VP-DELETION IN IGBO: A MINIMALIST APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Although the verb is the most important lexical category in the predicate slot of a sentence in many languages of the world, it can still be done away with. This is possible through the Verb Phrase Elision (VPE) mechanism, which is a situation in which a VP component of the construction is missing under some kind of identity with another VP in the antecedent clause. This is a well-known process in the English language but has never been discussed in Igbo. It is this gap that the present study wants to fill. The study reveals that under certain contexts, a linguistically incomplete structure could be grammatical and acceptable in Igbo. Certain factors that encourage and make this possible include when there is syntactic and semantic interaction between a subsequent clause and its antecedent and, making reference to the context in the understanding and interpretation of linguistic materials. Data for the study were collected through interviews, participant observation, and library information. The Minimalist Program (Chomsky, 2001) was adopted for analysis. The result shows that the elision of the verb phrase in the target construction happens under syntactic identity with an overt antecedent VP structure when the Spec of TP is filled by a subject. Following Hankamer and Sag (1976), we take VPE to be deletion of the VP at PF. The study is significant because it is beneficial to researchers, teachers and students in linguistics studies.

KEYWORDS: verb phrase, ellipsis, linguistic, minimalist program, spec TP

Introduction

Language is an amazing human phenomenon. It is a field of study that has attracted so much research in recent times. Findings by language scholars reveal that the different aspects of linguistics study like phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, etc., manifest an array of features that require deeper studies.

In the area of syntax, we note that syntactic constructions exhibit complex structures and configurations which are sometimes ambiguous and confusing. One of such complex structures is ellipsis, defined as a linguistic phenomenon whereby some parts of a sentence is left unpronounced, but whose meaning can be recovered from the context. Ellipsis is a common

phenomenon in many languages of the world. It has been attested and treated in such languages as Korean, Japanese, English, etc., but not discussed in Igbo.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, linguistic scholars have felt the need to develop the different languages of the world by describing their various components. This interest has heightened in recent times due to the danger faced by most indigenous languages which are classified as either being endangered or threatened by extinction for so many reasons.

One such sign of potential endangerment is when speakers begin to cease to use a language or use it in an increasingly reduced number of its original communicative domains and pass on this practice from one generation to another (UNESCO, 2008). Unfortunately, this is the fate of many Nigerian indigenous languages, including Igbo. Igbo is not officially listed under this group of endangered languages, but the rate at which it is being neglected (both in interpersonal communication and academic engagements) exposes it to possible endangerment.

It is in a bid to forestall this danger and strengthen the dialect so that it becomes more relevant for academic and communicative engagements that this study on VP-ellipsis in Igbo is undertaken. The paper investigates how linguistic element like the verb phrase, which ordinarily should be pronounced, is left out in a construction and still the meaning of the expression is understood.

Conceptual Study

Ellipsis is a fluid term that can be used to describe a number of communication experiences. For Merchant (2013), the term ellipsis has been applied to a wide range of phenomena across the centuries, from any situation in which words appear to be missing (in St Isidore's definition) to much narrower range of particular constructions. Thus, it is difficult to give a precise or generally accepted definition of the term as different authors understand the concept differently and define it accordingly.

However, researchers agree that ellipsis involves the omission of materials (a word, phrase or clause) from a construction the meaning of which could be recovered from context or preceding discourse. Crystal and Davy (1984) define ellipsis as omitting part of the sentence in conversational speech when their meaning is clear from the situation or verbal context.

"Ellipsis occurs when something that is structurally necessary is left unsaid" (Halliday & Hasan, 1994, p. 13). The use of the word "unsaid" implies that the elided material is "understood nevertheless" within the context. Therefore, ellipsis forces a connection – or a tie, between the point of ellipsis and another part of the text.

Ellipsis is an interesting phenomenon because it is identifiable by nothingness or absence within a bound context, usually a clause. Both speakers and writers employ ellipsis with the intention to shorten or reduce what they had said or written earlier. For Biber (1999, p. 156), "Ellipsis is the omission of elements which are precisely recoverable from the linguistic or situational context". The implication of the above definitions is that before ellipsis can take

place, there must have been other grammatical or linguistic structure, or extralinguistic context that contains the same information as the ellipted element.

Ellipsis occurs when elements are missing from the so-called surface structure. The surface structure in generative grammar refers to the level of structure reached after all transformation is done. In this regard, McShane and Marjorie (2005) connect ellipsis to syntax and suggest that the absent elements in the surface structure are expected to occupy a place in the syntactic structure of a sentence.

We understand ellipsis, generally, to be a cohesive device that helps to unify a text by economy of words because it saves a writer from unnecessary repetition of words that already have an endophoric relation in a text. Gengel (2007, p. 17) says that "elliptical structures seem to be an economy device. On the surface, a speaker does not utter materials she feels sure is already understood in the context and thus accessible to the hearer". However, in the syntactic derivation, "all considerations of economy seem to fail, as restrictions that hold in the distribution of elliptical structures language-internally and cross-linguistically demand a high sophisticated approach" (Gengel, 2007).

Following Kolokonte (2008, p. 1), we define ellipsis in this work to mean "the phenomenon where canonical sentences lack one or more syntactic constituents, whose meaning is fully interpreted by the speaker either by the use of previous linguistic material or previous discourse context". Ellipsis does not concern only written words or texts but also includes spoken language or utterances. It involves two parts of a construction: the elided structure and the antecedent element which could be a linguistic (grammatical) or discourse material. Before the application of ellipsis, it must be clear which part of the structure has to be ellipted, and ellipsis is dependent on context or previous information.

Theoretical Studies

Two major theories of ellipsis are usually fronted: the nonstructural and the structural theories. The nonstructural approaches (also called semantic approach) posit no unpronounced syntactic structure at all. That is, there is no more structure in the sentences than what is actually pronounced.

The semantic approach to ellipsis is defended by such linguists like Ginzburg and Sag (2000) and Culicover and Jackendoff (2005). For them, an ellipsis site contains no internal structure at any level of representation. Consequently, syntactic constraints are not respected in ellipsis and, therefore, "the relation governing ellipsis is a semantic rather than syntactic" (Hardt, 1993, p. ii). In short, elliptical material is base-generated empty and its meaning can simply be recovered from the antecedent clause or the previous discourse context through general mechanisms of recovery of meaning from discourse (Culicover and Jackendoff, 2005; Hardt, 1993).

The structural approach, on the other hand, claims that the syntax of an ellipsis site is in general just the same as the syntax of its non-elliptical counterpart, but subject to some kind of operation or constraint which induces non-pronunciation. Within the structural approaches, there are two main lines of argument: the null lexical element position and ordinary syntax.

Those that defend a null lexical element argue that the non-pronounced element is replaced or identified at some level of representation not relevant to the pronunciation (at LF or in some semantic/pragmatic component) LF-copying/null pro-form approaches. Those that posit null elements in the syntax come in two variants: either the null element is a single, designated terminal, as in Hardt (1993) and Lobeck (1995), or there are a plethora of null elements, as in Wasow (1972) and Ludlow (2004).

The second group posits essentially ordinary syntax, subject to some kind of deletion to render the syntax unpronounced (PF-deletion approaches). The foregoing discussion is schematised as follows.

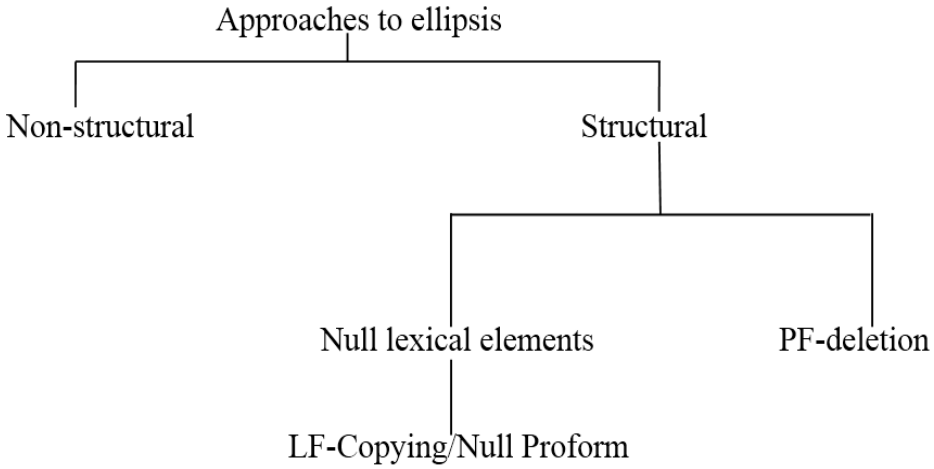

Figure 1: A schematic tree representation of the different approaches to ellipsis (Asuoha, Omego, & Isaac, 2020).

Empirical Review

Among the most commonly discussed ellipsis mechanisms is the verb phrase elision. A verb phrase consists of a main verb alone, or a main verb plus any modal and/or auxiliary verbs. The main verb always comes last in the verb phrase.

The verb phrase deletion has dominated the literature on ellipsis in the first few decades of generative grammar, especially in its English, Japanese and Korea, manifestations. Many scholars have studied this phenomenon in details, including Sag (1976); Hankamer and Sag (1976); Williams (1997); Zagona (1982); Fiengo and May (1994); Lobeck (1995); Fox (2000); and Johnson (2001), just to mention a few.

According to Hardt (1993, p. 1), the Verb Phrase ellipsis is the type of ellipsis "in which a verb phrase (VP) is left unexpressed, although it is clearly understood from context. Intuitively, it appears that the missing VP is identical to an antecedent VP, i.e. an overt VP appearing in surrounding context". Consider, for instance, the following examples in 4(a-b), where the VP is missing.

4 (a) Uche didn't leave, but Ada did.
(b) Nikky went to Paris, and Jane, too.

The example above is a clear indication that VP-ellipsis contains two parts: the antecedent and the elided structure. Potsdam (1997) captures this when he says that there is an overt VP, the *antecedent*, which substitutes interpretationally for an inaudible VP elsewhere, the target.

Generally, ellipsis is classified into two: clausal and predicate ellipsis. VP-ellipsis falls under the type of ellipsis construction usually designated as predicate ellipsis. Predicate ellipsis is "a type of ellipsis in which the main predicate of the clause is missing – often together with one or more of its internal arguments – but in which the inflectional domain and the canonical subject position are outside the scope of the ellipsis and hence remain unaffected" (van Craenenbroeck and Merchant, 2013, p. 702).

Research on ellipsis, in general or VP-ellipsis, in particular in Igbo language, is nonexistent. However, this does not in any form mean that the phenomenon does not exist among Igbo language users. On the contrary, ellipsis is a linguistic phenomenon and a communication device that is very common in Igbo linguistic repertoire and communication milieu.

It is common among Igbo interlocutors to make reference to previous discussions, ideas or materials from which the listeners easily deduce meaning. Hence, Igbo people say that "*ihe ụbọchị à gbàrà ọbịà ghaṇị*". In other words, "that thing" is a mystery to a stranger. This experience usually happens without the communicators involved being conscious or taking notice of it. The listeners are able to recover the omitted meaning (material) because it occupies a position in the previous communicative thread (i.e. in the mental reservoir of the interlocutor). This is, simply, what ellipsis (in a layman's understanding) is all about and, this form of communication is not a strange phenomenon in Igbo linguistic interactions and information sharing.

Ellipsis is called *nsepụ okwu* in the Igbo language. The term "nsepụokwu" is a compound word which comprises two main parts: *nsepụ* and *okwu*. The first part of the word "*nsepụ*" is a verbal compound lexical item, having three elements. The first element is an affix, to be precise, a high tone nasal prefix 'n'; the second element is also a high tone verb root se- 'loose', and the last part is a low tone verb -*pụ* 'out', 'remove'. It is the combination of these various parts that produces the word *nsepụ* which is translated to mean 'to leave out', 'to loosen out/from', 'to remove' or 'to delete'. The second part is a single lexical item *okwu* meaning 'word'.

Therefore, ellipsis or *nsepụ okwu* in Igbo grammar is the omission, deletion or leaving out of a word or phrase from a sentence or construction. It is important to remark that the deleted word or phrase is always understood (recoverable) from the meaning of the preceding text or context, i.e. from the environment of use or discourse.

Methodology

Fourteen competent native speakers were interviewed to provide the primary data for the research, using convenience and purposive sampling techniques. Six of them were elderly persons between 60 – 70 years of age. The remaining eight were competent Igbo language teachers in secondary and tertiary institutions. The researchers directly interviewed and listened to the informants as they responded to questions. The researchers also took time to listen to other native speakers as they used their dialect in natural uncontrolled situations. The library,

internet, other electronic media outlets, published and unpublished materials provided the secondary source. The tone marking convention used is as propounded by Green and Igwe (1963), which leaves the high tone unmarked, while the low tone is marked with the grave [̀] and the macron [̄] for down-stepped tone. We adopted the descriptive method of data presentation using interlinear morpheme-to-morpheme glossing. The most recent version of transformational generative grammar, the Minimalist Program (MP) framework proposed in Chomsky (2000) was used in data analysis because it employs fewer linguistic apparatus to construct syntactic structures. Its basic operations are centred on economy and operation merge which target movement of features relevant for convergent computation.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The verb is a lexical category in many languages of the world. It occupies a very important and central position in the sentence. Traditionally, the verb is considered as the most important word in the predicate slot of a sentence. In Igbo, a verb can change its form to reflect tense, aspect, mood and it can occur as the only element in a minimal predicate of a sentence. Emenanjo (1978:133-134) lists some features of Igbo verb to include: "It is found immediately preceding the complement(s) in the VP. It is the head of the VP as the Noun is the head of the NP. It is the only part of speech that takes affixes".

A typical simple sentence in Igbo is made up of just one clause, which may comprise of two basic constituent elements: a subject and a predicate. However, under the predicate slot, it is possible to have other elements like complement and adjunct, etc.

The data in 5(a-b) are examples of simple sentences in adjacent position. Each is composed of a single NP in the subject position and a VP, which consists of the active verb and its complement, in the predicate position.

5 (a) Uche jèrè ahịa.
Uche go.rV[1].pst market
'Uche went to the market'.

(b) Ada jèrè ahịa.
Ada go-rV.pst market.
'Ada went to the market'.

In 5(a), for example, the information is that 'Uche went to the market'. The adjacent sentence in 5(b) contains similar information that is 'Ada went to the market'. Each construction consists of two parts: the subject, which is a proper name, *Uche* and Ada, respectively and, the predicate in both cases, which is the remaining part of the constructions, *jèrè ahịa* 'went to the market'. The predicate in either case, is a verb phrase, with a verb root *ga-* 'go', which is inflected for past (i.e. simple past), while the complement is another noun, *ahịa* 'bicycle'. Furthermore, the verb in both constructions is a complex verb structure. Each is made up of a prefix n, a nasal sound and the rV- past suffix marker.

However, two simple declarative sentences can be conjoined together to form a longer stretch of expression, as the following data in (6) shows.

6. Uchè jèrè ahịa, Ada jèrè ahịa.
   Uchè go.rV.pst market, Ada prf-go-rV.pst market
   'Uchè went to the market', 'Ada went to the market'.

Usually, when one part of a simple declarative sentence is joined with another part that contains the same information or meaning, the verb phrase in the predicate slot of the second sentence is not always fully expressed or realised. In other words, while the subject member in each construction is retained, the predicate elements are normally omitted and so become silent and unpronounced.

The sentences in (6) above are well-formed and grammatically correct forms of expression in Igbo language and communication. However, they appear repetitive and clumsy. The presence of the same verb phrase in the second clause is very redundant, which makes it unacceptable. To avoid this unnecessary repetition, an element (in this case, an adverbial phrase) is employed or required which helps to bring out the same sense and meaning as the preceding (verb phrase) construction. When this happens, the two constructions will convey the same message differing only in the composition of the predicate slot.

This is illustrated with the following data in (7) and (8).

7. Ezè zụ-rụ igwè, Ada kwa [e] <*zụ-rụ igwè*>.
   Ezè buy.rV.pst bicycle, Ada, also
   Ezè bought a bicycle, Ada, too.

8. Uchè jèrè ahịa, Ada kwa [e] <*jèrè ahịa*>.
   Uchè go.rV.pst market, Ada also
   'Uchè went to the market, Ada, too.

So, to account for the VP in the predicate of the second sentence that has been elided or omitted, an adverbial particle has been added. This additional element is such that it functions to retain the same sense and information as the non-elided one as in 5(a-b) and (6) above. In this way, it serves to bring out the same meaning and convey the same intended message as the full sentence.

As would be observed from the data in examples (7) and (8) above, the first clause is a full sentence with an NP subject and a predicate. However, in the second clause, it is obvious that the entire predicate is deleted, save for the subject and one more constituent element. The non-elliptical version of (7) is as seen in 5(a-b) above. Thus, the constructions in (7) and (8), in which a VP constituent has been elided are more preferable.

Other VP-Ellipsis contexts are conceivable, but these do not exhibit properties of the additive or adverbial particle. For instance, in Yes/No interrogatives, the answer can involve the elision of the verb phrase, as shown below in (9).

9. Speaker A: John, ọ zụrụ ụgbọala?
   John RP buy-rV.pst boatland
   Did John buy a car?

Speaker B: Mba, igwe
NEG bicycle
No, bicycle.

In this example (9), we note that there is an omission or deletion of the verb phrase *zụ nụ* 'buy' in Speaker B's response. Again, in Yes/No constructions, the additive particle *kwa* is not required, which is in contrast to the additive VPE in (4) and (5) above.

There are other contexts where the verb phrase can be deleted, for example, in compound sentences. Ndimele (2003:172) says that a compound "is made up of two (or more) independent clauses of equal status". Consider the following data in (10).

10. Eze nwèrè ike i-dē ihe, mà e-cheghị m là ọ chò-rò2.
Eze has.rV.pst power to write thing, but prf-think not me that he want.rVpst.
'Eze can write something, but I don't think he wants to'.

The data in (10) is a clear example of verb phrase deletion or ellipsis in a compound sentence. The sentence is composed of two parts: the matrix clause and embedded clause. The first clause is a full sentence and contains the information understood to mean that "Eze can write something". The second part is a dependent clause in which the kernel message casts doubts on the willingness of Eze to be able to write something.

In this second clause, "but I don't think that he wants to", there is an omission of the verb component "write" from the subordinate or embedded sentence. The consultant explains that this construction is acceptable despite the elision of the VP component, *idē ihe* 'to write something' from the second clause. In her explanation, this happens if the listener was following closely the preceding discussions.

In addition, also, in some cases of ellipsis, a *pro-form* could equally be used for the substitution of the elided material as shown in the following data in (11).

11. Eze nwèrè ike i-dē hwe, mà e-cheghị m là ọ chò-rò (ime ya).
Eze has.rV.pst power to write thing, but prf-think not me that he want.rVpst do it.
'Eze can write something, but I don't think he wants to (do so)'.

In the example in (11) above, the verb phrase, *imē ya* '(to) do so', is a pro-form which is used to substitute for the VP that has been elided from the subordinate clause.

In line with the foregoing, another informant provides the following data in (12) as instance of VP elision.

12. Ada jèrè Abá là Uche n-gàrà Òwèrè.
Ada go.rV.pst Aba and Uche prf-go.rV.pst Owere.
Ada went to Aba and Uche went to Owere.

However, the coordinate construction in (12) above can be reduced to the following structure in (13).

13. Adá jèrè Ábá, Uche, Òwèrè.
    Ada go-rV.pst Aba and Uche, Owere.
    'Ada went to Aba and Uche, Owere'.

According to the data in (13) above, the verb of the second clause *jèrè* 'went' has been elided leaving behind only the goal or location, the NP 'Owere', which marks the destination in the second clause.

Going further, example (14) presents another data on VP-ellipsis in coordinate construction.

14. Ezè nà-eri nri mà Ada na-eri-kwa nri.
    Ezè be-eat.PROG food and Ada be-eat.$_{PROG}$.also food.
    'Ezè is eating and Ada is eating too'.

Nà in the phrase (*nà-eri*) is functioning as a copula to link the subject of the sentence (Eze) to the subject complement (nri). Thus, making the verb in the phrase 'is' in each case to be inflected for present continuous tense. In addition, it conveys the sense of continuity i.e. an ongoing action or activity that is taking place as the speaker speaks.

Following the deletion hypothesis in which an elliptical sentence is base generated, we observe that a sentence like (14) is base generated with a fully realised VP as in 14(a). A deletion rule is applied and as a result the VP-ellipsis in 14(b) is obtained.

14(a) Ezè nà-eri nri, mà Ada nà-eri-kwa nri.
     Ezè be-eat.PROG food and Ada be-eat.$_{PROG}$.also food.
     'Ezè is eating and Ada is eating, too'.

(b) Ezè nà-eri nri, mà Ada kwa. < nà-eri nri>
    Ezè be-eat.PROG, and Ada, too. <prf-be prf-eat.$_{PROG}$>
    'Ezè is eating, and Ada, also'.

The sentence in 14(b) has '*nà-eri nri*' (is eating food) ellipted from the second conjunct. Observe that the subject 'Ada' remains in overt syntax and is assigned a nominative case, in addition to the adverbial particle '*kwa*' (too/also).

However, the same sense and understanding can be gotten, also, if the additive particle is left out as the following data in (15) shows.

15. Ezè nà-eri nri, mà Ada. <nà-eri nri>
    Ezè be-eat.$_{PROG}$, and Ada. <prf-be prf-eat.$_{PROG}$>
    'Ezè is eating, and Ada'.

VP-ellipsis also results by substituting the coordinating conjunction with a subordinating conjunction *kama* 'but'. In this instance, again, the adverbial particle *kwa* is not required in the ellipsis clause as in (15) above. Consider the data in (16) below.

16. Ọ-bụghị naniị Uchè tufu-ru uwei ya, kamà Ngozi.
    It-be-NEG alone Uchè throw-rV.pst cloth his, but Ngozi.
    'It wasn't only Uchè that lost his cloth, but Ngozi.

Observe that in this second clause in (16), the whole items in the predicate slot have all been deleted, including the referential pronoun "*ya*". The elided VP is identical with the antecedent VP in the first clause, and the gap in the elliptic clause has only strict reading; it refers specifically to *Ngozi's* dress.

A similar situation is also obtained when the adverbial particle '*kwa*' performs the same syntactic function as the English adverb, 'too', as seen in the following data in (17).

17. Ọ-bụghị naniị Uchè tufu-ru uwei ya, kamà Ngozi, kwa.
It-be-NEG alone Uchè throw-rV.pst cloth his, but Ngozi, also
'It wasn't only Uchè that lost his cloth, but Ngozi, too'.

Analyzing VP-Ellipsis

It is evident from the different data presented above that ellipsis is a linguistic phenomenon in Igbo. The data in (7) gives a clear indication that the second clause of the sentence contains an elided material involving the deletion of a fully specified structure in the predicate slot. In the second clause, for instance, the verb phrase '*zụrụ igwè*' is left unexpressed and, therefore, totally missing. It is, thus, obvious that simple declarative sentence in adjacent construction such as the one in (7) is assumed to contain a VP elliptical structure.

Another reason to argue that what obtains in the above example is an instance of VP-ellipsis is to look at what has been omitted or elided, or better the size of the ellipsis site. This is identified here as a VP, namely, the verb *zụrụ (igwè)* 'bought (a bicycle)'. This elided element is the simple past tense of the root verb, '*zụ*'. The elision of this part of the construction agrees in every way with findings in the literature that VP-ellipsis deletes a verb-related projection.

Going further, the remnant of the ellipted VP is the subject which has an additional element, the adverb *kwa* 'too'. Kwa is an enclitic which, given its grammatical behaviour, is enlisted as a different part of speech in Igbo (Emenanjo, 1978). Enclitics can appear with possibly all parts of speech in Igbo except, with the possible exception of the preposition.

Enclitics are written together with verbs and separately with non-verbs. The enclitic *kwa* can appear both in the verbal and in the NP slots without appearing to be essential parts of these. When the enclitic *kwa* is following a verb, they are written together (see Ndimele, 2003, who suggests that *kwa* is an extensional suffix meaning 'also'), but when it is following a noun, it is written separately from it.

In the construction in (7) above, under consideration, the verb *zuru* which is inflected for past has an object complement *igwè* while the enclitic *kwa* following this VP slot is written separately. This enclitic *kwa* functions in the second clause like the English adverb 'also' or 'too', and so conveys the same idea that the verb which precedes it contains. It, at the same time, carries the same syntactic information and, of course, expresses the same meaning that is points to the same thing as the VP in the antecedent clause.

In addition, the missing VP in the second clause is identical to an antecedent VP '*zụrụ igwè*', i.e. an overt VP appearing in the preceding sentence. Thus, one of the conditions for the elision of a VP, that is the elided verb must be (syntactically) identical with another VP in the antecedent

clause, is respected or satisfied. Meanwhile, the semantic import of the antecedent verb is expressed by the additive or adverbial phrase, *kwa*, 'also'/'too', which in this case, is *zụrụ* 'bought'.

Therefore, under the PF-deletion analysis, the verb phrase in the second clause is deleted under identity (in this case, syntactic) with its antecedent. Thus, in VP-ellipsis construction in Igbo, there is an overt VP, that is the antecedent, which substitutes interpretationally for an inaudible VP elsewhere, the target.

Further observation shows that the canonical subject position is outside the scope of the ellipsis. This means that the subject and the adverbial particle moves out of the ellipsis site before deletion takes place. Again, the remnant contains an NP and an adverbial particle (or enclitic) in the predicate slot, which constitutes the ellipsis site.

Following Lobeck (1990, 1995) and Saito and Murasugi (1990) we argue that the ellipsis site in (7) is the complement of the functional category (T) and the Spec position is filled hence the deletion of the complement is allowed. Therefore, the deletion of VP is licensed (licensing condition on ellipsis will be discussed later) because the Spec TP is filled by a subject. A schema for VP-ellipsis is presented here as figure (2).

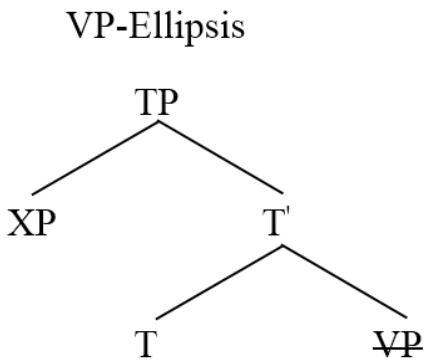

Figure 2: A tree showing that VP-ellipsis site is the complement of the functional category T.

For the purposes of this study, this type of VP-ellipsis is called Additive Verb Phrase Ellipsis. It is assumed in this study that the gap in the elliptic clause results from PF-deletion. Therefore, VP-ellipsis in Igbo requires the additive particle or the adverb *kwa* 'too' or 'also', in addition to the subject in the elliptic clause.

In line with the movement process, the remnants are extracted from the ellipsis site before ellipsis takes place and before Spell-Out. A tree diagram representing the foregoing discussion is presented in figure (3) as illustration.

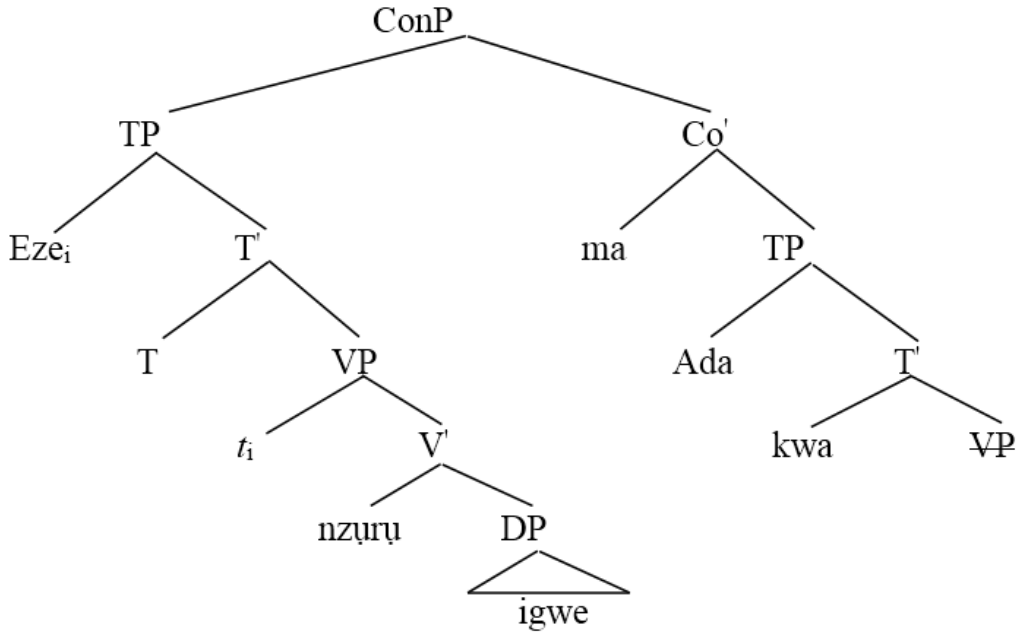

Figure 3: A sample tree diagram showing VP-ellipsis in Igbo.

It would be observed that in the tree diagram in figure (3) above, the ellipsis site is sent off to Spell-Out for non-pronunciation (Gengel 2007) when the licensor is merged. This means that to escape ellipsis, a phrase (*Ada kwa*) has to move out of the ellipsis site before the licensor is merged.

For this to be possible, a landing site has to be available in the immediate position that is higher than the ellipsis site but lower than the licensor. This condition is also met by the data in (7), above. The researchers, therefore, conclude that in Igbo, ellipsis of the verb phrase is licensed by the additive adverbial particle Vo which selects a TP complement.

In line with Lobeck (1995), the researchers further assume that Igbo allows VP-Ellipsis under syntactic identity with the first clause but this is conditioned by the existence of an adverb or a negative marker when the subject is the remnant.

Licensing

The licensing condition on ellipsis looks at the syntactic environments in which VP-Ellipsis is licensed. As already indicated, VP ellipsis is permitted only in certain syntactic environments, (i.e. when the Spec TP is filled by a subject). What this means is that even when an elided VP is identical with an antecedent VP, ellipsis is not always allowed. Looking at the following data in 18(a-b), it would be observed that ellipsis is permitted only in 18(a), but not allowed in 18(b).

18(a) John achọghị ije, mànà Mary chọrọ
John prf.want.NEG go, but Mary prf.wants to
John doesn't want to go, but Mary wants to

(b) *John achọghị ije, mànà Mary

The sentence in 18(a) is licensed because it contains the tensed verbal category *chọrọ* 'wants' which permits the elision of the VP in the predicate slot. Since the verb appears in T, it is widely assumed that the functional category T licenses an elided VP (Zagona 1982; Lobeck, 1995). On the other hand, the elision of the VP in 18(b) is not permitted, even though the elided VP is identical with the antecedent VP. The reason is due to the fact that the elided VP is not introduced by an overt verb.

Recoverability

Recoverability condition concerns the extent and way an elided VP is identical to its antecedent VP. An elided constituent must be recoverable from the context by having a salient linguistic antecedent. Put differently, there has to be morphological agreement between the antecedent VP and the inaudible VP elsewhere, the target. For example, the elliptical sentence in (19) is infelicitous when it is uttered from the blue (that is without a preceding discourse).

19. # Mary chọrọ
'Mary wants to'

It is clear that an elided VP and its antecedent have to be identical in some sense for the ellipsis site to be recoverable. Evidence from the syntactic identity condition comes from verbal morphology. For example, the elliptical sentence in (20) is ill-formed, even if an elided VP is semantically identical with the antecedent.

20. *Mary bụ ezi onye nkụzi, John ga-abụ kwa
Mary is good person teacher, John will be, also
Mary is a good teacher, John will be, too

If the VP is morphologically identical with its antecedent, VP ellipsis is well-formed as the data in (21) demonstrates.

21. Mary ga-abụ ezi onye nkụzi, John ga-abụ kwa
Mary will be good person teacher, John will be, also
Mary will be a good teacher, John will be, too

Therefore, the second condition requires that there be an antecedent that is salient and fits sufficiently well into the ellipsis site.

Conclusion

This paper gave an account of VP-ellipsis in Igbo whereby the verb phrase is left out from a sentence, but the meaning of which is recoverable from the preceding VP constituent in same construction. Adopting the Minimalist Program (Chomsky, 2000) in the analysis of data, the paper observed that the elision of the verb phrase component is a linguistic as well as grammatical mechanism in Igbo communication interaction. Ellipsis of the verb phrase in the dialect is licensed by the additive adverbial particle Vo which selects a TP complement and takes place when the Spec TP is filled by a subject. The elided verb is syntactically identical to an antecedent VP in the same construction. However, the remnant, the subject, has an additional element, the adverbial particle, *kwa* 'also/too', which functions to convey the same

meaning as the non-elided VP. The paper, therefore, concludes that VP-ellipsis is attested in Igbo as it is found in some other languages of the world.

Recommendation

Given the syntactic affinity between the subject and the predicate-VP in sentence structure, the study recommended that feature researchers should take up the investigation of subject-ellipsis in Igbo drawing on evidence from the pro-drop and null subject phenomenon in other languages.

Abbreviations

CoP = conjunction phrase; NEG = negation; PF = phonological form; Pfr = prefix; Pst = past; PROG = progressive; rV = verb root; Suf = suffix; TP = tense phrase.

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