THE STRUCTURE OF VERB PHRASE IN ỌGBA

OJUM, Chioma Vivien;

PROF. EJELE, Philomena Ekeikhomen

AND

ALERECHI, Roselyn Ihoma, *Ph.D*
Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies
Faculty of Humanities
University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the structure of the VP in Ọgba. The language is spoken across forty-one communities in Ọgba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria. This study adopts the X-bar theory which plays a significant role in the GB grammar. It employs the descriptive survey design. The data for the study were collected through the intuitive knowledge of the researcher and unstructured elicitation oral interview technique. The method of data analysis that is adopted in this study is purely descriptive method of morpheme-to-morpheme glossing. It is observed that the V is the only obligatory constituent of the VP in Ọgba. This suggests that V is the head of the VP. That is, the V is the most important grammatical element or category in a VP in the language. It is also observed that some verbs in the language can occupy a VP slot with or without any complement. This paper also ascertains that V can merge or combine with a single NP, double NP, an NPʲ with a PP, NP with a CP and CP alone to maximally expand or project into a VP.

KEYWORDS: Verb, Verb Phrase, Head, Headedness, Ọgba

Introduction

Humans do not communicate using sounds or words in segregation or isolation. But, they (the sounds or words) are merged in connected discourse (Ndimele, 1997). This basically suggests that every language is rule governed. No wonder language or linguistic researches (from the time of the traditional grammarians through the modern structural linguistic approaches down to the generative grammatical approach) devote a lot of time to examine the combination of words, their syntactic relations and analysis. Syntactically, no natural language permits the construction of grammatical structures by stringing words randomly. Thus, every proficient

user or speaker of a language must have the unconscious knowledge of the rules governing the formation of syntactic structures in his language. In view of that, an examination of the rules that govern the formation of grammatical and acceptable structures in a language is said to be indispensable. In every combination, there is generally a head (for phrases) and complements or qualifiers which specify the head. In terms of the relative order of words within a phrase or maximal projection, some languages are head-initial and complement-final or head-final and complement-initial (Ndimele, 1992). The term "complement" as used in this paper refers to an expression which combines with the head word to expand or project the head into a larger structure of essentially the same kind. It also refers to a word, phrase or clause that is essential to complete the meaning of a given construction (Radford, 1997). In other words, complements are usually arguments (that is, expressions that help complete the meaning of a predicate). Therefore, this paper examines the constituents of verb phrase in Ọgba.

The Ọgba Language

According to Ojum (2016), Isaac (2018) and Ikpo-Weke (2020), Ọgba is named after its native speakers. This implies that both the native speakers and their language are commonly called "Ọgba". Isaac (2018, p. 2) states that the "Ọgba Kingdom is found in the Niger Delta flood plain, with Ekpeye, Engeni and Ijaw areas to the south West, Egbema, Oguta and Awara to the North West and Ndoni Kwale and Onitsha to the West and North West." He also avers that Ọgba Kingdom is rich in both natural and human resources. Some of the rivers in the area are: The Orashi River, the Sombreiro River and Omoku River. Like other human languages, Ọgba has dialectal variations. While Ojum (2016) insists Ọgba has five dialectal variations which include Egni, Usomini, Igburu, Idu and Omoku; Isaac (2018) says that there are only two dialects in Ọgba (Egni and Igburu). On the other hand, both Ojum (2016) and Isaac (2018) uphold that Ọgba dialects are mutually intelligible. More so, Ojum (2016) observes that the five dialects have wide variations in terms of tone and intonation, and in terms of lexical items. The data for this study are drawn from the Idu dialect.

Tonal Convention

Ọgba is a tone language. This implies that like in Ọgba, as in other tonal languages, the pitch of the voice is used to distinguish the meaning of morphemes, words, phrases, clauses and sentences which otherwise are the same in terms of their segementals. The term "tone" refers to the variation in pitch. It is usually seen as the distinct pitch level of a syllable. Tones are mostly placed on the peak of the syllable which is usually a vowel or a

syllabic consonant. Emenanjo (2015, p. 113) affirms that "to ignore tone is to ignore an important code which not only identifies the language but also makes it unique." For instance:

1a.   òkè   LL   'share'
b.   Oké   HL   'boundary'

2a.   ézé   HH   'teeth'
b.   ézē   HM   'king/wealth'

According to Ahiamadu (2000), Ọgba has two major tones: high and low which is followed by a down-step tone and a mid-tone. The mid-tone is not usually marked in Ọgba. Thus, the mid-tones are conventionally left unmarked in this research. So, any unmarked tone should be read as mid.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the X-bar theory which plays a significant role in the GB grammar. According to Ndimele (1992, p. 29), the notion of "X-bar" was "first introduced into grammatical analysis by Chomsky (1970) in his article entitled 'Remarks on Nominalization', and was later popularised by Jackend off (1977)." Aaron (1995), Mathews (1997), Benamaisia (2001), Worukwo (2004), Carnie (2007), Lamidi (2008) and Nwala (2016) unanimously assert that the X-bar theory was introduced into grammatical study or analysis because of the need to develop the Phrase Structure Grammar (PSG) due to its shortfalls or inadequacies. Worukwo (2004) notes that the proponents of the X-bar theory believe that there are categories smaller than the phrase but larger than the words that intervene between the maximal projection and the headword. Worukwo (2004) also suggests that every phrase has a head which gives the phrase its essential character. He further says that in the PSG model, the head is viewed as projecting directly into the phrase. However, in the X^I model, it is assumed that there is an intermediate category between the maximal projection and the minimal category (the head). This means that unlike in the PSG, there is usually an intervening category which is smaller than the phrase but larger the word between the maximal projection and the headword. Similarly, Nwala (2016) insists that one of shortfalls of the PGS that was remedied by the X^I-theory is the failure of the former to identify or recognize the significance of the head. In view of that, PSG places all the grammatical categories in a construction at the same syntactic levels, while the X^I-theory recognizes the presence of an intermediate category and as a result places each grammatical element in a construction into different syntactic hierarchies. For that reason, this paper focuses on the grammatical constituents of verb phrase.

Review of Related Literature

Badom (2016), Ejeba (2016) and Isaac (2018) unanimously assert that words group together to constitute a phrase. They also describe the term "phrase" as a syntactic unit that generally consists of more than one lexical item, and is intermediate between word and clause levels. They further note that every phrase obligatorily has a head. This agrees with the assertion of Ndimele (1992, p. 5) that "it is the general property of phrases that every phrase or maximal projection must have a head which gives the phrase or maximal projection its essential character or which determines the nature of the overall phrase." The assertion of Ndimele (1992) denotes that a phrase can also be described as a maximal projection. It also ascertains that every phrase or maximal projection derives its name from its head. More so, Iloene (2007, p. 211) affirms that the VP in Igbo can have different structures. He also says that the rules for rewriting the likely projections of the VP in Igbo include:

2a. VP $\longrightarrow$ V

b. VP $\longrightarrow$ V + NP

c. VP $\longrightarrow$ V + NP + NP

d. VP $\longrightarrow$ V + NP + PP

e. VP $\longrightarrow$ V + NP + S$^\text{I}$

f VP $\longrightarrow$ V + S$^\text{I}$

From the rules in 2a-f, it is construed that a VP in Igbo language may comprise the V alone, the V may combine with other optional grammatical elements such as NP, PP and a full-fledge clause (S$^\text{I}$). The structural configuration above is very similar to the claim of Ndimele (1999) that the rules for rewriting the VP in English language can be collapsed into one single rule: VP $\longrightarrow$ V + (NP) + (PP) + (S$^\text{I}$). It is noticed that all the grammatical constituents in bracket in examples 2a-f are optional elements. Therefore, the V is the obligatory head of the VP. Consequently, this paper investigates the constituents of VP in Ọgba.

Methodology

This paper adopts the descriptive survey design. This design is considered suitable for this study because it is difficult for the research to compile all the VPs in Ọgba. Thus, a sample of the VPs is drawn from the language. The data for this study are drawn from two main sources- primary and secondary sources. The researcher used her knowledge or intuition as a proficient speaker of Idu dialect of Ọgba to generate the primary data. However, the

researcher did not allow her personal knowledge to influence the study unjustifiably. The researcher also draws or obtains data from other competent speakers of Ọgba through the use of unstructured elicitation oral interview technique. The reason for the unstructured elicitation oral interview is to obtain in-depth information through face to face verbal communication. The use of oral interview is considered appropriate for this study because the researcher believes that it is straight-forward and easy to analyze. The secondary data are drawn from books and other library materials that are available in the language. The method of data analysis that is adopted in this study is purely descriptive method of morpheme-to-morpheme glossing. This paper adopts the descriptive approach because it does not impose any linguistic rules to the language.

The Constituents of Verb Phrase in the Language

In Ọgba, the grammatical constituents that obligatorily come after the V(erb) in a sentence has diverse structural configuration. This implies that a verb complement is part of the predicate which is syntactically headed by the V. The data collected for this study indicate that the constituents of the VP in the language can have the following structural configuration:

❖ The V alone in a V-bar in Ọgba

In Ọgba, the V alone can occur in a V-bar. This indicates that the V can be the only grammatical category in a V-bar slot in the language. This is because the V is the only obligatory constituent in the V-bar in the language. This suggests that the V is the head of the V-bar. In essence, the V-bar is the maximal projection of the V. Furthermore, the examples in 3a-e reveal that the structural configuration of the V alone in a V-bar is:

3.   VP $\longrightarrow$ V as in:

a.   Uche bíà.
       PN   come.
       'Uche come here.'

b.   Wọ́ dná-là.
       3PL fall-Perf.
       'They have fallen.'

c.   ?Wọ́ dná.
        3PL fall

d.   Emeka jé-ré-là.
       PN   go-ext.-suff.-Perf.
       'Emeka has gone.'

e.   Emeka jé.
       PN   go.
       'Emeka go.'

The examples in 3a-e demonstrate that a V alone can occupy a V-bar slot in Ọgba. More so, examples 3a and 3e show that V alone in a V-bar typically results in imperative constructions. It is deduced from the examples that the verbs "bíà" 'come' and "jé" 'go' function as one place argument verbs in imperative structures in the language. This implies that they function as intransitivity verbs in imperative sentences in Ọgba. Similarly, examples in 3b-d also show that the perfective form of the verb "dná-là" 'fallen' can occupy the V-bar slot alone. Once more, example 3c shows that the basic form of the verb "dná" 'fall' cannot occupy the V position in a V-bar without the perfective marker in the language. Figure 1 is a tree diagram illustrating the structural configuration of V alone in a V-bar.
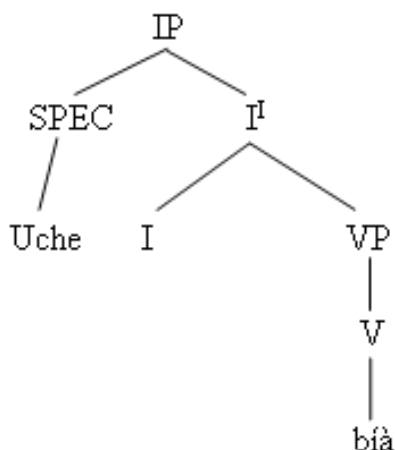

Fig. 1: A Tree Diagram Illustrating VP ⟶ V in Ọgba

In figure 1, it is deduced that the verb bíà 'come' does not subcategories an NP complement in an imperative construction. It can neither assign a theta role nor case to its right because it is weak in thematic projection capacity. This implies that the verb bíà 'come' is a one-place argument verb in imperative in Ọgba. It is also observed that any NP occurring in the complement position in figure 1 will either result in ungrammatical or change the structure to a declarative construction.

❖ The V and an NP Complement in a V-bar in Ọgba

The data gathered for this study indicate that some verbs in Ọgba obligatorily subcategorise for NP complement. This suggests that the verbs are two place argument verbs. Their subjects are the external argument while their objects are the internal arguments. The structural configuration of the V and an NP complement in a V-bar in the language is:

4.   VP ⟶ V + NP   as in:

a.   Ụ̀nụ́ zú   ẹ́kwá ọ̀chná.
        2PL buy+PST cloth white
        'You bought white cloth.'

b.   Ngozi zá   úlọ̀.
        NP   sweep+PST house
        'Ngozi swept the house.'

c.   Ada dọ́   míní.
        PN   fetch water
        'Ada fetched water.'

d.   *Ngozi zá.
         NP   sweep
         'Ngozi swept...'

e.   *Ụ̀nụ́ zụ́.
         2PL buy
         'You bought...'

f.   *Ada dọ́.
         PN   fetch
         'Ada fetched...'

In 4a-f, the verbs zụ́ 'buy', zá 'sweep' and dọ́ 'fetch' subcategories the NPs ẹ́kwá ọ̀chná 'white cloth', úlọ̀ 'house' and míní 'water' respectively. The ungrammaticality of examples in 4d-f prove that the internal arguments in 4a-c are obligatory. Figure 2 is a tree diagram illustrating the structural configuration of V + (NP) in a V-bar:
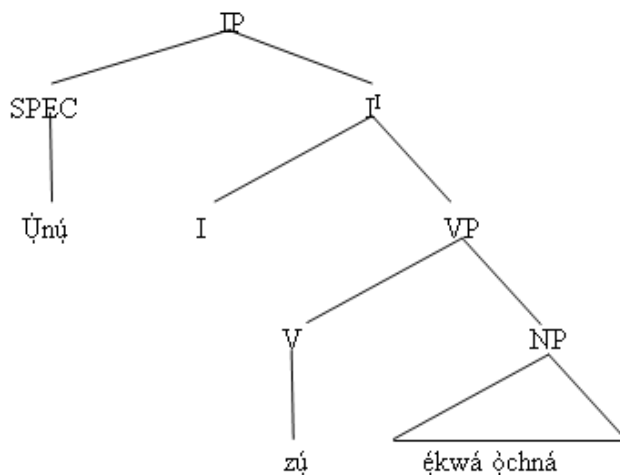
Fig. 2: A Tree Diagram Illustrating VP ⟶ V + NP in Ọgba

In figure 2, it is clear that the V which is the lexical head of the VP combines with the NP which functions as the internal argument to constitute the VP. The NP node referred to earlier is obligatory. Its deletion or omission can result in ungrammatical structures as in 4d-f.

❖ **The V and a Double NP Complement in a V-bar in Ọgba**

In Ọgba, some verbs obligatorily subcategorise for two internal arguments to project into a V-bar. In other words, they obligatorily admit two NPs in the accusative case. The available data show that the verbs that obligatorily subcategorise for two internal arguments in addition to their external argument are ditransitive verbs in the language. They have higher thematic projection capacity than the ones that subcategorise for one internal argument in addition to their external argument as in examples 4. The structural configuration of the V and a double NP complement in a V-bar in the language is:

5.   VP ⟶ V + NP + NP   as in:

a.   Ọ́-chị̀-ọ̀há   <u>gíyè</u> lá ndé   ézè gá-à mé kpúsí Amadi òkpú.
       Pref.-rule-community our conj. people chief his FUT. crown PN   cap
       'Our paramount ruler and his cabinet will crown Amadi.'

b.   Uche kpọ́   yé òkwú.
       PN   call+PST 1PL call (n)
       'Uche called us.'

c.   Wọ́ kpé   ndé   gíyè í-kpé.
       3PL judge-PST people our   pref.-judge
       'They judged our people.'

d.   Ụ́nụ́ mé rnú ò-rnú ká Amadi.
        2PL FUT work pref.-work Det. PN
        'You will do Amadi's job.'

In examples 5a-d, it is apparent that some verbs in Ọgba obligatorily subcategorise two internal arguments. This is because the deletion of any of the internal arguments in 5a-d can result in change in meaning, unacceptability or ungrammatical constructions. Figure 3 is a tree diagram illustrating the structural configuration of V + NP + NP in a V-bar:
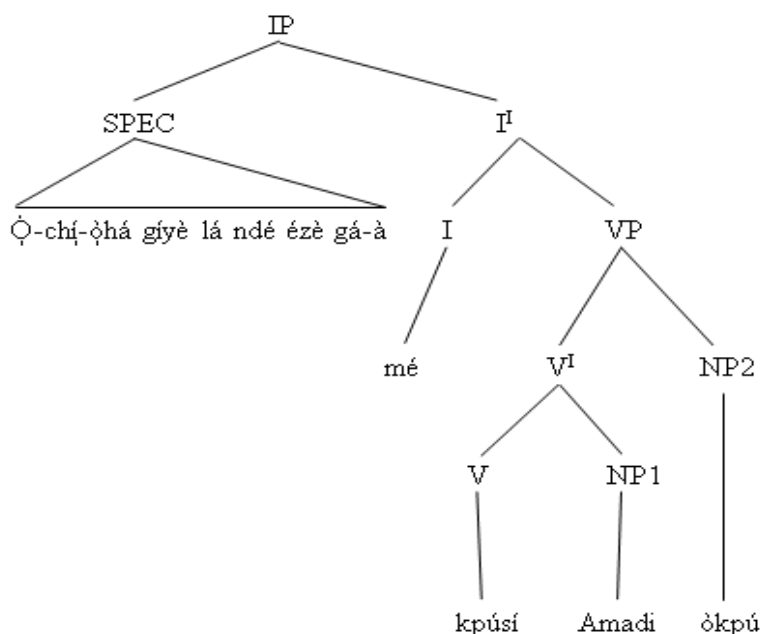

Fig. 3: A Tree Diagram Illustrating VP ⟶ V + NP + NP in Ọgba

In figure 3, the VP harbours two NP complements. The NP1 is governed and case-marked by the V the lexical head of the projection while the NP2 is governed and case-marked by the V^I (that is, an intermediate category). The figure also indicates that the V^I is usually a governor in V-bar which involves two NP complements. This means that the verbs "kpúsí" 'crown' and "kpọ́" 'called' in examples 5a and 5b govern and assign accusative case to their NP complements "Amadi" and "yé" 'we' respectively. On the other hand, the V^I governs and assigns accusative case to the NPs òkpú and òkwú.

❖ **The V and NP + PP Complement in a V-bar in Ọgba**

The data in examples 6 prove that a V-bar in Ọgba can consists of an obligatory V and an optional NP and PP. This indicates that the V can license an NP and PP in the language. The structural configuration of the V and NP + PP complements in a V-bar in Ọgba is:

6.   VP ⟶ V + NP + PP   as in:

a.   Yé wúrè   égó   l'ẹ̀kpá   kà nná   gíyè.
        2PL take+PST money Prep.-bag Det. mother our
        'We took money from our mother's bag.'

b.   Ọ́ znú ẹ́kwá l'áhìá.
        3SG steal+PST cloth prep.-market
        'S/he stole cloth in the market.'

c.   Uche mé tá ànụ́ l'ụ́lọ̀.
        PN   FUT chew meat Prep.-house
        'Uche will chew meat at home.'

d.   Dídí gíyè rnú ụ́lọ̀   l'álì   gíyè.
        Father our work house Prep.-land our
        'Our father built a house in our community.'

The examples in 6a-d demonstrate that a VP in Ọgba can harbour a V, an NP and a PP with diverse structural configurations. Figure 4 is a tree diagram illustrating the structural configuration of V + NP + PP in a V-bar in the language:
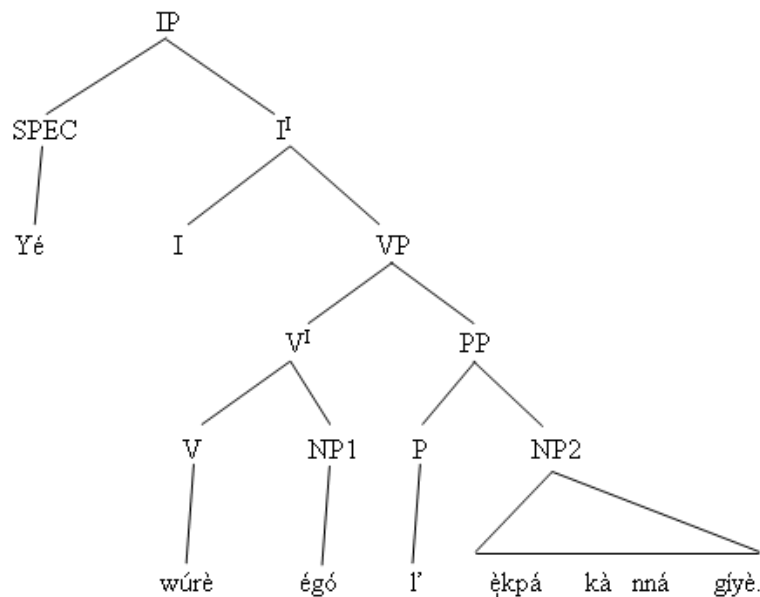

Fig. 4: A Tree Diagram Illustrating VP ⟶ V + NP + PP in Ọgba

In figure 4, V which is the lexical head of the VP governed or case-marked the NP1 while the PP is governed and case-marked by the V¹. The tree diagram (figure 4) also indicates that the NP2 is governed or case-marked by the P which is the lexical head of the PP projection. This suggests that the verbs wúrè 'take', znú 'steal', tá 'chew' and rnú 'work' in examples 6a-d govern and

assign accusative case to the NP1 that is their NP complements égó 'money', ẹ́kwá 'cloth', ànụ́ 'meat' and ụ́lọ̀ 'house' respectively. On the other hand, the Vᴵ governs and assigns accusative case to the PP which expands into a P and an NP. This shows that a PP can function as the indirect object of a construction in Ọgba.

❖ **The V and NP + CP in a V-bar in Ọgba**

The available data reveal that a VP in Ọgba can comprise of an obligatory V and an optional NP which is modified by a full-fledged clause. This means that the V can license an NP and a CP in the language. The structural configuration of the V and NP + CP in a V-bar in Ọgba is:

7.   VP ⟶ V + NP + CP   as in:

a.   Dídí gíyè rnú-lá   ụ́lọ̀ nyná ọ́   kwù wọ́lá ọ́ mé rnú.
       Father our work-Perf. house Det. 3SG say RC 3SG FUT work
       'Our father has built the house that he promised to build.'

b.   Emeka wúrè   égó   gà zú ànụ́ l'áhíà.
       PN   take+PST money Det. buy meat Prep.-market
       'Emeka took his money to buy meat from the market.'

c.   Wọ́ mé   rí àláèkwọ̀ nyná wò si bè   tnání.
       3PL FUT eat plantain Det.   3P cook Prep.-today
       'They will eat the plantain that they cooked toady.'

d.   Nná   gíyè mé sí-bè   ọ́knà nyná Uche nígà yé l'ụ́tụ́.
       Mother our FUT cook-ext.suff. corn Det. PN   give 1PL Prep.-morning
       'Our mother will cook the corn Uche gave us in the morning.'

In 7a-d, the VP harbours a V as its lexical head, NP as the direct object of the V and a CP as object complement. The tree diagram in figure 5 illustrates the structural configuration of V + NP + CP in a V-bar in Ọgba:
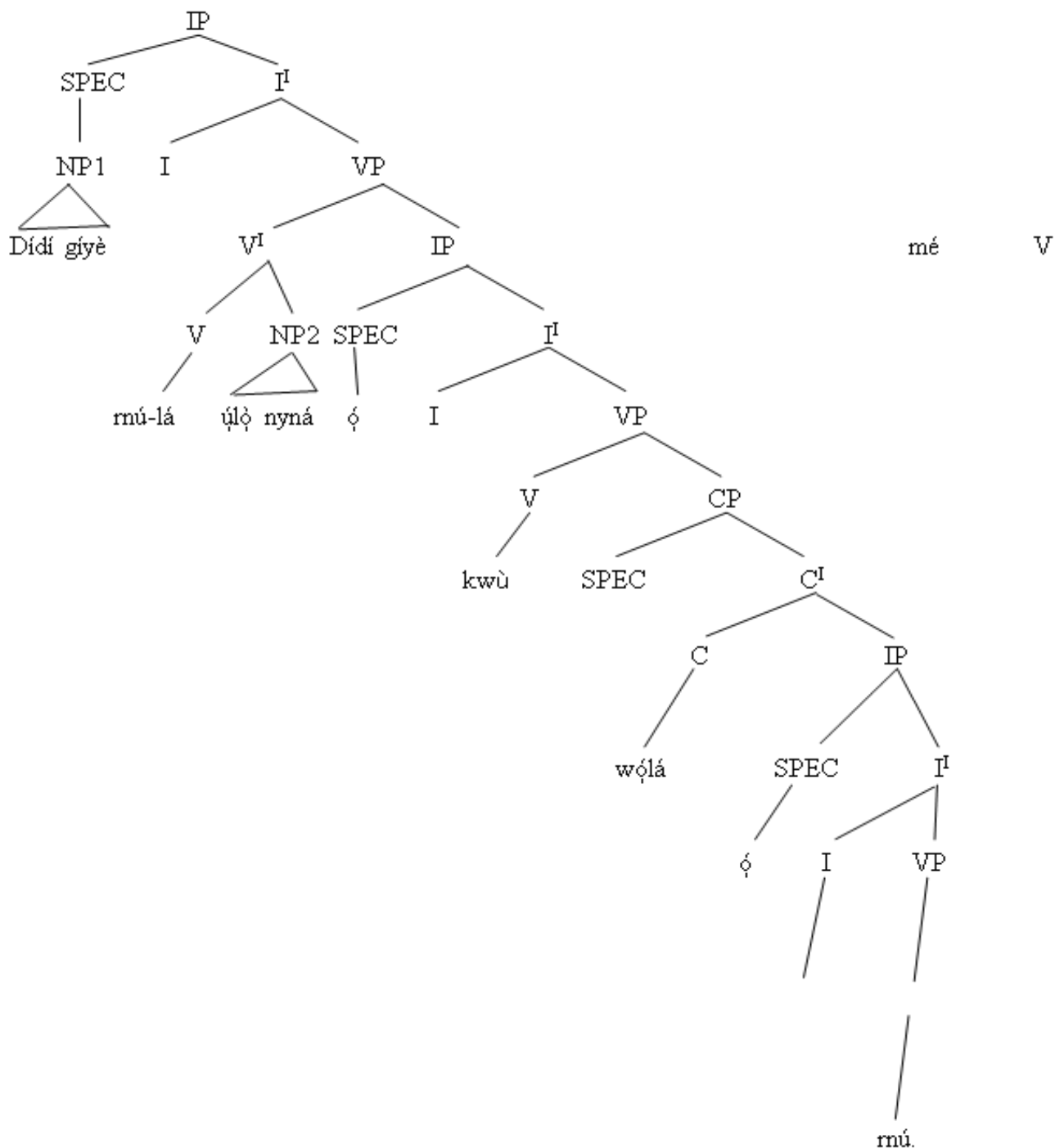
Fig. 5: A Tree Diagram Illustrating VP ⟶ V + NP + CP in Ọgba

In figure 5, it is construed that V governed or case-marked the NP2 while the complement clause or subordinate clause (IP) is governed and case-marked by the V^I. It is also observed that the NP2 which is licensed by the V of the superordinate (matrix) clause functions as the direct object while the subordinate clause (IP) function as object complement. This suggests that a VP in Ọgba can consist of a V as lexical head of the VP, an NP complement which functions as the direct object and a full-fledged clause (IP) as object

complement. More so, the V of the subordinate clause licensed a CP which further subcategorised an empty SPEC Cᴵ.

❖ **The V and PP + CP in a V-bar in Ọgba**

In Ọgba, a V can subcategorise a PP complement. The PP complement may have diverse structural configurations. It has an obligatory P as its lexical head, an NP or a CP. The structural configuration of V and PP + CP in a V-bar in the language is:

8.   VP ⟶ V + PP + NP + CP as in:

a.   Dídí gíyè kwú ní   nná   gíyè wọ́lá ọ́   mé zú áznù.
      Father our say Prep. mother our   RC   3SG FUT buy fish
      'Our father told our mother that he will buy fish.'

b.   Ọ́ kwú ní   m wọ́lá wọ́ mé rí írní.
      3SG say Prep 1SG RC   3PL FUT eat food
      'S/he told me that they will eat the food.'

c.   *Dídí   gíyè kwú ní   wọ́lá ọ́   mé zú áznù.
      Father our say Prep. RC   3SG FUT buy fish
      'Our father told our mother that he will buy fish.'

d.   ?Dídí   gíyè kwú ní   nná   gíyè
      Father our say Prep. mother our
      'Our father told our mother...'

In 8a-b, the VP harbours a V as its lexical head, PP and NP which projects into a CP. The omission of either the NP or the CP can result in ungrammatical or unacceptable constructions as in 8c and 8d respectively. The tree diagram in figure 6 illustrates the structural configuration of V + PP + NP + CP in a V-bar in Ọgba:
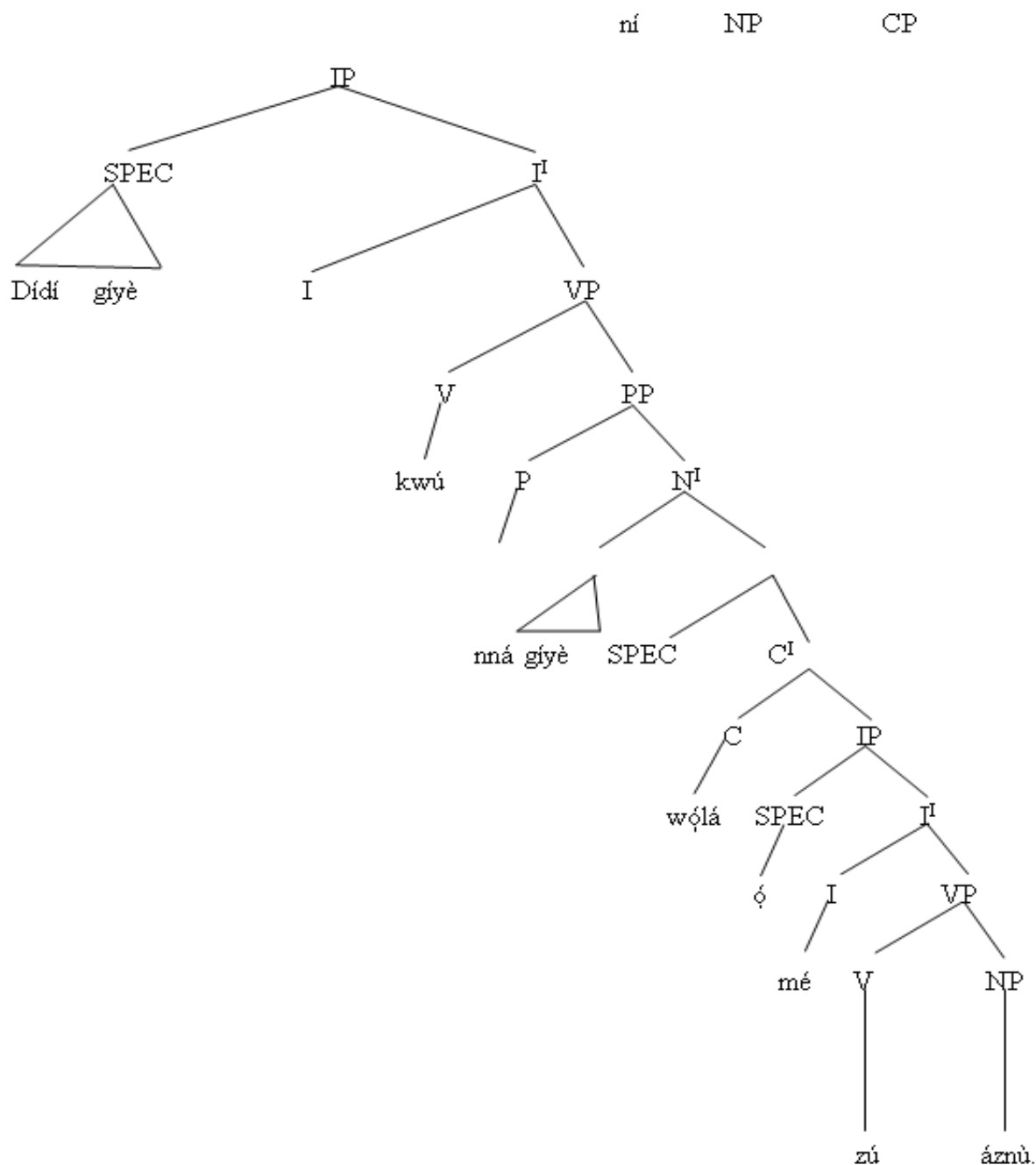
ní   NP   CP

IP
        SPEC   I¹
    Dídí   gíyè   I   VP
                                V   PP
                            kwú   P   N¹
                                    nná gíyè   SPEC   C¹
                                                    C   IP
                                                wólá   SPEC   I¹
                                                        ó   I   VP
                                                            mé   V   NP
                                                                zú   áznù.

Fig. 6: A Tree Diagram Illustrating VP $\longrightarrow$ V + PP + NP + CP in Ọgba

The tree diagram in figure 6 reveals that in Ọgba, V can govern or case-mark a PP in a V-bar. The tree also shows that the P which is the lexical head of the PP licensed the N¹ which is an intermediate category and the governor of the NP. It is observed that the P and its governee (NP) can be deleted without resulting in either change in meaning or ungrammaticality. The example in 8c is ungrammatical because of the presence of the P "ní" 'for' without the NP "ọ́ná kíyè" 'our mother'. Thus, this study posits that the PP in figure 6 is adjunct. On the other hand, the omission of the CP node can result in unacceptable construction as in 8d. This suggests that the complement of a

V in a V-bar in the language can be a CP. That is, a complement clause (subordinate clause) can function as the complement of a V. In other words, a CP can occupy the D(irect) O(bject) slot in a V-bar. Therefore, this study notes that a VP in the language may have the following structural configuration:

9.   VP ⟶ V + CP as in:

a.   Dídí   gíyè kwú wọ́lá ọ́   mé   zú áznù.
       Father our say RC   3SG FUT buy fish
       'Our father said that he will buy fish.'

The example in 9a corroborates the earlier assertion that a full fledge sentence can function as the complement of the V in Ọgba. The tree in figure 7 demonstrates the structural configuration of the CP that functions as the complement of a V in the language.
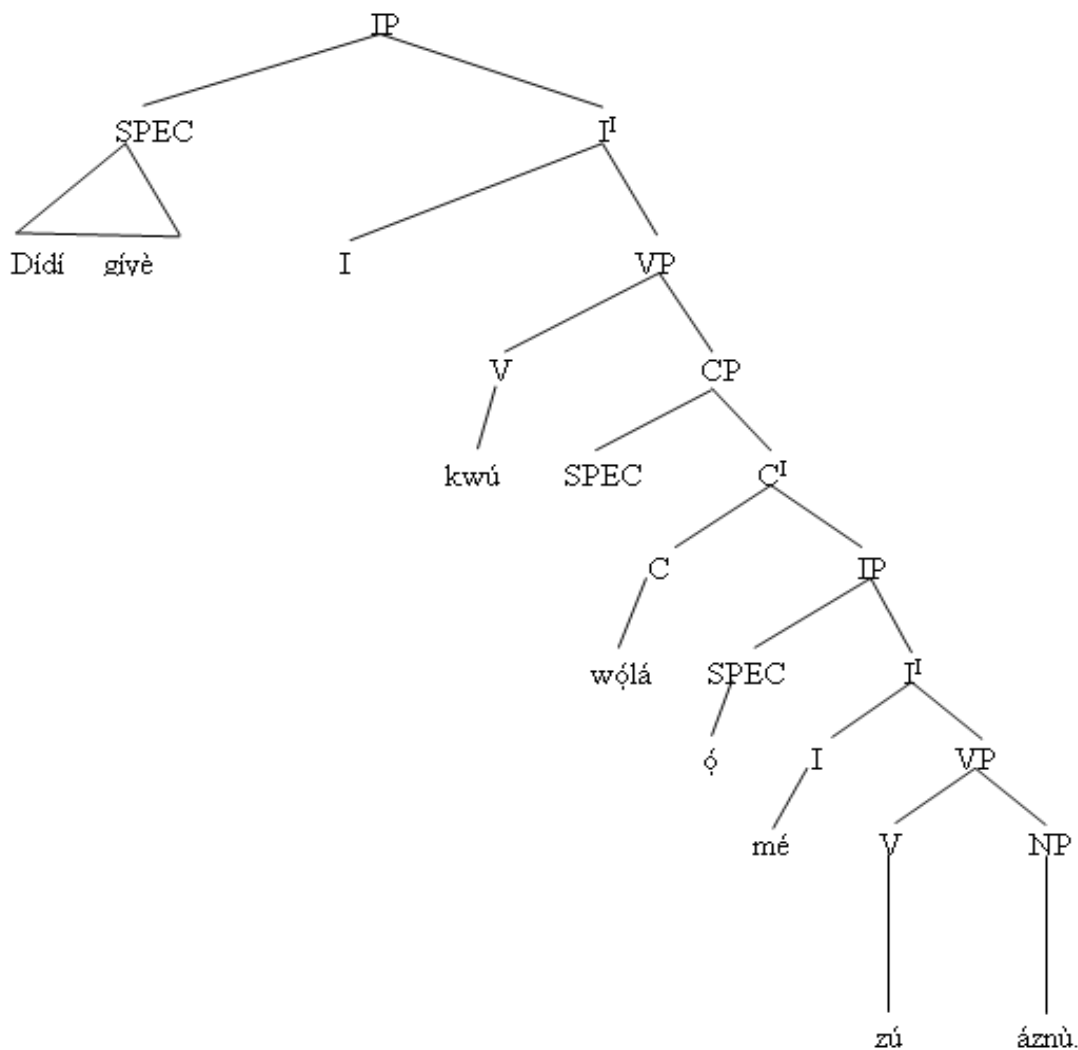

Fig. 7: A Tree Diagram Illustrating VP ⟶ V + CP in Ọgba

In figure 7, V which is the lexical head of the VP of the superordinate (matrix) clause governed or case-marked the CP while the V of complement clause or subordinate clause governed or case-marked an NP. All the constituents under the CP node function as the object of the V. This implies that the CP is the internal argument of the matrix clause.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is construed that structurally, the V is the only obligatory constituent of the VP in Ọgba. This implies that V is the head of the VP. That is, the V is the most significant grammatical element or category in a VP in the language. More so, it is observed that some verbs in the language can occupy a VP slot with or without any complement. This paper also ascertains that V can merge or combine with a single NP, double NP, an NP[I] with a PP, NP with a CP and CP alone to maximally expand or project into a VP. For that reason, this paper posits that the maximal projection or expansion of the VP in Ọgba can be represented as follows:

10.   VP $\longrightarrow$ V + NP + NP + PP + CP

The VP structure in 10 restates the earlier claim that the V is the only obligatory grammatical element in a VP in Ọgba. This is because all the other grammatical elements in bracket are optional. This supports the notion of the Principle and Parameter which states that every phrase must have a head word, which describes it, and that the head is the most important lexical category in the phrase (Priye & Nwala, 2019).

Recommendations

1.   The Ọgba scholars and custodians of language should stress emphasis on the significance of verb phrase in Ogba language and recommend for regular use of the phrase in daily communications.

2.   The learners should be made to understand that, among words classes or parts of speech, verb phrase plays a very important role in syntax and should be encouraged in communication.

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