Function of the post nominal element ki/k'uŋ in Lakota

Bruce Ingham
bil@soas.ac.uk

1. Introduction

In earlier writings on Lakota and Dakota (Boas & Deloria 1941, Buechel 1939, Riggs 1893) the post nominal element *ki* and its associated forms *kiŋhaŋ, ciŋhaŋ, k'uŋ* and *'uŋ* were usually referred to as a definite article. Rood & Taylor writing in 1976, 1996 have referred to it as one of a group of topic markers, although Simons 1987, writing of the related dialect Dakota and occasionally refering to Lakota, refers to it as 'der definite Artikel', while White Hat (1999), perhaps wisely, does not give it a designation, but translates it as 'the'. Van Valin & Lapolla (1997: 476) refer to it as the 'complementizer and definite article'. The difference in the function of *ki, kiŋhaŋ* or *ciŋhaŋ* on the one hand and *k'uŋ* or *'uŋ* on the other have been investigated in some detail by Rood & Taylor who term them 'hypothetical' and 'real'. However for the moment we may note that *k'uŋ* or *'uŋ* often mark a topic in the past time, whereas *ki* and *kiŋhaŋ* and *ciŋhaŋ* can mark future time. The distinction between the two is not relevant to the present discussion and we can refer to them together for the purpose of this discussion as *ki/k'uŋ*.

The element *ki/k'uŋ* has features which lend it to both the designations topic marker and definite article. In general, in many places where it occurs it can be translated into English as 'the' ie as a definite article. However there are places where it does not and would seem to function like a subordination marker translatable as 'when' or 'that' or as a relative marker 'who' or 'which'. Also in many places where an English definite article would occur, we do not find *ki/k'uŋ* in Lakota, particularly, but not exclusively, where the noun is followed by a postposition.

I have not seen definitions of the topic marker in contrast to the definite article in the literature. Generally the discussion is in terms of the definition of the topic in contrast to the subject. Li & Thompson who were perhaps the earliest writers who tried to isolate the function of topic, give certain features as distinguishing topics and subjects. Of the features given the following are relevant to our discussion (1976:461):

a)   The topic should be definite.
b)   The topic need not have a selectional relation with any verb in a sentence.
c)   The functional role of the topic is constant across sentences; it specifies the domain within which the predication holds.
d)   The verb does not show obligatory agreement with the topic.
e)   The topic takes sentence initial position.

Let us see how these characteristics apply to the Lakota material. In fact what has been referred to as a topic in Lakota does not conform with a) above, since both Rood & Taylor and Simon mention indefinite topics. In Lakota, what has been referred to as a topic has the following characteristics. It represents given information, already known to the hearer. In the simple one clause sentence it will be a nominal element and may be a postpositional phrase, while however in a complex sentence the topic may be a phrase containing a verb (see below 2.5. and 2.6.). The sentence may have more than one topic, as is shown below under 2.3., though I hope to demonstrate that this is is a minority case The comment, on the other hand represents information new to the hearer and may be either verbal or nominal. The normal order of the sentence is topic-comment. However, especially where the comment is verbal, the reverse order is sometimes found (see 2.2. below).

Li & Thompson (1976) make a distinction between 'topic prominent' and 'subject prominent' languages. A topic prominent language is defined as one in which the grammatical role topic-comment plays a major role (op cit.459). Simon does not regard Dakota as a topic prominent language:

"Nun ist aber das Dakota keine topic-prominente Sprache in Sinne des Chinesischen; der begriff des Subjekts hat eine, wenn auch im Verhaltnis zu den indoeuropaischen Sprachen eingeschrankte, Relevanz."

Nevertheless he does (op cit 149-51) analyze some sentences in terms of topic-comment structure.

2. Relevant structures in Lakota

Both Rood & Taylor and Simon (149-151) include in sentences which they analyze as topic-comment structures both definite and indefinite structures ie with or without the *ki/k'uŋ* marker. Their main reason for analyzing these as topics and not subjects would seem to be that they do not exclusively encode as subjects of the main verb, which the traditionally defined subject would do. However, if we restrict the definition of topic to definite items ie those showing *ki/k'uŋ* and also those where the head is a proper name, this will fit more with Li & Thompson's definition, which specifies definiteness, and thereby give the structure more clarity.

As regards the position of other elements of the sentence, generally in Lakota the verb is final and is preceded by its arguments. Sentences are usually joined to each other by connecting particles or conjunctions. The most common of these are *na* 'and', *yunk'an* 'then' and *hec'el* 'thus, so'. The topic will often come next either preceded or followed by time or place adverbials then by other noun phrases or a second topic as in the following:

1.   Hetaŋhaŋ   <u>wanagi ki</u>   t'ateyaŋpa iyec'el   aŋpetu c'aŋ   omanipi
that from   <u>spirit **the**</u>   wind like   day when   walk-they
'from that time the spirits moved like the wind every day' BO 10

In the following the topic and their translational equivalent in the gloss are underlined and the topic marker, translated as 'the', is in bold. These are grouped under the following headings: 1. topic first, 2. topic second, 3. sentences with two or more topic sentences, 4. postpositional phrase topics, 5. verb headed topics, 6. verb headed postpositional phrase topics[0].

2.1. Topic first

2.   <u>wic'asa   wap'iya ki</u>   owe   nuŋpa-pi
<u>man   cure **the**</u>   kind   two-they
'medicine men are of two kinds' BO 11

3.   <u>Miwak'aŋ Yuhala</u>   nignaye lo
<u>sword have</u>   you-deceive
'Sword Owner has deceived you' BO 1

---

[0] The majority of the examples in this paper are taken from texts compiled on topics of Lakota culture. These include the Bushotter papers, compiled by the Lakota scholar George Bushotter in the late 19th century (BO), Deloria (1932) (Del) and Buechel (1978) (BT), also two unpublished tape recordings, Stolzman (STO) and Frank Fools Crow (FFC). Also included are some examples from Buechel (1924) (BH).

---

4   tuŋwel   <u>aŋpetu wi ki</u>   ok'ise   waniŋl   aye
sometimes   <u>sun **the.**</u>   half   not there   become
'sometimes the sun becomes half invisible' BO 23

5.   <u>suŋkak'aŋ ki</u>   akiŋkicat'uŋpi
<u>horse **the**</u>   saddle-they
'they saddled the horses' BO 11

In the above examples *wic'asa wap'iya* 'medicine man', *Miwak'aŋ Yuhala* 'Sword Owner', *aŋpetu wi* 'sun' and *suŋkak'aŋ* 'horse' are the topic. All of these take *ki/k'uŋ*, except *Miwak'aŋ Yuhala*, being a proper name, which does not. Proper names, whether personal or place names do not usually take the *ki/k'uŋ*, but can stand in the position of topics. Names of tribal units or nations can however show them as in examples 1., 3., 4. and 5. below. Note also that the topic does not have to be the verb actor, but may as in 5. be the patient.

2.2. Topic second

In written texts the topic generally precedes the comment, while in spoken texts, where the text is less prepared, the alternative order can occur with more frequency. However, even in written texts, the less frequent comment-topic arrangement is seen such as the following:

6.   lila   woc'aŋte sica   ak'ip'api   <u>t'aoyate ki</u>
much sadness   suffer-they   <u>his people **the**</u>
'his people suffered much sadness' BT 368

Here the topic *t'aoyate ki* follows the comment.

2.3. Sentences with two or more topics

A sentence may also have two topics marked with *ki* as in:

7.   waŋna   <u>wic'ahcala ki le</u>   isnala <u>wic'ot'i ki</u> lt'ehanyaŋ t'i
now   <u>old man **the** this</u>   alone <u>village **the** far from</u> live
'now this old man lived far from the village'. BO 10

Here both *wic'ahcala* 'old man' and *wic'ot'i* 'village' show *ki*. The latter is also an example of a postpositional phrase topic (see 2.4. below). Often however, even where there is more than one noun in a sentence, which is definite in a semantic sense, only one is marked as the topic as shown below under 2.7.

2.4. Postpositional phrase topic

A postpositional phrase can be marked as topic and may come initially in the sentence as in:

8.   <u>le paha ki</u>   ak'otaŋhan   lila   pte   otapi
<u>this hill **the**</u>   beyond   much buffalo   many-they
'beyond this hill there are many buffalo' BT 192

9.   <u>waepazo   ki uŋ</u>   epazo sni;   <u>nap'ahuŋka   ki he uŋ</u>
<u>index finger   **the** by</u>   show Neg   <u>thumb   **the** that by</u>
ec'uŋpi
do-they
'they do not point at it with the index finger; they do it with the thumb' BT 167

10. wana ihinhaŋna **ki** el   oyas'iŋ   iglakapi
    now   next morning **the** in all   move camp-they
    'now on the next morning everyone moved camp' BO 10

However postpositional phrases in the rest of the sentence do not normally show *ki/k'uŋ* as with *pte iyayuh* 'following the buffalo', *c'uwi mahel* 'in the body' and *ite opta* 'across the face' below:

11. mit'aoyate **ki**   nahaŋhci waziyata pte iyayuh   uŋpi
    my-people **the**   still northward   buffalo following be-they
    'my people are still in the north following the buffalo.' BT 356

12. pte **ki** huŋh   c'uwi mahel   wamniyomni uŋ šk'e
    buffalo **the** some body in   whirlwind is Rep
    'it is said that some buffaloes had a whirlwind in their bodies.' BO 10

13. uŋjiŋtka-hu **ki**   hec'a waŋ uŋ   ite opta   iyuh'eyaya
    thorn-branch **the** be thus one by face across scratch
    'with a sort of thorn branch he scratched her across the face.' BO 1

2.5. Verb headed topics

A phrase containing a verbal form with a known subject can be embedded in a higher sentence as a noun phrase. In these cases *ki/k'uŋ* may occur just as though it was a noun phrase with a noun as head as in:

14. wawahteuŋlapi šni **ki** le   uŋgluskapi kta   iyec'eca
    like-we Neg   **the** this cleanse-we Fut   must
    'we must cleanse this dislike which we have.' STO

15. aŋpetu waŋ el   wop'ila   luha **ki** le   wašte ye lo
    day one in   thanks   you-have **the** this be good
    'it is good for you to have gratitude one day.' FFC

16. taku otuyac'iŋ   ep'iŋ kte **ki**   t'ehike
    thing in vain   I-say Fut **the**   be-difficult
    'it is difficult for me to say something in vain.' FFC

Here *wawahteuŋlapišni* is the verbal form 'we dislike each other', *luha* is the verbal form 'you have' and *ep'iŋ kte* means 'I will say'. All of these are followed by the topic marker *ki* to make them embedded sentences in the position of nominal phrases. Where no particular subject is involved in the verb, the animate plural suffix *-pi* can be used as an impersonal subject marker which then means 'people do' or 'they do' as in:

17. wetu   wahehaŋl   k'okic'ip'api. **k'uŋ** he   okablaya hiyu
    be spring   when   fear Recip-they... **the** that clearly come
    'in the spring that mutual fear cleared up' STO

18. ec'el wana   wokinipi **ki**   hec'etu welo
    accordingly now shoot to life-they **the** be-real
    'accordingly the shooting back to life (of the sun) was realized' BO 23

19. tok'el kic'izapi **ki** hena   taŋyan iyec'iŋka   uŋspepi
    how fight-they **the** these   well   at will   know-they
    'these ways of fighting they learnt themselves automatically' BO 110

In the above words *k'okic'ip'api, wokinipi* and *kic'izapi* here equivalents of 'mutual fear', 'shooting back to life' and 'fighting' could in other sentences mean 'they fear each other', 'they shoot back to life' and 'they fight'.
    Two other important uses of *ki/k'uŋ* with verb headed topics are in relative clauses and time and condition clauses. Relative clauses with a definite antecedent are marked by *ki/k'uŋ* at the end of the clause, while the antecedent is marked as indefinite. In certain time/condition clauses also the marker *ki/k'uŋ* occurs at the end of the clause as an indicator of that function. See the following examples:

relative clause

20. c'a waŋcak   wic'ahcala waŋ   eyapaha   yuhapi **ki** he
    so at once   old man one   announcer   have-they **the** that
    iyayiŋ
    went out
    'so at once the old man whom they had as an announcer went forth' BO 10

time/condition clause

21. t'okata   T̯uŋkasila ekta   wai **ki**   iyanislatiŋ kte
    later   Grandfather to   I-go **the**   you-be found out-Fut
    'later when I go to the President (lit 'Grandfather') you will be found out' BO 356

22. taku tok'a   kiŋhan   amakitaŋ yo
    something be wrong **the**   me-run Imp
    'if something is wrong, run to me' Del 82

2.6. Verb headed postpositional phrase topics

These verb headed phrases may also be followed by a postposition in which case, as with the purely noun headed type they may show *ki/k'uŋ*.

23. upi **k'uŋ** ogna   ak'e glapi kta   t'awac'iŋpi
    come-they **the** by again go-they Fut intend-they
    'they intended to go home again by the way which they had come' BH 180

24. na tuktel   lehaŋyak   iyuŋke **c'uŋ** [1]hel   hehaŋl
    and where   far away   lie **the** that-in   then
    ohiŋni   mni   u
    always   water come
    'at that place far away where it lies, then always water comes out' BO 28

25. tuktektel   wic'aopi **ki** el   c'uwignaka   akataŋhaŋ
    where   them-wound-they **the** in dress   upon
    we ahahaya   kic'agapi
    blood flowing make for-they
    'where they (the men) had been wounded...on their dresses they (the women) painted blood flowing' BO 110

---

[1]Referring to the Water Spirit. Such a being might shift his position under the earth and if he did that, water would no longer come up from where he was before, but wherever he moved to water would come again.

These postpositional phrases can also occur without *kɪ/k'uŋ* as in the following where the postpositional phrase is underlined:

26. unt'ipi el   hipi
     <u>we-live in</u>   come-they
     'they came to where we lived'

27. c'aŋke he   wic'asa kɪ   <u>k'utepɪ uŋ</u>   woɪlepi
     so that   man Top   shoot-they by   shoot flame-they
     keyapɪ
     say-they
     'so they said that they had shot it (the sun) into life by these men shooting at it'
     BO 23

2.7. Notionally definite noun phrases not showing kɪ/k'uŋ

One important factor in not regarding *kɪ/k'uŋ* as essentially a definiteness marker is the fact that, in many cases, items which are notionally definite are not marked by *kɪ/k'uŋ*. Very often a sentence with a number of definite items does not select all of these to be marked with *kɪ/k'uŋ*. It may select only one which is usually the first in the sentence or may select more than one as in 29. Consider the following:

28. le Lak'ota kɪ   ehaŋni   Sahɪyela   iwakte agli
     <u>this Lakota the</u>   long ago   Cheyenne   in triumph they-come
     'the Lakota long ago triumphed over the Cheyenne' BO 103

29. Lak'ota kɪ tohuŋwel   K'ulwic'asa   <u>t'ipi kɪ el</u>   Omaha
     <u>Lakota the</u> once   Low Man   live-they the in   Omaha
     wahowɪc'ayapɪ
     them-summon-they
     'once the Lakota sent word to the Omaha in the land of the Lower Brule' BO 103

30. Lak'ota kɪ   ehaŋni   Sahɪyela na   Sapa Wic'asa
     <u>Lakota the</u>   long ago   Cheyenne and   Black Man
     ob kic'izapi
     with fight-they
     'long ago the Lakota fought with the Cheyenne and the Utes' BO 103

In the above, of the nation names, only *Lak'ota* is marked as topic. *Sahɪyela* 'Cheyenne', *Omaha* 'Omaha', *K'ul Wic'asa* 'Lower Brule' and *Sapa Wic'asa* 'Ute' are not although they are all equally definite in being names of Indian nations well known to the Lakota. The word *t'ipi* meaning 'home' is in this case marked.

3. Findings

The above brief review and examples show the following. The marker *kɪ/k'uŋ* occurs only with phrases which are notionally definite. It can follow a phrase with a noun or a verb as head. It occurs preferably on the first noun phrase of the sentence. It occurs less frequently when a postposition follows the noun headed phrase or a conjunction in the case of a verb headed phrase. Frequently in a sentence with a number of noun phrases representing different arguments of the verb there is only one which shows *kɪ/k'uŋ*.

The fact that the topic can be a noun or an embedded sentence does indicate that the function of *kɪ/k'uŋ* is wider than that of the definite article in most languages, but one could still claim that it is still essentially a definiteness marker. However two other

factors go towards supporting the idea that definiteness marking is not essentially its function.

ii)   In relative clauses a definite antecedent is not marked within the relative clause by *kɪ/k'uŋ*, but is marked by *waŋ* the indefinite marker, *kɪ/k'uŋ* occurring at the end of the relative clause.

iii) The *kɪ/k'uŋ* can occur as the marker of a time or condition clause in which case it fits very well Li and Thompson's feature d) 'it specifies the domain within which the predication holds". As a time/condition clause marker it specifies a domain for the main clause.

Examples of these two types of clause including those given as 20-22 above are:

relative clause
31. c'a waŋcak   <u>wic'ahcala waŋ</u>   eyapaha   <u>yuhapɪ kɪ he</u>
     so at once   old man one   announcer   have-they the that
     ɪyayɪŋ
     went out
     'so at once the old man whom they had as an announcer went forth' BO 10

time/condition clause
32. t'okata   <u>T'uŋkasila ekta</u>   waɪ kɪ   ɪyanislatɪŋ kte
     later   Grandfather to   I-go the   you-be found out-Fut
     'later when I go to the President (lit 'Grandfather') you will be found out' BT 356

33. <u>taku tok'a   kiŋhaŋ</u>   amakitaŋ yo
     something be wrong the   me-run Imp
     'if something is wrong, run to me' Del 82

34. <u>tohaŋl el   hi kiŋhaŋ</u>   hel k'ul   iyuŋ-si-wic'asi
     when in   come the   that-in down   lie-tell-them-tell
     'when he came to her, they told her to tell him to lie down' BO 115

Importantly also the *kɪ/k'uŋ* phrase is often associated with a pause following it, isolating it from what follows. It seems that it is often used as a hesitation phenomenon allowing the speaker to sort out what he is going to say next. This supports the interpretation of it as a discourse marking element rather than a definiteness marker.

4. Discussion

One difficulty in distinguishing between a topic marker and a definite article is that in many languages items referred to as topics are usually definite. However the criteria for stating that a particular item is a definite article would seem to be less rigorous than that for stating that it is a topic marker ie there are more constraints on topic markers than on definite articles. Therefore, since it should be easier to demonstrate that an item is not a topic marker than that it is not a definite article, let us proceed on the basis that *kɪ/k'uŋ* is a topic marker and review the cases which seem to go against that assignment. This can be done on the basis of the characteristics mentioned above.

In fact the Lakota *kɪ/k'uŋ* clauses conform to all of Li & Thompson's defining characteristics: (a) they are definite, (b) they do not have to have a selectional relation with the verb as some of them are postpositional phrases, (c) they specify the domain within which the predication holds, (d) the verb does not show obligatory agreement with it and (e) it is usually, but not always, takes initial position in the sentence.

5. Conclusion

The general findings are that, in the majority of cases, *ki/k'uŋ* only occurs once in any one clause, whether or not there are other elements in the clause notionally regarded as definite and that it does not usually occur in a postpositional phrase. This points towards the conclusion that Lakota has in addition to other types, a type of sentence which selects one element which is 'given' information and puts it at the beginning of a non-initial sentence in order to link it to what went before. This explanation is helpful in explaining why other notionally 'definite' noun phrases in the sentence and particularly prepositional phrases do not usually show *ki/k'uŋ*.

How do we explain the exceptions to this. It is of course not impossible to have two topics, though in other languages with topics, Arabic for instance, instances of this are infrequent and regarded as marginal and possibly the result of hesitation phenomena[2].

A clue to this arises in the examination of different types of text in Lakota. One text, an oral rehearsed monologue on religion comparing the Lakota religion with Christianity (Solzman) has a high incidence of *ki/k'uŋ*. Whereas the Bushotter texts, from which most of the above examples are taken, show a significantly lower incidence. Can it be that in analytical discourse there is a need to single out more elements as the discussion covers new ground, whereas texts recounting well known events or at least events of a familiar nature do not require this.

As an example of the variable use of *ki/k'uŋ* consider the following exerpt from Stolzman:

> Le p'ejuta wic'aśa na wac'ekiya wic'aśa hektakiya mniciyapi **ki** e. Le ót'okaheya oiyaye **ki** he p'ejuta wic'aśa na wac'ekiye wic'aśa mniciyahaŋpi **ki** le hektakiya waniyetu 1965 hehaŋ t'oka oiyaye. Le Vatican Council **ki** he icinuŋpa mniciye **ki** héhaŋ, taku waŋ yugaŋ égle **ki** he wóc'ekiye ánuŋwaŋb hiyeye **ki** lena iwoglag wic'aśi. Hehaŋ J. B. **ki** le H. R. **ki** hel Lak'ota wouŋspeic'ic'iye **ki** le ec'uŋ.

> "This is (about) the medicine men and (Christian) priests meeting in the past. When it first began, the meeting of the medicine men and priests, it began first in the year 1965. At the time of the second Vatican Council, one thing (matter) which they opened up was that they told them to talk about other religions found here and there. Then J.B. in the H. R. mission made a study of Lakota."

Notice that in the above the item *p'ejuta wic'aśa na wac'ekiya wic'aśa* 'the medicine men and priests', which is the subject of the whole discourse, is not marked by *ki/k'uŋ*, in both occurrences, although it is notionally definite. However the proper names Vatican Council, J. B. and H. R. are marked with *ki/k'uŋ* although this is unnecessary with proper names as pointed out above under 2.1.

I would conclude that the particle *ki/k'uŋ* in Lakota is basically a topic marker specifying the domain within which a predication holds, but partakes also of some of the nature of a definite article.

---

2 see Ingham (1994). ff 35 pp198-9

References

Boas, F. and Deloria E.C. (1941) *Dakota Grammar.* D.G. American Academy of Science.

Buechel, E. (1924) *Bible History in the Language of the Teton Sioux Indians.* Benziger Bros. New York.

Buechel, E. (1939) *A Grammar of Lakota: the Language of the Teton Sioux Indians.* Rosebud Educational Society.

Buechel, E. (1978) *Lakota Tales and Texts.* Red Cloud Indian School, Pine Ridge.

Bushotter Papers *Texts by George Bushotter 1887.* Manuscript 4800 Dorsey Papers: Dakota : Teton (3.1 1.3) ‹103›, Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives.

Deloria, E.C. (1932) *Dakota Texts.* AMS Press New York.

Ingham, B. (1994) *Najdi Arabic: Central Arabian.* John Benjamins. Amsterdam, Philadelphia. LOALL Series.

Li, C.N. [ed] (1976) *Subject and Topic.* New York.

Li, C.N. and Sandra Thompson (1976) 'Subject and Topic; a new typology of language' in Li (1976) pp 459-489.

Riggs, S.R. (1893). *Dakota Grammar, Texts and Ethnography.* Government Printing Press. Washington (AMS Reprint, 1976).

Rood and Taylor. (1976) (ii) *Lakhota Grammar* or *Beginning Lakhota* . University of Colorado, Lakhota language project.

Rood, D. S. and Allan R. Taylor. (1996) 'Sketch of Lakhota' in Ives Goddard [ed] *Languages* pp 440-482, vol xvii of William C. Sturtevant (ed) *Handbook of North American Indians* i-xvii . Smithsonian Institution. Washington.

Simons, B. (1987) *Komplexe Satze im Dakota (Sioux).* Peter Lang. Frankfurt am Main. Bern. New York.

Solzman (undated) a tape of a translation into Lakota of some pages of Stolzman, W.S.J. (1986) *The Pipe and Christ: A Christian-Sioux Dialogue..* Pine Ridge South Dakota. Red Cloud Indian School.

Van Valin Jr., R.D. and Randy J. LaPolla (1997) *Syntax: structure , meaning and function.* Cambridge University Press.

White Hat, A. (1999) *Reading and Writing the Lakota Language: Lakota Iyapi uŋ Wowapi nahaŋ Yawapi.* The University of Utah Press. Salt Lake City.