section, let me mention that Tswana also has a construction of the type designated by Buell (2007) as semantic locative inversion, whose analysis

10. I leave open the question of the possible extension of the presentational focus construction to transitive verbs in Tswana. I never came across examples illustrating this possibility in my work on Tswana, but I cannot exclude it either, since I did not check the acceptability of constructions with a transitive verb including an invariable class 15/17 subject marker and followed by the noun phrase representing its A argument.

is not developed in the present paper. In this construction, which seems to be possible with a very limited number of Tswana verbs, “a noun denoting a place or space [...] raises to subject position in its canonical form, without any concomitant locative morphology” (Buell 2007:106). This is illustrated by the comparison of ex. (17), where the verb ‘settle’ agrees in noun class with **Masarwa** (**màsárwá**) ‘Bushmen’, with ex. (18), where the same verb agrees with **lefatshe** (**lìfátshì**) ‘country’.

- (17) **Masarwa a aga ko lefatsheng le.**  
**mà-sárwá**      'á-áχ-à      kó      lì-fátshì-ḡ      l-é  
 CL6-Bushman    CL6-settle-FIN    there<sub>2</sub>    CL5-country-LOC    CL5-DEM  
 ‘Bushmen live (lit. settle) in this country.’
- (18) **Lefatshe le le aga Masarwa.**  
**lì-fátshì**      l-é      'lì-áχ-á      mà-sárwà  
 CL5-country    CL5-DEM    CL5-settle-FIN    CL6-Bushman  
 ‘This country is inhabited by Bushmen.’ lit. ‘This country settles Bushmen.’

### 3.2. The competing analyses

According to Demuth & Mmusi (1997), the Tswana construction in which a locative expression immediately precedes a verb form with the class 15/17 marker in the subject agreement slot is a locative inversion construction involving a locative subject. Their description of this construction is based on the following examples, transcribed and glossed here in a way that reflects my own views on Tswana.

- (19) **Fa setlhareng go eme basimane.**  
**fá**      sí-t<sup>h</sup>àrì-ḡ      χó-ém-í      bà-símàní  
 there<sub>1</sub>    CL7-tree-LOC    CL15/17-stand(PRF)-FIN    CL2-boy  
 ‘By the tree stand the boys.’
- (20) **Ko Maung go tlaa ya rona mariga.**  
**kó**      màúḡ      χó-tláá-j-à      róná      màríχà  
 there<sub>2</sub>    Maung    CL15/17-FUT-go-FIN    1PL    winter  
 ‘To Maung we shall go in winter.’
- (21) **Mo lefatsheng go fula dikgomo.**  
**mó**      lì-fátshì-ḡ      χó-fúl-á      dí-q<sup>h</sup>òmó  
 there<sub>3</sub>    CL5-country-LOC    CL15/17-graze-FIN    CL8/10-cow  
 ‘In the country are grazing the cattle.’

As announced in the introduction, the present paper argues the case for an alternative analysis according to which:

- this construction is better analyzed as an impersonal construction (i.e., a construction lacking a grammatical subject) involving an expletive subject marker;

- in this construction, the locative preceding the verb is not a core constituent, and must be analyzed simply as a frame setting adjunct (i.e., a syntactically peripheral phrase occupying a topic position at the left periphery of the clause rather than the subject position).<sup>11</sup>

It is important to immediately emphasize that the decision concerning the syntactic status of the locative expression in preverbal position has no impact on the account of the syntax-semantics interface, since both analyses are compatible with the semantic properties of the construction: analyzing the locative expression in preverbal position as an exotic variety of subject or as a common-type frame setting adjunct equally predicts its restriction effect on predication. What I will try to show is that, syntactically, the locative subject analysis only leads to needless complications. The locative subject analysis does not predict any property of the construction that would not be equally well predicted by the frame setting adjunct analysis, and makes wrong predictions on important aspects of the construction.

### 3.3. Lack of evidence from agreement

In Bantu languages, as already commented in Section 1, the most obvious evidence supporting the analysis of presentational focus constructions as involving locative subjects comes from agreement. In Tswana, as already illustrated by the examples presented in Sections 3.1-2, the subject marker in the presentational focus construction is invariably the subject marker of class 15/17, even when the locative expression combines with locative adverbs that historically come from class 16 or 18. The simplest analysis compatible with this lack of agreement between the proposed locative and the verb is that the locative phrase to the left of the verb is a frame setting adjunct that is assigned its discourse role in a position at the left periphery of the clause rather than in subject position, and the subject marker is an expletive which has some etymological relationship with the locative system, but synchronically constitutes a default subject marker in an impersonal construction (i.e., in a construction that lacks a grammatical subject).

Demuth & Mmusi (1997) argue however that the locative phrase to the left of the verb has behavioral properties that justify analyzing it as fulfilling the subject function, in spite of the lack of any evidence of agreement. According to their analysis, there are still three locative classes, and the subject marker in this construction still expresses subject agreement, but verbal subject agreement morphology does not differentiate the three locative classes. In other words, they analyze the invariability of the subject marker in the inversion construction as a consequence of the fact that the construction is possible only if the role of grammatical subject is assigned to phrases belonging to one of the three classes that trigger class 15/17 agreement on the verb.

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11. On frame setting adjuncts, see among others Charolles & Péry-Woodley (eds) 2005, Charolles & Prevost (eds) 2003, Frey 2000, Lang et al. (eds) 2003.

### 3.4. Evidence supporting the locative subject analysis

After a very detailed discussion of the grammatical properties of the preverbal locative in Northern Sotho, Zerbian (2006) concludes that “In view of the lack of supporting evidence for a locative-as-subject analysis for preverbal locatives, it is suggested that ‘locative inversion’ in Northern Sotho be treated as an impersonal construction with a preposed locative constituent”. Her argumentation is convincing and entirely transposable to Tswana, and consequently does not need to be repeated in detail here. In the rest of Section 3, apart from Section 3.5.3 (in which I discuss a point that as far as I know has not been evoked in previous analyses of this type of construction), I will mainly emphasize some details I consider particularly significant.

#### 3.4.1. Evidence from raising

According to Demuth & Mmusi (1997), raising constructions, illustrated by ex. (22), provide evidence supporting the locative subject analysis.<sup>12</sup>

- (22) **Kwa Gauteng go lebeletswe go na.**  
**kwá**    **χàútéŋ**            **χó-líbéléts-w-í**            **χó-nà**  
 there<sub>2</sub>    Johannesburg    CL15/17-expect-PASS-FIN    CL15/17-rain  
 ‘In Johannesburg it is expected to be rainy.’

However, such examples only show that Tswana has a raising construction compatible with the locative subject analysis. They do not provide arguments against the impersonal analysis, since there would not be the slightest difficulty in accounting for the same observations within the impersonal analysis. As rightly observed by Buell (2007:115-116), there is nothing exceptional for expletives in impersonal constructions to be involved in raising in the same way as canonical subjects.

#### 3.4.2. Evidence from relativization

Exactly the same can be said of the observations on relativization which constitute the second argument used by Demuth & Mmusi (1997) to argue that locatives can be subjects controlling class 15/17 agreement. The point is that Tswana does not use a resumptive pronoun in subject relativization and shows variations in the use of the resumptive locative **teng** (**tèŋ**) ‘there’ in the relativization of locatives – ex. (23) & (24).

12. In addition to the glossing of **kwa** (**kwá**), the gloss given here for this example rectifies two errors in the gloss given in Demuth and Mmusi’s paper. First, **Gauteng** (**χàútéŋ**) ‘(in) Johannesburg’ must not be segmented as **Gaute** ‘Johannesburg’ plus **-ng** ‘LOC’; etymologically, **Gauteng** is the locative form of **χàúτά** ‘gold’ (‘at the place where there is gold’), but synchronically, **ng** cannot be isolated as a formative in **Gauteng** taken as a toponym. Second, **go** in **go na** ‘rain’ is not a subject concord, but the noun prefix of class 15/17 that characterizes infinitives; like other noun class prefixes, this prefix is underlyingly toneless, but in this example, it undergoes a high tone spreading process occurring at word boundaries.

- (23) **basimane ba ba emeng fa setlhareng**  
**bà-símàní bá 'bá-ém-ì-ḡ fá sí-tʰàrí-ḡ**  
 CL2-boy CL2 CL2-stand-FIN-REL there<sub>1</sub> CL7-tree-LOC  
 ‘the boys who are standing by the tree’
- (24) **fa setlhareng se basimane ba emeng (teng)**  
**fá sí-tʰàrí-ḡ sé bà-símàní 'bá-ém-ì-ḡ (tèḡ)**  
 there<sub>1</sub> CL7-tree-LOC CL7 CL2-boy CL2-stand-FIN-REL there  
 ‘by the tree by which the boys are standing’

According to Demuth and Mmusi (1997), the resumptive locative is ‘optional but highly preferred’ if the relativized clause has a canonical subject, whereas if the relativized clause has the construction with an invariable subject marker of class 15/17, the resumptive locative is ‘permitted, but the preferred structure is without it’, which they view as evidence that the extracted locative is a subject.

This point has been discussed in detail by Zerbian (2006:371-2) and Buell (2006:116-7). Let me just add that an obvious weakness of Demuth & Mmusi’s argumentation follows from the data itself, since what they observe is not a clear-cut distinction in the use of a resumptive element in the relativization of locatives, and they acknowledge that the correlation they propose between the presence/absence of the resumptive element and the syntactic status of locatives is only a matter of ‘preferences’.

### 3.4.3. Evidence from questioning

Machobane (1995) puts forward two other pieces of evidence in support of a locative subject analysis of the same construction in Southern Sotho (previously analyzed as an impersonal construction by Demuth 1990): the inability of the preposed locatives to be questioned *in situ*, and the control of reflexives. Concerning interrogation, it is true that Tswana and Sotho, like many other Bantu languages, have a rule according to which subjects cannot be questioned by means of interrogatives in preverbal position – ex. (25), and that **kae** (**káí**) ‘where’ cannot be found in preverbal position either – ex. (26).

- (25) **Basadi ba opela mo kerekeng.**  
**bà-sádí 'bá-ḡpél-à mó kéréké-ḡ**  
 CL2-woman CL2-sing-FIN there<sub>3</sub> (CL9)church-LOC  
 ‘The women are singing in the church.’

BUT \***Mang o opela mo kerekeng ?**  
 intended: ‘Who is singing in the church?’

- (26) **Mo kerekeng go opela basadi.**  
**mó kéréké-ḡ ḡú-ḡpél-á bà-sádi**  
 there<sub>3</sub> (CL9)church-LOC CL15/17-sing-FIN CL2-woman  
 ‘In the church there are women singing.’ (lit. ‘there sing women’)

BUT \***Kae go opela basadi?**  
intended: ‘Where are there women singing?’

However, the very notion of frame setting adjunct (and more generally, topicalization) excludes questioning, and consequently the inability of locatives in sentences such as (26) to be questioned *in situ* cannot be used as a criterion for choosing between the locative subject and the frame setting adjunct analysis.

#### 3.4.4. Evidence from reflexive control

Concerning reflexive control, let me add to Zerbian’s discussion of this point that Machobane’s argument does not hold for the simple reason that the example she gives (reproduced here as (27)) does not involve uncontroversial control of a reflexive *pronoun*.

(27) Southern Sotho (Machobane 1995: 122)

**Táfolé-ng      hó-i-pény-ets-a      fééla.**  
(CL9)table-LOC   CL15/17-REFL-shine-APPL-FIN   only  
‘On the table shines on its own.’

The point is that this example involves a verbal affix traditionally labeled ‘reflexive’ but which, much in the same way as Romance *se*, has a variety of uses involving lexical operations on verb valency rather than syntactic binding. Here again, it would be very easy to find comparable examples in well-described languages in which nobody has ever proposed the recognition of locative subjects.

#### 3.5. Evidence against the locative subject analysis

##### 3.5.1. The semantic correlate of the absence of a preverbal locative

In Tswana, a crucial property distinguishing subjects from non-subject constituents is that the absence of a subject noun phrase in canonical verbal predication acts as an instruction to identify the subject argument to a discursively salient entity that could be represented by a noun phrase belonging to the same class as the subject marker included in the verb form. In ex. (28), in the absence of a noun phrase controlling class 1 agreement, the only possible interpretation implies identifying the first argument of ‘sing’ to a specific person whose identity is known by the speaker and retrievable from the context by the addressee. Such a sentence cannot be used as the equivalent of English ‘Someone is singing’.

(28) **O a opela.**  
**ú-à-ópél-à**  
CL1-DISJ-sing-FIN  
‘He/she is singing.’

Crucially, the alleged “locative subjects” lack this property. As reflected in the translation of ex. (13) & (15) above, their deletion does not imply anaphoric reference to a specific place identifiable by the addressee, and is simply interpreted as expressing indetermination as to the place where the event occurs. In Tswana, this type of behavior is typical of non-subject constituents.

### 3.5.2. One or two inversion construction(s) with an invariable subject marker of class 15/17?

The fact that the deletion of preverbal locatives in the presentational focus construction does not trigger anaphoric reference to a specific place creates a serious problem for the analysis of preverbal locatives as grammatical subjects. This difficulty is acknowledged by Demuth & Mmusi (1997), but since they stick to the notion of locative subject, the solution they propose is the recognition of two distinct constructions involving an invariable subject marker of class 15/17. They analyze the construction with an invariable subject marker of class 15/17 as a locative subject construction or an expletive subject construction depending on the presence of a preverbal locative. However, this solution does not really preserve the consistency of the notion of grammatical subject, since it implies the recognition of a construction in which the subject noun phrase cannot be omitted at all. Such a solution could be considered only if this difficulty were counterbalanced by very strong arguments supporting the locative subject analysis, which is not the case.

### 3.5.3. Passive morphology combined with an invariable subject marker of class 15/17

Additional evidence against the solution proposed by Demuth and Mmusi (1997) comes from the observation of the use of passive morphology combined with an invariable subject marker of class 15/17. As already mentioned in Section 3.1 and illustrated by ex. (15) & (16), in this construction, which – according to the analysis proposed here – is an impersonal passive construction, passive morphology licenses the omission of any mention of the participant encoded as the subject in the corresponding canonical predication. In ex. (15) & (16), this use of passive morphology was illustrated by sentences in which no locative was present, but as illustrated by ex. (29), the same use of passive morphology can be observed in the presence of a preposed locative.

- (29) **Mo mafatsheng a mangwe go a berekwa,**  
**mó mà-fátshí-ṅ á mà-ṅwí χú-à-bérék-w-à**  
 there<sub>3</sub> CL6-country-LOC CL6 CL6-other CL15/17-DISJ-work-PASS-FIN  
 ‘In the other countries people work (lit. ‘there is worked’),

**ga go tshamekiwe jaaka le dira.**

**χà-χú-ts<sup>h</sup>ámík-íw-í dzááká 'lí-dír-à**  
 NEG-CL15/17-play-PASS-FIN as 2PL-do-FIN  
 ‘they do not play (lit. ‘there is not played’) as you do.’

In other words, the presence of a preposed locative has no effect on the use of passive morphology in constructions with an invariable subject marker of class 15/17. The recognition of a single inversion construction with an expletive subject marker of class 15/17, irrespective of the possible presence of a preposed locative, constitutes the only simple way of accounting for this particular use of passive morphology. Recognizing locatives preposed to a verb form including an invariable subject marker of class 15/17 as subjects would imply stipulating that passive forms may have subjects that do not result from object promotion, and that, in constructions with locative subjects, passive morphology fulfills a function different from its function in constructions with other types of subjects, but identical to its function in impersonal constructions. Restricting the recognition of locative subjects to constructions involving non-passive verb-forms could be considered as an alternative solution, but in the absence of independent evidence this would constitute a purely ad hoc and needlessly complicated solution.

The analysis of locatives preposed to a verb form including an invariable subject marker of class 15/17 as subjects must therefore be rejected on the basis of the following three considerations:

- all the syntactic and semantic properties of the locatives in preverbal position that have been discussed in the literature can be easily accounted for within the impersonal analysis,
- one of the properties of the locatives in preverbal position at least (the fact that their omission does not trigger an anaphoric reading) clearly contradicts their identification as grammatical subjects;
- the compatibility of the locatives in preverbal position with the particular use of passive morphology just discussed cannot be accounted for in the locative subject analysis without introducing needless complications.

#### 4. Conclusion

It follows from the preceding discussion that, contrary to previous claims, the locative system of Tswana is basically of the same type as that of the other Southern Bantu languages whose locative systems have been analyzed in the recent literature, and the recognition of a locative subject construction in Tswana is not justified:

- The alleged 'locative class prefixes' of Tswana are deictic locative adverbs which have entirely lost the relationship they originally had with the noun class system, and whose only difference with their cognates in the other Southern Bantu languages is their tendency to develop a preposition-like use.
- The presentational focus construction of Tswana can conveniently be characterized as an impersonal construction, and the locatives optionally occurring in preverbal position in this construction exhibit no property that would justify a locative-as-subject analysis.

The fact that Southern Bantu languages have locative systems and inversion constructions very different from those typically found in Central Bantu languages is clearly acknowledged in the recent literature, but some doubts still subsisted about the situation of Tswana, and dissipating these doubts was the aim of the present article.

## Abbreviations

CAUS	causative
CL	noun class
DEM	demonstrative
DISJ	disjoint
FIN	inflectional ending of verbs
FUT	future
LOC	locative
NEG	negation
PASS	passive
PAST	past
PL	plural
PRF	perfect
REL	relative

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### Résumé

Plusieurs articles publiés ces dix dernières années ont démontré que dans plusieurs langues Sotho-Tswana (S30) et Nguni (S40), le marquage locatif a cessé d'être intégré au système de classes nominales, et les locatifs préverbaux dans les constructions à inversion ne sont pas des sujets grammaticaux. Une partie de la littérature sur le tswana suggère toutefois que, de ces deux points de vue, cette langue pourrait être différente. Le présent article soutient que son système locatif n'est pas en fait particulièrement conservateur (et est même plus innovateur que celui des autres langues S30-40), et que les locatifs préverbaux utilisés dans la construction à inversion du tswana ne présentent pas de propriétés qui justifieraient une analyse différente de celle des locatifs préverbaux des autres langues S30-40.