A syntactic and Semantic Analysis of the Tɛ̀ɛ̀ Verb Phrase

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
	This study descriptively analyses the syntactic and semantic features of the Tɛ̀ɛ̀ verb phrase. It also analyses the structure of the verb phrase in Tɛ̀ɛ̀, a language spoken in Tai Local Government Area of Rivers State. The verb phrase is a syntactic unit composed of at least one verb and its dependents and other modifiers but not always including the subject. The verb is central in every language coupled with the fact that it is the most important and widely described phrase because the structure of and the meanings expressed in many languages revolves around the verb word. The research focuses to explore the peculiarities of the verb phrase in the language focusing basically on the structure of the verb phrase and the meaning generated thereof. It focuses on the features of the verb phrase in Tɛ̀ɛ̀; the constituent that make it up, their arrangement as well as the meaning attributed by such arrangements. The primary data for this work were collected using the intuitive knowledge of the researcher as a native speaker verified with unstructured interview with competent native speakers. From the analysis of the data collected, the researcher discovered that the verb phrase in Tɛ̀ɛ̀ can have various configurations. The constituents that may combine with the head of a verb phrase to project it into a larger structure are the complements and the adjuncts. The complement of the verb phrase can be the noun phrase, the prepositional phrase and the inherent complement. The adverbial functions both as complement and adjunct in the language.

1. Introduction

Phrases are syntactic structures made up of the head element with or without dependent elements. Dependent elements may precede or follow the head (Aronoff & Reese-Miller, 2006; Crystal, 2010; Fromkin & Hyams, 2010; O'Grady, Archibalds, Aronoff, & Rees-Miller, 2005; Yule, 2006). The head determines the type of phrase and how the dependent elements organise and function in the phrase (Aronoff & Reese-Miller, 2006; Crystal, 2010; Fromkin & Hyams, 2010; O'Grady, Archibalds, Aronoff, & Rees-Miller, 2005). There are different types of dependent elements conditioned by the type of phrase (Aitchison, 1992; Aronoff & Reese-Miller, 2006; Crystal, 2010; Fromkin & Hyams, 2010; Lyons, 1992; O'Grady, Archibalds, Aronoff, & Rees-Miller, 2005; Yule, 2006). Dependent elements occur in a given order in relation to the head and relate to the head in different ways. In a verb phrase, some dependent elements are needed by the head to complete its meaning, while others are not need by the head verb. Dependent elements that the head verb needs for its meaning to be complete are closely linked to the it, while those that the head verb does not need are loosely linked to it.

Tɛ̀ɛ̀ is one of the languages that make up the Kegboid group of languages (Williamson and Blench 2000). Scholars like Anyanwu and Omego 2011 have described the grammar of the language without much emphasis on the syntax of the language. That is the only attempt on the description of the grammar of the language. The current work is set to explore the peculiarities of the verb phrase in the language focusing basically on the structure of the verb phrase and the meaning generated thereof. It focuses on the features of the verb phrase in Tɛ̀ɛ̀; the constituent that make it up, their arrangement as well as the meaning attributed by such arrangements.

2. Literature Review
2.1 The Phrase
the phrase is a group of words which are joined following the rules of the grammar of the language (Ndimele, 1999). A phrase is also seen as a single element of structure typically containing more than one word and lacking the subject-predicate structure (Crystal, 2010). Huddleston (1984:26) sees the phrase as "a type of construction containing a head element optionally accompanied by one or more dependents". Thus, a phrase is a group of words joined by the rules of grammar of a language without subject and predicate.

2.2 The Notion of the Head
the notion of the head is very important in the discussion of phrases. It is seen as syntactically central; the head is the most central part of a construction because it determines the meaning of the entire phrase. All the other word in a construction depend on the head (Ndimele, 1999). Words which are part of the phrase and which come before the head are called pre-head whereas words which come after the head are called the post head. He added that the head determines the nature of the entire phrase.

Tallerman (2005) further explains that the head determines the nature of the elements that occurs in its phrase. He added that a phrase takes its name from the word functioning as the head. Depending on the head, the following phrases exist; noun phrase (NP), verb phrase (VP), prepositional phrase (PP), adjective phrase (Adj.P), and the adverbial phrase.

2.3 The Verb Phrase
The term 'verb phrase' is used in two senses according to Crystal (2010). The first sense is from the traditional point of view which refers to a group of verbs which together have the same syntactic function as a single verb. The second sense is from the generative point of view which sees the verb phrase as being equivalent to the whole of the predicate of a sentence; as is clear from the expansion of S as NP + VP in phrase structure grammar. Bussmann (1996:930), argues that "the predicate is not the same with the verb phrase in generative transformation grammar since unlike the verb phrase, in the tree diagram, it dominates not only the verb but also all elements (object) dependent on the verb".

Structurally, a verb phrase is the largest expressions or the maximal projection of the verb. Other units of the grammar such as the NP and/or the PP, the AdjP and the AdvP can combine with the verb to form the VP.

Crystal (2010) presented two views on the verb phrase. He looked at it from the traditional and generative perspective. He stated that the verb phrase traditionally refers to "a group of verbs which together have the same function as a single verb". He went further by giving the following examples: 'is coming', 'may be coming', 'get up to', stating that only one verb in the group is the main verb while others are subordinate to it. On the other hand, from the generative point of view, he describes the verb phrase as having a broader definition. He equals the verb phrase to the whole of the predicate slot of the sentence as represented in the schema below:

S   ⟶   NP + VP

In the same manner, the verb phrase is determined by the sub-categorization features of the verb. For instance, a verb can be transitive in which case it selects or co-occurs with or without adverbials. For instance, laugh, play, see, give and show.

2.4 Constituents of the Verb Phrase
Fromkin and Rodman (1993:204) states that a verb phrase may consist of:

A verb alone

The boy slept

VP   ⟶   V

A verb followed by a noun phrase

The child found the puppy

VP   ⟶   V + NP

A verb followed by a noun phrase followed by a prepositional phrase

The woman put the cake in the cupboard

VP $\longrightarrow$ NP + PP

A verb followed by a prepositional phrase

The child laughed at the puppy

VP $\longrightarrow$ V + PP

3. Methodology
The data were generated from the intuition of the researcher as a native speaker. However, the study does not rely solely on this method in order to avert being subjective (rather than objective), which is a major disadvantage of sole reliance on intuition, hence, the additional unstructured interview was also used as a method of eliciting primary data and they were also engaged in informal narrative discussions. Relevant syntactic structures were elicited from the discourse and compared with similar structures derived intuitively. A descriptive method was utilized in the study since it is language based. This is best for the study because it the descriptive method describes what is observed from the native speakers of Tɛ̀ɛ̀ without any personal bias.

4. Results and Discussion
4.1 verb phrase in Tɛ̀ɛ̀
Verb phrase in Tɛ̀ɛ̀ can have various configurations. The constituents that may combine with the head of a VP in Tɛ̀ɛ̀ to project it into a larger structure are the complements or adjuncts. The choice of the complements is dependent on the semantic and syntactic properties of the head (the verb).

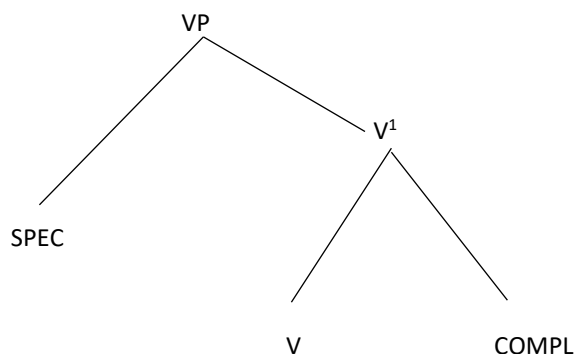Structurally, Tɛ̀ɛ̀ VP can take any of the following forms.

VP $\longrightarrow$ V

VP $\longrightarrow$ V + NP

VP $\longrightarrow$ V + NP + NP

VP $\longrightarrow$ V + NP + PP

VP $\longrightarrow$ V + NP + S^1

Schematically, Tee VPs are formed according to the following format:

VP   SPEC + V^1

V^{11} V^1 +   ADJUNCT

V^1 V   +   COMPL

A complement combines with V to form a V^1, an adjunct combines with the V^1 to form a higher V^1. Hence a V projection may contain several V-nodes. The specifier combines with V^1 to form VP. VP is the maximal projection of V.

Examples

1a)   Dum lóp hʷáá

PN wash car

'Dum washed the car'

b)   Dum lóp hʷáá bie búlẹẹ

PN   wash car   in outside

'Dum washed the car in the compound'

c)   Kiisi ne kpìgì   Nia

PN   give money Nia

'Kiisi gave Nia money'

4.2   Tee Verb Phrase Complements

As stated earlier, the verb is the head of the verb phrase and it is the only obligatory constituent of the Tèè.

2a)   bà   beè   dé zฺฺá

3PL   PST eat food

'they ate the food'

b)   *bà beé dé

3PL PST eat

3a)   kobo beé hʷé lo gbó

PN PST kill the dog

'Kobo killed the dog'

b)   *Kobo beé hʷé

PN PST kill

the ungrammaticality of (2b) and (3b) result from the absence of an accompanying complement.

VP ⟶ V

On the other hand, the verb can stand as the only obligatory element in a verb phrase as exemplified below:

4a)   Ledum beé lú

PN PST come

"Ledum came'

b)   à beé ʔú

3SG PST die

'He died'

The verbs lú 'come' and ʔú 'die' as shown above, does not allow a following object (NP). This accounts for the ungrammaticality of the following sentences where the verb lú 'come' and ʔú 'die' are followed by the objects.

5a)   *Ledum beé lú lo gbó

PN PST come the dog

b)   *a beé ʔú lo zฺฺá

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3SG PST die the food

In what follows, the various complements of the verb phrase in the language is discussed.

4.2.1 The Noun Phrase Complement

In Tɛ̀ɛ̀, the complement of the verb phrase can be a noun phrase. This is discussed below;

VP ⟶ V + NP

The object complement "occurs in a two-place simple sentence. It is the internal argument, and it is assigned the patient Ɵ-role. An object complement completes the meaning of the object it follows.

6a)   Were beé hʷé póró

PN PST kill fish

'Were killed a fish'

b)   Bebu beé zìbásî́ Bemu

PN   PST slap PN

'Bebu slapped Bemu'

In a construction where there are several V-bars, the object complement combines with the V to form the lowest Vᴵ projection (the object is dominated by the VP).

VP ⟶ V + NP + NP

7a)   Bà bòg̀ḛrḛ kpìgì lo nwaà

3PL lend money the woman

'They lent the woman money'

b)   bà bògère ye   kpìgì

3PL. lend 3SG money

'They lent her money'

c)   Mama beé ne hyáà piyá-tɔkpá

PN PST give yam people-school

'Mama gave some students yam'

d)   Mama beé ne wa hyáà

PN PST give 3PL yam

'Mama gave them yam'

(7a-d) above shows the structure of a verb phrase when it has two object complements. It is observed that nothing intervenes between a case-assigner and a case-receiver. The structure of the verb phrase with double object is that the direct object is followed by the indirect object or the reverse (indirect object before direct object) when the indirect object is a pro-form as in (7b,d) above.

In the case where the VP occurs with double objects, there is a certain subcategory of verbs, change of position verbs, which have the capacity to assign two Ɵ-roles to their internal argument the preposition 'bie' glossed 'in the' is used as in (8) below.

8a)   Nornu beé bòg̀ḛrḛ kpìgì Barida bie kedu

PN   PST   lend money PN in the   market

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'Nornu lent some money to Barida in the Market'

4.2.2 Propositional Phrase Complement

VP ⟶ **V** + **NP** + **PP**

In Tɛ̀ɛ̀, it is possible for a prepositional phrase to function as the complement of a verb.

7a)   póro dé nɔ ákwíríká

Fish be on fish-rack

'the fish is on the fish-rack '

b)   lo kpá de bu bèrè

det. Book be in bag

'the book is in the bag'

The V and the PP projects to the Vᶦ thus placing them on the same terminal nodes. This indicates that PP is complement of the V.

4.2.3 Finite Clause Complement
In Tɛ̀ɛ̀, a subordinate finite clause may function as a complement within the verb phrase of the subordinate conjunction.

8a)   à   dã   goó   Sene   yẹẹ   tọ

3rd.SG hear   that   PN   buy   house

'she heard that Sene bought a house'

b)   bà   sũà   goó   m̀   ga   lu   hyõóe

3rd.pl   know   that   1st.sg   PROG. Come tomorrow

'they knew that I was coming tomorrow'

4.2.4 Adverbials as Complements
 Adverbials can perform both complement and adjunct function. Here, adverbials are discussed as complements not as adjuncts. In Tɛ̀ɛ̀, adverbials complementing the head verb occur in a position immediately after the verb. They combine with the V to form the Vᶦ such that their deletion affects the grammaticality of the construction.

  9a)   À yii bu tɔ á

3SG enter in house that

'she enters that house'

b)   ló dòògànù de ànìì álékéré

the party be   six   clock

'the party is at 6 O'clock'

10a)   *À yii

She enter

b)   * ló dòògànù de

the party be

as mentioned above, the deletion of the adverbials affects the grammaticality of the construction. This is the reason for the ungrammaticality of (10a-b) as opposed to (9a-b) above. This shows that the adverbials are complements of the verb phrase.

4.3 Adverbials as Adjuncts
In Tɛ̀ɛ̀, adverbials can act as adjuncts. An adjunct can be a prepositional phrase, clauses or a noun phrase.

11a)   bà bʉ̀ʉ̀ lo kpá bèè̩ số

3PL read the book two time

'they read the book twice'

b)   Biaka sú lo bấ lè̩è̩ sóó

PN take the pot from kitchen

'Biaka took the pot from the kitchen'

12a)   bà bʉ̀ʉ̀ lo kpá

3PL read the book

'they read the book'

b)   Biaka sú lo bấ

PN take the pot

'Biaka took the pot'

The grammaticality of (12a-b) shows that the deletion of adjuncts does not affect the grammaticality of constructions in the language. This is the major difference between the adverbial complements and the adjuncts.

Another difference between them is that the adverbial complement is closer to the head than the adjuncts as it is observed in (12a-b) and (11a-b) above. Again, the complement is within the V^l containing the head V while the adjunct is outside of it.

4.4 Inherent Complement Verb
In Tɛ̀ɛ̀, the semantic unity between certain verbs and their accompanying nominals is so strong that these verbs are almost empty without these nominals.

13a) Yii yèm̀

Enter mourning

'to mourn'

b)   è̩mà èp

try check

'to examine'

c)   kéé zɨ̋ɑ̋

stay-away food

'to fast/starve'

d)   Úwẹ́ hyóọ̩

sing song

'to sing'

e)   tẹrẹ kế

drop egg

          'to hatch'

f)   bírá máá

        bath water

        'to bathe'

14a)   Lekia   yii yèm̀ ye dáḿ

        PN   enter mourning 3SG husband

        'Lekia mourns her husband'

b)   Nwíí a ga kéé zíá̋

        Child this PROG stay-away food

        'this child is fasting'

14a-b) contain inherent complement verbs (ICVs). There is nothing intervening between the verb and its inherent complement. The verb root and the inherent complement combine to project as the minimal V. this indicates that they are considered as a single lexical item.

5. Conclusion

This study has provided insight into the syntactic and semantic features of the verb phrase, the constituents that make it up, their arrangements as well as the meaning attributed by such arrangement with the aim of adding to the growing literature of the langauge

From the analysis of the data, itw as discovered that the constituent that may combine with the head of the verb phrase in Tèè are complements ; the noun phrase, the prepositional phrase and the inherent complement. The adverbial functions both as complement and adjunct in the language. . There are other aspects of the verb phrase in the language and the current researcher recommends further studies into these other aspects.

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