CHAPTER 1

1. Introduction

1.1 The Xitsonga language

Xitsonga is a language which is spoken by the Vatsonga people that inhabit the eastern littoral belt of Southern Africa, from Kosi Bay northwards to Sofala (up to the Save river) in Mozambique ([1]Rhode, 2001: J). The Vatsonga people are spread across the southern edge of Mozambique; the eastern part of Zimbabwe and the eastern part of Swaziland along the border with Mozambique (cf. also Baumbach (1987:1). Their language, Xitsonga is also one of the official languages in the new democratic South Africa.

Various scholars have classified Xitsonga (generally referred to without the prefix *Xi-*, hence *Tsonga*) as a member of the [2]Bantu language family.

Greenberg (1972) classified it as a Bantu language family which falls within the Benue-Congo, which is part of Niger-Congo, a sub-group of Congo-Kordofanian.

Doke (1967:23) classified the languages of Africa mostly into geographical regions and grouped them into the northern, western, central, eastern and southern Bantu languages. Together with the Nguni, the Sotho, the Shona, the Venda and Inhambane groups, he placed the Tsonga group within the Southern Bantu languages. He sketches his classification as follows:

[1] For some reason the author/editor decided to use alphabets instead of numbers to represent pages.
[2] The term `Bantu' has been stigmatised due to its political overtones in the former apartheid era in South Africa. However, it seems that no other suitable term has so far been found to replace it successfully. I shall

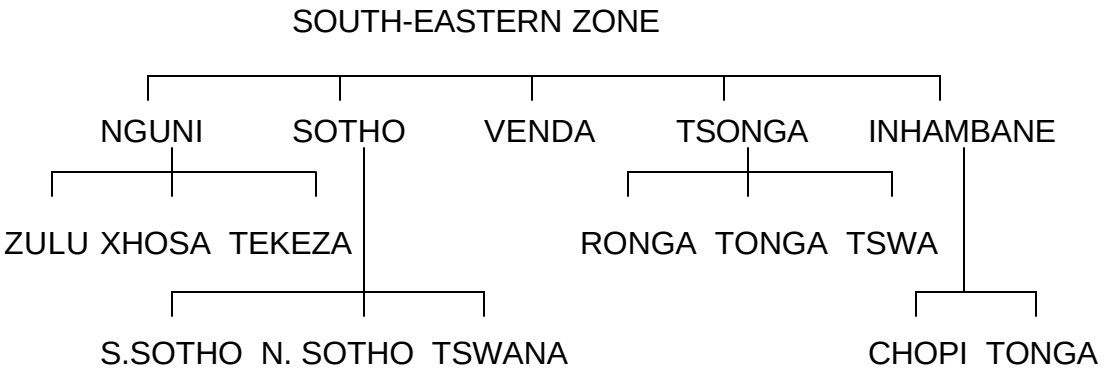

Figure 1: Doke's classification of Bantu languages

Guthrie (1967, Vol.1) in Mathumba (1993:43) also classified Xitsonga as an independent language group within the Bantu language family. He divided the Bantu language family into 15 zones which he numbered alphabetically from A in the north-west to S in the south-east, omitting the letters I, J, O and Q in his classification. He placed Xitsonga in zone S which he further divided into five groups, identifying each language within this group numerically. The five groups he numbered S.10 (Shona), S.20 (Venda), S.30 (Sotho), S.40 (Nguni), S.50 (Tsonga) and S.60 (Chopi). S.50 is made up of three mutually intelligible languages, viz. Tshwa (S.51), Tsonga-Shangaan (S.53) and Ronga (S.54). According to Bill (1983:8) Guthrie's Gwamba (S.52) is the Tsonga dialect spoken in the Northern Transvaal `with a strong Sotho influence'.

Baumbach (1987:2) suggests that it might be necessary to classify the Tsonga language under the Nguni group as a Tekeza language but acknowledges that this can only be done `after a thorough investigation'. Till then, Xitsonga remains an independent language group as per Doke and Guthrie's classification.

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therefore continue to use it in its original and `innocent' sense of merely referring to a particular family of languages.

As for the term [3]`Tsonga', Baumbach (1987:1), is of the opinion that

> The terms Thonga, Tsonga, Shangaan and Gwamba are very often used as synonyms for what linguists want to indicate, i.e. a specific language. The terms Tsonga, Tonga, [4]Thonga and Shangaan, are however, also used as an embracing term for all the different Tsonga dialects, i.e. an inclusive term for a group of closely related languages which are spoken in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and the Republic of South Africa.

Sitoe (2001:1) and Sitoe et al. (2003:1) by and large express the same view when they assert that

> The term "Tsonga" has been used by scholars to designate both a whole language group (S.50 in Guthrie's (1967-71) referential classification), namely Tshwa (S.51), Tsonga-Shangaan (S.53) and Ronga (S.54), and each one of the languages. The cross-border language (S.53) is referred to by the term *Xitsonga* in South Africa, but in Mozambique people refer to their language by the term *Xichangana*. They use the term "Tsonga" to designate the whole language group.

This work will adopt the same view that the language spoken in South Africa is more correctly referred to as Xitsonga and we shall use the term "Xitsonga" as it is documented in The Constitution of the (new democratic) Republic of South Africa, (1996:4).

As is the case in the other countries where Xitsonga is spoken, in South Africa this language has many dialects. The data used in this study was collected largely from the dialect of the Vatsonga people as spoken in the Tshamahansi/Mokopane/ Zebediela districts of the Limpopo Province, formerly

[3] For an etymological explanation of this term one may refer to Mathumba (1993), Junod (1927) and Bryant (1929).

known as Potgietersrus, which is also the community to which I belong (See the map provided earlier under Explanatory Notes).

1.2 The aim of study

This study will mainly focus on the following aspects of Xitsonga:

- the predicate argument structure (PAS) of the verb in Xitsonga in general and that of the verbs of change of possession in particular;
- the occurrence of alternations and their semantic interpretation;
- the effect of verbal affixes on the PAS of verbs in Xitsonga. Following Levin (1993), the verbs of change of possession that will come under direct scrutiny are, *give* verbs, *contribute* verbs, verbs of *future having*, verbs of *providing*, verbs of *obtaining* and verbs of *exchange*. Both written and oral sources will be used to extract these types of verbs so that they are studied in as many structural contexts as possible.

To begin with, under the issue of predicate argument structure, the nature and behaviour of these verbs will be observed at different levels of representation, viz. the lexical-syntactic and the lexical-semantic representations (cf. Chapter 2 for the explanation of these terms). The basic and inherent properties of intransitive, monotransitive and ditransitive verb forms (also referred to as *one-, two-* and *three-place predicates* respectively) will be analysed and described with a thorough treatment of both the syntactic and semantic characteristics of the external and internal arguments. The term argument is defined by Trask (1993:20) as "a noun phrase bearing a specific grammatical or semantic relation to a verb and whose overt or implied presence is required for well-formedness in structures containing that verb…. **Internal arguments** occur inside the verb

[4] The term "Thonga" in this instance refers to the "Tsonga" which Doke (1945: 96-97) documented as (Shangana) and should not be confused as one and the same with the Tonga language spoken in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe (cf. chiTonga, ciTonga in Doke (op.cit.)).

phrase and are subcategorized for by the verb ([5]direct objects, indirect objects), while **external arguments** occur outside the VP (subjects)".
On the syntactic level it will be shown how a verb selects several arguments and how these arguments are distributed in a grammatical sentence and what sorts of rules govern such a distribution into external and internal arguments.

On the semantic level the various theta roles, such as "agent", "patient", "theme" and "beneficiary", that are assigned to the arguments by the verb will be analysed and described. Furthermore, the relationship between the lexical-syntactic and lexical-semantic representation will be explained. A selection of these types of verbs will be interpreted while highlighting the principles which govern such relations between the arguments.

Secondly, with regard to alternations, this study endeavours to establish and outline the possible syntactic environments in which various alternations manifest themselves within a range of applications such as verbs of change of possession, namely the *dative alternations, fulfilling alternations, sum of money subject alternations* and *possession alternations*. Although, strictly speaking, this is not a comparative study, a demonstration of how each type of alternation takes place in English will be given followed by an application of the alternations to Xitsonga constructions. The applicability of such alternations in Xitsonga will be established and variations as dictated by the syntax will be highlighted. A list of sentences which participate in a particular type of alternation will be given followed by a semantic analysis of the various arguments.

Thirdly, verbal affixes (also referred to as *verbal extensions* by some authors such as Sitoe (2001), Poulos (1990), (cf. 4.1 for more information)) which have

[5] In this work the terms *primary* and *secondary* will be used to refer to `direct' and `indirect' objects respectively as they should in languages such as English because "the indirect objects are not recognized in the GB framework" (cf. Trask, 1993:83). In most Bantu languages both objects display objecthood properties. For example, they can be promoted to the subject position of a sentence through passivization. Also, either object can be replaced by an object marker. Taking into account these facts, Bantu linguists also avoid the terms *direct* and *indirect*, (cf. Machobane (1989); Bresnan & Mchombo 1987)).

an effect on the predicate argument structure of the verbs they are attached to will be considered, particularly the applicative suffix {-el-} and the causative affix {-is-}. An investigation will be made to determine whether they increase, suppress or bind theta roles. These affixes will be considered with the different types of internal arguments to determine whether they have the same effect on them. They will also be used with intransitive, monotransitive and ditransitive verb stems to determine their effect on their predicate argument structure. The resultant theta roles will be analysed throughout with each application. The effect of the applicative and the causative will be investigated when they are attached to **give** verbs, **contribute** verbs, verbs of **future having**, verbs of **providing**, **equip** verbs, verbs of **obtaining** and verbs of **exchange**.

Since every task needs a tool, for the task at hand I have adopted the theoretical framework of Government and Binding (GB) and paragraph 1.3 below takes care of that.

1.3 The theoretical framework

The theoretical framework assumed in this study is the theory of Government and Binding (GB) and specifically one of its subsystems of principles, the *theta theory*, including subsequent developments within the principles and parameters model. The version on which the presentation will be based is by and large the one found in Chomsky (1981) and Chomsky (1982) which has also been presented in Sells (1985).

Sells (1985:19) relates the theory of Government and Binding to other syntactic models and compares it with its predecessor, transformational grammar (TG). Without delving into the comparison of these two theories, a few digressions of the GB theory from the TG theory may be observed. Sells (op.cit.) points out firstly that although the former “makes use of transformational operations, it is not their most important aspect; and little rests on it”.

Secondly, GB has revised the terminology that it took over from TG, such as 'deep'- and `surface' structure which have been replaced with *d*-and *s-structure* respectively. The main difference lies in the details pertaining to government and binding relations that obtain amongst constituents of a clause. Over and above these two levels of representation which were brought in from TG, GB added two other levels, viz. 'phonetic form' and 'logical form'. At the most general level, the organisation of GB grammar is as shown in figure 2 below:

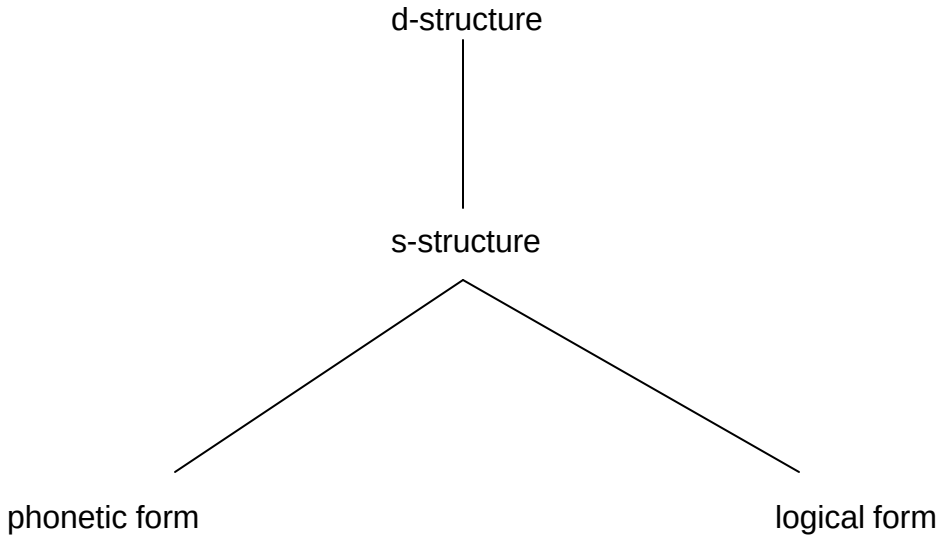

Figure 2: Organisation of GB grammar (Adapted from Sells, 1985:19)

The organisation of GB grammar with all its different components is as follows:

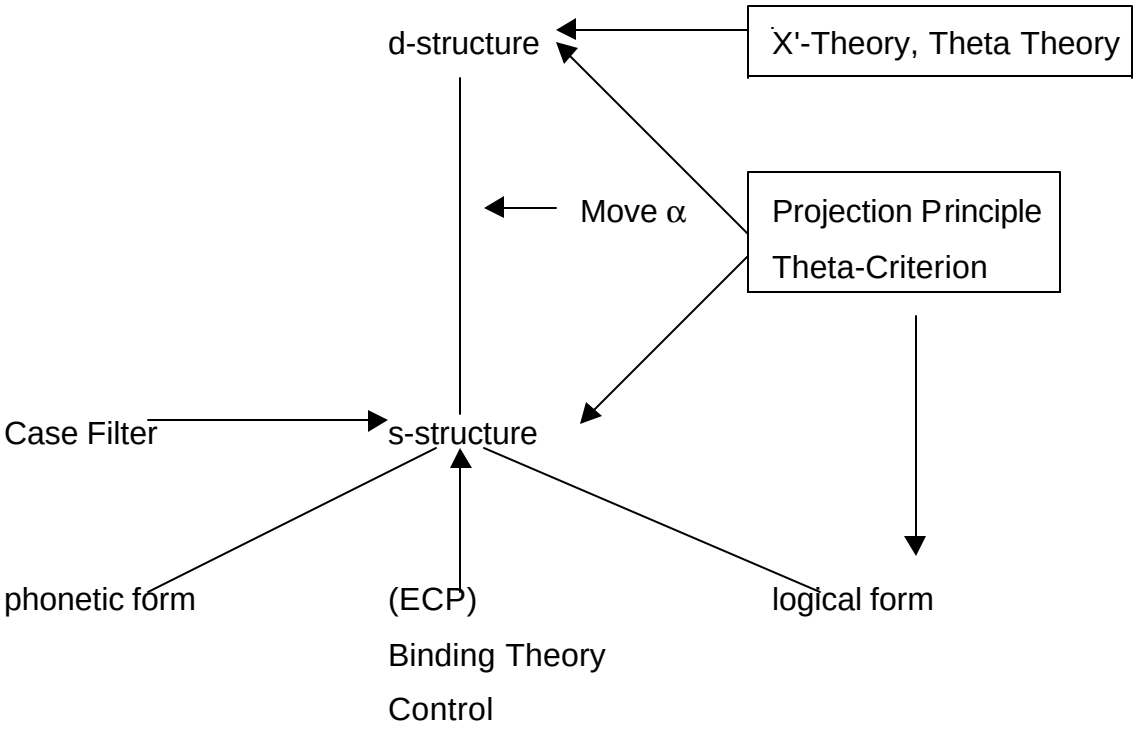

Figure 3: Components of GB grammar (Adapted from Sells, 1985:24)

In figures 2 and 3 above, the phonetic form (PF) is the level which represents the actual string that is the output of the grammar at the `sound' end. Logical form (LF) on the other hand is the corresponding level at the `meaning' end. The d-structure is generated by phrase structure rules such as example 1 below:

1. S → NP INFL VP

A sentence generated by this rule in the d-structure can be, for instance, 2 below:

2. The boss PAST fire John

In the surface or s-structure the same sentence would appear as 3 below:

3. a. The boss fired John

The levels of d- and s-structure are related by the transformational operation of Move α where α is understood to be a variable over syntactic categories, the fundamental idea being that a structure may be altered in any way by 'moving anything anywhere'. For example, in the formation of the passive the subject NP is moved from the subject position to the object position of the sentence as in example 3b below:

b. John was fired by the boss

Chomsky (1981:5) postulates a set of interacting subtheories each of which deals with some central area of grammatical enquiry. Horrocks (1987:100) also has reference. The following are the subsystems of GB: Government theory, Case theory, Binding theory, Bounding theory, Control theory, X-bar theory and Theta theory.

I should emphasize that due to the nature and scope of this study, I will not make an attempt to give a full exposition or comprehensive presentation of each one of these subsystems; rather, I will try to give a brief definition of each with appropriate examples, modified from Chomsky (1981):

Government theory relates to the (sisterhood) relation between the lexical head of a phrase/ projection and the categories that it subcategorizes. Government relations define strict locality domains within which grammatical relations and processes take place. In X-bar terminology, a lexical head governs its complements in the phrase of which it is a head. The formal definition of government is:

A. á governs â iff:
   (a) á is a zero-level category (i.e. N, V, P, A etc.)
   (b) á c-commands â, and
   (c) for every Y, Y a maximal projection/ phrase dominating â, Y also dominates á (i.e. á and â must be contained within the maximal projection/ phrase).

B. The SC (AGR) governs the subject NP.

Consider the following sentence:

4. Manana u-pfala rivanti leswaku a nga vangeli vana xirhami xa mpundzu
   1mother 1SC-close-PRS 5door so that 1SC-NEG-CAUS-APL-NEG 2children 7cold POSS-3morning
   (Mother closes the door so that she does not cause children morning cold)

This sentence can be sketched in a tree diagram with indications of government on the next page:

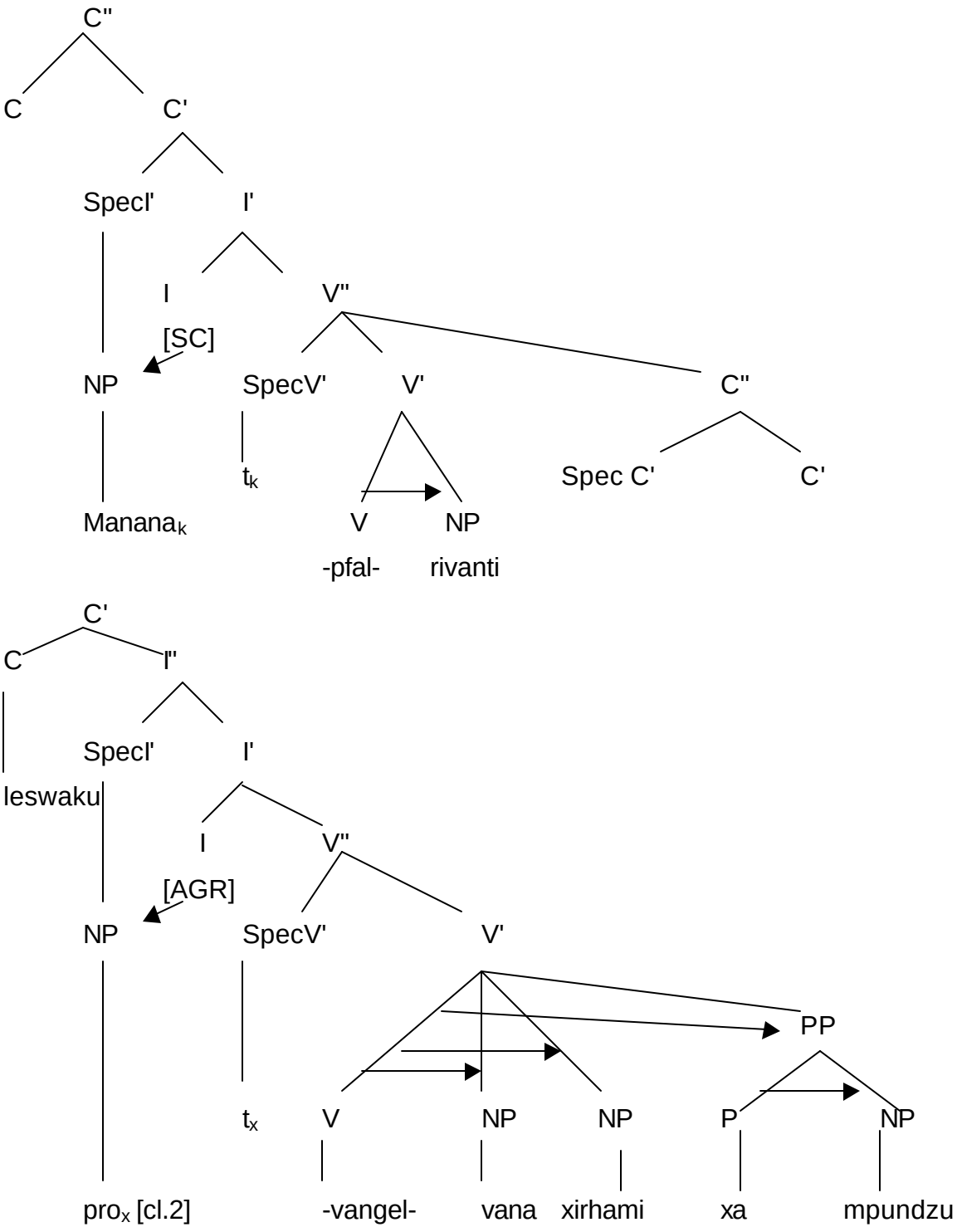

Figure 4: Principles of government

In this sentence, V in the matrix clause [6]governs its complement NP. In this way condition (a) of government is satisfied because V is a zero-level category and hence the head of VP. Condition (b) is also satisfied because V c-commands NP.

In the secondary clause, the V dominates the two NPs and the PP. However, V cannot govern the daughters of PP, viz. P and NP because they are outside her jurisdiction. They fall within another maximal projection, PP. P governs her sister, NP. Furthermore, in both clauses, we note that the subject NP is always governed by SC (even if the NP is a pro), a situation which satisfies condition B of government. Government is a pre-condition for Case marking.

Case theory deals with the assignment of abstract Case to noun phrases. The underlying assumption of Case theory is that noun phrases with phonetic content are required to be case-marked. The following are some basic principles of Case assignment (adapted from Chomsky, 1981:170):

(i) NP is assigned nominative Case if governed by AGR(SC) of INFL;
(ii) NP is assigned objective/accusative Case if governed by V (i.e. if it occurs as object of a transitive verb);
(iii) NP is assigned oblique Case if governed by P;
(iv) NP is assigned genitive Case if governed by the genitive *a* (e.g. in possessive and descriptive possessive constructions).
(v) NP is assigned locative Case if governed by a locative preposition (i.e. locative morphology).

Horrocks (1987:103) makes this observation that “the basic idea is that Case is assigned under government, the choice of Case being determined by the governor in any given example”.

[6] Government is indicated by arrows from left to right in the diagram.

In Xitsonga, as in other Bantu languages, Case is non-overt, i.e. it is structurally realised at S-structure. Let us go back to our example 4 on page 10 and its accompanying structural representation in figure 4 (page 11) above for some examples of Case assignment.

As can be seen in figure 4, the AGR (SC) assigns nominative Case to the subject NP *Manana* (Mother). The verb *pfala* (close) assigns accusative Case to the object NP *rivanti* (door) while P assigns genitive Case to the NP *mpundzu* (morning). The oblique Case and the locative Case are incorporated in examples 5 and 6 below respectively:

5. Wanuna u-xava rirhandzu **hi sagwati**
   1man 1SC-buy-PRS 5love with 5present
   (The man buys love with a present)

6. Mbangwa u-yile **ekerekeni**
   1PN 1SC-go-PFT LOC-9church
   (Mbangwa went to church)

In example 5, the preposition **hi** assigns oblique Case to the NP *sagwati* (present) while in example 6 the verb *yile* (went) assigns locative Case to the NP *ekerekeni* (to church). Another subtheory is the binding theory.

According to Horrocks (1987:108) **"**The **Binding theory** is concerned primarily with the conditions under which NPs are interpreted as referential with other NPs in the same sentence. NPs which are arguments are assumed to fall into one of the three categories: anaphors, pronominals, and referential expressions."

Anaphors are those NPs whose reference is determined sentence-internally and which cannot have independent reference. In English, reflexives and reciprocals fall into this category but in Xitsonga, as in other African languages, reflexives

and reciprocals are used differently and are not associated with an empty position. Thus the only anaphor in the African languages is the NP-trace.

Pronominals are NPs that lack specific lexical content and have only the features, `person', `number', `gender' and `case', e.g. *hina* (we/us), *xona* (it). Unlike anaphors, they may either refer to individuals independently or co-refer to individuals already named in a discourse. This is illustrated in example 7 below:

7. Tiyingwe ta-twisisa. **Tona** a-ti-fani ni tinghala.
   10tiger 10SC-understand-PRS. 10pro NEG-10SC-same-NEG ASS 10lion
   (Tigers are understanding. They, they are not the same as lions.)

Referential or R-expressions are NPs which are understood as having some identifiable entity as their referent (Coreference is excluded.). This is shown in 8 below:

8. Rhulani u-ri Ximbani u-tlharihile.
   1PN 1SC-say-PRS 1PN 1SC-clever-PFT
   (Rhulani says Ximbani is clever)

The binding theory has three sub-clauses, one for each of the three subcategories of NP arguments mentioned above:

(i) An anaphor must be bound in its governing category.
(ii) A pronominal must be free in its governing category.
(iii) An R-expression must be free everywhere.

In essence binding entails co-indexing by a c-commanding NP. A category á binds category â iff.

(i) á c-commands â and
(ii) á is coindexed with â

A definition of governing category is: á is a governing category for a category â if á is the first maximal phrasal category containing â as well as the governor of â. The following example illustrates what is stated here:

9. a. N'watipala u-kombela vatlangi leswaku va-n'wi-rahela bolo
1goalkeeper 1SC-ask-PRS 2players that 2SC-1OM-kick-APL-PRS 9ball
(The goalkeeper asks the players to pass him the ball)

This sentence can be indexed as follows:

b. [7][N'watipala$^{j}_{i}$ u-kombela vatlangi^{z} leswaku pro^{z} 2SC-OM$^{j}_{i}$-rahela pro$^{j}_{i}$ bolo]

If we interpret the sentence in such a way that the subject pro of the imbedded clause is co-referential with *vatlangi* (players), then we say that this subject pro is bound by *vatlangi*. Likewise, if we interpret the subject in such a way that object pro in the imbedded clause is coreferential with *n'watipala* (goalkeeper) then we say that this object pro is bound by *n'watipala.* Next is the bounding theory.

Bounding theory (also known as the **subjacency**) poses locality conditions on certain processes and related items. Central to this movement theory is the transformational rule Move á**.** In principle the transformational/movement rule can apply freely to move any element to any position over any distance/domain. However, subjacency poses constraints/restrictions on the application of the movement rule Move á, specifying locality conditions on movement. Sentences 10a (d-structure) and 10b (s-structure) below will serve as examples of a Tsonga sentence that reveals the operation of subjacency:

[7] The superscripts$^{j\,\&\,z}$ stand for control relations while the subscript$_{i}$ stands for co-indexation.

10. a. Wu-xaveriwa ku-chayeriwa movha
3SC-buy-APL-PASS-PRS PRO-drive-APL-PASS-PRS 3car
(It is bought to be driven, a car)

b. Movha wu-xaveriwa ku-chayeriwa
3car 3SC-buy-APL-PASS-PRS PRO-drive-PASS
(A car is bought to be driven)

This movement can be schematised as follows:

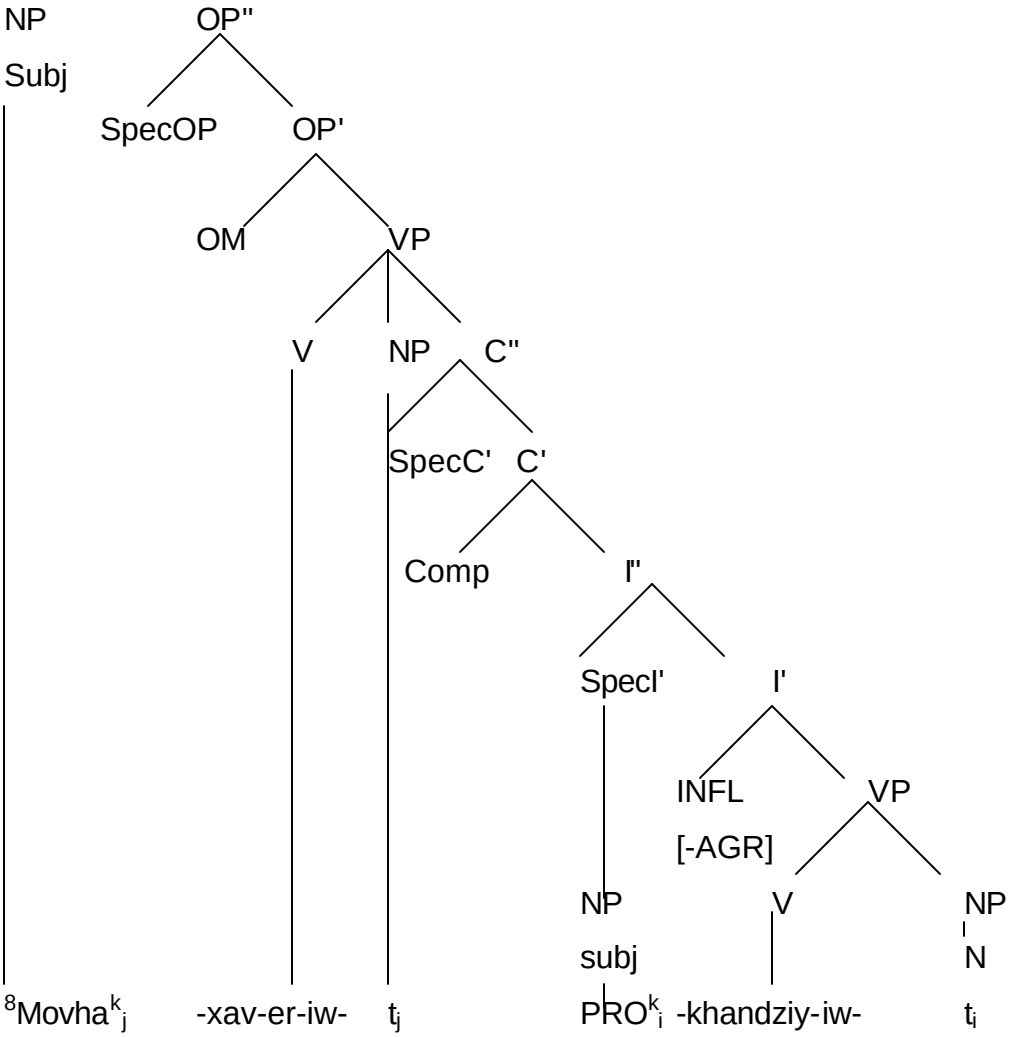

Figure 5: Operation of subjacency

[8] The superscript ^{k} stands for control relations while the subscripts$_{j}$ and$_{i}$ stand for co-indexation.

In this analysis **-xav-er-iw-** governs $\mathbf{t_j}$ while **–khandziy-iw-** governs $\mathbf{t_i}$ but neither assigns Case. The subjacency Principle which states that movement may not cross more than one governing category is observed and the movement of both the NP and PRO does not crosss any governing category.

There is also proper control of PRO by its antecedent *movha* (car) and the PRO is free within its local domain. The PRO lacks agreement and, as a result, it cannot be assigned Case, for, Case assignment takes place under government. The properties of PRO also receive attention under control theory.

Control theory determines the potential for reference of the abstract pronominal element PRO, the phonetically empty category which characteristically appears as subject of infinitival clauses. It is therefore concerned with establishing the antecedent or controller of PRO. Control theory is concerned with establishing relations through principles that determine whether PRO subject of the infinitive is controlled by an external argument or the internal argument (or both) in the matrix clause. There are also instances where PRO might not have a specific controller. Four types of control are distinguished, viz. subject control, object control, split control and arbitrary control. The following examples exemplify each of these types respectively:

11. a. Vadyondzi va-ala ku-tsala xikambelo
2learner 2SC-refuse-PRS 15SC-write 7exam
(Learners refuse to write the examination)

In example 11, the NP subject (antecedent) *vadyondzi* controls the empty category PRO and is co-indexed with it because they share the same grammatical features of [cl.2 +3rd person +plural]. The co-indexation will be as follows:

b. Vadyondzi^{x} va-ala PRO^{x} tsala xikambelo

Since the INFL node in the infinitival clause lacks agreement, there is no governor for the subject position. This means that PRO in the subject position of the infinitival clause is ungoverned. Consequently it is also not assigned Case. This PRO is also classified as a pronominal anaphor. Horrocks (1987:133) justifies this as follows:

> The item is rather like an anaphor in that it lacks the potential for independent reference, but is like a pronominal in that its antecedent apparently can never be in the same clause.

Other observations made by Horrocks (op.cit.) are that the empty category in this case cannot be a trace and that there is no question of its being created by the rule Move á. Also, the relationship in this type of construction is not subject to subjacency.

In **object control** the object NP of the matrix clause controls PRO. Object control obtains in examples such as the following:

12. a. Ngheni u-xavelela Lulu ku-dya swakudya
1PN 1SC-beg-APL-APL-PRS 1PN 15SC-eat 8food
(Ngheni begs Lulu to eat food)

In this case PRO is controlled by the object of the matrix clause, viz. Lulu. Therefore Lulu is co-indexed with PRO. This is also because PRO is ungoverned and as a result has no Case. Cf. the example below:

b. Ngheni u-xavelela Lulu^{k} PRO^{k} dya swakudya

In **split control**, both the subject NP and the object NP control PRO. Split control obtains with verbs such as *pfuna* (help) as in the example below:

13. a. Khangela u-pfuna kokwana ku-hlantswa
1PN 1SC-help-PRS 1grandma 15SC-wash
(Khangela helps grandma to wash)

Co-indexation will be as follows:

b. Khangela^{x} u-pfuna kokwana^{y} PRO$^{x/y}$ hlantswa

Unlike all the other instances, **arbitrary control** obtains when PRO has no specific reference. In this case the subject NP of the matrix clause is pro existential as in the following example:

14. a. Swa-nyumisa ku-yiva swakudya
8SC-embarass-CAUS-PRS 15SC-steal 8food
(It is embarassing to steal food)

The pro existential will appear as follows:

b. pro [existential] -nyumis- PRO -yiv- swakudya

Another one of the basic subtheories of GB is the X-bar theory which is discussed below:

In an attempt to define **X-bar theory**, Haegeman (1994:104) sees it as

> The part of grammar regulating the structure of phrases has come to be known as X-bar theory. X-bar theory brings out what is common in the structure of phrases.

It makes a distinction between lexical and non-lexical categories. The lexical categories include the Verb, the Noun and the Adjective, all of which are

distinguished in terms of a feature system based on the feature matrix [±N; ±V]. The verb is [-N, +V] and the noun is [+N, -V]. The non-lexical categories include the elements that are usually considered to belong under the inflection node, such as Agreement, Tense, Negation as well as the Complementiser. The principles of this theory restrict structural representations in terms of the scheme below, where **X** is a maximal projection while **X** is the head. **X** is the projection intermediate between the maximal projection and the head. **Xº** is the complement of the head **X** both of which constitute the **X** projection:

X ---→ Spec X ,X
X ---→ X, Complement Xº

For example, the following sentence can be presented in the diagram below it:

15. Wansati u-bile n'wana
    1woman 1SC-beat-PFT 1child
    (The woman beat the child)

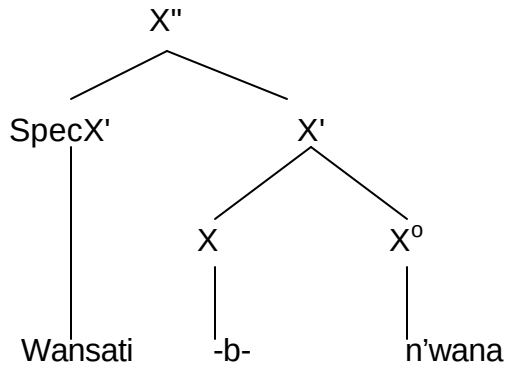

Figure 6: Tree diagram of the X-bar theory

The last and also one of the most central theories within the GB approach and within this project, is the theta theory.

Haegeman (1994:49) defines **Theta theory** as "the component of grammar that regulates the assignment of thematic roles". By `thematic roles' is meant those semantic roles that are assigned to the arguments by the verb, such as **agent**,

patient, **beneficiary**, **theme**, etc. Thus, in the entry for a lexical head *veka* (put), for instance, the NP complement is assigned the role of **patient** or **theme** and the PP complement the role of **location**. It is further assumed that although verbs do not subcategorise for subjects, the majority of verbs may theta-mark the subject position of sentences containing them. Therefore, the NP subject of the verb *veka* (put) is assigned the **agent** role. Since this subsystem is central to this discussion, it requires more than a mere definition. For that reason this discussion will be expanded in paragraph 1.4 below.

1.4 Theta theory

Syntactic-semantic studies revolve a lot around the notion of thematic roles. Dowty (1991:547) asserts:

> There is perhaps no concept in modern syntactic and semantic theory which is so often involved in so wide a range of contexts, but on which there is so little agreement as to its nature and definition as THEMATIC ROLE (or THEMATIC RELATION) and its derivative, THETA-ROLE in GB theory.

Among others, scholars such as Sells (1985), Trask (1993), Dowty (1986), Haegeman (1994) and Du Plessis et al. (1995) have made supporting comments in this regard.

Sells (1985:35) observes that “Many different theories make reference to theta roles (under one name or another) yet there is unfortunately no presently available theory of what the range of possible roles is and how you might tell in a given context which one you’re dealing with; one must, for the present, rely on intuition in large part”.

Trask (1993:278) supports this view when he asserts that “the proponents of GB have been remarkably unforthcoming about precisely which theta roles are posited in the framework, but at least Agent, Patient and Goal are generally recognized…”.

However, Dowty (1986:548) disagrees with the credit that Trask (op.cit.) seems to give to the proponents of GB when he observes, “there is disagreement even on the most familiar roles, e.g. on whether Theme…is the same as Patient or distinct from it.” He declares, “no one that I know of has ever attempted to propose a complete list.”

Haegeman (1994:49) also makes the same observation and asserts, “Although many linguists agree on the importance of thematic structure for certain syntactic processes, the theory of thematic roles is still very sketchy. For example, at the present stage of the theory there is no agreement about how many such specific thematic roles there are and what their labels are”. For example, some linguists use `theme’ where others use `patient’ to refer to the same entity upon which the action is performed. According to Haegeman, “other authors amalgamate the roles PATIENT and THEME under the one role of THEME”.

Du Plessis et al. (1995:3) refer to Gruber (1965) and Jackendoff (1972) as giving some semantic indication of the semantic arguments by using theta role labels such as “agent, theme, experiencer, patient and others…” where `theme’ and `patient’ are listed as different theta roles. They further highlight (1995:3) the fact that “Jackendoff argued that an NP may bear more than one theta role… and that the assignment of these two theta roles involves a semantic decomposition of the verb into a structured complex of elementary predicates, each of which has its own array of arguments: a given argument of the complex predicate may correspond to two or more arguments of the individual predicates”.

In an attempt to provide a solution to this glaring absence of consensus about what thematic roles are, Dowty (1991:547) even suggests “a theory in which the only roles are two cluster-concepts called PROTO-AGENT and PROTO-PATIENT, each characterised by a set of verbal entailments: an argument of a verb may bear either of the two proto-roles (or both) to varying degrees, according to the number of entailments of each kind the verb gives it.”

Early work on thematic relations suggested the existence of a Thematic Hierarchy. Among other things, this hierarchy generally indicates which argument of an underived verb will be assigned to the subject position. Jackendoff (1972:43) sets up the following hierarchy of semantic relations:

Agent > Location/ Source/ Goal > Theme

Grimshaw (1990:7-8) draws a hierarchy structure which is very close to that of Jackendoff (1972) in that they agree on the highest and lowest roles and writes, “I will assume a version of the hierarchy in which the Agent is always the highest argument. Next ranked is Experiencer, then Goal/ Source/ Location and finally Theme.” Thus

Agent > Experiencer > Goal/ Source/ Location > Theme

Machobane (1989:48) adopts the following hierarchy for Sesotho, which differs markedly from that of Jackendoff’s and Grimshaw’s (op.cit.):

Causer > Agent > Benefactive > Experiencer > Goal (animate) > Theme > Goal (inanimate) > Locative > Instrument.

According to this hierarchy the Causer is the highest semantic role, followed by the Agent, the Benefactive and so on. Although it is anchored in the tradition of Thematic Hierarchy as proposed in Jackendoff (1972), it deviates from many of these in ranking the Experiencer after the Benefactive, making a distinction between animate and inanimate Goals and labelling the argument assigned by the causative suffix as the causer.

Despite all the differences of opinion among various scholars regarding what theta roles are or what they should be, as well as the differences in ranking them on a hierarchy scale, the main issue to highlight here is that verbs select theta roles from this broad list of thematic roles to build up their predicate argument structure. Grimshaw (1990:7) concurs with this view when she states:

> Hierarchy is…the organizing principle of a-structures. Argument structures are constructed in accordance with the thematic hierarchy, so the structural organization of the argument array is determined by universal principles based on the semantic properties of the arguments.

For example, consider the sentence below:

16. Manana u-xavisa vana malamula
    1mother 1SC-buy-CAUS-PRS 2children 6oranges
    (Mother causes children to buy oranges)

In this example, the causative {-is-} assigns an extra argument to the PAS of the verb and selects for it the **causer** role, which is the highest role in this hierarchy structure. It assigns to the internal arguments **recipient** and **theme** respectively.

My description of theta roles will largely follow Haegeman's inventory (1994) and will accommodate more than one theta role on a particular argument where an ambiguous reading arises. Although different definitions of **theme** and **patient** will be given, the two will be used interchangeably as there is still not sufficient clarity of the differences between the two and besides, it is not easy in Xitsonga to get suitable examples of these roles in the subcategory of verbs that we are dealing with here, viz. verbs of change of possession. As a result it will be beyond the scope of this study to resolve issues of such complex nature.

Now that the ground has been laid, it is germane to explore the predicate argument structure of a Xitsonga construction.