THE GİKÜYŨ REFERENCE PHRASE: A ROLE AND REFERENCE GRAMMAR [RRG] PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract
This article looks at the morphosyntax of the Gĩkũyũ Reference Phrase [RP] or what is now often known as the Determiner Phrase [DP] and formerly the Noun Phrase [NP] and shows how it fits within the formalism proposed in Role and Reference Grammar [RRG] the theoretical framework adopted here. Of greater importance is the fact that in Gĩkũyũ a demonstrative can serve as the nucleus in the Layered Structure of the Reference Phrase [LSRP] without a lexical noun. The structure of the Gĩkũyũ RP has been shown to be accounted for by both the constituent and operator projections without resorting to abstract movements. In this paper it is proposed that the RP should not be understood as a DP since it is not always that determiners are found in referring expressions. Endocentricity in phrases as assumed by those who claim for DPs is not tenable cross-linguistically. An alternative is to have a label that is functionally oriented such as the RP.

Key Words: Reference phrase, nominals, projection, adjectives, endocentricity.

Introduction
This article looks at the description of a syntactic unit commonly called by some the noun phrase [NP] and by others, the Determiner Phrase [DP] as it is in Gĩkũyũ. Gĩkũyũ is a Bantu language spoken in Kenya and grouped as E51 by Guthrie (1951). The concern will be especially on the morphosyntax of the Gĩkũyũ Reference Phrase (RP). Most syntactic theories will refer to that syntactic unit headed by a noun as a Noun Phrase (NP) but in this article following Van Valin (2005; 2008; 2010) we take the NP as the Reference Phrase [RP] because it has been observed that not all so called NPs are headed necessarily by a noun (for argumentation see Van Valin 2008b). ‘The nucleus of an RP is neither restricted to nominals, nor … to lexical heads’ (Van Valin 2010,710).

Dryer (2004;2007) notes that there are noun phrases that are not headed by a noun and he suggests that they should be referred to by an alternative label that would accommodate those assumed NPs without a noun and those that contain a noun. Dryer does not suggest a label and this is done in Van Valin (2008). This article will try to explain the composition of the Gĩkũyũ RP within the tenets of Role and Reference Grammar [RRG] a structural-functional theory of grammar (see Van Valin & LaPolla, 1997) (henceforth VVLP) and Van Valin (2005; 2010).

Endocentricity as proposed in X-bar syntax has been found to be untenable in the description of the Gĩkũyũ NP morphosyntax (Mugane, 1998,238). We intend to present an alternative which captures the morphosyntax of the Gĩkũyũ RP more explicitly without imposing unnecessary features. The data for this paper is introspective and also from secondary sources. The paper will look at the morphosyntax of the simple Gĩkũyũ RP within the representation provided for in RRG. We do not intend to give an introduction of the theory and we advise the readers to refer to the references cited.


1
Previous Studies

The NP has received much attention from linguists albeit for different motivations as well as from differing standpoints. The noun phrase has been observed by linguists like Chomsky (1970) and Jackendoff (1977) among others, to have strong structural parallels with the clause in the Generative theory paradigm hence the introduction of the X-bar syntax for both phrases and clauses (inflectional phrases, IP). Within RRG, the same parallelism is assumed but endocentricity is rejected. Literature on the discussion on the NP is varied. There are those that are theoretically oriented and those that are purely descriptive without allegiance to specific grammatical theories. Some studies would include Rijkhoff (2002), Payne (1993, 1994), Dryer (2004, 2007) etc. These studies are functional and typological oriented.

One of the most oft-quoted works on the NP is Abney (1987). This work was revolutionary as far as the description of the NP is concerned. It is his reanalysis of the English NP, and the determiners in it that led to the renaming of the NP to DP. Dryer (2007) suggests that the notion of determiner should be reserved for a language that restricts co occurrence with demonstrative and possessive words. Gikuyu allows Dem + Ass (Poss) as in ĩria yakwa ‘9Dem 9 Assoc-2sg ‘that which is mine.’ (Lit. that mine).

Andrews (1985), without loyalty to a particular theory, looks at the functions of the NP in many languages of the world and comes up with three basic functions: semantic, pragmatic and grammatical; with the semantic and pragmatic NP functions being subsumed in ‘semiotic functions’ (p.63). Andrew’s functions appear persuasive to RRG whose approach includes the investigation of how these three levels of linguistics would interact in language description (VVLP, 1997; Van Valin, 2005).


Specific studies on the Gikuyu RP are even fewer going by what Mugane (1998) says. There are grammars by missionaries or educated Africans whose training was not in Linguistics, specifically for foreign learners of Gikuyu. We can include Armstrong (1967), Barlow (1960), Gecaga (1953), Leakey (1978) etc. What is common in all these works is the fact that they are more prescriptive than descriptive, with underlying pedagogic overtones and without making claims based on [a] modern theoretical foundation while the first one deals with Gikuyu phonology. Kihara (2010) is the closest to the present article in so far as the fundamental issues raised are concerned. We note that Kihara’s study was based on a slightly older version of the RRG theory of noun structure.

There are, however, works that have attempted to give Gikuyu data a theoretical description. We have a closer look at Mugane (1998) because he makes the strongest theoretical claims. Here we can also mention Mugane (1997) on his varied treatment of the Gikuyu syntax especially the associative phrase and noun classes. In a later work, Mugane (1998) looks at the morphosyntax of the Gikuyu NP and limits his study to the demonstrative placement, optionality of the head noun, and the two-way split in the morphological marking inherent in the nominal elements. He works within the tenets of Lexical Functional Grammar [LFG], especially the lexical integrity principle.

Mugane (1998) notes that Myers (1987) on Shona word and Carstens (1991) on Swahili NP did not discuss prosodic and discourse effects which result from word order. In his argument he gives this example which we take as 1.

(1.) ici ciake ndune, ciake Mugane (1997, p.139)

10-Dem 10- Assoc-3sg Pron 10- red 10 all ‘these red things of hers/his, all’

Mugane (1997) notes that there is an intonation break because of the linear order of the words. While other theories may not have, the means to account for this intonation / pause RRG has a provision and that is why we have the Reference

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1 We relied on secondary analysis of Abney (1987)
Phrase Initial Position (RPIP) and the Reference Phrase Final Position (RPFP) on the LSRP. In this case, the discourse (which is in reality, focusing,) which results from intonation and the linear order is accounted for.

Mugane (1998) suggests that a Gĩkũyũ NP[R] has a morphological split: lexical domain and a grammatical domain which would respectively be the constituent and operator projection in RRG. Mugane assumes that all those elements in the RP which agree in pronominal marking as belonging to the DP and are concordial.

The Layered Structure of the Reference Phrase

RRG posits a formal structure to describe the Reference Phrase called the Layered Structure of the Reference Phrase [LSRP] formerly called the Layered Structure of the Noun Phrase [LSNP]. It is parallel to the syntactic representation of the clause; the Layered Structure of the Clause [LSC] in terms of projections. Both have the Constituent and Operator projections like the LSC. Below is a table for operators in the LSRP:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nuclear_R operator:</th>
<th>Nominal Aspect (count-mass distinction, classifiers languages)</th>
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<td>Core_R operators:</td>
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<td>RP operators:</td>
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<td>Deixis</td>
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Table 1
Operators in the LSRP

Source: Van Valin (2005, p.24)

Previously, (cf. VVLP, 1997; Van Valin, 1993a) adjectives were thought to be part of the Operator projection but this was later revised due to the fact that adjectives were the only lexical category in the Operator projection all others being grammatical function words. This is well captured by Abney (1987) cited in Payne (1993) who notes that functional categories have no descriptive content but lexical categories do have.
Below is a modified general schema of the Gĩkũyũ LSRP partly adapted from VV (1997, p.57):

![Diagram of the Gĩkũyũ Reference Phrase](Image)

Gĩkũyũ has two types of nouns: underived e.g. *mwana* ‘child’ and derived (deverbal nouns) *mũ-rĩmi* ‘farmer’ which is derived from verb root –*rĩm*– ‘dig/farm’ Noun derivation in Gĩkũyũ involves prefixation and suffixation. Gĩkũyũ RP can thus be a single underived noun as well as a referential entity that has modifiers like numerals, pronouns, (possessives, demonstratives) quantifiers, associatives, adjectives etc. as in these examples in 2.

(2) *Mĩtĩ ũyo mĩtungu mĩraihu mĩrũ*  
4-trees (noun) 10-those (Dem) 4- huge (Adj)  
4- tall (Adj) 4-dark (Adj)  
‘those,tall, huge, dark trees’

**Numeral:**  
*mĩtĩ*  *ĩrĩ*  
4- trees 4-two

**Demonstrative:**  
*mĩtĩ*  *ĩ-ri’a*  
4-trees 1-Dem  
‘those trees’

**Possessive:**  
*mĩtĩ*  *yake*  
4-trees 4- Assoc – 3SG- Pron  
‘His/her trees’

**Quantifier:**  
*mĩtĩ*  *yothe*
4-trees 4-all
‘all the trees’

Adjective:
miti mïraihu
4- trees 4- tall
‘tall trees’

Associative:
miti ya guka
4-trees 4Assoc 1

Grandfather
‘grandfathers’ trees’

It is also possible to have a postpositional to bring out the location (in, on, at) as in mūtitū – inĩ ‘in the forest’

miti mïtungu mïraihu mïrū

We note that the adjectives cited above do bear the noun class morphology from the nouns and they can occur with any noun (cf. Rijkhoff, 2002; Mugane, 1997, 1998; Carsten, 1993). Barlow (1960) shows that the modifiers follow a linear order beginning with the noun, demonstrative, possessive, quantifier and the adjective come last. To illustrate observe the RP below in 3:

(3). mïti īno yake yothe īna mïraihu
        4-trees 4-Dem 4-Ass- his 4-
        Quantifier 4-four 4-tall
‘All these four tall trees of his’

Mugane, (1997) notes that whereas nouns can be pre- or post-modified by demonstratives, post-modification is the neutral order. Pre-modification is claimed to be motivated by pragmatic effects such as clefting and/or focusing deictic information. VVLP (1997) also posit a similar idea in reference to English and say that discourse–pragmatic (e.g. topicality) and semantic (e.g. affectedness) are some of the considerations that are involved in this kind of modification.

(4) mïti īno īno mïti
        4-trees 4-Dem 4-Dem 4-trees
‘these trees’ ‘these trees’

Following the general schema of the LSNP given by VVLP (1997) the article begins by showing the LSRP of an underived Gĩkũyũ noun.
In this RP, there are several operators. We have the demonstrative ĕ-ria ‘those’ marked against operator deictic while yothe ‘all’ is marked against quantity, mĩraihu against the adjective, ĕna ‘four’ against number. NASP is only marked on mĩti ‘trees’ though the adjective in Gikuyu do take the nominal classifiers. Previously it would have been marked against NASP but now ADJ is no longer an operator. The deictic ĕ-ria can prosodically become relative ĕrĩa and it would be marked against operator DEF.

(6) (a)  Mĩti ĕrĩa mĩnene  ‘trees that are big/ those big trees’
         4-trees PROREL 4-big

(b)  ĭyo mbũri – ĕ-ta – rĩ noru
     that 9-goat  9-NEG  – be 9- fat
This RP provides the additional markings on the Operator projection. The negation in the CORE is marked against the negation particle –ta- which could also be used in the clause. īyo, is marked as definite and deictic in the operator projection.

These locality operators according to VVLP (1997) are concerned with showing the location of the referent with respect to a reference point usually the interlocutors (deictics) and with showing the speaker’s concern with the identifiably of the referent by the hearer (definiteness).

We propose that īyo can serve as both showing deictically as well as referring to a definite goat. Locality operators include demonstratives, articles, and determiners. VVLP (1997) rightly put it that they are closely connected with discourse-pragmatic properties of the RP or clause. In addition, they are the outermost operators, right at the bottom of the Operator projection. For the nominal aspect, we have proposed that the noun class marked on mbũri has the same quality with that on the adjective noru, since we have previously said that adjectives in Gikũyũ do share the nominal classifiers from the nouns they modify.

Genitive RP constructions in Gikũyũ do present an interesting scenario especially those that are related to kinship terms. For example, nyina ‘his/her mother’ is inherently possessive without any marker to demonstrate its the possessive nature. This does not mean that the language does not use possessive pronouns since we can have nyina wao (9-mother Poss-theirs) ‘their mother’. The inherent possession is also found in other kinship terms like, ithe ‘his/her father’ mũka ‘his wife’, mũrũme ‘her husband’.

Instances when the possessive pronouns are not used include those that involve participants in a discourse where there is the assumption that the referent is understood by both the speaker and the hearer. To show possession, the kinship nouns are inflected at the end by a possessive suffix clitic. For example in 7 below:
(7) *Mũrũme-gwo* (2-Poss – husband – 2PRS-Poss) ‘your husband’

*Mũka-gwo* (2- wife – 2PRS- Poss) ‘your wife’

*Tata-we* (9-aunt – 3-PRS – Poss) ‘his/her aunt’

The addition of suffixes –gwo and -we indicate 2- person -3 person possession respectively and we should note that these possessive NPs can be affected by number e.g. *mũka-gwo* would become aka anyu ‘your wives’. The genitive shows agreement in number with the noun and it is expressed either with a prepositional phrase or with a suffix.

Below in 8 (a-b) are LSRPs for both types with the Operator projection.

(8) (a) *Mũthuri wake*

1-husband of-3-PSN-SG – Poss

‘her husband’

(b) *Mũthuri-we*

1-husband– 3-sg - Poss

‘her husband’

Figure 6 & 7

*Nouns as predicates in a Gĩkũyũ simple RP*
In the above examples, the possessive clitic –we indicates possession and like suffix –we is marked as singular in number together with wa-. The RP mũthuriwe ‘her husband’ is derived from an ellipsis process in the NP mũthuri wake ‘her husband’ where ‘w’ and ‘e’ left to mark both person and possession to result to ‘mũthuriwe’. The person and possession marker are incorporated in the head noun ‘mũthuri’. Both RPs have DEF for an operator because we are referring to a particular husband for a particular woman. The clitic –we and –ke are taken to serve two purposes, that is, to show possession in the constituent projection as well as to signal definiteness in the operator projection.

To bring the argument closer to the language under study, Mugane (1997, p.39) is of the view that ‘should a modifier that occurs to the left of another modifier in linear precedence… be permitted to the right of it… then the comma intonation must be employed’.

Mugane (op.cit) further explains that the intonation used shows “appositeness and that the modifier to the right of the comma is outside the noun phrase” (pg39). Mugane’s example 22 is repeated here as example 9.

(9)(a) ici ciake ciothe ndune
10Dem 10- Ass-3-sg Pron 10-all
10-red ‘all these red things of her’s/his’

If ciothe was to be permuted to the right, then the result would be 22b, (9) (b) ici ciake ndune, ciothe ‘these
10-Dem 10-Ass-3sgPron 10-red 10-all
red (things) of her’s/his, all

In that case, we can argue that this permuted element is similar in some way to the left detached phrase especially because it is separated by a pause as is the case with detached phrases’ positions. It may also appear similar to the PrCS as we know that RPs in Gĩkũyũ that are stationed in the PrCS are said to be in apposition to the pronominal argument incorporated in the verb. We would also say that this element is closest to the right detached phrase for two reasons, pause and the positioning (right).If it is outside the NP as Mugane (1997) argued and COREg external but dominated by NP as VVLP (1997) claim, we are proposing that in

Figure 8
A Noun as a Predicate

Sometimes, Gikũyũ nouns can have predicating functions in the RPs they occur in. The two nouns in Mũthuri mwarimu (2-man 2- teacher) ‘a man who is a teacher’ or mwarimu mũthuri (2-teacher 2- man) ‘a teacher who is a man’.

This RP has an argument that is a noun ‘mwarimu’ as the predicating element in the NUCR operator. This position can either be occupied by an adjective or a noun that functions like an adjective as is the case above. In the Layered Structure of the NP [RP] as posited by VVLP (1997) there is an initial position called the NP-initial position (NP(IP) [RPIP]. VVLP (1997) suggest that this NPIP is analogous to the LDP in the clause and the PrCS though different from the PrCS because it takes adjuncts and possessors [in English] and unlike the LDP, the NPIP [RPIP] has semantic restriction on what elements can be stationed there. They conclude by saying that to determine what element occurs in the NPIP [RPIP] is a complex activity and it involves discourse-pragmatic and semantic considerations like affectedness and topicality.

The Gĩkũyũ Reference Phrase
Gĩkũyũ, the NPIP should also have another element of its kind positioned at the right hand side of the LSRP.

This position is mainly necessitated by discourse-pragmatic reasons. It is not limited to quantifier ‘ciothe’ since Mugane (1997) shows that even permutation involving possessive pronouns and adjectives produce the same effect as shown below in 9(c) and (d) respectively

\[(9)\ (c) \ i \ ciothe\ ndune,\ ciake\]
\n\‘all these red ones, of his/her’s\]
\n\10Dem\ 10-all\ 10-red\ 10-3sg-Pron\]

\[(9)(d)\ i\ ciothe\ ndune,\ ciake\ ciake\]
\n\‘all these red one, of his’/her’s\]
\n\10-Dem\ 10-red\ 10-all\ 10-Assoc\ 3sg-Pron\]

Figure 9
RPIP in a Gĩkũyũ RP

Mugane (1997) concludes in his analysis that the comma is used to indicate the point at which the linear order has been violated. It would be worthwhile to say that the violation he talks about is as a result of the speaker’s need to be emphatic and definite and these are discourse – pragmatic considerations that language users may select. To illustrate the NPIP in the LSNP we use the following example in 10.

\[(10). Icio\ nyũngũ\ ciothe\ ithatũ\ nene\]
\n\10-Dem\ 9-pots\ 10-all\ 10-three\ 10-big\]
\n\‘all those three big pots’\]
In 9 above, it is shown that the demonstrative exists in apposition to the NUC noun – nyųngũ. The pronominal demonstrative is also marked against definite operator because it seems to topicalize the head noun nyųngũ. In other words, the fronting of the pronominal demonstrative is motivated by discourse –pragmatic needs. Since it could also have come after the head noun as in nyųngũ icio ciote ihatu nene”

This LSRP, the study proposes that the demonstrative occupies the RPIP position following the fact that English has demonstratives like this and that which are pronominal in nature and can hence serve as referring expressions as in ‘That is mine’ or ‘I gave him this’. In Gĩkũyũ, the demonstrative is also marked for number and class and it can serve as referring expression without the lexical noun since number and nominal class are marked on the demonstrative. For example, icio nĩ ciakwa (10-those are 10-mine) ‘those are mine’. We note that the class marker indicates the nominal class of the noun referred to though it is not lexically shown.

The demonstrative pronoun is taken to behave like a Precore slot [PrCS] or a left detached phrase [LDP] element, though structurally different, and its position is determined by factors different from those that determine both the PrCS and the LDP.

**Conclusion**

From the foregoing, we have shown that the Gĩkũyũ RP can be accounted for by the RRG's LSRP. It is evident that the Constituent projection and the Operator projection can adequately account for simple RPs in Gĩkũyũ. It becomes evident that since the demonstrative in Gĩkũyũ can either be pre/post nominal, the LSRP can account for it as it does for the discontinuous elements in other languages without resorting to abstract movements.

In this paper, we claim that the LSRP provides evidence for the establishment of RPFP, to account for the positioning of such elements which have the same characterization as the detached phrases. The claims that RPs be described as DP may not always be tenable in language like Gĩkũyũ whose demonstrative is either pre/post-nominal. There is no need for positing abstract movements. The answer lies in having a formalism that can describe the RP as it actually is noting and respecting the discourse-pragmatic function of the structure. In addition, we have shown that it is possible for the demonstrative to occur singly in a RP without any overt lexical noun. It serves as the nucleus of the RP thereby defeating the very idea of endocentricity since the ‘head’ is not a noun and therefore, no need to claim for a NP as a structure. In light of this paper, structure as well as function is important and since language is used to refer and predicate (nouns refer), we take that the reference function of the noun is most important hence the claim for the RP and not NP.

**References**


