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A Contrastive Analysis of Topicalization in English and Urhobo.

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Abstract

This research is a contrastive Analysis of Topicalization in English and Udrhobo a South Western Edoid Nigerian language. Its objective is to explore topicalization in English and Urhobo Languages using basic Chomsky's Phase theory model to establish points of divergence while noting convergence in the derivation of the investigated phenomenon so as to highlight areas of learner's difficulty which will be useful to teachers as best strategies un teaching process. The study utilized two sources of data namely primary and secondary sources. Through observation and textbook, internet and dictionaries, data was collected and analyzed. The theoretical framework adopted for the study is the Phase Theory. The data analysis posited that the theory is a suitable mechanism for the analysis of the investigated structure, lexical items are assigned to probes as a result of the features they possess to realize goal and every syntactic operation is done in phases which is the only level of representation.

Key words: Phase, Urhobo, Features, Phonological form(PF), Logical form(LF)

Introduction

This study is centered on topicalization in English and Urhobo language. Before delving into the discussion of the above topic, it is pertinent to make an effort to get clear in our minds the sense in which the word 'transformation' is used in this study since different people have different notions of the term 'transformation'. The English language like any other language has rules of syntax. Many languages including English have a transformation that move constituents

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which according to Aarts (193) are "strings of one or more words that syntactically and semantically behave as a unit" from one part of the phrase structure to another. This in essence means that some sequence of words in a particular sentence can occur in a different position in the same sentence.

Topicalization is a mechanism of syntax that establishes an expression as the sentence or clause topic by having it appear at the front of the sentence or clause (as opposed to in a canonical position further to the right). It often results in a discontinuity and is thus one of a number of established discontinuity types (the other three being *wh*-fronting, scrambling, and extraposition). Topicalization is also used as a constituency test; an expression that can be topicalized is deemed a constituent. The topicalization of arguments in English is rare, whereas circumstantial adjuncts are often topicalized. Most languages allow topicalization, and in some languages, topicalization occurs much more frequently and/or in a much less marked manner than in English.

It has been observed that most students find it difficult to relate topicalized sentences to the original code. This development has given rise to confusion and difficulty in the comprehension of such sentences by students. Further to this, transformational generative grammar provides the basis for determining kernel or basic sentences upon which formal transformation can occur and the absence of research on topicalization in Urhobo based on the Phase theory of Chomsky's Transformational Generative Grammar which is the most recent theory has necessitated this study. This paper shall look these problems with a view to providing students with a sound basis for understanding topicalized sentences from the point of view of transformational generative grammar.

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The objective of the study is to explore topicalization in English and Urhobo Languages using basic Chomsky's Phase theory model to showcase the various forms of the syntax and also posit that topicalization is attainable in both languages. A contrastive study is a source of experimental study into the predictability of the learner's difficulty combined with error analysis, as a partial classroom research tool for teachers anxious to adjust their teaching to the state of the knowledge of the learners. Thus, this research will serve as a comprehensive descriptive work on topicalization in both languages which will proffer solution to learners' difficulty and function as a reference material for further study in Urhobo. It will also enrich the existing literature on topicalizaton and probe speakers of Urhobo to research other aspect of the language.

Review of Related Literature

Many languages have a way to mark the topic in a sentence.

(1) This book, I really like.

(2) a. As for this book, I really like it.

b. This book, I really like it.

Example (1) is typically called the topic construction while (2) is referred to as left dislocation. In both cases some sort of topic phrase is placed at the head of the sentence. We will refer to both as topicalization. There are a number of issues to contend with in analyzing these constructions, including:

(3) (i) What is the "meaning" of topicalization?

(ii) How does the topic phrase end up where it does, at the head of the clause?

(iii) Can topicalization occur freely, in any environment?

As it turns out, the answers to (3ii) and (3iii) vary from language to language, and within a language, the answers may differ depending on which topic "meaning" (3i) one is considering—

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for there are more than one. One point that is clear at the outset is that to deal with sentences like (1) and (2), one needs to incorporate into the grammar a topic position that occurs somewhere above the TP. In Chomsky (1977), it is noted that no rule could create a structure such as *as for this book* within the core sentence (CP), hence the topic position must be outside of this core portion of the structure. He proposes it to be S″, which we will translate into the more modern designation TopP, which occurs above CP.

(4) TopP → Top CP

Furthermore, as observed by Sag (1976), the topic construction can occur in an embedded structure.

(5) I informed everyone that [this book, they should read by tomorrow].

To accommodate this fact, Chomsky further proposes the following (again we update the labels to more modern versions).

(6) $$CP \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} C\ TP \\ C\ TopP \end{array} \right\}$$

Along with accounting for embedded topics, this rule, in combination with (4), allows for topic recursion (Chomsky 1977), of which (7) is an example.

(7) As for John, as far as this book is concerned, he will definitely have to read it.

In principle there is no upper limit on the number of topics allowed, although in practice sentential meaning and other factors intervene to restrict the number.

Typically there is just one topic, but two are not impossible, as (7) shows.

Contrastive Analysis

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Contrastive analysis is one of the fields in linguistics which deals with the systematic study of language. It is systematic because the methods applied are both objective and empirical. The concern of linguistics is rather to provide an explanation to how language works than promote the language use. This is why Finch (2000:2) asserts that:

> Linguists do not privileged any particular variety of form of language, or indeed any group of users. They are concern is with understanding language, rather than controlling it.

Through a systematic observation of how native speaker use the language, the linguists provide a description of how the language is used by carefully analyzing the data collated. At this stage, the linguist attempts to establish the underlying rules which speakers of the language must follow because language is rule-governed.

Contrastive analysis is concerned with the process of a monolingual becoming a bilingual. CA involves systematic comparison of two languages, an L1 and an L2 with the aim of identifying their similarities and differences. As James (1980:27) puts it:

> Contrastive analysis is made up of micro linguistic analysis. The goal of the former is 'the description' of the linguistic code, without making reference to the users to which the code is put, or how messages carried by this code are modified by the context in which they occur.

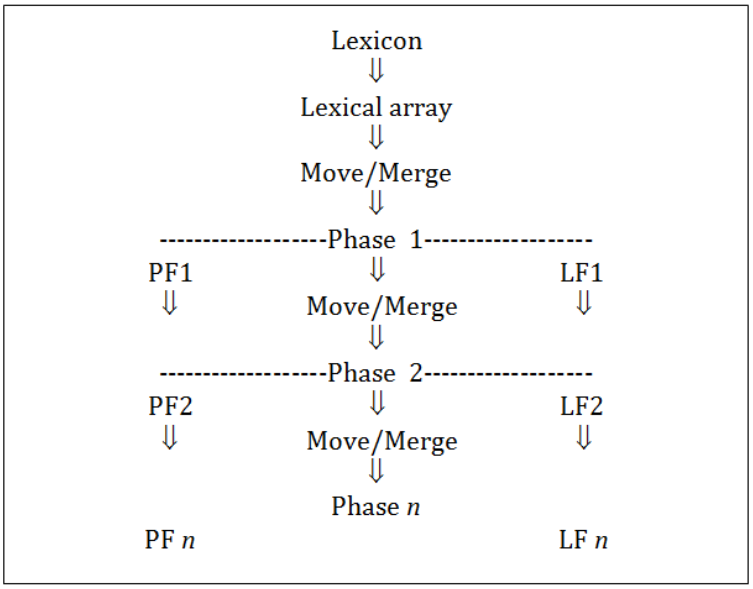
Theoretical Framework

With the basic topicalization facts from English and Urhobo in tow, we can begin to account for these facts from a principled, theoretical perspective. First, we must enumerate the crucial theoretical assumptions that will inform our analysis.

Phase Theory: A Brief Review

For our analysis, we adopt aspects of the framework of Chomsky (2000, 2001, 2004, 2008, 2013). In Phase Theory, there is only one level of syntactic representation, the phase. This study therefore assumes the following representation of language processing in Figure 4.1 (Quicoli 2008: 303):

Figure 4.1: Model of Grammar in Phase Theory



In Figure 4.1, the lexicon is a list of all of the units or lexical items (LIs) that we can put in our derivation of a sentence. It therefore not only includes 'vocabulary' words such as the Urhobo *shẹ̀* 'buy,' *okọ-otọ* 'car,' and *evun* 'in,' but also proper nouns such as *María* and grammatical features such person, number, and gender, as well as tense, verb, EPP, and abstract Case features. To form a derivation, lexical items are selected from the lexicon to arrive at a 'lexical array', which is the specific set of items that will be used to generate a given sentence. These items are then plugged into the syntactic derivation via the operation of External Merge, and enter into further operations, such as Agree and Move (a.k.a., Internal Merge).

As we can see in Fig. 4.1 above, the derivation proceeds in a piecemeal fashion, phase by phase. Chomsky takes phase domains to encompass phase heads (v* and C) and their specifiers. The

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phase heads, as well as the heads they immediately select (V and T), are the initiators of In order to be visible at a higher phase and thus active for further syntactic operations, goals must move to the left edge of a phase domain. Goals that fail to move to a phase edge are 'impenetrable', that is, inaccessible to higher probes, according to the Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC). The PIC can be stated formally as follows, with H the head of a phase:

1) The domain of H is not accessible to operations outside HP; only H and its *edge* are accessible to such operations (Chomsky 2001: 13).

The reason why the domain of H is impenetrable to a higher probe is that once a complete phase has been formed, the complement of H undergoes a Transfer operation. During Transfer, the relevant structure is simultaneously sent to the phonological component (PF), to be assigned an appropriate phonetic representation, and the logical form component (LF), to be assigned an appropriate semantic interpretation. From that point on, the relevant domain is no longer accessible to the syntax. For example, once a CP phase has been formed, phase head C and the T head that it directly selects will only be able to find a suitable goal with which to agree in v* and in the edge of v* (i.e., in [Spec, v*P]. This can be visualized in Figure 4.2:

Figure 4.2: Phase Search Space and Complement Domains

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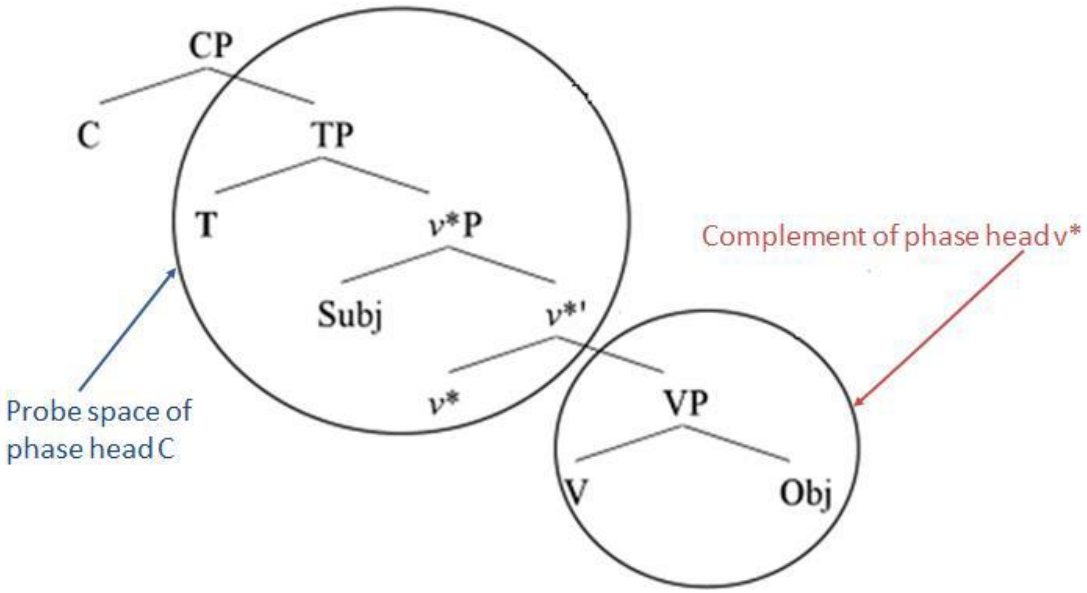

As we can see in Figure 4.2, once the C-phase is built up, the domain of v* (i.e., VP) gets transferred to the interfaces and becomes inaccessible to operations in the C-phase. The phase head C, however, can access items in the phase head v*, [Spec, v*P], as well as T. Crucially, C not only sees all lexical items in its search space, but features as well.

Role of Features in Phase Theory

This brings us to another important aspect of Phase Theory, the concept of features. As we alluded to above, the structures manipulated by syntax are Lexical Items (LIs) composed of feature bundles, and these features may enter the derivation already valued or unvalued. By the end of each phase though, all relevant features must be valued and then sent to the appropriate interface or get deleted (more on this below). The effect of the operation Agree is to match already valued features with corresponding unvalued features and in the process value them.

Chomsky (2000) argues that the difference between valued and unvalued grammatical features correlates with a related distinction between those grammatical features that play a role in semantic interpretation, dubbed 'interpretable,' and those that do not play a role in semantic

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interpretation, hence 'uninterpretable.' The φ-features of nominal expressions (person/number/gender) are interpretable, since, for example, a first person singular pronoun like *I* clearly differ in meaning from a third person plural feminine pronoun like *hers*. All nominal expressions enter the syntax with their interpretable φ-features already valued. Nouns and pronouns also enter the derivation carrying an abstract Case feature, which is uninterpretable. The Case feature on a nominal is uninterpretable because, for instance, whether a subject pronoun surfaces as nominative, accusative, or genitive depends only on the type of clause it is in, not on its thematic or semantic role in that sentence. This is illustrated in the English examples below, where the third person pronoun appears in three different forms:

2) a. It seems [*they* were arrested]
   b. He expected [*them* to be arrested]
   c. He was shocked at [*their* being arrested]

Chomsky (2008) further posits that C is the original locus of T's φ-features, which percolate down to T via 'feature Inheritance.' Before we examine in more detail the interplay of features and phase heads in the course of the syntactic derivation, let's first consider why features play such an essential role in Phase Theory.

Delete or Crash: Uninterpretable Features

As we saw in the model of grammar outlined above, each structure generated by the syntax is subsequently sent to the PF component to be 'spelled out,' i.e. assigned a PF representation which provides a representation of its Phonetic Form, and to LF, to receive a semantic interpretation. In Phase Theory, however, unvalued uninterpretable features cannot be read by the interfaces and thus cause the derivation to 'crash.'

That is, unvalued features are illegible to PF and uninterpretable features are illegible to LF. With regard to PF, unless the syntax specifies via feature valuation whether we require, for

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example, a first person singular or third person plural present tense form of the verb *ESTAR*, the derivation will crash because the PF component cannot determine whether to spell out *ESTAR* as *estoy* or *están*. This is the problem that unvalued features pose for PF. Now, consider LF. Interpretable features by definition play a role in semantic interpretation and thus feed into LF, while uninterpretable features play no role in that process and cannot help but cause an LF crash. The question, then, becomes how to prevent unvalued features from feeding into PF and how to prevent uninterpretable features from feeding into LF. Phase Theory answers this question by postulating that in the course of the derivation unvalued features get valued before they get sent to PF and uninterpretable features get deleted before they reach LF.

Materials and methods

This research made use of the descriptive design for this study. Descriptive design is a method where the researcher collects data which is analyzed. From the data analysis, he/she is able to explain and describe an already existing condition/situation. The population for this study is the Urhobo speaking communities in Ughelli North LGA of Delta State. This research utilized two sources of data, namely the primary (observation) and secondary (text books, internet and Dictionary) sources. The primary source is the observation carried out on the respondents that were observed, whereas the secondary sources are available textbooks, internet information and dictionary. Sentences were drawn from internet and textbooks and where translated to Urhobo by coordinate bilingual speakers of English and Urhobo. The English structures as well as their Urhobo translation equivalent were analyzed with the Phase Theory of Chomsky's Transformational Generative Grammar in order to determine the grammatical (*merge/agreement*) operations involved in the derivation of the relevant structures as well as areas of convergence

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and divergence in the derivation of the English and Urhobo structures. The procedure involved proffering answers to the following questions about the relevant derivations.

i. Is topicalization obtainable in English and Urhobo using the Phase theory?
ii. Will this analysis break ground of learners' difficulty in comprehending topicalized expression?
iii. Will the similarities and differences between English and Urhobo topicalized stuctures be made explicit?

Data presentation and analysis

1. **Noun Phrase Preposing**
   a. You still have much to learn.
   b. Much to learn, you still have _____.

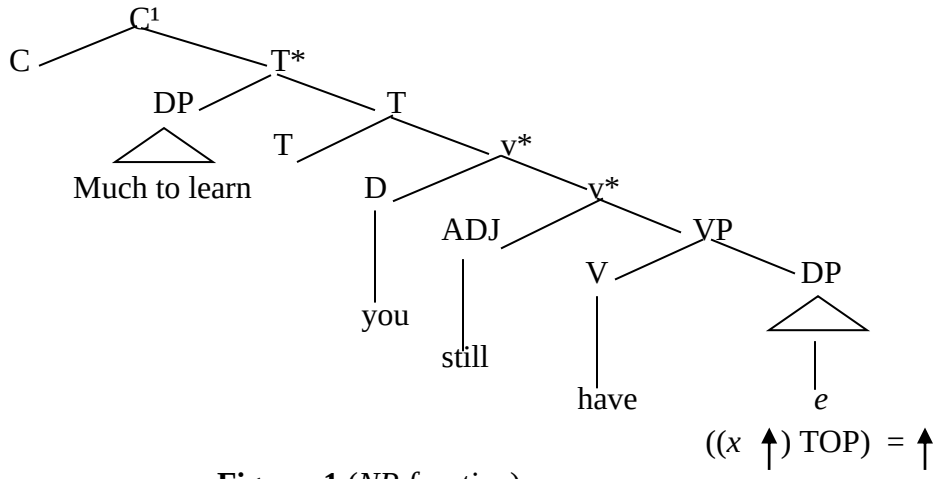
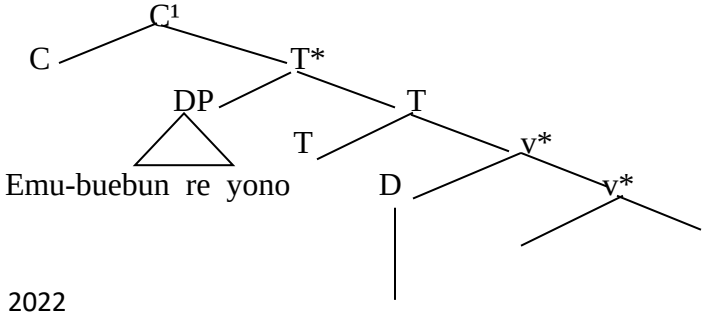


Figure 1 (*NP fronting*)

c. Wo ji vwẹ emu-buebu re yono.
   You still have much to learn
d. Emu-buebun re yono, wo ji vwo _____.
   Much to learn you still have



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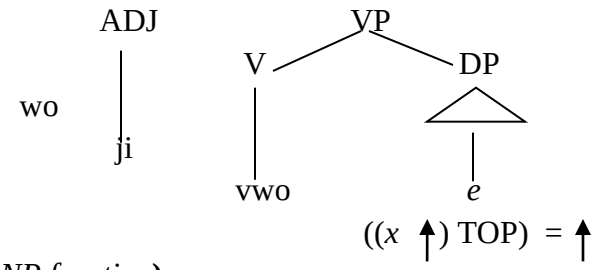


Figure 2(*NP fronting***)**

From the above analysis in figures 1 and 2 respectively, the Noun phrase is moved from the goal position to the probe position at the TOP where derivation takes place and it is not possible to leave behind any of the component parts of the moved NP.

2. Direct Object Preposing

a. Do you like wine?
b. Wine, I like _____.

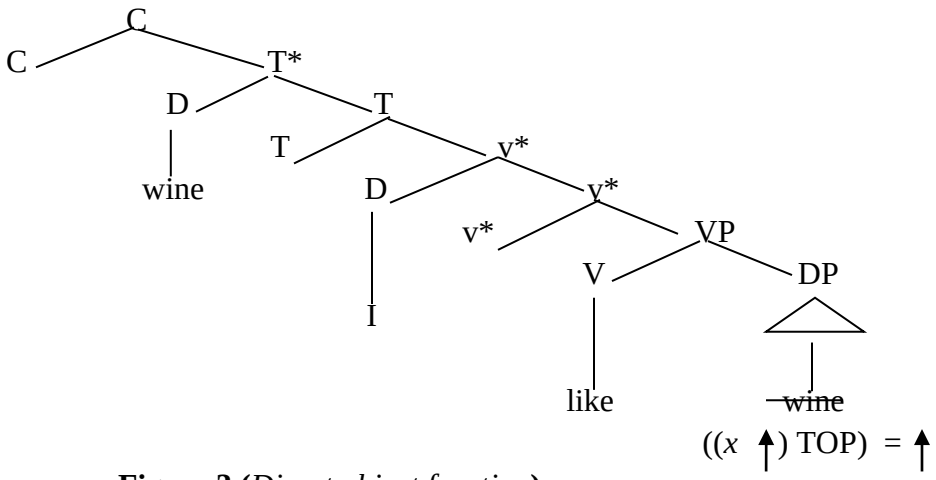
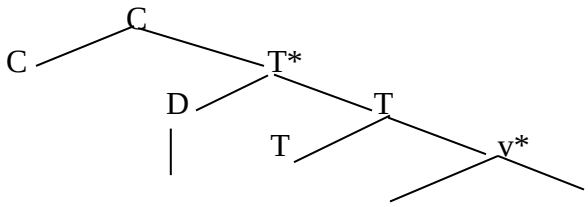


Figure 3 (*Direct object fronting***)**

c. Wọ guolo udí?
Do you like wine
d. Udí, me guolo-re _____.
Wine I like



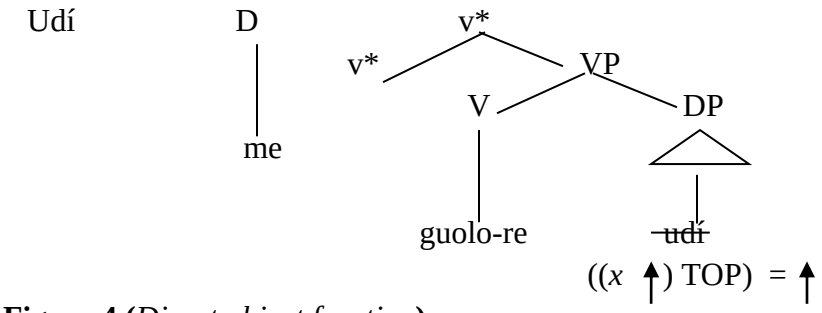


Figure 4 (*Direct object fronting***)**

From the analysis in figure 3 and 4 respectively, a different syntactic structure was chosen, one which involves movement of the Direct Object from the positions marked by '_____' to a clause – initial position. Here the phrase *wine(udí)* is more prominent (more topic – like) than it would be if it occurred in its normal position following the verb. In other words, the clause "[wine] I like ____," literally brings to the fore the topic 'wine*(udí)*'.

3. Verb Phrase Preposing

VP – Topicalization otherwise known as VP – Preposing involves movement of a verb phrase from its normal position in the clause to the beginning of that clause, and as such is a special type of topicalization.

a. Duru says that he will wash the dishes
b. *[wash the dishes] he will _____.

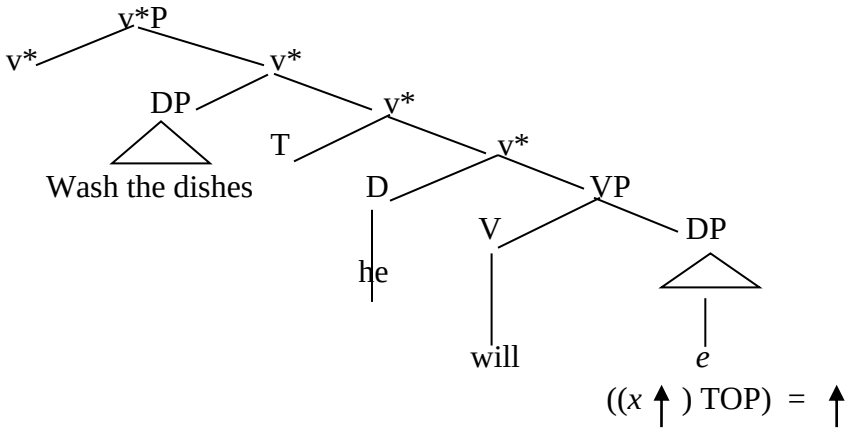


Figure 5 (*VP fronting***)**

c. Duru tare ne Ọ cha hwọrẹ imize na.

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Duru says that he will wash dishes the
d. [hwọrẹ imize na] Ọ cha _____.

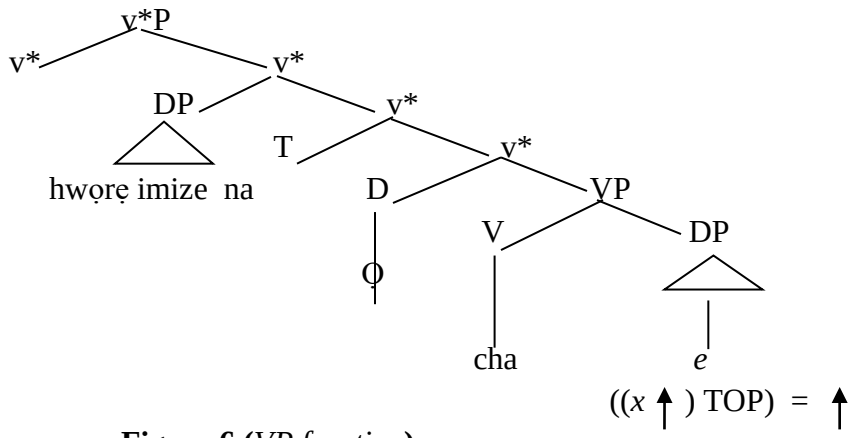


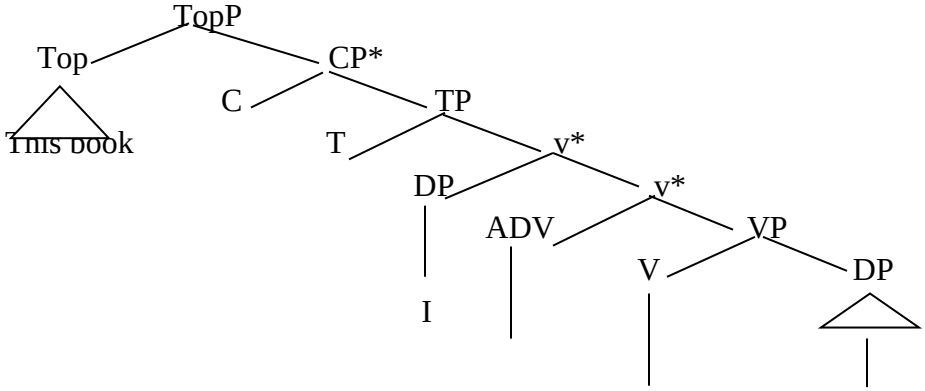
Figure 6 (*VP fronting*)

From the foregoing (figures 5 and 6), it is obvious that Direct Objects are part of the verb phrase of the sentences in which they occur, and this is because they are fronted along with the main verbs that precede them. Simply put, we cannot leave the Dos behind. Direct Objects are sisters of the main verb inside VP. When the VP – Preposing applies, the VP is moved to a clause – initial position. We assume that the entire VP is moved, including the empty spec – position. Here, it is important to note that VP – Preposing can only apply if the sentence in question contains an auxiliary verb such as "*will* or *did*". Another notable fact is that in each case *will* is left behind. This means that modal auxiliary verbs are not part of the VP of the sentence in which they occur. if they were, they would have been fronted along with the main verb and Direct Object.

4. Topic associated with movement

The English topic construction is associated with movement as shown by the fact that it is sensitive to islands.

a. I really like this book.
b. This book, I really like _____



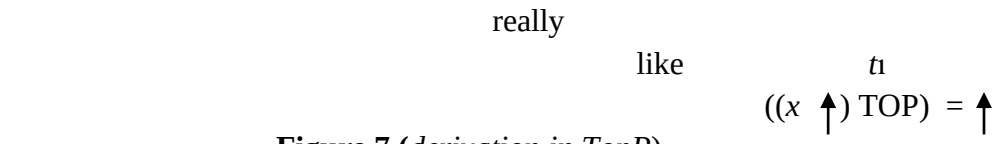


Figure 7 (*derivation in TopP*)

c. Left dislocation

I really like this book.

This book, I really like _____ it.

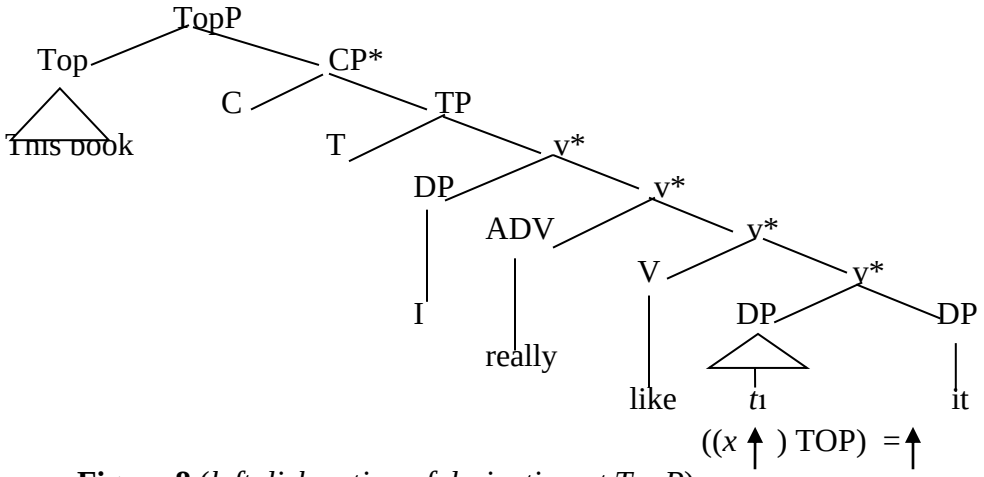


Figure 8 (*left dislocation of derivation at TopP*)

5.

a. Me ghene guọlọ obe nana.
I really like book this

b. Obe nana, me ghene guọlọ.
Book this I really like

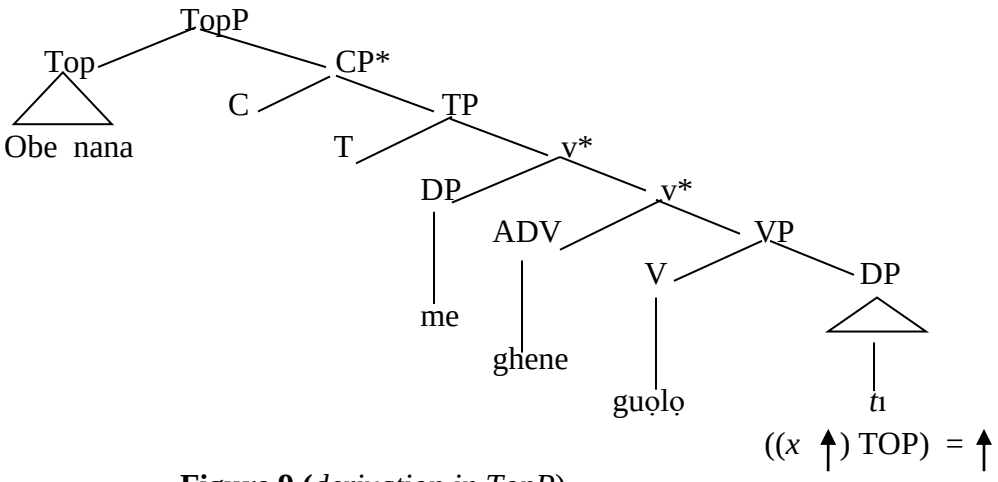


Figure 9 (*derivation in TopP*)

It is reasonable to assume from the occurrence of the "resumptive" *it* and the insensitivity to islands that there is no movement involved in left dislocation. Presumably, the topic phrase is externally merged at Spec,TopP, and the "resumptive" *it* is interpreted as coreferential with it (or with the DP inside it. This is not a trivial matter: *it* being a pronoun, it should be free to refer to some entity outside of the sentence instead of the sentence-internal topic, but that would lead to a topic that isn't obviously connected to the content of the sentence, making it extremely difficult if not impossible to know how to interpret it as a topic.

On the other hand, the topic construction shows properties of movement, such as having a gap and being island sensitive, as we saw. Nevertheless, the topic expression itself (*this book*) is externally merged, just as with left dislocation. The movement that occurs, is a form of *wh*-movement; the *wh*-phrase that moves to Spec,CP is subsequently deleted.

Conclusion

This research investigated topicalization in English and Urhobo using the phase theory of Chomsky's transformation gemerative grammar which is the most recent theory as the basis to which our analysis is subjected. We defined topicalization as a mechanism of syntax that establishes an expression as the sentence or clause topic by having it appear at the front of the sentence or clause.

Our analysis has shown that topicalization is attainable in both languages within the framework of the Phase theory of transformational generative grammar. Topicalization in English and Urhobo involves movement within the matrix clause where elements of the sentences containing features are assigned positions at the beginning of the sentences thereby giving them more emphases making them the topic. The deviation in the analysis on both languages is as a result of the sentence structure operated by the languages. The analysis also explicates structures that do not support movements as a result of their unvalued and uninterpretable features as well as their correlation with other corresponding structures.

In phase theory, there is only one level of representation that is the "phase". The features of lexical items are assigned probes to realize goals when the syntax shows that such is required. Unless the above is done, the derivation will crash but the meaning of the sentence is not lost rather rendered ungrammatical.

1. The study highlights the fact that topicalization is language universals.

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2. The study made explicit the structure of topicalized sentences through the assigments of probes and goals to differentiate them from their original code
3. The study also demonstrated the suitability of the Phase theory for analysis of topicalization in Urhobo.

Based on this study's pedagogical value, it is recommended that the Phase theory is a good linguistics framework for the analysis of topicalization in Edoid languages as typified in Urhobo through this study.

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