

Dependent Case as a licenser in Kikuyu

Kenyon Branán, MIT

Yip et. al. (1987) and Marantz (1991) argue for the notion of “dependent case”, assigned when two nominals are in a local c-command relation. Under such approaches, dependent case is divorced from licensing. This paper argues that dependent case has a licensing function, even in languages without overt morphological case, based on novel evidence from Kikuyu.

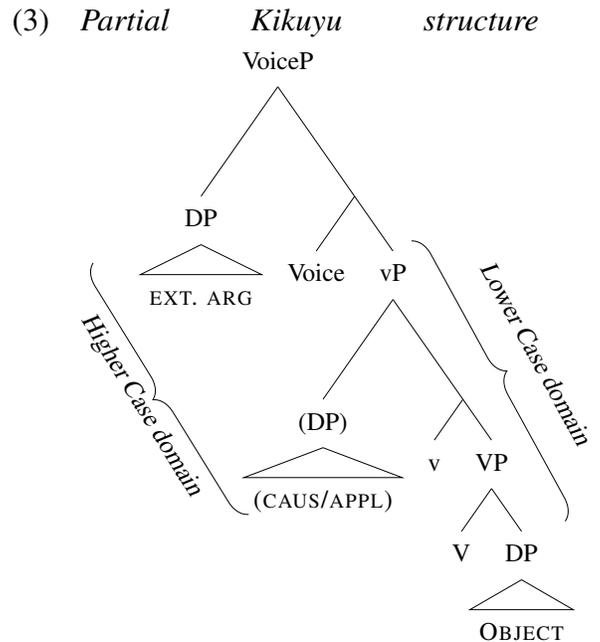
Core Puzzle: Subjects in Kikuyu allow both prenominal and postnominal demonstratives.

- (1) a. [ũyũ mũndũ] nĩ-a-rũg-ir-e.
 1.dem 1.man FOC-1S-jump-ASP-FV
 ‘This man jumped.’
- b. [mũndũ ũyũ] nĩ-a-rũg-ir-e.
 1.man 1.dem FOC-1S-jump-ASP-FV
 ‘This man jumped’

However, in a simple transitive sentence, the direct object only allows the postnominal order.

- (2) a. Mwangi nĩ-a-on-ir-e [mũndũ ũyũ]
 Mwangi ...see... 1.man 1.dem
 ‘Mwangi saw this man.’
- b. *Mwangi nĩ-a-on-ir-e [ũyũ mũndũ]
 Mwangi ...see... 1.dem man
 ‘Mwangi saw this man.’

Core analysis: Following Massam (2001), Ball (2005), and Levin’s (2015) arguments from Tongan and Niuean, I argue that the contrast in (2) reflects the obligatory use of an alternative licensing strategy for Caseless nominals, namely, strict linear adjacency between N and V, to license the Caseless direct object. I propose a partial clause structure for Kikuyu like that in (3). Furthermore, I assume that the clause is bifurcated into two domains for dependent case assignment, following Baker & Vinokurova (2010), who propose that Case is assigned phase-internally. Under this assumption, the direct object and external argument are insufficiently local for dependent case assignment, as they are contained in separate phases. Since the direct object in Kikuyu lacks Case, it must be licensed through this alternative licensing mechanism, accounting for the contrast in (2).



Predictions: Given the structure in (3), the proposal that dependent case has a licensing function makes an unusual prediction: the introduction of additional nominals in the lower case domain should result in Case

being assigned to the direct object—obviating the need for the alternative licensing strategy that requires V-N adjacency. Examples (4a-b) show that this prediction is borne out. When a sufficiently low argument is added that c-commands the direct object, the N head of the direct object need not be adjacent to the verbal complex, and the DEM-N ordering is allowed.

- (4) a. mũthuri nĩ-a-neng-er-ir-e mburi [rĩrĩ ihũa]
 1.man FOC-1S-hand.over-APPL-ASP-FV 9.goat 5.dem 5.flower
 ‘A man gave a goat this flower.’
- b. mũngirigaca nĩ-a-ra-rĩ-ithi-a mburi [rĩrĩ ihua]
 agriculture.officer FOC-1S-TNS-eat-CAUS-FV 9.goat 5.dem 5.flower
 ‘An agricultural officer has made/forced a goat to eat this flower’

As shown in (3), the additional argument in (4a-b) is in the same domain for case assignment as the direct object. As a result, the direct object is assigned Case, and need not resort to the alternative licensing strategy that requires V-N adjacency. Furthermore, when there is an additional nominal in

the lower Case domain, the direct object need not satisfy adjacency, even when it is in principle able to, as we see in (5), in which the additional nominal has been A-moved from the VP.

- (5) a. *mũtumia_{appl} nĩ-a-neng-er-ir-w-o* [*rĩrĩ*] *ihũa*
 1.woman FOC-1S-hand.over-APPL-ASP-PASS-FV 5.dem 5.flower
 ‘The woman was handed this flower.’
- b. *mburi_{cs} nĩ-ĩ-ra-rĩ-ithi-w-o* [*rĩrĩ*] *ihũa*
 9.goat FOC-9S-TNS-eat-CAUS-PASS-FV 5.dem 5.flower
 ‘A goat was made/forced to eat this flower’

In (5), since the additional argument and direct object were in the same case domain at some point in the derivation, the lower nominal, the direct object, is assigned dependent Case by the higher nominal. Similarly, the postverbal object in a bivalent unaccusative is not subject to the adjacency requirement, as shown in (6). Both nominals in (6) were in the same case domain at some point in the derivation. As a result, the lower of the two is assigned Case, and need not satisfy adjacency.

- (6) a. *gĩkundi nĩ-gĩ-kini-ir-e* [*ĩno*] *nyumba*
 7.group ...-7S-reach-... 9.bldg 9.dem
 ‘The group has reached the building.’
- b. *gĩkundi nĩ-gĩ-kini-ir-e* [*ĩno*] *nyumba*
 7.group ...-7S-reach-... 9.dem 9.bldg
 ‘The group has reached the building.’

Finally, note that the intermediate argument is itself contained in both the lower and higher case domains, since it is at the edge of the vP phase, and thusly may assign and be assigned Case in both phases. It should therefore not be subject to the adjacency requirement, since it is assigned Case in the higher domain. Example (7) shows that this expectation is borne out: the higher argument in a double object construction need not satisfy adjacency, as it has been assigned Case.

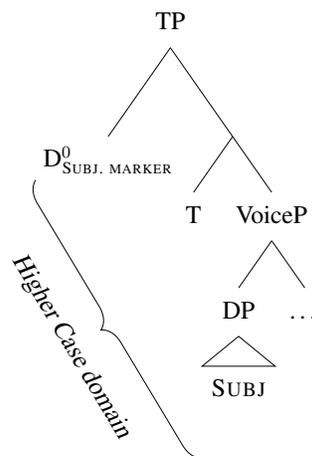
- (7) a. *Mũndũ nĩ-a-nyot-er-a* [*ĩno*] *njohi*
 1.man ...-thirst-APL... 9.dem 9.beer
 ‘A man has grown thirsty for this beer.’
- b. *Njambi nĩ-a-nyot-ĩ-a* [*ĩno*] *mburi*
 N. ...-thirst-CS... 9.dem 9.goat
 ‘Njambi has caused the goat to be thirsty’

Licensing the subject: As shown by the absence of the N-V adjacency requirement in (1), subjects in Kikuyu have Case. Furthermore, as we see in (8), subjects in Kikuyu have Case even when they do not occupy the canonical subject position and do not control subject marking verbal morphology, evidenced by the mismatch in class between the class 3 subject and class 17 agreement morphology.

- (8) a. *nĩ-kwa-hing-w-o* [*mũrango*] [*ucio*]
 ...-17S-close-PASS-... 3.door 3.dem 3.dem
 ‘There has been closed this door.’
- b. *nĩ-kwa-hing-w-o* [*ucio*] [*mũrango*]
 ...-17S-close-PASS-... 3.dem 3.door
 ‘There has been closed this door.’

Following Schneider-Zioga (2007), Zeller (2008), I assume that the subject agreement morphology in Kikuyu is actually a pronominal D⁰ clitic. This nominal subject marker is obligatory, so, as a result, there will always be at least two nominals in the higher of the two case domains in (3)—the subject,

- (9) *Partial Kikuyu structure*



and the subject marker. The subject, at some point in the derivation, is the lower of the two, schematized in (9). In (9), there are two nominals in the higher domain: the pronominal subject marker, and the subject itself. Thus, the subject is assigned Case, as the lower of two nominals in the same case domain. How, then, is the subject marker itself licensed, since it is not asymmetrically c-commanded by another nominal, and thus presumably lacks Case? Note that the subject marker is part of the verbal complex. I assume that the subject marker is in fact Caseless, but is licensed through strict adjacency with the verbal complex, in much the same way that Caseless direct objects are.