CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF COMPLEMENTISER PHRASES IN SELECTED YORUBA AND ENGLISH NEWS TEXTS

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Abstract

Complementiser phrase (CP) is the maximal category that is projected from a complementiser which heads the phrase, and its proper understanding can greatly enhance a language learner's competence. Contrasting the syntactic structure of CP in the learners' first language (L1) with that of their target language (TL), which is a crucial scholarly way of identifying areas of convergence and divergence in the two languages, has not enjoyed much comparative investigation. Therefore, this research attempts a syntactic contrastive study of CPs in English and Yoruba texts, with a view to highlighting their similarities and differences. Data for the study were purposively sampled from selected British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) news in Yoruba and translated to English with the aid of Google Gemini – an online translation tool. Ten CPs were illustratively analysed from both languages using the Principles and Parameters Theory (PPT) of Chomsky's Transformational Generative Grammar. In both Yoruba and English, all the CPs have embedded inflectional phrases (IPs). Also, while some CPs (i.e. arguments) are subcategorised by VPs, some (i.e. relative clauses) are subcategorised by NPs. The Yoruba Pé and English 'that' are base-generated complementisers; on the other hand, tó and tí in Yoruba are moved from the embedded IP to the Spec CP, while 'who' and 'where' in English originate inside the VP or PP and move successively cyclically through Spec-IP to Spec-CP. In English, 'that' functions both as a declarative complementiser and a relative marker, whereas Yoruba splits these functions: pé for declarative clauses and tí/tó for relative clauses. There is therefore a possibility for English L2 learners to confuse relative clauses with noun clauses, especially when they are both introduced by 'that'; hence, there is a possibility for English L2 learners to confuse relative clauses with noun clauses, especially when they are both introduced by 'that'. Subordinate clauses – nominal, adverbial and relative ones – need to be carefully taught and learnt, bearing in mind the differences and similarities

observed. The dissimilarities identified should be the focus in the process of teaching and learning the English syntactic structures which have CPs.

Keywords: Complementiser Phrase, English and Yoruba, Universal Grammar, Principles and Parameters Theory. Learning Difficulty

1. Introduction

Contrastive Analysis started when language experts compared stages in the development of a language by taking a model from other developed languages. The activities involved in the changes and development of languages had been known as comparative historical linguistics.[1] Contrastive analysis was introduced by Lado in the book L*inguistics across Cultures*.[2] It was a tool developed to aid second language teaching and learning. CA is the careful study of the structures of languages with the intention of comparing and contrasting their forms. The examination of two or more languages systematically to identify areas where they align and differ is the essence of CA. This process helps in understanding the potential challenges learners might face when acquiring a new language, predicting errors and informing language teaching methodologies.

It will be academically profitable to systematically examine Yoruba and English from the lens of Contrastive Analysis (CA) and broaden the understanding of L2 learners of English and future translators. The complementiser phrase is commonly used in English and Yoruba. Comparing its syntactic features will help in learning both languages better and confirming the claims of universal grammar.

2. Statement of the Problem

Contrastive studies of English and Yoruba exist. Banjo is a study on the syntactic and lexical structures of English and Yoruba.[3] Lawal focuses on the Yoruba words "pé" and "kí" and their roles as either verbs or complementisers.[4] Lamidi studied empty categories in English and Yoruba.[5] Lamidi worked on head parameter and grammaticality in Yoruba-English code-switching.[6] In his 2004 work, he did a study on agreement relations in English and Yoruba.[7] Also, Ogunsiji worked on code switching and code mixing among Yoruba-English bilinguals.[8] It is observed from their works that the mother tongue (MT) features have strong influence on TL learning and use by Nigerians. Raji worked on the similarities and differences in the use of pronouns, plural nouns and prepositions between English and Yoruba languages.[9] There is the need to do a CA of the complementiser phrase of English and Yoruba, and this his study is poised to do that,

3. Aim and Objectives

This study is aimed at investigating the complementiser phrase in English and Yoruba languages for pedagogical and theoretical purposes. The objectives of this study are as follows:

i. To identify and discuss the points of convergence in the complementiser phrase of English and Yoruba languages,
ii. To identify and discuss the points of divergence in the complementiser phrase of the two languages,
iii. To predict possible areas of difficulty that a Yoruba learner of English language may encounter in the process of acquiring the English language.

4. Theoretical Framework

The theory adopted in this study is the Principles and Parameters Theory (PPT), postulated by Noam Chomsky. It is made up of seven sub-theories/modules. The subsystem of the principles includes: X-Bar Theory, Bounding Theory, Government Theory, Theta (Θ) Theory, Binding Theory, Case Theory and Control Theory.[10] The X-bar sub-theory of GB is used in this study in analysing some CPs in both English and Yoruba. The heads of the phrases are identified since X-bar gives primacy to the head. The non-obligatory satellites that converge on the head are also shown in this study.

The X-Bar Module

One of the sub-systems of the Principles and Parameters Theory is the X-bar Theory which this research has adopted in order to account for structural differences of the languages under study. Carnie affirms that "the first presentation of X-bar theory appeared in Chomsky".[11] According to Carnie, "X-bar approach started off as a series of statements that restrict the form of phrase structure rules, but eventually developed into an independent system which allows us to capture generalizations not available with simple PSRs."[12] Carnie further explains that the X-bar theory serves both as an extension to phrase structure grammars and places a number of restrictions on the form that Phrase Structure Rules (PSRs) can take. In relation to this, Lamidi states that "the development of X-bar Theory is as the result of the inadequacies of the Phrase Structure Grammar (PSG) because the PSG permits too many rules."`[6] Furthermore, the X-bar sub-theory accounts for constituents that are lesser than a phrase and constituents that are more than a phrase which the Phrase Structure Grammar could not account for.[7]

The X-Bar Schema

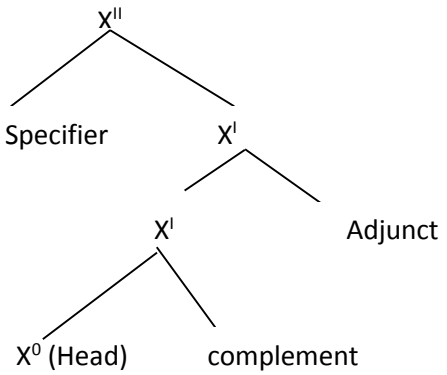


Fig. 1 X-Bar Schema [13]

In the schema, X is the variable representing noun (N), verb (V), adjective (Adj), adverb (Adv), preposition (P), inflection, (I), complementiser (C), etc. which is the head of its own phrase. The item without a bar (X^0) is the head, it is obligatory item and it stands for the lexical category which has neither specifier nor adjunct/complement. The item with a single bar (X^I) refers to the combination of the head and a complement/adjunct.[14] It is called an intermediate category (coming between the smallest and the largest categories). The item with two bars (X^{II}) is the phrasal category, consisting of the head, the complement/adjunct and a specifier. The maximal projection is separated from the intermediate projection by the specifier which is adjoined to the maximal projection.

8. Methodology

Ten complementiser phrases were used as data for this paper. Using purposive sampling, the obtained data were collected from selected 2025 BBC news in Yoruba and translated into English. The translation was done with the aid of *Google Gemini*, an accurate online translation tools. There was a careful comparison of data collected which were analysed using the phrase marking (tree diagram) of X-Bar theory.

9. Data Analysis

In the expressions below, the CPs are in bold, five each from both languages. Each *a* is the English translation of its *b* counterpart.

1a the town **where the attack occurred**

1b ìlú **tí ìkọlù náà ti wáyé**

2a Chief Abomtse stated **that the attackers invaded Tse Antswam town.**

2b Olóyè Abomtse sọ **pé àwọn tó wà ṣe ìkọ́lú náà yawọ ìlú Tse Antswam**.

3a the number of people **who have lost their lives in the herdsmen attack**

3b àwọn èèyàn **tó ti pàdánù ẹ̀mí wọn níbi ìkọlù àwọn darandaran náà**

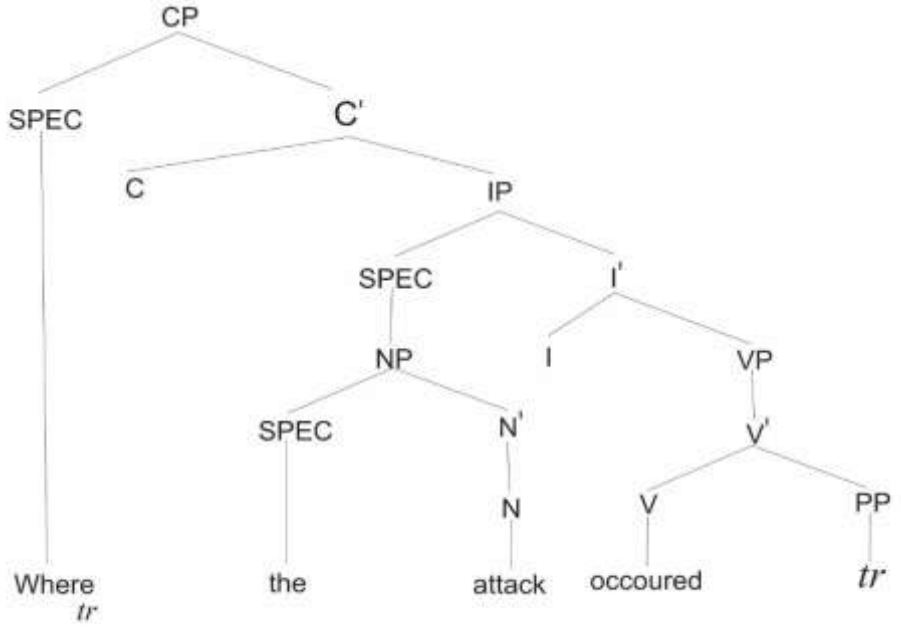
4a He said **the attack was truly heartbreaking for them**.

4b Ó ní **ìkọlu náà jẹ́ èyí tó ba àwọn lọ́kàn jẹ́ gidi**.

5a He added **that many people sustained severe injuries**.

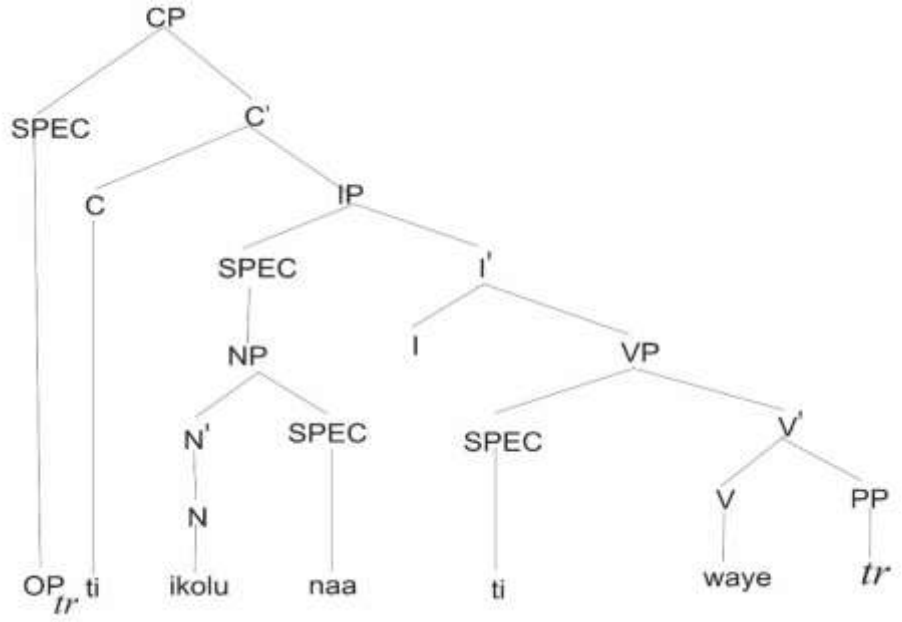
5b Ó fi kun **pé ọ̀pọ̀ èèyàn ló farapa yánnayànna**.

Datum 1a: the town **where the attack occurred**



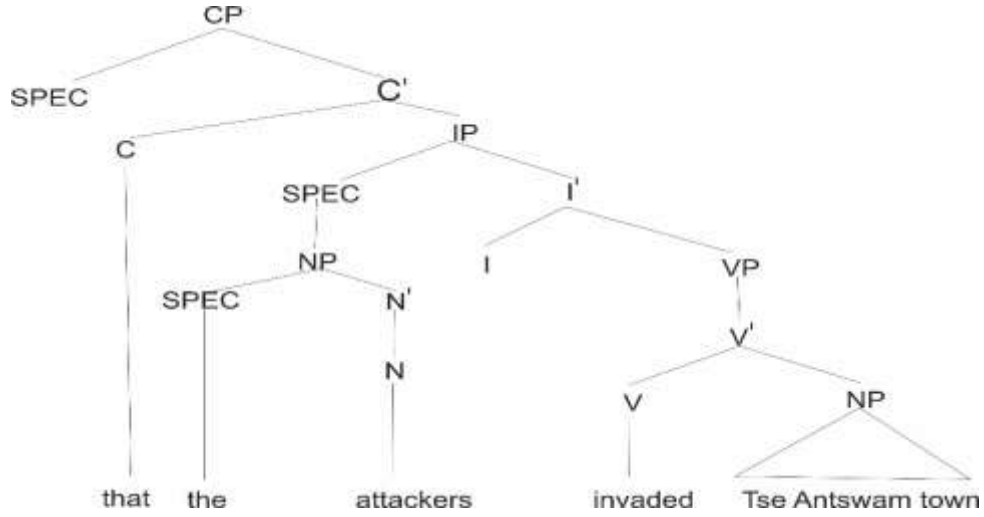
The CP's complementiser *where* is not base-generated; it moves from the sentence-final position (PP) of the IP *the attack occurred at which place*, to the specifier (Spec) position of the CP, leaving a trace with its index. *Where* originates as the complement of the preposition *at* (in deep structure).

Datum 1b: ìlú **tí ìkọlù náà ti wáyé**



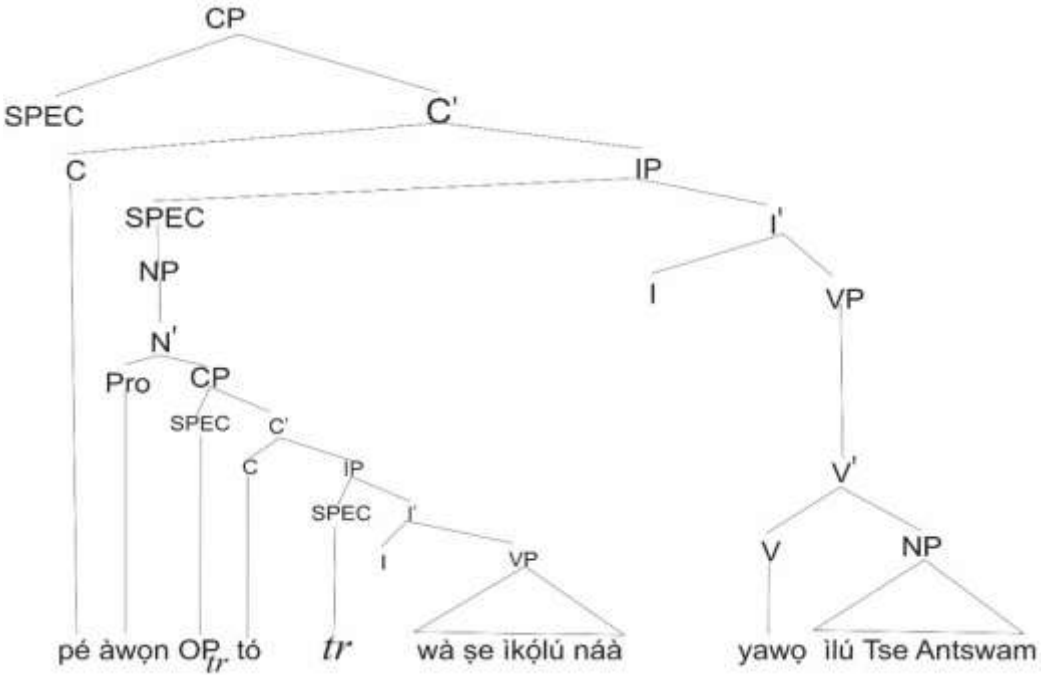
The CP shows a relative clause in which an operator moves from the PP complement of *wáyé* to Spec-CP, leaving a trace. The complementiser *tí* occupies C and licenses A′-movement. In IP, the subject NP *ìkọlù nàà* consists of the noun *ìkọlù* and the specificity marker *nàà*. The perfective element *ti* sits in I and selects the VP. Within VP, the verb *wáyé* assigns a theta-role to the PP, from which the operator has been extracted, creating the lower trace.

Datum 2a: Chief Abomtse stated **that the attackers invaded Tse Antswam town**



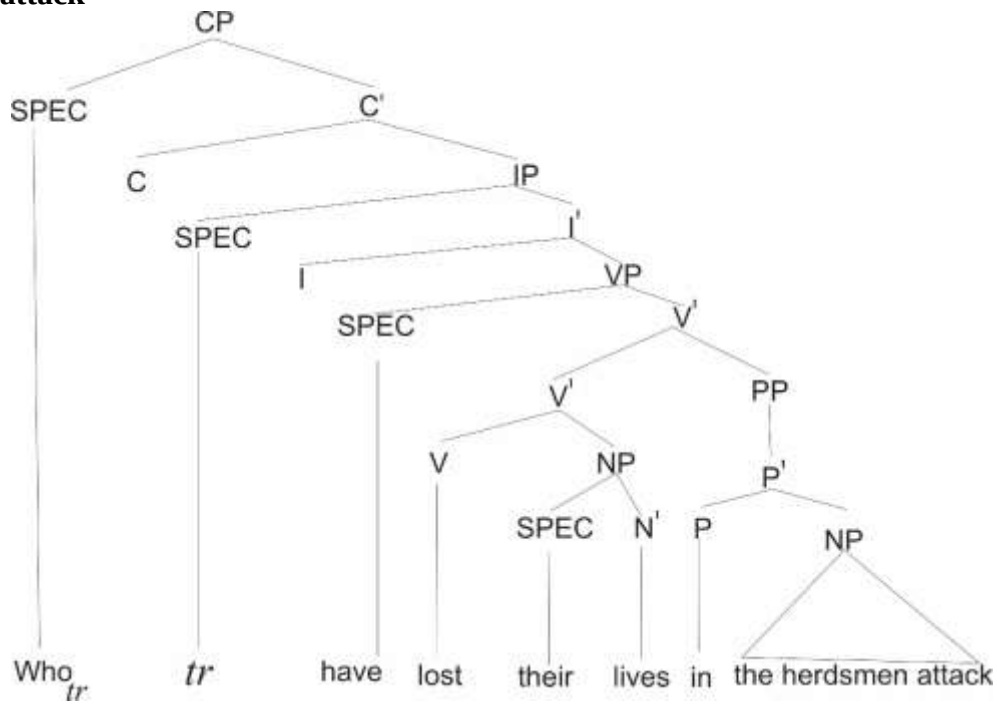
The COMP *that* in the CP above is base-generated (not a product of movement); therefore, it occupies the C node. The CP itself is subcategorised by the verb *stated*. The Spec position of the CP is not occupied; the CP is an argument in object position.

Datum 2b: Olóyè Abomtse sọ **pé àwọn tó wà ṣe ìkọ́lú náà yawọ ìlú Tse Antswam**



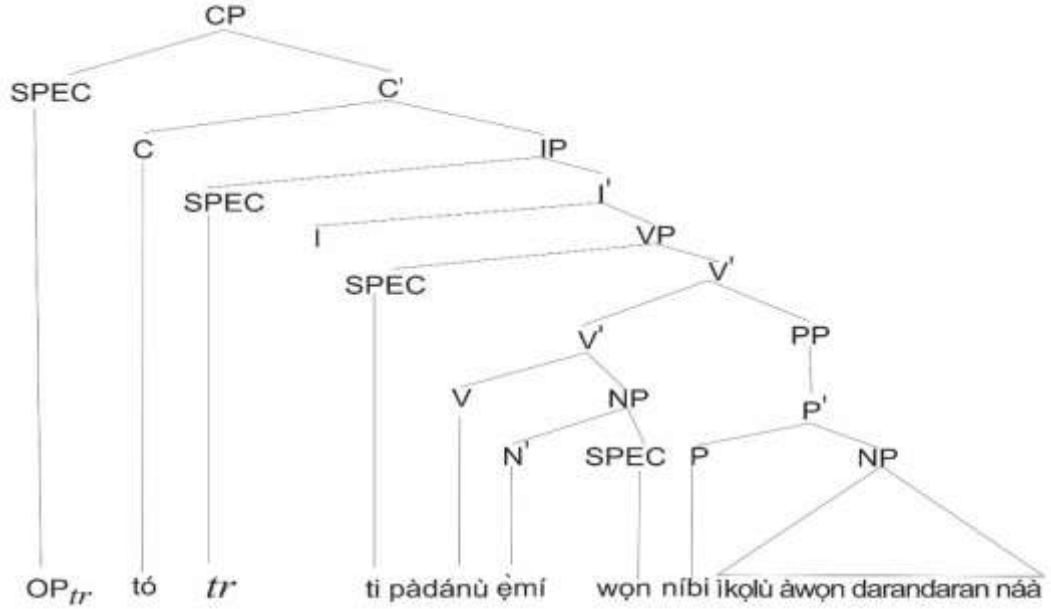
The CP above does not only have an embedded IP; the Spec (subject) of the IP also has CP embedded in it. The first CP is an argument subcategorised by the verb *sọ* and the C node is occupied by the COMP *pé* which introduces the reported clause. In Spec-CP, the NP *àwọn* hosts a CP containing a relative clause, where an operator moves from its VP-internal position to Spec-CP, licensed by the relativiser *tó*. Within the embedded IP, the subject is null *pro*, while the predicate *wà ṣe ìkọ́lú náà* forms a serial verb construction which may be seen as a complex VP. The matrix VP contains the verb *yawọ* and the NP *ìlú Tse Antswam*, which receives the verb's internal theta-role.

Datum 3a: the number of people **who have lost their lives in the herdsmen attack**



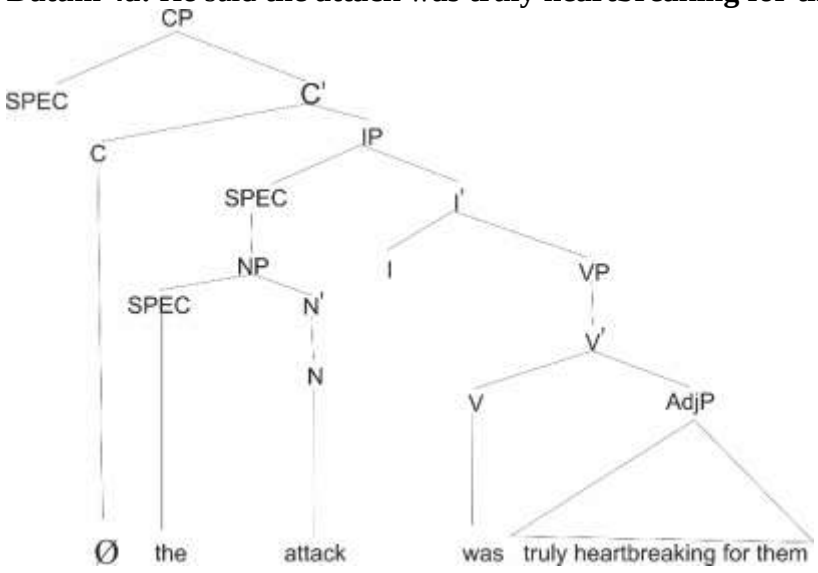
The CP above is a subordinate (relative) clause subcategorised by the NP *the number of people*. It should be noted that the movement of *who* originates in object position, not Spec-IP; it moves to Spec-IP only as an intermediate landing site. The complementiser *who* moves from the Spec IP position to Spec CP, leaving a trace with its index. The C node is not occupied since there is no base-generated complementiser.

Datum 3b: àwọn èèyàn **tó ti pàdánù ẹ̀mí wọn níbi ìkọlù àwọn darandaran náà**



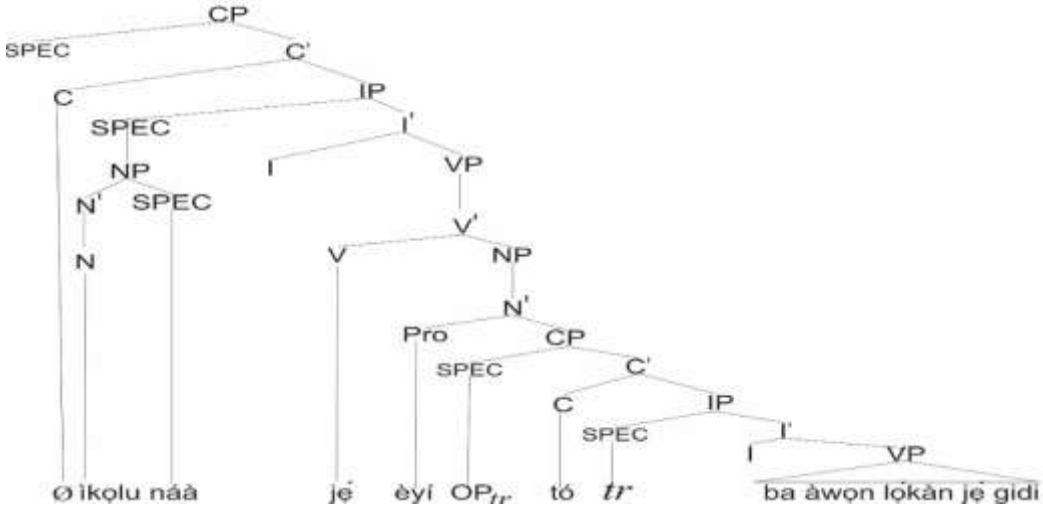
The CP above is also a subordinate (relative) clause subcategorised by the NP *àwọn èèyàn*. It is formed by operator movement from within the adverbial PP complement of the lower VP to Spec-CP, leaving a trace. The relativiser *tó* occupies C and licenses A′-movement. In IP, the auxiliary *ti* sits in I and selects the VP headed by *pàdánù*. The VP contains an NP object, *ẹ̀mí wọn*, analysed as N′ with a pronominal possessor in Spec-N′. The PP *níbi ìkọlù àwọn darandaran náà* functions as a locative complement, with the NP *ìkọlù àwọn darandaran náà* occupying the complement of P.

Datum 4a: He said **the attack was truly heartbreaking for them**.



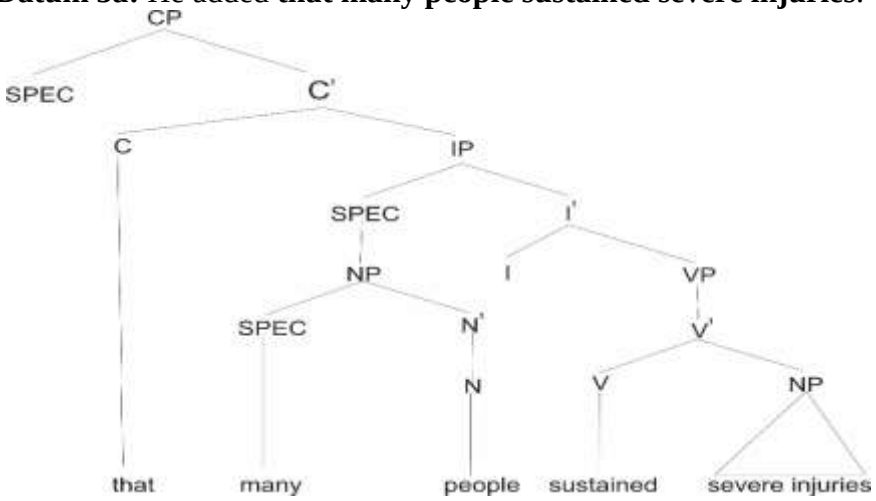
The CP above is subcategorised by the verb *said*. However, there is a case of zero or null complementiser; the COMP exists in the logical form (LF) but not the phonetic form (PF). Therefore, the C node is occupied by the null (Ø) symbol, indicating elision.

Datum 4b: Ó ní **ìkọlu náà jẹ́ èyí tó ba àwọn lọ́kàn jẹ́ gidi**.



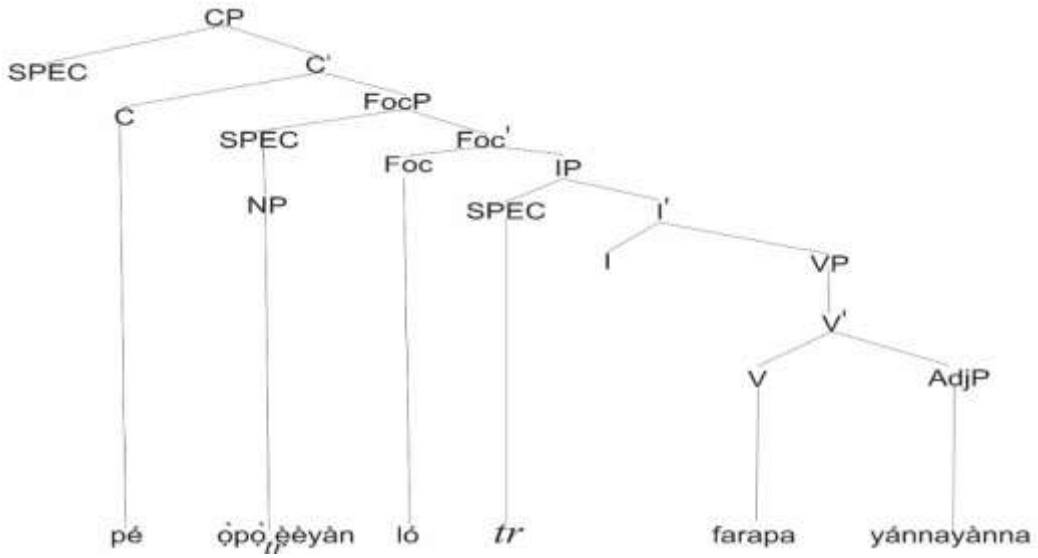
The CP above is also subcategorised by the verb *ní*. There's a case of zero complementiser here as well. The subject NP *ìkọlù náà* occupies Spec-IP, with *náà* functioning as a specificity marker in Spec-N′. The VP contains the **copula** *jẹ́* selecting the NP *èyí*, which heads another nominalized CP. Within this embedded CP, an operator moves from the object position inside the lower VP to Spec-CP, licensed by the relativiser *tó*. The embedded VP hosts the predicate *ba … lọ́kàn jẹ́ gidi*, where the NP *àwọn* occupies the internal argument position.

Datum 5a: He added **that many people sustained severe injuries**.



The CP above is an argument subcategorised by the verb *added*. The complementiser is not a product of movement and the Spec position is not occupied.

Datum 5b: Ó fi kun **pé ọ̀pọ̀ èèyàn ló farapa yánnayànna**.



The CP above is also an argument subcategorised by the verb *fi kun*. The complementiser *pé* is based-generated. There is however a focus particle *ló*; therefore, the focus (NP: ọ̀pọ̀ èèyàn) is moved leftward from the Spec IP position. The complementiser *pé* selects a FocP projection hosting the focused constituent *ọ̀pọ̀ èèyàn* in Spec-FocP. The focus marker *ló* occupies Foc and licenses movement of the focused NP, leaving a trace in Spec-IP. Yoruba permits focus within embedded clauses, unlike English. The IP contains the auxiliary-like element in I, while the VP is headed by the verb *farapa*, which selects the AdjP *yánnayànna* as a depictive complement. The focused NP receives its thematic role from the embedded predicate before moving to the left periphery for focus interpretation.

10. Discussion of Findings

As seen in all the ten CPs, in both Yoruba and English, all the CPs have embedded inflectional phrases (IPs). Also, it is observed that some CPs are subcategorised by VPs (2a, 2b, 4a, 4b, 5a and 5b) while some are subcategorised by NPs (1a, 1b, 2b within IP, 3a, 3b and 4b within VP). What is a simple NP in English can turn out to be a complex NP in Yoruba as seen in 2a and 2b. Also, as observed in 4a and 4b, an English adjectival phrase (AdjP) may not be expressible as an AdjP in Yoruba but as a CP. As seen in 2a, 2b, 5a and 5b, the Yoruba *Pé* and English *that* are base-generated complementisers; hence, they are not moved. On the other hand, *tó* and *tí* in Yoruba are moved from the embedded IP to the Spec CP (1b, 2b, 3b and 4b) while *who* and *where* in English originate inside the VP or PP and move successive-cyclically through Spec-IP to Spec-CP. (1a and 3a). Base-generated

complementisers typically introduce argument CPs (2a, 2b, 5a and 5b) while operator-moved complementisers characterise relative clauses (1a, 1b, 2b within IP, 3a, 3b and 4b within VP). Both Yoruba and English languages have non-base-generated complementisers. As seen in 1a, 1b, 2b within IP, 3a, 3b, 4b within VP and 5b, when indicating a place or location of movement, the extraction originates inside the VP/PP domain and moves through Spec-IP to Spec-CP.

Additionally, 4a and 4b show that in both languages, a CP can exist without an overt complementiser. It is also observed that overt CPs occur more in Yoruba than in English; there are two more embedded CPs in 2b and 4b without the 2a and 4a having the complementing CPs. As seen in 5b, there is a focus marker *ló*; following split CP, Yoruba exhibits overt focus marking via particles like *ló*, unlike English, where focus is expressed through clefting or prosody rather than dedicated particles. Rizzi (1997) As seen in 2a, 2b, 3b, 4b, 5a and 5b, in English, *that* functions both as a declarative complementiser and a relative marker, whereas Yoruba splits these functions: *pé* for declarative clauses and *tí/tó* for relative clauses. There is therefore a possibility for English L2 learners to confuse relative clauses with noun clauses, especially when they are both introduced by *that*.

11. Conclusion and Recommendation

This work applied the Principles and Parameters Theory (particularly, the X Bar Theory), to the study and description of CPs in English and Yoruba. The data source is BBC news in both English and Yoruba languages. The suitability of PPT hinges on its adequacy to produce a descriptively adequate grammar of every human language.[16] This study falls within the purview of Contrastive Analysis. The study identified both the areas of convergence and divergence between the CP of English and Yoruba. Further research may explicate the wh-question CPs in both languages. Subordinate clauses –nominal, adverbial and relative need to be carefully taught and learnt, bearing in mind the differences and similarities observed in the study.

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