A Comparative Exploration of some Structures of English Language and Idoma Sentences

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Abstract

This paper centers on a comparative exploration of some structures of English language and Idoma sentences. The Phrase Structure PS Rules of Transformational Generative Grammar is the analytical framework of the study. This paper draws data from different domains of language usage, using the purposive sampling technique to select viable sentences that are analysed. The findings reveal, among other things, that unlike the English language, nouns in Idoma could come before adjectives and suffixes could be added to sentences to give complete thought. A notable similarity between English language and Idoma is that they have the same placement of sentential elements except determiners and adjectives that come after the nouns. Both English language and Idoma (Agila dialect) are capable of being represented on the tree diagram. Through the deployment of the analytical framework for this study, the paper shows that the PS rules enables the identification of the uniqueness of some simple sentences in Agila in order to categorise them into various structures and to show that Transformative Generative Grammar is a viable tool for exploring the linguistic structures of Agila. The study further reveals that Idoma can be analysed side by side with the English language, especially in drawing out their similarities and differences. The study recommends the teaching of Agila language in Ado Local Government Area to acquaint the learners with the rudiments of analysing their native language using English language as a guide. This will bring the errors committed by students to a barest minimum. Consequent upon these, the study concludes that Agila dialect is unique and should be given more attention by linguists.

Keywords: *Structures, Constituent, Transformation, Generate, and Linguistics.*

Introduction

Language is a vehicle through which man expresses his thoughts and desires to other people. Without language human beings cannot be fulfilled in life because most of their thoughts, desires, emotions and feelings may be bottled up. Language is therefore, an organised system of symbols tacitly fashioned by a group of people to enable an intelligible communication with one another. This shows that language is a communicative tool designed to enable people to interact with one another in a speech community. It is with this understanding that Lyons (1970) sees language as the major system of communication employed by a particular group of people within a particular society known as linguistic community of which they are members. Of importance to Lyons' definition is the iconic role language plays – as the unifying essence of a particular people. This means that language not only binds people together but it gives them a unique identity. This unifying essence of language provides the perspective for which Bloch and Trager (1942, p.5), situate language. Language, to them, is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols through which social groups cooperate.

To expatiate on the definition of language as a system, Chomsky (1957, p.13) posits that language is a set of sentence with each finite in length and structured from a finite set of elements. Chomsky's position above affirms that inherent in each sentence are layers of structures. These structures enable man to produce countless number of sentences from a given number of sounds and limited symbols available to such language. It is the unlimited repeatability of certain meaningful elements in a sentence that enables language to express a limitless number of thoughts by using a finite stock of items. Corollary to Chomsky's submission, Bolinger (1968, p.12) defines language as a system of oral auditory communication through the use of conventional signs organised arbitrary patterned sound units which are assembled in line with some sets of rules interacting with the experiences of its users. Bolinger's definition shows that language is a complex, abstract and productive system that links meaning with sound. Language can also be seen as a structured phenomenon which means the pattern of the language as a whole or the arrangements of linguistic units as phonemes, morphemes, words, phrases and clauses within larger units of discourse. These definitions point to the fact that people do not use words selected from the vocabulary of their language randomly. So learning a language includes the ability to put words together in a particular order to form longer strings of utterances.

The definitions provided above are tilted towards syntax – the model of linguistics concerned with the study of how sentence are structured. It is the system of rules by which words are structured into phrases and sentences (Carnie, 2007, p.4). Carnie points further that syntax deals with the paradigm of language that is situated amidst words and how they ennoble the meaning of longer strings called sentences or utterances. It mediates between sound productions which are usually organised into words and how they enhance the understanding of what people say (Carnie, 2007, p.4). From Carnie's perspective, syntax describes the selection and ordering of words string

together to form coherent sentences. Hence, the knowledge of syntax involves knowing the order of sentences in a language.

The focus of this study is to show the way syntax works in Agila dialect, in the context of Idoma language. Using the Transformational Generative Grammar as a model of analysis, the paper shows the order of words that coalesce into phrases, clauses and sentences in Idoma language. This study aims at undertaking a comparative exploration of some structures of English language and Idoma languages with particular focus on the Agila dialect. Hence, the study is anchored on the following specific objectives: to show that the Agila dialect offers a model for illustrating English, to explore the viability of the Transformational Generative Grammar as theoretical model for exploring the simple sentences of Agila dialect; and to identify the uniqueness of simple structures of Agila dialect. The paucity of research on the Agila dialect provides the gap which this thesis sets to fill.

This study will be beneficial to the students of anguage, particularly those who are concerned with grammar and structural analysis of language. This research will serve as a source for further study on syntax. It will be a resource material to language students interested in the study of Idoma language. In addition, the research will spur interest in the study of other minority languages. The paper will also help in ensuring the continuity of the Agila dialect. This is because it will provide materials that will preserve the Agila dialect.

The grammar of a language marks speaker's knowledge of rules specific with his/her language. It describes what the speaker does when he speaks his language. Chomsky (1965) opines that it is the intuitiveness that determines the competence and performance of the speaker. Grammar specifies acceptable ways by which units of linguistic elements may be constructed in any language to form meaning. Grammar has been defined by different scholars according to their various academic dispositions.

Huddleston (1988) and Thornburg (1999) assert that grammar is a finite set of rules, which produce a limitless number of grammatical sentences peculiar to a language and not ungrammatical ones. It is used to assign to each generated sentence its proper structural descriptions. Thus, grammar can be seen as those requirements in natural languages, which pertain to appropriate usage in human communication. They maintain that a good command of grammatical structure is essential for the acquisition of competence of a language.

From all the definitions above, it can be said that the grammar of a language shows that the language is more than a collection of individual words. It describes how words of a language work together to create meaning. It explains how they interact with one another to form larger structures that are capable of expressing divergent ideas. Grammar looks at the rules of formation of sentences while syntax views the word order i.e. the structure of the words in the sentence.

Agila: Historical Overview

The name 'Idoma' stands for the people and the language they speak. Erim (1993, p. 158) says that: "linguists believe that the Idoma-Alago-Yala people together with the Yoruba, Edo, Igbo, Igala all belong to the Kwa sub family or the Benue-Congo Complex of African languages".

The Idoma language is classified as a minority language. This work uses the Agila variety of Idoma to explicate the data. Egwurube (2012, pp.16-17) asserts that the Agila society is presently located in the Southern intermediate of Idoma land. They are bordered by Igumale to the north, Ngbo, Essa and Effuim of Ebonyi to the east and south, then Ehah Amufu of Enugu State to the west.

Comparative Grammar

Comparative grammar was the most important branch of linguistics in the 19th century in Europe. It is also known as comparative philology; the study was originally stimulated by Sir Jones in 1786 that Sanskrit was related to Latin, Greek and German. Comparative linguistics according to the *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied linguistics* (1988, p.102) is a branch of linguistics which studies two or more languages in order to compare their structures and to show whether they are similar or different. Comparative linguistics is also used by some applied linguists for establishing the differences between the learners' native language and the target language in the area of syntax, vocabulary, and sound system. Comparative linguistics is the scientific study of language from a comparative point of view, which means that it is involved in comparing and classifying languages in order to discover the features they share and learning about language in general. Comparative linguistics according to Encyclopedia Britannica (1998) is the study of the relationships correspondences between two or more languages and the techniques used to discover whether the languages have a common ancestor.

Transformational Generative Grammar as the Framework of Analysis

In 1957, Noam Chomsky proposed *Syntactic Structure* which described that grammar should be seen as an autonomous system which is independent of semantic or phonological systems. Then, Chomsky introduced the concept of Transformational-Generative Grammar (TGG) in his book *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965). Chomsky states that every sentence consists of two levels of structure, deep and surface structure. Osisanwo (1999, p. 9) catalogs the distinctive points of Chomsky Transformational Generative Grammar as follows:

> Firstly, it is the grammar sets out to explain the native speaker's capacity to produce, identify and interpret correct sentences in his language. Secondly, it considers the syntactic component of grammar as central, while semantic and phonology components are interpretative. Thirdly, it makes an explicit distinction between a surface structure and a deep structure. The semantic component interprets the deep structure while the phonological component interprets the surface structure. Fourthly, transformational Generative Grammar recognizes the sentences as a theoretical category, while other units like the clause are used merely as ad-hoc descriptive labels. Fifthly, in analysis the grammar derives all exponents from the initial sentences by a set of rules of two kinds. The

first set of rules produces structures and basic or kernel items, while the second set uses transformation to produce the remainder of the formal items.

Deep Structure and Surface Structure

Chomsky advances the idea that every sentence in a language has two stages of representation namely; the deep and surface structure. The concept of the deep structure and surface structure are based on the notion of Competence and Performance. Competence is seen as the speaker-hearer knowledge of their language (Chomsky, 1965, p. 4). Meanwhile, performance is defined as the actual use of language in real context. Deep structure is considered as abstract and it deals with meaning. It describes the order of words in a simple, active, positive, and declarative sentence. It also shows the lexical and phrasal categories to which the words belong and the hierarchical relationships in which the words enter i.e. it reveals the form of the sentence. The surface structure is defined as realization of deep structure. Surface structure is processed material ready to be used in language activity. The deep structure becomes a surface structure via transformation.

Rules of Transformational Generative Grammar
Yule (2007, p.95) states that transformational rule is a rule which will alter or move constituents in the structures obtained from the Phrase Structure Rules.
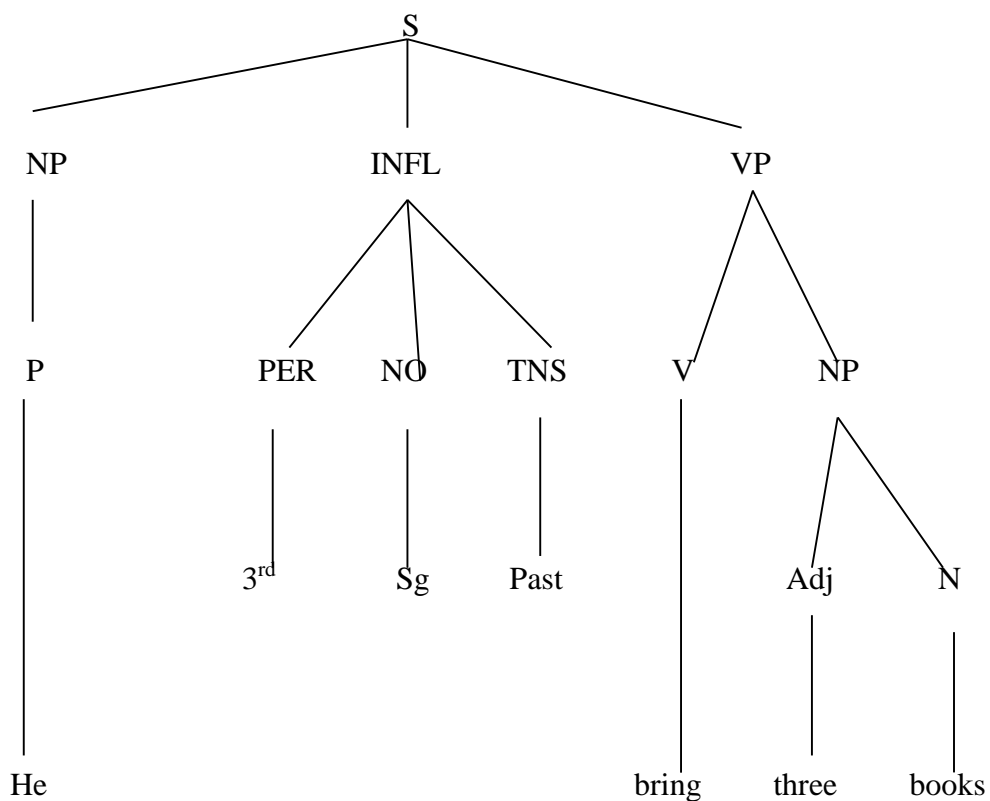
Phrase Structure Rules
In *Syntactic Structure*, Chomsky proposed some basic rules to generate a sentence which he called Phrase Structure Rules. Phrase Structure Rules are the basic of constructing the deep structure i.e. The Phrase Structure is used to generate deep structures which are converted into the surface structure by transformational Rule. The Phrase rule note what syntactic categories exist in a given language and what different internal structures each of these can have. They are deployed to break down a natural language into their constituent namely, phrasal categories and lexical categories (parts of speech). This theory argues that native speakers are born with the innate knowledge of the rules that governs sentence in their language. It is this innate knowledge of the structures and rules of their language that helps them to make new sentences that they have not heard before. In essence native speakers do not put words together randomly but follow a specific ordering of words which make their speech to conform to that of other speakers of the same language.
In carrying out this study, sentences were selected from utterances of language used in different spheres of life and were examined to find out how the native speakers use language. The data were carefully selected using the random sampling method, from different domains of everyday language usage for analysis. A total number of three sentences were analysed due to worth of space. The paucity of research on the Agila dialect of Idoma is the motivation for this study.

The next section presents and analyses the data showing components that make up the sentence structure.

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Analysis of some Structures of English language and Agila Sentences

(a) He   brought   three   books.   (b)   Ọ   bi   ọkpa   eta   wa

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                                  S
                 ┌────────────────┼────────────────┐
                NP              INFL               VP
                 │          ┌─────┼─────┐       ┌───┴───┐
                 P        PER    NO    TNS      V      NP
                 │         │      │     │       │      ┌┴──┐
                 │         │      │     │       │     Adj   N
                 │        3rd    Sg   Past      │      │    │
                 │                             bring  three books
                He
```
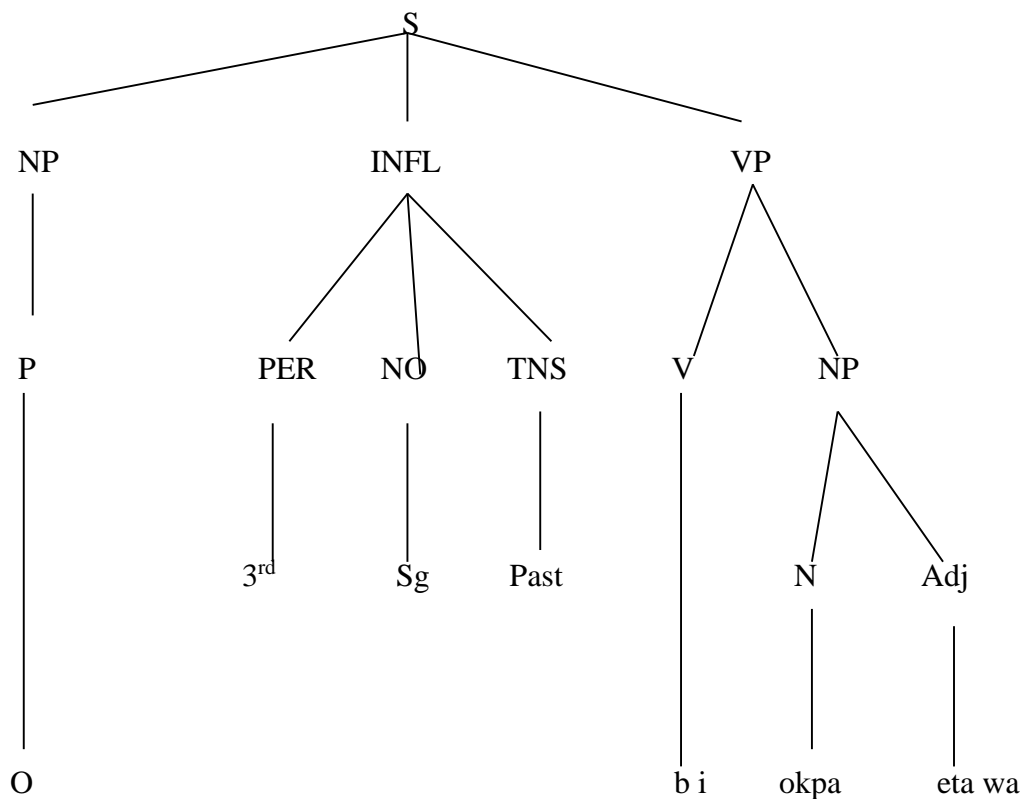
Affix hopping: -ed + bring = brought

Surface Structure: He brought three books
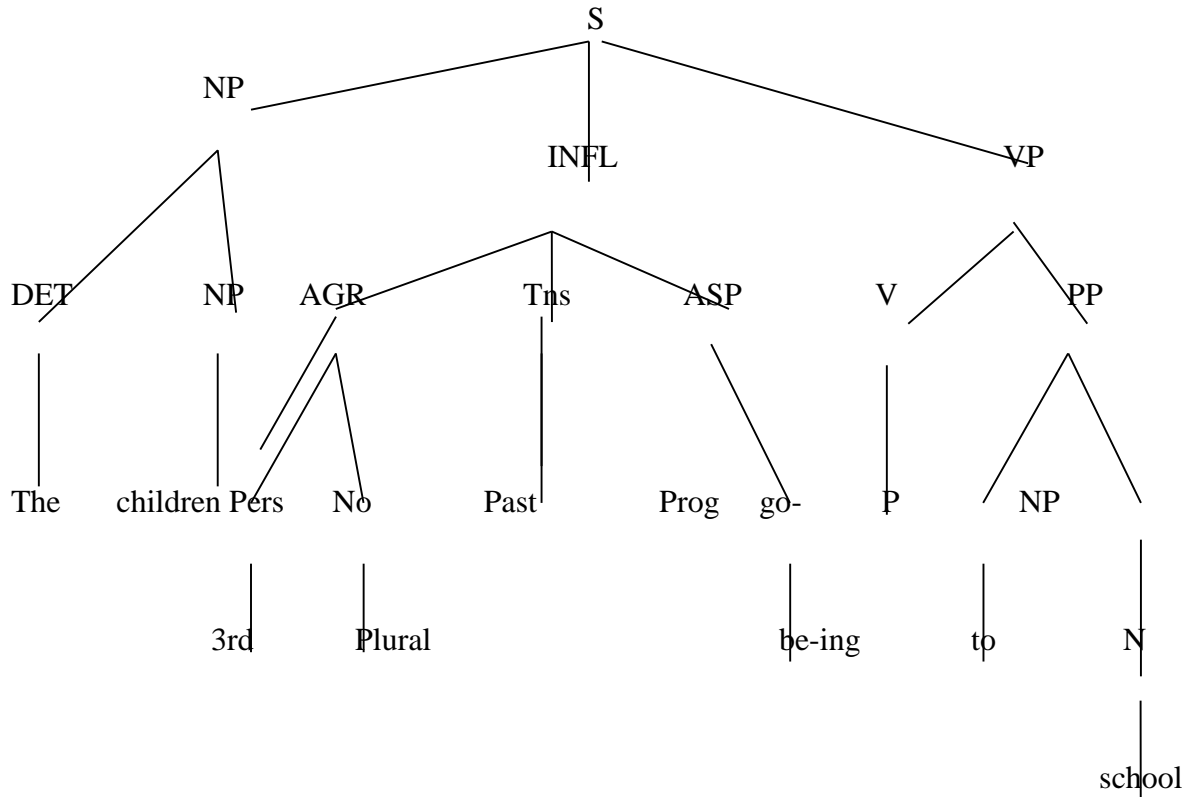
b) The Agila Sentence. O bi okpe eta wa

Discussion on Datum I

In the English structure, 'He' in this diagram is a pronoun, 'brought' is a verb, 'three' in the sentence is an adjective i.e. a cardinal number showing the quantity of the books that were brought and 'books' in the sentence stand for a noun. However, in the tree diagram, an affix hopping rule was applied to the verbal element 'brought' leaving the base form 'bring'. In the Agila analysis, on the other hand, the noun 'ọkpa' comes before the adjective 'eta' and a suffix 'wa' is added to the sentence to give it a complete thought. This differs from the English structure in which the adjective 'three' comes before the noun 'book'. This shows that there is a clear variance between the English structure in datum one and that of the Agila structure.

(a) The children are going to school

(b) (Ayipẹ a yọ I gainọkpa) Ape ma e nyuunokpa

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                                    S
              NP                                              
                                         INFL                        VP
     DET          NP      AGR          Tns      ASP        V              PP
      |            |                    |        |         |          NP
     The       children Pers   No     Past     Prog   go-   P          |
                        |      |                              |  NP     |
                       3rd   Plural               be-ing     to        N
                                                                       |
                                                                    school
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Affix Hupping Rule:

+being

be+ Pres+ plural = are

Prog. be-ing Subsumed the –ing in the being to get=going

Surface Structure: The children are going to school

Discussion on Datum II

To account for the element in the structure above, 'the' is a determiner, 'children' is the plural of 'child' and it stands for a young human who is not yet an adult while 'are' is an auxiliary verb supporting the main verb 'going'. An auxiliary verb according to Amaechi (2005, p.98), is the opposite of a lexical verb. In his words, they "are verbs that cannot convey independent meanings; they must combine with the lexical verbs to convey full meanings." They are also classified into

two namely; modal and non-modal auxiliary verbs. 'Going' in this case, is a present progressive i.e. the blend of both the present and progressive tenses. As seen in the diagram, the preposition 'to' in the sentence shows the relationship between its object and another word. Here, the object is the noun 'school'.

It is evident that in Agila, determiners come immediately after nouns in sentences and that is seen in the sentence above. However, determiners normally come before nouns in English sentences. Also the preposition, 'to' in the English sentence could not be accounted for in the Idoma sentence. This shows that the Agila dialect has a unique structure that distinguishes it from the English sentence.

(a)The chair is in the room   (b) (Ugada a tai nu) Ugada ma hu ifu uhnu ma
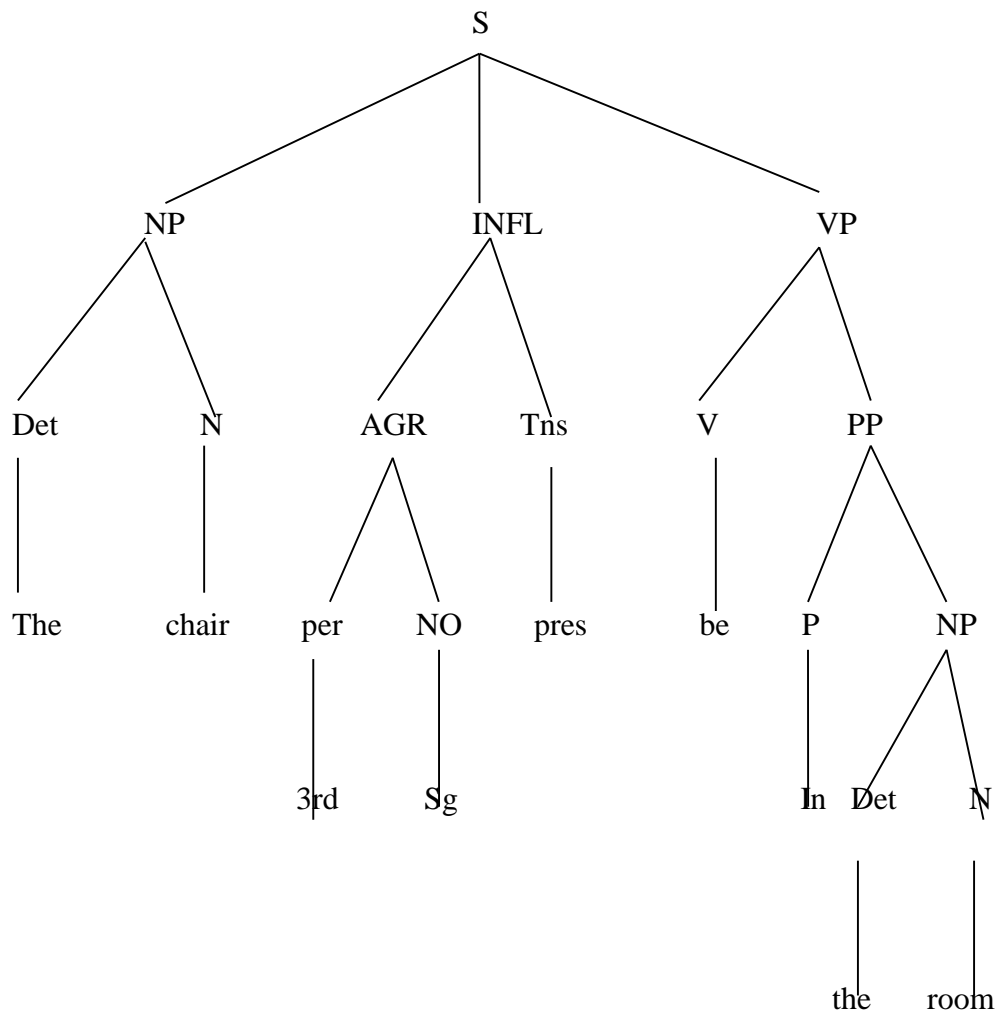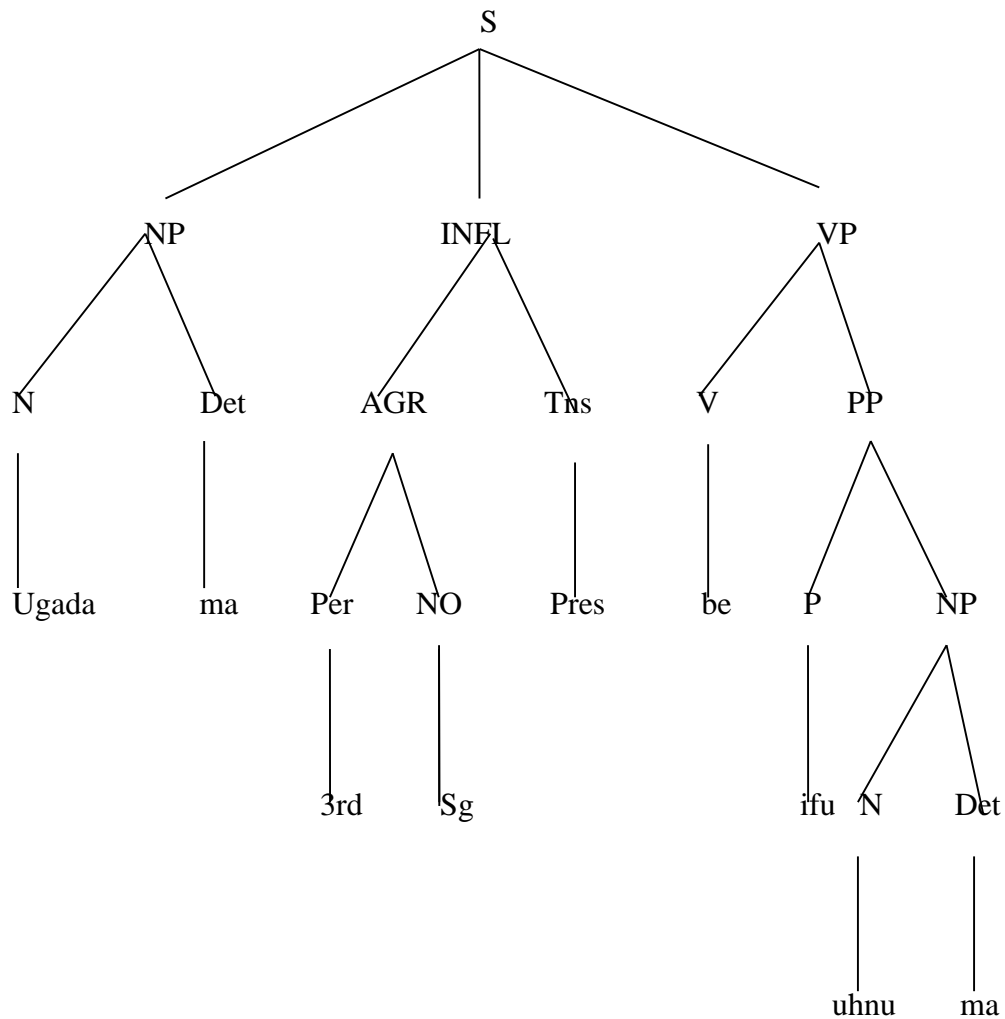
Affix Hopping Rule: Sg + Pres + be = is

The 'is' in the sentence is replaced by the 'been' verb in the tree

Surface Structure: The chair is in the room

(a) (Ugada   a   tai   nu)   Ugada   ma   hu   ifu   uhnu   ma

```
                              S
            ┌─────────────────┼─────────────────┐
           NP               INFL                VP
         ┌──┴──┐          ┌──┴──┐            ┌──┴──┐
         N    Det        AGR   Tns           V    PP
         │     │        ┌─┴─┐   │            │   ┌─┴─┐
       Ugada  ma       Per NO  Pres         be   P   NP
                        │   │                    │  ┌─┴─┐
                       3rd  Sg                  ifu N  Det
                                                    │   │
                                                  uhnu  ma
```

Discussion on Datum III

'The' is a determiner and 'chair' is a noun and it is the head word in the sentence. The linking verb, 'is', takes the place of the main verb; 'in' is a preposition showing where the chair is. According to Ogungbe and Bossan (2013, p.39), a preposition is a word that illustrates the

relationship between its object and another word in a sentence. Similarly, 'the room' is another noun phrase that is composed of determiner and noun. The structure of both the English and the Agila sentences above are similar except for the reversal of the position of the determiner and noun. In English, the determinant comes before the noun while in Agila, determiner always comes after the nouns.

Findings

This section of the study looks at the discoveries made from the research. The findings reveal that determiners and adjectives come after the nouns in Agila structures as demonstrated earlier. This shows that Agila has a unique structure that distinguishes it from the English sentences and it worths studying.

In the first datum, in the sentence section, 'He brought three books', there is a clear variance between the English sentence and the Agila structure and that can be seen in the arrangement of the adjective in the Agila dialect which comes after the noun 'okpa eta; book three' instead of 'three books'. This supports the practicability of Transformational Generative Grammar as a model for analysing the syntactic structures of Idoma because Agila sentences are capable of being transformed and analysed. The general findings is that some prepositions like 'too' cannot be accounted for in Agila and determiners always come after the noun in Agila instead of before the noun as it is in English language and one needs to add suffix to some words in Agila for them to make meaning like 'wa', to get the equivalent meaning in Agila.

In the second sentence, "The children are going to school", 'to' i.e. the preposition could not be accounted for in Agila dialect which makes it different from the English structure. However, some of the structures in both English language and Agila are the same, except for the noun that comes before the determiner in the Agila sentence which is common with all the sentences with determiners in Agila dialect e.g., 'The chair is in the room' has the same placement of its elements with that of the English except the determiner coming after the noun. This illustrates that Agila dialect has the potential to be studied as a language because of its unique nature of placement of elements (adjectives and determiners).

Conclusion

This work examined the similarities and the differences of some sentences in English language and the Idoma dialect, Agila.. It was noted that the arrangement of the constituents in English language and Agila is similar. They only differ in the noun coming before the determiner in Agila instead of the determiners preceding the noun in English. The similarities between the two languages are more than the differences. However; the variation in the grouping of words in Agila dialect and English language may result in a problem for the learners of English language. This is because there may be direct transfer of sentences in Agila to English language, thereby making

sentences that may not be acceptable to the main speakers of English. The Agila dialect can be used as a model to illustrate English in the sense that it has the ability to be displayed on the tree diagram side by side with that of the English language which in turn makes their similarities and differences clear.

The study also affirmed that Transformational Generative Grammar is a viable theory for accessing the syntactic structure of Agila because it focuses mostly on syntax and how the native speakers of the variety of language understand and use the dialect. This paper concludes that Agila dialect has a unique structure that differentiates it from that of the English and it is worth studying.

Recommendation

This study recommends that teachers should prepare a lesson plan to handle and emphasise those grey areas and this in turn, makes the learners to be proficient in the second language. The government should include the area of deficiency of the learners in the planning of the Curriculum and more time should be dedicated to the teaching of English so as to create more awareness among the native learners of English. This study also recommends that the government should hire the services of competent teachers to teach English language in schools to avoid learner's errors or to reduce it. More so, the government can provide the learners with books that will enable them to overcome those challenges of learning English. This work also advocates that the policy makers should pick interest in the standardization of the Agila dialect of Idoma and encourage the teaching of the dialect in the primary schools by passing a law that supports that. The paper enjoins the readers and researchers to do more study on the Agila dialect of Idoma so as to bring it to limelight.

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