The African e-Journals Project has digitized full text of articles of eleven social science and humanities journals. This item is from the digital archive maintained by Michigan State University Library. Find more at: http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals/

Available through a partnership with

Scroll down to read the article.
REMARKS ON SOME SYNTACTIC NOUN FEATURES IN SHONA†

N.C. DEMBETEMBE

Department of African Languages. University of Zimbabwe

WE MAY REPRESENT the knowledge that we possess of the idiosyncratic properties of words as a kind of internalized dictionary, commonly referred to as a lexicon. It is a fact that, although a Shona speaker has never explicitly been told that certain verbs and adjectives may not have certain types of nouns as subject when they occur in deep structures of sentences, he nevertheless knows very well that, for example, a noun like mombe (a cow) is not the type of noun that can occur as the subject of the verb -verenga (read), that a noun like botá (porridge) cannot be the subject of an adjective like -tatu (three), that the verb -nyórá (write) must have as subject a noun with the property of humanness (e.g., mudzídísí, teacher; mwana, a child; Mukómaná, a boy). Any grammar which is intended to describe our knowledge of our language must be able to account for this type of information among other things. It must be able to describe why string (1) is an acceptable sentence, while (2) is not:

(1) Mabhrání akanyórá tsánba. (The clerk wrote a letter.)

(2) *Mombe yákavérenga bhúku. (*A cow read a book.)

The lexicon will contain in particular: (a) those aspects of phonological structure which it is not possible to predict by general rules; (b) those properties which are relevant to the functioning of transformational rules, e.g., subject raising, object deletion; (c) those properties of a lexical formative which are necessary for semantic interpretation; and (d) lexical features which show the positions in which a lexical formative can be inserted (by a lexical rule) in a preterminal string. Although a distinction is being made in this presentation between syntactic and semantic features, it should be noted nonetheless that this distinction is not clear-cut. It is still a vexed question. For instance, some linguists, such as Chomsky, would regard features such as [+ count] and [+ human] as syntactic, while others, such as Grinder and Elgin, would regard these same features as semantic. It is not yet possible to determine the exact boundary between syntactic and semantic

† I am grateful for the comments of Professor G. Fortune on an earlier draft of this article.

1 The view adopted in this article is that noun phrases which involve a noun and an adjective qualifier start off as sentences in the underlying structure.

features. Nor is it known yet what range of syntactic and semantic features is available in natural languages or in any particular language. For the purposes in hand, however, a feature will be considered to be a purely semantic lexical feature if it is not referred to by any rule of either the phonological or the syntactic component. A feature is syntactic if it is referred to by some transformational rule of the syntactic component. A syntactic feature will determine, for instance, what pro-form should occur after some transformation has applied in a given type of sentence, or whether or not a given noun can be used with a secondary prefix. On the other hand a semantic feature will determine what lexical item is privileged to occur in a given frame as dictated by the other lexical items in that frame. The difference between phonological and syntactic features is obvious enough not to require elaboration. Since in this study the features mentioned above in (a), (c) and (d) play an insignificant role, they will not be discussed any further.

Syntactic features may influence in important ways the choice of words and/or their arrangement in surface structure. This will be illustrated later. These syntactic features may be subdivided into various types, depending precisely on the type of reference to a ‘frame’ that is implied. While some of these features for example [gender] and [± feminine], may be regarded as inherent in the sense that they specify a unit without any reference to a frame, others refer to the position of a formative in the phrase structure, e.g., [± noun], [± verb]. These latter features are called contextual or categorical features, and they define the lexical category to which a formative belongs. Still others specify the frame of constituents (of categories) in which a given formative can be inserted, e.g., + ____ NP, − ____ NP. These are commonly known as subcategorization features.

Syntactic features are concerned with subcategorization rather than with ‘branching’ or ‘re-write’ rules. It would also appear that the only categories involved in this respect are those which comprise lexical formatives as members. It has already been noted by McCawley that re-write rules are an inappropriate device to effect subcategorization of lexical categories because this subcategorization is not strictly hierarchic, but involves instead cross-classification. Syntactic features will include rule specification, e.g., object raising. This rule will be applicable only to those sentences with verbs which are positively specified with respect to object raising.

The rest of this study will be concerned with those syntactic features which subcategorize nouns only. These features include: [gender], [± common], [± count], [± human], [± locative], [± abstract], [± time]. I shall try to adduce evidence indicating to what extent in a grammar of Shona these features are syntactically relevant.

1. The feature [+N]
Every noun in Shona when entered in the lexicon will be positively specified for the feature [+N], indicating that it belongs to the grammatical category ‘noun’, as opposed to the categories ‘verb’, ‘adjective’, etc. By a lexical redundancy rule every noun will be negatively specified for the categories ‘verb’, ‘adjective’, etc. It is obvious enough not to require discussion that lexical items specified for [+N] will enter certain syntactic frames from which lexical items specified for [+Verb] or [+Adjective] will be excluded.

2. The feature [gender]
This is a property of every noun in Shona. It is this feature which enables nouns to control concordial agreement within a noun phrase or a sentence. So much has been written in Shona, and indeed in Bantu languages as a whole, about grammatical concord which is dictated by nouns that it would be superfluous to dwell on it again here. The question of number is, however, another matter. Given the system of genders in Shona, whether the singular/plural feature can be said to be syntactically significant is in my view open to question. It would have been pertinent to dwell on this aspect at some length, but it is not possible in this short paper.

3. The feature [± common]
In order to appreciate the relevance of this feature in Shona it may be pertinent to dwell a little on primary and secondary prefixes. A prefix is considered to be primary with respect to a given noun if it is the usual or normal form that occurs with that noun when signifying a normal specimen of the phenomenon or object being referred to. For example, the stem -kómaná normally appears with either [gender 1] or [gender 2]. The nouns mukómaná (a boy) and vakómaná (boys) refer to a normal boy and normal boys respectively. There is no connotation of size or other quality implied.

However, it is quite common for a noun to possess a gender with which it is not normally associated. This happens when it is intended to supply information about some quality of the object referred to. That is, in addition to stating the type of specimen it is, something is also said about its size or other quality. For example, the stem -kómaná, in addition to occurring with [gender 1] and [gender 2], can also occur with the following genders:

(3) gender 5 — gómaná (a huge boy)
    7 — chikómaná (a short and stout boy)
    11 — rukómaná (a thin, emaciated boy)
    12 — kakómaná (a small boy)
    14 — ukómaná (boyhood)

Thus the genders 5, 7, 11, 12 and 14 are used in secondary association in respect of
the noun -kömaná. The assumption made here is that primary prefixes will appear in deep structure while their secondary function will be accounted for by a transformational process.

Fortune has subdivided secondary prefixes into two groups, namely, commentary and supplementary prefixes. The former indicate special or abnormal specimens of the nouns referred to and they include genders 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12 and 13. The latter do not specify an object as abnormal but introduce a set of new and supplementary references; among those genders are 1a, 2a, 7, 14, 16, 17 and 18.

The feature common/non-common appears to be justified in a grammar of Shona on the grounds that, although sometimes two nouns may share the same gender among their features, one of them may take on a gender in secondary function because it is a common noun while the other may not, simply because it is not a common noun. For instance, the nouns Sará (the name) and sekúru (an uncle) each have [gender 1a]. But whereas we can say kasekúru (12) (an undersized uncle) we cannot normally say kaSará (12) (a small Sara). Consider the noun Haráre as another illustration. This noun may have as one of its features [gender 9]. As with Sará above we cannot say, for example, ruHaráre (11), whereas with a noun like mombé (a cow), which also has [gender 9], we can happily say rumombé (11) (a thin under-sized cow). The nouns sekúru and mombé can each occur with a gender expressing a secondary idea, namely, genders 12 and 11 respectively in this case, because they are common nouns, and the nouns Sará and Haráre cannot, simply because they are not common nouns.

Given the division of secondary prefixes into those that are commentary and those that are supplementary, we observe that the feature [± common] is relevant only in respect of secondary prefixes of the commentary type. Hereunder are further examples involving commentary prefixes:

(4) a. With common nouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary association</th>
<th>Secondary association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>badzá (5) (a hoe)</td>
<td>chipazá (7) (a worn-out hoe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rupadzá (11) (a despised hoe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>kapadzá (12) (a little hoe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>zibandzá (21) (a big hoe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chipunu (7) (a spoon)</td>
<td>kapunu (12) (a small spoon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>zipunu (21) (a big spoon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mhuru (9) (a calf)</td>
<td>chimhuru (7) (a fat calf)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rumhuru (11) (an undernourished calf)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 The figure which occurs immediately after a noun in this article indicates the gender or noun class to which that noun belongs.
**b. with non-common nouns**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary association</th>
<th>Secondary association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*chiZuze (7)</td>
<td>*ruZuze (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*kaZuze (12)</td>
<td>*ziZuze (21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| *chiDombóshava (7)  | *ruDombóshava (11)   |
| *kaDombóshava (12)  |                       |

| *chiZambézi (7)     | *ruZambézi (11)      |
| *kaZambézi (12)     | *ziZambézi (21)      |

However, supplementary prefixes can be used with both common and non-common nouns as illustrated below:

(5) a. With common nouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary association</th>
<th>Secondary association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dándá (5) (a log)</td>
<td>váDanda (2a) (Mr Danda)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>padándá (16) (at the log)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| váMurombó (2a) (Mr Murombo) | urombó (14) (poverty) |
| mumurombó (18) (in a poor person) |                     |

b. With non-common nouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary association</th>
<th>Secondary association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ali (1a) (a name)</td>
<td>váAli (2a) (Mr Ali)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chiAli (7) (in the manner of Ali)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| muHera (1) (member of Hera tribe) | uHera (14) (Buhera district) |
| chiHera (7) (in the manner of the Hera tribe) |                     |
4. The feature [± count]

4.1. Now consider the nouns muti (a tree) and muto (soup), each of which has among its features [gender 3]. The noun muti can be accompanied by the numeral mumwe (one, single) as in muti mumwe chete (one tree). But this is not possible with muto. The string muto mumwe chete when taken to mean ‘one or single’ soup is ungrammatical. This string is, however, grammatical only if it means ‘same soup’ (i.e., the same as another). This latter meaning is also applicable to the string muti mumwe chete (the same tree). Take another example: the nouns mago (wasps) and mamera (sprouted grain) have each the feature [gender 6]. But whereas we can say:

(6)  
mago maviri (two wasps)  
mago matatu (three wasps)  
mago mana (four wasps)

we cannot say:

(7)  
*mamera maviri  
*mamera matatu  
*mamera mana, etc.

Although in the case of muti and mago we can speak of the one as a singular noun and the other as a plural noun, we do not have a plural noun which corresponds to muto nor do we have a singular noun which corresponds to mamera. The nouns muti and mago are count nouns while muto and mamera are non-count nouns. This seems to confirm the syntactic relevance of the count/non-count feature in Shona. This argument relies on the behaviour of nouns with numeral adjectives.

4.2. It is noteworthy also that nouns like muto, mamera and rudó (love) may not be used with singular secondary prefixes of the commentary type, e.g.:

(8)  
muto *chimuto *rumuto *kamuto *zimuto  
mamera *chimamera *rumamera *kamamera *zimamera  
rudó (love) *chirudó *rurudó *karudó *zirudó  
mvúrú (water) *chimvúrú *rumvúrú *kamvúrú *zimvúrú  
chando (cold) *chichando *ruchando *kachando *zichando

But such nouns as musikaná (a girl) and badzá (a hoe) may be used readily with singular secondary prefixes of the commentary type, e.g.:

(9)  
musikaná chisikaná rusikaná kasikaná zisikaná  
badzá chipadzá rupadzá kapadzá zibadzá

The point which is being made here is that nouns in the former group may not be used with singular secondary prefixes because they are non-count nouns, whereas those in the latter group can be so used because they are count nouns.
5. The feature [± human]

5.1. In asking certain questions in Shona the interrogative formatives used will depend on whether the noun phrase being questioned is human or non-human. If it is the former the interrogative formative employed is *ani* (who, whom), and *chii* (what) if the latter, e.g.:

(10) a. Sekai akatsvódá Pawakwenyewa. (Sekai kissed Pawakwenyewa.)
    b. Sekai akatsvódá ani? (Sekai kissed whom = Whom did Sekai kiss?)

(11) a. Vakómaná vákaúráyá nyóká. (The boys killed a snake.)
    b. Vakómaná vákaúráyá chií? (The boys killed what = What did the boys kill?)

(12) a. Kateya ákapá Shayá bhóra. (Kateya passed to Shaya the ball = Kateya passed the ball to Shaya.)
    b. Kateya ákapá ani bhóra? (Kateya passed to whom the ball = To whom did Kateya pass the ball?)
    c. Kateya ákapá Shayá chií? (What did Kateya pass to Shaya?)

Note, however, that in the case of those non-human nouns which refer to place or time—in other words, adverbials of place or time—they will not be substituted for by *chii*. These will be discussed later. The interrogative formative is chosen, not according to concord relationship with the object concerned, but in accordance with the expectation of syntactic category in the answer. The determining factor of syntactic subcategorization in this case is the human/non-human distinction.

If it is an object, direct or indirect, which is being questioned, that object is simply substituted for by *ani* or *chii* as the case may be. This is exemplified in (10)–(12) above. If it is a subject noun phrase that is being questioned, the same interrogative pro-forms are used but the sentence is modified a little. In addition to substituting for the string under consideration, the interrogative pro-form is stabilized, or, in other words, turned into a predicate with the rest of the sentence becoming a relative clause, as shown by the ‘b’ sentences of the examples which follow:

(13) a. Chipó akabátwá nemapúrisa nezúro. (Chipo was arrested by the police yesterday.)
    b. Ndianí akabátwa nemapúrisa nezúro? (lit., it is who—the one arrested—by the police—yesterday = Who was arrested by the police yesterday?)

(14) a. Ndege inofambá nemudénga. (An aeroplane travels in the air.)
    b. Chií chinofamá nemudénga? (lit., it is what—which travels—in the air = What travels in the air?)

*In Shona, adverbials of place and time are in effect noun phrases.*
5.2. It is observed also that when two or more subject noun phrases or object noun phrases which refer to human beings are conjoined, the concord which they dictate and control together is usually that of [gender 2]. In the case of object noun phrases this concord is required sometimes as a substitute referent or as a coreferent. Examples (15)–(20) refer to conjoined subject noun phrases while (21)–(23) pertain to co-ordinated object noun phrases. (In these examples the number after a noun phrase indicates the gender or class of the head noun.)

(15) *Mukómaná* (1) *némusíkaná* (1) várí kútaurirana. (A boy and a girl are talking to each other.)

(16) *Sekúru* (1a) natetè (1a) vánouyá mangwána. (Uncle and aunt will come tomorrow.)

(17) Varúmè (2) névakádzí (2) vácháenda kumusangano. (Men and women will go to the meeting.)

(18) *Sekúru* (1a) nemúzukúru (1) vánodána. (An uncle and his nephew love each other.)

(19) *Murimi* uyu (1) nemádhoméni (6) vánonzwáná. (This farmer and the agricultural demonstrators get on well.)

(20) *Shámwarí* yángü (9) nehárahwa íye (9) vákátósvorana. (My friend and that old man quarrelled.)

(21) a. *Ndaóna* hanzvádzí (9) néhanzvádzí (9). (I saw a brother and a sister.)

b. *Ndaváona*. (I saw them.)

(22) a. *Tícha* ápa vákómaná (2) névasíkaná (2) zviiwísi. (The teacher gave both boys and girls some sweets.)

b. *Tícha* ávapá zviiwísi. (The teacher gave them some sweets.)

(23) a. Takásángana naJó (1a) naMatenzíni (1a) kwáMachípísa. (As for Jo and Matenzeni we met them at Machipisa.)

b. *Jo* naMatenzíni takásángana návo kwáMachípísa. (As for Jo and Matenzeni we met them at Machipisa.)

But when two or more subject noun phrases or object noun phrases which do not refer to human beings are conjoined the concord which they usually control together is [gender 8]. The examples in (24)–(26) pertain to conjoined subject noun phrases and those in (27)–(28) to conjoined object noun phrases.

(24) *Pasí* (16) nedenga (5) zvákásíkwa naMwarí. (Earth and heaven were created by God.)

(25) *Makudo* (6) nembáda (10) zvákavéngáná. (Baboons and leopards are enemies.)

(26) *Bere* (5) nédhongí (5) hazvídí kuónaná. A hyena and a donkey do not want to see each other.)
(27) a. Tinófudza mombe (10) nehwaí (10) pamwé cheté. (We let cattle and sheep graze together.)
    b. Mombe nehwaí tinózvifudza pamwé cheté. (As for cattle and sheep we let them graze together.)

(28) a. Waona kambwánaná (12) némhurú (9) kúpi? (lit., you saw a puppy and a calf where = Where did you see a puppy and a calf?)
    b. Wazviona kúpi? (lit., you saw them where = Where did you see them?)

In the strings (15)—(28) the choice of either concord va- or zvi- depends on whether the conjoined noun phrases refer to human beings or not. To that extent the human/non-human distinction is syntactically significant.

Occasionally, however, conjoined noun phrases which refer to human beings may control together either [gender 2] or [gender 8] as illustrated below:

(29) Murimi uyu (1) nemádhoméni (6) zvinonzwáná. (cf. string (19).)

(30) Shámmwarí yángu (9) nehárahwa iye (9) zvákaitósvaranu. (cf. string (20).)

The following strings, however, are ungrammatical:

(31) *Sekúru (1a) natete (1a) zvinouiyá mangwána. (cf. string (16).)

(32) *Varúmu (2) névakádzi (2) zvícháenda kumusangano. (cf. string (17).)

Further investigation is required here to determine when [gender 8] may or may not be used optionally with conjoined human noun phrases. What is uncontroversial, though, is that when human noun phrases are co-ordinated they control [gender 2] concord. That is, no cases have been found in which conjoined human noun phrases will control [gender 8] concord to the exclusion of [gender 2] concord.

When two non-human noun phrases, both plural and belonging to the same gender and semantic class, are joined together, they may optionally control the concord of their gender.

(33) a. Nákátema misasa (4) nemínchondo (4) yaívá múmunda.
    b. Nákátema misasa nemínchondo zvaívá múmunda. (I cut down the musasas and munhondos which were in the field.)

It is significant that non-human noun phrases, unless they are personified, will never control the concord of [gender 2].

What is intriguing, though, is a conjoined structure which involves a human and a non-human noun phrase. If a choice of gender referring to the two noun phrases together has to be made, it will have to be that of [gender 8] rather than of [gender 2]:

* Varúmu (2) névakádzi (2) zvícháenda kumusangano. (cf. string (17).)
(34) *Muvhimi (1) nembwa yake (9) zvakatsakatika. (The hunter and his
dog disappeared.)

(35) Muvhimi (1) nembwa yake (9) zvakatsakatika.

(36) Ndakáona mukómaná (1) nemómbe dzáké (10) zvichínésána.
(lit., I saw a boy and his cattle troubling one another = I saw a
boy being given a hard time by his cattle.)

(37) *Ndakáona mukómaná (1) nemómbe dzáké (10) vachínésána.

Normally we tend to avoid conjoining such noun phrases. The human noun phrase
is given the privilege of controlling concordial agreement while the non-human
noun phrase is made an adverbial of some sort, usually a prepositional phrase:

(38) Muvhimi akatsakatika pamwe chete nembwa yake. (The hunter
disappeared together with his dog.)

(39) Ndakáona mukómaná achingínésána nemómbe dzáké. (I saw a boy
having trouble with his cattle.)

It is noteworthy nevertheless that when two or more noun phrases are
conjoined the concord which they control together is usually either that of [gender
2] or [gender 8], the former with human noun phrases and the latter with non-
human noun phrases.

6. The feature [± locative]

6.1. There are certain verbs in Shona which require the presence of a locative
noun phrase as an indirect object. To this end, consider the following sets of
sentences:

(40) a. Tinóisa shuka mubótá. (We put sugar into porridge.)
    b. Tinóisa mubótá shuka. (We put into porridge sugar.)
    c. Tinóisa bótá shuka. (lit., we put porridge sugar = we put into
        porridge sugar.)

(41) a. Simbi ákapá bhóra kuná Kudá. (Simbi passed on the ball to
    Kuda.)
    b. Simbi ákapá kuná Kudá bhóra. (Simbi passed on to Kuda the
        ball.)
    c. Simbi ákapá Kudá bhóra. (lit., Simbi passed on Kuda the ball =
        Simbi passed on to Kuda the ball.)

(42) a. Ndakwéreta mari' kushámwarí yángu. (I borrowed some money
    from my friend.)
    b. Ndakwéreta kushámwarí yángu mari. (I borrowed from my
        friend some money.)
    c. Ndakwéreta shámwarí yángu mari. (lit., I borrowed my friend
        some money = I borrowed from my friend some money.)
The meanings of the sentences in each set are the same. The parts printed in bold type are locatives. In the ‘a’ sentences the locatives occur in a position after the direct object, but in the ‘b’ sentences these same locatives are placed immediately before the direct object. Although the ‘b’ sentences are not altogether rejected as ungrammatical, nevertheless they have a jarring effect. In other words, they are lower than ‘a’ sentences on the acceptability scale. On the other hand, if the locative noun phrases in the ‘b’ sentences have their locative features removed, these sentences become quite acceptable, as in ‘c’. I shall refer to the transformation which has moved the locatives in the ‘b’ sentences as the Indirect Object Movement rule. The point being made here is that this rule is usually accompanied by the deletion of the locative feature. Notice also that in, for instance, (40) a, if the locative feature is deleted without moving the indirect object, the resulting string is an unacceptable sentence in the writer’s dialect:

(43) *Tinóisa shuka bótá. (We put sugar porridge.)

This seems to suggest that the locative/non-locative feature is syntactically significant. In (41) a and (42) a if the locative feature is shed, the strings which result are, however, not totally unacceptable, but are lower on the acceptability scale.

6.2. In Shona there is a class of verbs which requires locatives as direct objects. In the examples which follow the locatives are set in bold type. If the locative feature is reduced, the strings become ill-formed, as indicated by the ‘b’ sentences:

(44) a. Mhungú yápinda muguru. (The black mamba slipped into a hole in the ground.)
   b. *Mhungú yápinda guru.

(45) a. Vaná vánoenda kumushá mangwána. (The children will go home tomorrow.)
   b. *Vaná vánoenda mushá mangwána.

(46) a. Tinosvika pachikomo icho zvíva richinyúrá. (We shall arrive at that hill at sunset.)
   b. *Tinosvika chikomo icho zvíva richinyúrá.

(47) a. Vanhu vésé vakanzí váuyé kúmusangano. (All the people were told to come to the meeting.)
   b. *Vanhu vésé vakanzí váuyé musangano.

As has been pointed out already above, this class of verbs requires as direct objective a locative noun phrase. If the locative complement is left out in (44) the result is the ungrammatical sentence in (48):

(48) *Mhungú yápinda. (*The black mamba entered.)

7 It is assumed in this article, but not proved because it is not crucial to the discussion in hand, that in the underlying structure the direct object comes before the indirect object.
This shows that the verb -pinda must be followed by a complement. Notice that sentences (45)-(46) would be grammatical even if the locative complement is left out. This is illustrated in (49)-(51):

(49) Vaná vánoenda mangwána. (The children will go tomorrow.)
(50) Tinósvika zúvá richínyárá. (We shall arrive at sunset.)
(51) Vanhu vésé vákanzi váuyé. (All the people were told to come.)

This is so because verbs like -enda, -svika and -uyá also belong to another subclass of verbs which permit the optional deletion of the object.

Note that noun phrases which function as adverbials of place will also be specified for the feature [locative].

The locative feature which is spelt out as ku, i.e. [gender 17], appears to be redundant with some locative nouns like kumhiri (on the bank of a river), kuzasi (down below), kushure (behind), kumberí (in front), and place-names, which are on the whole not named after people, e.g. kuDombóshava, kuHaráre, kuMázowe. These locatives can also occur simply as mhiri, zasi, shure, mberí, Dombóshava, Haráre and Mazówe, respectively. Places which take their names from people have in place of ku the possessive kwa, which is not deletable, e.g. kwáMréwa, kwáMióko, kwáMatámbo. It is interesting to note that some place-names which were originally named after some people have through the passage of time changed the kwa to ku, e.g. kuHaráre, kuSínoía.⁸ One name which is still in the process of undergoing that change is Mukaró (a place in Gutu District). The concord used in all these cases is that of [gender 17], e.g.:

(52) kumberí uko cf. mberí uko (in front there)
  kuzasi kwáZambei cf. zasi kwáZambei (the lower reaches of the Zambei)
  kushure kwédu kúri kúnya cf. shure kwédu kúri kúnya (behind us it is raining)
  kuSínoía ndíko kuné guva rábabá cf. Sínoía ndíko kuné guva rábabá (father's grave is at Sínoia)

This optional deletion of the locative feature does not happen in the case of the other two locative features, namely, pa and mu.

7. The feature [± abstract]

Non-count nouns may be subdivided into two groups on the basis of their use with some prefixes in secondary function. The relevant secondary prefixes here are zvi- of [gender 8] and tu- of [gender 13]. The prefix zvi- here has the meaning

⁸ Haráre was named, according to one version, after a man who lived on Salisbury Kopje. It is said that he kept a fire burning on all nights at his village, and so people nicknamed him Haarare (he does not sleep), which was later corrupted to Haráre.

The town of Sínoía got its name from Chief Chinoi, who used to live there a long time ago.
‘despised, contemptible’, while *tu*— means ‘a little amount, not much’. The first group comprises those non-count nouns which can be used with either zvi- or *tu*—:

(53) munyū (3) (salt)  
   zvimunyū tumunyū  
   dovī (5) (groundnut butter)  
   zvidovī tudovī  
   maburo (6) (boiled mixture of malt and water)  
   zvimaburo tumaburo  
   shuka (9) (sugar)  
   zvishuka tushuka  
   rupīza (11) (relish made from ground, roasted cow-peas)  
   zvirupīza turupīza  
   *upfu (14) (mealie meal)  
   zvิupfu tuupfu

The nouns in the second group do not allow these two prefixes generally:

(54) rudō (11) (love)  
   *zvirudō *tirudō  
   ngonono (10) (snoring)  
   *zvingonono *tungonono  
   tsviyo (10) (epilepsy)  
   *zvitsviyo *tutsviyo  
   mabayo (6) (pain in side)  
   *zvimabayo *tumabayo  
   nzara (9) (hunger)  
   *zvinzara *tunzara  
   havi (9) (craving)  
   *zvihavi *tuhavi  
   *hanganwa (10) (forgetfulness)  
   *zvihanganwa *tuhanganwa

It is observed that the nouns in the latter group are all abstract in nature, while those in the former group are non-abstract. They are concrete nouns. To this extent it would appear that the abstract/non-abstract feature is significant in Shona. However, the latter group is not very tight. While, for instance, nouns like *hópe (10) (sleep)* and *háshá (10) (anger)* are abstract in nature, they nevertheless can occur with the prefix *tu* in secondary association, as in *tu*hópe (12) (little sleep) and *tu*háshá (12) (little anger), but these nouns cannot occur with the prefix zvi—:

*zvi*hópe, *zvi*háshá.

Notice also that there are some nouns which, though incorporeal in nature, are nevertheless count nouns syntactically, e.g.:

(55) pfungwá imwé cheté (9) (one idea)  
   pfungwá mbiri (10) (two ideas)  
   mweyá mumwé cheté (3) (one soul)  
   mweyá mítatu (4) (three souls)  
   nguvá imwé cheté (9) (one time)  
   nguvá zhinji (10) (many times)

Such is the nature of the language.

8. The feature [± time]

It would appear that the head nouns of noun phrases which function as adverbials of
time should be considered to have as one of their cluster of features the feature [time].

That time adverbials as a grammatical category in Shona are noun phrases is shown immediately below. First, the head noun can be qualified in the usual way, e.g.:

\[(56)\] mangwánani āno (6) (this morning)
\[nhási āno (1a) (lit., today this = today)\]

Secondly, they can control concordial agreement in clauses and sentences:

\[(57)\] goré rakápera (5) (lit., the year which ended = last year)
\[manherú aākaúya (6) (the night on which he came)\]

When an adverbial of time in a sentence is questioned the interrogative formative used is rínhí (when). The choice of rínhí rather than any other interrogative formative is determined by whether or not the NP being questioned has the feature [time]. In the examples which follow, the time adverbials have been set in bold type:

\[(58)\] a. Vanhu vānoenda kumusangano mangwána. (People go to the meeting tomorrow.)
   b. Vanhu vānoenda kumusangano rínhí? (lit., people will go to the meeting when = When will people go to the meeting?)

\[(59)\] a. Tinóvhara chikóro muná Zvítā. (We close school in December.)
   b. Tinóvhara chikóro rínhí? (When do we close school?)

\[(60)\] a. Tsítsí ákábérekwa goré rakápera. (Tsitsi was born last year.)
   b. Tsítsí ákábérekwa rínhí? (When was Titsi born?)

When referring to a specific time within the day or the month or the year, rínhí may be replaced by ngúvai (at what time):

\[(61)\] a. Ucháenda kudhoróbha nhási masikáti. (You will go to town today in the afternoon.)
   b. Ucháenda kudhoróbha nhási ngúvai? (You will go to town today at what time?)
   c. *Ucháenda kudhoróbha nhási rínhí?

\[(62)\] a. Chitíma chinosvika manherú. (The train will arrive in the evening.)
   b. Chitíma chinosvika rínhí? (When will the train arrive?)
   c. Chitíma chinosvika ngúvai? (The train will arrive at what time?)

\[(63)\] a. Chítíma chinosvika nhási. (The train will arrive today.)
   b. Chítíma chinosvika rínhí? (When will the train arrive?)
   c. *Chítíma chinosvika ngúvai?
Notice that (63)c by itself would be grammatical, but considered as being related both structurally and semantically to (63) a and (63)b it is ungrammatical.

CONCLUSION

In this study I have tried to show the noun features which are syntactically significant in Shona. These are: gender, common/non-common, count/non-count, human/non-human, locative/non-locative, abstract/non-abstract, and temporal/non-temporal. These features will influence the syntax of sentences in Shona in one way or another. It may be concordial agreement, use with secondary prefixes, or with a certain type of adjective, or the choice of formatives with certain types of sentences. All this information should be accounted for in any grammar of Shona which purports to be descriptively adequate.