

Structure of the Gokana Verb Phrase: A Principles and Parameters Analysis

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Annotation: This paper described the structure of the verb phrase in Gokana within the framework of Principles and Parameters Theory. The study examined the structure, types and linear order of constituents within the Gokana verb phrase. The study found that the Gokana VP has an abstract SPEC V-bar which serves as a landing site for moved adjuncts from post verbal position to pre verbal position of the Gokana clause. The paper identified the specifier, complement and adjunct as the basic constituents of the verb phrase in Gokana. The paper noted that while complements are obligatory and tightly woven into the structure of the verb with respect to sub-categorization facts of the verb, adjuncts and specifiers are non-obligatory in the canonical structure of the Gokana verb phrase. Thus, the Gokana VP can sometimes occur without specifiers, adjuncts and complements in surface syntax. The study noted that the verb is the head of the Gokana verb phrase. The study identified five subtypes of complements and six subtypes of adjuncts in the Gokana VP. The paper claimed that there is a severe semantic constraint on the linear sequence of adjuncts and recommended a detailed investigation of the order of adjuncts in the Gokana verb phrase.

Key words: Gokana, Principles and Parameters Analysis, Specifiers, Complements, Adjuncts, Linear Sequence, Sub-Categorization, Landing Site and Verb Phrase.

INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to provide an objective and principled description of the Verb Phrase in Gokana clause structure with insights from the Principles and Parameters Theory. Gokana is spoken in Gokana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria by approximately 200,000 people. It is closely related to Baan, Eleme, Tee and Kana. These Languages form a genetic unity and (Williamson & Blench 2000:33) classify them in Delta - Cross of Cross River within the Bantoid – Cross of the East Benue - Congo branch of Benue – Congo.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher collected data from fluent native speakers of Gokana with the help of field assistants. The researcher also relied on his intuition as a native speaker of the language but where any given set of data contradicted his intuition, direct oral interview was used to elicit comparative data from other native speakers of the language. Secondary sources of data such as texts and library materials were also utilized. These data were analyzed within the framework of Principles and Parameters Theory.

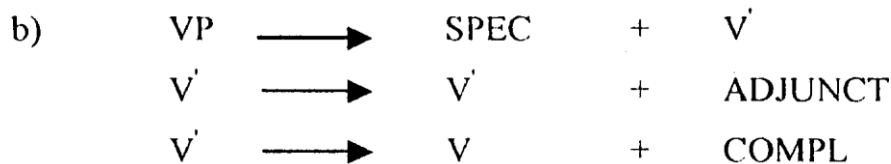
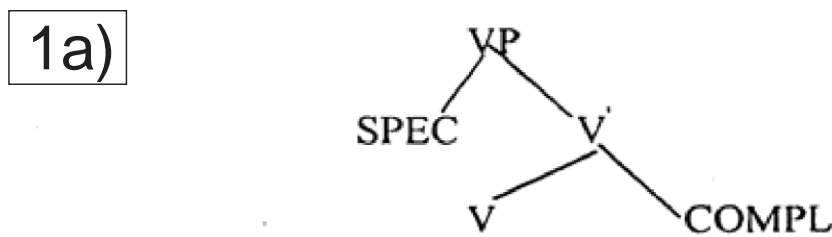
DEFINING THE VERB PHRASE

A number of studies, Ndimele (1999), Isaac (1995), Fromkin and Rodman (2000), Finegan (1994), Radford (1988) and Jackendoff (1977a) agree that the verb phrase is one of the basic syntactic categories that is universally present in all languages. Ndimele (1999:119) asserts that the VP is structurally the maximal projection of the verb. He claims that other grammatical units such as the Noun Phrase, Prepositional Phrase, Adjectival Phrase and Adverbial Phrase can combine with the verb to form the Verb Phrase. There is a consensus of opinion in the Principles and Parameters Theory that a VP must obligatorily contain a verb as its head element. Jackendoff (1977a) argues

that sometimes the verb may take an obligatory complement. He claims that the lexical properties of the head of a phrase determines the type of complement that co-occurs with it. Jackendoff (1977) further claims that the V and its complement together form a V-bar constituent which can be expanded into a V-double bar by the addition of specifiers. Radford (1988) argues that adjuncts are optional elements of the VP. He makes a distinction between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ post modifiers within the VP. He claims that the internal post modifiers are more closely connected to the V. The internal post modifiers are classified as complements while the external post modifiers are classified as adjuncts. Thus, Isaac (1995:119) notes that by function, the dependents of the VP can be subsumed into two main types: complements and adjuncts. But there appears to be a consensus of opinion among scholars of X-bar syntax that the VP contains a head, specifier, complement and adjunct. On the directionality of the linear sequence of the VP. Finegan (1994:238) asserts that the modifying element follows the verb in Verb-initial languages while the modifying element precedes the verb in Verb-final languages.

STRUCTURE OF THE VERB PHRASE IN GOKANA

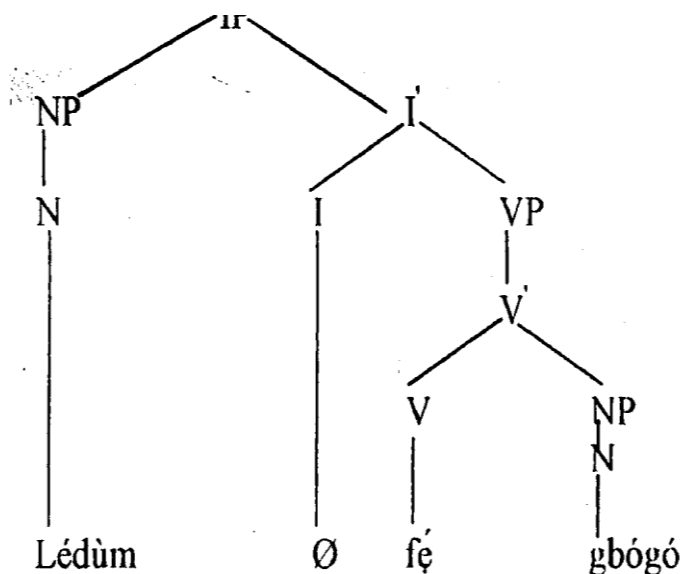
In this subsection, the internal configuration of the Gokana VP is discussed. Schematically, Gokana VPs are formed according to the following format:



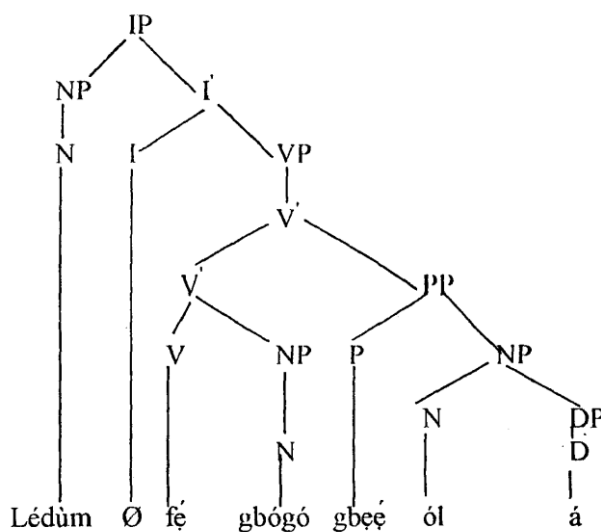
A complement combines with V to form V. An adjunct (PP or ADVP) combines with a V to form a higher V'. Hence a V projection may contain several V-nodes. The specifier combines with V' to form VP. VP is the maximal projection of V.

Exmples:

- 2a) Lédüm fe gbógo [Complement + V —* V]
 PN kill dog
 ‘Ledum killed a dog’

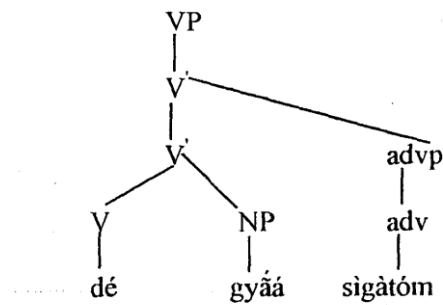


- b) Ledum fe gbOgó gbcö ól a [Adjunct + V → V^I]
 PN kill dog at farm the
 ‘Ledum killed a dog at the farm’

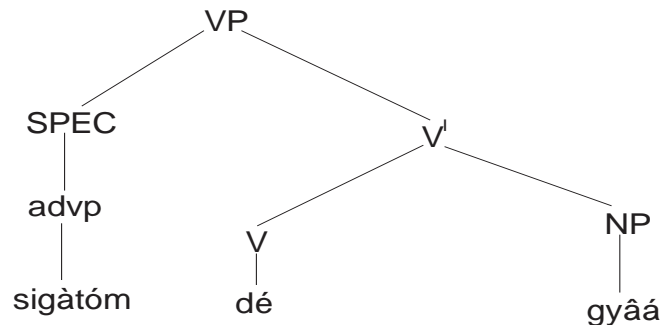


It is reasonable to point out that usually there may be no overt specifier in the VP of a given sentence (cf Haegeman 1994:93). The SPEC-V is a theoretical provision (landing site) for moved adjuncts. Compare (3a) and (3b):

- 3 a) dé gyâá sigátóm
 eat food some time
 ‘eat sometimes’



- b) sigátóm dé gyâá
 some time eat food
 'eat sometimes'



Observe that the VP structure in (3b) corresponds to the structure in (1a) but in (2), the SPEC node is pruned.

Finally, it is possible that a VP simply dominates a verb and that there are no specifiers, adjuncts or complements. This is illustrated in (4):

(4):

- bà gé dú
 they DR come
 'They are coming'



CONSTITUENTS OF THE VERB PHRASE

In this subsection, the various constituents of the Gokana Verb Phrase are to be discussed in some detail.

COMPLEMENTS

Crystal (1997:67) defines complement as:

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“A term used in the analysis of grammatical function, to refer to a major constituent of clause or sentence structure, traditionally associated with ‘completing’ the action specified by the verb”.

The obligatory status of a complement depends on the argument structure of the verb. Two-place verbs do obligatorily require complements. By ‘obligatory’ we mean that deleting the complement yields ungrammaticality or else a significant change in the meaning of the verb.

Examples:

5a) bà bom a nvin
 they beat his child

‘They flogged his child’

b) * bà bom
 they beat
 * they flogged

(5a) is grammatical because it has a complement, but (5b) is ungrammatical because it lacks a complement. The absence of a complement in (5b) violates the argument structure of the verb bom ‘flog’.

TYPES OF COMPLEMENTS

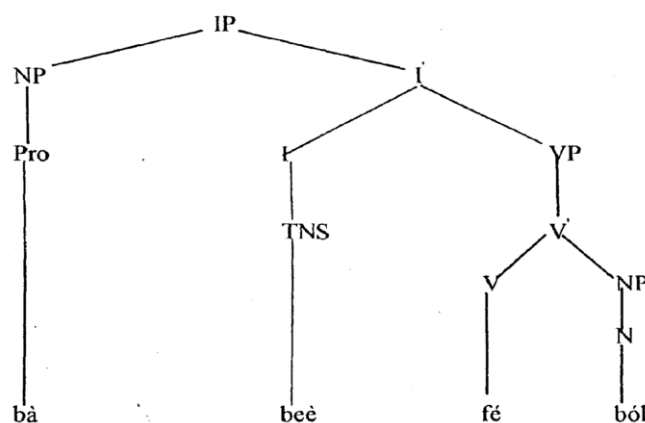
In Gokana, the following types of complements occur.

OBJECT COMPLEMENT

An object complement occurs in a two place simple sentence it is the internal argument and it is assigned the patient theta role.

Examples:

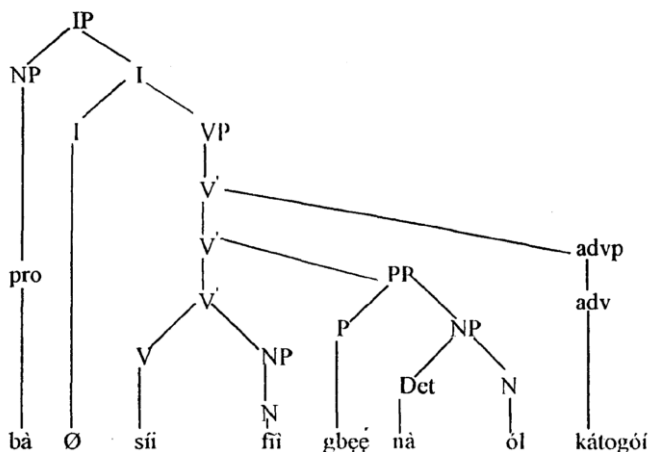
6) bà beé fé ból
 they PST kill goat
 ‘They killed a goat’



In a construction where there are several V-bars, the object complement combines with the V to form the lowest V¹ Projection, as in 7:

7)

Ba sii fii gbee na ol katogoi
 they caught rat at my farm now
 ‘They caught a rat in my farm just now’



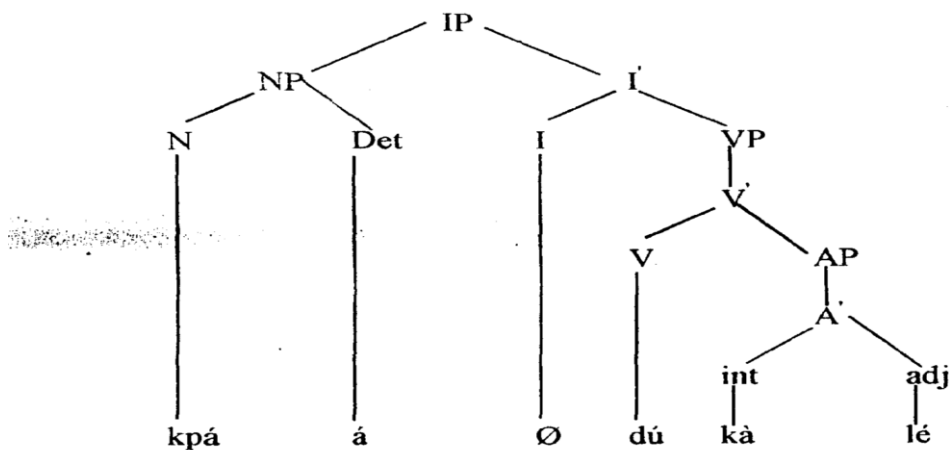
The complement that combines with the V to form Ibmi the lowest V' is obligatory, while the other elements that enter into construction with the V to form the intermediate V-bars are optional elements within the VP structure.

ADJECTIVAL COMPLEMENT

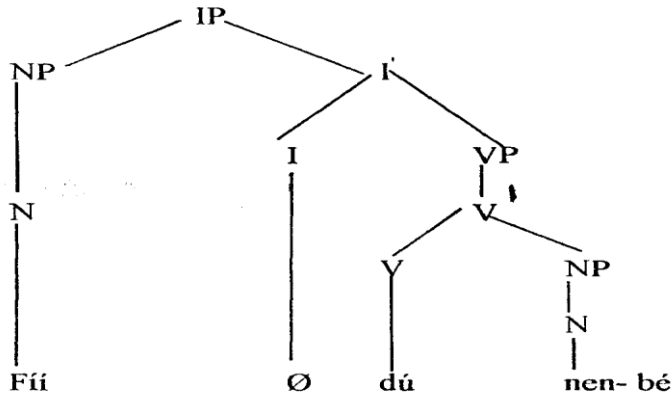
The adjectival complement only occurs in constructions with the copula verb ‘be’. Any construction containing an adjectival complement involves just a single argument. The issue of differentiating semantic roles does not arise. The adjectival complement is not an object; it characteristically denotes some property that is predicated of the person(s) or thing(s) referred to by the subject. The most typical adjectival complements recognized in the linguistic literature are adjectival phrases, but noun phrases also function as adjectival complements in Gokana.

Examples:

8a) kpá a dü kà lé
 book the be very good
 ‘The book is very interesting’



- b) Fii du nen - be
 PN be person fight
 ‘Fii is a soldier’



Observe that in (8a), the adjectival complement is an adjectival phrase, while in (8b) it is a noun phrase. But unlike the noun phrase in the VP structure in (7), the noun phrase of the VP in (8b) cannot be assigned a patient 0-role. It is only obligatory in the VP structure because it denotes some property that is predicated of the person referred to by the subject. Hence, it combines with the V to form the V^I.

ADVERBIAL COMPLEMENTS

Although adverbials mostly perform adjunct functions, they are treated as complements in Gokana whenever they occur in a position immediately after the verb (i.e. when they combine with the V to form the V^I), such that their deletion affects the grammaticality of the construction.

Examples:

- 9a) a bā [mm to a]
 she enter in house the
 ‘She entered into the house’

- b) boôna – tô a di [boo taátóm]
 group stay the be on three work
 ‘The meeting is at 3 0’ clock’

The obligatory nature of the bracketed phrases in the context in which they occur in (9a-b) justifies their being assigned the grammatical function of complementation. If the bracketed constituents are deleted, the constructions in which they occur will be ungrammatical, as seen in (10a-b).

- 10a) * a bā
 he enter
- b) * boônà - tô a di
 group stay the be

A comparison of (10a-b) with (11a-b) lends empirical support to the claim that the underlined constituents in (9a-b) are in complement function.

11a) a sere gyaa a [mm to a]
 she keep fish the in house the

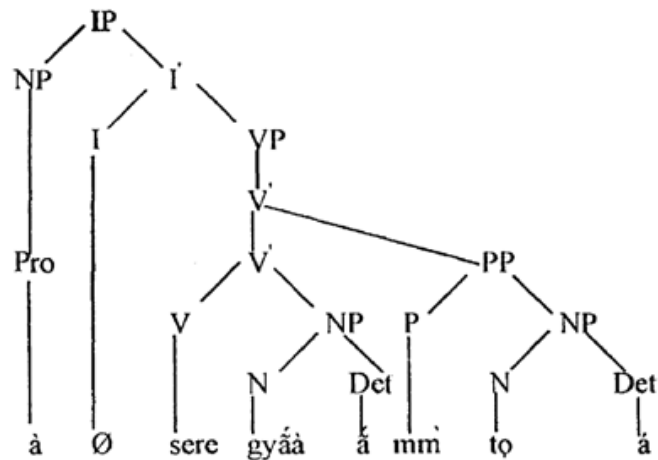
‘She kept the fish in the house’

b) bà dé gyáá [boo taátom]
 they eat food on three work

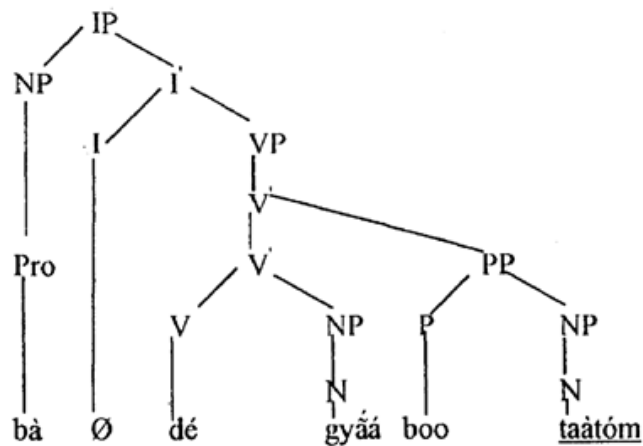
‘They ate the food by 3 o’clock’

Notice that the underlined constituents in (11a-b) are the same as those in (9a-b), but here they no longer combine with a V to form a V^I. but they rather combine with a V’ to form a higher V^I as illustrated in (12a-b):

12)



b)



Thus, whereas their deletion in (10a-b) results in ungrammaticality because they were obligatory constituents in the position where they occurred, their deletion in (11a-b) will not result in ungrammaticality. This shows that in (11a-b), they are optional elements of the VP and therefore not complements but adjuncts.

FINITE CLAUSE COMPLEMENT

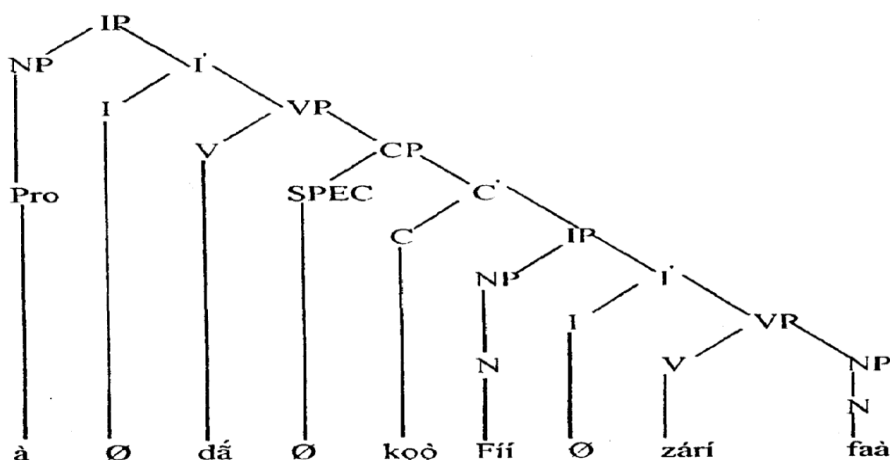
Huddleston (1988:63) states that:

“Subordinate clause complements exhibit varying degrees of functional resemblance to NP complements, but finite ones are sufficiently similar for us to be able to assign them the same function”.

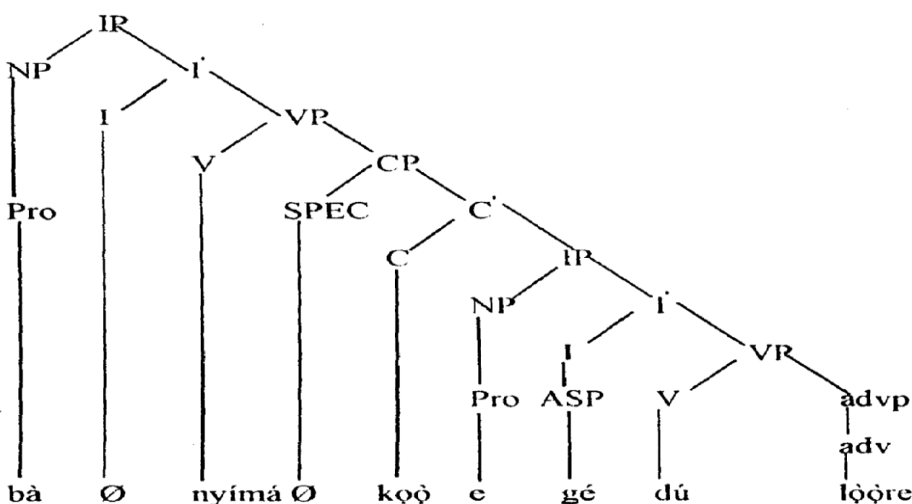
In Gokana, a subordinate finite clause may function as a complement within the VP of the superordinate construction.

Examples:

- 13 a) a dā [koö Fii zári faa]
 he hear that PN buy car
 ‘He heard that Fii bought a car’

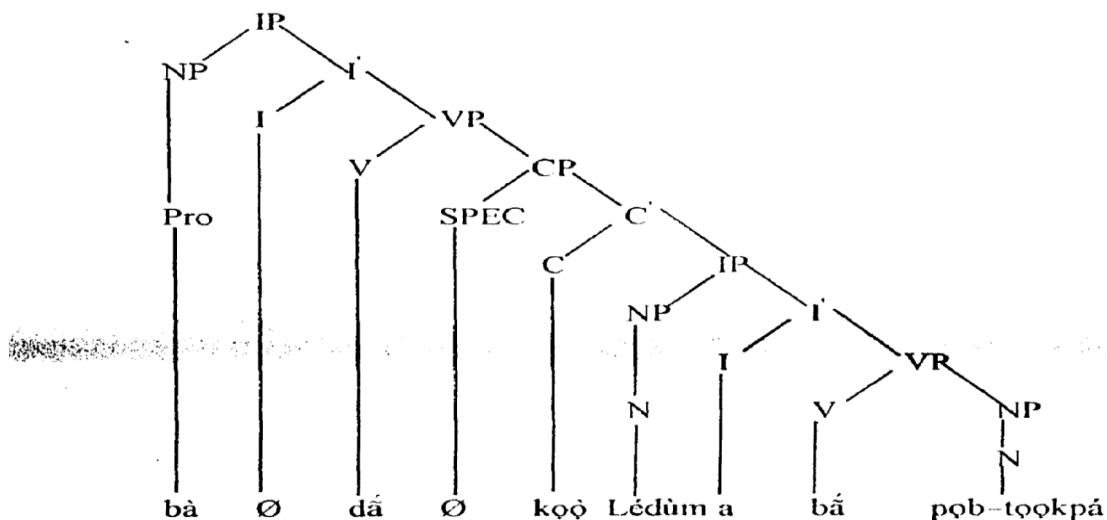


- b) bà nyima [koo e gé du lööre]
 they know that we PROG come tomorrow
 ‘They knew that we were coming tomorrow’

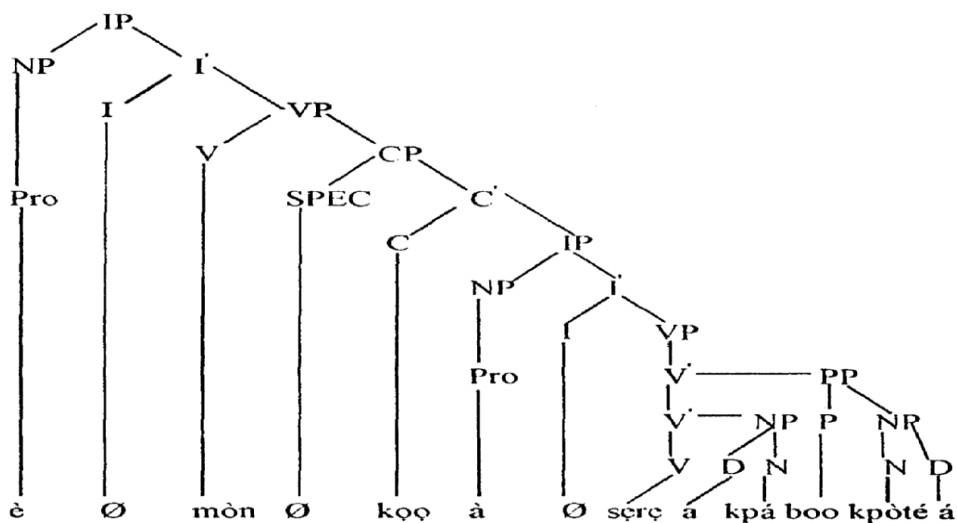


- c) bà da [koo Lé dum a - ba pob-tookpá]
 they hear that PN has enter big house book

‘They heard that Ledum has entered the university’



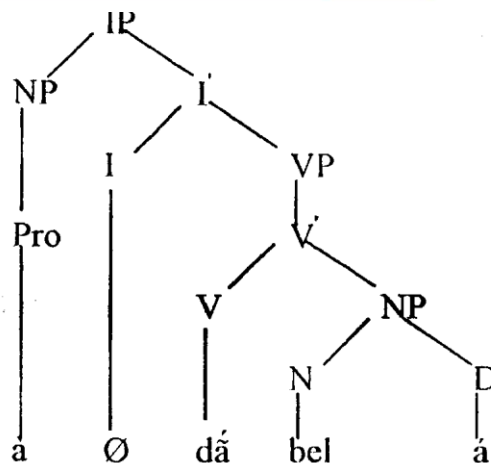
- d) è m̀n koo a sere a kpá boo kpóté a
 we see that he keep his book on chair the
 ‘We saw that he put his book on the chair’



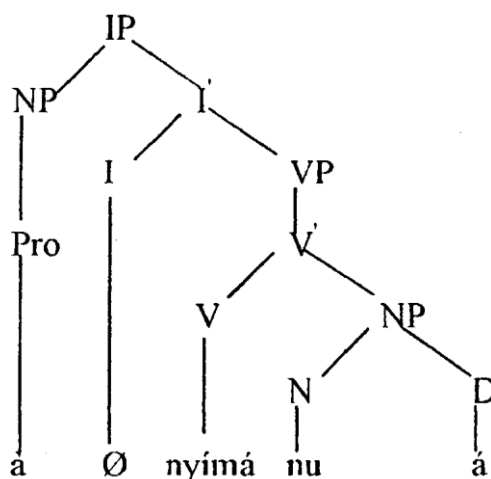
In (13a-d), the bracketed constituents are finite clause complements. They function as the direct object of the verb of the superordinate construction. Notice that the position they occur in is similar to the position usually occupied by an NP complement. This explains why it is possible to replace these clauses with an NP.

Examples:

- 14a) à dá bel á
 he hear talk the
 ‘He heard the news’



- b) a nyimá nu a
 he know thing the
 'He knew the issue'

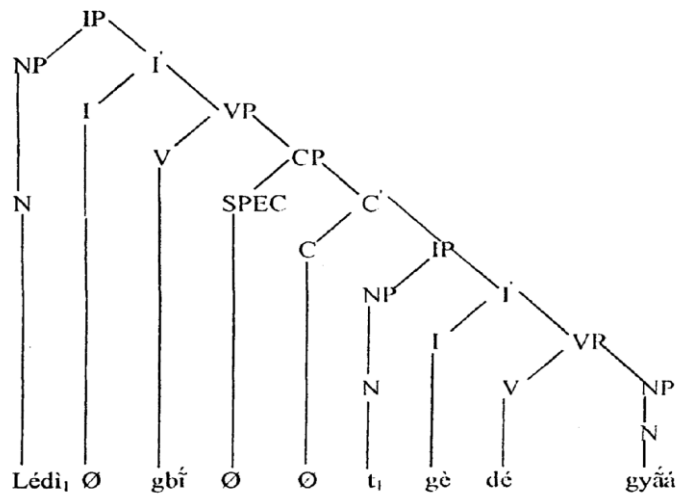


NON-FINITE COMPLEMENTS

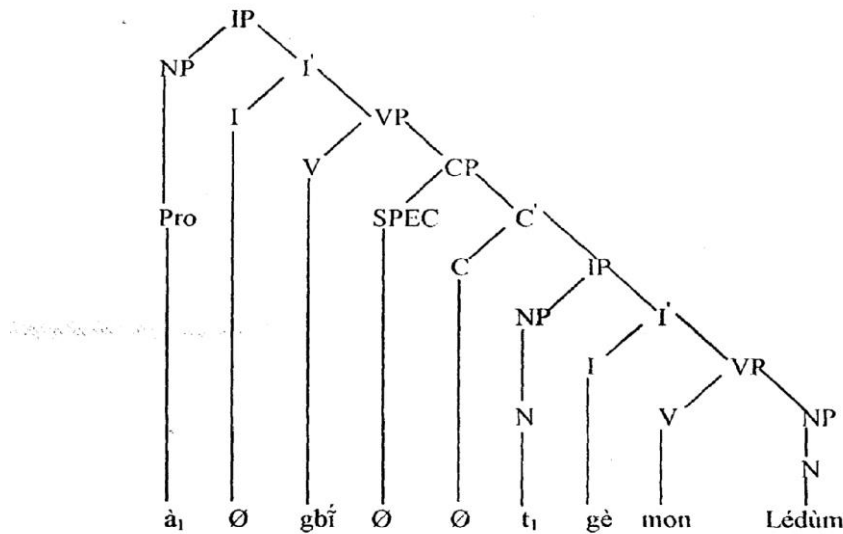
Non-finite clauses also occur as complements within the Gokana VP. The complement function of the Gokana non-finite clause is similar to that of an NP. A clause is non-finite in Gokana if it lacks an overt subject and cannot be marked for tense.

Examples:

- 15 a) Lédi gbi [ge dé gyaá]
 PN want to eat food
 'Ledi wants to eat'



- b) a gbi [gé mon Lédùm]
 he want to see PN
 ‘He wants to see Ledum’



ADJUNCTS

Lyons (1968:344) states that ‘an adjunct is by definition a “modifier” attached to a “head”, upon which it is dependent and from which it can be “detached” without any consequent syntactic change in the sentence’.

Crystal (1997) also defines an adjunct as:

“... an optional or secondary element in a construction”.

From these definitions, one fact is significant: that adjuncts are functionally non—obligatory constituents of the VP. In this regard, Huddleston (1988 :65) writes:

“Adjuncts are less tightly integrated into the structure of the clause than are complements: their occurrence is less governed by grammatical rule. They are always optional and their selection

does not depend on the presence of a verb of a particular subclass... nor can we give grammatical rules excluding particular combinations of different kinds of adjunct or imposing a maximum number of adjuncts for any clause”.

In their categorial assignment, adverbial phrases occur as adjuncts in Gokana. But functionally, prepositional phrases, clauses and noun phrases also function as adjuncts.

Examples:

16a) Gbárã kpári a keto [lee]

PN sweep his floor always

‘Gbara always sweeps his floor’

b) a sere a kpá [mm ñdigiri kpó i]

she keep her book in small box this

‘She kept her books in this small box’

c) ê bee dü bon i [lore i]

we PST come village this morning this

‘We arrived at this village this morning’

The bracketed constituents in (16a-c) are adjuncts. (16a) is an adverbial phrase, (16b) a prepositional phrase, and (16c) a noun phrase.

One-place verbs can, however, immediately precede an adjunct in a VP structure.

Example:

17) ñnóm a u looré i

bird the die morning this

‘The bird died this morning’

TYPES OF ADJUNCTS

The distinction of types of adjuncts is to a large extent semantic rather than strictly syntactic.

The following types of adjuncts occur in the Gokana VP:

18a) Place adjunct, as in:

Lédum bee sere a kpègê [boo kpôtó - i.]

PN PST keep his money on chair this

‘Ledum kept his money on this chair’

b) Time adjunct, as in:

a gé si ba bon [boo taátóm löore]

she will go their village on three work morning

‘She will visit their village at 3 o’clock tomorrow’

c) Manner adjunct, as in:

Lédum kyãa kyêè [oo]

PN walk walk sluggishly

‘Ledum walked sluggishly’

d) Duration adjunct, as in:

bâ bee be be [mm voo gbaa]

they PST fight fight in five year

‘They fought for five years’

e) Degree adjunct, as in:

a si [zoogá]

she work terribly

‘She worked so well’

f) Reason adjunct, as in:

Feeghe dé gyaa [boo - bee - koo müüró dü ka kpée]

PN eat food on name that soup be very sweet ‘Feeghe ate the food because the soup was very delicious’

From the adjuncts in (18a-f), another general fact can be established about Gokana adjuncts: that they can be realized as a single word, a phrase or a clause.

ORDER OF ADJUNCTS

The adjuncts recognized in Gokana do not occur in a random order. The grammar provides a fixed word order for adjuncts as follows:

1. Manner
2. Degree
3. Place
4. Time (Duration)
5. Reason

Time and duration adjuncts do not co-occur. Sentences showing the order of adjuncts are given below:

19a) bà kyaà kyèè oo zoogá gbee ôl söo’eaá boo -
they walk walk sluggishly terribly at farm yesterday on
béè – koo to va zó va.

name that leg them pain them

‘They walked extremely sluggishly at the farm yesterday because their legs were aching’

b) a guá sáisái lee gbeá Báni mm vôô gbáá
s/he hide always at Bani in five years

boo - béè - koo a bee do log.
on name that s/he PST fall law

‘he was always in hiding for five years in Bani because he committed a crime’

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have described the structure of the Verb Phrase in Gokana and also examined the types and linear order of constituents of the Verb Phrase. The paper claimed that the Gokana Verb Phrase has an abstract SPEC V-bar which serves as a landing site for moved adjuncts from clause internal position.

The paper identified the specifier, complement and adjunct as the basic constituents of the Verb Phrase in Gokana. The study, however, pointed out that only the complement is an obligatory constituent of the Gokana Verb Phrase. The complement is tightly integrated into the structure of the verb through the sub-categorization features of the verb.

The study noted that the verb is the head element in the Gokana Verb Phrase and can sometimes occur as the only constituent of the Verb Phrase in overt syntax. The study made a distinction between finite and non-finite complements and identified five subclasses of complements as well as six subtypes of adjuncts in the Gokana Verb Phrase.

RECOMMENDATION

The paper claimed that there is a severe semantic constraint on the linear sequence of adjuncts in Gokana and recommended a detailed investigation of the order of adjuncts in the Gokana Verb Phrase.

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