

LOCATIVES, IMPERSONALS AND EXPLETIVES IN SESOTHO

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1 INTRODUCTION*

The syntactic role of inverted locatives has been the topic of some controversy, with recent proposals by Bresnan & Kanerva (1989) and Bresnan (1990) arguing that inverted locatives may function as subjects in languages as typologically diverse as English and Chicheŵa. Bresnan (1990) claims these striking grammatical similarities can be accounted for at the syntactic function level, while the few grammatical differences can be captured at the categorial level, i.e. English locatives are PPs, while Chicheŵa locatives are NPs. This paper extends the partial structural correspondences framework (an extended form of LFG) to account for somewhat different locative phenomena in Sesotho, a southern Bantu language where impersonal or expletive constructions show many of the same grammatical characteristics reported for English and Chicheŵa inverted locative constructions, but where a difference in the categorial status of locatives leads to some important syntactic differences between Sesotho on the one hand, and English and Chicheŵa on the other.

Bresnan & Kanerva (1989) argue that Chicheŵa does not have expletive constructions, but rather has locative inversion constructions where locative phrases pattern as subjects. This contrasts with reports for the southern Bantu languages Sepedi (Louwrens 1981, Prinsloo 1984) and Sesotho (du Plessis 1981) where locatives are assumed to be adverbials, and the 'locative' subject marker *ho-* an existential or expletive. Apparent support for this claim comes from the the lack of any semantic locative interpretation in expletive constructions.

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This paper reviews some of the critical evidence regarding both the syntactic functions of Sesotho inverted locatives and impersonal *ho-* constructions, and their categorial status. In section 2 I show that Sesotho inverted locatives can not function syntactically as subjects, while in section 3 I show, however, that the class of verbs that co-occur with the impersonal *ho-* is more extensive than that reported to occur with English and Chicheŵa inverted locatives. In section 4 I discuss the grammatical function of the inverted subject in the object position of impersonal *ho-* constructions, and in section 5 I pursue further the issue of the grammatical and categorial status of *ho-* itself. Finally I address the categorial nature of Sesotho locatives in section 6 and discuss the subsequent theoretical implications in section 7.

2 SUBJECTS AND INVERTED LOCATIVES

Sesotho subjects are marked by grammatical agreement between the lexical subject and the subject marker; both show class 2 agreement in (1a) below.

- (1) a. **Ba-shányáná bá-pálám-é** li-pére.¹
2-boys **2SM-ride-PRF/M** 10-horse²
 'The boys are riding horses.'

As in other pro-drop languages, grammatical agreement still holds between the lexical subject and the verb when the lexical subject is inverted, as in (1b).

- (1) b. **Bá-pálám-é** li-pére **ba-shányána.**
2SM-ride-PRF/M 10-horse **2-boys**
 'They are riding horses, the boys.'

Most Bantu languages are typified by an extensive noun class and agreement system with several singular/plural pairs, including an infinitival class and three locative classes corresponding to the Proto-

1 Lesotho orthography is used throughout with the exception of the glides (o=w, e=y) and second person singular subject marker u, rendered here as o (phonetically identical to third person singular subject marker, except that third person has High tone). Present tense -a appears only when the verb is final in the verb phrase. High tone is marked as (´), a lowered high (phonetically mid) tone is marked as (+), and low tone is left unmarked.

2 Gloss abbreviations are as follows: APL=applicative/benefactive, CAUS=causative, COMP=complementizer, CONJ=conjunction, COP=copula, DEM=demonstrative pronoun, ho=expletive/impersonal subject marker (class 17), LOC=locative suffix, M=mood, OBJ=object clitic, PASS=passive, PN=independent pronoun, PREP=preposition, PRF=perfect, REL=relative marker, RL=verbal relative suffix, SM=subject marker, 8=noun class 8.

Bantu **pa*, **ku*, and **mu* (classes 16, 17, and 18). In Sesotho these locative noun class prefixes have been lost; only lexicalized remnants of them are found on locative adverbials such as *fatse* 'on the ground, down', *holimo* 'above', *mane* 'over there' (Doke & Mofokeng 1957). Rather than creating locatives through the use of a noun class prefix, Sesotho uses the preposition *ka* or the locative suffix *-ng*.

- (2) a. Ba-eti bá-il-é ká-ntlé.
 2-travelers 2SM-go-M PREP-outside
 'The visitors went outside.'
- b. Ba-eti bá-tl-il-é mo-tsé-ng.
 2-travelers 2SM-come-PRF-M 3-village-LOC
 'The visitors came to the village.'

When a locative is fronted or topicalized, no grammatical agreement results between the topicalized locative and the verb, *ba-eti* 'visitors' still functioning as the subject (2c). Such constructions are somewhat stilted, speakers preferring the locative in final (2b) as opposed to initial (2c) position.

- (2) c. ?Mo-tsé-ng ba-eti bá-tl-il-e.
 3-village-LOC 2-travelers 2SM-come-PRF-M
 'To the village the visitors came.'

No presentational focus results in (2c). Presentational focus occurs only when a locative is fronted with the (historically locative) impersonal subject marker *ho-* (labeled here as class 17). Again, speakers prefer the locative in (3a,b) to be in final position.

- (3) a. Mo-tsé-ng hó-na-lé se-fáte.
 3-village-LOC 17SM-COP-CONJ 7-tree
 'In the village there is a tree.'
- b. Mo-tsé-ng hó-tl-il-é ba-eti.
 3-village-LOC 17SM-come-PRF-M 2-travelers
 'To the village came the travelers.'

An attempt to introduce grammatical agreement between the locative and the verb results in the ungrammatical examples in (4).

- (4) a. *Mo-tse-ng o-na-le se-fate.
 3-village-LOC 3SM-COP-CONJ 7-tree
 'In the village there is a tree.'
- b. *Mo-tse-ng o-tl-il-e ba-eti.
 3-village-LOC 3SM-come-PRF-M 2-travelers
 'To the village came the travelers.'

In Bantu languages like Chichewa, where locative noun class morphology is productive, locatives are marked with a locative noun class prefix. However, this is also ungrammatical in Sesotho, as shown by the unacceptability of the examples in (5).

- (5) a. *Ho-mo-tse-ng ho-na-le se-fate.
 17-3-village-LOC 17SM-COP-CONJ 7-tree
 ‘In the village there is a tree.’
 b. *Ho-mo-tse-ng ho-tl-il-e ba-eti.
 17-3-village-LOC 17SM-come-PRF-M 2-travelers
 ‘To the village came the travelers.’

Sesotho lexical subjects must show grammatical agreement with the verb, yet Sesotho locatives do not pass this test.

Sesotho inverted locatives also fail to pass the test for subject extraction from a relative clause. Sesotho relative clauses are characterized by a subject gap in Subject relatives, and a resumptive pronoun in Object and Oblique relatives (Doke & Mofokeng 1957, Demuth 1990). For locatives, the invariant locative relative marker *moo* is used, and the ‘resumptive’ locative adverb *teng* is required in the embedded clause. This is illustrated in (6a). Any attempt to extract the locative from subject position, leaving a gap in place of the ‘subject marker’ *ho-*, results in ungrammaticality, as shown in (6b).

- (6) a. *Moo*_i hó-il-é-ng ba-eti *teng*_i.
 REL 17SM-go-PRF-M-RL 2-travelers there
 ‘Where there went the travelers (there).’
 b. **Moo*_i [e;_i] il-e-ng ba-eti (*teng*_i).
 REL 17SM-go-PRF-M-RL 2-travelers there
 ‘Where there went the travelers (there).’

Thus, Sesotho locatives fail to pass both the grammatical agreement and extraction tests for subjecthood. Further tests on subjecthood, such as subject extraction from other types of embedded clauses, or the questioning of subjects in situ (this is ungrammatical in Sesotho – see Demuth 1989a) appear to be confounded by the fact that the use of *ho-* requires presentational focus. However, the lack of grammatical agreement, the relative clause extraction facts, plus speakers’ preference for placing the locative in final, rather than initial position, indicate that the grammatical function of Sesotho inverted locatives is not that of a subject, but rather of an oblique, and suggest that locatives in Sesotho do not function as arguments.

Interestingly, we see in the next section that the distribution of Sesotho *ho-* with different classes of verbs is much more flexible than that reported for both English and Chichewa.

3 VERBS, ARGUMENT STRUCTURE AND *HO-*

Bresnan & Kanerva (1989) report that Chicheŵa locative inversion is found only with intransitive, primarily unaccusative verbs, or with passivized transitives. Object drop verbs such as 'eat' or 'cook' cannot be used with inverted locatives, nor can intransitive verbs be passivized.

Verbs that occur with Sesotho *ho-* constructions are not nearly as restricted. In addition to occurring with unaccusatives, i.e. intransitive verbs of motion, posture, and existence (7),

- (7) a. Hó-qhóm-a ba-ná.
17SM-jump-M 2-children
'There are children jumping.'
- b. Hó-ém-é pére.
17SM-stand-PRF/M 9horse
'There is standing a/the horse.'
- c. Hó-tswal-á li-póli.
17SM-birth-M 10-goats
'There are goats giving birth.'

Sesotho impersonal *ho-* constructions are also allowed with unergative verbs, as in (8).

- (8) a. Hó-bin-á ba-sáli+.
17SM-sing-M 2-women
'There are women singing.'
- b. Hó-sés-a ba-ná.
17SM-urinate-M 2-children
'There are children urinating.'
- c. Hó-lóh-a bo-nkhóno.
17SM-weave-M 2b-grandmother
'There are grandmothers weaving.'

Sesotho *ho-* constructions are also found with passivized transitives, where *by*-phrases and applicatives are both permitted.

- (9) a. (Nokáné-ng) hó-fúmán-w-é li-pólí ké molísána
(9river-LOC) 17SM-find-PASS-PRF/M 10-goats by 1-herder
'(At/in the river) there were found goats by the herder.'
- b. (Ma-símó-ng) hó-lelék-is-w-a li-nonyana ké
(6-fields-LOC) 17SM-follow-CAUS-PASS-M 10-birds by
ba-lemi.
2-farmers
'(In the fields) there are birds being chased by the farmers.'

- c. Hó-rom-él-éts-w-é ba-sálí nama ké
 17SM-send-APL-PRF-PASS-M 2-women 9meat
 mo-rena.
 by 1-chief
 'There was sent some meat to the women by the chief.'
- d. (Peísó-ng) hó-math-éts-w-é mo-rena.
 9race-LOC 17SM-run-APL/PRF-PASS-M 1-chief
 '(In the race) there has been run for the chief.'

In addition, Sesotho permits the use of *ho-* constructions with object drop verbs in the passive intransitive.

- (10) Hó-a-j-éw-a+.
 17SM-PRES-PASS-eat-M
 'There is being eaten.'
- (11) (Ká pítsa) hó-á-phe-uw-a.
 PREP 9pot 17SM-PRES-cook-PASS-M
 '(With the pot) there is cooking.'

Finally, Sesotho also allows for the passivization of both unergative verbs (12a-c) and unaccusative verbs (13a-c) with *ho-* constructions.

- (12) a. Hó-a-bín-w-a+.
 17SM-PRES-sing-PASS-M
 'There is singing.'
- b. Hó-á-ll-uw-a.
 17SM-PRES-cry-PASS-M
 'There is crying.'
- c. Hó-a-kén-w-a+.
 17SM-PRES-enter-PASS-M
 'There is entering.'
- (13) a. Hó-a-qhong-w-a.
 17SM-PRES-jump-PASS-M
 'There is jumping.'
- b. Hó-a-éng-w-a+.
 17SM-stand-PASS-M.
 'There is standing.'
- c. Hó-a-tswál-w-a+.
 17SM-birth-PASS-M.
 'There is birthing.'

What is not found in Sesotho, however, is impersonal *ho-* occurring with both postposed subjects and accusative objects simultaneously. Thus, while *ho-* has greater flexibility in the classes of verbs with which

it occurs, that class is not unbounded. I suggest that this restriction may have little to do with the syntactic behavior of the locative itself, but may rather be a result of the presentational focus of these constructions, combined with the status of *ho-* as a dummy subject. This will be discussed further in section 5.

The class of verbs permitted to co-occur with Sesotho *ho-* constructions is therefore larger than that allowed in both Chicheŵa and Chishona locative inversion constructions (Bresnan & Kanerva 1989, Harford 1990). These differences are sketched below in Table 1.

Table 1.
Distribution of Verb Classes Permitted with
Locative Inversion/Impersonal Constructions.

	Active			Passive		
	<i>Chicheŵa</i>	<i>Chishona</i>	<i>Sesotho</i>	<i>Chicheŵa</i>	<i>Chishona</i>	<i>Sesotho</i>
Unergative			x		x	x
Unaccusative	x	x	x		x	x
Transitive				x	x	x

We can capture the parametric differences in allowable argument structures presented in Table 1 by appealing to thematic roles. Following Bresnan & Kanerva (1989) and Bresnan (1990), each of the three verb types can be attributed the following thematic characteristics, where agent is higher on the Thematic Hierarchy than Theme, and the parentheses indicate a suppressed thematic role in the passive:

Verb	Active	Passive
Unergative	< ag loc >	< (ag) loc >
Unaccusative	< th loc >	< (th) loc >
Transitive	< ag th loc >	< (ag) th loc >

For Chicheŵa, those verbs that can undergo locative inversion include only those where the Theme is the highest expressed thematic role. Thus, Chicheŵa allows for locative inversion with unaccusatives in the active and transitives in the passive (where the Agent role has been suppressed). Harford (1990) reports that Chishona differs from Chicheŵa in permitting locative inversion with verbs where the highest non-suppressed thematic role is not an Agent.

Sesotho is similar to Chishona in allowing for suppressed agents of passives to be expressed as obliques. Sesotho differs from Chishona and Chicheŵa, however, in disallowing only those verbs where both Agent and Theme roles are overtly expressed, i.e. the case of active transitives. As will be discussed in section 5, we will argue that the ruling out of active transitives may be a universal restriction on presentational constructions. We turn now to a discussion of the inverted subject.

4 THE SYNTACTIC FUNCTION OF THE INVERTED SUBJECT

The syntactic function of the inverted subject that appears in the object position of *ho-* constructions is somewhat ambiguous: in some respects it behaves like an object, while in other respects it does not. As shown in (14c) below, Sesotho does not allow the verb to be separated from its object.

- (14) a. **Li-péré** lí-j-á jwańg.
 10-horses 10SM-eat-M 14grass
 'The horses are eating grass.'
- b. Lí-j-á jwańg **li-pére.**
 10SM-eat-M 14grass 10-horses
 'They are eating grass, the horses.'
- c. *Li-ja **li-pere** jwang.
 10SM-eat-M 10-horses 14grass

Similarly, the inverted subject of *ho-* constructions cannot be separated from the verb.

- (15) a. Hó-fihl-fl-é **li-pére.**
 17SM-arrive-PRF-M 10-horses
 'There arrived horses.'
- b. Hó-fihl-fl-é **li-péré** bo-sú.
 17SM-arrive-PRF-M 10-horses 14-night
 'There arrived horses at night.'
- c. *Ho-fihl-il-e bo-siu **li-pere.**
 17SM-arrive-PRF-M 14-night 10-horses

The patterning of the inverted subject of *ho-* constructions as internal to the verb phrase is supported by three other phrase level phenomena:

1. phrase penultimate lengthening (:).
2. tonal lowering on the final syllable of the verb when it is final in the VP (+)
3. the appearance of the present tense marker *-a-* when the verb is final in the VP.

Anything outside of the VP, including a normally inverted subject, readily becomes apparent, as shown by the penultimate lengthening on *pere* 'horse' in (16c) and the presence of the present tense marker *-a-*, penultimate lengthening and tonal lowering in (16d).

- (16) a. **Ba-sh** ányána bá-fep-á li-pé:re.
 2-boys 2SM-feed-M 10-horse
 'The boys are feeding horses.'

- b. **Ba-shányáná bá-á-li-fé:p-a+**.
2-boys 2SM-PRES-10OBJ-feed-M
'The boys are feeding them.'
- c. **Bá-fep-á li-pé:re ba-shányána.**
2SM-feed-M 10-horse 2-boys
'They are feeding horses, the boys.'
- d. **Bá-á-li-fé:p-a+ ba-shányána.**
2SM-PRES-10OBJ-feed-M 2-boys
'They are feeding them, the boys.'

When these diagnostics are used with impersonal *ho-* constructions, the inverted subject is found to be internal to the VP, as seen in (17b).

- (17) a. **Hó-a-j-é:s-w-a+**.
17SM-PRES-eat/CAUS-PASS-M
'There is feeding.'
- b. **Hó-j-es-w-á li-pé:re.**
17SM-eat/CAUS-PASS-M 10-horses
'There is feeding horses.'

These phrase level tests indicate that the inverted subject is internal to the VP and not simply adjoined. It would therefore appear to pattern as an object. However, the inverted subject does not behave syntactically as do typical objects; it does not undergo passivization (18b), nor does it pronominalize (18c).

- (18) a. **Hó-lis-á ba-shányána (ma-símó-ng).**
17SM-herd-M 2-boys 6-fields-LOC
'There are boys herding (in the fields).'
- b. ***Ba-shanyana ba-lis-w-a (ma-simo-ng).**
2-boys 2SM-herd-PASS-M 6-fields-LOC
- c. ***Ho-ba-lis-a (ma-simo-ng).**
17SM-2OBJ-herd-M 6-fields-LOC

Furthermore, it can not be relativized, as shown by the ungrammaticality of the object relative in (19b).³

- (19) a. **Hó-ful-á li-pére (ma-símó-ng).**
17SM-graze-M 10-horses 6-fields-LOC
'There are horses grazing in the fields.'

³ Note the resumptive object pronoun that is characteristic of Sesotho object relatives. Again, this example may also be ungrammatical due to the effects of presentational focus.

- b. *Ke eng eo_i ho-e_i-ful-a-ng ma-simo-ng?
 COP what 9REL_i 17SM-9OBJ_i -graze-M-RL 6-fields-LOC
 'What is it that is (it) grazing in the fields?'

We have shown that the inverted subject in *ho-* constructions is phrasally internal to the VP, but that it does not function syntactically like a canonical object. Bresnan & Kanerva (1989) claim that the inverted subject of Chicheŵa locative inversion constructions is an unaccusative object, and this would appear to hold for Sesotho impersonal *ho-* constructions as well.

We turn now to the syntactic role of the inverted subject.

5 THE GRAMMATICAL AND CATEGORIAL STATUS OF IMPERSONAL *HO-*

We have seen in section 2 that Sesotho subject markers exhibit grammatical agreement with their lexical counterparts, yet impersonal *ho-* does not agree with inverted locatives, as in Chicheŵa, nor does it agree with the inverted subject in object position, as in English (e.g. "There were/*was people in the street"). What, then, is the grammatical function of Sesotho *ho-*, and what is its categorial status within the grammar?

As in both Chishona and Chicheŵa, *ho-* is used with weather constructions.

- (20) Hó-a-bát-a+ ká-ntlé.
 17SM-PRES-cold-M PREP-outside
 'It's cold outside.'
- (21) Hó-a-chés-a+ ká-tlú-ng.
 17SM-PRES-hot-M PREP-house-LOC
 'It's hot inside the house.'

And like Chishona, *ho-* can occur with complementizers.

- (22) Hó-náhan-w-a hore malómé ó-bohlále.
 17SM-believe-PASS-M COMP 1uncle 1COP-wise
 'It is suspected that (my) uncle is wise.'

Unlike either Chicheŵa or Chishona, however, Sesotho *ho-* never has any locative or other semantic content; it carries no pronominal reference, as shown by the following examples.

- (23) a. Hó-fil...-e ntaté.
 17SM-arrive-PRF-M father
 'There arrived father.'

- b. Hó-a-bín-w-a+.
 17SM-PRES-sing-PASS-M
 'There is singing.'

While NPs can be referred to with a subject marker of the same class (24a) (though not with one of a different class (24b)), locatives cannot be anaphorically referred to, neither by *ho-*, nor by the class of the noun itself (25a,b).

- (24) a. **Chélete**, o-nahan-a hore
9-money 2sSM-believe-M COMP
 é-ba-tháb-fs-its-e?
9SM-2OBJ-happy-CAUS/APL-PRF-M
 'Money, do you think that it made them happy?/pleased them?'
 b. ***Chelete**, o-nahana hore
9-money 2sSM-believe-M COMP
 li-ba-thab-is-its-e?
10SM-2OBJ-happy-CAUS-APL-PRF-M
 'Money, do you think that it made them happy?/pleased them?'
 (25) a. ***Ma-simo-ng**, o-nahan-a hore
6-fields-LOC 2sSM-believe-M COMP
 ho-il-e ba-eti teng?⁴
17SM-go/PRF-M 2-visitors there
 'To the fields, do you think that the visitors went there?'
 b. ***Ma-simo-ng**, o-nahan-a hore
6-fields-LOC 2sSM-believe-M COMP
 a-il-e ba-eti teng?
6SM-go/PRF-M 2-visitors there
 'To the fields, do you think that the visitors went there?'

Even with weather verbs there is no grammatical agreement between the locative and the verb. In fact, (26a) is somewhat awkward with the preposed locative, but is perfectly acceptable with it postposed as in (26b).

- (26) a. ?**Ká-ntlé** ó-náhan-a hore hó-a bát-a+?
 PREP-outside 1SM-think-M COMP 17SM-PRES-cold-M
 'Outside, do you think that it is cold?'

⁴ This example is acceptable for some speakers of South African Sesotho, but it is strongly ruled out by at least two Sesotho speakers from Lesotho.

- b. O-nahan-a hore hó-a bát-a+ **ká-ntlé?**
 1SM-think-M COMP 17SM-PRES-cold-M PREP-outside
 ‘Do you think that it is cold outside?’

From these findings we conclude that *ho-* cannot be considered a pronominal with semantic content. Rather, it patterns much as a dummy subject, or expletive. Note, however, that unlike English, where expletive constructions take only indefinite NPs (“there was **a** man in the room/*there was **the** man in the room”), there is no definiteness effect in Sesotho: *ho-* can be used with definite NPs as well as with independent pronouns as inverted subjects (27a,b).

- (27) a. Hó-rob-éts-é **Mphó.**
 17SM-sleep-PRF-M Mpho.
 ‘There is sleeping Mpho.’
 b. Hó-kená **bo-na.**
 17SM-enter-M 2-PN
 ‘There is entering them.’

Given its lack of referential content, it would appear that *ho-* functions as a dummy subject, somewhat reminiscent of impersonal constructions in Germanic languages (e.g. Perlmutter 1978, see also Platzack 1983), or as an expletive, as proposed by du Plessis (1981). Furthermore, *ho-*, not the locative itself, appears to control the effect of presentational focus, as shown by the lack of presentational effect in the somewhat awkward, but grammatical (2c), repeated here as (28).

- (28) ?Mo-tsé-ng ba-eti **bá-tl-il-e.**
3-village-LOC 2-travelers **2SM-come-PRF-M**
 ‘To the village the visitors came.’

We noted in section 3 that locative inversion in Chicheŵa and Sesotho *ho-* constructions are ruled ungrammatical with active transitive verbs, i.e. verbs with both Agent and Theme roles, and that both involve presentational function. While languages may differ in which thematic roles they allow to be highest on the thematic hierarchy, it may be that presentational constructions are inherently inconsistent with the co-occurrence of both Agent and Theme in such constructions. Thus, Sesotho and Chicheŵa might be considered to be at extreme ends of a Presentational Focus Continuum, with Chishona falling in between. At the most restricted end of the continuum we find inverted locatives that occur with a very restricted set of verbs – i.e. those that have Theme as their highest role. At the other end we have expletive constructions exhibiting only the general restriction on presentational function, i.e. that the simultaneous presence of both Agent and Theme be ruled out. And in the middle we would expect to find languages like Chishona,