

The Syntax of Determiner Phrase in Igbo

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Abstract: The paper analyses the syntax of Igbo Determiner phrase (DP). Even though there are few works on “D” category, some elements of Igbo DP have not received a comprehensive study syntactically. The study through the frame work of X-bar theory and the parametric method of data analysis reveals that DP in Igbo is both overtly and covertly marked. The elements of DP in the Igbo language displays a two-way ordering. Some elements adjoin rightwards while others such as ‘o`utu (many), ájo (bad), imèrimè (many) and ótù (ótu) occur as left adjuncts of the N. A Noun can raise from its position in the deep structure to juxta-posed with ‘ufodu rightwardly. ‘Ótù, ájo, imirikiti, imerime and okoto’ (some) are quantifier (Q) determiners that cannot adjoin rightwards both at higher and lower DP constructions. They head their own projection. ‘Ótù’ is in complementary distribution with the English indefinite article ‘a’ and ‘an’. The Igbo determiner (DET) ‘ahu’ has both back-pointing and forward references. Pragmatically, when it back-points, ‘ahu’ stands in complementarity with the English definite determiner ‘the’.

Key words: Igbo • Determiner Phrase • X-bar theory • Syntax

INTRODUCTION

Igbo is a major language in Nigeria that has millions of people speaking it as a first language. Igbo is a tone language with three basic tones: high, low and the downstep. It is a member of Niger-Congo language, which belongs to West Benue-Congo family [1]. The language consists of many dialects which are mutually intelligible. Linguistically, the language is classified into groups of dialects based on the common features associated with the major geographical areas in which varieties of Igbo language are spoken in Nigeria. [2], categorized the language into eight groups viz: West Niger, East Niger, East Central, Cross River, South Eastern, North-Eastern, South-Western and Northern groups of dialects. Even though, the language has grown with so many dialects, the study will not discuss on any of the varieties, rather it will use the Standard form, that is, the variety owned and spoken by all yet not easily spoken in private conversations or other informal discussions.

Syntax is the study of patterns that govern the way in which words are combined to form phrases, sentences or clauses. It can be seen as constructive rules according

to which words are combined into sentences. When a language displays a head last order, the head containing the phrase follows its complements, but when it is head initial the head precedes its complements. Some languages combine the features of head initial and head last in the relationship between the head and its complements. The study investigates the syntax of Igbo DP.

The objective of this study is to give DP its rightful place in the study of the syntax of Igbo language. Since the determiner is part and parcel of the projections of the syntactic structure of the Igbo language; its nature and syntactic ramifications must be carefully studied and recorded.

Methodology: The researchers are native speakers of the language and relied majorly on their intuitive knowledge on the subject matter. They also employed the method of direct observation to collect factual information about the syntactic ordering of DP elements in Igbo constructions. This method is considered appropriate because it would enable the researchers to observe other native speakers as they use DP elements in sentence generation in an informal

environment. For the secondary source, data were collected from the libraries based on the materials related to the field of study. The internet is another source of data for the study, though not much came from the source.

Theoretical Explication: A phrase is a sequence of words joined together following the rules of the grammar of a language. Phrases are named after a class of word which has a primary as well as obligatory function within it. The obligatory element (the head) can stand for the whole construction. [3] observes that “each category has a head which is both obligatory in the construction and which characterizes the structure as a whole”. The DET in the traditional grammar are grouped under functional categories and are not allowed to project into phrases [4] [5-8]. The alternative proposal of [9], is that determiners are DP heads that take NP as a complement just as types of syntactic constituents that have a nominal [10] in refining the phrase structure rules advocated for extension of X-bar theory. He proposed a DP where specifier position will be used to mark a particular grammatical function: that of subjects. In the light of this postulation he claims that the NP instead, is the complement to the Det head. Following this line of thought, the proposal therefore posits that the traditional grammar structural representation of noun phrases found in generative grammar have been faulted to be perfect both theoretically and empirically. Consider Fig. 1 below

The above structure can pass as a simple noun phrase but the reason for [10] observation lies in the difficulty that may arise in a situation where multiple prenominal elements have just a single specifier node. For instance, when there is the possibility of occurrence of many determiner elements that postpones a single Noun. It poses a problem in relation to a well-formed structural representation. The construction below for instance, cannot pass for a clear and straightforward structural representation-

. “thesefewcans”

His assertion is that a functional category such as Determiner at its maximal projection is considered as a higher projection which should properly embed a noun phrase as a lower projection. This hypothesis for Abney is suitable for explanatory device that involves several semantic and syntactic co-existence between noun phrases and clauses, such allows the full range of prenominal elements to be accommodated in structures in the standard X-bar theory as illustrated in Fig 2:

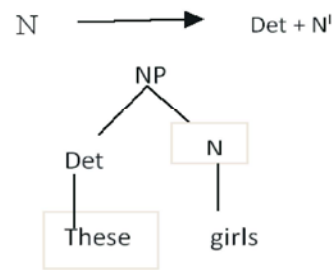


Fig. 1.

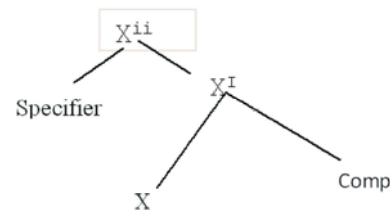


Fig. 2.

The X-Bar syntax frame above places the DP as the extended projection of N, as the CP is the extended projection of V. According to [9] and [8], both the Det and Comp turn their complements into arguments which embed some related functional categories that mediate between the lexical head (N or V) and the highest functional category (D or C). The presence of these functional categories provides us with the extra positions needed to represent all the prenominal elements in the DP such that the phrase in ‘2’ above (these few men) can be properly represented in the structure as below:

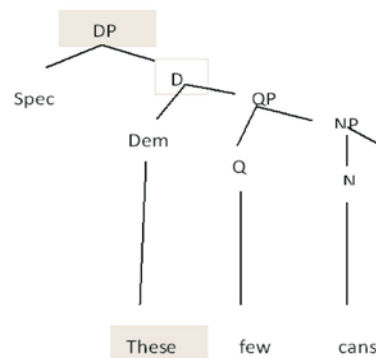


Fig. 3

The above explication shows how X bar model empowers functional elements like Det to project to its maximal. It is pertinent to note that the model provides extra node positions for the elements that are prenominal in a construction.

In our earlier study, we discussed the concept and the elements of DP in languages and particularly in Igbo,-

[11]. DP is a separate category different in function and behaviour from other syntactic categories. It is a functional phrase which consists of determiner elements. See [3, 12-15]. The focus of our study is to examine the syntax of DP in Igbo language.

Empirical Study: Word order topology varies from language to language. Many languages have pre and post noun modifiers of different categorizations. [7] observes that in English articles, the determiner head takes an NP as its complement and by so doing specifies its reference type and thus decides the referent of the NP in discourse. [8] says that in Idoma, the NP is rarely pre-modified, very few adjectives, determiners and indefinite pronouns can occur before the head noun. The pronominal modifiers in Idoma include indefinite quantifiers- *óhí* (some), *àlèwà* (many), *èjè njè*(all), *údúdí* (all), attributive adjectives and indefinite pronoun. Below are her examples:

- 4a. *òdúdí áche nò wa à hòkónú tochè*
Quant people-Pl Nom that come the cut-mouth to-the
sg-NOM
'Everyone/body who came greeted the chief'
óhí kú à wà
Indef-quant of Nom Pl the come
'Some of the children came'
b. *Èjè njèàno à me*
Quant oil the finish
All the oil is finished.

It is clear that languages such as English, Japanese and Korean etc, display a head last order because the head containing the phrase follows its complements- [10]. Other languages such as Yoruba, Chinese, Batonu, is head initial because the head precedes its complements while a language like Efik combines the features of head initial and head last in the relationship between the head and its complements.

Willson (1998) [11] observes that "the word order in Marshallese determiner phrases is unusual when considered against the word order in Marshallese sentences. She says that most sentences have an SVO syntactic order which suggest that Marshallese is a head initial language but DPs seem to have a complement-head order that makes the language appear as head final. The following are her illustrations:

- 5a *pinjel eo* "the pencil"
pencil the
b *leddik ro* "the girls"
girl the PL

- c. *uni ki rura* "the/that beautiful house" house that
beautiful man one

[8], reasons that the possible explanation for the head initial word order of Marshallese complementizer, prepositional and noun phrases is that the Marshallese DP is derived and that their DP syntactic structure can be accounted for by movement of the NP from a complement position to the specifier of DP.

[12], observes that, non-qualifying adjectives in French introduce a noun and may determine or specify it at the same time while qualifying adjectives have the optionality of either preposing or postposing a noun in the process of modification. [6] opines that determiners postpose the nounin [6] observe that Javanese and Madurese determiner phrases display an array of possibilities in ordering of their internal constituents. In both languages, numbers and quantifiers can both precede and follow head nouns.

[11] notes that most Nigerian languages like Igala, Yoruba, Tiv, etc., behave like Marshallese with respect to the arrangement of their determiners. Her finding is that these Nigerian languages' determiners are post posed before the head. Her instances from the three Nigerian languages are depicted below:

- Igala
6 *a uni ki rura* "the/that beautiful house"
house that beautiful
b *one onemele*
somebody original "nice person"
c *I yale ule yeye.*
he/she/it pres walk walk slowly "He/she/it
walks slowly".
Yoruba
7 *a ile dara dara noo*
house beautiful that "the/that beautiful house"
b *ikan ninu awon ile re*
each amongst all house his "each/every of his
house"
c *gbogbo ile noo*
all house that
"all those houses"
Tiv
8 *a kpatema la*
cat that "the cat"
b. *or mom*
man one "one man"

The review looked at DP ordering in some languages, the study therefore, sets to investigate the syntactic ordering of Igbo DP elements in a construction through the X-bar model. With the use of parametric method of analysis, we shall analyse the syntax of DP in Igbo with reference to the relationship between the head and other internal constituents. The relevant X... rules that can generate these constituents will specify the ordering of elements within the entire phrase. In its contribution to the field of linguistics, the work will guide the linguists of other languages in terms of well-formedness in ordering of constituents as well as provide data for comparison between DP occurrence in Igbo and other languages.

The syntax of DP in Igbo

Demonstratives in Igbo DP: Demonstratives (Dem) in Igbo have determiner function and constitute rich source of Igbo DP. See Emenanjo (1978), Ogbalu (1982) Mbah (2006:111) Uzoigwe (2011:7), Obiamalu (2011:520) and Nweze (2013) for demonstratives in Igbo. We shall discuss their syntactic occurrence for the same function of identity and referentiality of items as follows:

- 9a. Mbeáhu (nwuru)
Nom Dem pst die
Tortoise that pst die
That tortoise(died)
- b) Akpááhu/ Akpà rídi'áhu/ Akpà áhugà
Nom Dem/Nom deictic pro Dem/Nom Dem clitic (pl)
Bag that/bag those that / those bags
That bag/those bags/those bags
- c) Elékéré à
Nom Dem
Clock this
This clock

The demonstratives occupy rightward position in Igbo. The noun post poses it but this does not mean it is lower in the structure. Although N right- adjoins the Det, 'áhu', it is still the head of the functional category. Igbo operates complement- head order as it deviates from the universal grammatical form. Following Kayne [15], observes that "Since Igbo does not show any form of agreement morphology between the noun and the associated functional category, the NP complement moves to the Spec position in surface syntax giving rise to the C-H order". This implies that the Det head takes an NP as its specifier. Structurally, 3a is represented thus:

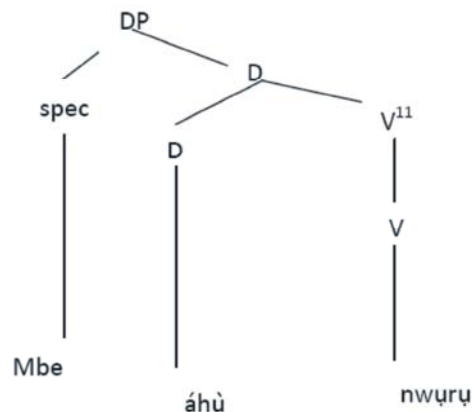


Fig. 4:

Deixis in Igbo DP: Deictic elements in Igbo are expressed through pronouns (m/mu, gi, i/i, o, o, anyi, ha, ya na unu). [2], postulates that demonstrative pronouns and adverbs of place are used to mark deictic expressions in Igbo. Deictic elements also referred to as personal deixis are part of Igbo DP. See [3, 7, 16]. We present their syntactic occurrences in the constructions below:

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| 10a. Akwà rídi' áhu | b. Akwà Oché rídi' à |
| Nom Dem | Nom Dem |
| Cloth those | Cloth these |
| Those clothes | These clothes |

Observe that the spatial demonstratives in Igbo adjoin rightwards. It preposes the nominal elements

Quant (ifiers) in DP: Quant elements in Igbo include u'fodu, o'tutu, o'koto, dum, niíle, ncha, and imerime. In Igbo, some of the elements adjoin leftward while others adjoin rightwards. Quant such as dum, niíle otutu, ufodu and ncha adjoin rightwards to pre-pose the noun as in the examples below: niíle íle

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 11a. Nwókē niíle | b) Anyi ncha | (e) otutu efere |
| Nom quant | Nom (pro) | |
| | quatNom quant | |
| man all | We/us all | plates many |
| All men | All of us | many plates |
| d. útú'fodu | | |
| b. Ochédúm | Nom quant | |
| Nom quant | Mat some | |
| Chair all | Some mats | |
| All chairs/seats | | |
| Mmadu ncha-All people/every person | | |

As can be observed in the above examples, while 'niile, o'koto, dum and ncha cannot in any construction adjoin leftward; they strictly obey the positioning of modifiers after the noun in Igbo, the element such as u'fodu can raise to the left of N, that is, having the capability of juxta posing the N without a change in the meaning of the construction as in '12' below:

- 12 a. éwúu'fodu
 Nom quant
 Goat many
 Many goats
 b. u'fodu éwú
 quant Nom
 some goat
 Some goats

This led [14], to contend that in Igbo, "some quantifiers agree with the structure of the English language where the modifiers are positioned before the noun." This implies that, there could be exceptions to rules aiding the feature of flexibility and creativity in languages. These forms can be said to be used before and after their nouns.

Imerime has the same semantic value with 'o'tutu. It is a quat constituent that start in the deep structure as a left adjunct of N. It is consistently left peripheral. Consider '8' below

- 13 a. Imèrimèmmádu`
 quant Nom
 many people
 b. *MmaduImèrimè

The phrase in '8b' is ungrammatical. It cannot pass for an acceptable Igbo construction.

Imèrimè follows the universal grammatical form in terms of occurrence and therefore consistent with the X-bar principle that assumes a functional element to head its projection, stand higher in the structure and have scope over the NP which it c-commands. From the explication so far, it is evident that some DP elements in Igbo operate Head-Comp (H-C) order, while others operate Spec- Head-Comp (S-H-C) order. When the later becomes the case, the comp to the 'DP' moves to the Spec position in surface syntax to generate the C-H order. See '11&12' above. As can be observed, constructions '12' show two-way orderings for Igbo DP.

Imerime cannot co-occur with other quant elements. It closes the nominal completely such that no other DP element can be hosted in-between it and the N. See phrases '9' below:

- *Imèrimè u'fodu oche (many some seats)
 *Imèrimè dùm oche (many all seats)
 *Imèrimè niile, *Imerime ncha

The pronominal quant does not allow a numeral determiner in between it and the N as in the instances below:

14. *Imèrimèn` irí áto mmadu biara
 Quant Num Nom pst come
 Many thirty person/people pst come
 Many thirty persons/people came

The correct word ordering for sentence '10' above is 'Imerime mmadu iri ato biara' - Many, up to thirty persons came. Its occurrence with ordinal number is exemplified in '10b,

- b. Imèrimèu`lo áno
 Quant house Num (ordinal)
 Many fourth houses

On the co-occurrence of determiners in Igbo, [3] states that the following are syntactic rules that govern the co-occurrence and arrangement of two or more determiners in a single phrase:

- 15a) two pronouns cannot co-occur contiguously within an S-domain.
 b) the quantifier is always final within an N structure.
 c) two quantifiers cannot co-occur as complements of the same head.

This study does not completely pattern with Mbah in rule 'b and c' above (see 12a&b) above

'Dum and niile' whose semantic value is 'all', co-occur in the language though their occurrence are not very regular. Example:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 16a. Akwà dùm niile
Nom quant quant
clothe all all
All clothes/the clothes | b. Akpàniile dùm
Nom quant quant
bag all all
All bags/the bags |
|---|---|

The above shows that there is no hierarchical order between the quant elements. Any of them can dominate the other.

Apart from 'dum and niile' other quantifiers do not co-occur in a single phrase. The ungrammaticality of co-occurrence of other quant elements is shown in '12' below:

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 17a. *ufoduotutu oche | *(some many chairs) |
| b. *otutu dum akwukwo | *(some all books) |
| c. *Imerime ufoduakwa | *(many some clothes) |

Possessives/Genitives in Igbo DP: We disagree with [3] that because Igbo is head initial, 'Otu and 'ájo' are DP elements which are attributive to the head(noun) and as such cannot head their projection.

[14] observes that the Igbo language structure seems to agree with the structure of the English language as it relates to the numeral determiner ótù. 'Ótù' is pre-posed before the noun. Moreover, if we use the tool of syntagmatic relationship which may exist between numerals and nouns as below:

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| 18a. Ugwu atod. * ugwu ótù | |
| Hill three (three hills) | hill one |
| b. Oke ise | e.* oke ótù |
| c. Akwa asaa | f. *akwa ótù |

We observe that the other numerals occur within the same syntactic slot (rightward adjoin) of the nouns though not within the same phrase; they make possible substitute and exhibit paradigmatic relationship but all the phrases in '18d-f' are ungrammatical. The ungrammaticality is attributed to the Det element (ótù) adjoining rightward to the NP. Ótù' in Igbo cannot occur word final in both higher and lower DP. [13], contends that the numeral one (ótù) can head DP projection as well as prepose a noun. The NPs are taken to be complement of the Det head 'otu'. Following [5, 9, 8] etc. 'Ajo andótù' as Det elements head their projection. The possible interpretation here is that the DP in Igbo displays two orderings and that 'ótù' has both nominal and determiner function. We wish to state that the right or left peripheral adjunct of DP depends on the elements of DP in the language. In Igbo, ajo, ótù and nke are DP elements. There is no sense in accepting the rest of the numerals as Det element and reject 'ótù' as one. Ótù and the rest of numerals complements each other, while ótù occur word initial, the rest occur word final. If ótù', a numeral Det in Igbo is juxtaposed to occupy the left peripheral position (D), it remains a Det not a noun.

Ordinal numbers notes [14], maintain positions after the head word as seen in examples below:

- 19a. Onye nke ato- person that is three- *third person
- b. Onye nke mbu - person first- *first person
- c. Third person- at onye - *onye nke ato
- d. First person- mbu onye- *onye mbu.

Summary of the Findings and Conclusion

The work studied the syntax of Igbo DP. In the course of the study, it reveals that the demonstratives occupy rightward position in Igbo. The noun post poses it but this does not mean it is lower in the structure; 'ahu' is the head of the functional category even though N right- adjoins the D. Igbo operates both complement-head and head complement order as it deviates from the universal grammatical form. Quant elements such as dum, niile and ncha prepose the noun; this category of quant cannot in any situation adjoin leftward. 'ò'tutu, u'fodu and imerime are quant that start in the deep structure as a left adjunct of N. 'Ufodu has the capability of juxtaposing the N. Imerime/imirikiti and ò'kotoare consistently left peripheral. The syntax of the Num determiners is such that the cardinal Num det adjoin rightwards with the exception of 'ótù' while the ordinal Num det occur after the head word.

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