

Comparative Analysis of Èlòyì and English Verb Phrase

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Abstract: This research studied Èlòyì and English Verb Phrases (VPs) using a comparative syntactic analysis. Èlòyì is an under-documented Benue-Congo language of Nigeria. Grounded in the framework of Contrastive Analysis, the research examined the structural configurations and distributional patterns of verb phrases in both languages with a view to identifying points of universalities and uniqueness. Data for the study were obtained through a combination of primary sources, including native speaker intuitions and interviews with language informants in Keffi Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, and secondary sources from existing literature. The analyses reveal that both Èlòyì and English share the basic VP structure in which a verb functions independently as a complete phrase (VP = V). However, significant structural differences are observed. While English allows both direct and indirect object, Èlòyì strictly adheres to direct object. The findings contribute to the descriptive documentation of Èlòyì and underscore the relevance of contrastive syntactic analysis in understanding cross-linguistic variation. The study also has implications for second language learning and teaching, particularly for Èlòyì speakers acquiring English, as structural differences in verb phrase formation may present areas of difficulty. Overall, the research enriches the body of knowledge in comparative linguistics and supports ongoing efforts to document and analyze indigenous Nigerian languages.

Keywords: Èlòyì and English Verb Phrase.

List of Abbreviations: V (Verb), VP (Verb Phrase), RP. (Resumptive Pronoun), Adv. (Adverb) PP (Prepositional Phrase), Adj. (Adjunct) NP (Noun Phrase) CAT (Comparative Analysis Theory), CA(Contrastive Analysis), CAH (Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis), TL (Target Language) PST (Past), PROG.(Progressive), FUT (Future).

INTRODUCTION

Language is a major cultural phenomenon in human society and therefore an important regulator of individual consciousness and social interaction. Language is so vital in human existence that there is hardly any situation or human function where language is not required. Language as a means of communication is essential in all speech communities. There is power in language (speech). It was in recognition of this that a philosopher, Daniel Webster once remarked thus: If all my talents and powers were to be taken away from me by some inscrutable providence, and I had my choice of keeping but one, I would unhesitatingly ask to be allowed to keep the power of speaking; for through it, I will quickly recover all the rest.

The efficacy and indispensability of language is philosophically summed up in the above excerpt. Language is the facilitator of human essence. All inventions and achievements ever recorded in human existence have their roots in language as a veritable instrument of thought and an indispensable channel/tool of communication.

Language is a means with which humans and animals use to communicate ideas, feelings, emotions, and desires through arbitrary written symbols or signs. Nevertheless, language is central to human lives and is arguably the cultural tool that makes humans

different from any other species. Language is the symbolic behavior that allows human activities to occur. It helps humans to communicate with one another. The importance of language to human beings cannot be overemphasized because it is the means for the transmission of meaningful information, and the meaning derived from such information at some levels is partly realized in syntax which according to Yusuf (2007) is the level of linguistics which is concerned with how morphemes and words combine to form larger grammatical units. Ndimele (2008) remarks that knowing the grammar of one's language involves several knowledge which entails knowledge about pronunciation, word formation, sentence formation, individual meanings of words and longer expressions, and about the appropriate context in which to use the word(s) in a particular utterance. Thus, in our everyday life, we produce and comprehend language with such apparent ease that we take it for granted. The study of language grammar particularly syntax, reveals how languages organize meaning through words' arrangement and grammatical rules. The most important element in every construction and the nucleus of all groups of words is the verb (verb phrase). To consider any group of words in a sentence, the main determinant is the presence of verb (main) in it. It is especially significant because it expresses the action(s) being carried out in such a structure(s) in a given clause/sentence. The focus of this study is on the acceptable sentence patterning with regards to the phrasal structure – VP of the languages under study. Sentence in any language is made up of string of words called phrases and clauses.

Verb phrase is the most important syntactic category attested in all natural languages of the world (Universal Grammar). It is therefore the basic structure in a sentence, which forms the largest projection of the verbs. The verb phrase is a universal part of speech (Chomsky, 1965).

The verb phrase can be a word or a group of words that function as verb. Therefore, this research attempts to study the grammar of Èlòyì and English verb phrases. This is motivated by the need to identify the configuration of the verb phrases in the languages.

Brief Historical Backgrounds of Èlòyì and English

Èlòyì (also known as Afo, Afu, or Ejiri) is an indigenous Nigerian language spoken primarily in Nasarawa State, with smaller populations in Benue State. It is classified as a Benue-Congo sub-group of Niger-Congo language family. Armstrong as cited in Abubakar (2021) classifies Èlòyì language as Idomoid which was based on a single wordlist and he later expressed doubts. The language has two dialects thus: Èlòyì Mb'eki, and Èlòyì Mb'ambu. Traditionally, most of the Èlòyì lived in a 15 miles (24 km) range of rocky hills in what today is Nasarawa State. Despite its sociocultural and linguistic importance, Èlòyì remains under-described in linguistic scholarship.

Philip (2010) asserts that English is a West Germanic language that originated from the dialects brought to Britain in the 5th century by Germanic tribes such as the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes. Over time, it evolved through several historical stages - Old English (450 - 1100), Middle English (1100 - 1500), and Modern English (from 1500 to present). Old English was heavily inflected and syntactically flexible, but the Norman Conquest of 1066 significantly influenced its development, introducing a large number of Norman French and Latin loanwords into the lexicon. During the Middle English period, the language underwent substantial simplification in its inflectional system, leading to a more fixed word order. The Early Modern English period witnessed further standardization, aided by the introduction of the printing press in the late 15th century, as well as the works of influential writers such as William Shakespeare. Contemporary English, often referred to as Present-Day English, has become a global lingua franca due to historical factors such as British colonial expansion and the subsequent economic and cultural influence of the United States. Structurally, English is characterized by relatively fixed word order, limited inflection, and a rich system of verb phrase modification, making it a useful point of comparison in cross-linguistic studies such as the analysis of verb phrase constructions in Èlòyì.

Syntax: A Conceptual Review

Syntax is the study of the interrelationships between elements (words) of sentence structure, and of the rules governing the arrangement of the sentences in sequence. In the opinion of Finegan (2004), syntax is a part of grammar that governs the form of 'strings' (words or structures) by which language users make statements, ask questions, give directives, and so on. The study of syntax addresses the structural and functional relationships within a sentence. The syntactic component of language is both creative and syntactic. Speakers of a language are able to combine words in novel ways forming sentences they have never heard before. However, not just any combination of words will give a grammatical structure.

Syntax refers to "the whole system and structure of a language or of languages in general, usually taken as consisting of syntax and morphology (including inflection) and sometimes also phonology and semantics." Grammar has two overlapping meanings: 1. everything about how a language works, including syntax as a subset. 2. How words are inflected, conjugated and so on.

Syntax is the arrangement of words in sentences, clauses and phrases, and the study of the formation of sentences and the relationship of their component parts. In a language such as English, the main device for showing the relationship among words is word order; e.g., in "The girl loves the boy," the subject is in initial position, and the object follows the verb. Transposing them changes the meaning. In many other languages, case markers indicate the grammatical relationships. In Latin, for example, "The girl loves the boy" may be "puellapuerumamat" with "the girl" in initial position, or 'amatpuellapuerum, amatpuerumpuella, orpuellaamatpuerum' (Nordquist 2020). The meaning remains constant because the -um ending on the form for "boy" indicates the object of the verb, regardless of its position in the sentence. Sentences are constructed from phrases or groups of words that have a closer relationship to each other than to the words outside the phrase. In the sentence "My dog is playing in the yard" there is a closer relationship between the words "is and playing," which together form the verb structure, than between the words "playing in the," which form only part of the verb and part of the phrase indicating the location of the playing. The study of syntax also includes the investigation of the relations among sentences that are similar, such as "John saw Mary" and "Mary was seen by John." Syntax received much attention after 1957, when the American linguist Noam Chomsky proposed a radically new theory of language, 'transformational grammar', (Britannica.com/topic/syntax).

According to Nordquist (2020), in linguistics, "syntax" refers to the rules that govern the ways in which words combine to form phrases, clauses, and sentences. The term "syntax" comes from the Greek, meaning "arrange together." The term is also used to mean the study of the syntactic properties of a language. In computer contexts, the term refers to the proper ordering of symbols and codes so that the computer can understand what instructions are telling it to do, (thoughtco.com/syntax-grammar).

Syntax is a branch of linguistics that seeks to understand how languages' grammar is generated and how sentences are formed. For native speakers of a language, syntax will often feel intuitive, but it can be hard to describe in words. Languages all have highly complex syntax, meaning that linguists need to study speech carefully to get a sense of the rules that govern speech. Syntax in linguistics is usually described using branching tree-like diagrams that show the relationships between different words in a sentence. But what does syntax mean for teachers and students? Understanding how to form grammatically correct sentences in English and other languages is essential for students who are working on improving their literacy and writing skills as it can allow them to write with greater confidence and accuracy, (study.com/academy/lesson).

According to Burgess (1968), "it is syntax that gives the words the power to relate to each other in a sequence...to carry meaning – of whatever kind – as well as glow individually in just the right place."

Phrase: A Review

A phrase may consist of a group of words, normally with a head word, which are joined together in accordance with the rules of the grammar of the language. According to Carnie (2007), a phrase cannot in itself constitute a complete sentence even though a measure of meaning emanates from it. For instance: The farmer, the pretty lady, went to market and so on, are examples noun, adjectival and verb phrases respectively.

Phrases in language have syntactic functions which are determined by the ways they are used in a given sentence. Anyanwu (2007) asserts that the notion of 'head' is very crucial in the discussion of the phrase being it the nucleus of any phrase. Amfani (2007) points that every word category can project maximally to a phrasal category. Thus, a noun project maximally to a noun phrase, verb to a verb phrase, adjective to an adjectival phrase, adverb to an adverbial phrase, preposition to a prepositional phrase and so on.

A phrase is the resultant construction from the combination or addition of other words to expand a major level category (Ndimele 2008). It is a single element of structure typically containing more than one word, and lacking, in most cases, the subject-predicate structure. Traditionally, it is seen as a part of the structural hierarchy, falling between clause and word (Crystal 2008). Sentences are not only built "out of words belonging to different parts of speech, but also out of phrases belonging to the corresponding set of phrasal categories" (Radford 1988).

Opega (2005) defines a phrase as "a group of words that lacks a finite or main verb, and which does not make a complete sense or meaning." This implies that phrases do not have subjects and are incapable of standing on their own. They are found within the structure of a sentence. Examples include: in the garden, looking through the window, down the road, across the river, at the roundabout, from Nasarawa State.

In English grammar, a phrase can be a word or a group of two or more words functioning as a meaningful unit within a sentence or clause. A phrase is commonly characterized as a grammatical unit at a level between a word and a clause.

Verb Phrase

A verb phrase (hereafter VP) is a part of a sentence that contains both a verb and a direct or indirect object that acts as a dependent of the verb. In general, a VP is a syntactic unit or structure consisting of predicative elements of a sentence that provides information about the subject of the sentence. In other words, a VP is a syntactic unit that corresponds to the predicative structure of a sentence. Stockwell (1973) defines a verb phrase as a group of words in surface strings whose cores are verbs. The VP has an obligatory verb, which is the head of the verb phrase, and VPs are named as a result of which the action of the main verb changes from the subject (agent) to the object (patient).

A verb phrase is innately defined as an independent group of words consisting of a verb stem and some of its dependencies, such as arguments, complements or modifiers. It is a complete sentence with the syntactic role of a simple lexical verb, consisting of a verb (main verb) and other verbal particles. A complete verb phrase according to Noel (1986) contains a lexical main verb and may also contain auxiliary verbs. In fact, VPs focus on verbs.

In terms of structure, the verb phrase is the largest extension of the maximum projection of the verb (cf. Ndimele, 1999). In other words, a verb phrase is a grammatical or syntactic unit in which a verb acts as a head. The head of the verb phrase, which is the verb, is the element on which the sentence focuses, and everything depends on it. In the light of the above, Lamidi (2008) points out that the structure of the verb phrase is determined by the types of verbs present in the component. Since the head of a verb phrase is a verb, the type of verb is determined by the characteristics of the subcategories of the verb stem or head. For example, transitive verbs, intransitive verbs, ditransitive verbs, etc. According to Yusuf (1997), a verb phrase is traditionally called a predicate. Armstrong (2005) avers that the verb that is the head of the VP contains the predicate part of the sentences. The verb must occur with or without complements.

Thus, the structure of the verb phrase according to him is made up of the verb and its particles:

VP → V XP
 VP → V NP
 VP → V NP NP
 VP → V NP PP
 VP → V AP
 VP → V Adv. P
 VP → V IP

As obtained in many languages, a verb phrase consists of a single verb and one or more auxiliaries, complements, objects, or other modifiers that function specifically as verbs.

Tallerman (2005) opines that VPs contain lexical core verbs marked in present and past tense. He also argues that verbs have a grammatical property of finiteness, which according to Yadugiri (2006) is a grammatical property of all VPs, because VPs are marked as finite either by the first auxiliary verb if an auxiliary verb is present or by a lexical verb if there are no auxiliaries.

As earlier mentioned, every group of words called a phrase is headed by an element to which the function(s) it performs. That is, noun phrase has noun as the headword, verb phrase headed by a verb, adjectival phrase by an adjective and so on. Therefore, verb phrase is a word or group of words headed by a verb in a structure.

Opega (2005) posits that the verb phrase is a group of verbs. It is so called because it is more than a one-word verb. It consists of one or more auxiliary verbs with the finite or the main verb all of which function as a single verb: will come, had danced, has been singing, was running, is cooking, would have been done, should have been doing, will be traveling and so on. This is illustrated thus:

The members of the choir have been singing.
 Ubaidallah will come.
 The spouse had danced.
 A camel was running.
 Chef John is cooking.
 By this time tomorrow, I would have been done with the work.
 They should have been doing their assignments.
 I will be traveling.

In the above, the italicized parts of the sentences are examples of verb phrases in English language.

The verbs phrases are universal grammar because they are very common in all languages. They frequently occur in all languages. They are also known as nucleus phrases and are often abbreviated as VP.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Comparative linguistic enquiry came as an approach to language study in 1930 when writers became concerned of other languages (Olufunke, 2008). Comparative linguistic analysis, especially in the area of syntax, takes two different languages and examines their similarities and differences (Wallwork, 1985). Similarly, Yusuf (2007) observes that comparative analysis involves a comparison of words to ascertain whether the words compared are related. In his view, comparative analysis was introduced by Joseph Greenberg as “mass comparison” to signify taking a large number of languages to find out whether they are related.

Relative to language teaching, Lado (1957) has the overall objective of aiding language teaching. Lado’s system of comparative analysis is based on vigorous step by step comparison of the first and second language. This comparison may cover any aspect of the language. Individuals tend to transfer the forms and meaning of their native language and culture into the target language. Lado’s theory is also a model for language learning, often referred to as Contrastive Analysis (CA), a foundation he laid down in his hypothesis (CAH). He sees speech as a system of habits. He maintains that these habits are based on

the grammar of the language. Lado makes it obvious that most difficulties in L2 are due to the differences between L1 and the Target Language (TL). He rightly puts it that those areas that are similar to the native language are the easiest to learn. Therefore, learners should concentrate on the points of differences and not similarities between the two languages. Lado's descriptive framework is based on the fact that patterns responsible for the difficulty in the learning can be predicted and described by making a systematic comparison of two languages. The basic assumption of Lado's theory is that language learning will be easier when two languages happen to be similar. His postulation in CAH is adjudged to the strong version of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) while Oler and Ziahosseni's version of the CAH is called the moderate version, and the Ronald Wardhaugh's version is called the weak version.

Therefore, using the above assumption of comparative analysis theory, this research makes a comparison of VPs of two languages; thus: Èlòyì and English, in order to examine their structural similarities and/or dissimilarities.

METHODOLOGY

This research, being a comparative study of Èlòyì and English verb phrases, is detailed in a single basic area of research. The focus is on VP structure, and the universals of VP in natural languages citing copious examples from Èlòyì and English respectively. The area for this study is Keffi Local Government Area of Nasarawa State which has a majority of English and Èlòyì speaking areas.

In this research work, the researchers employed the primary and secondary methods of data collection as well as introspective means. The primary method employed for this work includes language helpers (informants), interviews from elderly persons (from both languages).

The secondary method used in data collection is the use of library where different works were consulted and other sources like the internet were also consulted to gather enough data for the research. The study sought for data mostly through primary source and about 70% of the information presented in this study owe to native information.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section of the study presents data from the chosen languages which are presented and analyzed separately; tagged as Data A and B in order to ease its readership.

Data A: Èlòyì Verb Phrases

O`Kabiruē <u>kām`utu.</u> RP V(pst)	(Kabiru went to the farm.)
O`Musaē <u>riabishi.</u> (Kiyang`irima) RP V(pst)	(Musa ate food.)
O`Sirajoē <u>yakiya.</u> RP V(pst)	(Sirajo bought something.)
Miniriabishi. FUT. V	(I will eat food.)
Ada mi ē <u>kpa</u> mi. V	(My father beat me.)
Minikukyize. FUT V	(I will sweep – a place.)
Mimanam`ule. V(pst)	(I saw you yesterday.)
Miyi mu kizeikuma. (kiz`lkuma) Am V(PROG)	(I am sweeping – a place.)
Sokavungwoeduma. V V	(Go and learn work.)
Mibôm`ogba. V(pst)	(I came home.)

Grammatically, verb phrases in Èlòyì can be a single word as in ma ‘saw’ in (vii) and bô ‘came’ in (x) or a string of words in a given construction. The data in (i) ē kà ‘went’, ē ri ‘eat’ in (ii), and ē ya ‘bought’ in (iii) could be said a string of words. The ē there in, is a Resumptive/Pre-verbal Pronoun which together with the main verb, project the larger construction – VP. The RP in the above said language could have more than one function from both parts of the sentence. To the subject, it functions as number determinant. It indicates singular subject. When it is a plural subject, it changes to ‘ō’. And to the verb, it has the function of an auxiliary verb. Looking at it from the point of the verb, together with the main verb, they project the verb phrases of the sentences in question.

Again, njiri ‘will eat’ in (iv), and njiku ‘will sweep’ in (vi) are also a string of words and have the same structure with (i), (ii) and (iii). But here, the case is, the nj in the structures save as auxiliary verbs (modal verbs) to the main verbs ri‘eat’ and ku ‘sweep’ to show futurity unlike the ē in above.

In (viii), the verbs do not come together in such structure. The auxiliary verb yi ‘am’ comes between the subject mi ‘I’ and mu kizē ‘a place’ before the main verb ikuma ‘sweeping’ in the progressive form. This is to say, the verbs can be spread within a sentence in Eloyi and still have the same function as verb phrase. So... vungwo in (ix), can be described as a serial verb because the two verbs, together express a single action, and therefore, another structural configuration in Eloyi.

Finally, verb phrases in Eloyi always precede their object of modification – direct object.

Data B: English Verb Phrases

The man went to the farm.

V

A student learnt English.

V

The wife has gone home.

V

Ibrahim could do it.

V

Najib will come home.

V

I would have been done tomorrow by this time.

V

He should have come home.

V

This is the phrase whose head is a verb traditionally called the predicate. The structure of a verb phrase in English language typically consists of a main verb optionally preceded by a maximum of four auxiliary verbs, which belong to different sub-classes of auxiliaries (Mathews, 2007, Greenbaum and Nelson, 2002: 54): auxiliary1 (modal) + auxiliary2 (primary – have) + auxiliary3 (primary –been/being) + main verb.

The assertion that a verb phrase can be a single word in English language can be seen in i ‘went’ and ii ‘learnt’ where they are the only words that occupy the position and report the actions of the subject ‘the man’ and ‘a student’ respectively. In (iii) ‘has gone’, (iv) ‘could do’, (v) ‘will come’, (vi) ‘would have been done’, and (vii) ‘should have come’ are all strings of words with one or more auxiliaries as earlier explained. Each of the auxiliaries in the above sentences has grammatical functions within the structure it appears. The auxiliaries express: perfection (completeness) of the actions as in ‘has’ in (iii), ability (past) as in ‘could’ in (iv), futurity/promise as in ‘will’ in (v), future perfect possibilities as in ‘would have been done’ and ‘should have come’ in (vi) and (vii) respectively.

Again, within the verb phrases above, other phrases can be realized. For example in (i) ‘to the farm’ is a prepositional phrase found within the verb phrase of the sentence. While in (ii) ‘English’, (iii) ‘home’, (iv) ‘it’, (v) and (vii) ‘home’, are all part of the verb phrases of the sentences and, are, phrases (noun phrases). In (vi), ‘tomorrow by this time’ is an adjunct i.e.

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