A Comparative Syntactic Analysis of Focus Construction: A Case Study of Igbo and Yoruba Languages

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Abstract. Every language in the world has peculiar features. It is the non-features of a particular language that account for the differences in language. What each individual language does is to choose its specific parameters from the principles that universal grammar (UG) has presented. Hence, focus construction is one of the principles which all languages have in common. But the parametric dimension varies from one language to another. This research paper is a comparative analysis of focus construction of Igbo and Yoruba language sentences with the view of finding out their uniformities and divergences in the area of derivations, positions, markers and their features.

Keywords: focus construction; focus marker, complementizer, structural positions, Government and Binding Theory, Trace movement principle, subjacency conditions, extracting site and landing site, resumptive pronoun

1. Introduction

The issue of focus construction has turn into an interesting research in the area of syntax which triggered researchers to get involved in the study of linguistics. This makes Aboh, Hartmann and Zimmermann (2008) to opine that: "Focus strategies in African languages contributes to the ongoing discussion of focus by investigating focus related phenomena in a range of African languages, most of which have been under represented in the theoretical literature on focus."

In the article, several theoretical and methodological perspectives of focus strategies in Niger-Congo and Afro-Asiatic languages ranging from generative analysis to typological generalization across languages were analyzed which reveals new focus strategies and tone focus distinctions that are not discussed in the theoretical literature of focus construction. Hence, focus construction is one of the general frame works of the theory of universal grammatical principles which are found in almost all the languages in Africa, but different variations and unique parametric approaches are involved. Therefore, it is highly imperative to look into the parametric approaches involved in focus construction in Igbo and in Yoruba to find out the uniformities and divergences in both languages in the area of derivation, position, their focus markers and features.

2. Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research is to make a comparison between Igbo and Yoruba languages with the aim of finding out the similarities and distinctions that exist between the two languages in the areas of their focus markers, the derivation of their focus constructions from “D- structure to S- structure”, their structural positions and their movements. The research also verifies whether
The trace movement principle and subjacency conditions are satisfied when such movements occur.

3. Theoretical frame work

The researchers adopted the theoretical frame work of Government and Binding Modular model theory of Syntax proposed by Chomsky and associates in (1977) in his lecture on Government and Binding theory (GB) was introduced when Chomsky proposed some major revision in the Extended Standard Theory. GB Theory accounts for all roles that involve movement with a universal transformational rule called move-a (move-alpha). The rule is bound by subjacency condition in all languages. (Radford: 1988, Ndimele:1992, Ogbonna :2008, Ayodele and Nwokeji :2012).

4. Statements of research:

- Focus markers in Igbo and Yoruba languages are not the same.
- The two languages realized focus construction at the S-structure.
- The two languages have the same structural position but differ in their derivation.
- Both languages fulfilled the trace movement principle.
- Both satisfied the subjacency conditions.

5. Research questions:

In the cause of this research, these questions below will be answered:

- Is there any difference between focus marker in Igbo and Yoruba language?
- Do the two languages have the same structural position?
- Do the two languages realize focus construction at the s-structure?
- Does focus construction in both languages fulfill the trace movement principle?
- Do the two languages satisfy the subjacency conditions?

6. Research data

The data used for this research were collected from oral interview conducted from some selected individuals who made some simple sentences and changed them to focus constructions in both languages. The researchers made use of some available literatures. However, researcher’s experiences counted a lot since they are competent speakers of both languages.

6.1 Research limitation

This research is limited to two Nigerian languages-Igbo and Yoruba languages which among the three major languages the Federal Government recommended in Nigeria. They are also part of the major African languages Ayodele and Nwokeji (2012) asserting Onwuejeogwu (1991) and Nwachukwu (1988) uphold that Igbo language and other African languages which Yoruba language is among emerged from the Proto-Niger linguistics groups, the two languages belong to the Niger-Congo language family. The two languages are part of the “Kwa sub-family.” The research is limited mainly to the comparison of focus constructions between the two languages to find out the similarities and differences that exist between them in the area of their focus markers, their derivations, their structural positions and their movement.

Lists of syntactic Abbreviations

Foc / FM……………………………………Foc us marker
COMP…………………………………C omplementizer
INFL/I…………Inflection
Pro……………………………………Pronoun
NP……………………………………Noun Phrase
N……………………………………Noun
V……………………………………Verb
VP……………………………………Verb Phrase
+AGR………………………………….+Agreement
7. Definition of Certain Terms

*Focus construction:* It is a vital word or phrase in an expression that are used to disclose information or draw attention in a context with the aim of bringing new concept.

*Focus Markers:* They are syntactic elements used in realizing focus constructions in a sentence.

*Government and Binding Theory:* It is known as principles and parameters. It refers to a specific approach to linguistic theory. It focuses on principles rather than rules. It followed from extended standard theory in transformational grammar. (Radford: 1988)

*Trace Movement Theory:* The theory came on board Chomsky made a revision on the extended slandered theory which is called the revised extended standard theory (REST). It involves with the ideas of trace movement theory of rules. Haegeman (1991) views trace as an empty category which encode the base-position of a moved constituent. It can be indicated by “t”. Ndimele (1992) looks at it as ‘ghost copy’ of the moved element while Lamdi (1990) refers to it as a shadow which can be used as an indicator that an element has moved out of that position. Also, Ayodele and Nwokeji (2012) asserting Taiwo (2008) view trace as an identical empty category.

*Trace Movement Principle:* It is a principle in which a linguistics unit is subject to the availability of a landing site so that the moved element does not crash-land on another linguistic unit at the targeted position. The only available landing site for empty category is the Spec-CP node, Ndimele (1992) Moreover, trace movement principle says that all moved constituents most carry along with them the grammatical properties associated with them at their original extraction site (Ndimele:1991). However, a moved element must enter into bound with its trace at the original site. This means that the moved NP object to the verb and its trace must be co-index.

*Subjacency Condition:* Focus construction is subject to subjacency condition. According to Haegeman (1991) subjacency condition says that movement cannot cross more than a bounding node. He points out those bounding points are subject to parametric variation. For instance, in English, IP and NP are bounding node while in Italian, CP and NP are bounding node.

Extraction site/ Landing site: Extraction site is the original position of the moved element before it is been moved while landing site is the exist position the moved element will stay finally. Trace is being realized at the s-structure phenomena.

8. Review of Some Related Literature on Focus Construction:

The issue of focus construction has turn into an interesting research in the area of syntax which triggered researchers to get involved in the study of linguistics. This makes Aboh, Hartmann and Zimmermann (2008) to opine that:

*Focus strategies in African languages contributes to the ongoing discussion of focus by investigating focus related Phenomena in a range of African languages, most of which have been under-presented in the theoretical literature of focus.*

In the article, several theoretical and methodological perspectives of focus strategies in Niger-Congo and Afro-Asiatic languages ranging from generative analysis to typological generalization across languages were analyzed.
which reveals new focus strategies and tone focus distinctions that were not discussed in the theoretical literature of focus construction. Hence, focus construction is one of the general frame work of the theory of universal grammatical principles which are found in almost all the languages in Africa but different variations and unique parametric approaches toward the subject is in question. In linguistics concept, various meanings and explanations have been given to focus construction. To buttresses this, Bamgbose (1990) views focus as a construction used in calling attention to phrase structure and sentences. However, Chomsky and Halle (1968) connects focus construction as a link to other general cognitive processes which include attention orient ion. In another dimension, Halliday (1967) sees focus as a grammatical category that determines which part of sentence contributes new non-derivable contractive information.

To support the point, Givon (2001) connects focus construction with the packaging of new, old and contrasting information. Halliday (1967) argues that focus and information structure have things in common in the area of coding of information. Hence he says:

Focus is related to information structure. Contrastive focus specifically refers to the coding of information that contrary to the presupposition of interlocutor.

Moreover, Lambrech (1994) establishes three main types of focus constructions: predicate focus, structural \ argument focus structure and sentence focus structure. To throw light on it, Bamgbose (1990) describes structural position of Yoruba focus construction as follow: subject position, object position, qualifier position, adverb position and main verb position. This entails that in Yoruba language, there are five ways in which a simple sentence can be restructured to focus construction. This means that focus construction can take the position of a subject, object, qualifier, adverb or the main verb. Whatever position focus construction takes, it must be moved forward to the left position. The same structure is being applied to Igbo language except its derivation. Also Dinter (2002) in looking at the English language, views focus in term of using it in high lighting part of a sentence, hence he says:

In English grammar, the term focus is used to refer to the highlighting of part of a sentence for communication purposes. One part of a sentence is moved to a place where it has the greatest communicative impact.

Moreover, Jackendoff (1972) Root (1988) Krifka (1992) argue that focus consists of a feature that is assigned to a node in the syntactic representation of a sentence. On the other hand, Dinter (2002) shading light on what Gravstein etal argue, note that focus is what is emphasized in either an utterance or in writing. They argue that such a re-ordering of sentence structure depends on the speaker’s or writer’s perspective of communication.

8.1 Features of Focus Construction

- In focusing, the structural position of any particular focus always moves backwards to the left position.
- All focus constructions are derived from simple sentence.
- It has focus construction markers.
- It discloses information in an expression.
- It draws attention and lays more emphasis.
- It brings in new concept.
- Focus construction markers in both languages:

Focus markers is an element used in realizing focus construction in syntax. It is a universal principle that cuts across to almost all the languages that has +focuses. But languages vary with respect to morphological realization. However, Frascarli and Puglielli (2000) claim that focus marker’s generation comes from the nominal and verbal focus marker derived from the same copular form. They argue that that focuses construction in marking languages must be considered to originate from cleft construction whose meaning can be compared to the English “it is \that”. Viewing focus construction from a syntactic point of, they consider focus as a complex sentence as cleft constructions are. frascarli and pugliellui (2002)
in proving that focus markers (fm) are derive from the nominal and verbal focus marker which are derived from copula form and to affirm that focus markers originated from cleft construction whose meaning can be compared to the English “it is that” used the focus system of Somali dialect which has been extensively illustrated and analyzed in Svolacchia et al (1999) to prove their points. Svolacchia et al. (1999) claim that the Somali focus system which is one of the richest among Cushitic languages also dispose of a third construction to realize focus.

Pointing from Frascarelli and Puglielli (2002) furnishes a significant observation that focus markers in Somali dialects are derived from an original copular from which includes a 3rd person elicit pronoun as shown below.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ak} & + \ y & + \ \text{aa} \\
\text{Be} & \phantom{+} \text{3 SGM} & \text{press}
\end{align*}
\]

However, looking at the pattern in which they derived focus markers in Somali dialect and the claim that focus markers generation comes from cleft nominal and verbal focus markers which they argue that it originated from cleft construction whose meaning could be compared to the English “it is that”. This makes the researchers to be in support with Frascarelli and Puglielli (2003) that Igbo focus markers “O bu” meaning “it is that”. This is a combination of two words originated from nominal and verbal elements which are used to realize focus construction in Igbo language in which “o” meaning [he/ she/ it] a third person singular originated from a nominal element while “bu” which represent “is,” verb to be, is a verbal element. This could also be considered as a cleft construction in English language which could also be considered as focus construction at the same time is originated from cleft construction. In the same view, Bamgbosse (1990) affirms that focus construction in Yoruba language is realized from focus marker (fm) “ni” meaning [it is / was].

Derivation of focus construction from simple construction to focus and from extracting site to landing site:

In both languages, all focus construction is derived from simple sentence to focus. To buttresses this, Bamgbosse (1990) claims that focus construction in Yoruba language is derived from simple sentence using a focus marking “ni” meaning [it is / was] as a focus construction marker. In Igbo language, focus constructions are derived from simple sentences. Examples in both languages are below

Igbo simple construction: sentence (1a)

Ngozi   siri  ofe
Ngozi  cooked soup.

Igbo focus construction sentence (1b)

O bu ofe ka Ngozi siri
It was soup that Ngozi cooked.

Yoruba simple construction: sentence (2a)

Nike se obe
Nike cooked the soup

Yoruba focus construction: sentence (2b)

Nike ni o se obe
It was Nike that cooked the soup.

In comparison, looking at the derivations of the two languages in sentence (1a) and (2a), you will discover that both sentences are in simple sentences. While sentence (1b) and (2b) are focus constructions which are derived from sentence (1a) and (2a). These proved that focus constructions are derived from simple constructions. Another significant feature of focus construction is the issue of structural position which allows any particular focus to move to the left position while focused. To prove this, in sentence (1a) ofe “soup” this was at the right position moved to the left position in the sentence. While in sentence (2a) Nike “name of a person” moved from the right position to the left position.

Structural position of focus constructions and their movements analyses in both languages:

In focusing, the structural position of any particular focus always moved from the extraction sit that is the original position to the landing site that is the final position of the element. It always at the left position. In these analyses, Bamgbosse’s view of different types of structural positions will be used

Focusing the subject position:
Focusing the subject position of a construction is the type in which the subject of sentence is being displaced which draws attention in the context. In Yoruba focus construction, the noun is moved and is replaced with a pronoun “o” meaning [he/she/it]. However, Taiwo (forthcoming) claims that the subject position in Yoruba language must not be left empty even after movement has taken place. Therefore, a resumptive pronoun must be left behind whenever movement takes place. He calls this resumptive pronoun a trace of the moved constitution. He revises the trace movement theory which according to Radford (1988) which says:

Any moved constituent x leaves behind at its extraction site an identical Empty category [x\textsuperscript{ne}]. This empty category is known as trace and the moved Constituent is said to be the antecedent of the trace.

Taiwo (forthcoming) revises this theory to accommodate the resumptive pronoun which is trace of a moved constituent when movement occurs. The theory says:

Any moved constituent x leaves behind at its extraction site an identical category [x\textsuperscript{ne}]. This identical category can be an identical Category or a resumptive pronoun. The category is known as trace And the moved constituent is said to be the antecedent of the trace.

(Taiwo: forthcoming)

However, subject position of focus construction in Igbo language does not require a pronoun as a replacement of the subject element as a trace rather, the focus marker “o bu” comes before the element. Below are some examples in both languages.

Igbo simple construction: sentence (3a)

Ugo riri ji
Ugo eat + past yam.
Ugo eat yam

Igbo focus construction: sentence (3b)

O bu Ugo riri ji.
loc Ugo eat + past yam.
It was Ugo that ate yam.

Yoruba simple construction: sentence (4a)

Tolu je isu.
Tolu eat + past yam.
Tolu ate yam.

Yoruba focus construction: sentence (4b)

Tolu ni o je isu
Tolu foc pro eat + past yam.
It was Tolu that ate yam.

Looking at sentence (3b) you will observe that the focus marker “o bu” precedes the subject “Ugo”. While in sentence (4b) the subject “Tolu” is moved to the front which precedes the focus marker “ni” and is replaced with a resumptive pronoun which is the trace of the moved element. Moreover, all focused elements must precedes the focus marker in Yoruba language.

8.2 Focusing the Object Position

The object position focusing construction involves the movement of the object from the extraction site (final position) to the landing site (initial position). The only different in the two languages is that the Igbo focus marker “o bu” precedes the object. While in Yoruba the object precedes the focus marker. Another different between the two languages is that in Igbo object focusing position, the use of “ka” meaning “that” which is one of the complementizer in Igbo is involved. It comes after the object. Below are some of the examples in both languages.

Igbo simple construction: sentence (5a)

Ada siri ofe.
Ada cook+past soup.
Ada cooked the soup.

Igbo focus construction: sentence (5b)

O bu ofe ka Ada siri.
loc ofe comp Ada
cook+past.
It was soup that Ada cooked.

Yoruba simple construction: sentence (6a)

Bola se obe.
Bola cook+past soup.
Bola cooked the soup.

Yoruba focus construction: sentence (6b)
Obe ni Bola Se.
soup foc Bola cook+past.
It was soup that Bola cooked.

Looking at sentence (5b), the “ofe” in sentence (5a) which is at the final position is moved to the position of the subject when focused and a complementizer “ka” is added after it. Also, in sentence (6b) you will discover that the “obe” in sentence (6a) is moved to the position of the subject.
Focusing the qualifier position:

In Yoruba, when a qualifier in a noun phrase is being focus, a qualifying pronoun is used to replace the qualifier that is being displaced or moved. However, in Igbo, a noun is been replaced to qualify a noun. The qualifier noun precedes the noun it qualifies. Below are some examples in both languages.

Igbo simple construction: sentence (7a)
Obi kwara efere ya.
Obi break+past plate his
Obi broke his plate.
Igbo focus construction: sentence (7b)
O bu efere Obi kwara.
foc plate’ Obi break+past.
It was obis’ plate that broke.

Yoruba simple construction: sentence (8a)
Ade fo awo re.
Ade break+past plate his
Ade’s plate broke.
Yoruba focus construction: sentence (8b)
Awo Ade ni o fo.
Plate’ Ade foc pro break+past.
It was Ade’s plate that broke.

Looking at sentence (7b) and (8b), you will observe that efere “plate” in sentence (7a) and awo “plate” in sentence (8a) moved from the final positions to the initial positions as qualifiers. Also “ya” [his] in sentence (7a) and “re” [his] in sentence (8a) which were at the final positions were removed while focusing.

8.3 Focusing the Main Verb

In Yoruba language, when the verb in a sentence is not more than one, the verb will focused, but if the verb is more than one, as in the case of serial verb, one out of the verbs will be focused.
The verb that is being focused will be nominalized in partial repetition and the repeated verb will be at the front. Likewise in Igbo, the verb is been reduplicated and the reduplicated verb precedes the complementizer “ka” meaning “that”. Below are some examples in both languages.

Igbo simple construction: sentence (9a)
Eze zuru ewu.
Eze buy+past goat.
Eze bought a goat.
Igbo focus construction: sentence (9b)
O bu ozuzu ka Eze zuru ewu.
foc buying comp Eze buy+past goat.
It is a fact that Eze bought a goat.

Yoruba simple construction: sentence (10a)
Shola ra ewure.
Shola buy+past goat.
Shola bought a goat.
Yoruba focus construction: sentence (10b)
Rira ni Shola ra ewure.
Buying foc Shola buy goat.
It is a fact that Shola bought a goat.

Looking at sentence (9b) and sentence (10b) you will discover that the main verb in sentence (9a) “zuru” and “ra” in sentence (10a) are duplicated and are displaced to the front position and the main verbs go back to present position.

Focusing the adverb position:
In both languages anytime an adverb is being focused, the adverb is moved to the front position. In the case of Igbo language, there is no single word that represents an adverb but when a preposition precedes a noun it can mean an adverb. Example:

Igbo simple construction Sentence (11a)
Ngozi biara n’isiutu.
Ngozi Come+past in head morning.
Ngozi came early in the morning.
Adverb can also be derived in Igbo by partial duplication of two nouns. Example
Oso +oso =osiiso meaning “quickly.
Below are examples of adverb position in both languages:

Igbo simple construction:  sentence (12a)

Oluchi biara n’isiụtụtụ
Oluchi come+past in head morning.

Oluchi came early in the morning.

Igbo focus construction:  sentence (12b)

O bu n’ụtụtụ ka
Oluchi biara
foc in head morning comp
Oluchi come+past.

It was early in the morning that Oluchi came.

Yoruba simple construction: sentence (13a)

Bola wa aaro kutu.
Bola come+past in morning early.

Bola came early in the morning.

Looking at these sentences, you will observe that the adverbs in the sentences were moved to the front.

8.4 Analyzing focus movement in both languages using phrase marker (Tree Diagram):

For the purpose of this analysis, sentence (5a), sentence (5b), (6a) and (6b) which involve the movement of the object positions from the extraction site to the landing site will be used to prove that focus construction involves movement from the extraction site to the landing site. Also, to prove that both languages satisfies the trace movement principle and subjacency condition.

D-structure (underlying structure) Igbo simple sentence (5a)

Ada siri ofe
Ada cook+past soup.
Ada cooked soup

Focusing the object position of Igbo focus construction to show movement from the extraction site to its landing site using tree diagram.

Sentence (5b) O bu ofe ka Ada siri.

It was soup that Ada cooked.

D- Structure (underlying structure) Yoruba simple sentence (6a)

Bola se obe
Bola cook+past soup
It was Bola that cooked the soup.

9. Summary / Conclusion

In this research, the researchers made a comparison between two languages Igbo and Yoruba with the aim of finding out the similarities and distinctions that exist between the two languages in the area of their focus markers, derivation of their focus constructions from D-structure to S-structure, their structural positions and their movements. We also verified whether the trace movement principle and subjacency condition were satisfied. In the course of the research, we found out that focus markers in Igbo and Yoruba are not the same. The two languages realize focus construction at the S-structure. The two languages have the same structural position but differ in their derivations. Both languages satisfied the subjacency condition. Also, they fulfilled the trace movement principle.

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